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Research on the Realistic Dilemmas and Innovative Practice Paths of College Career Education in the New Era

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Abstract: In the context of the new era, career education in universities represents a crucial approach for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue, serving the broader national strategy of building an educational power, and effectively resolving the structural contradictions inherent in college students' employment. Currently, there are numerous practical problems and bottlenecks in career education across Chinese universities, including lagging pedagogical concepts, rigid instructional content, monotonous delivery models, weak faculty competencies, and imperfect institutional guarantee mechanisms. Consequently, traditional employment guidance-style education is no longer suitable for the dynamic needs of modern talent cultivation and rapid social development. Based on the contemporary requirements of educational reform and the unique growth characteristics of modern college students, this article systematically analyzes the current developmental status and practical predicaments of university career education. By integrating career construction theory with the core concept of holistic education, this study explores innovative practical paths for university career education across six critical dimensions: educational concept innovation, curriculum system reconfiguration, digital and intelligent technology empowerment, practical scenario expansion, professional faculty team building, and long-term mechanism construction. Ultimately, the primary aim is to build a comprehensive, all-round, and regular career education system. This framework will significantly help college students achieve precise career positioning and sustainable lifelong career development, thereby providing robust theoretical references and practical lessons for improving the overall quality of university talent cultivation and ensuring the high-quality development of university employment initiatives.

Keywords: career education; higher education; educational reform; holistic education; lifelong development

1. Introduction

With the advancement of the education power strategy, the continuous expansion of higher education accessibility, and the evolving structure of the employment market, college career education has transitioned from traditional employment assistance to a core component of universities' mission to foster virtue and cultivate talent. It serves as a critical link between higher education talent cultivation and societal talent demands. The current era imposes higher expectations on college talent cultivation, requiring students not only to possess solid professional knowledge and skills but also to demonstrate clear career awareness, effective career planning, strong adaptability, and lifelong development capabilities [1, 2].

At present, the number of college graduates continues to grow, with projections indicating that the scale will reach 12.7 million by 2026. The employment market is characterized by "overall pressure and structural contradictions coexisting." Challenges such as employment homogeneity, career uncertainty, and mismatches between individuals and positions have become increasingly evident. While a minority of students have clear career goals, the majority face unclear career awareness, limited planning abilities, and inadequate career literacy. These issues stem from the fact that traditional

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college career education has been largely confined to employment guidance during the graduation season and job-hunting skills training, neglecting lifelong career cultivation, personalized development guidance, and the shaping of lifelong abilities. Consequently, the effectiveness of such education remains difficult to demonstrate [3].

In this context, advancing the innovation and optimization of college career education and establishing a modern career education system for colleges has become a necessary step for institutions to deepen educational practices, fulfill their missions, and address both student development and societal needs [1, 4]. This paper examines the current state and challenges of college career education and explores scientific, systematic, and digital innovative approaches to provide new perspectives and solutions for the high-quality development of college career education in the current era.

2. Core Connotation and Era Value of College Career Education in the New Era

2.1. Core Connotation

College career education in the new era transcends traditional employment guidance by adopting a comprehensive approach rooted in virtue promotion and talent cultivation. It is supported by career construction theory and holistic education principles, encompassing the entire journey of college students from admission to post-graduation development. Its primary focus has shifted from merely addressing employment challenges to fostering lifelong development. Through systematic education, scenario-based practice, and personalized guidance, it aids students in achieving self-awareness, career exploration, value formation, and skill enhancement. This process helps students establish correct perspectives on careers, employment, and success, aligning their personal growth with national priorities, industry trends, and societal progress. The first key feature is its comprehensiveness, which extends beyond concentrated guidance during the graduation season to span the entire four-year university experience. This phased approach includes enlightenment in the first year, exploration in the second year, planning in the third year, and implementation in the fourth year. The second feature is its individualization, moving away from uniform, template-based models to tailor education based on students' professional fields, personality traits, and developmental needs. The third feature is its integration, combining ideological and political education, professional training, practical learning, and mental health support. This ensures a cohesive approach to imparting knowledge, cultivating abilities, and guiding values.

2.2. Era Value

From the perspective of the country, innovating university career education is an important measure to serve the strategies of building an education power and a talent power [5]. As the main site for talent cultivation, universities can guide college students to align with national strategies, key industries, and grassroots frontlines through scientific career education, which can optimize talent resource allocation, address employment structural challenges, and provide society with high-quality and adaptable composite talents, contributing to the advancement of national industries and achieving sustainable economic and social development.

