

Original Paper

People-Centered: Balancing Humanistic Care and Institutional Constraints in Higher Education Management

Jinrong Liu¹

¹ Baoshan University, Baoshan, Yunnan, China

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Abstract

In contemporary educational administration, the people-centered philosophy is gaining increasing prominence. Educational management not only involves the implementation of systems and regulations but also requires attention to the emotional needs and humanistic care of both teachers and students. As society evolves, striking a balance between institutional constraints and humanistic care has become a significant research topic in educational administration. Through literature analysis and case studies, this paper explores the equilibrium between humanistic care and institutional constraints. Findings indicate that appropriate humanistic care enhances the effectiveness of educational administration and boosts satisfaction among both teachers and students, whereas overly rigid systems may stifle innovation and flexibility. Therefore, rationally balancing humanistic care with institutional constraints not only promotes educational quality but also fosters a harmonious educational environment.

Keyword

People-Centered, Educational Administration, Humanistic Care, Balance

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of higher education today, educational management is not merely a simple arrangement of teaching resources and administrative affairs, but also involves attending to the emotional needs and humanistic care of teachers and students. The people-oriented educational philosophy emphasizes respecting the uniqueness of teachers and students and paying attention to their mental health and emotional needs. Liu and Han (2022) argue that the lack of humanistic care in university educational management not only fails to enhance teachers' work motivation but also makes it difficult to ensure students' personalized development. Institutional constraints are equally indispensable in university management, as they provide norms and frameworks

for the educational process. How to strike a balance between the two—ensuring the standardization and effectiveness of educational management while preserving the warmth of humanistic care—has become an important issue that urgently needs to be explored. This balance not only affects students' learning experiences and growth, but also directly impacts the overall educational quality and social responsibility of higher education institutions.

2. The Vital Role of Humanistic Care in Educational Administration

2.1 The Concept and Implications of Humanistic Care

Humanistic care refers to an educational management philosophy centered on the individual, focusing on students' emotions, needs, and holistic development. It emphasizes that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but also the understanding and respect of students as independent individuals. Humanistic care advocates for creating an inclusive and supportive environment where students receive attention and support in areas such as mental health, value formation, and personal development. This care manifests in positive teacher-student relationships and respect for students' unique backgrounds and differences.

In the practice of humanistic care, educational managers need to combine this philosophy with institutional constraints to ensure the order and efficiency of the educational process. While institutions provide necessary norms and frameworks, overly rigid institutions may neglect the individual needs of students. Therefore, when formulating and implementing educational policies, elements of humanistic care should be flexibly integrated to better adapt to the diverse needs of students, thereby achieving the fundamental goal of education—cultivating well-rounded, high-quality talents. Through this balance, educational management can better promote students' growth and well-being.

2.2 The Manifestation of Humanistic Care in Higher Education Management

This is reflected in attention to and support for students' mental health, as well as emphasis on teachers' professional development and the active cultivation of campus culture. Based on the humanistic philosophy, strengthening flexible management and promoting the organic integration of flexible and rigid management can not only improve the quality of school education but also provide diverse constructive suggestions for school development (Xu, 2022). In higher education management, the further manifestation of humanistic care also includes an emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness. Educational administrators should pay attention to the needs of students from different backgrounds and enhance each student's sense of belonging and participation by formulating individualized educational plans. Cheng (2023) argues that infusing humanistic care into higher education management can not only enhance college students' practical abilities and educational administrators' comprehensive competence but also improve the effectiveness of educational management work. At the same time, universities should pay attention to teachers' mental health and job satisfaction, providing support for professional development and psychological counseling so that teachers can devote themselves more effectively to teaching and research in a caring environment. The well-being of

faculty and staff directly affects the quality of education. Therefore, for the development of colleges and universities, Guo and Yue (2024) suggest that humanistic care should be integrated into educational management through various means, which can not only stimulate teachers' work enthusiasm but also help students achieve all-round development. In summary, humanistic care in higher education management not only focuses on individuals' mental health and professional development but also needs to strengthen attention to diversity and inclusiveness at the institutional level, creating a more harmonious and positive educational environment to achieve the comprehensive development goals of education.

