

A Study on Moral and Legal Education in Middle Schools

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Abstract. With the ongoing implementation of the new curriculum reform and the "double reduction" policy, there is an increasing emphasis on cultivating students' values and instilling correct outlooks on life and the world. Middle school moral and legal education plays a crucial role in shaping students' future development. However, the current moral and legal literacy among middle school students is generally low. This paper examines the effectiveness of moral and legal education in middle schools and proposes improvement suggestions. The key focus is on textbook-based education, student-centered approaches, and value-oriented teaching. The paper suggests measures such as carefully selecting teaching content, optimizing teaching methods, fostering teacher-student communication, and promoting group exploration and cooperation to create efficient and effective classrooms. By navigating the intricate interplay between curriculum reform and educational policy, this study sheds light on the multifaceted facets of moral and legal education's role in nurturing ethical and responsible citizens. The proposed recommendations underscore the importance of adaptable teaching methodologies and holistic engagement to bridge the existing gap in moral and legal literacy among middle school students. As a result, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on curriculum transformation and pedagogical efficacy, aiming to empower educators and educational stakeholders to shape a brighter educational landscape for future generations.

Keywords: Moral and Legal Education, Value-Oriented Teaching, Curriculum Reform.

1. Introduction

The national focus on quality education and the in-depth advancement of the new curriculum reform have highlighted the educational role of moral and legal courses. Middle school students are in a special period of growth, where their thoughts gradually mature and their values are taking shape. During this crucial developmental stage, it is essential to employ correct and effective educational methods to influence their growth and guide them in establishing the right concepts of the rule of law and moral character. Moral and legal education plays a critical role in cultivating middle school students' understanding of the rule of law and moral character, and it is also pivotal in shaping their worldview, outlook on life, and values.

However, the effectiveness of moral and legal education in middle schools currently varies. Some educators have not fully recognized the significance of this course and its impact on students' psychological development. The focus on rote learning and exam-oriented assessments in teaching has failed to fully engage students' enthusiasm for learning, and insufficient attention to students' physical and psychological well-being has led moral and legal classes to become dull and memorization-based.

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the issues present in middle school moral and legal education and propose corresponding suggestions. The paper is dedicated to enriching the teaching content, optimizing teaching methods, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, and establishing efficient moral and legal classrooms, making the teaching and learning process more dynamic and enjoyable. Simultaneously, the paper will emphasize cultivating and enhancing students' core competencies to promote their comprehensive development, thereby further improving the effectiveness of moral and legal education.

2. Issues in Teaching

2.1. Content Detached from Real Life

In the teaching of moral and legal education in middle schools, some teachers directly follow the original textbook content and use pre-made courseware from the internet without making meticulous modifications. This results in a flat and straightforward teaching process. The teaching materials often consist of cases directly taken from the textbook, lacking the extension of content beyond the book, making the teaching content lack vitality. The teaching content is detached from students' daily lives, making it difficult to pique their interest and emotional identification, leading to students easily developing a sense of disinterest in learning. Moral and legal education is a course that originates from real-life experiences, and the current moral and legal education textbooks are often designed to be straightforward and easy to understand. However, when conducting moral and legal education, teachers often neglect to connect the content with real-life situations and current affairs, making students feel bored and uninterested, thus undermining the effectiveness of using ideological and political education to improve students' moral and ethical levels [1]. The distance between the moral and legal education content and students' actual lives is too far, which hinders students from applying the knowledge they have learned to solve practical problems in their lives. Moral and legal education is crucial for fostering students' awareness of rules and order and cultivating their understanding of ethical and moral norms. However, the current teaching content often neglects to start with students' life experiences, thus failing to develop students' legal concepts and ethical morals [2].

2.2. Low Student Learning Enthusiasm

In the teaching of moral and legal education in middle schools, there is a widespread lack of enthusiasm among students for learning. The root causes of this phenomenon can be roughly attributed to two factors:

Firstly, due to the continued influence of the exam-oriented education system on students' future academic prospects, schools, teachers, and students primarily focus on so-called "core subjects" such as Chinese, mathematics, and English, while subjects labeled as "secondary" are often overlooked, including moral and legal education, physical education, arts, and music. As a result, during the teaching of moral and legal education, teachers tend to stick to the content and courseware without detailed preparations. The explanations of knowledge points become outdated and lack novelty. There is a lack of extension of knowledge points in the teaching process, causing students' attention to be quickly diverted.

