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From "Insufficient Knowledge and Unsteady Behavior" to "Unity of Knowledge and Action": Theoretical Reflection and Path Reconstruction of Behavioral Norm Cultivation Education for Students in Technical and Vocational Colleges

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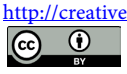

Abstract

Technical and vocational colleges shoulder the important mission of cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents, and the cultivation of students' behavioral norms is a basic project to realize the fundamental task of moral education and cultivating people. However, current technical and vocational colleges generally face the practical dilemma of students' "insufficient knowledge and unsteady behavior"—vague cognition of norms, weak implementation of behaviors, and difficult transformation of knowledge into action. On the basis of sorting out the manifestations of the dilemma and its deep-seated causes, this paper integrates cognitive psychology, behaviorism, constructivism and moral development theory, puts forward a theoretical framework of behavioral norm cultivation with "cognitive compensation, behavioral stabilization, internalized consciousness" as the core logic, and constructs a four-in-one cultivation education model of "cognition-emotion-behavior-environment" through visual transformation, hierarchical promotion and scientific feedback, so as to provide theoretical reference for technical and vocational colleges to solve the problem of disconnection between knowledge and action.

Subject Areas

Education Administration

Keywords

Technical and Vocational Colleges, Behavioral Norm Cultivation, Unity of Knowledge and Action, Hierarchical Promotion, Internalization Mechanism

1. Introduction: The Practical Dilemma of Behavioral Norm Education in Technical and Vocational Colleges

Before proceeding, we define the core constructs used throughout this paper. "Behavioral norms" refer to the explicit or implicit rules and expectations regarding students' daily conduct on campus, including punctuality, appearance, dormitory hygiene, classroom discipline, and professional etiquette. "Insufficient knowledge" denotes students' superficial, fragmented, or inaccurate understanding of these norms, often due to overly abstract or lengthy presentations. "Unsteady behavior" refers to the inconsistent, situation-dependent execution of norms that collapses when external supervision is removed. "Unity of knowledge and action" describes the ideal state where cognitive understanding of norms consistently translates into voluntary, stable behavior without internal conflict. Importantly, behavioral norm cultivation differs from broader ideological and moral education: the latter focuses on values, worldviews, and political identity, while the former targets observable, context-specific conduct that can be shaped through systematic environmental and behavioral interventions.

The Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools clearly put forward the requirement of "emphasizing the unity of knowledge and action and strengthening the cultivation of behavioral habits" [1]. For technical and vocational colleges, the cultivation of students' behavioral norms is not only related to the maintenance of daily campus order, but also directly related to the shaping of students' future professional literacy, which is highly consistent with the talent training goal of "integrating moral and technical education and combining work with study". Surveys show that students in technical and vocational colleges generally have problems such as weak cultural foundation, poor behavioral habits and insufficient self-discipline. Putting forward high-standard behavioral norm requirements immediately upon enrollment is likely to cause a systematic gap from cognition to implementation. At present, the core dilemma of behavioral norm education in these colleges is concentrated in the structural contradiction of "insufficient knowledge and unsteady behavior" and the disconnection between knowledge and action.

The core performance of "insufficient knowledge" is that the current norms are mostly presented in lengthy and abstract written clauses, which do not conform to the cognitive characteristics of students in technical and vocational colleges, leading to obstruction in the "first mile" of norm education. When students face dozens of pages of the Student Handbook in the early stage of enrollment, it is difficult for them to grasp the core points, and their understanding of the bound-

ary between "allowed" and "not allowed" is vague. "Unsteady behavior" is reflected in the fact that students' implementation of norms is highly dependent on external supervision. When the supervision intensity decreases, irregular behaviors rebound rapidly, and the stability and initiative of behaviors are seriously lacking [2]. This phenomenon of "being one way during inspections and another way after inspections" is particularly prominent in scenarios such as being late, leaving early, appearance and grooming, and dormitory hygiene.

A deeper problem is that current behavioral norm education mostly stops at system publicity and clause requirements, and the "transformation mechanism of norms from text to action" has not been effectively established. Xiong Wei's research points out that colleges and technical schools pay more attention to ideological and political education, but ignore the cultivation of behavioral norms and moral qualities [3]. The educational method is unbalanced, emphasizing classroom theoretical indoctrination and neglecting social practice, which breeds students' bad behavioral habits [3]. At the same time, the student management of most vocational schools is still at the level of "controlling students", failing to deeply guide the internal cultivation law of students' conscious compliance, and focusing on surface management rather than following internal laws [4]. Ma Weining further points out that cultivation education is of great significance for cultivating students' good habits, but there are problems such as unreasonable goal setting and single educational methods in cultivation education in higher vocational colleges [4]. This gap between "knowledge" and "action" not only reflects the deficiencies in students' individual behavioral habits, but also puts forward systematic requirements for the overall reconstruction of the moral education system in technical and vocational colleges.

