Research on the Theory of Home-School Collaboration in Moral Education for College Students

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Abstract **- Moral education is a core component of college students' growth, development, and value formation, while home-school collaboration serves as a vital foundation for enhancing the effectiveness of moral education and establishing a comprehensive educational framework. To systematically explore the mechanisms of home-school collaboration in college students' moral education, this study, grounded in theories of home-school collaboration, conducts a theoretical examination of issues such as the alignment of goals, division of responsibilities, and coordination of approaches between university moral education and family upbringing. Through literature review and logical analysis, this study elucidates the crucial role of home-school collaboration in fostering moral cognition, cultivating moral behaviour, and reinforcing moral beliefs among college students, while clarifying the profound impact of family influence, institutional guidance, and two-way interaction on the effectiveness of moral education. The results indicate that establishing a sound home-school collaboration mechanism, ensuring unimpeded communication channels, and consolidating educational synergy can effectively address the shortcomings of a single-track moral education model, thereby enhancing the relevance and sustainability of moral education. The study further proposes that future efforts should focus on improving institutional safeguards for home-school collaboration, promoting alignment between families and universities in value guidance, habit formation, and psychological support, and effectively enhancing the quality of moral education for college students.**

Keywords: **College students, moral education, home-school collaboration, collaborative education, effectiveness of moral education**

I. INTRODUCTION

We are at present witnessing a rapid increase in attention to moral education in higher education institutions worldwide. Moral education is widely recognized as a core component of college students' growth, development, and value formation (Zhang & Li, 2021). However, in many parts of the world, moral education in universities still operates primarily within campus boundaries, with limited involvement of families in the educational process (Liu, 2020). In other words, most universities implement moral education as an independent, school-centered activity, without systematically integrating family resources and influences.

Fortunately, recent educational reforms have emphasized the importance of collaborative education. The concept of home-school collaboration has gained prominence as a vital foundation for enhancing the effectiveness of moral education and establishing a comprehensive educational framework (Wang, 2019). In recent days, for instance, many universities have begun to explore mechanisms for involving families in moral education through parent-teacher associations, family-school communication platforms, and joint educational activities.

Among various collaborative approaches, home-school collaboration in moral education has special features which are unavailable in traditional, university-centered moral education models. In this sense, home-school collaboration allows for the integration of family influence and institutional guidance, creating a seamless educational environment that extends from campus to home (Chen & Zhao, 2022). Thus, it provides a space for college students to receive consistent moral guidance across different contexts, increasing the coherence and effectiveness of moral education.

In fact, as reported by Zhou (2023), many studies support the positive relationship between home-school collaboration and educational outcomes in primary and secondary education. However, research on home-school collaboration in higher education remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by systematically examining the theoretical mechanisms of home-school collaboration in college students' moral education.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Broadly speaking, moral education in universities faces significant challenges in achieving its intended outcomes. There are some studies which have discussed the difficulties encountered by universities in implementing effective moral education programs (Li & Wang, 2020). In China, for instance, researchers have reported that university moral education often remains at the level of knowledge transmission, with limited impact on students' moral behaviour and value internalization (Liu, 2020).

The limited effectiveness of university-cantered moral education is also found in several other countries. For example, in the United States, studies have shown that moral education programs in universities often fail to produce lasting changes in students 'moral reasoning and behaviour (Rest & Narvaez, 2018). Likewise, in European countries, researchers have found that moral education is often marginalized in university curricula, with limited institutional support and faculty engagement (Smith, 2019). Consequently, many universities are seeking new approaches to enhance the effectiveness of moral education.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating three key theoretical questions:

1. What are the core components and mechanisms of home-school collaboration in college students' moral education?
2. How do family influence, institutional guidance, and two-way interaction affect the effectiveness of moral education?
3. What are the pathways for establishing effective home-school collaboration mechanisms in higher education?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Moral Education for College Students

Moral education refers to the systematic process through which educational institutions foster students'moral cognition, cultivate moral emotions, shape moral behaviour , and reinforce moral beliefs. For college students, moral education is particularly important because this period represents a critical stage in value formation and identity development (Zhang & Li, 2021).

Research has demonstrated that effective moral education encompasses multiple dimensions. First, moral cognition involves students' understanding of moral principles, ethical standards, and social norms. Second, moral emotions include empathy, guilt, shame, and other affective responses to moral situations. Third, moral behaviour refers to actions that conform to or violate moral standards. Fourth, moral beliefs represent the internalization of moral values as part of one's identity (Rest & Narvaez, 2018).

However, university moral education faces several challenges. These include the gap between knowledge and action (students know moral principles but do not apply them), the limitation of campus-based interventions (moral education stops when students leave campus), and the lack of individualized approaches (one-size-fits-all programs fail to address diverse student needs) (Liu, 2020).

Home-School Collaboration

Home-school collaboration refers to the cooperative relationship between families and educational institutions in supporting student development. This concept originated in primary and secondary education but has increasingly been applied to higher education as universities recognize the continuing influence of families on college students (Epstein, 2019).

