

Current Investigation of Moral Education Implementation in Primary and Secondary Schools—Evidence from China

Shaowei Zhou^{1,2,3}, Xin Gao⁴

¹Education Development Research Center of Nanshan District, Foshan, China

²Qiaoshan Primary School, Foshan, China

³Minle Primary School, Foshan, China

⁴College of Education, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

Email: gaixin1993@zjnu.edu.cn

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Abstract

The development of moral education in primary and secondary schools is crucial for enhancing the overall quality of education. Research conducted through a survey on the current status of moral education implementation in primary and secondary schools across 16 provinces and municipalities in China reveals that there has been generally good progress in instilling moral values during the compulsory education stage. However, students and school teachers have higher expectations for the implementation of moral education, and the evaluation system for the current status of moral education in primary and secondary schools has become a significant hindrance for county-level governments, education administrative departments, and schools in advancing the implementation of moral education. Therefore, to effectively implement moral education in primary and secondary schools, there is a need to strengthen top-level design, improve the guarantee mechanism for moral education implementation, explore regional excellent cultural resources to facilitate the effective implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools, and establish a three-dimensional, standardized evaluation system for moral education implementation.

Keywords

Primary and Secondary Schools, Moral Education, Implementation Status

1. Introduction

Primary and secondary education, as a crucial component of educational system

construction, holds paramount importance for the development of the nation and its people (Cheung & Lee, 2010). The quality of primary and secondary education determines the overall progress of the education sector, with the effective implementation of moral education serving as a key factor in the overall quality of primary and secondary education (Han et al., 2018). As a fundamental task of socialist education with Chinese characteristics, the ultimate goal of moral education in primary and secondary schools is to utilize educational methods to assist students in continually acquiring new knowledge, enhancing self-awareness, and cultivating the ability to explore and create new knowledge (Li et al., 2017). This, in turn, contributes to the nurturing of qualified builders and successors dedicated to the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Through these efforts, students can better understand and transform the world, actively contributing to the creation of a brighter future for humanity (Wang & Shao, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The development of moral education in primary and secondary schools has become a significant component of school curricula. The systematization of moral education as an academic discipline is a prevailing trend in its development (Zhang, Saharuddin, & Aziz, 2022). Scholars increasingly discuss the specialization of moral education as an academic field and the standardization of curriculum design (Bleazby, 2020). Furthermore, there is an expansion in the age range and stages associated with moral education. Some scholars argue that the cognition of moral education should not be limited to moral training received in schools but should be considered as part of a lifelong learning process (Chen, Liu, Dai, & Wang, 2023). However, survey results indicate a weak contribution of moral discussions and an even weaker contribution of moral education lectures to moral commitment (Corrigan, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Brown, 2013). Moral education can facilitate the personal and social progress of college students, reflecting both the intrinsic and instrumental values of moral education (Wong, 2023).

Starting from teachers' perceptions of moral education courses, specialized research has been conducted on teacher moral education, identifying models of teachers' views on moral and civic education, dimensions of teacher ethical models (frameworks), teaching strategies, and the roles of teachers (Zhang et al., 2022). Additionally, scholars have surveyed the characteristics of 307 moral exemplars commonly used in moral education textbooks in South Korea and Japan. The results indicate significant similarities and differences in moral exemplars between the two countries. While both emphasize moral autonomy and respect for human life, South Korea tends to feature more historical figures as moral exemplars, while Japan includes more students and ordinary individuals (Chang, Hung, Lu, & Chou, 2018).

The advancement of modern technology has brought about changes in the

dimensions of moral education, such as defining ethical norms in the internet environment and addressing moral education requirements in the face of new technologies and environments (Chang et al., 2018). Technological progress presents both opportunities and challenges for moral education (Wong, 2023). On one hand, the openness, anonymity, and interactivity of the internet are challenging traditional moral concepts, particularly as university students extensively engage with online media and face widespread moral lapses (Han et al., 2018). On the other hand, applications based on human-computer interaction and virtual reality scenarios enable more realistic moral experiential learning (Qi & Tang, 2004). There is also a concern that the development of artificial intelligence may replace teachers in the future, although current researchers unanimously emphasize the irreplaceability of humans in moral education (Tan, 2020).

