

# Investigating the Challenges and Strategies of Teacher Morality Policy for Higher Education Sustainability in China: Perspective of Stakeholder

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## Abstract

This study was designed to explore the challenges and strategies for the sustainable development of teacher morality policies in Chinese higher education. Based on the new era of a decade of the operation of teacher morality policies in Chinese universities, from the perspective of stakeholders, this study used a qualitative research method to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with 28 university teachers. The results found that the faculty group had a more profound knowledge and understanding of teacher morality policies and had positive attitudes and bright expectations for future development and enhancement. Teacher morality policy faces current challenges in four aspects: institutional regulation, evaluation system, education management, and policy subjects, which require the participation of multiple parties and joint planning. Taking the promotion of teachers' sustainable development as the fulcrum, we should improve the system construction, optimize the supporting policies, coordinate the management mechanism, and stimulate the vitality of the main body. In addition, the limitations of the study are given in the last.

## Keywords

Higher Education Sustainability, Teacher Morality Policy, Teacher Moral, Teacher Sustainable Development

## 1. Introduction

The framework for sustainable development identifies education as a catalyst for

transformational change, whereby higher education is seen as an enabler for addressing issues related to sustainability (Shields, 2019). Higher education plays an irreplaceable role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Higher education's innovative and sustainable exploration of science, technology, and resources supports and contributes to the achievement of global sustainability (Finnveden, Newman, & Verhoef, 2019). As the core human resource of higher education institutions, also known as the first resource of education, higher education faculty is an invaluable force in advancing sustainability and quality development (Ma, Shi, & Hou, 2023). Professional ethics, as a subordinate concept of morality, generally refers to the sum of moral principles and norms that should be followed in the process of work production. Due to the exemplary and professional nature of the teaching profession, the professional ethics of teachers profoundly affect the quality of education and teaching work and talent training. As an ideology based on professional ethics, teacher morality is the internal driving force of teachers' teaching practice and the root of teachers' competence. Teacher morality is often called the soul of a teacher, and it has become an effective consensus in the world to construct teacher ethics, improve the quality of education, and promote the development of universities. Education itself is inherently virtuous, combining both intellectual and moral activities. Any action by teachers in teaching exhibits some moral significance, and the way teachers make decisions, think, and perceive should be considered from an ethical perspective (Liu, 2022). With the deep development of global integration and SDGs, all countries in the world based on different political cultures and realistic national conditions, as the same community of human destiny, have common interests and common value expectations in dealing with new issues and challenges of teacher morality construction (Miao & Qin, 2020). In 2019, the Chinese government issued *China Education Modernization 2035*, the first of eight basic concepts of which is to pay more attention to morality first. 2022 In explaining the policy, the head of China's Ministry of Education clearly pointed out that the preparation of *China Education Modernization 2035* is China's active participation in global education governance, fulfillment of China's commitment to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the development of education for the world. It is a practical action to contribute Chinese wisdom, Chinese experience, and Chinese solutions to the development of education in the world.

Current China, with the world's largest higher education system, has made a positive impact and contributed an outstanding role in talent training, scientific research, social services, and international exchange (Du, Sun, & Cheng, 2019). With its enormous exemplary value, teacher morality has an essential and crucial role to perform in the process of sustainable development of higher education in China (Ma, Shi, & Hou, 2023). Emphasis on teacher moral construction has been an excellent tradition of the Communist Party of China, and successive Chinese national leaders have taken moral education as the fundamental of educa-

