

Research on the Integration Path of Ideological and Political Education in Universities under the Construction of Free Trade Ports

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Abstract: The development of free trade ports presents new opportunities and requirements for ideological and political education in higher education institutions, with integrated development serving as the core approach to align with talent cultivation needs in this context. Against the backdrop of free trade port construction, this paper analyzes the contemporary significance and rationale for integrating ideological and political education, identifies existing challenges at the content, mechanism, and carrier levels within current integration efforts, and explores pathways for integration through content restructuring, mechanism refinement, and carrier innovation, thereby providing ideological and political education support for cultivating high-quality talents that meet the developmental demands of free trade ports.

Keywords: Free trade port development; Ideological and political education in universities; Integrated development; Path research

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1. Introduction

The accelerated development of the Free Trade Port imposes higher demands on universities regarding students' political literacy, patriotic commitment, and global perspective in talent cultivation. As a core component of talent development, ideological and political education in higher education institutions urgently requires integrated development. Traditional ideological and political education faces challenges such as disconnection from the Free Trade Port's developmental needs, insufficient integration with specialized education, and inadequate coordination among educational mechanisms, making it ill-suited to the talent cultivation objectives of the Free Trade Port. Grounded in the actual context of Free Trade Port development, this paper examines the underlying logic and practical challenges of integrating ideological and political education with Free Trade Port initiatives, systematically proposing scientific pathways to achieve synergy between ideological and political education and the Free Trade Port's progress.

2. The core meaning of an integrated development of ideological and political education in universities under the construction of free trade ports

2.1. The development of the free trade port endows ideological and political education with contemporary significance

The national strategic positioning of free trade port development has endowed ideological and political education in universities with a contemporary significance that blends local characteristics with an international perspective, enabling it to transcend the traditional boundaries of such education and serve as a vital ideological vehicle for supporting regional high-quality development and cultivating talents needed by the era. As China's forefront platform for opening-up, the free trade port's development process has crystallized core elements for ideological and political education, including a spirit of reform and innovation, principles of openness and inclusiveness, legal system requirements, and a sense of national responsibility. These elements must be thoroughly explored and integrated into educational frameworks to align ideological education more closely with contemporary trends and regional development practices. The practical experience of free trade port construction has transformed ideological education from abstract theory into concrete reality, providing vivid contemporary materials that enhance the practical relevance of value guidance. This contemporary dimension is also reflected in the upgraded objectives of ideological education: building free trade ports demands versatile talents with firm political convictions, global vision, professional expertise, and local commitment. This necessitates that university ideological education move beyond singular value-oriented approaches and deeply integrate value guidance with competency development.

2.2. The core essence of integrated development in ideological and political education in higher education institutions

The core essence of integrated ideological and political education in higher education lies in breaking down barriers between ideological education and other academic components, achieving comprehensive and deep integration with professional education, campus culture, social practice, and regional development, thereby establishing a systematic and unified "holistic ideological education" framework. This integrated approach transcends mere superficial combination or fragmented content assembly; it fully incorporates the value-guiding function of ideological education throughout all stages and aspects of talent cultivation. It ensures ideological education aligns with professional instruction, resonates with campus culture, and integrates deeply with social practices to achieve unity of knowledge and action. The core principle also emphasizes comprehensive synergy among educational stakeholders, resources, and processes, radically transforming the traditional single-instructor model by pooling expertise from subject teachers, counselors, administrative staff, and external practice mentors to create collective educational synergy. Furthermore, it coordinates internal ideological resources, campus cultural assets, and practical/cultural/talent resources from free trade port initiatives, extending ideological education beyond classroom settings and beyond campus boundaries. This approach achieves the fundamental goal of holistic, continuous, and comprehensive education, embedding ideological education throughout the entire talent development process.

