Applying the Confucian Concept of "Legitimacy" to Educate a Sense of Responsibility among Students of the Chinese Language Department at the University of Foreign Languages, the University of Danang

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Abstract	Original Research Article

This article examines the application of Confucius's doctrine of legitimacy in educating the sense of responsibility among students of the Chinese Language Department, University of Foreign Languages, the University of Danang. The doctrine of legitimacy not only serves to maintain social order but also plays a fundamental role in shaping personal morality and responsibility. The paper analyzes the current state of moral education at the department, identifying issues such as the disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, as well as students' lack of proactiveness in social activities. Several solutions are proposed, including integrating moral education into the curriculum, enhancing extracurricular engagement, and providing teacher training. The study concludes that applying the doctrine of legitimacy can foster a comprehensive sense of social responsibility among students, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of society.

Keywords: Legitimacy, Social Responsibility, University of Foreign Languages – Danang, Sense of Responsibility, Moral Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern and postmodern society, along with the vigorous development of globalization and information technology, issues concerning ethics and social responsibility have become increasingly important. While economic and technological advancements bring undeniable conveniences, they also contribute to the erosion of core human moral values. Today's younger generation is facing significant challenges related to personal character and social responsibility. Irresponsible behavior, corruption, and the degradation of traditional values are on the rise, leading to serious consequences for society. Particularly in the postmodern world, where moral standards are increasingly undermined, the moral decay of individuals within social and familial relationships has become an undeniable reality. This situation presents an urgent call for moral education within institutions of higher learning.

Confucius's doctrine of legitimacy, with its core principle that "when names are correct, speech is proper, and affairs succeed," offers a promising solution to this dilemma. According to this doctrine, every individual must clearly recognize their role and responsibility within society, thereby fulfilling their obligations properly. This not only contributes to the establishment of a well-ordered society but also plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral character and personal integrity of the younger generation.

Numerous studies by scholars such as Ngo Hai Son and Xia Guojun have affirmed that Confucius's doctrine of legitimacy possesses enduring value, particularly in moral education and character formation. According to Confucius, when individuals are fully aware of their designated titles and social roles, they are able to behave appropriately and responsibly in all circumstances. Applying this principle in education not only helps students recognize their responsibilities in academic contexts but also in social and community activities, thus fostering the development of morally upright and socially responsible citizens. However, moral education in universities today faces many challenges. Despite the implementation of various programs intended to instill ethical values, most of these efforts have proven ineffective in cultivating a strong sense of responsibility

among students. One of the major causes is that moral education curricula often lack practical relevance. Students are frequently preoccupied with academic achievements and career aspirations, while paying insufficient attention to foundational moral values. Additionally, students today are under significant pressure from society, family, and peers, which leads to a lack of initiative in socially meaningful activities and, in some cases, irresponsibility in both academic work and civic duties.

To address these issues, the application of Confucius's doctrine of legitimacy in the moral education of students—particularly those in the Chinese Language Department at the University of Foreign Languages, the University of Danang—presents a meaningful and timely solution. This study adopts a combination of theoretical analysis, student surveys, and in-depth interviews to gather empirical data on students' awareness and sense of responsibility. The research assesses the current state of responsibility education and proposes practical measures that can assist students in developing sound character, enhancing moral integrity, and strengthening their social responsibility, thereby contributing to the construction of a stable and progressive society.

2. The Doctrine of Legitimacy and Its Role in Moral Education

The concept of "legitimacy" (正名, zhèngmíng) is a central category in Confucian thought, presented in the Analects (Lunyu), and constitutes one of the foundational principles of Confucian philosophy. As a core concept of Confucianism, legitimacy has exerted a profound influence on Chinese civilization and the wider East Asian cultural sphere, including Vietnam. It plays a crucial role in maintaining social order and fostering a firm moral foundation. Confucius emphasized that all entities and phenomena in society must be called by their correct names, and every individual must behave in accordance with their proper status and role. If "names" are incorrect, social disorder will ensue, and regulations and institutions cannot be effectively implemented (Xia Guojun, 2003).