tion development and positioned the mission of nurturing people in university education from a strategic height (Han, 2021). Looking back at the past ten years, the moral construction of Chinese universities has been guided by Xi Jinping's theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and has gone through an important period of deepening reform, optimizing mechanisms, and steadily improving quality. Teacher morality has a variety of connotations and extensions, with many scholars providing rich discussions on the meaning of teacher ethics (Liu & Han, 2020). In general, teacher morality in a broad sense should include teachers' public ethics, professional ethics, and personal private ethics. It in a narrow sense refers to professional ethics based on the special status of teachers. That is, the universal norms formed in the long-term educational and teaching activities to regulate the professional relations and ethical order of teachers, which are not bound to the limited cognition of individual teachers, nor are subjective assertions detached from social reality (Sun & Liu, 2022). The attachment of teacher morality construction and national politics is more obvious, and teacher morality itself is the requirement of ideology and the cornerstone of political implementation. The moral construction in colleges and universities is a practical process based on the external guarantee of moral code and promoted by the internal drive of self-reflection, self-improvement, and self-worth realization of teachers. The essence of moral cultivation is to contribute to the better life of individuals and the holistic development of human beings, which is the logical starting point for the regulation of external policies and the stimulation of internal motivation (Yan, 2021; Li & Yang, 2021; Zhang & Qu, 2021).

In 2011, China's Ministry of Education enacted the *Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in Higher Education*, which is the first macro document promulgated at the level of China's central government that specifically addresses teacher morality construction in higher education. Distinguished from previous relevant documents, the policy on teacher morality in colleges and universities is based on years of exploration and experience accumulation of policies on teacher morality construction in primary and secondary schools in China, and shows a considerable degree of specificity, clarity, and professionalization (Li & Jin, 2019). Since the 18th National Congress, the policy of teacher morality in colleges and universities has shown a trend of growth, and the Ministry of Education and other relevant departments have issued a series of macro policy documents, which effectively strengthen the overall leadership of the Communist Party of China on the work of teacher morality construction and view all aspects, such as teacher morality education, assessment and governance in colleges and universities. As a kind of monopolistic educational resource of the government, education policy has the quality of legitimacy to influence the allocation of educational resources. The increase in its quantity not only indicates that the state attaches great importance to the construction of university teachers' ethics, but also proves that there are problems and challenges in the construction of university teachers' ethics in practice, so it needs to continuously issue documents to

declare the strengthening of the policy position. As the accumulation of policy documents continues, the application and implementation process has changed from simple to complex, interconnected and intertwined to form a complex policy world. This not only brings challenges for universities to understand and interpret the spirit of national policies, but also makes it difficult for faculty groups to follow the code of teacher morality and balance their own and organizational development (Chen & Yang, 2021; Huang, 2021; Yu & Wang, 2021).

Global changes in complex social structures and cultural trends have confronted the construction of teacher morality in Chinese universities with multiple challenges, which have a direct impact on the social identity of university teachers and the attractiveness of the teaching profession (Wang, 2021). Teacher moral construction is not only the embodiment and extension of moral implications at the level of the teaching profession, but also the characteristics and operation of morality in the educational field. The properties of teacher morality construction are manifested in the plurality of participating subjects, the complexity, and interaction of the construction system and process. As direct stakeholders, teachers in colleges and universities have the most intuitive feelings about the implementation and execution of the policy, which is effective feedback on the challenges and strategic choices faced in the policy, and an important perspective for research and investigation. Many previous studies have also emphasized the significant role of investigating educational policies based on teachers' perspectives for educational development (Yu & Wang, 2021; Xiao, Han, & Kang, 2019).

## 2. The Significance of Teacher Morality in Chinese Higher Education Sustainability

For a long time, Chinese higher education has established a relatively scientific and complete institutional system of university teacher morality policy under the overall leadership of the Communist Party of China. The national level ensures the legitimacy of university teachers' moral construction through legal improvements, such as the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Teachers* and the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Higher Education*. Reviewing only the decade of China's entrance into the new era (2012-2022), 8 educational policies specifically for teacher morality in colleges and universities have been promulgated at the national level (Table 1), which shows the core status of teacher morality construction in the high-quality development of higher education. By implementing higher education policies, higher education organizations enact a system of teacher ethics norms in line with their own development, further refine the content and improve the binding force within the organization (Chen & Zhu, 2021). With good moral cultivation as the internal driving force, teachers transmit ideas, attitudes, skills, and knowledge to students through their teaching behaviors. It can be said that teacher morality provides the advancement from conceptual change to action agenda for the cultivation of talents and the