Secondly, this generation of middle school students has grown up in the age of the internet, where they react rapidly to information available online and have various sources of obtaining information [3]. Their daily lives are filled with a wide range of information, and it can be said that they are growing up in an atmosphere of "information explosion." Some teachers currently use outdated teaching materials in moral and legal education. If the teaching content and methods are not innovative enough, it becomes difficult to convince students, as they seek more novelty. Moreover, purely adopting a didactic teaching approach can lead to students developing resistance, as they have their own insights into current society and life, but teachers lack the ability to use fresh topics to guide students' thinking [4]. Therefore, dull and outdated teaching methods struggle to capture their interest, and an exclusively didactic teaching style may reduce the effectiveness of education. Students may lose interest in more abstract and logical knowledge, hindering the cultivation of their habits and abilities for deep thinking, and causing them to lose enthusiasm for learning and interactive engagement in the classroom.

2.3. Monotonous Teaching Methods

In the teaching of moral and legal education in middle schools, some teachers tend to have rigid and outdated teaching methods and philosophies, mostly following the traditional "didactic" teaching approach without a comprehensive understanding of the teaching methods and principles for moral

and legal education in middle schools. Middle school moral and legal education involves certain philosophical and abstract elements. If teachers solely rely on past teaching methods, such as merely providing explanations through verbal lectures, it would be challenging to achieve the expected teaching objectives of moral and legal education.

For instance, currently, many teachers use the "read-aloud" teaching method for moral and legal education. They explain each concept in the textbook one by one, interspersing simple cases to help students understand. However, this teaching method is too monotonous, and students may become bored and tired over time, with some even dozing off during the class. Under such a monotonous teaching method, the teaching mode of moral and legal education mostly revolves around teachers posing questions based on textbook concepts, and students mechanically providing answers from the textbook, lacking effective interaction [5]. Additionally, some teachers may consider moral and legal education as a "secondary subject," believing that passing the exam is sufficient, and thus not paying excessive attention to the effectiveness of teaching. They directly focus on doing exercises and discussing questions as the main components of moral and legal education, neglecting the cultivation of students' core competencies. In the cultivation of core competencies, it is essential to enable students to think critically. However, in the current moral and legal education in middle schools, the monotonous teaching methods struggle to maintain students' attention, hindering their ability to reflect and adjust their values and actions.

2.4. Lack of Teacher-Student Communication

In middle school moral and legal education, the classroom atmosphere is crucial, and the interaction between teachers and students can stimulate students' learning enthusiasm. Moreover, the words and actions demonstrated by moral and legal teachers can serve as role models for students. However, currently, some moral and legal teachers fail to fully motivate students' enthusiasm for learning. They do not engage in effective dialogues and interactions during moral and legal education, nor do they influence students' understanding of social ethics, morals, and legal issues through communication and exchanges with students. This hinders the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills, and the lack of effective communication between teachers and students also impedes the shaping of students' character and values.

Additionally, some teachers in moral and legal education do not timely follow up on and pay attention to the negative perceptions of some students during classroom teaching. Instead, they bring the extended topics back to the content of the textbook, and students' mental well-being does not receive positive intervention. After class, apart from moral and legal education, some teachers also double as the class teachers for their respective classes. However, after the lesson is over, they consider their teaching task for that session complete, and there is a lack of communication between teachers and students after class.

3. Improvement Suggestions

3.1. Selective Teaching Content to Stimulate Learning Interest

In middle school moral and legal education, teachers should not only rely on the textbook to impart knowledge to students and create logical structures of knowledge but also incorporate real-life situations to expand and extend the content, thus stimulating students' learning interest. Teachers should continually explore the content of the textbook while breaking free from its fixed framework, making the content vivid and applicable by linking it to students' actual learning situations. For example, teachers can organize moral and legal practice activities that involve students, allowing them to verify theoretical knowledge through practical experiences.

To achieve this, teachers need to adopt the guiding principles of the new curriculum standards and deeply explore the textbook content. Additionally, they should use real-life examples to integrate ethics and legal education into the goal of nurturing students' characters and values. By incorporating positive real-life cases into the teaching process, students can better understand the theoretical

knowledge and apply it to their daily lives, fostering the development of their core competencies. During moral and legal education, teachers should carefully select relevant examples from the textbook content, starting with real-life teaching cases and integrating the teaching content with students' life experiences and social backgrounds. By interpreting ethical and legal theories through real-life examples, students can better grasp the teaching content. Using real-life materials and combining them with textbook content to create corresponding teaching scenarios can help students better understand the subject matter [6].

Acquiring information from the teaching materials is still crucial in middle school moral and legal education, especially in the context of current affairs knowledge included in the textbooks. However, due to the slower update pace of textbook content compared to current affairs, teachers should supplement their teaching by incorporating current affairs explanations in the moral and legal education process, ensuring the effectiveness of classroom teaching [7]. This requires teachers to carefully select suitable current affairs materials related to the textbook content while ensuring their reliability. Introducing appropriate current affairs can simplify the understanding of theoretical knowledge in the textbook and keep moral and legal education up to date, catering to students' psychological and learning needs, and stimulating their interest in learning ethical and legal theories, thus making middle school moral and legal education more effective.

