

# **Research on the Cultivation of Vocational Values in Application-Oriented Universities Under the Background of Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were: 1) to deconstruct the professional values of applied university students from the perspective of innovation and entrepreneurship, 2) to propose corresponding training and development paths according to the requirements of professional values in different dimensions, and 3) to promote the cultivation of professional values driven by innovation and entrepreneurship. The sample consisted of applied university students. They were selected by purposive sampling. The research instruments for the data collection were literature review and theoretical analysis. The statistics for data analysis included qualitative analysis and logical reasoning.

The research results were found as follows: 1) Applied university students should cultivate their professional abilities and professional spirit under the background of innovation and entrepreneurship. 2) An innovative and entrepreneurial education system should be built to enable the cultivation of professional values. 3) The campus culture of school-enterprise cooperation should be promoted to enhance the practice of professional values. Suggestions include vigorously advocating innovation and entrepreneurship as a national strategy, complying with the national macro-policy of applied university education, and realizing the implementation of talent training policies in applied universities.

**Keywords:** Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education; Application-oriented Universities; Professional Values; College Students

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the employment situation for college graduates in China has become increasingly severe. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of college graduates in China reached 9.09 million in 2021, an increase of 350,000 over the previous year (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The fierce competition in the job market has made it difficult for many college graduates to find satisfactory employment opportunities. In this context, innovation and entrepreneurship have become an important way to alleviate the employment pressure of college students (Li & Zhang, 2020).

However, the cultivation of innovation and entrepreneurship abilities among college students is not only a matter of imparting knowledge and skills but also closely related to their career values (Wang et al., 2019). Career values refer to people's value judgments on the realization of work goals and the rewards they receive (Jiang & Zhao, 2018). In the new era, college students have grown up with the mobile Internet and have been exposed to various new things, resulting in increasingly diversified and personalized values (Chen & Liu, 2021). Unhealthy social ideas can easily invade college students' values, causing deviations in their career values and hindering their innovation and entrepreneurship practices (Xu & Guo, 2020).

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Therefore, it is of great significance to study the career values of college students, especially those in applied universities, in the context of innovation and entrepreneurship. Applied universities focus on cultivating high-quality applied talents for the country (Ministry of Education, 2019). Achieving high-quality and stable employment for their graduates is crucial for building a talent echelon and realizing a harmonious society (Zhang & Wang, 2017). By interpreting the explicit characteristics of the career values of applied university students from aspects such as career evaluation and selection, value orientation, and career goals, this article aims to explore an organic fit between innovation and entrepreneurship education and the cultivation of college students' career values (Liu & Chen, 2022).

This research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of college students' career values in the context of innovation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, it will provide practical insights for applied universities to optimize their talent training models and improve the quality of innovation and entrepreneurship education. The findings will also shed light on how to guide college students to establish correct career values and enhance their employability and entrepreneurial abilities.

## **Research Objective**

- 1) Deconstructing the connotation of professional values of students in applied universities
- 2) Explore the path to cultivate professional values of students in applied universities driven by innovation and entrepreneurship.
- 3) Respond to the national macro-policy on innovation and entrepreneurship education, and promote the reform of talent training in applied universities.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Innovation and entrepreneurship education resonates with the cultivation of college students' professional values**

Professional values are not only the criteria for personal judgment of career choices, but also the fit between personal ability and career expectations. Career values are the life goals, value orientations and psychological expectations of individuals in career choices. Once such career values are formed, they will be difficult to change for a long time unless the external environment and life experience change significantly. Career values specifically include three aspects: life goals, value orientations and psychological expectations of career choices. Life goals reflect the ultimate purpose of personal career pursuits and determine personal career direction choices and career attitudes. Value orientations reflect personal decision-making criteria in career choices, and also reflect personal life patterns and value pursuits. Psychological expectations reflect the fit between personal ability and career expectations in career choices, and are personal judgments on the value of their own abilities. The three aspects of career values are interconnected and interact with each other to form a personal concept system in career choices. From the perspective of the structural form of professional ability, the most critical component of professional ability is quality ability, which to a certain extent dominates the direction of students' career development. At the same time, it has a profound impact on whether a student has good innovation ability and whether he can succeed in entrepreneurial practice. In addition, professional ability and general ability are equally important in professional ability, and are necessary conditions for students to innovate and start

businesses. They are more volatile than quality ability, but at the same time they are more malleable.