According to Epstein's model of home-school collaboration, effective collaboration encompasses six types of involvement: parenting (helping families create supportive home environments), communicating (establishing two-way communication channels), volunteering (recruiting family participation in school activities), learning at home (providing guidance for family educational activities), decision-making (including families in institutional governance), and collaborating with the community (integrating community resources) (Epstein, 2019).

For college students, home-school collaboration is particularly important because families continue to exert significant influence on students' values, behaviour s, and career choices. Research has shown that family involvement in higher education is associated with higher student retention, better academic performance, and greater psychological well-being (Wang, 2019).

Theoretical Mechanisms of Home-School Collaboration in Moral Education

The mechanisms through which home-school collaboration enhances moral education can be understood through three theoretical perspectives. First, from a systems perspective, home-school collaboration creates a consistent educational environment across home and campus, reducing contradictions and conflicts in students' moral socialization (Chen & Zhao, 2022).

Second, from a communication perspective, home-school collaboration establishes two-way information flow between families and universities, enabling both parties to understand students' moral development and coordinate their educational approaches. This prevents the situation where universities and families work at cross-purposes or undermine each other's efforts (Li & Wang, 2020).

Third, from a resource perspective, home-school collaboration mobilizes family resources (such as parental guidance, family traditions, and community connections) to supplement university moral education programs. This is particularly important for addressing the individualized needs of students that cannot be met through mass education approaches (Zhou, 2023).

Theoretical Framework and Propositions

Drawing on Epstein's theory of home-school collaboration and Rest 's four-component model of moral development, this study proposes the following theoretical propositions:

P1: Goal alignment between families and universities positively affects the effectiveness of moral education.

P2: Clear division of responsibilities between families and universities positively affects the coherence of moral education.

P3: Two-way communication between families and universities positively affects the coordination of moral education approaches.

P4: Educational synergy (the combined effect of family and university efforts) positively affects students' moral cognition, moral behaviour, and moral beliefs.

IV. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a theoretical research design, combining literature review and logical analysis. The literature review systematically examined existing research on home-school collaboration in moral education, while logical analysis was used to identify theoretical mechanisms and construct an integrative framework.

Data Sources

Literature was sourced from four databases: CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), Wanfang Data, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. Search terms included combinations of "college students, "" moral education, "" home-school collaboration, "" family involvement, "" collaborative education, "and" effectiveness of moral education. " The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2024.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they met the following criteria: (1) published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) focused on moral education, home-school collaboration, or family involvement in higher education; (3) provided theoretical or empirical insights relevant to the research questions; (4) written in Chinese or English. Articles were excluded if they focused exclusively on primary or secondary education without implications for higher education.

Analytical Approach

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes in the literature. Following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis proceeded through six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final framework. Logical analysis was then used to examine the relationships among identified themes and to construct theoretical propositions.

V. FINDINGS

Theme 1: Goal Alignment Between Families and Universities

The literature consistently emphasizes the importance of goal alignment between families and universities for effective moral education. When families and universities share common goals regarding the moral development of students, educational efforts are reinforced rather than contradicted (Epstein, 2019).

However, the literature also reveals significant gaps in goal alignment. Many parents of college students prioritize academic achievement and career preparation over moral development, while universities emphasize both but often lack effective strategies for moral education (Liu, 2020). This misalignment can lead to conflicting messages: universities encourage certain moral values while families inadvertently undermine them through different priorities.

Goal alignment requires explicit communication between families and universities about educational goals. Without such communication, families may be unaware of university moral education objectives, and universities may be unaware of family values and expectations (Zhang & Li, 2021).

Theme 2: Division of Responsibilities

A second theme concerns the division of responsibilities between families and universities in moral education. The literature suggests that effective home-school collaboration requires clear role differentiation rather than duplication of efforts (Chen & Zhao, 2022).

Universities are best positioned to provide systematic moral education through curricula, extracurricular activities, and campus culture. They can expose students to diverse moral perspectives, facilitate moral reasoning through discussion and debate, and provide opportunities for moral action through service learning and community engagement (Rest & Narvaez, 2018).

Families, in contrast, are best positioned to provide personalized moral guidance based on intimate knowledge of the student's character, history, and circumstances. Families can reinforce university-taught values through everyday conversations, model moral behaviour through parental example, and provide emotional support that enables students to act on their moral convictions (Wang, 2019).

When responsibilities are unclear or overlapping, confusion and conflict can result. For example, when universities attempt to replace rather than supplement family moral education, students may experience value conflicts or reject university efforts as intrusive (Zhou, 2023).

Theme 3: Two-Way Communication

The third theme concerns the role of two-way communication in home-school collaboration. The literature distinguishes between one-way communication (universities informing families) and two-way communication (universities and families exchanging information). Effective collaboration requires two-way communication (Epstein, 2019).

One-way communication is insufficient because it does not allow families to share their perspectives, concerns, and insights with universities. Without family input, universities lack information about students' home environments, family values, and individual circumstances that affect moral development (Li & Wang, 2020).