3.2. Innovative Teaching Methods to Improve Teaching Efficiency

In middle school moral and legal education, innovation in teaching methods is crucial to enhancing teaching efficiency. Embracing innovative teaching methods is a key step that moral and legal teachers must take. If teachers hesitate to take this step, it not only reduces teaching efficiency but also hinders their own professional development.

To innovate moral and legal teaching methods, teachers should first introduce diverse and practical activities with fun, diversity, and relevance in the teaching process. They should integrate knowledge points into these activities, allowing students to analyze and explore through practical experiences, which helps them gain insights and improve their ethical and legal awareness [8]. When organizing diverse practical activities, teachers should first understand the educational resources available in the local area and utilize them for practical activities, expanding the content beyond the classroom. Secondly, teachers should focus on the moral and legal teaching objectives and carefully plan and organize thematic activities [9].

Additionally, teachers can fully embrace the method of cooperative learning in small groups for moral and legal education. Cooperative group exploration is an important way to cultivate students' self-directed inquiry skills and enhance the quality of their learning. Teachers can choose various issues as teaching guides and select major international and domestic current affairs topics that students are concerned about as exploration topics. Utilizing various forms of teaching resources, such as videos, images, comics, and stories, can deepen students' experiences and cognition [6]. Using issues as the driving force for teaching can stimulate students' thinking abilities, and with the assistance of multimedia technology, teachers can optimize the presentation of teaching materials. Moreover, teachers can guide students to construct knowledge frameworks using mind maps, such as fishbone diagrams and tree diagrams.

3.3. Enhancing Teacher's Comprehensive Qualities

In middle school moral and legal education, the comprehensive qualities of teachers are crucial in the teaching process. Teachers should fully utilize their enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity in teaching [10]. They need to consciously change their role from being the leader in the classroom to becoming the guide for students. In moral and legal education, teachers should strive to build an equal and democratic teacher-student relationship, create a thought-provoking classroom atmosphere, and continuously engage in dialogues with students. Through communication, teachers can understand the real situations and genuine needs of students and genuinely care for and support each student.

Middle school moral and legal teachers should broaden their horizons and possess timeliness, openness, and flexibility in teaching the subject. They should consider the grand strategy of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the significant changes happening in the world. Teachers should pay attention to domestic and international current affairs and effectively integrate them into the teaching of middle school moral and legal education. They need to stay aware of societal and era-specific issues, enhance their sensitivity and acumen towards current affairs, and improve their ability to explore resources and utilize the internet. By fully tapping into the value of current affairs resources, teachers can find relevant and timely current affairs topics that align with the teaching materials, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their teaching.

Ideological and political courses are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of nurturing morality and cultivating talents. During lesson preparation, teachers should carefully study the curriculum standards, grasp the content of the textbooks thoroughly, deepen their understanding of the knowledge system, and continuously improve their professional knowledge and ethical conduct. The middle school stage is a critical period for physical and mental growth, as well as the formative stage for the worldview, outlook on life, and values of students. Therefore, teachers should attach importance to the role of moral and legal education in shaping the three perspectives and qualities of middle school students and pay attention to their mental health.

4. Conclusion

Ideological and political courses play a vital role in fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering morality and cultivating talents. Among these courses, middle school moral and legal education stands out as a critical subject for nurturing students' moral character during their formative middle school years. The significance of moral education lies in its profound impact on students' growth and character development, underscoring the utmost importance of ensuring the effectiveness of moral and legal education within the classroom setting.

To achieve an effective moral and legal education, teachers must be proactive in understanding and adapting to new teaching requirements. They should abandon outdated teaching methods and embrace innovative approaches that resonate with the evolving needs of students. Building a positive and equitable teacher-student relationship is crucial, as it fosters an open and welcoming environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns. Moreover, teachers should prioritize the mental health and moral development of their students, offering guidance and support to help them navigate ethical challenges and dilemmas.

The success of middle school moral and legal education also hinges on teachers' continuous efforts to enhance their teaching skills and comprehensive qualities. Teachers need to invest in their personal growth and professional development, nurturing qualities such as empathy, understanding, and patience to better connect with their students. A deep commitment to ongoing exploration and innovation in teaching techniques is essential, as it enables teachers to adapt their approaches to suit the diverse learning styles and preferences of their students. By continuously creating engaging and interactive moral and legal classrooms, teachers can foster a learning environment that inspires students to actively participate in their ethical and legal education journey. Ultimately, such efforts contribute significantly to shaping morally upright and responsible individuals who can make meaningful contributions to society.

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