2. Dilemma Analysis: Deep-Seated Roots and Group Characteristics of the Disconnection between Knowledge and Action

Students in technical and vocational colleges are in a critical stage of transition from the youth rebellious period to the professional society. The dilemma of their behavioral norm cultivation is not only a concentrated reflection of the internal characteristics of the group, but also the result of the lack of design in the current moral education system and cultivation education mechanism.

From the perspective of internal factors, the admission threshold of technical and vocational colleges is relatively low, and some students have long lacked good learning and behavioral habits. As contextual observations in our institution suggest, and consistent with Chen's survey, students in technical and vocational colleges to become high-skilled talents, in addition to mastering cultural and professional knowledge, the cultivation of daily behavioral norms is particularly important [2]. However, in actual education, some students have insufficient learning motivation, vague goals and weak self-management awareness, which easily bring bad behavioral habits into campus life and bring challenges to moral educa-

tion work. Xiong Wei's survey found that students have prominent problems in hygiene habits, language civilization, care for public property and other aspects, but their plasticity is significant, and the key lies in the scientificity of educational methods [3].

From the perspective of schools, management concepts and system design have exacerbated the disconnection between knowledge and action. Observational evidence shows that the current student management of vocational schools is still oriented to "controlling students", relying on high-frequency discipline inspections and post-event correction to maintain surface order, lacking systematic design to help students form internal motivation to comply, which takes effect in the short term but cannot achieve long-term behavioral changes. Xiong Wei confirmed that the educational concepts and methods of colleges and technical schools are inconsistent, emphasizing theoretical indoctrination and neglecting behavioral norm education, leading to the alienation between students' cognition and action [3]. Ma Weining added that affected by the enrollment level and professional development orientation, students in higher vocational colleges have shortcomings in ideological morality and behavioral habits, and some colleges simply equate cultivation education with ideological and moral education, ignoring the cultivation of comprehensive quality, making cultivation education a mere formality [4].

The failure of behavioral norm education in technical and vocational colleges is essentially a systematic rupture of the "knowledge-action" conversion chain. Merely strengthening clause indoctrination or maintaining high-pressure control cannot break the vicious circle of "insufficient knowledge, unsteady behavior, disconnection between knowledge and action". Only by comprehensively examining the internal mechanism of norm cultivation can we find a breakthrough path.

3. Theoretical Integration: Multiple Theoretical Supports for Norm Cultivation Education

The dilemma of "insufficient knowledge and unsteady behavior" stems from the fact that educational practice has not fully followed the laws of human psychological and behavioral development. The cultivation of behavioral norms is essentially a complex process from cognitive construction to behavioral consolidation and then to emotional internalization. It is necessary to integrate four major theoretical resources: cognitive psychology, behaviorist psychology, constructivism and moral development theory, to build a scientific intervention framework.

1) Cognitive Psychology Perspective: Information Coding, Load and Chunking

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, the primary obstacle for students in technical and vocational colleges to acquire norms is the mismatch between the presentation mode of norms and the processing characteristics of working memory. Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory points out that the capacity of working memory is limited, and if the information presentation is not concise and intui-

tive, it will cause cognitive overload and affect information coding and storage [5]. Directly copying the complex and abstract Student Handbook is likely to lead to students "forgetting after reading". Peng Danling's research shows that "visual + auditory" dual-channel input can significantly improve information processing efficiency [6], which provides a scientific basis for transforming norm education from a single text indoctrination to diverse presentations such as pictures and texts, and short videos.

2) Behaviorist Psychology Perspective: Environmental Control, Reinforcement and Behavior Shaping

Behaviorist psychology provides operable intervention tools for the cultivation of behavioral norms. Skinner pointed out that the consequences of behavior (reinforcement or punishment) will affect the probability of the behavior occurring in the future [7]. Based on behaviorist theory, Jia Hongying extracted a behavioral education system for college students, shaping good behaviors through positive incentives and correcting bad behaviors through environmental control and extinction strategies [8]. This framework is particularly suitable for solving the problem of students' "unsteady behavior". The "shaping" strategy emphasized by behaviorism—decomposing complex target behaviors into a series of small steps and timely reinforcing every progress—is the core principle of hierarchical promotion of norm cultivation in technical and vocational colleges. Its proposition of "step-by-step and hierarchical education" provides a deep theoretical support for the hierarchical strategy.