2.3 The Relationship Between Humanistic Care and Educational Quality

In the relationship between humanistic care and educational quality, the two are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Guo and Yue (2024) state that in modern higher education management practice, emphasizing the application of humanistic care has become an inevitable trend, helping to better carry out higher education management work so as to promote students' all-round development. Educational quality is not only reflected in the improvement of academic performance, but should also include the comprehensive development of students' ideological and moral character, innovation ability, practical ability, and mental health. Research shows that an educational environment with humanistic care helps to enhance students' learning motivation and autonomy, strengthen their sense of belonging and well-being. Moreover, humanistic care promotes trust and cooperation between teachers and students, fosters an open and inclusive campus culture, and provides students with a good environment for growth. However, the implementation of humanistic care cannot rely solely on emotional investment; it also requires institutional guarantees to ensure the scientificity and fairness of educational management. Only under the constraints of institutions can humanistic care be effectively implemented, avoiding the blindness of emotionalism and the laxity of management. In practice, research has found that Cheng (2023) argues that the infiltration of humanistic care in educational management is an effective measure to enhance students' comprehensive competence. In summary, the role of humanistic care in improving educational quality cannot be ignored. It can stimulate students' potential, promote personality development, and create a good educational environment, thereby achieving comprehensive and coordinated development of higher education.

3. The Necessity of Institutional Constraints in Educational Management

3.1 Definition and Necessity of Institutional Constraints

Institutional constraints refer to the norms and limitations on educational behaviors and management activities formed by laws, regulations, policies, and internal rules in educational management. This constraint mechanism includes national education laws, industry standards, and various internal rules and regulations within universities, aiming to ensure the smooth progress of educational work through clear behavioral guidelines. Wang (2025) states that institutions are an indispensable part of educational management, fundamentally defining the behavioral boundaries of teachers and students, possessing a

certain constraining significance, and serving as an important prerequisite for ensuring the smooth implementation of educational management. In higher education management, institutional constraints ensure effective collaboration among teachers, students, and administrators within their respective scopes of responsibility, while avoiding problems such as unclear rights and responsibilities and resource waste caused by role ambiguity. Therefore, establishing and improving the institutional constraint mechanism plays a vital role in promoting the standardization and specialization of educational management, as well as enhancing educational quality and efficiency.

At the same time, institutional constraints also play an important role in maintaining educational equity and justice. By implementing a series of fair and transparent systems, it is possible to effectively constrain the power of managers, reduce the interference of human factors in educational outcomes, and ensure that every student receives education on a level playing field. Guo and Yue (2024) state that universities, when conducting educational management, should uphold the principle of fairness and justice and avoid any form of subjective bias or interference. Furthermore, institutional constraints can establish a reasonable mechanism for accountability. When educational managers or teachers are derelict in their duties, the system can clarify responsibility and safeguard rights and interests. This not only promotes integrity in education but also helps cultivate students' awareness of the rule of law and respect for rules. In summary, the necessity of institutional constraints lies not only in regulating educational management behaviors but also in ensuring a fair and just educational environment, thereby promoting the healthy development of the entire education enterprise.

3.2 The Impact of Institutional Systems on Educational Management Outcomes

The impact of institutions on educational outcomes is multifaceted, and one important aspect is that the implementation capacity of institutions is directly related to teaching quality and learning efficiency. The design and implementation of educational management systems can provide teachers with clear teaching norms and standards, promoting orderly classroom instruction. For example, regular teaching evaluations and course feedback mechanisms can help teachers adjust their teaching strategies in a timely manner to meet students' learning needs. Research shows that Zhang and Wang (2025) argue that the governance of any organization cannot be separated from institutions, and the same holds true for universities. It can be said that without institutions, governance cannot be carried out. Without good institutions, there cannot be good governance, let alone the achievement of good governance. When teachers carry out their teaching work within a clear institutional framework, it not only enhances the systematic and continuous nature of teaching but also increases students' learning motivation, thereby effectively promoting the realization of educational goals.