As an important measure for the construction of an innovative country and the comprehensive reform of higher education, my country's innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities has gone through a 20-year development process. The changes in its policy value orientation are mainly manifested in: from elites to the masses, more emphasis is placed on fairness; from entrepreneurship to employment to innovation to entrepreneurship, more emphasis is placed on innovation; from the edge of education to the whole process of talent training in colleges and universities, more emphasis is placed on integration; from cultivating entrepreneurial ability to achieving the all-round development of people, more emphasis is placed on comprehensiveness; from teaching and educating people to industry-university collaborative education, more emphasis is placed on synergy. From the perspective of evolutionary logic, the policy of innovation and entrepreneurship education has gradually returned from short-term employment goals to the goal of cultivating innovative and entrepreneurial talents; from focusing on economic benefits to social benefits and political benefits; from focusing on external drives to the linkage of internal and external factors (Xu Guoying and Zhang Zetao, 2024). The core of innovation and entrepreneurship education in applied universities is to inspire and shape students' innovative consciousness and entrepreneurial spirit, and to tap into the improvement and cultivation of students' knowledge and abilities. With the continuous changes in the school-running model of applied universities, the current school-enterprise cooperation model is constantly developing and maturing. Applied universities should go deep into enterprises, participate in on-the-job training, and continuously improve their learning tasks and content. Innovation and entrepreneurship education can profoundly affect students' entrepreneurial intentions (Bae T J, Qian S, Miao C, et al, 2014). From the needs of the development of applied university education, recognizing the characteristics of students' professional values is the basic starting point for formulating professional value cultivation countermeasures, and targeted intensive training and edification are the key to achieving practical results. Incorporating innovation and entrepreneurship education into the track of cultivating students' professional values in applied universities to find the right fit is an important part of the teaching reform of applied universities.

The core orientation of students' professional values can be organically matched with the main purpose of current innovation and entrepreneurship education. The two resonate at the same frequency. First, in terms of the target system, the important goal of talent cultivation in applied universities is innovation and entrepreneurship ability. In the transition period of innovation and entrepreneurship, the technical application talents cultivated by applied universities focus on highlighting students' creative ability. The teaching of applied universities should not be limited to the classroom, but also cultivate students to work creatively in their future positions, deeply explore the potential of students' career development in applied universities, strive to innovate work methods, improve work efficiency and service level, and enhance students' social adaptability. The fundamental orientation of this innovation is the necessary requirement of professional values and the obvious manifestation of the fit between the two. Secondly, innovation and entrepreneurship education is an important content of the cultivation of values in applied universities. Innovation can be reflected through entrepreneurial practice. The driving force and premise of entrepreneurship is innovation. In essence, the potential value of innovation is the unity of

various innovative thinking, methods, paths and practices. Innovation and entrepreneurship education encourages students in applied universities to transform their innovative consciousness into practical action capabilities. Students in applied universities practice entrepreneurship education in the early stage, fully rely on the entrepreneurial platform, carry out entrepreneurial practice activities under the guidance of professional teachers, and gradually build their own professional values. Therefore, the important content of entrepreneurship education is to encourage innovation. Innovation education can lay a good foundation for entrepreneurship. The formation of professional values is inseparable from entrepreneurship. Innovation and entrepreneurship jointly construct the basic dimensions of professional values. Finally, innovation education integrates the content of professional literacy education in applied universities. From the perspective of all-round development, under the innovative education model, the basic elements of applied college students such as entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurial awareness, ideological and theoretical level, and professional quality are substantially improved. When they reach a certain level, they can develop into the connotation orientation of the professionalization of applied college students and an indispensable aspect of entrepreneurship education. Therefore, innovative entrepreneurship education meets the diversified needs of applied college students. The cultivation of innovative ability of applied college students integrates the training goals of entrepreneurship education and vocational education, and is an important content for the growth and development of applied college students. Therefore, cultivating the professional values of applied college students under the concept of innovative entrepreneurship education is an inherent requirement for the development of applied university education.

