A Study on the Integration of Mental Health Education and Ideological and Political Education in Universities Under New Circumstances

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Abstract

With the changing landscape of higher education in the new era, the importance of mental health education and ideological and political education in the comprehensive development of students has become increasingly prominent. Traditional approaches to ideological and political education and mental health education have shown a certain disconnection in terms of content and methods, necessitating the exploration of integrative pathways to better promote students' ideological consciousness and mental well-being. This paper, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, examines the mechanisms and implementation paths for integrating mental health education with ideological and political education in universities. By reviewing the literature and conducting empirical research, the study analyzes the progress of related research both domestically and internationally, and, in conjunction with the current state of university education, proposes theoretical foundations and practical strategies for constructing an integrative mechanism. The findings indicate that the integration of mental health education and ideological and political education can enhance students' mental resilience and ideological and political literacy, thus providing a new pathway to achieve educational objectives. Finally, the paper puts forward corresponding policy recommendations aimed at offering theoretical support and practical guidance for promoting the integration of mental health and ideological and political education in universities under new conditions.

Keywords: higher education, mental health education, ideological and political education, Educational Integration, theoretical framework

1. Introduction

Universities today face a complex and ever-changing environment, where students increasingly encounter mental health issues amid pressures from academic demands and employment competition. At the same time, ideological and political education, as a crucial means to cultivate students' core values, is receiving growing attention. Traditionally, mental health education and ideological and political education have been conducted independently, failing to meet the diverse developmental needs of students. Therefore, exploring a new model of integration between the two has become a significant direction in university education reform. This paper aims to build a theoretical framework and conduct empirical research by examining the current situation, challenges, and development paths of integrating mental health education with ideological and political education, thereby providing both theoretical basis and practical guidance to enhance students' mental resilience and ideological consciousness[1].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Status of Mental Health Education and Ideological and Political Education Abroad

Research abroad shows that mental health education and ideological and political education are gradually attracting attention. Particularly in Western countries, where mental health issues are becoming increasingly prominent, scholars and educators are exploring ways to promote students' mental well-being and ideological literacy through education. Countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom began focusing on mental health education as early as the 1960s, with an emphasis on early identification, intervention, and prevention through courses, counseling services, and psychological interventions to help students regulate emotions, relieve stress, and enhance resilience. Many universities have adopted comprehensive intervention models, integrating mental health courses, counseling services, and emotion management workshops into regular teaching and extracurricular activities. Moreover, policy support—such as the 2013 "National Mental Health Education Strategy" in the U.S.—has

provided essential resources for this field.On the other hand, ideological and political education abroad places greater emphasis on civic education, social responsibility, and value cultivation, stressing the principles of freedom, democracy, and equality, and focusing on individual development and social participation[2]. Civic education courses in the U.S. and Europe strive to cultivate citizens' sense of responsibility and democratic governance, often incorporating practical activities to promote social engagement. Although the research emphases differ, there is a growing convergence in cultivating individual mental health and social responsibility. Some researchers even suggest that mental health education plays an important role in shaping social responsibility.However, the integration models abroad are still immature, with mental health and ideological and political education largely operating independently, lacking effective coordination and sufficient interdisciplinary research. Overall, while international studies on mental health intervention and civic responsibility provide valuable insights for domestic practices, there remains significant room for further integrative research[3].

2.2 Development and Existing Problems of Mental Health Education in Domestic Universities

In recent years, Chinese universities have increasingly focused on mental health education, yet significant shortcomings persist. A survey of 100 universities nationwide revealed that approximately 30% of institutions have not established a systematic mental health curriculum for all students; while key universities generally have dedicated mental health centers, only about 30% of local and small-scale universities possess a well-developed system. A survey of 300 universities indicates that over 40% suffer from insufficient mental health teaching staff. Data show that the ratio of counseling teachers to students in key universities is about 1:250, whereas in local and small-scale institutions, the ratios are as high as 1:500 and 1:800 respectively, severely affecting teaching quality and service effectiveness. Furthermore, student participation is a pressing issue: only 35% of students reported actively engaging in mental health activities, while 40% barely participate, reflecting deficiencies in the appeal and effectiveness of the courses[4]. Overall, significant gaps exist in coverage, staffing, and student engagement in mental health education at domestic universities. Therefore, universities urgently need to increase resource investment, optimize curriculum systems, and strengthen teacher training to enhance the effectiveness of mental health education and better meet the growing psychological needs of students.