From the perspective of universities, innovating career education is a key leverage to enhance higher education and improve educational quality. Promoting the integration of career education with professional teaching, ideological and political education, and practical education can strengthen the university's education system, address the disconnect between talent cultivation and market demand, and improve the competitiveness of university education and the alignment of talent cultivation with societal needs [6].

From the perspective of students, systematic career education is an important foundation for lifelong development [7]. Modern career education not only helps students address practical challenges related to graduation and employment, but also cultivates their career planning ability, professional core competencies, and adaptability, guiding

them to embrace lifelong learning, respond effectively to dynamic changes in the job market, and achieve sustainable personal growth.

3. Realistic Challenges of Career Education in the New Era

3.1. Lagging Educational Concepts and Deviation in Educational Positioning

Currently, many universities exhibit significant misunderstandings regarding career education, with outdated concepts failing to meet contemporary demands. Career education is often narrowly equated with employment guidance, emphasizing job-seeking skills, hosting policy lectures, and organizing job fairs, while neglecting its broader educational roles such as career enlightenment, cognitive development, value orientation, and skill cultivation. Furthermore, career education tends to adopt a "utilitarian" approach, prioritizing quantitative metrics like employment rates and job quality over addressing students' unique developmental needs and fostering lifelong learning capabilities. Additionally, some universities rely excessively on Western theoretical frameworks for career education, without adequately adapting them to China's foundational educational goals, national context, and the developmental characteristics of university students. This disconnect between educational content and objectives undermines the intrinsic value of career education and limits its effectiveness.

3.2. Fixed Curriculum System and Insufficient Adaptability to Students' Learning Situations

Curriculum serves as the fundamental medium for career education. At present, career education courses in many universities exhibit fragmented structures, uniform content, and limited variety in delivery methods. Regarding course design, most universities provide only a compulsory general career planning course during the first year, lacking progressive and tiered courses tailored to the diverse needs of students across different academic years and developmental stages. In terms of content, the materials are often outdated, focusing predominantly on theoretical knowledge and job-seeking skills, while neglecting insights into emerging industries, new professions, and industry development trends. Additionally, practical topics such as professional competencies, workplace etiquette, entrepreneurship, and stress management are underrepresented. From a pedagogical perspective, traditional lecture-based teaching remains dominant, with minimal integration of innovative methods such as case studies, experiential learning, workshops, and immersive practices. This results in low levels of classroom engagement, interaction, and practical application, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of the teaching process.

The current career education model in universities is predominantly singular, lacking a robust collaborative education mechanism. Career education is primarily managed by student affairs departments and employment guidance centers, creating a "single-player" operational framework. Internally, coordination among various university departments, such as professional colleges, academic affairs offices, youth organizations, and mental health centers, remains insufficient [8, 9]. This disconnect hinders the integration of career education with professional instruction, ideological and political education, practical training, and entrepreneurship and innovation education, thereby limiting the synergy of educational resources and processes. Externally, partnerships between universities and industry enterprises, employers, alumni networks, and social organizations are often superficial, with limited opportunities for vocational practice, industry research, and on-the-job training. Consequently, students face restricted avenues for exploring career paths and understanding workplace demands and industry trends. Furthermore, collaboration between schools and families is inadequate. Parental influence, shaped by traditional employment perspectives, significantly impacts students' career decisions, yet a cohesive home-school educational alliance has not been established.

3.3. Weak Teaching Staff and Professional Level Needs Improvement

The professionalization of faculty is essential for ensuring the quality of career education. However, current efforts to build career education teaching teams at

universities remain inadequate. The faculty structure is notably unbalanced, with the majority of career education teachers being part-time staff, such as counselors and administrative personnel. This results in a significant shortage of full-time career educators and poor team stability. Additionally, faculty members often lack sufficient professional competence. Part-time instructors typically receive inadequate systematic training in career education theory, vocational assessment techniques, and job market analysis. This limits their understanding of emerging industry developments and job competency requirements, thereby hindering their ability to provide personalized and precise career guidance. Furthermore, universities lack comprehensive mechanisms for faculty training, evaluation, and incentives. This leads to insufficient motivation among teachers to engage in innovative research and practical exploration in career education, making it challenging to meet the demands of high-quality career education development in the current era.

3.4. Insufficient Technological Empowerment, Lagging Digital Education Level

In the digital era, technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and virtual reality have been widely applied in the education field. However, the digital transformation of career education in many universities remains slow. First, the construction of digital platforms is incomplete. Existing employment platforms are primarily limited to basic functions like job postings and data statistics, lacking integrated features such as career assessment, personalized planning, intelligent responses, and comprehensive tracking. Second, the application of digital technologies is superficial. Tools such as AI-driven career simulations, VR-based workplace experiences, and big data academic analysis are rarely utilized, resulting in an inability to accurately match student needs or implement stratified and categorized education. Third, data resource integration is inadequate. Academic, practical, psychological, and career assessment data remain disconnected, hindering the potential for data-driven precision in career education.