2.3. The compatibility between an integrated development of ideological and political education and talent cultivation in free trade ports

The integrated development of ideological and political education demonstrates remarkable intrinsic compatibility with the talent cultivation needs of the Free Trade Port. Both shares aligned educational objectives, content frameworks, and training methodologies, serving as crucial ideological foundations and practical supports for nurturing high-caliber professionals for the Free Trade Port. The talents required for its development must possess not only solid professional expertise and robust practical skills, but also steadfast political commitment, profound patriotic dedication, strong social responsibility, and an open international perspective. The core mission of this integrated approach, cultivating students'

correct worldviews, life philosophies, and values while enhancing their political literacy and comprehensive humanistic competencies, aligns perfectly with the Free Trade Port's talent development priorities. This synergy is further evidenced by the deep alignment in training pathways: the diverse practical scenarios inherent in Free Trade Port operations provide tangible, real-world contexts for integrated ideological and political education, enabling it to transcend the limitations of purely theoretical instruction ^[1].

3. The practical challenges in integrating ideological and political education in universities under the free trade port initiative

3.1. The content of ideological and political education is out of sync with the development needs of the free trade port

Current ideological and political education in universities remains significantly disconnected from the development needs of the Free Trade Port. The curriculum framework fails to adequately align with the practical implementation and developmental requirements of the Free Trade Port, making it inadequate for meeting the real-world talent cultivation demands. The educational content predominantly consists of generalized, standardized theoretical knowledge, lacking in-depth integration of policy interpretations, historical development trajectories, contemporary spirit, and practical requirements specific to the free trade port. Core elements such as reform initiatives, openness, rule-of-law governance, and local characteristics have not been effectively translated into concrete teaching materials, creating a clear disconnect between ideological education and port development. While some universities have attempted to incorporate Free Trade Port-related content, these efforts remain superficial, lacking a systematic, comprehensive design and integrated framework. Key case studies, exemplary figures, and developmental challenges from the port's progress have not been effectively integrated with core ideological theories. This superficial integration results in students' limited and fragmented understanding of the port's development, hindering their genuine comprehension of its contemporary significance and historical mission. Consequently, students fail to develop the necessary ideological commitment, proactive actions, or sense of responsibility to support port development, thereby undermining the core function of ideological education in regional advancement.

3.2. Insufficient depth and breadth in integrating ideological and political education with professional education

The integration of ideological and political education with professional education remains at a superficial exploratory stage, exhibiting notable deficiencies in both depth and breadth. This failure to achieve synchronized progression and resonance between the two has become a major obstacle to their integrated development. In most universities, ideological and political education and professional education continue to operate as separate tracks: ideological courses focus on imparting theoretical knowledge and value guidance, while professional courses concentrate on cultivating specialized knowledge and practical skills, lacking effective integration. Professional instructors generally demonstrate insufficient awareness of ideological education; they fail to proactively identify ideological elements within their courses or organically integrate ideological education into the content, processes, and evaluations of professional instruction, resulting in a pronounced tendency to prioritize professional expertise over ideological education. The integration also shows significant limitations in scope, primarily concentrated in humanities disciplines such as literature, law, and management, as well as science, engineering, business, and marine economics, fields most closely linked to Free Trade Port's development, where the integration remains inadequate ^[2]. These disciplines have failed to tailor ideological education to their unique professional characteristics and the actual requirements of positions related to free trade port initiatives, leading to a disconnect between ideological education and professional training.

3.3. The collaborative education mechanism for ideological and political education remains inadequate in the context of free trade ports

Under the Free Trade Port framework, the collaborative education mechanism for ideological and political education in universities remains significantly inadequate. The absence of a systematic, standardized, and sustainable collaborative framework hinders effective coordination among educational stakeholders, resources, and processes, severely limiting the practical effectiveness of integrated ideological and political education. Universities have yet to establish a comprehensive collaborative mechanism for such education, with insufficient regular communication channels and coordinated workflows among ideological education instructors, subject teachers, counselors, and administrative staff. Clear division of responsibilities and seamless workflow integration among these entities prevent the formation of a cohesive educational synergy. Collaborative mechanisms between universities and local governments or enterprises are also lacking. Institutions have failed to fully leverage high-quality external resources, including government agencies, enterprises, industry associations, and social practice bases, associated with Free Trade Port development, nor have they established deep partnerships with relevant enterprises, government departments, and research institutions for collaborative education. Consequently, practical resources, talent demands, and industry standards from the Free Trade Port remain underutilized as quality educational materials, leaving ideological and political education without substantial practical support.