2.3 Theoretical Evolution and Practical Exploration of Ideological and Political Education in Universities

Ideological and political education has always played a vital role in Chinese higher education, with its theories and practices continuously evolving. From the early days following the founding of New China—when the focus was on studying Marxist theory and disseminating core socialist values—to the period between the 1950s and 1970s when classroom lectures were predominant in shaping a socialist worldview, and later, during the reform and opening-up era, when social theories and current issues were incorporated, ideological and political education gradually began to emphasize critical thinking and social participation. In the 21st century, amid social transformation, ideological and political education has shifted from merely guiding political thought to cultivating comprehensive qualities, innovation, and practical abilities in students. Universities have integrated ideological and political education with professional courses, social practice, and volunteer services, establishing student-centered, diversified educational models and employing online platforms and digital resources to explore interactive and experiential teaching methods, thereby enhancing course appeal[5]. Meanwhile, the diverse needs of different student cohorts have led some universities to adopt small-class, thematic, and customized teaching approaches. Against the backdrop of globalization, some institutions are also incorporating international perspectives to broaden students' global awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. Overall, while traditional theoretical instruction is gradually giving way to practice-oriented, innovative, and comprehensive quality cultivation, there remains room for improvement in content, methods, and outcomes, though the evolving theories and practices have laid a solid foundation for nurturing talent in the new era[6].

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

3.1 Construction of the Theoretical Framework

Mental health is a complex, multi-dimensional concept influenced by an interplay of individual factors, social support, cultural values, and social structures and resources. Figure 1 presents a framework model of the factors affecting mental health, illustrating how these elements interact to impact an individual's psychological well-being[7].
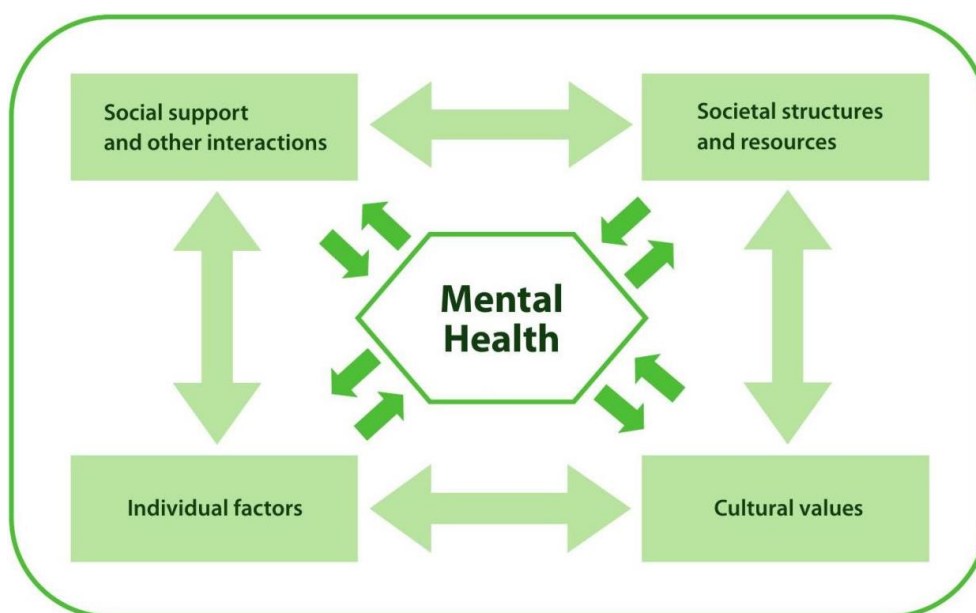
Figure 1. Model of Factors Influencing Mental Health