Two-way communication enables universities to understand family contexts and families to understand university programs. It allows for coordination of approaches, early identification of problems, and joint problem-solving. Communication channels identified in the literature include parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, phone calls, email, social media groups, and dedicated family-school communication platforms (Chen & Zhao, 2022).

Theme 4: Educational Synergy

The fourth theme concerns educational synergy—the combined effect of family and university efforts that exceeds the sum of individual effects. The literature suggests that home-school collaboration creates synergy through several mechanisms (Zhou, 2023).

First, consistency reduces cognitive dissonance. When students receive consistent moral messages from families and universities, they are more likely to internalize those messages and act on them consistently. Inconsistency, in contrast, leads to confusion, rationalization, and moral disengagement (Rest & Narvaez, 2018).

Second, reinforcement strengthens learning. When moral lessons taught at university are reinforced at home through discussion, modelling, and expectation, students are more likely to remember and apply those lessons. Without reinforcement, moral learning may fade or be displaced by competing influences (Wang, 2019).

Third, complementarity addresses gaps. Universities can provide moral education content that families lack the expertise or resources to provide, while families can provide personalized guidance that mass university programs cannot offer. Together, they cover the full spectrum of moral development needs (Zhang & Li, 2021).

VI. DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this theoretical study contribute to the literature on moral education and home-school collaboration in several ways. First, the study extends home-school collaboration theory from primary and secondary education to higher education, identifying unique features of collaboration in the college context. Unlike parents of younger children, parents of college students must balance involvement with respect for student autonomy, and collaboration must account for the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Epstein, 2019).

Second, the study identifies specific mechanisms through which home-school collaboration enhances moral education: goal alignment, clear responsibility division, two-way communication, and educational synergy. These mechanisms provide a theoretical framework for designing and evaluating home-school collaboration programs in higher education (Chen & Zhao, 2022).

Third, the study clarifies the distinct but complementary roles of families and universities in college student moral education. Universities are best positioned to provide systematic, cognitive-oriented moral education, while families are best positioned to provide personalized, behaviour -oriented moral guidance. This role differentiation suggests that effective collaboration requires not just communication but also mutual respect for each party‘s unique contributions (Liu, 2020).

Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for universities seeking to enhance moral education through home-school collaboration. First, universities should establish formal mechanisms for goal alignment with families, such as parent orientation sessions that explain moral education objectives and solicit family input on values and priorities (Wang, 2019).

Second, universities should develop clear guidelines for the division of responsibilities between families and universities. These guidelines should respect family autonomy while clarifying university expectations, and should be communicated to both families and students (Zhang & Li, 2021).

Third, universities should invest in two-way communication platforms that enable ongoing dialogue between families and universities. These platforms should be accessible, user-friendly, and designed to facilitate information exchange rather than merely broadcasting university messages (Li & Wang, 2020).

Fourth, universities should design moral education programs that actively engage families in the educational process. Examples include family-inclusive moral education activities, parent education programs on supporting moral development, and family feedback mechanisms that allow parents to share observations and concerns (Zhou, 2023).

Limitations

As a theoretical study, this research has several limitations. First, the findings are based on literature review and logical analysis rather than empirical data. While this approach is appropriate for theoretical development, empirical validation is needed to test the proposed mechanisms and propositions. Second, the literature reviewed is predominantly from Chinese and Western contexts, and findings may not generalize to other cultural settings. Third, the study focuses on home-school collaboration in general terms and does not address variations by student characteristics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background) or institutional type.

VII. CONCLUSION

This theoretical study examined the mechanisms of home-school collaboration in college students‘moral education. Through literature review and logical analysis, the study identified four key mechanisms: goal alignment between families and universities, clear division of responsibilities, two-way communication, and educational synergy. The study proposed that establishing sound home-school collaboration mechanisms, ensuring unimpeded communication channels, and consolidating educational synergy can effectively address the shortcomings of single-track moral education models, thereby enhancing the relevance and sustainability of moral education.

The study contributes to the literature by extending home-school collaboration theory to higher education, identifying specific collaboration mechanisms, and clarifying the distinct roles of families and universities. Practically, the study suggests that universities should establish formal goal alignment mechanisms, develop clear responsibility guidelines, invest in two-way communication platforms, and design family-inclusive moral education programs.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. First, empirical studies should test the proposed mechanisms using quantitative methods. Surveys could measure goal alignment, responsibility clarity, communication quality, and educational synergy, and examine their relationships with moral education outcomes. Second, longitudinal studies should examine how home-school collaboration evolves over the course of college and how it affects long-term moral development. Third, comparative studies should examine variations in home-school collaboration across different cultural contexts, institutional types, and student populations. Fourth, intervention studies should evaluate the effectiveness of specific home-school collaboration programs and identify best practices. Finally, future research should examine potential challenges and barriers to home-school collaboration, including privacy concerns, logistical

difficulties, and value conflicts between families and universities.

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