**Table 1.** Policy documents on teacher morality in Chinese universities in the new era.

No.	Policy Name	Release Time
1	Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in Higher Education	2011
2	Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Ideological and Political Work of Young Teachers in Colleges and Universities	2013
3	Opinions on Establishing a Sound Long-term Mechanism for the Construction of University Teachers' Morality	2014
4	Measures for the Prevention and Handling of Academic Misbehavior in Higher Education Institutions	2016
5	Opinions on the Full Implementation of the Postgraduate Supervisor's Responsibility for Moral Education	2018
6	Ten Rules of Professional Conduct for College Teachers in the New Era	2018
7	Guidance on the Handling of Teachers' Misconduct in Universities	2018
8	Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Teacher Morality in the New Era	2019

sustainability of higher education. Teacher morality, as a core imperative for the sustainable development of higher education in China, has become a hot topic of educational research based on the Chinese context (Wang, 2021; Yu & Wang, 2021; Xiao, Han, & Kang, 2019; Rong, 2019).

Overall, teacher morality construction in colleges and universities is mainly carried out under the authority of the state public power of education policy and promoted through the establishment of the policy system and the enrichment of policy tools. The higher education teacher morality policy system is an indispensable means to play a guiding role in driving teacher morality construction in an other-regulated manner, but its binding force on teacher moral behavior and the driving force is very limited (Shen, 2022), especially when caring for sustainable social development and high-quality development of higher education. As stakeholders, teachers in colleges and universities have a strong need for self-worth realization and professional identity and relying solely on the supervision and control of policies and other hard drivers for teacher morality construction is not powerful enough. No matter how perfect the development plan and institutional arrangement are, deviations will occur in the policy implementation, which needs timely detection and correction. Therefore, studying the problems and challenges in the process of policy implementation and promotion from the perspective of stakeholders is an effective way to seek strategies and solutions.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Study Background

The year 2011 was a key point in the policy development of teacher morality in Chinese universities. The *Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in Higher*

*Education* issued on December 30 of that year is the first central document in China that specifically addresses teacher morality construction in higher education. The specialization of the policy reflects the transformation of the concept of policymaking for teacher morality construction in colleges and universities and the increase of national attention to related issues. With the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2012, China entered a new era of building a socialist country with Chinese characteristics and opened a new chapter of building dreams. 2022, the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held on October 16, 2022, which reviewed the great achievements of China in the new era of ten years and summarized the experience gained and provided more Chinese wisdom and better solutions to the common problems faced by mankind and provided Chinese experience for the sustainable modern development of global countries based on their own national conditions (Ke, 2023; Liu & Sun, 2023; Xiao, 2023; Peng, 2022; Meng & Yuan, 2021). At present, based on the fundamental task of establishing moral education, the policy system of teacher ethics in the new era has gone through a decade of improvement and optimization. To study the operation of the policy from the perspective of university teachers, an important stakeholder, to understand the feelings and needs of teachers, to understand the challenges of the current teacher morality policy, and to seek strategies to improve the policy is a necessary choice to promote the sustainable development of higher education nowadays.

### 3.2. Study Design and Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design with semi-structured in-depth interviews based on realistic and contextual characteristics and following the scientific and rigorous structure of the interviews. As one of the most effective methods for collecting primary data, in-depth interviews, unlike simple questionnaires or rating scales, reveal more in-depth details of respondents' experiences and perspectives on the topic (Chang & Han, 2019). Semi-structured interviews, as a common method in qualitative research, can be designed with a targeted outline according to the purpose of the interview and the interviewee, and can ensure flexibility in the interview while ensuring that pre-determined questions can be answered, making it possible to fully explore the details and reasons behind the questions with a high degree of validity. The objective of the interviews in this study was to explore the views of Chinese university teachers on the challenges and strategies of the construction of university teacher morality policies in the new era. Teachers from higher education institutions who have been working in higher education for more than 2 years were selected for this study, and the levels covered leaders, full-time teachers, and administrators in higher education institutions; the titles covered professors, associate professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants; and the age span was from 30 to 55 years. Interviewees were 28 (14 males, 14 females) stakeholders from 6 higher education institutions in 5 cities in China (Table 2). The reason for this selection was to