For Confucius, the doctrine of legitimacy is not only about accurately defining social roles—it is also essential for maintaining a well-ordered and disciplined society. He regarded this principle as the starting point for restoring social stability and national development. Fundamental social relationships—such as ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger siblings—must all adhere to the principle of legitimacy to ensure fairness and harmony in human conduct. For example, a ruler must act with dignity befitting a sovereign, ministers must be loyal, and children must demonstrate filial piety (Nguyen, 2002, p. 89).

The Confucian idea of legitimacy is not merely a normative principle of ethical and political behavior—it constitutes a comprehensive philosophical doctrine encompassing deep reflections on language, epistemology, human nature, and the structure of social order. Since the time of Confucius, legitimacy has served as a methodological tool for reestablishing societal norms, positioning individuals within relational frameworks, and guiding actions in accordance with their roles. It provides a structured approach for regulating moral behavior and nurturing a sense of responsibility grounded in clearly defined social functions.

*Firstly, **social roles and status**: the individual within a framework of obligations.* One of the deepest meanings of legitimacy lies in the establishment of social roles—that is, the individual must clearly understand who they are, what position they hold within the system of social relationships, and what title they are associated with: as a child, one must be filial; as a student, respectful; as a learner, committed to study; as a citizen, responsible to the nation. From this understanding, the individual is not only "called" by a specific name or title, but must also "live up" to that name through concrete actions. Legitimacy therefore implies an intrinsic relationship between *ming* (名 – name/title) and *shi* (實 – substance/reality)—between one's title and one's actions, between social role and actual behavior. As Confucius affirmed: "If names are not correct, language will not be in accordance with the truth of things; if language is not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried out successfully" (Analects – Zi Lu). Thus, when names and realities do not align, words lose their authority and actions fail to produce constructive social outcomes. Legitimacy, therefore, is the starting point for all responsible behavior—when individuals are conscious of their roles, they naturally adjust their conduct to match their rightful position.

*Secondly, **social order and ethical relations**: legitimacy within the structure of society.* In Confucianism, society is understood as a network of interwoven relationships, each demanding "propriety," aligned with the principles of ritual (*li*), righteousness (*yi*), and responsibility (*ze*). Legitimacy functions as an organizing principle to ensure order and harmony within this intricate network. Confucius proposed a model of relational ethics known as the "Five Cardinal Relationships" (*wu lun*, 五倫): ruler–subject, father–son, husband–wife, elder brother–younger brother, and friend–friend. Each social position is associated with a specific title and a corresponding set of moral expectations. Legitimacy guarantees that each role operates within its rightful boundaries, enabling a socially just and ethically coherent system of interactions.

*Thirdly, **behavioral standards and internal moral development**.* At a deeper level, legitimacy contributes to the creation of behavioral standards and internalized moral values—not enforced by external punishment, but cultivated through self-awareness and voluntary self-regulation in accordance with one's role. Legitimacy is not about the imposition of conduct, but rather about moral guidance—awakening responsibility through a profound understanding of one's social designation. When a student fully understands their title—i.e., as a learner, a future professional, and a citizen—they realize that practicing virtue, studying diligently, respecting teachers, helping peers, and following school discipline are no longer mere obligations, but essential actions to be "worthy of the name." Responsibility, therefore, is transformed from a coercive duty into a moral choice arising from within. This is the deeper foundation for cultivating an internalized sense of responsibility, which modern education aspires to achieve.

Fourthly, a foundation for character education: legitimacy as a value-based moral framework.

