Received: 20 Nov. 2026 | Revised: 22 Nov. 2026 | Accepted: 23 Nov. 2026 | Published online: 25 Nov. 2026
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contemporary Education and Teaching Research
2026,Vol. 7(11)428-434
DOI: 10.61360/BoniCETR26202121110

Practical Pathways and Reflections on Reforming Ideological and Political Education in Universities in the AI Era

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Abstract: New-generation information technologies represented by generative artificial intelligence are driving transformative changes in higher education. A suite of national policies has been released to facilitate the deep integration of artificial intelligence into university teaching, creating opportunities while imposing practical challenges for the reform of ideological and political education. Serving as the core platform for value cultivation in higher education, ideological and political education aims to nurture college students' values, critical thinking, aesthetic awareness and cultural identity. Artificial intelligence supports precise learning diagnostics, adaptive resource recommendation, immersive scenario construction and longitudinal dynamic assessment, which underpin differentiated instruction, self-directed inquiry and holistic talent development. However, its application is accompanied by notable risks, including heterogeneous AI literacy among educators, technological alienation, erosion of humanistic attributes, data vulnerabilities and algorithmic ethical concerns. To advance the high-quality development of ideological and political education in universities, this study establishes a human–AI collaboration-oriented reform framework for "AI + ideological and political education". The framework reconstructs competency-centered teaching objectives, reorganizes curriculum content by combining textbook narratives and digital resources, develops situated, personalized and project-based pedagogies enabled by intelligent tools, constructs a multi-stakeholder developmental assessment system underpinned by data, and enhances educators' AI proficiency and digital ethical reasoning via systematic professional training. By reconciling technological empowerment with humanistic values, this work circumvents the pitfalls of technological instrumentalism and data fundamentalism, facilitates the paradigm shift from knowledge transmission to competency cultivation, and offers actionable strategies for the digital upgrading of ideological and political instruction in higher education.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, university ideological and political education, instructional reform

1. Introduction

At this juncture, next-generation information technologies, spearheaded by generative artificial intelligence, are making rapid inroads into higher education. In December 2024, China's Ministry of Education released the Notice on Advancing Artificial Intelligence Education in Higher Education, and has continuously issued policy documents to promote the in-depth application of artificial intelligence in university teaching. These documents explicitly encourage university educators to develop actionable frameworks for AI instruction and embed artificial intelligence education across the full spectrum of higher education. The 2026 "AI + Education" Action Plan goes further by stressing the need to weave STEM and humanistic learning together, with deliberate attention to college students' cognitive growth and socioemotional development. Taken together, these policy signals mark a critical shift: artificial intelligence is no longer merely an instrument for educational digitization but a force capable of restructuring educational ecosystems. This transformation demands fundamental changes to disciplinary instruction, moving pedagogy away from knowledge transmission toward competency development, and replacing experience-based decision-making with data-informed practice.

As the foundational site for value-oriented instruction in colleges and universities, ideological and political education carries the central mission of building college students' values, critical thinking, aesthetic sensibility, and cultural identity. Relevant national guidance for university ideological and political education underscores the importance of

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embracing deeper integration between information technology and ideological and political pedagogy while attending to new modes of literacy learning in digital environments. Pairing artificial intelligence with university ideological and political education offers powerful infrastructure for nurturing core disciplinary competencies, yet it also creates systemic disruptions to conventional teaching goals, curricular materials, instructional routines, and assessment systems. A pressing practical challenge for ongoing higher education reform is how university educators can respond thoughtfully to this technological shift, negotiate tensions between preserving established pedagogical foundations and embracing innovation, and advance high-quality transformation in university ideological and political classrooms. This paper maps out both opportunities and inherent tensions surrounding AI integration within university ideological and political education and proposes a structured reform framework to guide university teachers.

2 Opportunities and Challenges of Integrating Artificial Intelligence into University Ideological and Political Education

2.1 Key opportunities for integrated development

First, AI enables precise diagnostic assessment of student learning to support differentiated instruction. Leveraging speech recognition, semantic analysis and other technologies, artificial intelligence can conduct real-time monitoring and intelligent analysis of ideological and political learning processes including class presentations, argument elaboration, research reports and practical assignments. It accurately identifies individual gaps in value cognition, understanding and discrimination, and opinion expression, furnishing empirical evidence for university teachers to deliver differentiated pedagogy.