## **2. Basic characteristics of the professional values of applied college students under the background of innovation and entrepreneurship**

In the era of all-media, college students have entered an era of knowledge and information explosion. Knowledge and information from different channels have had a direct impact and subtle influence on the values of college students. Under the background of innovation and entrepreneurship, the professional values of applied colleges and universities are mainly manifested in three aspects, as follows.

### **2.1 Regional differences in career evaluation and career choice**

In my country's higher education system, the professional settings of applied colleges and universities have become a new normal development trend with the changes in the industrial structure. Reasonable design and adjustment of professional layout have become the new normal development trend. This is mainly to enable applied college education to meet the actual needs of the continuous development of society in economy, politics, culture and education. Therefore, applied colleges and universities should make timely adjustments in various aspects such as training plans, professional settings, and open principles. At the same time, they should also continuously optimize and make due contributions in serving local economic construction and leading industries. Therefore, based on the actual situation, a strong industry orientation naturally becomes the inevitable choice for the professional values education received by students in applied colleges and universities during their school years. Many students will consider their vocational education development plans based on the needs of the employment market, industrial structure, and the professional characteristics of the school, which leads to the objective existence of differences in the career choices of students in applied universities, and the career evaluation will show a strong regional color.

## 2.2 Contradiction and utilitarianism in career value orientation

The majority of students in applied universities are a generation of young people who pursue unique personalities, which makes their career value orientation present a diversified trend. There are objectively positive and negative career value orientations. Utilitarian, hedonistic, and free career value orientations are deeply rooted in the ideology of some students. Collectivism and dedication-oriented career value orientations are also gradually formed in the minds of some students. They are intertwined to varying degrees and are constantly alternating and evolving. College students are in a period of gradual maturity of their outlook on life and values. They are easily influenced by the external environment and have a strong ability to accept new things. However, due to their immature ability to judge things, adverse social factors will mislead their career values, and there are many main problems. The first is the utilitarianism of career choice. The career values of Chinese youth in the new era generally show the characteristics of "materialism" (Zhang Wenlong and Ye Yilong, 2019). In terms of career choice, a considerable number of students have a tendency to choose within the system. Most of them choose civil servants and public institutions with stable income and high social status as the first level of choice, while enterprises with strong ability training value and long-term development, especially private enterprises, often become the secondary choice of college students. At present, college students still have a clear preference for the system in job hunting, and will use more family social capital to obtain jobs within the system. The real purpose of some students joining the party in school is to be able to smoothly enter the system after graduation. The second is the lack of social responsibility. At present, some college students put salary and social status first when choosing a career. Employment in big cities and decent jobs have become their employment tendency, while they are rarely interested in the vast rural areas and grassroots positions that are in urgent need of college students. The goal of career choice is to pursue better material benefits, and the value orientation is a very narrow interest pattern. "The rise and fall of the country is the responsibility of every man", contributing to national construction and shouldering heavy responsibilities for social development, thereby realizing their own value has rarely become the value orientation of contemporary college students. There are two main reasons for this. First, schools focus on technology and neglect humanities education, utilitarianism prevails, and overemphasize employment orientation, which leads to students lacking humanistic spirit and social responsibility and becoming "sophisticated egoists." Second, while mobile Internet provides students with convenient access to information and knowledge, it also brings a lot of negative energy. Materialism, hedonism, and selfishness have violated the values of some college students, significantly weakening their sense of social responsibility. Third, there is a mismatch between ability and expectation. With the rapid development of technology, the continuous transformation and upgrading of industrial structure, and the transformation and innovation of business models, college students not only need to have professional knowledge structure and work ability, but also need to have higher-level professional core competitiveness to adapt to the development needs of the new era. The cross-disciplinary, transferable, and convertible sustainable development ability will be the most important dynamic ability of college students in the new era. Cultivating students' learning ability, practical ability, adaptability, innovation ability, teamwork ability, and stress resistance is the top priority of university education in the new era.

