

# Life Education for College Students: A Case Study of Life Education in Chinese Universities

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**Abstract:** Life education is crucial to the formulation of the outlook and values of college students. However, Chinese higher education has limitations in life education, such as immature life-education curricula, a paucity of life-education subject matter, and the absence of life purpose among college students. This study seeks to pinpoint the causes of the problems with life education for Chinese college students and propose pertinent suggestions, including the implementation of whole-person education and life-based education, an increase in life education research, the optimization of home life education, and the adoption of new media in life education.

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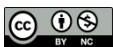
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**L**IFE education is an educational activity that aims to help people understand, revere, and love life, as well as improve survival skills and the quality of life. Its primary purpose is to educate individuals to value their own and others' lives and to equip them with fundamental crisis coping tactics (Li, 2008). Many Chinese universities and colleges have offered life education courses or have established relevant offices to promote life education among students. Due to the relatively short history of life education in Chinese higher education institutions, there is a lack of parameters for it, and its shortcomings are evident. This article raised issues with life education among Chinese college students, analyzed the underlying causes, and came up with relevant recommendations.

## **Challenges in Life Education for College Students**

### ***Immature Life Education Curricula in Higher Education Institutions***

In recent years, there has been a growing incidence of mental problems in Chinese college students, such as sub-health mental states, psychological disorders, and mental imbalances. Inadequate self-knowledge, low morale, and the absence of beliefs are prevalent among them. The root of these issues is the incomplete life education system in higher education. First, current higher education curricula overemphasize students' mastery of disciplinary expertise while disregarding the multidimensional cultivation of comprehensive competencies in them. There is no formal, scheduled life education in place, and its weight remains low in the entire curriculum. Second, student character building, mental health, and spiritual pursuits have been overlooked. Third, crisis response and coping training have been superficial. Lastly, there is a lack of professional life education staff and limited life education instructional materials (Fang & Tian, 2021). Overall, even though the majority of Chinese colleges have incorporated life education into their curricula, current life education emphasizes the actualization of social values in individuals' lives with little guidance on how to construct personal life meaning, manifesting the dearth of humanistic care for students and concern for their spiritual needs in higher education institutions.

### ***Inadequate Life-education Subject Matter***

Despite the fact that a large number of Chinese universities offer elective courses in psychology, ethics, philosophy, and other disciplines that involve life-related issues, there are no well-structured life education-specific courses in operation. Current life education in most universities includes life

safety education and emergency response training, as well as the indoctrination of social values. It is not a comprehensive and targeted instructional design that should cover subjects such as life meaning, self-actualization, resilience against failures, etc. In addition, due to the traditional proclivity to avoid discourse on death in Chinese culture, most schools exclude death education, an integral part of life education, from their life education programs (Zhu, 2009). Only a very small number of students reported occasional exposure to death education, while the majority stated that they had never received any education in this regard. The truth is that the understanding of life-death relations, a key area in life education, is fundamental to the formation of individuals' outlook and values. Life education must provide a reasonable interpretation of death, including its physiological process and significance, to inspire more in-depth contemplations on the value of life in students.

### ***A Lack of Life Purpose among College Students***

Insufficient life education leads to a dearth of life purpose in college students, which is displayed in the following aspects: (i) Weak capabilities of adaptation. A sizeable portion of students have difficulty adapting themselves to college life, with some of them even developing mental psychopathologies like depression and bipolar disorder. (ii) Low stress resistance to some students. A slight increase in academic, economic, emotional, and social pressures is unbearable, which can possibly induce extreme reactions like committing suicide. (iii) The absence of life goals. Notwithstanding the improved materialistic conditions they enjoy, some students fail to set clear goals for their studies and lives, feeling perplexed and powerless. (iv) Low interest in real-world life. In the IT era, many college students choose to indulge themselves in the cyber world and circumvent interactions in real life, resulting in emotional aloofness (Ge & Ping, 2016).