Firstly, individual factors include each person's physical and psychological characteristics, such as genetic predispositions, mental resilience, and emotional regulation abilities. These factors directly influence how individuals respond to stress, challenges, or adversity, thereby having a profound impact on their mental health. Individual factors encompass not only physiological aspects like illness and overall health but also emotional and cognitive components such as self-esteem, confidence, and emotional stability.Secondly, social support and interpersonal interactions refer to the support systems within one's social network—including family, friends, colleagues, and community organizations. The strength and quality of social support play a crucial role in alleviating psychological stress and providing a sense of security and belonging. Beyond material support, emotional support and social interactions significantly enhance an individual's psychological resilience.Social structures and resources involve the distribution of resources, economic conditions, educational opportunities, and social policies in the environment. For instance, the accessibility and fairness of welfare systems, educational systems, and employment opportunities directly affect individuals' quality of life and mental health. Inequalities in social resources often exacerbate disparities in mental health among different groups, underscoring the impact of social structure.Finally, cultural values reflect a society's perceptions and attitudes toward mental health. The understanding and prioritization of mental health vary across cultural contexts, influencing how individuals perceive mental issues, seek psychological help, and cope with challenges[8]. In some cultures, mental health problems may be stigmatized, while in others, they are seen as conditions requiring treatment and intervention. Cultural values exert a profound and lasting influence on individuals' mental health awareness and behavioral patterns.In summary, mental health is not merely an individual issue but a result of interwoven factors across individual, social, and cultural dimensions. The model in Figure 1 emphasizes the importance of social support, cultural values, social resources, and individual factors, thereby providing a comprehensive theoretical basis for mental health education and intervention.

3.2 Research Methods Design

To comprehensively explore the current state and impact of integrating mental health education with ideological and political education in universities, this study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. By utilizing literature review, questionnaires, case studies, and interviews, the research systematically examines the integration from multiple perspectives to ensure comprehensive and reliable results.First, the literature review serves as the foundational research method, analyzing existing studies both domestically and internationally to examine the theoretical bases, development histories, and current integration models of mental health and ideological and political education. This method not only provides support for the theoretical framework but also identifies current gaps in research, offering valuable lessons from successful experiences.Second, the questionnaire survey collects data from university students and faculty regarding their perceptions and needs concerning the integration of mental health and ideological and political education. The designed questionnaire

covers understanding, demands for integrated education, and evaluation of its effectiveness, using a five-point Likert scale for quantification and further analysis of implementation outcomes in actual teaching.Third, case study analysis involves selecting several universities that have implemented integrated education as research objects. In-depth analysis of their course structures, teaching methods, and teacher training experiences reveals successful integration models and challenges, thereby providing strategies for replication in other institutions[9].Finally, the interview method gathers qualitative insights through in-depth interviews with university teachers, educational administrators, and mental health professionals, focusing on practical experiences, encountered challenges, and evaluations of integration effectiveness. These interviews offer rich qualitative data to further understand the background, teacher perspectives, and student feedback regarding the implementation.Through the combined use of these methods, the study provides a multi-dimensional analysis of the integration of mental health and ideological and political education, revealing potential issues and developmental directions, and offering theoretical and practical recommendations for effective implementation in the future[10].

4. Analysis of the Current Situation of Mental Health and Ideological & Political Education in Universities

As society increasingly emphasizes mental health issues, domestic universities have gradually recognized the importance of mental health education and ideological & political education in students' overall development. However, despite some progress in these areas, many challenges remain. Based on surveys and data analyses conducted in numerous universities nationwide, this section provides an in-depth analysis of the current status of mental health and ideological & political education, aiming to reveal existing problems and their causes, and to offer guidance for future improvements.Firstly, regarding the coverage and resource allocation of mental health education, although most universities have established mental health education centers, coverage remains limited in some local and small-scale institutions. As the Table 1 shown, Data indicate that approximately 30% of universities have not provided a systematic mental health curriculum for all students; particularly in resource-poor institutions, the content and methods of mental health education are relatively simple. In addition, even though many universities offer mental health courses, student participation is low, and some schools even lack dedicated mental health educators, making it difficult to ensure course quality and effectiveness.

Table 1. Resource Allocation of Mental Health Education in Different Types of Universities