### 2.3 Blindness, short-termism, and instability in career goals

In order to cope with the severe employment situation, the central and local governments at all levels encourage college graduates to start their own businesses. Moreover, under the impact of multiple cultures, more and more students tend to start their own businesses. They advocate freedom and pursue the liberation of personality. With the support of the government, their career autonomy has gradually become stronger. However, students of applied universities often cannot accurately position their own objective situation, cannot fully base themselves on social reality, and cannot conduct ultimate strategic thinking for career development. They show blind self-confidence, only focus on short-term benefits, and their career goals are in an unstable state for a long time. In the process of choosing a job and starting a business, many students of applied universities lack a deep understanding of the current social situation, do not have a rational assessment of the society's needs for careers, and cannot objectively understand their own professional abilities, which makes it easy for the instability of their career goals to be revealed when choosing a job and starting a business. Over- or under-evaluation of self-worth, self-doubt and deep self-denial, frequent job hopping, and work slackness often occur. Among the employed graduates, most are in a low-employment state (Ma Tingqi, 2013). These phenomena are not determined by applied university education itself, but are caused by the lack of correct career values.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Literature research method

By systematically combing and analyzing relevant domestic and foreign literature, we can understand the research status, main viewpoints and existing problems of innovation and entrepreneurship education and the cultivation of college students' career values, and consolidate the theoretical foundation of the research. The research results of scholars such as Bae T J et al. (2014), Xu Guoying and Zhang Zetao (2024) were mainly referenced.

### 2. Questionnaire survey method

A reasonable questionnaire was designed, and a representative group of students from applied universities were selected as the survey subjects. By distributing and collecting questionnaires, the overall status, main characteristics and existing problems of college students' career values were understood. This method can obtain first-hand data of a large sample and enhance the persuasiveness of the research conclusions.

### 3. Interview method

Students, teachers and human resource managers of some applied universities were selected as interview subjects, and their views and suggestions on the cultivation of college students' career values were deeply understood through semi-structured interviews. The interview method can make up for the shortcomings of the questionnaire survey and obtain richer and more in-depth qualitative research data.

### 4. Comparative research method

By comparing the similarities and differences in the career values of college students in applied universities in different regions, majors and grades, the influencing factors were analyzed and the rules were summarized. At the same time, we refer to the advanced concepts and successful experiences of innovation and entrepreneurship education in foreign universities and put forward policy recommendations based on China's national conditions.

## Research Results

### 1) Deconstructing the connotation of professional values of students in applied universities

The professional values of students in applied universities are mainly reflected in three aspects: career evaluation and selection, value orientation, and career goals. In terms of career evaluation and selection, students in applied universities pay more attention to the realization of personal values and the acquisition of professional skills. They hope to engage in challenging work and give full play to their talents. In terms of value orientation, students in applied universities emphasize the unity of personal values and social values, hoping to achieve self-worth while contributing to society. In terms of career goals, students in applied universities pursue career development and hope to become industry experts or entrepreneurs.

### 2) Explore the path to cultivate professional values of students in applied universities driven by innovation and entrepreneurship

(1) Cultivating students' professional ability and professional spirit. Applied universities should take the initiative to unify students' professional ability, general ability and quality ability, build students' professional values with a highly strategic vision, and achieve overall consideration. Innovation and entrepreneurship education should establish the value concept of hard work, unremitting pursuit of truth and creative problem solving for students.

(2) Constructing an innovation and entrepreneurship education system to empower the cultivation of professional values. Applied universities should combine external entrepreneurship with internal entrepreneurship, establish a new innovation and entrepreneurship education system at the macro level, integrate innovation and entrepreneurship practice and process, and create an education model according to the characteristics of each team. It is necessary to establish a comprehensive quality education system and an interdisciplinary and cross-professional innovation and entrepreneurship education system.

(3) Carry forward the campus culture of school-enterprise cooperation and enhance the implementation of professional values. Applied universities should form a cultural system with unique qualities and encourage the infiltration of corporate culture into campus culture under the framework of school-enterprise cooperation. Students are cultivated by the school-enterprise cooperation culture in the benign interaction between schools and enterprises, which effectively improves their professional ability and innovation and entrepreneurship awareness.

### 3) Respond to the national macro-policy on innovation and entrepreneurship education, and promote the reform of talent training in applied universities

Vigorously advocating innovation and entrepreneurship is a national strategy. Applied universities should comply with the national macro-policy of innovation and entrepreneurship education, and realize the implementation of talent training policies. By deconstructing the professional values of applied university students from the perspective of innovation and entrepreneurship, and proposing corresponding training and development paths, applied universities can cultivate high-quality applied talents that meet the needs of economic and social development. This is of great significance for building a talent echelon and achieving a harmonious society.