## **Causes of Life Education Issues in Chinese Universities and Colleges**

### ***The Impact of Social Changes on College Students' Values***

The overall social environment in China has undergone unprecedented changes in the past few decades. The market economy has been the most crucial driving force for Chinese social development. While it fuels economic growth and enhances people's quality of life, it poses a negative im-

pact on the traditional ethics and values of Chinese society due to its profit-seeking nature. Its side effects, such as undue utilitarianism and individualism, have the potential to significantly affect the values and behavior of college students who are at the critical stage of forming and developing life meaning (Chu, 2014). Furthermore, alongside the growth of the market economy, the diversity of social culture is intensifying, which can broaden the horizons and enrich the spiritual lives of college students but may also confuse them in their determination of life purpose. Hence, a proper life-purpose education is highly necessitated in higher education curricula. Nevertheless, the current higher education curricula in China have not paid adequate attention to students' spiritual needs and life purpose cultivation, thus having minimal effects on fueling their exploration of life meaning.

### ***Lack of Professional Life Education Capability in College Teachers***

The undesirable efficacy of life education in Chinese colleges is to a large extent related to the low competence in life education among college teachers. Within the examination-oriented educational system, college professors tend to focus on the transmission of disciplinary knowledge. Few of them are aware of the importance of having conversations with students about life purpose to provide guidance for their higher-order understanding of the value of life and to help them actualize life goals. In addition, student affairs personnel at colleges who have day-to-day contact with students for their school routines have the chance and responsibility to administer life education to the latter. However, due to the miscellany of their job responsibilities and the fact that they may have other concurrent positions, student affairs personnel only focus on the management of students' routine events and ignore their personality development, let alone delivering them a life-meaning education. Generally, inadequate teacher engagement is a severe restriction to the effective execution of life education in Chinese colleges.

### ***A Paucity of Life Education by Families***

In the course of the growth of college students, their family environment has a substantial impact on their spiritual development. Recent decades have witnessed tremendous changes in people's lifestyles. The increasingly intricate social interactions and fast pace of work have contributed to the degeneration of familial relationships. This leads to children's defiant attitudes towards their parents and renders home-based life education extremely difficult. In the meantime, the universal utilitarian tendency has also extended to home education. Parents are far more concerned with their children's aca-

demographic results than with their holistic development (Yu, 2001). Parents may communicate with their college-age kids on subjects like personal ambition and career planning but seldom have conversations with them on emotional regulation in interpersonal interactions or reasonable reactions to challenges and failures. Meaningful life education from parents rarely occurs in college students' familial lives.

### ***The Negative Influences of Internet Culture***

College students are among the groups that are most susceptible to the impact of Internet culture. Negative effects of the Internet, such as online gaming addiction, may mislead them in their understanding of the real world and society by blurring the distinctions between the actual world and virtual reality. Also, the wide spread of decadent attitudes via the Internet, such as money worship, hedonism, and egocentrism, is likely to undermine their positive outlooks and values. Furthermore, internet-based communications substantially reduced the chances of in-person interactions. Students' indulgence in cyberspace deprives them of encounters with the external environment, possibly leading to unmet emotional needs and socially deviant behaviors (Zhao et al., 2020).

## **Suggestions for Strengthening Life Education for College Students**

### ***Adhering to the Ideas of “Whole Person” Education and Life-Based Education***

The core of “whole person” education is to foster all-round growth in students (Yang, 2020). Effective education should span all aspects of student development, including personality optimization, character building, willpower training, imagination and creativity cultivation, and life purpose exploration, as well as physical and intellectual development. College is a critical period in students' lives in which they have a big chance to develop positive outlooks, values, and moral principles. Life education should work to comprehensively foster intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development in college students. It is intended to assist in their endeavor to enhance behavior and character alongside their pursuit of academic expertise.

As social creatures, humans cannot isolate their personal development from social realities. No educational activity is independent of social contexts. Life education should derive from life, be executed by life, and be necessitated by life. Life itself is full of educational significance all the time

(Song, 2001). Life-based education is a practice that bases education on actual social life and taps into social resources that facilitate students fostering positive values and exploring the meaning of life. To implement life-based education, college educators should make full use of prime events that occur in school or community settings and guide students to analyze life issues and social phenomena in rational ways with the aim of helping them better adapt to university life and develop problem-analysis and solving capacities. Additionally, it is essential to provide college students with opportunities to put their values into practice. Higher education institutions can enhance students' awareness of social responsibility and capacities to fulfill responsibilities by engaging them in social practice.