ensure that the interviewees were all hands-on participants in the operation of teacher morality policies in the new era, had direct experience of the policy running and development, and had the correct knowledge and understanding of the terminology and wording in the interview questions.

Interview questions include: 1) Can you tell us about your views on teacher morality policies in the new era? 2) Based on your experience, what challenges

**Table 2.** Interviewees.

Position	Academic Title	Affiliation/Region/Gender	No.
Full-time teacher	Prof.	E University/BD/Female	T1
	Prof.	B University/SY/Male	T2
	Prof.	C University/SY/Female	T3
	Prof.	A University/BJ/Male	T4
	Associate Prof.	D University/GX/Female	T5
	Associate Prof.	A University/BJ/Female	T6
	Associate Prof.	F University/CQ/Male	T7
	Associate Prof.	E University/BD/Female	T8
	Lecturer	A University/BJ/Male	T9
	Lecturer	A University/BJ/Female	T10
	Lecturer	B University/SY/Female	T11
	Teaching Assistant	C University/SY/Male	T12
	Teaching Assistant	C University/SY/Male	T13
Education leader	Prof.	E University/BD/Female	T14
	Prof.	A University/BJ/Male	T15
	Prof.	D University/GX/Female	T16
	Prof.	B University/SY/Male	T17
	Associate Prof.	F University/CQ/Female	T18
Education administrator	Prof.	F University/CQ/Male	T19
	Prof.	E University/BD/Female	T20
	Prof.	D University/GX/Male	T21
	Associate Prof.	D University/GX/Female	T22
	Associate Prof.	A University/BJ/Male	T23
	Lecturer	F University/CQ/Male	T24
	Lecturer	C University/SY/Male	T25
	Teaching Assistant	F University/CQ/Female	T26
	Teaching Assistant	B University/SY/Male	T27
Teaching Assistant	B University/SY/Female	T28	

do you think exist in the operation of current teacher morality policies? 3) In your opinion, what aspects should be focused on in the process of formulating and improving future university teacher morality policies? What are your suggestions and strategies? The three questions in this study are based on the scientific nature of semi-structured interviews, avoiding questions with suggestive answers and biased questions, and are closely focused on the purpose of the interview after discussions with relevant experts. During the interview process, the researcher adjusted the interview ideas through the interviewees' answers, so that the interviewees could speak freely and get true and accurate information to the greatest extent.

### **3.3. Data Collection and Coding**

The interviews were conducted through both video meet and face-to-face, and the average interview time was around 35 minutes. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded and converted into textual materials for further coding and analysis after the end of the interview. This study followed the saturation principle for the data collection process (Li & Yang, 2020), and the interview contents were promptly organized and analyzed after each interview. After coding and organizing the interview data of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> interviewees through the Nvivo12 software, no new free nodes appeared, indicating that no more new and important information was found to appear, demonstrating that the data had reached theoretical saturation and the number of interviewees met the requirements.

In this study, Nvivo12 software was used as the qualitative analysis software to ensure the standardization and normality of the analysis process. The software can help the researcher to organize, code, and analyze the data of the materials, and it is convenient to help the researcher to read the interview content repeatedly in a targeted manner to dig out more valuable information. To ensure the reliability of the coding analysis, the study used content analysis, which meticulously divided the content based on an open coding process to facilitate the scientific analysis of the interview content.

## **4. Results**

Most of the interviewees articulated profound and specific views on the challenges faced in the operation of teacher morality construction policies in the new era. And they emphasized them concerning their own professional roles and the overall development orientation of higher education (Table 3).