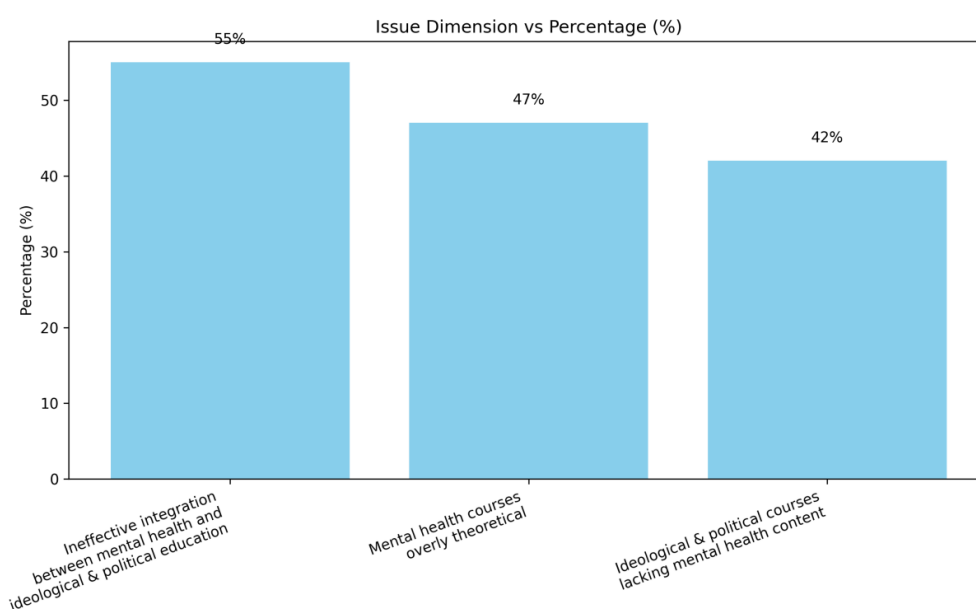| University Type	Mental Health Center Established	Mental Health Courses Offered	Proportion of Full-Time Teachers
Key Universities	Yes	Yes	80%
Local Universities	No	No	30%
Small-scale Universities	Yes	No	20%

Figure 2. Student Evaluations of the Integration between Mental Health and Ideological & Political Education

Secondly, there is a significant gap in the integration of mental health education and ideological & political education. In many universities, these two fields are conducted separately, lacking effective integration; their educational objectives, content, and methods are often pursued independently. According to questionnaires completed by students and teachers, approximately 55% of students reported that they did not perceive any elements of ideological & political education in their mental health courses, and it is difficult to observe mental health-related content in ideological & political courses. Figure 2 shows that over half of the students believe that the integration between the two is insufficient, with mental health education focusing more on emotional and cognitive regulation, while ideological & political education primarily emphasizes political theory and value transmission.

In addition, a shortage of teaching staff remains a significant issue. Surveys show that over 40% of universities face a shortage of mental health educators, especially in local and small-scale institutions, where many schools do not have dedicated mental health teachers and part-time counselors often lack sufficient expertise. This leads to lower teaching quality and hampers the ability to meet the growing needs of students. Figure 3 illustrates the ratio of mental health educators to students in different types of universities. Key universities maintain a relatively low teacher-to-student ratio, while local and small-scale institutions exhibit much higher ratios, underscoring the staffing shortage.
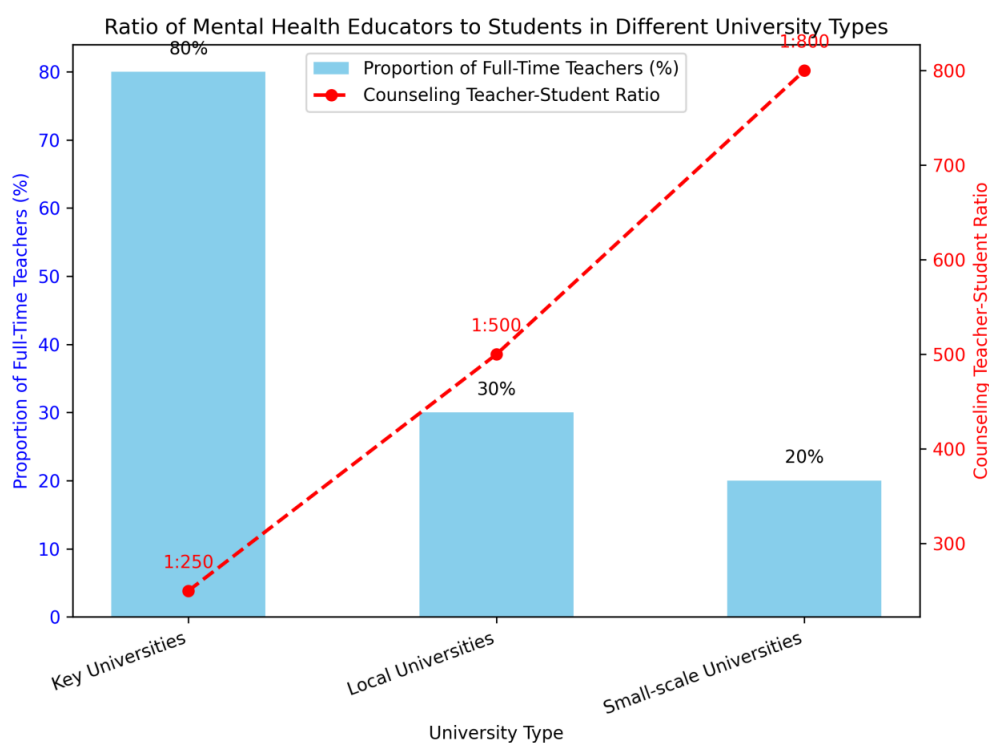

