

# Emotional Experience: The Psychological Mechanism of Issue-based Teaching in Promoting Core Literacy in Ideological and Political Subjects among Middle School Students

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## ABSTRACT

In the context of education reform oriented towards core competencies, ideological and political education in middle schools is undergoing a transformation from knowledge imparting to the cultivation of abilities and values. To deeply reveal the psychological mechanism by which emotional experience is transformed into political identity and internalization of values in issue-based teaching, this study takes "emotional experience" as the core mediating variable and explores its role in promoting the generation of core literacy in the subject of ideological and political education for middle school students through issue-based teaching. The study shows that problem-based teaching achieves the goal of cultivating core competencies through the psychological path of "cognitive conflict - emotional experience - value internalization". Cognitive conflict is the starting point of teaching, emotional arousal is the key link in the cultivation of core literacy "awareness", and emotional resonance promotes value internalization and behavioral transfer. Based on the findings of this study, an emotional experience-driven teaching strategy is proposed, covering the construction of life-related and conflict-related issue situations, emotional regulation led by cognitive reassessment, and step-by-step reflection guidance. The three form a closed-loop system, which can not only exert the dynamic efficacy of emotional experience, but also ensure the correctness of value orientation through cognitive reassessment and reflective guidance, providing theoretical basis and practical approach for the implementation of the core literacy of political science in issue-based teaching.

## KEYWORDS

Issue-based teaching; Emotional experience; Ideological and political science; Core competencies; Psychological mechanisms

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of global education reform and core literacy orientation, secondary school politics education is facing a transformation from knowledge imparting to equal emphasis on ability and value cultivation (Ministry of Education, 2020). Although a large number of studies have shown that problem-based teaching can enhance students' critical thinking and participation abilities, the psychological mechanism of why and how students' emotional experiences are transformed into political identity and value internalization through classroom topics has not been fully revealed. This study proposes "emotional experience" as the core mediating variable and focuses on how emotional arousal and resonant experience in issue-based teaching work together to promote value internalization and civic literacy. This perspective is of great theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, incorporating emotional resonance into political education research can construct an integrated generative model of "cognition-emotion-value", explaining how issue

participation transforms from emotional experience into intrinsic civic motivation. From a practical perspective, this study provides actionable instructional design principles for middle school politics classrooms: while retaining the cognitive challenge of topic discussion, consciously designing emotional arousal and resonance segments (such as situational narrative, role-playing, empathy exercises), supplemented by cognitive re-evaluation and reflective guidance, can enhance students' emotional identification with public values and long-term engagement intentions.

As a teaching paradigm oriented towards social reality issues, the core value of problem-based teaching lies not only in promoting the unity of knowledge and action among students, but also in triggering deep learning and identification through emotional experiences. In the teaching of political science, students often experience cognitive uncertainty and emotional fluctuations when facing social controversial issues, and this psychological tension is the source of learning motivation. How to understand and guide this emotional experience so that students can achieve meaning construction and value recognition in the process of exploring social issues is also the key to generating the core literacy of the political subject.

In conclusion, the research on the problem-based teaching mechanism centered on "emotional experience" not only has significant theoretical innovation value, but also provides new directions and specific paths for classroom practice in political education, teacher professional development and curriculum evaluation.

## **2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **2.1. The Educational Function of Thematic Teaching in Ideological and Political Course**

"Issue-Based Teaching" Also known as "Issue-Centered Education", it focuses on real issues and controversial issues in society, politics, ethics, or public life. A teaching model that promotes students' critical thinking, value judgment and civic responsibility through inquiry, discussion and reflection [1, 2]. The core idea is derived from Dewey's idea that "education is life", emphasizing that learning should be based on real social problems and promoting the formation of meaning construction and civic participation awareness in real social situations. Problem-based teaching is different from traditional lecture-based teaching. Instead of the teacher's one-way transmission of political knowledge, it leads students to make rational dialectics in multiple viewpoints through the presentation of issue situations with conflicting values, thereby forming personal positions and value recognition [3]. In the teaching of ideological and political subjects, the issue-based teaching method emphasizes the learning process of "situation - interaction - reflection". Compared with the traditional exam-oriented teaching method which is mainly lecture-based, the topic activities included in the topic teaching method, namely the learning methods such as group discussion and cooperative inquiry, enable students to interact and communicate in groups based on real situations, enhance dialectical thinking ability, have a spirit of doubt, and students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge, Instead, they are participants in the exploration of social issues and constructors of meaning. By exploring social hot topics such as environmental policy, civil rights, and social equity, students gradually form political cognitive structures and value positions through information gathering, position analysis, and group debates. This process not only promotes the acquisition of political knowledge, but also helps internalize political attitudes and civic responsibility. Encourage students to actively engage in collective inquiry learning and enhance the spirit of patriotism, socialism and collectivism among middle school students.

