



A Study on the Implementation and Optimisation Path of Primary School Labour Education

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Abstract

With the national focus on the “double reduction” policy promoting holistic student development, the importance of labour education’s practical and theoretical skills has increased. However, the current curriculum lacks a comprehensive system, teaching teams, and extracurricular formats, hindering its effectiveness and students’ work abilities. This study aims to systematically explore labour education in Chinese primary schools, focusing on its ideological origins, professional advantages, and practical measures. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, we conducted a survey and interviews with teachers and students to identify key challenges and propose optimisation strategies. Our findings reveal significant gaps in the current system and provide valuable suggestions for its future development.

Subject Areas

Pedagogy

Keywords

Labor Education, Implementation, Optimization Path

1. Research Background

The background of the study is centered on the policy context and real pain points, analyzed through the newly issued documents of the state and the problems encountered in real teaching.

1.1. Policy Background

The Opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist

Party of China on Comprehensively Strengthening Labour Education in Universities, Secondary Schools and Primary Schools in the New Era put forward the following: labour education is an important element of the national education system and a necessary means of growth for students, and it has the comprehensive value of educating people in terms of moral integrity, increasing intelligence, strengthening the body and cultivating beauty [1]. The recent policy emphasis on “labour education” has set new requirements for curriculum construction in China’s primary schools. Specifically, the “double reduction” policy refers to reducing both the amount of homework and after-school tutoring, allowing more time for students to engage in extracurricular activities, including labour education. However, despite this policy shift, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the current state of labour education in primary schools. Existing studies and data indicate that labour education faces several challenges, including a lack of dedicated teaching staff, limited resources, and unclear curricular guidelines.

1.2. Practical Problems

While observations suggest blurred boundaries between home and school in labor education homework, empirical evidence remains scarce. This exacerbates conflicts, stemming from ambiguous authority and responsibility. Teachers struggle with assignment “degrees”, often exceeding students’ capabilities, turning it into “parental homework”.

Currently, part-time labor education teachers outnumber full-time ones. One-way lectures hinder students’ independent thinking, leading to low efficiency. Under examination-oriented education, students lack labor knowledge, have negative attitudes, and weakened abilities, creating a gap with societal demands.

Research on labor education is diverse and lacks a unified framework. Definitions vary, and a unified evaluation system is needed. To promote labor education, empirical research and clarification of roles are crucial.

2. Status of Research

The current state of research will be analyzed in terms of connotation interpretation and literature review.

2.1. Introduction

Connotation interpretation focuses on explaining some of the more difficult to understand proper nouns.

2.1.1. Primary and Secondary Labour Education

Tan Chuanbao defines “work education” as an educational activity aimed at promoting the formation of work values (*i.e.*, the formation of a correct view of work, a positive attitude toward work, and love for work and working people, etc.) and the development of work literacy (a certain level of work knowledge

and skills, and the formation of good work habits, etc.) among students [2]. The Opinions state that labour education is an important element of the socialist education system with Chinese characteristics, and directly determines the working spirit, working values and working skills of socialist builders and successors. The types of labour education in primary and secondary schools include daily life labour, production labour and service labour [3].

2.1.2. “Double Reduction”

Double Reduction, in the field of education in China, refers to effectively reducing the excessive burden of homework and out-of-school training for students in the compulsory education stage. On 24 July 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework for Students in the Compulsory Education Stage and the Burden of Out-of-School Training, which requires all regions and departments to earnestly implement and carry out the opinions in light of the actual situation. The “double-reducing” policy is a return to the original intent of educating people and the laws of education, and is an important measure to address the current imbalance and inadequacy of China’s educational development.

2.1.3. Optimisation Path

Optimization path mainly refers to a series of strategies and measures to improve the quality and effectiveness of labour education, so that it can better meet the development needs of the new era and achieve the purpose of educating students.

2.2. Current Implementation of Labour Education

This section will address both curriculum implementation and curriculum content.

2.2.1. Implementation of the Curriculum

Documents of the State Council stipulate that labour education classes in primary and secondary schools should not be less than one class period per week, and schools should make provisions for the time students spend working outside the classroom and school every day. Universities and primary and secondary schools will set up a work week in each school year, which can be organised independently during the school year or winter and summer holidays, with collective work as the main focus.