Figure 3. Ratio of Mental Health Educators to Students in Different University Types

Finally, low student participation in mental health education affects its overall effectiveness. Although most universities offer mental health courses and counseling services, about 60% of students indicate little interest in these activities, especially during periods of high academic pressure when they tend to overlook the importance of mental health. Figure 4 displays the level of student participation in mental health courses and activities: 35% of students actively participate, while 40% hardly participate, indicating that both the appeal and effectiveness of mental health education need to be improved.

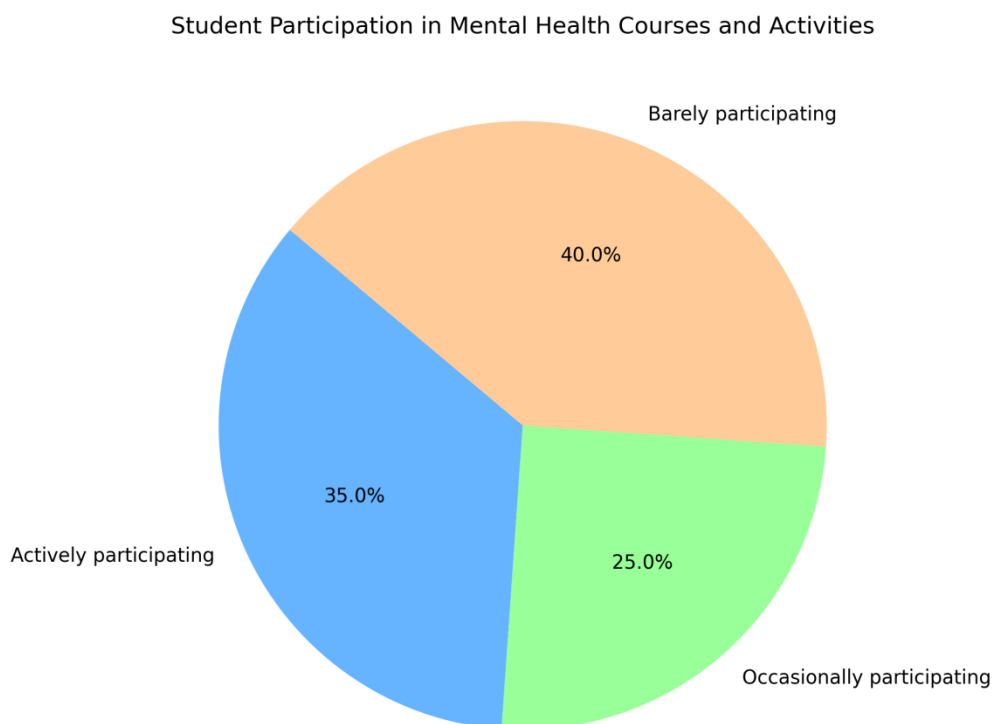Student Participation in Mental Health Courses and Activities

Figure 4. Student Participation in Mental Health Courses and Activities

In summary, although domestic universities have made some progress in mental health and ideological & political education, they still face many challenges. Issues such as limited coverage, monotonous educational content, insufficient teaching staff, low student engagement, and a lack of integration between mental health and ideological & political education urgently need to be addressed. Universities must strengthen teacher training, optimize curriculum content, and explore more effective integration models to better serve the mental health and ideological development needs of students.