### **2.2. The Integration of Project-Based Teaching with Political Science Teaching**

Problem-based teaching provides a practical path and psychological support for the new development of teaching concepts in ideological and political subjects. Early ideological and political teaching

centered on the imparting of political theory knowledge and the one-way indoctrination of values, emphasizing students' acceptance and memory of established political ideas. This teaching model was reasonable in a specific historical period, but it also led to political classes being overly moralistic, making people feel somewhat detached from the basic situation of the real world and real life [4]. With the rise of constructivist learning theories and humanistic educational concepts, the education sector has gradually realized that political teaching should not be limited to the transmission of knowledge, but should become an important way to cultivate students' political understanding, judgment and action. The goal of political education has shifted from teaching students political knowledge to the cultivation of values of "citizenship and social responsibility" [5, 6]. This shift in thinking is particularly evident in the international education community. Since the 1980s, a tradition of "controversial issues teaching" has gradually emerged in civic education and social science teaching in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia [2, 7]. The model advocates that teachers take social reality and public issues as the starting point of teaching, guide students to think multi-dimensionally and discuss positions, and form value judgments and social participation awareness in rational debate. This classroom form breaks away from the one-way knowledge input model of political teaching and places more emphasis on students' experiential and subjective learning, making the classroom a "micro-society" for cultivating democratic thinking and public rationality [8]. Under the influence of this concept, problem-based teaching has gradually been regarded as a teaching paradigm that can enhance students' core literacy in ideological and political subjects.

In China, problem-based teaching has been introduced and has become an important path for ideological and political education reform. Since the 21st century, with the adjustment of political curriculum reform, the transformation of the teaching concept of the political subject has also undergone a reform process from "knowledge-oriented" to "competency-oriented". In recent years, the Ministry of Education has explicitly put forward the teaching requirements based on problem situations and inquiry-based learning in the "General Senior High School Ideological and Political Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, 2020 revision)", providing policy support for the promotion of problem-based teaching in middle school politics classrooms. The new curriculum standards explicitly state that the core competencies of the political subject include political identity, legal awareness and public participation, and require teachers to use contextualized and inquiry-based teaching methods to help students form a deep understanding of the country, society and themselves in real social issues. Compared with traditional lecture-based teaching, problem-based teaching is more in line with this teaching objective. Compared with other teaching methods, problem-based teaching emphasizes the setting of teaching topics. Teachers conduct activities in specific situations to enable students to master the subject knowledge involved in the topics and develop related skills, ultimately forming correct values, possessing essential qualities, and mastering key abilities. It nurtures core competencies [9].

At the practical level, the academic community and front-line teachers, in combination with China's curriculum standards and social realities, propose problem-based teaching models suitable for local classrooms, such as organizing problem-based inquiry through structured design of "research in discussion to obtain relevant experience, discussion in discussion to clarify topic answers, discussion in discussion to apply discussion results" [10]. Both research and practice have pointed out that in ideological and political classes in China, problem-based teaching helps to enhance students' policy understanding, scientific literacy, legal awareness and social responsibility, but in actual teaching, teachers still face confusions and difficulties in terms of educational value, topic setting, activity organization, etc. [11]. In addition, in the process of implementing "curriculum-based ideological and political education" and integrating ideological education with academic education, Chinese universities and high schools are constantly exploring how to introduce problem-based inquiry to enhance students' critical thinking and participation ability while maintaining the value orientation of the curriculum [12]. Overall, the evolution of problem-based teaching in political science from theory to practice is manifested as: From the Western tradition of civic education centered on controversial

issues, through local policy guidance and teaching innovation, a classroom practice paradigm that takes into account cognition and civic action has gradually formed, but it still needs further systematic research and standardized practice in aspects such as emotional arousal, value guidance and teacher capacity building. In order to achieve the educational goal of promoting students' emotional resonance while ensuring rational judgment and internalization of values [7].

### **2.3. Psychological Approaches to the Cultivation of Core Competencies in Political Science Through Issue-Based Teaching**

As a teaching paradigm oriented towards social reality issues, the core value of problem-based teaching lies not only in promoting the unity of knowledge and action among students, but also in triggering value resonance through emotional experience, thereby achieving deep learning and identification. In the teaching of political science, students often experience cognitive uncertainty and emotional fluctuations when facing social controversial issues, and this psychological tension is the source of learning motivation. Through proper instructional design and guidance, teachers can transform this cognitive conflict into positive learning motivation, enabling students to achieve meaning construction and value recognition in the process of exploring social issues. The psychological mechanism of this process can be summarized as the path of action of "cognitive conflict → emotional experience → value internalization". This is also the key to generating the core literacy of the political science discipline.