On the other hand, institutions also play an important role in maintaining students' academic integrity and fairness. Provisions regarding academic integrity within the educational system can effectively curb misconduct such as plagiarism and cheating, fostering a good academic atmosphere. Zhang and Wang (2025) state that formally binding institutions, as the formal rule systems for universities to handle internal and external relationships, are the fundamental support for ensuring the smooth

operation of university activities such as teaching, research, and social service. In addition, reasonable reward and punishment mechanisms can effectively stimulate students' learning motivation, prompting them to make continuous progress through competition. Conversely, an environment lacking institutional constraints tends to breed lax learning attitudes, leading to a decline in academic standards and overall educational outcomes. Therefore, institutions in educational management are not merely a formality; they profoundly influence every aspect of educational activities, thus directly affecting educational effectiveness.

4. Management Strategies for Achieving Balance

4.1 Incorporating Elements of Humanistic Care into Institutional Design

In higher education management, incorporating humanistic care into institutional design is not only a management philosophy but also a profound understanding of students' holistic development. First, in curriculum design and teaching arrangements, a more humanistic teaching model can be developed by focusing on students' individual differences and emotional needs. For example, in addition to a rigorous course schedule, schools can encourage the provision of humanities-oriented courses tailored to the characteristics of students from different majors and grade levels, such as mental health education, career planning, and competency development. These courses not only help enhance students' personal abilities but also strengthen their awareness of autonomous learning and self-management skills. Through flexible and diverse course arrangements, schools can better reflect respect for and attention to students' individual needs in institutional design.

Secondly, incorporating elements of humanistic care into the assessment and feedback mechanism is particularly important. In many universities, student academic evaluation still mainly relies on a single method of score-based assessment. This dehumanizing evaluation method may increase students' academic pressure and even affect their mental health. Therefore, when designing the evaluation mechanism, universities can introduce diversified feedback methods such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher comments, in addition to traditional exam scores. This diversified evaluation approach not only provides a more comprehensive reflection of students' learning situations but also allows students to experience care and support during the feedback process. Research shows that Zheng (2025) suggests that in areas such as talent cultivation and performance assessment, universities should build diverse growth platforms for teachers and students, improve financial aid and reward policies, and provide appropriate guidance to effectively enhance the sense of fulfillment among both teachers and students. In this way, universities can better embody humanistic care in institutional design, thereby helping students find a better balance between their studies and daily life.

4.2 Enhancing the Humanistic Literacy and Emotional Competence of Educational Administrators

The humanistic literacy and emotional competence of educational administrators are key pivots for constructing a balance between humanistic care and institutional constraints in higher education management. Wang (2021) states that teachers should transform their own educational management

concepts and create a relaxed and humanized teaching atmosphere and environment for college students, which plays a very important role in promoting their holistic development. Enhancing one's humanistic literacy requires two-way efforts: knowledge accumulation and value internalization. On the one hand, strengthening the reserve of humanistic knowledge through systematic training programs, offering interdisciplinary courses such as literature, history, and philosophy, guiding administrators to draw humanistic wisdom from classic works and understand the subject position of "people" in the essence of education; on the other hand, constructing reflective practice mechanisms, encouraging administrators to transform humanistic theories into a keen perception of the needs of teachers and students through means such as educational logs and case studies, thereby forming a closed loop of thinking of "observation—understanding—empathy".