Second, intelligent resource curation supports self-directed, needs-driven learning. Drawing on behavioral learning analytics, recommendation systems can match red educational resources, academic readings, microlearning modules and inquiry tasks to college students' cognitive levels and interests. This makes instruction more targeted and empowers learners to take greater ownership of their learning.

Third, AI facilitates immersive scenario building to enrich learning experiences. With virtual reality, digital avatars, text-to-image generation and related tools, teachers can reconstruct historical scenes, contemporary contexts and value-laden situations depicted in teaching content. Abstract theoretical content is translated into perceptible, experiential contexts, deepening college students' value perception and cultural understanding.

Fourth, process-oriented assessment fosters holistic student growth. Intelligent platforms continuously capture longitudinal data across listening, thinking, speaking and practicing, generating multi-dimensional learner profiles that encompass knowledge, skills, thinking and core competencies. This shifts assessment away from the traditional reliance on closed-book examinations toward evaluation that is process-focused, developmental and comprehensive.

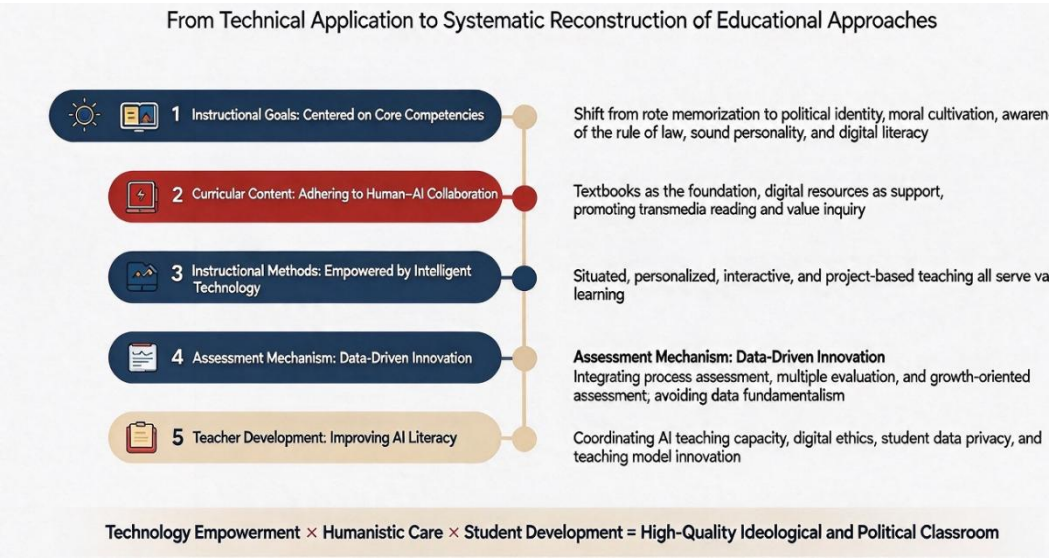

Figure 1. Reform Pathway

2.2 Pressing practical challenges

First, university teachers vary widely in their AI literacy. Some educators possess limited understanding and proficiency in deploying artificial intelligence. They regard AI as an additional burden rather than a supportive pedagogical tool, and struggle to translate technological strengths into instructional gains. This gives rise to the disjointed phenomenon where technology and classroom practice operate in separate silos.

Second, there are risks of technological alienation. Overreliance on AI-generated viewpoints and model essays may lead to formulaic, homogenized student expression. Such reliance erodes independent reasoning and personalized value perception, running counter to the core mission of university ideological and political education: nurturing students through emotional resonance and value edification.

Third, sustaining the humanistic essence of instruction poses a persistent dilemma. University ideological and political teaching uniquely delivers affective cultivation, value guidance and spiritual enrichment. If deployed without careful oversight, the mechanistic, algorithmic nature of technological tools can obscure the affective richness and human warmth of education. Maintaining a productive tension between technological empowerment and humanistic care therefore remains essential.