First of all, cognitive conflict is the starting point of teaching. Cognitive conflict refers to the psychological tension that arises when an individual's own cognition, attitude, or behavior contradicts the new cognition, attitude, or behavior they are currently facing. Piaget's (1970) theory of cognitive development suggests that learning stems from "cognitive dissonance" that occurs when an individual is confronted with new information. In the teaching of political issues, when students' existing values or social cognition conflict with real-world problems, it triggers deep thinking and meaning reconstruction [13]. For example, when discussing the topic of "freedom of speech on the Internet and social responsibility", students may have cognitive conflicts in the contradiction between freedom and norms, a process that prompts them to form a more complex understanding of political concepts and social rules. Research shows that a moderate cognitive imbalance can significantly increase students' metacognitive level and learning engagement, laying the cognitive foundation for subsequent emotional experiences [14, 15].

Secondly, emotional arousal is the key to promoting the cultivation of the core literacy "awareness" in the political discipline through issue-based teaching. Emotional experience includes emotional arousal and resonance [16]. Classroom issues with real significance or value conflicts (such as conflicts between environment and development, contradictions between individual rights and public order) tend to evoke emotional responses (such as indignation, sympathy, shame or pride, etc.) in students, which are not teaching noise but motivations for the allocation of cognitive resources and a deep understanding of knowledge and values. Theory and evidence of the interaction between emotion and learning suggest that emotional activation can more effectively focus on key information, enhance information accessibility and memory consolidation, especially positive emotional arousal can significantly improve memory performance for difficult learning tasks [17, 18]. It is a necessary condition for transferring knowledge and skills acquired in a structured school environment to real-world decision-making scenarios [19]. Therefore, moderate and guided emotional arousal is an important starting point for issue-based classrooms to lead students to engage in deep critical thinking and transfer application. The teaching of political issues is precisely through arousing students' emotional participation, enabling them to form political sentiments and civic responsibility along the path of "feeling society - thinking society". For example, when discussing the topic of "environmental protection and economic development" in class, students are likely to have an emotional perception that bad economic behavior triggers environmental problems by watching environmental documentaries and sharing personal experiences, thereby deepening the cultivation of awareness and

literacy of the harmonious development of economic construction and environmental protection driven by emotions, achieving the unity of "knowing".

Emotional arousal itself can both promote learning and lead to extremism, especially negative emotional feelings. The key lies in whether the political classroom can offer strategies for emotional regulation (such as cognitive reassessment) so that intense emotions do not overwhelm rational reflection. The process model of emotion regulation shows that both pre-emptive strategies and reactive strategies can work in the classroom: the former includes situation selection and pre-emotional cues, etc. The latter includes guided breathing, suggestions for emotional expression rules, etc. [20]. When students learn to use cognitive reassessment to transform emotional experiences into problem awareness (for example, understanding "anger" as "sensitivity to injustice"), their emotions can be transformed into more systematic argumentative motivations, prompting the central processing and value weighing of information. That is to say, emotion regulation is not about "suppressing emotions", but about integrating emotional feelings as cognitive resources to transform emotional experiences into rational judgments and value construction.

Thirdly, emotional resonance is the key to internalizing values and transferring behaviors. Emotional resonance refers to an individual's understanding and consistent expression of the emotional information conveyed by an event or the emotional state of another person in an emotional experience. When using problem-based teaching in a political class, students form "emotional synchronization" through emotional interaction with the teacher, peers, and the subject of the social event. This resonance not only enhances the emotional tension in the classroom, but also promotes value recognition. Domestic research has found that emotional resonance significantly enhances students' value understanding and behavioral intent in ideological and political classes (Liu Yu, 2021; Zhou Li & Li Zekun, 2023). For instance, emotional experience is associated with moral self-awareness and just world belief, and positive emotional experience promotes prosocial behavior and loyalty [21-24]. This suggests that problem-based teaching is not merely a process of knowledge construction, but rather a psychological growth process interwoven with emotional experience and social cognition.