### ***Promoting Collaborative Research on Life Education***

Effective implementation of life education is contingent on innovative theoretical research in this regard. The wave of life education emerged as a result of the constant social advancements in China. However, it must be acknowledged that Chinese theoretical research on life education is relatively underdeveloped due to its late start (Huang, 2014). Despite the large number of studies on life education for college students in recent years, the majority of them are theoretical analyses with a lack of applicable measures for the practical implementation of life education. It is imperative to intensify research in this area and innovate in life education subject matter. First, leverage universities' advantage in scientific research. Teaching staff, administrators, and student affairs personnel should all be encouraged to engage in life education research by formulating pertinent research projects. A portion of higher education institutions can set up specialized centers for life education research and implementation according to their academic capabilities. Second, increase inter-college exchanges on life education theories and practices. Teachers should be provided with opportunities to take part in domestic and international conferences on life education to learn from peers' useful experiences. Regular conversations between schools should be held about the progression, issues, and improvements of life education so that they can learn from each other and elevate the effectiveness of life education. Third, emphasize the mutual promotion between life education research and practice. Life education practices provide evidence for research on this subject, which in turn offers guidance and proposals for the former. A mutually beneficial mechanism between life education research and execution should be developed to better explore effective approaches to life education.

### ***Enhancing the Role of the Family in Life Education***

Home is an ideal setting for college students' life education (Wang, 2019). The significance of familial life education lies in its potential to fuel children's healthy growth and development. The role models of parents, home environment, and family heritage all have tacit influences on a child's education. A happy family is a protector of life, whereas an unhappy one can possibly destroy it. To a certain extent, home education has a more far-reaching impact on individuals than formal schooling. It is literally a lifelong education (Yu, 2017). Given this, it is crucial that parents fully understand the value of familial life education and guide their children to face challenges positively and optimistically to foster an upbeat mindset in them. It is imperative to optimize parents' role models and child home experiences and to create a life-valued, life-purpose-focused home environment for the healthy growth of youngsters.

### ***Leveraging New Media in Life Education***

New media technologies have the advantage of being expeditious in transmitting huge volumes of information and free from temporal and special restrictions. The use of new media in life education can substantially expand its sphere. In the IT era, college students' studies and lives are inextricably connected with the Internet. Particularly in the post-pandemic period, online media is gaining weight as a means of academic communication (Huang & Ren, 2022). In the context of the application of new media, knowledge is not only represented by written characters but also by images and videos. The novel instructional paradigm can effectively increase students' interest in life education.

The wide variety of new media, including websites and mobile platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, has the potential to render life education a ubiquitous endeavor and maximize student engagement in it. First, schools can establish life education-specific Weibo or WeChat public platforms through which information about life education can be delivered to students in the form of text, figures, videos, etc. Second, universities can search and screen online life education-related information across the board and give secondary publicity to those top-notch contents on school-based networks and Weibo and WeChat accounts to heighten their influence. Third, new media platforms can be used to make life education programs public to attract more college students, such as visits to memorial halls for eminent historic figures, voluntary service in nursing homes, and life education-themed essay and speech contests. Efforts of these kinds can potentially motivate college students' active and dedicated engagement in life education.

In addition, higher education institutions should contribute more to Internet regulation. Due to their special knowledge background and age, college students tend to be more sensitive to novel ideas and receptive to

emerging cultures than other groups, exhibiting a substantial level of uncertainty about their outlooks and values (Sun, 1998). In the intricate cyberspace environment, college students are susceptible to a variety of misleading concepts. Universities should strengthen their collaboration with network regulation agencies to prevent the dissemination of detrimental information and sanitize their campus-based websites to create an upbeat cyber atmosphere for students.

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