4. Implementation principles for the integrated development of ideological and political education in universities under the free trade port initiative

4.1. The core principle of combining demand orientation with value leadership

The integration of demand orientation and value guidance constitutes the core principle for the synergistic development of ideological and political education in universities under the construction of Free Trade Ports. This requires that such integration not only precisely aligns with the developmental needs of Free Trade Ports and talent cultivation requirements but also steadfastly upholds the fundamental mission of value guidance, avoiding the pursuit of mere integration at the expense of this core objective. Demand orientation demands that the content design, innovative approaches, and explorations in ideological and political education closely revolve around the practical needs of Free Trade Port development, involving in-depth analysis of industrial trends, talent competency standards, and the essence of contemporary values. This enables the creation of targeted and practical educational content that enhances the practical significance and applicability of integrated development. Value guidance represents the central function and fundamental mission of ideological and political education; throughout the entire integration process, the overarching goal of nurturing talents for the Party and the nation must be consistently upheld. Socialist core values, education on ideals and beliefs, patriotic sentiment cultivation, and patriotism must permeate all aspects and stages of integrated development. This guides students to establish sound worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, strengthen their faith in Marxism, conviction in China's socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and confidence in realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation, while reinforcing their commitment to contributing youthful energy to Free Trade Port's development and national progress. Only by organically combining demand orientation with value guidance can ideological and political education's integrated development effectively align with the realities of Free Trade Port's construction while fully fulfilling its core role in fostering moral integrity and nurturing talents.

4.2. The principle of synergy in the deep integration of ideological and political education with professional education

The principle of synergy between ideological and political education and professional education requires completely dismantling the barriers between the two, achieving comprehensive coordination in educational objectives, teaching content, instructional methods, and assessment systems. This ensures both domains move in tandem, mutually reinforce each other, and achieve organic integration. The principle mandates the seamless integration of ideological and political

education's value-oriented goals with professional education's objectives of knowledge dissemination and competency development. Based on the job requirements and talent standards of relevant disciplines in the Free Trade Port, the value-guiding principles of ideological education must be fully incorporated into professional training programs and permeate the entire talent development process, realizing a unified approach that combines value orientation, knowledge transmission, and skill cultivation^[3]. In practical teaching, educators should actively identify ideological elements within professional courses and integrate patriotic values, professional ethics, rule awareness, and innovative spirit into all aspects of instruction, including classroom teaching, laboratory practices, course design, and graduation projects, aligning with the practical demands of Free Trade Port's development.

4.3. Development principles that balance local characteristics with an international perspective

The development principle that balances local characteristics with an international perspective aligns closely with the strategic positioning of integrating the Free Trade Port's openness with local development. It requires the integrated development of ideological and political education to not only deeply explore the Free Trade Port's distinctive local resources to foster students' local identity, but also emphasize cultivating their international vision and cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to adapt to the port's open development environment. The emphasis on local characteristics demands that this integration fully leverage the free trade port's regional culture, historical heritage, construction practices, and contemporary spirit, incorporating its reform and innovation stories, cultural essence, regional development missions, and the dedication of its builders throughout the educational process. This nurtures students' commitment to rootedness and responsibility toward the Free Trade Port, encouraging them to understand, cherish, and contribute to its development. The international perspective requires integrating the port's strategic role as a frontline platform for opening-up with global rules, international perspectives, inclusive principles, and cross-cultural competencies. This guides students to develop global thinking, grasp international economic and trade regulations, and enhance their cross-cultural communication and collaboration abilities, equipping them to thrive in the port's open environment and contribute internationally-oriented capabilities to its development.