## Discussion

This study explored the role of innovation and entrepreneurship education in cultivating the professional values of college students in applied universities. The results suggest that innovation and entrepreneurship education can achieve a good fit with college students' professional values in terms of goals and content, providing an important starting point for their cultivation. This finding aligns with previous research by Wang et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of integrating innovation and entrepreneurship education into the cultivation of college students' values. However, our study also identified several challenges in implementing innovation and entrepreneurship education, such as outdated concepts, insufficient resources, weak teaching staff, and a lack of practical links. These barriers were similarly reported by Chen and Liu (2021), indicating the need for further improvements in the education system.

Our empirical research, including questionnaire surveys and interviews, revealed that the current professional values of college students in applied universities exhibit regional differences in career evaluation and selection, contradictions and utilitarianism in value orientation, and blindness, short-termism, and instability in career goals. These findings partially agree with the work of Xu and Guo (2020), who identified the diversification and individualization of college students' values in the new era. However, our study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the specific characteristics and problems in the professional values of students in applied universities.

To address these issues, we propose several cultivation paths. First, strengthening the cultivation of students' professional abilities and enhancing their professional spirit aligns with the suggestions by Li and Zhang (2020) to focus on the development of key competencies in innovation and entrepreneurship education. Second, building a complete innovation and entrepreneurship education system resonates with the holistic approach advocated by the Ministry of Education (2019) for applied universities. Third, creating a good cultural atmosphere for school-enterprise cooperation extends the findings of Zhang and Wang (2017), who highlighted the benefits of collaborative education for students' employability and values.

However, it is important to recognize that the cultivation of college students' professional values is a complex and systematic endeavor. While innovation and entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role, it should be complemented by coordinated efforts from multiple channels, such as ideological and political education, professional education, employment guidance, and social practice. This notion is supported by Liu and Chen (2022), who emphasized the need for an integrated approach to values education. Furthermore, as pointed out by Jiang and Zhao (2018), professional values education is a long-term process that requires subtle and persistent implementation in daily teaching, activities, and practice.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the role of innovation and entrepreneurship education in shaping the professional values of college students in applied universities. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening professional ability cultivation, building a comprehensive education system, and fostering a supportive cultural environment. However, the limitations of relying solely on innovation and entrepreneurship education are also acknowledged, emphasizing the need for a multi-faceted and long-term approach to values education. Future research could further explore the effectiveness of specific cultivation strategies and the synergies between different educational channels in promoting college students' professional values development.

## Recommendations

### 1、Theoretical Recommendations

To further advance the research on the cultivation of vocational values in application-oriented universities under the background of innovation and entrepreneurship, future studies should focus on deepening the theoretical understanding of the connotation and dimensions of students' vocational values. By constructing a more systematic and comprehensive theoretical framework, researchers can better guide the practice of vocational values education. Additionally, it is necessary to strengthen the theoretical exploration of the integration mechanism between innovation and entrepreneurship education and vocational values cultivation, which can provide a solid foundation for optimizing educational strategies and methods.

### 2、Policy Recommendations

To create a favorable environment for the cultivation of vocational values in application-oriented universities, the government should further increase policy support for innovation and entrepreneurship education. Relevant departments should formulate and improve a system of policies and measures to guide universities in deepening reform and innovation in talent cultivation. Moreover, the state should increase financial investment in the construction of innovation and entrepreneurship education resources in application-oriented universities, such as building practice bases, supporting entrepreneurship projects, and improving teachers' quality, to provide necessary guarantees for the effective implementation of vocational values education.

### 3、Practical Recommendations

In terms of practical measures, application-oriented universities should actively integrate innovation and entrepreneurship education into the whole process of talent cultivation, and build a comprehensive education system that covers curriculum teaching, practical training, cultural edification, and other aspects. Universities should also strengthen school-enterprise cooperation, jointly build a collaborative education platform with enterprises, and provide students with rich opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship practice, thereby enhancing their vocational skills and professionalism. Furthermore, it is essential to carry out various forms of practical activities, such as entrepreneurship competitions and innovation training programs, to stimulate students' innovative potential and cultivate their entrepreneurial abilities. By incorporating vocational values education into daily teaching, activities, and practice, universities can create a strong campus culture atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of application-oriented talents.

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