### **4.1. The Main Challenges Faced in the Operation of the Teacher Morality Policy in the New Era**

#### **4.1.1. Institutional Norms Need to be Effectively Translated into Governance Performance**

Five interviewees suggested that the state has made great progress in the theoretical exploration of teacher morality policy, but in the implementation of teacher

**Table 3.** Current challenges and strategies of teacher morality policies faced by university teachers.

Type	Name
Main Challenges	Institutional Norms Need to be Effectively Translated into Governance Performance
	Teacher Morality Evaluation System Needs to be Improved
	Synergy of Administrations Needs to be Enhanced
	Awareness of the Responsibility of Policy Subjects Needs to be Promoted
Strategies & Recommendations	Improve Teacher Morality Institutionalization and Refine Policy Components
	Collaborative Promotion of Teacher Morality Practice
	Strengthen the Autonomous Construction of Policy Subjects
	Optimize the Policy Environment and Promote the Cultural Atmosphere

morality policy, a part of higher education institutions only stay in the interpretation and serious study of policy documents, without formulating the actual practice of teacher morality construction implementation guidelines according to the development orientation of schools and the growth characteristics of teachers. In other words, universities do not find the anchor point for converting macro teacher morality construction policy into effective governance.

Interviewee T23 pointed out that the content of the guiding rules documents for teacher morality construction enacted by universities copied the norms of higher-level teacher morality policies without refinement, the content was too general, the enforceability and operability were not strong, the resistance of teacher morality policies increased in the process of top-down implementation and enforcement, and the effectiveness of governance for teachers needed to be improved.

Interviewee T18 indicated that the management and coordination capacity played by local governments in the operation of teacher morality construction policies needs to be enhanced. As a formal organization of public utilities with limited autonomy, higher education institutions, driven by the system combining national centralization and local decentralization, have limited institutional construction and policy implementation of their own, and local education departments should enhance their support and coordination capacity in the operation of teacher morality policies and the governance of higher education.

Ten interviewees all pointed out that in the construction of teacher morality, there are obvious differences in the understanding of different departments within university organizations. Some functional units have the unclear divisions of authority and responsibility for the work related to teacher morality, inadequate effective docking, and fragmentation and duplication of work.

Interviewee T26 noted that the use of policy tools in teacher ethics policy is

irrational and lacks a more scientific mix and match. The policy environment is directly influenced by the effectiveness of policy tools.

#### **4.1.2. Teacher Morality Evaluation System Needs to Be Improved**

Some interviewees expressed that the construction of teacher morality is a systematic and complete project, which should cover all aspects of education, propaganda, assessment, supervision, and punishment. In the current period, the phenomenon of formalization of teacher ethics education and propaganda prevails. Regarding the evaluation of teacher ethics, it is still in the exploration stage, and the appropriateness of qualitative and quantitative evaluations is not quite clear.

Interviewee T20 expressed that teacher moral construction is the unity of self-discipline and other regulation, and self-evaluation of teacher morality reflects the degree of personal awareness of one's actions, which can promote identity and understanding of teacher morality and should be valued.

Several interviewees said that the support department of the teacher morality evaluation mechanism is weak, failing to form a multi-part linkage, and the evaluation mechanism is not running smoothly, which is due to the lack of attention to the construction of teacher morality within the organization, rich theoretical expressions, but a single way of implementation.

Many interviewees stated that teacher morality evaluation policies lack a categorical approach in the process of evaluating different types of teachers for their job responsibilities and job characteristics. There is a single approach to evaluation, with loose links between social and school assessment and insufficient attention to student and peer review.

Interviewee T3 expressed that in the practice and enforcement of teacher morality evaluation policies, the attention to teacher morality of leaders of university organizations is marginalized. As the decision-making core of the university, leaders are the leading force of teacher morality construction within the institution and have the role of teacher ethics demonstration. The growth and reflection of the morality of college leaders is a spring and fertile ground for cultivating excellent teacher morality, but the lack of focus on moral code and moral growth of leaders in the context of current policies and the lack of policy guidelines affect fairness.