In Confucianism, the doctrine of legitimacy serves as a profound vehicle for character education, compelling individuals to engage in self-reflection based on their respective social roles: as a child—to be filial (*xiao*); as a student—to be respectful (*li*); as a citizen—to fulfill duties (*yi*); as a friend—to be trustworthy (*xin*). Legitimacy does not seek to impose a rigid behavioral model; rather, it enables learners to understand who they are and where they stand in society, thereby fostering personal virtue through self-awareness and inner dialogue. As such, legitimacy may be viewed as a "moral reference framework" for modern education: education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but also the cultivation of life values, social responsibility, and moral resilience. Integrating the Confucian notion of legitimacy into the educational environment—especially for students majoring in language, culture, and intercultural communication—helps them not only become professionally competent, but also ethically grounded individuals. They learn not only to "excel in their profession," but also to "be true to themselves": living with purpose, embracing responsibility, and acting appropriately across a range of social roles.

3. The Current State of Responsibility Education among Students of the Chinese Language Department, University of Foreign Languages – the University of Danang

The cultivation of a sense of responsibility among students, especially those in the Chinese Language Department at the University of Foreign Languages – the University of Danang, is a vital mission in shaping the personality, morality, and social responsibility of the younger generation. However, this educational endeavor currently faces several challenges that must be addressed in order to achieve comprehensive educational outcomes.

The university has implemented various moral education programs, including courses such as Philosophy, Life Skills, and seminars on professional ethics. These programs are primarily designed to provide students with foundational knowledge of ethics and humanistic values. Nevertheless, the practical application of these theories to students' real-life situations and future careers remains limited. While some moral education activities have been organized in extracurricular formats—such as field trips, volunteer campaigns, and academic competitions—these often lack the necessary appeal and fail to establish meaningful connections between theory and the lived experience of social responsibility.

Another critical issue lies in the disconnection between ethical instruction and students' academic specialization. As a result, students often perceive these lessons as irrelevant to their future professional paths or personal lives. Regarding students' attitudes toward moral education, survey results indicate that their awareness of responsibility and ethical conduct still has notable shortcomings. Although the majority of students are aware of their academic roles and future career aspirations, they exhibit a lack of proactiveness in engaging in socially meaningful activities. Specifically, only around 30% of students participate in community or volunteer efforts regularly, while the remainder do so sporadically or not at all. Many students believe that their responsibility is limited to academic performance and exams, without connecting it to broader societal or civic duties. Alarmingly, 40% of students indicated that their sense of responsibility toward the community needs improvement. This reveals a significant concern: moral education should enable students to understand that responsibility extends beyond academics to include active participation in community service, environmental protection, and contributions to sustainable social development.

Several factors affect the effectiveness of moral and responsibility education. One of the most important is the educational and family environment. Students—particularly those from rural backgrounds—may not have received sufficient moral and responsibility-based education at home, which influences the formation of personal and social accountability. In addition, the pressures of modern society—academic performance, career expectations, and social relationships—often distract students from their civic duties. Social media further complicates this by propagating superficial and irresponsible role models, which distort students' moral perceptions and behaviors.

The role of instructors and curricula also exerts a significant impact. Most lecturers still lack teaching methods that effectively bridge theory and practice, and there have been limited initiatives to encourage student participation in real-world activities. Courses related to ethics and social responsibility remain marginal within professional training programs, resulting in a lack of clarity and practicality in students' understanding of their future responsibilities both in learning and in work.

One of the most pressing issues in moral education is the weak linkage between theoretical instruction and practical application. Students may learn about ethical values in class, yet are rarely given opportunities to put them into practice in daily life. Even well-intentioned extracurricular activities often lack real-world relevance or engagement, reducing student enthusiasm. Another issue is students' lack of initiative in building a sense of responsibility. Many prioritize academic achievements over participation in ethical or social education activities. This reflects a disconnection between theory and practice that prevents students from appreciating the importance of morality in their lives and future careers.

4. Some Measures for Educating a Sense of Responsibility among Students of the Chinese Language Department, University of Foreign Languages – the University of Danang in the Contemporary Context

In the current era, where ethical values and social responsibility are facing considerable challenges, cultivating a sense of responsibility among students of the Chinese Language Department at the University of Foreign Languages – the University of Danang has become a pressing priority. To help students gain a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities toward

society, the university must implement consistent and effective educational strategies. The following are several practical measures that can be applied to enhance student responsibility in today's context.