3) Constructivism Perspective: Context, Experience and Meaning Construction

Constructivist theory promotes the transformation of behavioral education from external control to internal identification. Its view of learning emphasizes that learning is a process in which learners actively construct meaning through interaction with the environment in specific contexts. Zhong Qiquan pointed out that social constructivism holds that people construct knowledge through direct interaction with others in social and cultural contexts, and the teaching innovation of its orientation is worthy of our pursuit [9]. Therefore, behavioral norm education should not be limited to publicity, but should create real or simulated situations, guide students to independently understand the meaning of norms through role-playing and situational experience. When students perceive the value of abiding by operating procedures in practical training and experience the significance of maintaining public health in dormitory activities, norms will be transformed from external coercion into internal beliefs.

4) Moral Development Perspective: From Heteronomy to Autonomy

The cultivation of behavioral norms needs to respect the progressive law of teenagers' moral development from "heteronomy" to "autonomy". Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory points out that individual moral cognition will go through three stages: the pre-conventional level (seeking advantage and avoiding disadvantage), the conventional level (maintaining norms) and the post-conven-

tional level (internal principles) [10]. Students in technical and vocational colleges are in the transition stage from the pre-conventional level to the conventional level, both testing the rules and paying attention to the recognition of teachers and peers. This requires cultivation education to set gradient goals, provide a safe external norm and gradually withdraw guiding support, helping students smoothly pass the "heteronomy" period and achieve moral autonomy.

In summary, cognitive psychology requires norms to be "visualized" to reduce cognitive load; behaviorism provides operational tools for reinforcement and stratification; constructivism emphasizes the importance of situational experience; moral development theory reminds that education needs to be step-by-step. The four major theories work together to provide sufficient theoretical support for opening up the norm cultivation chain.

4. Path Reconstruction: From Cognitive Compensation to Unity of Knowledge and Action

Based on theoretical integration, this paper proposes a behavioral norm cultivation path with "cognitive compensation, behavioral stabilization, internalized consciousness" as the core logic. Based on the physical and mental characteristics of students in technical and vocational colleges, it designs intervention measures from three levels to open up the "knowledge-emotion-behavior" transformation channel.

1) Cognitive Compensation: Visualization and Chunking of Norm Presentation

To solve the problem of "insufficient knowledge", it is necessary to reshape the presentation form of norms according to the principles of cognitive psychology, transforming boring clauses into "perceivable, memorable and communicable" cultural symbols. Chen Cheng proposed that the shaping of students' behavioral quality in technical and vocational colleges should take into account both the acquisition of daily behaviors and the standardization of ideological awareness [2]. Based on this, core norms can be extracted according to high-frequency scenarios such as "classroom, practical training, dormitory and public areas", and using the advantage of "visual + auditory" dual channels, transformed into carriers such as graphic posters, situational comics, short videos and pocket manuals to give play to the role of environmental education. At the same time, with the help of chunking strategy, norms can be refined into rhyming jingles or four-character verses (such as the dormitory norm "Make the quilt, ventilate the room, turn off the lights and keep quiet; Do not return late, do not violate rules, do not quarrel or make noise"), so as to reduce the memory burden, reduce students' psychological resistance and improve the efficiency of norm communication [5] [6].

2) Behavioral Stabilization: Hierarchical Promotion and Process Reinforcement

The core of "behavioral stabilization" is to transform norms into stable actions. It is necessary to combine the behaviorist "shaping" strategy and Vygotsky's

"Zone of Proximal Development" theory to design gradient and progressive educational training, which is consistent with the gradual process of students' behavior formation from "imitation" to "autonomy" and then to "automation".

At the academic stage, implement the hierarchical progression of "basic compliance, improved behavior, professional quality enhancement": in the first academic year, focus on basic norms such as appearance and grooming, and classroom discipline, ensure full compliance through high-frequency inspections and timely feedback; in the second and third academic years, focus on improved behaviors such as practical training norms and team cooperation; in the graduation class, strengthen professional quality norms such as workplace etiquette and post discipline, and integrate them into on-the-job internship and employment guidance [2] [3]. Each stage sets a clear behavioral ladder, from "not being late or leaving early" to "being fully prepared before class" and then to "taking the initiative to care for classmates", guiding students from passive obedience to active implementation. At the same time, peer mentors and head teachers work together to provide precise assistance to students with weak behaviors and narrow the group gap.

At the class management level, implement the behaviorist principle of immediate reinforcement, link rewards and punishments with daily performance, and improve management efficiency by reinforcing healthy behaviors and eliminating bad behaviors [8]. Establish a student behavioral norm score file, conduct regular public announcement and feedback, link the evaluation results with the qualification for selection of outstanding students, focus on positive incentives, and strengthen students' main responsibility [2] [3].