In addition, the interviewees also emphasized that the reward and punishment mechanism of teacher morality needs to be improved. The exemplary role of high teacher ethics and the warning role of bottom-line teacher ethics both have a certain effectiveness. The disciplinary mechanism at the legal and policy level only intervenes in the results of unethical behavior, but not in the motives of unethical behavior, which is not preventive and lags.

Interviewee T9 emphasized that the incentives and commendations for teacher morality are generally based on spiritual incentives, lacking material rewards, with an insufficient sense of honor and gain. The tightness between the evaluation and assessment results of teacher morality and teachers' growth and career development is insufficient and needs to be further strengthened.

#### **4.1.3. Synergy of Administrations Needs to be Enhanced**

Many interviewees emphasized that compared with moral constraints centered on self-discipline, the institutional function of the teacher morality policy system to regulate individual and collective behavior as a rule and mode of operation can provide a systematic standard and basis to provide strong constraints and guarantees. However, the synergy of administration in which the role of teacher morality building needs to be improved. Many administrators lack the spirit of service and are negative in the interpretation of teacher ethics norms and the promotion of teacher ethics education, apathetic to the development of teacher morality. This phenomenon exists not only in the work on teacher ethics, but also commonly in teacher governance, where the servant orientation of the administration is skewed and manifests itself in a bureaucratic style.

Meanwhile, the interviewees also pointed out that colleges and universities are responsible for the construction of teachers' morality, but the problems of multiple management and unclear attribution have always existed, and the communication mechanism is not effective enough.

The interviewees also stressed that the policy of teacher morality in the new era points out the need to integrate teacher morality into the whole process of education and teaching, but in educational practice, scientific research, and social services, multisectoral collaboration process exists the common phenomenon of high voice, but little tangible effect.

Six interviewees all pointed out that the management instruments of universities are an important part of the implementation of teacher morality construction measures. Under the guidance of policies, the rationality of management methods and management processes is extremely significant. Active and effective collaboration can not only promote the sound operation of teacher moral construction, but also provide a good growth environment for the development of teachers and students. Interviewees have encountered time wasting and inefficiency in their daily work due to poor communication and collaboration.

#### **4.1.4. Awareness of the Responsibility of Policy Subjects Needs to Be Promoted**

Teachers in colleges and universities, as the policy subjects of university teacher morality policies, are not homogenized within their groups. Obviously, the teacher morality policy in the new era has paid attention to the heterogeneity within the teachers' group and made targeted norms, which have guiding power for the expansion and deepening of the policy. The heterogeneity of policy subjects adds complexity. The interviewees noted that no matter how sound and perfect the long-term mechanism of teachers' moral construction is, it is eventually transformed into individual decisions and actions of university teachers and materialized into actions shown in education and teaching. The rational understanding of policy subjects and the construction of their own behavior are crucial to the influence and effectiveness of the policy.

Some interviewees stated that there is a sense of cultivating students, but they

are tired of completing business work and satisfying life security and lack the knowledge of the nature of self and the shaping and cultivation of morality. Other interviewees pointed out that as long as not touching the red line of the law and the code of teacher ethics is the support for the construction of teacher ethics, as the ideological and theoretical study and the improvement of personal moral cultivation are negative states. The value of teacher morality for their growth and development is ranked after.

Some interviewees also explicitly stated that the not easily quantifiable nature of teacher morality and the implicit nurturing characteristics do not stimulate their motivation for the internalization of teacher morality. There is a correct understanding of the apparent gap between their behavior and the existence of teacher morality expectations, but they lack motivation.

In conclusion, some interviewees all showed a definite lack of responsibility and weakened consciousness, and lacked the power to affirm themselves, reflect morally, and improve their virtue development.