Fourth, ethical concerns and data-security risks persist. The collection and utilization of college students' personal data, copyright and veracity issues surrounding AI-generated content, and the potential impacts of algorithmic bias on learner assessment impose new demands on educators' ethical awareness and regulatory compliance.

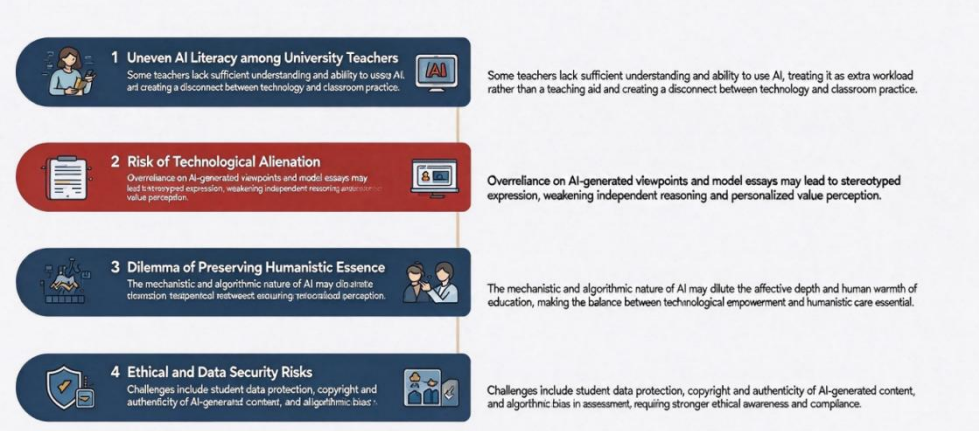

Figure 2. Instructional Practices

3 Practical Pathways for Reforming University Ideological and Political Education in the AI Era

3.1 Reframing instructional goals around core competencies

University ideological and political teaching in the age of artificial intelligence must move beyond mere theoretical memorization and knowledge drilling, centering its educational mission on fostering college students' core disciplinary competencies. First, grounded in the core competency requirements of university ideological and political education — political identity, moral cultivation, awareness of the rule of law, and sound personality — instruction should fundamentally aim to cultivate contemporary college students who can reason rationally, uphold cultural confidence, and sustain lifelong learning. Second, educators ought to guide students to understand and deploy AI tools judiciously, building their media literacy, critical disposition, and information discernment for the digital age. Competent use of intelligent technologies thereby becomes an integral dimension of ideological and political literacy. This reorientation of instructional goals prioritizes human development over technological adoption, keeping student agency at the forefront.