However, the current status of moral education development in primary and secondary schools requires further clarification. Therefore, this research focuses on addressing the following two questions:

What is the current status of moral education development in primary and secondary schools?

What are the existing problems in the development of moral education in primary and secondary schools?

3. Methodology

The study determined the survey subjects to be teachers and students in primary and secondary schools. However, the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools also involves policy initiatives from county governments and education administrative departments. Therefore, the study also included surveys of personnel from county governments and education administrative departments. The research employed a combination of questionnaire surveys and interviews, covering 136 districts in 16 provinces across the eastern, central, and western regions of China. Statistical analysis was conducted using the SPSS 22.0 software. After screening and elimination, the study collected a total of 18,300 questionnaires from school administrators and teachers (referred to collectively as “teachers”), 20,300 questionnaires from students, and 625 questionnaires from administrative personnel. Interviews were also conducted with district and education administrative personnel, school leaders, teachers, and student representatives to ensure a comprehensive and scientific investigation.

3.1. Tools of Data Collection

The study utilized self-designed questionnaires tailored for administrative personnel, teachers, and students. While the content was similar for all groups, adjustments were made in the questionnaire design to suit the characteristics of each target group. The final questionnaire, titled “Investigation of the Current Status of Moral Education Implementation in Primary and Secondary Schools,” covered basic information of the survey participants and the implementation

status of moral education in primary and secondary schools. The components of moral education implementation included ideal beliefs, patriotism, moral cultivation, knowledge and insight, spirit of striving, and comprehensive qualities. The questionnaire incorporated various types of questions such as single-choice, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted mainly with administrative personnel, teachers, and students, covering aspects such as the progress, effectiveness, problems, and countermeasures of moral education implementation in primary and secondary schools.

3.2. Survey and Analysis

The survey leveraged the convenience of the internet and covered 16 provinces in China, including Beijing, Fujian, Gansu, Guangdong, Hainan, Hebei, Henan, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, Tianjin, Tibet, Yunnan, and Chongqing. After excluding incomplete data, the study obtained 18,300 valid teacher questionnaires and 20,300 valid student questionnaires. The breakdown included 7353 urban teacher responses, 6480 town teacher responses, and 4467 rural teacher responses. For students, there were 11,831 urban student responses, 4780 town student responses, and 3,689 rural student responses. The study covered both primary and junior high school students, with 11,212 responses from primary school students and 9088 responses from junior high school students.

4. Results

Proactive Promotion of Moral Education Implementation by County Administrative Departments. The survey reveals that county governments and education administrative departments are actively promoting the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools, conscientiously fulfilling their respective responsibilities. Firstly, these departments adhere to national policies as guidance and formulate implementation plans tailored to regional characteristics. Data shows that 93.7% of administrative personnel indicate that their regions have detailed implementation plans based on national patriotism documents, and 93.8% state that their regions have developed relatively comprehensive education plans in accordance with national requirements for moral education in primary and secondary schools. This reflects the overall effectiveness of county governments and education administrative departments in executing national policies. Secondly, education on the core socialist values holds a significant position in the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools. County governments and education administrative departments actively carry out and implement this education while gradually establishing comprehensive implementation mechanisms. The data indicates that 93.7% of administrative personnel state that their regions have developed effective mechanisms for ideal belief education, and 93.7% mention that their regions frequently conduct education on socialist core values. Finally, the integration of valuable

moral insights from outstanding traditional Chinese culture is essential for successful moral education. The survey finds that 93.3% of administrative personnel state that their regions have incorporated local excellent traditional cultural resources into school education, showcasing the effective connection between county governments and education administrative departments and local cultural richness.

Effective Implementation of Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools with Expectations for Improvement

The survey indicates that the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools is generally effective, but there is room for improvement. Schools actively take measures to implement moral education. Among the surveyed teachers, 92.3% believe that their schools have developed relatively comprehensive patriotism education plans, and 92.9% state that their schools frequently conduct patriotism education. Furthermore, 93.8%, 97.4%, 86.2%, and 79.6% of teachers, respectively, affirm that their schools use methods such as classroom teaching, weekly flag-raising ceremonies, promoting exemplary figures, and watching documentaries for patriotism education. The survey also reveals that 94.1% of teachers believe their schools promote students' comprehensive development through courses in sports, arts, and labor education, while 79.1% state that schools use museums and memorial halls to enhance students' interests and capabilities for exploration and learning. Additionally, 90.8% of teachers note that schools conduct diverse practical activities to enhance students' overall abilities, contributing to their comprehensive and individual development. However, only 17.1% of teachers believe that schools motivate students to strive for excellence through exemplary demonstrations, and only 39.4% think that their schools have created a favorable learning environment. This suggests the need for schools to strengthen attention to details and foster an environment conducive to the cultivation of moral character.