## **4.2. The Strategies for the Teacher Morality Policy in Chinese Universities**

### **4.2.1. Improve Teacher Morality Institutionalization and Refine Policy Components**

Nowadays, in the new era when the policy system of teacher morality construction in colleges and universities is optimized and developed in parallel, improving the norms of teacher morality and refining the policy content are necessary choices to enhance the effectiveness of the policy, and are also important guarantees for the legitimacy of the teacher. Some interviewees pointed out that legislating teacher morality in colleges and universities at the national level and using legal guidelines as the fundamental guidance for teacher morality practice in many educational contexts can effectively enhance the legitimacy of teacher morality policies.

Besides, interviewees also noted that teacher morality policies should be problem-oriented and give positive policy responses to current problems. The connotations and conceptual expressions of teacher ethics should be clearly defined in the policy elements, and abstract and broad expressions should be reduced. The policy content can be understood by itself without the interpretation of professionals, which is also the earnest hope of the interviewees.

The interviewees also suggested that the state should pay attention to the full coverage of policy contained in the process of systematizing and promoting university teacher morality policies, increasing and strengthening the five-in-one long-term effectiveness of publicity, education, assessment, supervision, rewards, and punishment. The connection within the policy system should be close, not separate, and the logic of inner development should be used as a link to achieve the positive effect of mutual promotion.

The better guidance of teacher morality policy will be for the effectiveness of implementation at lower levels, so we need more clear objectives and more spe-

cific details of the policy components. Some interviewees expressed a strong expectation for more detailed policy content.

#### **4.2.2. Collaborative Promotion of Teacher Morality Practice**

Several interviewees have indicated that the practice of teacher morality is an effective grip for the establishment of a long-term mechanism of teacher morality policy. As an important part of China's higher education reform in the new era, the construction of curriculum ideology and politics in colleges and universities provides a practical field for the integration of teachers' ideological and political literacy and teaching ability, which provides essential support for the construction of teacher morality, prompting teachers to integrate ideological and moral understanding and correct value orientation into their knowledge teaching while imparting professional knowledge and skills. At the same time, the construction of curriculum ideology and politics facilitates the building of university teachers' morality and enhances the self-improvement and essential understanding of teachers' morality dynamically.

Furthermore, some interviewees emphasized that improving effective communication within organizations is an integral part of advancing the practice of teacher morality policies in the future. Transforming management into service is a core tenet of the modernization of national educational governance capacity and the basis for efficient collaboration within university organizations. Enhancing the service consciousness of managers, establishing good moral ideals, and correcting the inertia of the concept of personal attachment and the excessive fetishization of section management are key strategies to collaboratively promote the practice of teacher morality.

Interviewee T14 highlighted that the establishment of a targeted development plan for teacher morality and criteria for the division of competencies based on collaboration among departments, and integrated into the school's master plan, can effectively ensure synergy in the practice of teacher morality policies.

#### **4.2.3. Strengthen the Autonomous Construction of Policy Subjects**

Interviewee T24 stated that returning to teachers, valuing the motivation of policy subjects, and improving teachers' internalization of teacher ethics norms and moral development are constructional imperatives as well as policy goals. Teacher morality policy should pay more attention to specific situations in teachers' theoretical understanding and practical reflections.

Some interviewees emphasized that teacher morality policies should focus first and foremost on individual teachers, on the multifaceted needs of teachers themselves to survive, live, and work, and use reasonable policy tools to stimulate the motivation of policy subjects. Focusing on teachers' needs is a fundamental prerequisite for teacher moral to work as well as to be effective, and it is one of the most powerful strategies.

Some interviewees pointed out the adoption of strategies in the value orientation: meeting the personal values of teachers is fundamental to the exercise of

their instrumental and social values. An effective combination of external institutional exhortation and internal self-motivation is fundamental to the promotion of teacher morality.