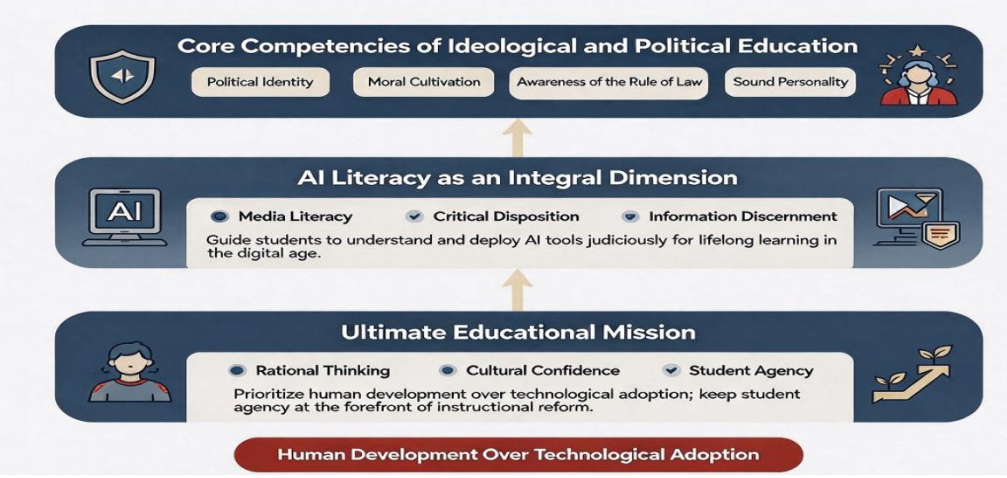

Figure 3. Reframing Instructional Goals Around Core Competencies

3.2 Reconfiguring curricular content around human–AI collaboration

Curricular content serves as a vital vehicle for instructional reform. Within the AI landscape, the organization of ideological and political curriculum should foster symbiosis between textbook texts and digitally enabled resources. First, educators should curate high-quality digital resources through legitimate repositories such as the National Smart Education Platform for Higher Education, selecting appropriate digital readers, red educational videos, academic lectures, micro-lectures, and supplementary reading materials to enrich classroom offerings. Second, students should be encouraged to engage in transmedia reading and inquiry situated within authentic value contexts. Everyday linguistic materials including news excerpts, policy documents, short video transcripts, and AI chat exchanges can be brought into class to help students evaluate information credibility and sharpen their value judgment. Third, the foundational status of textbooks must be preserved; digital resources should not supplant in-depth textual analysis, ensuring that deep engagement with canonical works and value cultivation remain undiluted. This reconfiguration of curricular content hinges on integration rather than replacement, harnessing technological affordances to nourish the spirit of university ideological and political education.

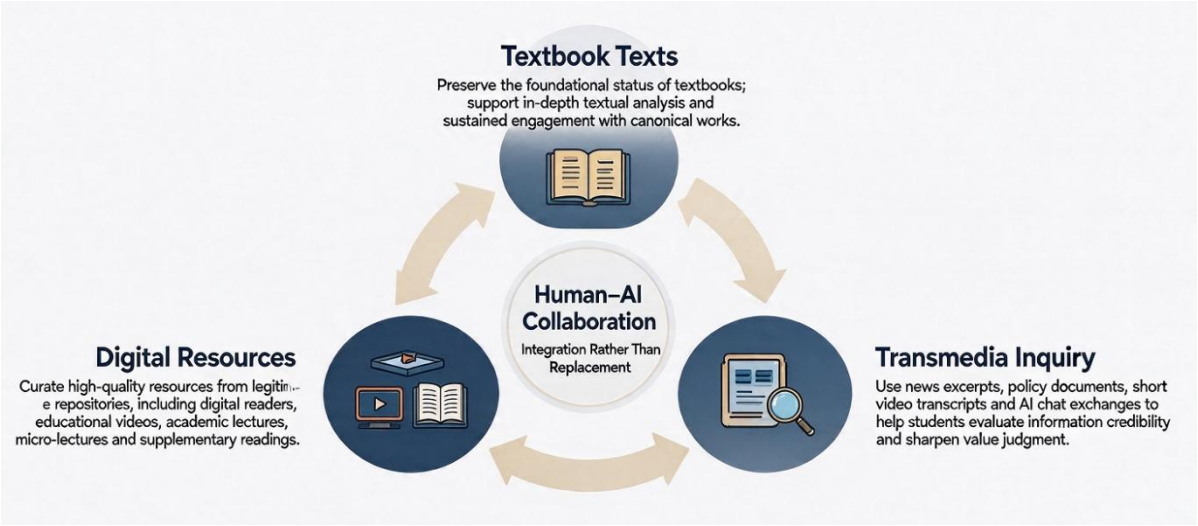

Figure 4. Reconfiguring Curricular Content Around Human–AI Collaboration

3.3 Transforming instructional practices with intelligent technology

Transforming instructional approaches constitutes a pivotal step for AI-enabled university ideological and political pedagogy. First, educators can implement situated learning. Intelligent tools can generate authentic contexts grounded in college students' social experiences and the thematic connotation of teaching content. For instance, text-to-image models and digital avatars may visualize historical scenes, inviting embodied participation that nurtures value comprehension and speculative thinking. Second, personalized learning can be advanced. Intelligent platforms support learning diagnostics and differentiated task design, supplying tailored inquiry scaffolds and guidance matched to students' proficiency levels and aligning targeted instruction with individualized learning. Third, interactive discussion can be structured. Real-time response systems and collaborative platforms powered by AI enable students to raise questions, debate, and share interpretations of teaching content, refining their expressive capacity and deeper reasoning through intellectual exchange. Fourth, interdisciplinary project-based learning may be incorporated. Ideological and political education can be integrated with other subject areas around themes such as AI literacy and national condition inquiry, fostering holistic competencies through authentic project work. Importantly, all technological implementations ought to serve value learning itself, avoiding technology use for its own sake.