5. Construction of an Integration Mechanism and Exploration of Practical Paths

To effectively integrate mental health education with ideological and political education, universities should establish a sound integration mechanism and design specific implementation paths. First, the construction of this mechanism must be based on the theoretical foundations of systemic education and coordinated development. The integration of mental health education and ideological and political education should focus on achieving overall educational goals by breaking down disciplinary barriers through curriculum integration, activity design, and experiential learning, so that both fields can mutually penetrate and complement one another in content, methods, and objectives. Specifically, universities can design interdisciplinary courses that combine the basic theories of mental health education—such as emotional management and stress regulation—with key elements of ideological education, including core socialist values and patriotism. By organically combining theoretical lectures with interactive activities, students can enhance their psychological resilience while simultaneously increasing their ideological awareness. In addition, universities should organize extracurricular activities—such as themed lectures and personal growth camps that integrate mental health with ideological and political education—to encourage students to participate in volunteer services and psychological assistance programs, thereby boosting their sense of social responsibility and emotional regulation skills. In terms of implementation, universities must work on securing institutional support, developing robust curriculum systems, and building strong faculty teams to ensure the smooth advancement of integrated education. They should issue relevant policy documents to specify course requirements and provide the necessary resources for integration. At the same time, universities should continuously improve their curriculum systems through regular evaluations and adjustments to meet the diverse needs of students. The development of a qualified faculty is equally crucial; universities should cultivate interdisciplinary teachers with backgrounds in both psychology and ideological education by enhancing teacher training and promoting academic exchanges. Moreover, to improve student participation and educational outcomes, schools should establish effective student participation mechanisms—through clubs, student councils, and other

channels—to collect feedback and ensure that integrated education is both targeted and effective. Through these measures, universities can construct a rational integration mechanism that ultimately enhances both students' mental health and ideological literacy, promoting their comprehensive development.

6. Empirical Research and Case Analysis

To deeply analyze the actual effects of integrating mental health education with ideological and political education, this study selected a university as a case study to conduct an empirical investigation of the integrated model. Since 2019, the university has actively promoted the organic integration of mental health education and ideological and political education by implementing interdisciplinary curriculum designs, themed activities, and experiential learning approaches to improve students' psychological resilience and ideological awareness. This case study aims to analyze the actual outcomes of the integrated education model and assess its impact on enhancing students' mental health and ideological literacy.

6.1 Implementation of the Integration Model

In its integrated education efforts, the university adopted an interdisciplinary curriculum design that combines content from both mental health education and ideological and political education. The courses include basic psychological theories, emotional regulation, and stress management, as well as key ideological elements such as core socialist values and national development strategies. Additionally, the university organized a series of lectures and practical activities under the theme "Mental Health and Ideological and Political Education" to encourage students to achieve dual improvements in their psychological and ideological development through classroom instruction, interactive activities, and social practice.

6.2 Data Analysis and Outcome Evaluation

A survey of students who participated in the integrated courses from 2019 to 2021 revealed improvements in both mental health and ideological literacy. The Figure 5 below shows the average scores before and after the courses for emotional management, stress regulation, social responsibility, and ideological awareness. The data indicate that students' scores in these areas significantly increased after the integrated curriculum, with improvements of 23.5% in emotional management and 20.5% in ideological awareness, demonstrating the positive effect of integrating mental health education with ideological and political education.
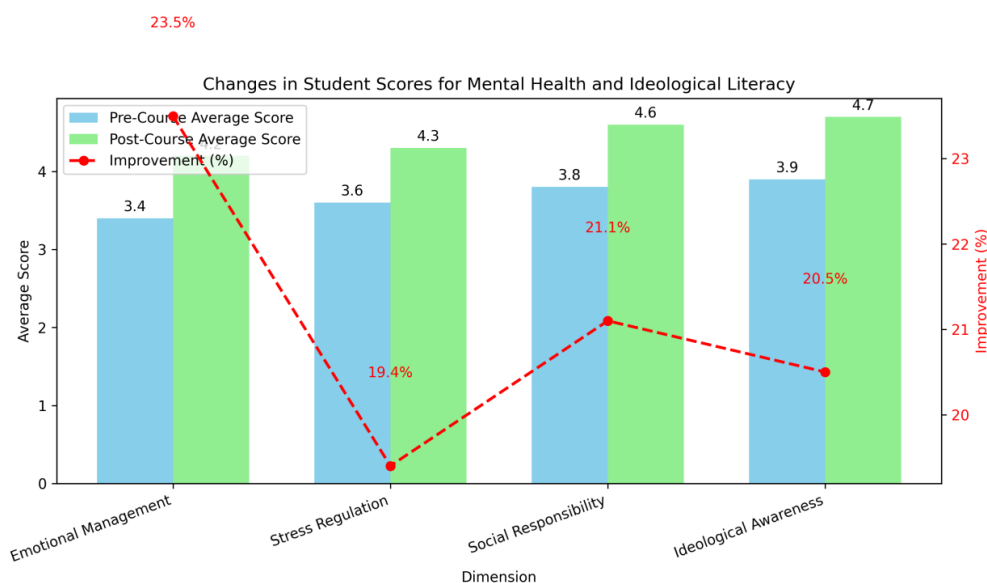