In addition, in a political classroom with supportive teacher-student interaction and opportunities for autonomous participation, the concern aroused by emotional resonance is more likely to be internalized as part of personal value and identity. According to the self-determination theory, after learners receive emotional support and psychological satisfaction, external values and social norms gradually transform into intrinsic motivation, achieving a psychological transformation from "external drive to self-identity" [25]. Problem-based teaching in political science helps students internalize political values as the driving force of personal beliefs and social actions by guiding them to express positions, experience conflicts, and form empathy in real social issues. Emotional resonance thus becomes an "intermediary channel", making emotional experience the psychological foundation for the formation of lasting core competencies in political science.

To sum up, the psychological mechanism of issue-based teaching is not a single linear one, but a systematic process of the interaction between cognition and emotion. Cognitive conflict triggers emotional experience, emotional experience promotes value recognition, and value internalization is a sign of achieving political core literacy. The proposal of this mechanism expands the psychological foundation of political science teaching and provides theoretical support for understanding how issue-based teaching promotes core literacy through "emotion-driven cognitive construction." Future research could further explore the role path of emotional resonance in the formation of core literacy in political science from the perspective of classroom interaction, providing guidance for the optimized implementation of issue-based teaching.

## **2.4. Emotional Experience-driven Issue-Based Teaching Strategies for Core Competencies in Political Science**

The emotional experience-driven issue-based teaching strategy is based on the psychological mechanism of "cognitive conflict - emotional experience - value internalization". It aims to create activity-based subject courses while also being open and leading. Through the closed-loop design of context construction, emotion regulation and reflection guidance, emotional experience is transformed into the internal driving force for the generation of political subject core literacy. At the same time, cognitive reassessment and reflective guidance are used to avoid emotional extremism and achieve the coordinated development of emotional resonance and rational cognition.

The topic Settings should be based on students' life experiences and social realities, and select content with both value conflicts and emotional tensions, such as "Personal Information Protection and Digital Economy Development", "Fairness and Efficiency in Rural Revitalization", etc. [11]. Teachers can expose students to real social contradictions through situational narratives, on-site case presentations, role-playing, etc., to evoke cognitive conflicts and emotional resonances - such as evoking sympathy through cases of protecting the rights and interests of left-behind children and triggering reflection through ecological destruction incidents [4]. This life-related context design can transform political issues from abstract concepts into perceptible emotional carriers, laying the foundation for subsequent emotional regulation and value internalization. Therefore, the life-like and conflict-like construction of the issue context becomes the basis for emotional arousal.

According to Gross's (1998) model of the emotion regulation process, teachers need to guide students to adopt a combination of pre-regulation and reactive regulation to transform emotional experiences into cognitive resources. After the emotion is awakened, students are guided to reconstruct the meaning of the emotion through cognitive reevaluation, such as transforming "indignation at social injustice" into "demand for the improvement of the rule of law" and "anxiety about public events" into "sense of responsibility for participating in public affairs" [18]. Therefore, the emotion regulation strategy led by cognitive reassessment is the key to rational transformation. At the same time, through response strategies such as guided breathing and explanation of emotional expression rules, avoid emotional overload affecting rational judgment, and enable students to form dialectical cognition of political issues while maintaining emotional heat, in line with the core literacy requirements of rule of law awareness and public participation in the political discipline.

The idea of consistency in teaching, learning and assessment provides a new path for improving the quality of high school politics teaching and implementing the cultivation of core literacy in the subject. Consistency in teaching, learning and assessment emphasizes that teaching, learning and assessment are not isolated links, but an organic whole that is interrelated and mutually reinforcing, jointly serving students' learning and development [26]. Secondly, it is necessary to guide students to analyze the social essence behind emotions in combination with the knowledge of ideological and political subjects, and to transform emotional resonance into self-good value recognition through activities such as thematic debates and practical plan design. This stepwise reflection not only meets the need for autonomous participation and emotional support in self-determination theory, but also enables students to achieve the transformation of "emotional experience - cognitive understanding - value practice" through reflection, truly internalizing core competencies such as political identity and social responsibility as stable psychological qualities and behavioral tendencies [25].

## **3. CONCLUSION**

This study examines the role of emotional experience in thematic teaching of ideological and political education (IPE) at secondary schools, within the context of core competency education reform. The research reveals that thematic teaching follows a psychological pathway of "cognitive conflict - emotional experience - value internalization" to cultivate core competencies. Cognitive conflict

serves as the starting point, emotional arousal is pivotal for competency development, and emotional resonance facilitates value internalization and behavioral transfer. Based on these findings, the study proposes an emotion-driven teaching strategy. This strategy creates a closed loop through life-related, conflict-driven thematic scenarios, cognitive re-evaluation for emotional regulation, and step-by-step reflective guidance. It effectively harnesses emotional motivation while ensuring proper value orientation, providing both theoretical support and practical pathways for implementing core competencies in IPE.

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