In addition, the interviewees also emphasized that teacher morality should be fully adapted to the national development context and that teacher morality policies should consider the current rapid development of China. The goal of teacher morality construction should be to move from restraint to value leadership, and to reverse the bias in the perception of teachers' identities, which is "all about giving and no reward", focusing on the essence of teacher morality as a balance between giving and receiving, rights and obligations, external statutes and independent construction, spirituality and materiality, and ideal beliefs and real needs.

#### **4.2.4. Optimize the Policy Environment and Promote the Cultural Atmosphere**

A good policy environment can establish an equal dialogue mechanism among stakeholders, which can promote the pattern of shared governance among multiple social actors and contribute to the development of institutions and policy refinement. The interviewees pointed out that in higher education reform and teacher morality policy optimization, the wishes and suggestions of teachers at different levels should be included in the link of policy formulation, and a widely shared rule discourse among teacher groups should be established.

The interviewees also highlighted that opening more channels for the expression of teacher morality policies by multiple participating subjects and circumventing the limitations of one family's opinion are optional strategies for the development of the current information society and knowledge economy.

Interviewees stressed that focusing on the coupling between teacher morality policies and different related education policies is an effective strategy to create a favorable policy environment. The social culture of respecting teachers requires the joint contribution of multiple policy subjects and also needs full appreciation within university organizations. Optimizing the policy environment by improving the supporting policies is a key strategic choice.

In the construction of the campus culture of teacher morality, the form of morality propaganda and the content of teacher morality education activities can be adopted in a diversified way, focusing on continuity and information penetration. According to the cultural interests and value perspectives of teachers and students, we can design a suitable approach to improve the environment for the immersion of teacher ethics culture.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the above results, we can find that in China, teacher moral building has been fully developed from top to bottom in universities. The teacher community, a stakeholder, has a deeper awareness and understanding of teacher morality policies, with positive attitudes and good expectations for future development and deepening. Studies on the issue of teacher ethics are typically exploratory,

and neither the study itself nor the path to solving the research problem is fully clear and unified at present. In-depth investigation of teacher morality policy issues requires continuous enrichment and development by theoretical experts, continuous exploration of theoretical and practical paths by educational practitioners, and the need to understand and listen to the real feelings and good hopes of front-line educators about teacher morality construction and policy operation. This study investigates university teacher morality policies from the perspective of teachers, using a semi-structured in-depth interview research method to obtain the challenges faced by teacher groups in four aspects: institutional norms, assessment systems, educational management, and policy subjects, which also suggest relevant development strategies. The study affirms the development direction of teacher morality construction in colleges and universities in China in the new era decade, presents a realistic model of the current operation of teacher morality policies, and provides certain Chinese experiences for the global governance of teachers.

However, there are some limitations in this study. The implementation of teacher morality policy and teacher governance is a process in which multiple subjects participate and work together as a group. This study is one-sided from the perspective of a group of teachers only and cannot show the interaction and deep nature of the coalition of interests. Due to the limitations of the research members' abilities and time, the number of interview samples and the areas involved in this study also have certain shortcomings. In future research, we will expand the sample size and explore more regions (not limited to China) in order to obtain real samples of stakeholders' opinions on the formulation and implementation of teacher morality policies in different countries and regions.

In conclusion, the research and discussion on the construction of university teachers' morality are always based on the inheritance of history and culture and the needs of the development of the times, which is a constant theme of social development and educational research, and an important issue to promote human civilization for well-being. Improving the effectiveness and longevity of teacher morality policy is the inherent need and fundamental guarantee for solidifying the high-quality development of education and its sustainability. Improving institutional construction and optimizing supporting policies, coordinating management mechanisms, and stimulating the dynamism of policy subjects all require the joint participation and joint planning of all interested parties. Global sustainable development and the comprehensive construction of China's socialist modernization are intrinsically coupled and have the same goal, both of which need to be guided by policies and institutions and supported by education, thus unifying the promotion of economic development and sustainable human development (Zhang & Qu, 2021; Shen, 2022; Li, Cai, & Liu, 2021).

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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