First, integrate moral and responsibility education into the official curriculum. A fundamental step is to embed moral education and social responsibility into the official courses offered by the Chinese Language Department. Although the current Chinese Language curriculum is professionally robust, it lacks dedicated courses on professional ethics and social responsibility. The absence of focus on responsibility in both academic and career contexts prevents students from fully understanding and internalizing these values. To address this, the university should consider introducing courses such as "Professional Ethics in Chinese Language Teaching and Research" and "Social Responsibility in Language Professions." These courses would help students recognize their responsibilities not only during their studies but also in their future professional endeavors. In addition, the university should design practical and applied instructional methods—such as teaching through case studies, scenario-based learning, and group discussions—so students can bridge theory with real-life ethical challenges in education, research, and communication. These pedagogical approaches will cultivate a deeper understanding of moral values and professional responsibility.

Second, extracurricular activities are a critical avenue for students to practice and internalize moral values in real-world settings. To foster a sense of responsibility, the university should organize experiential extracurricular programs that allow students to engage with real-life situations. These activities not only help students develop soft skills but also promote social engagement and a commitment to community service. One possible initiative is community-based projects. Students from the Chinese Language Department could participate in volunteer programs in local areas, organize community support campaigns, environmental protection initiatives, or take part in public health campaigns. These activities help students connect with real-world ethical issues and apply moral values in practical contexts. Furthermore, the university could facilitate international volunteer opportunities or partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), enabling students to broaden their worldview, enhance teamwork, develop problem-solving skills, and strengthen leadership capacities. Such engagements help students cultivate a profound sense of social responsibility while fostering virtues such as compassion, empathy, and moral accountability.

Third, promote active and creative learning initiatives. Encouraging students to participate in proactive and creative learning is an effective method to enhance their sense of responsibility in both academic and research contexts. Active learning not only improves research capabilities but also nurtures autonomy, motivation, and a strong work ethic. One useful approach is to organize student research competitions or academic forums where students can present their ideas and research on social, cultural, and ethical issues. These forums foster an intellectually vibrant environment that stimulates students to reflect more deeply on personal and societal responsibility. Additionally, the university should offer students opportunities to engage in applied research projects—such as studies on Chinese culture, linguistics, or community-related social issues. These projects enhance not only students' research skills but also their awareness of how to responsibly apply academic knowledge to address practical problems.

Fourth, effective moral education requires close coordination among universities, families, and society. Although universities play a central role in shaping student morality and responsibility, families and society also contribute significantly to the development of students' ethical consciousness. The university should collaborate with parents to jointly shoulder the moral education of students. Parent-university meetings can serve as platforms for mutual support, helping students to better understand their obligations. At the same time, the university should partner with social organizations and businesses to create real-world opportunities for students to experience and practice ethical values in both work and community contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

In the context of modern society—where morality and social responsibility are increasingly challenged—the education of responsibility among university students, particularly those in the Chinese Language Department at the University of Foreign Languages – the University of Danang, has become more important than ever. Confucius's doctrine of legitimacy, with its foundational principle that "when names are correct, speech is proper, and affairs succeed," continues to demonstrate its timeless value in fostering a disciplined and morally sound society.

Applying this doctrine to the moral and civic education of students not only enhances their awareness of their roles and responsibilities in academic settings but also shapes their character and ethical integrity—enabling them to contribute positively to both their communities and broader society. Despite ongoing challenges in the responsibility education process—especially the disconnect between theory and practice, and the lack of student initiative in socially meaningful engagement—there remains significant potential for improvement.

Measures such as integrating moral and civic education into the formal curriculum, expanding practical extracurricular activities, fostering creative learning environments, and improving instructional quality can help address these issues effectively. More importantly, close collaboration among universities, families, and society at large will serve as a decisive factor in cultivating a comprehensive sense of responsibility among students.

Acknowledgments

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