3) Internalized Consciousness: Constructive Experience and Value Shaping

The ultimate goal of behavioral norm cultivation is to achieve the leap from "heteronomy" to "autonomy", and the core is to construct students' emotional and value identification with norms [3] [4] [9]. If norms do not touch deep emotions and values, they can only be short-term external coercion. It is necessary to promote the internalization of norms through experiential education.

Set up "norm experience positions" and role exchange activities, guide students to simulate normative scenarios, understand the collective consequences of violating norms through experience, and stimulate the initiative to abide by norms. Promote students to participate in community management and behavioral supervision, and assume the independent responsibility of maintaining order in the collective; cultivate "norm propagandists", encourage outstanding students to carry out self-education demonstrations, and realize the transformation from "obeying authority" to "obtaining peer recognition" and then to "adhering to internal moral principles". Bandura's Social Learning Theory points out that observational learning and role-playing are important ways to change attitudes and behaviors [11]. Experiential participation can effectively stimulate internal motivation, transforming norms from "external constraints" into "collective contracts" and realizing the in-depth goal of cultivation education.

5. The Four-in-One Cultivation Education Model of "Cognition-Emotion-Behavior-Environment"

The above three paths support each other and resonate synergistically, which can be integrated to build a closed-loop four-in-one cultivation education model of "cognition-emotion-behavior-environment", realizing the sustainable promotion of the unity of knowledge and action.

At the cognitive level, visualized and chunked norms solve the bottleneck of "insufficient knowledge", making norms "understandable, memorable and usable"; at the emotional level, positive incentives and experiential education make norms "warm, understandable and popular", improving the initiative of behaviors; at the behavioral level, gradient progressive goals and immediate reinforcement make norms "achievable, stable and persistent", promoting behavioral solidification; at the environmental level, create a standardized micro-environment covering classrooms, dormitories and practical training bases, link home-school cooperation, and build a cultivation community with consistent goals.

The core of this model is: smooth the entrance of "knowledge" through lightweight cognitive presentation, strengthen the stability of "action" with behaviorist shaping strategies, trigger the identification of "emotion" through experiential environment, and ensure the effectiveness of "unity" through systematic environmental education. The cultivation of behavioral norms is no longer a one-sided high-pressure promotion by teachers, but has become a positive educational ecology with multiple interactions and vitality.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

The cultivation of students' behavioral norms in technical and vocational colleges is an educational proposition with both practical significance and constructiveness. Starting from the dilemma of "insufficient knowledge and unsteady behavior", this paper integrates four major psychological theories, constructs a cultivation framework of "cognitive compensation, behavioral stabilization, internalized consciousness", and proposes a four-in-one model of "cognition-emotion-behavior-environment".

Existing studies have confirmed that the cultivation education in technical and vocational colleges must be based on the characteristics of students, and simple "control" is difficult to work. The coordinated efforts of behavioral training and value generation are the key to solving the dilemma. This paper only initially constructs a theoretical framework.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the proposed framework is primarily theoretical and derived from existing literature and contextual observations at specific technical colleges. Its applicability to other types of vocational institutions (e.g., higher vocational colleges vs. secondary technical schools) or to different regional and cultural contexts may require further adaptation. Second, the three-stage path assumes a linear progression, but in reality students may oscillate between stages, especially those with varying baseline self-regulation skills.

The framework's boundary conditions likely include students with severe behavioral disorders or those in highly unstable home environments, where external reinforcement may need to be prolonged. Third, the suggested use of AI-powered monitoring tools (e.g., behavioral norm APPs) raises significant governance and privacy concerns. Without transparent data policies, informed consent, and opt-out mechanisms, such tools risk creating a surveillance culture that contradicts the goal of fostering autonomous moral agents. Future implementations must address data security, student autonomy, and algorithmic bias. Fourth, the model has not yet been empirically validated; causal claims about the effectiveness of the four-in-one approach await longitudinal or experimental testing.

Future research needs to be in-depth from three aspects: first, develop a behavioral norm measurement tool suitable for students in technical and vocational colleges, and establish measurable evaluation indicators for "cognition-emotion-behavior"; second, carry out action research in real situations, carry out hierarchical education experiments based on classes, and summarize practical experience; third, with the help of artificial intelligence technology, develop digital tools such as behavioral norm monitoring APP to provide convenient means for behavior recording and feedback. Through continuous research and practical innovation, we will help students in technical and vocational colleges achieve the growth leap from "insufficient knowledge and unsteady behavior" to "unity of knowledge and action".

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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