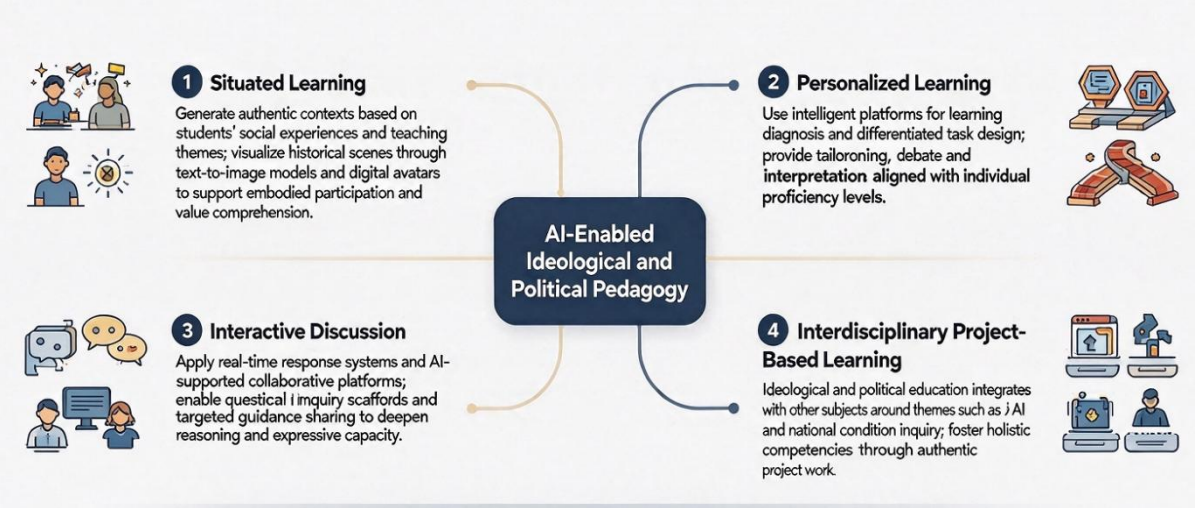

Figure 5. Transforming Instructional Practices With Intelligent Technology

3.4 Innovating assessment systems through data-informed practice

Assessment reform acts as a powerful lever for instructional transformation. Artificial intelligence makes continuous, multidimensional student assessment feasible. First, a process-oriented assessment framework can be established. Intelligent platforms continuously capture learning data from class presentations, papers, assignments, social practice and inquiry activities, generating dynamic digital learner profiles to inform timely instructional adjustments. Second, multiple assessment modes should be combined: teacher evaluation, peer feedback, student self-assessment, and algorithmic scoring. This holistic approach attends not only to knowledge and skills but also to affective dispositions, thinking dispositions, and value growth. Third, growth-oriented assessment should be prioritized, focusing on individual longitudinal progress instead of normative ranking so that assessment returns to its core purpose of supporting development. At the same time, educators must guard against data fundamentalism. Assessments should remain grounded in authenticity, comprehensiveness, and fairness, preventing oversimplified algorithmic judgments that overlook student potential and individuality.