The cultivation of emotional competence must focus on two dimensions: emotional management and relationship building. At the emotional management level, psychological tools such as the Emotional Intelligence Inventory (EQ-i) should be introduced to help managers identify their own emotional patterns. Through mindfulness training, stress management workshops, and other approaches, they can enhance their emotional regulation abilities, thereby avoiding mechanistic or emotional tendencies in policy implementation. Regarding relationship building, implementing a "participatory management" model requires managers to regularly engage in student club activities, faculty forums, and similar settings to cultivate empathy through authentic interactions. Concurrently, establishing a "mentor-mentee" emotional support network enables seasoned managers to impart humanistic warmth in educational administration through both instruction and example to newcomers.

4.3 Establish a Feedback Mechanism to Promptly Adjust Management Strategies

Higher education institutions should move beyond the one-way control paradigm and establish a closed-loop system encompassing "policy implementation—emotional response—strategic optimization." This approach enables the management framework to gain corrective momentum through continuous adaptation.

First, establish a comprehensive feedback network to ensure unimpeded channels for diverse stakeholders to voice their opinions. For students, embed routine deliberation mechanisms within the "one-stop" community platform, centralizing management of academic appeals, psychological assistance requests, and institutional suggestions. For faculty, leverage the Faculty Congress to launch specialized "institutional perception" surveys, combining anonymous questionnaires with focus group discussions to capture emotional resistance and implicit demands during policy implementation. Feedback data is integrated into digital governance ledgers, enabling full traceability of the "request-processing-evaluation" cycle to ensure individual voices are not lost in bureaucratic processes. Second, establish a tiered response and rapid resolution mechanism for feedback. Categorize feedback into three types: Structural deficiencies such as outdated institutional designs or redundant procedures should trigger targeted revisions to optimize rule alignment; Behavioral misconduct like apathetic execution or improper discretion should be addressed through scenario simulations and service ethics

training to enhance frontline managers' humanistic competence. Set distinct resolution timelines for each category to prevent delayed responses or weakened principles caused by a one-size-fits-all approach.

Third, incorporate feedback conversion rates and institutional responsiveness into management performance evaluations. Shift the evaluation focus from merely “avoiding incidents” to “fostering effective education.” Establish a feedback adoption checklist and regularly publish the Management Strategy Adjustment Report, disclosing revised policy items, improvement case studies, and reasons for unadopted suggestions to create a transparent and tangible feedback loop. Publicly commend entities with high adoption rates to cultivate intrinsic motivation for faculty and student participation in governance.

Fourth, establish a routine tracking mechanism for institutional implementation outcomes. Each semester, select several key policies for post-implementation evaluation. Utilize methods such as follow-up questionnaires and focus groups to understand the actual experiences and unintended consequences encountered during policy execution.

5. Conclusion

In the ongoing process of deepening reforms in higher education administration, striking a balance between humanistic care and institutional constraints has become a critical factor influencing educational quality and management effectiveness. This paper's systematic analysis reveals that humanistic care, serving as a flexible pillar of educational management, effectively stimulates the agency and creativity of faculty and students while enhancing their identification with educational goals and sense of belonging. Conversely, institutional constraints, functioning as a rigid framework, provide essential normative safeguards for the orderly conduct of educational activities. These two elements are mutually reinforcing and indispensable. However, some universities currently face challenges such as insufficient humanistic care or overly rigid systems in their management practices, hindering the simultaneous improvement of management effectiveness and faculty/student satisfaction. To address this, this paper proposes strategies including establishing dynamic adjustment mechanisms, improving channels for faculty and student participation, and strengthening the flexible design of systems to achieve an organic integration of humanistic care and institutional constraints. This balance not only helps optimize the educational management ecosystem and promote the comprehensive development of faculty and students but also provides theoretical support and practical pathways for advancing the modernization of university governance. Future research may further explore tailored balancing models by considering the distinctive characteristics of different types of universities. Simultaneously, examining how management tools in the digital context influence the relationship between humanistic care and institutional constraints could advance educational management research to greater depth.

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