4. Innovative Practice Paths for Career Education in the New Era of Universities

4.1. Revise the Education Philosophy and Rebuild the Core Position of Career Education

Innovating career education in the new era of universities should first overcome the limitations of traditional perspectives and transition from "employment guidance" to "career education." First, emphasize the fundamental goal of "cultivating virtue and fostering talents," integrating comprehensive education throughout the career education process. This approach aims to guide students in establishing career values centered on contributing to society and aligning with national strategic industries, grassroots initiatives, and emerging sectors, thereby achieving a balance between personal aspirations and societal needs. Second, adopt a lifelong education perspective by constructing a "four-year progressive" career cultivation system. This system focuses on career enlightenment in the first year, helping students understand themselves, explore their academic disciplines, and develop career awareness; career exploration in the second year, guiding students through industry research, experiential learning, and skill enhancement; career planning in the third year, where students define career goals, create development plans, and address skill gaps; and employment implementation in the fourth year, which includes job-seeking guidance, role alignment, mindset preparation, and career adaptation training. Finally, develop localized innovations by building a career education framework tailored to China's higher education landscape, industry trends, and the developmental needs of university students. This framework should move beyond the constraints of Western theoretical paradigms to establish a system that aligns with China's unique context and requirements.

4.2. Reconstruct the Curriculum System and Create a Layered Progressive Teaching Model

To address the challenges of rigid course structures and limited adaptability, a three-dimensional, progressive curriculum system comprising "general education foundation + professional advancement + specialized development" should be established. This

approach ensures comprehensive coverage, stratification, and personalized career education. First, general education foundation courses should be strengthened by introducing a mandatory course, "College Career Planning," for all first-year students. This course would cover fundamental topics such as career awareness, self-assessment, career planning, and employment policies, laying a robust foundation for students' career growth. Second, professional advancement courses should align with specific professional training objectives and industry requirements, integrating career education into professional instruction. These courses could include topics such as industry analysis, professional career competencies, and job-role alignment, fostering a stronger connection between academic learning and career development. Third, specialized development courses should be diversified, offering electives such as entrepreneurship, workplace etiquette, resume writing, interview techniques, career psychological adjustment, and interdisciplinary career pathways, catering to students' varied developmental needs.

Simultaneously, teaching methods should be innovated by moving away from traditional lecture-based formats. Emphasis should be placed on workshop-style teaching, experiential learning, case discussions, and project-based approaches to create immersive educational environments [10, 11]. Leveraging the capabilities of modern digital platforms, resources such as online micro-lessons, live lecture sessions, and career-focused short videos should be developed. By adopting a blended teaching model that integrates online and offline methods, the courses can become more engaging and effective.

4.3. Integrate Multiple Resources and Build a Comprehensive Collaborative Education System

To address the issue of isolated efforts in career education, it is essential to integrate internal and external resources, as well as online and offline platforms, while fostering collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Internally, a structured mechanism should be established, emphasizing "school coordination, departmental collaboration, college leadership, and class implementation." This approach promotes synergy among the employment guidance center, academic affairs department, Youth League Committee, mental health center, and secondary colleges. By embedding career education into professional teaching, ideological and political education, practical activities, and mental health education, the goal of holistic, continuous, and comprehensive student development can be achieved.

Externally, partnerships with enterprises, regions, and other universities should be strengthened to create sustainable career practice platforms. Collaborations with leading enterprises and emerging industries can facilitate the establishment of career education practice bases, enabling regular activities such as enterprise visits, job training, industry research, and workplace internships. Inviting executives, industry experts, and distinguished alumni to deliver lectures, provide career counseling, and share experiences can help students gain insights into industry trends and job requirements. Additionally, working with human resources departments and talent service agencies to introduce high-quality employment, policy, and guidance resources can expand students' career opportunities. Furthermore, enhancing home-school collaboration through parent meetings, targeted notifications, and online communication can guide parents in adopting informed perspectives on success and employment, fostering a unified educational effort between families and schools.