Figure 5. Changes in Student Scores for Mental Health and Ideological Literacy

6.3 Case Analysis and Reflections

Analysis of the university's integration model reveals that combining curriculum integration with experiential learning is key to its success. The organic integration of mental health and ideological content not only helps students understand psychological knowledge but also strengthens their sense of social responsibility and national identity. In particular, through practical activities, students have improved their emotional regulation skills and enhanced their commitment to community service and social support. However, despite achieving positive outcomes, the model still faces challenges. Some students show limited interest in the integrated content, leading

to lower participation rates, especially during periods of high academic pressure when they tend to focus more on subject-specific courses. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary teaching skills of some faculty members require further improvement; some ideological education teachers lack adequate psychological knowledge, while mental health educators may have insufficient expertise in ideological education, preventing the optimal integration of course content and teaching methods.
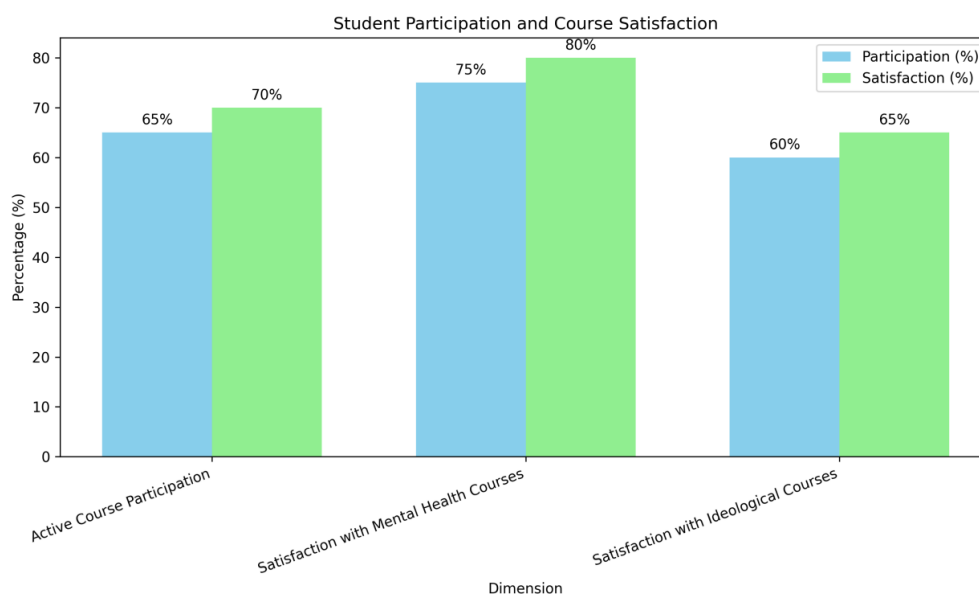

Figure 6 . Student Participation and Course Satisfaction

The Figure 6 indicates that while most students express satisfaction with the course content, participation and satisfaction with ideological courses are relatively lower. This suggests that despite high evaluations of mental health courses, the attractiveness of ideological and political courses needs further enhancement, particularly in integrating real-life applications with psychological education.

7. Conclusion

This study, through empirical research on the integrated model of mental health and ideological and political education at a university, found that the combination of curriculum integration and experiential activities effectively improved students' mental health and ideological awareness, notably in areas such as emotional management, stress regulation, social responsibility, and ideological consciousness. However, despite these positive outcomes, challenges remain in terms of student participation and the appeal of ideological courses. To further promote the integration of these two fields, future efforts should focus on strengthening teacher training, optimizing curriculum content, and enhancing student engagement.

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