5. Practical approaches for the integrated development of ideological and political education in universities under the free trade port initiative

5.1. Restructuring the content system of ideological and political education to meet the needs of the free trade port

Reconstructing the ideological and political education content system to meet the demands of the free trade port serves as the fundamental basis for advancing its integrated development. This requires aligning the educational content with the practical needs of free trade port construction, contemporary values, and talent requirements, thereby establishing a comprehensive framework that combines theoretical depth, practical applicability, local relevance, and international perspective. First, the education system must deeply integrate the core principles of free trade port development by systematically incorporating policy interpretations, historical evolution, reform initiatives, legal framework requirements, principles of openness and inclusiveness, and local cultural characteristics to enable students to fully understand the historical context, strategic significance, and key objectives of the free trade port initiative. Second, tailored educational content should be designed across disciplines and sectors based on the free trade port's industrial priorities and talent standards. For key sectors such as port-related industries, modern services, digital economy, marine economy, and cross-border trade, the curriculum should explicitly emphasize civic responsibility, professional ethics, rule awareness, and innovative spirit essential to industrial advancement.

5.2. Establishing an integrated teaching system for ideological and political education and professional education

Establishing a teaching system that deeply integrates ideological and political education with professional education serves as the key pathway to promote their collaborative educational impact. This requires comprehensive and systematic design across teaching objectives, content, methodologies, and assessment frameworks to achieve organic integration and synergistic development. In designing teaching objectives, it is essential to seamlessly combine the value-guiding goals of ideological and political education with the knowledge transmission and competency development objectives of professional education. Clear educational objectives and requirements for ideological and political cultivation should be defined for each discipline and course, enabling professional instructors to maintain a clear pedagogical direction and actionable strategies during instruction, thereby preventing disconnection between the two domains. Regarding teaching methodologies and evaluation systems, innovative integrated approaches such as case-based teaching, project-based learning, situational teaching, and practical instruction should be widely adopted to organically integrate ideological and political education throughout the entire professional curriculum, allowing students to subconsciously absorb value guidance through their academic studies. Additionally, a robust “ideological and political education + professional education” comprehensive evaluation system should be established, incorporating students’ ideological literacy, value systems, and professional ethics into course assessments. The effectiveness of ideological and political education delivered by instructors should be reflected in their performance evaluations, promotion reviews, and recognition awards, with corresponding incentive mechanisms strengthened to fully motivate educators to actively implement integrated teaching practices, ensuring genuine implementation of this convergence.

5.3. Innovating educational platforms for ideological and political education aligned with free trade port development

Innovating ideological and political education platforms tailored to the development of Free Trade Port serves as a crucial pillar for advancing integrated ideological education. This requires transcending the limitations of traditional classroom teaching as the sole educational medium, and establishing a diversified, multi-dimensional educational framework that integrates classroom instruction, campus culture, social practice, and university-local and university-enterprise collaborations. First, it is essential to cultivate campus cultural platforms with Free Trade Port’s characteristics by organizing events such as thematic lectures, speech contests, knowledge competitions, cultural festivals, and achievement exhibitions, thereby fostering a strong Free Trade Port cultural atmosphere. This allows students to internalize the contemporary spirit and development philosophy of Free Trade Ports through immersive cultural exposure. Second, comprehensive practical education platforms must be developed by establishing deep partnerships with relevant government agencies, enterprises, industry associations, and social practice bases. This involves jointly establishing ideological education practice bases and off-campus internship sites, while organizing students to engage in social practices, including research on Free Trade Port development, internships, volunteer services, and public welfare initiatives. Such hands-on experiences enable students to gain firsthand understanding of free trade port development realities and enhance their practical skills and sense of responsibility.

6. Conclusion

This paper establishes a research framework encompassing four dimensions, core concepts, practical challenges, implementation principles, and implementation pathways, clarifying the fundamental direction and practical approaches for integrating ideological and political education in universities within the context of Free Trade Ports. By reconstructing content systems aligned with Free Trade Port requirements, developing teaching frameworks that deeply integrate ideological education with academic disciplines, and innovating educational platforms tailored to Free Trade Port

development, this approach effectively addresses current challenges, such as content fragmentation, superficial integration, inefficient mechanisms, and limited delivery channels. It promotes deep synergy between ideological education and Free Trade Port development, enabling ideological education to fully fulfill its core role in value guidance. This initiative cultivates a new generation of professionals for Free Trade Port construction, individuals with steadfast political commitment, profound patriotic dedication, broad international perspectives, and robust professional competencies, thereby providing sustained talent support and robust ideological impetus for the high-quality development of free trade ports.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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