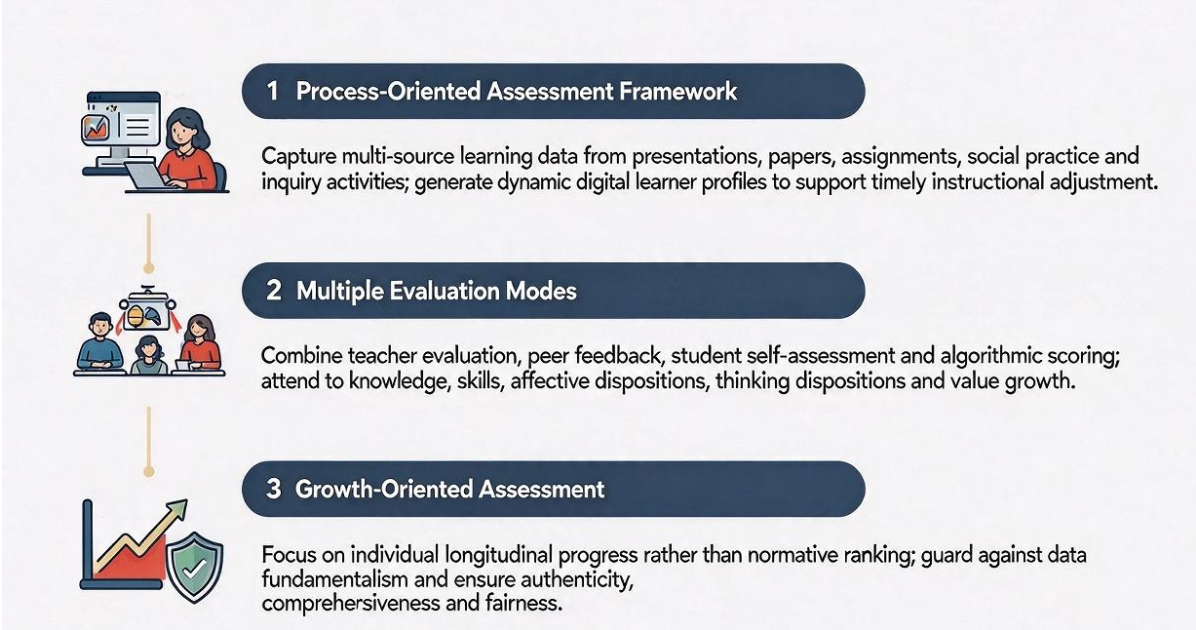

Figure 6. Data-Informed Assessment Mechanism

3.5 Boosting teachers' AI literacy through targeted professional development

University teachers are central to translating reform into classroom practice. Strengthening educators' AI literacy provides a foundational safeguard for sustainable reform of university ideological and political education amid AI adoption. On one hand, AI competencies should be embedded within formal university teacher development systems. Specialized workshops, seminars, and case-based inquiry can help instructors master core practices including AI-assisted lesson planning,

learning analytics, interactive classroom facilitation, and automated assignment feedback, expanding their capacity to steer these tools intentionally. On the other hand, teachers need training in digital ethics and critical judgment, equipping them to exercise professional discretion over algorithmic outputs and AI-generated content while responsibly managing student data privacy and technological boundaries. Meanwhile, teachers should be supported to design and investigate "AI + Ideological and Political Education" instructional interventions, developing replicable, shareable pedagogical models. Communities of instructional researchers can then scale these effective practices across universities.



Figure 7. Targeted Professional Development for Teachers' AI Literacy4 Conclusion

4. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence unlocks transformative opportunities for university ideological and political education while imposing new demands to uphold the intrinsic values of value-oriented teaching. The fundamental logic of this reform lies not in technology itself, but in people: in university teachers' capacity to wield technology with pedagogical wisdom, and in college students' potential for richer value perception and spiritual growth enabled by these tools. Only by centering core competencies, embracing human–AI collaboration, and prioritizing student development can educators thoughtfully navigate the tensions between technological empowerment and value immersion, targeted instruction and individualized growth, and data-informed monitoring and authentic assessment. Such balance supports high-quality, compassionate, and sustainable transformation of university ideological and political classrooms amid the AI revolution. As intelligent systems continue to evolve, further exploration is required across curriculum integration, ethical governance, and university–society collaborative education, ensuring that technology becomes a steady force that nurtures college students and cultivates sound ideological and political literacy.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest to this work.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the project "Automatic Control Principle" (Grant No. ZXX240102599015) of Hangzhou Dianzi University Information Engineering College.

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How to Cite: Cao , Y. (2026). Practical Pathways and Reflections on Reforming Ideological and Political Education in Universities in the AI Era. *Contemporary Education and Teaching Research*, 7(11), 428-434. https://doi.org/10.61360/BoniCETR262021211110