4.4. Strengthen the Construction of Teaching Staff and Build a Professional Team for Education

Teacher professionalization is the core guarantee for the innovative development of career education. It is essential to establish a high-level teaching team characterized by "primarily full-time, supplemented by part-time, and supported by experts." First, the capacity of full-time teachers should be expanded by equipping them with sufficient professional career education instructors, clearly defining job responsibilities, promotion pathways, and assessment standards to ensure team stability [4, 12]. Second, the part-time teaching team should be optimized by selecting outstanding counselors, professional educators, and ideological and political instructors to join the career education team. Additionally, industry experts, distinguished alumni, and enterprise HR professionals

can be engaged as part-time mentors to enrich the teaching staff. The teacher training system should be improved by establishing a regular training mechanism, organizing periodic training sessions on topics such as career education theory, digital technology application, career assessment, and employment market analysis. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in career education research and explore teaching innovations to enhance their professional and scientific educational capabilities. Simultaneously, a robust teacher assessment and incentive mechanism should be established, integrating career education teaching, guidance, and research into the teacher performance evaluation, selection, and reward system to fully mobilize teachers' enthusiasm and creativity.

4.5. Enabling Digital and Intelligent Technology to Empower, Building a Precise Career Education New Model

Adhering to the development trend of digital education, supported by technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, VR/AR, etc., promote the digitalization, precision, and intelligence upgrade of career education. Firstly, build an integrated digital and intelligent career education platform, integrate functions such as career assessment, course learning, career information, job push, practice registration, tracking guidance, and data statistics, relying on big data to analyze students' academic situations, personality traits, ability weaknesses, and development demands, and generate personalized career planning schemes and growth suggestions for students.

Secondly, we innovate the digital education and training scenarios by introducing tools such as VR workplace experience systems, AI simulated interviews, and intelligent assessment of vocational abilities. This enables students to immerse themselves in the workplace environment, simulate job-seeking scenarios, and accurately understand their own abilities, thereby enhancing their career adaptability and response capabilities [12, 13]. By leveraging big data technology to analyze employment data from previous years, industry development data, and job demand data, we can precisely predict employment market trends, providing data support for the school's career education adjustments and students' career choices. At the same time, we build an online career education platform based on new media platforms, using forms such as official accounts, video accounts, and live broadcasts to disseminate industry information, planning techniques, employment policies, and role model stories, achieving regular and incremental integration of career education.

4.6. Improving Guarantee Mechanisms, Consolidating Long-Term Career Education Foundation

A sound guarantee mechanism is a crucial support for the sustainable and innovative development of career education. It is essential to establish a long-term guarantee system encompassing three dimensions: system, funding, and evaluation. Regarding system guarantees, efforts should focus on enhancing the management framework, implementation guidelines, and operational standards for career education in universities. This includes clearly defining departmental responsibilities, work processes, and promotion criteria [14–16]. Career education should be integrated into universities' talent training plans and education quality assessment systems to ensure its standardized and institutionalized advancement.

In terms of funding guarantees, a dedicated fund for career education should be established. This fund would primarily support course development, teacher training, platform construction, practice base establishment, research initiatives, and activity implementation, thereby providing adequate resources for innovative practices in career education. For evaluation guarantees, it is necessary to move beyond a singular evaluation model focused solely on employment rates and develop a diversified evaluation system for career education. Evaluation indicators should encompass teaching quality, students' career awareness, planning skills, vocational competency development, employment outcomes, and student satisfaction [17]. By combining process and outcome evaluations, as well as quantitative and qualitative methods, the effectiveness of career education can

be comprehensively assessed. Such evaluations should serve as a driver for educational enhancement and quality improvement.

5. Conclusion

Career education in universities in the contemporary context is a fundamental and strategic undertaking for fulfilling the core mission of higher education, advancing educational quality, and supporting students' lifelong development. In response to changes in the employment market, evolving expectations for higher education, and the developmental needs of university students, traditional models of career education are no longer sufficient. Universities should proactively renew their educational concepts. Based on students' long-term growth and social demand for talent, they should comprehensively promote innovation in career education by reconstructing curriculum systems, innovating educational models, integrating multi-stakeholder resources, strengthening faculty development, applying digital and intelligent technologies, and improving supporting mechanisms. Such efforts can address the limitations of utilitarian, fragmented, and one-dimensional career education, and help establish a holistic, personalized, systematic, and intelligent career education system suited to contemporary conditions.

In the future, universities should further deepen the quality-oriented development of career education, continuously advance the integration of career education with values education, discipline-specific education, practical education, and digital education, and continue exploring educational pathways adapted to contemporary conditions, new student cohorts, and changing employment markets. These measures can effectively improve the outcomes of career education, help university students develop sound professional values and strengthen their core vocational competencies, enable them to achieve high-quality employment and sustainable lifelong development, and cultivate more high-level interdisciplinary talent to support broader social and economic development.

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