Teachers as the Practitioners of Moral Education Implementation.

Teachers play a pivotal role in integrating moral education goals into classroom teaching, leveraging the classroom as the main platform for character development and promoting the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools. For example, 92.4% of teachers frequently use terms such as "Chinese Dream" and "New Era" to influence students in classroom teaching, while 88.1% of teachers strengthen students' knowledge and insight through intensified classroom teaching. Teachers, focusing on classroom teaching, also extend beyond traditional boundaries, incorporating various forms of teaching. According to the survey, 83.0% of teachers engage in extracurricular activities to promote student development, and 71.3% proactively establish links with families to assist students in applying acquired knowledge in practice. This reflects that moral education implementation extends beyond the confines of the classroom.

Significant Effects of Student Moral Education with New Development Ex-

pectations

As the core component of school education, moral education in primary and secondary schools serves as the fundamental task, determining the standard by which all school work is assessed. The ultimate goal is to measure student performance, which is not only critical for improving the quality of education but also the starting point and culmination of successful moral education implementation. The survey indicates that the effects of moral education implementation are evident in students, but there are still certain expectations for their further development.

From the perspective of teachers, students generally perform well, but there are still issues with the spirit of striving. Data reveals that 89.1% of teachers believe students' eagerness for knowledge exceeds expectations, 90.4% agree that students frequently take the initiative to ask questions related to learning in class, and 93.1% believe students' personalities are well demonstrated in school. However, the survey finds that 90.4% of teachers observe a prevalent overnight success mentality among students, 92.8% note a prevalent trend of comparison, 70.9% believe students lack thriftiness, 77.0% think students lack the courage to strive, and 89.0% believe students often lack perseverance in their endeavors. From the teacher's perspective, students need to further enhance their spirit of striving.

Considering the students as the subjects of moral education, the survey shows significant effectiveness in moral education implementation, but there are still expectations for their personal development. Survey data indicates that 92.2% of students have a strong ideal belief, 92.7% exhibit a strong sense of patriotism, 98.8% possess good moral cultivation, 97.9% perform well in knowledge and insight, and 84.4% exhibit good comprehensive qualities. Students not only possess knowledge and patriotism but also demonstrate good moral emotions and judgments. To achieve their goals, students strive to acquire knowledge by studying late into the night and using various methods to search for information. Additionally, 90.7% of students have formulated plans to achieve their goals, including plans for academic and career development. This reflects students' expectations for their future development.

Discovery of New Issues through Interviews

Interviews with county government officials, education administrative department personnel, and school teachers align with the questionnaire survey results, indicating that county governments are actively promoting moral education, and schools are implementing concrete measures. Overall, county governments and education administrative departments actively promote the process of implementing moral education in primary and secondary schools, continuously strengthen policy implementation, improve relevant systems, and effectively advance the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools. Schools, in the process of implementing moral education, primarily focus on

classroom teaching, consistently foster socialist core values and patriotism education, leverage the advantages of the Party, Youth League, and student organizations, utilize excellent cultural resources in the region, formulate targeted education strategies based on the psychological characteristics of students in different grades, and actively strengthen collaboration with the community. Schools conduct a variety of rich moral education practical activities, integrating moral education into subjects, courses, and activities, continually raising the level of moral education implementation.

However, interviews also identified new issues in the process of implementing moral education in primary and secondary schools. Some schools are constrained by overall planning, teacher concepts, academic knowledge, and other limitations, leading to a lack of school-based curriculum development. As a result, it is challenging to form a systematic education mechanism for cultural, physical, and artistic courses and comprehensive practical activities, resulting in unsatisfactory educational outcomes. In rural schools, there are specific challenges related to the economic pressure on families, with many students being left-behind children. Due to the lack of parental companionship, students in rural schools face challenges in terms of the spirit of striving and moral cultivation. Moreover, limited effective interaction between schools and families hinders the effectiveness of family-school education collaboration. Additionally, most county governments, education administrative departments, school leaders, and teachers expressed that there is a lack of a specific evaluation system for moral education implementation. Further efforts are needed to establish a more comprehensive evaluation system for the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools.

5. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn overall, the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools is relatively effective, but there are areas that need improvement. County governments and education administrative departments focus more on promoting ideal beliefs and patriotism in the process of implementing moral education in primary and secondary schools. However, there is less emphasis on aspects such as moral cultivation, knowledge and insight, the spirit of striving, and comprehensive qualities in students' growth and development. Particularly, schools need to enhance their efforts in fostering students' spirit of striving and cultivating a conducive school environment. Student development is a unified entity that combines comprehensive development with individual development. County governments, education administrative departments, and school teachers need to place more emphasis on enhancing students' overall qualities. This implies that the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools requires detailed planning and design, extending to each implementing entity.

The implementation of measures for moral education in primary and second-

ary schools has contributed to the improvement of effectiveness. However, students and school teachers have higher expectations. Not only do students expect better personal development in the implementation of moral education, but teachers also anticipate promoting student development through the implementation of moral education. Therefore, the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools needs to focus on classroom teaching as the main platform. Utilizing traditional Chinese culture as a carrier and incorporating methods such as classroom permeation, environmental cultivation, and activity-based education, the quality of implementing moral education needs to be enhanced. It should genuinely connect moral education with student growth and school development.

The lack of an effective evaluation system for the effectiveness of moral education implementation in primary and secondary schools is a significant obstacle for county governments, education administrative departments, and schools. Therefore, there is a need to establish a comprehensive assessment system and evaluation standards for the implementation of moral education, targeting county governments, schools, and students. This will effectively enhance the outcomes of moral education implementation.

In summary, addressing the identified areas for improvement and establishing a robust evaluation system will contribute to the continued success and enhancement of moral education in primary and secondary schools.

Recommendations

Strengthen Top-level Design and Improve the Guarantee Mechanism for Moral Education Implementation Clearly define the goals and methods of moral education implementation in primary and secondary schools. Develop a systematic design for the implementation of moral education based on well-defined goals. Actively formulate relevant implementation policies, considering the overall development of primary and secondary schools in the region. Tailor policies to the practical needs of educational development in the current era. Emphasize the role of classroom teaching as the main platform for moral education implementation. Establish a robust system that integrates various elements of school education, such as school culture, environment, and management, to enhance overall educational functions. Develop targeted education strategies based on the characteristics of students at different grade levels. Strictly implement curriculum standards and create a comprehensive and three-dimensional educational system that considers different stages, subjects, teaching environments, educational forces, and platforms.

Explore Regional Excellent Cultural Resources to Facilitate Effective Moral Education Implementation Connect Traditional Chinese culture with contemporary moral education. Decode moral education from the rich resources of traditional culture and use it as a carrier for implementation. Explore local historical and cultural resources, especially those conducive to national social devel-

opment and personal character development. Utilize these resources as effective carriers for the implementation of moral education in primary and secondary schools. Use traditional Chinese culture as a vehicle for moral education implementation. Infuse moral education into classrooms, environmental influences, and various activities. Align this approach with the new moral outlook that reflects the harmonious development of individuals, society, and nature. Blend the promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture with insights from advanced civilizations worldwide.

Explore and Establish a Comprehensive and Standardized Evaluation System for Moral Education Implementation in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Construct an evaluation and supervision system for moral education implementation at the county government level. The county government plays a crucial role in promoting moral education in primary and secondary schools. Establish an assessment system to monitor and encourage proactive efforts in moral education implementation. Provide reference standards for schools in moral education implementation, promoting benchmarking activities to enhance the overall effectiveness of moral education. Develop a student evaluation system tailored to the overall requirements of moral education and future development. Focus on building a systematic assessment system that encompasses the six aspects of ideal beliefs, patriotism, moral cultivation, knowledge and insight, the spirit of striving, and comprehensive qualities. Encourage the development and improvement of formative and summative assessments. Incentivize schools to explore and refine a scientific and diverse set of evaluation indicators. Foster a culture of scientific educational quality, using standards and evaluations to drive continuous improvement in the effectiveness of moral education implementation in primary and secondary schools.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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