According to Tan Chuanbao, the main problems of labour education are two-fold: weakening and alienation. Some schools regard labour education as a superfluous embellishment of school education, while others have no labour education activities at all. The main goal of work education should be to cultivate students’ work values, rather than being misused as a means of punishment, leisure or talent show in school education [4].

2.2.2 Curriculum Content

In the lower grades of primary school, emphasis should be placed on the enlightenment of labour awareness and learning to take care of oneself in daily life, such as learning to fold quilts and tidy up one's own desk; and in the middle and upper grades of primary school, emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of labour habits, such as sharing household chores at home and actively participating in public welfare work inside and outside the school. Lin Kesong and Xiong Qing believe that open and inclusive curriculum implementation can be promoted, divided into three dimensions of integration: the integration of different areas within the labour education curriculum, the integration of labour education lessons with the curriculum of a certain subject, and the integration of labour education lessons with subject areas [5].

2.3. Exploring the Strategies of Improving Labour Education

The enhancement strategy of labor education is explained through two parts: the role of teachers and the use of social resources.

2.3.1. The Role of Teachers

The Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council proposed in the Opinions that various initiatives should be taken to strengthen the construction of the talent team. Various measures will be taken to establish a combination of full-time and part-time labour education teachers. According to the needs of labour education in schools, schools should be equipped with the necessary full-time teachers. Shi Junqing, a researcher with the Chinese Society of Education, pointed out that labour education in the new era has a new connotation of the times, which poses a new challenge to labour education teachers, and that it is necessary to build a high-quality, specialised labour education teaching force that focuses on hygiene habits and labour habits in primary schools. Teachers must have a clear understanding of the nature of labour education in the new era, grasp the goals and tasks of labour education in the new era, and improve the scientific and efficient model of labour education.

2.3.2. Utilising Social Resources

The Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council proposed in their opinions that the number of practice places should be vigorously expanded to meet the demand for diversified work practice at all levels and in all types of schools. Full use should be made of the existing comprehensive practice bases, out-of-school activity places for young people, vocational colleges and universities, and work practice places, and the mechanism of opening up and sharing should be established and improved. Rural areas can designate appropriate land, mountains, forests and pastures to be used as practice bases for agricultural learning, and urban areas can identify a number of enterprises, public institutions and social organizations to be used as practice places for students to participate in production and service work.

Sun Huiping and Ning Bentao proposed that labour education should build a

“three-in-one” development system, with schools as the main support for labour education, the government as the guiding and supporting party, and parents, enterprises, institutions and other social forces to rationally organise labour education [6]. Lin Kesong and Xiong Qian proposed to connect the curriculum of labour education with the students’ life and career world, to expand the space of labour practice, to extend the place of implementation of the curriculum of labour education to outside the school, and to extend labour education to society and families [5].

3. Research Review

From the existing research, it can be seen that labour education has gradually become a hot spot for educators. Especially after the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Labour Education in Universities, Middle Schools and Primary Schools in the New Era in 2020, the research heat of labour education has been further increased. From the perspective of research, some studies no longer use the traditional perspective, and analyse labour education issues from a multidimensional, multidisciplinary and multitheoretical perspective; from the perspective of research methodology, some studies break the barriers of the previous discursive method and documentary method, and carry out empirical research explorations, with the increasing integration of qualitative and quantitative research; from the perspective of research topics, labour education research covers all school segments, with an ever-expanding range of topics.

However, there are still problems such as the lack of concern for the practical problems of labour education at present and the lack of research on the theoretical system of labour education. In terms of research objects, most studies also focus on college students and relatively scattered labour education in primary and secondary schools, lacking the important value of tracing labour education in the process of cultivation in primary and secondary schools from the source and theory. To sum up, this study starts from the ideological origin of labour education, combines its own professional characteristics and advantages on the actual situation of labour education in primary schools in China, conducts systematic research on labour education in primary schools, and explores more practical and feasible measures for the implementation of labour education, so as to further enrich the research on labour education.

4. Research Design

The design of the study was divided into research questions and research methods aimed at using a scientific design to drive the implementation of the survey.

4.1. Research Problems

The research questions are mainly two parts: implementation and problems and optimization path and path assessment.

4.1.1. Implementation Situation and Problems

The study understood the objectives and teaching contents of primary school labor education, including the cultivation of labor skills, labor consciousness, and value cultivation, among others. Additionally, it studied the teaching methods along with the utilization of teaching resources in primary school labor education, such as curriculum contents, teaching materials, and teaching aids. Furthermore, the study analyzed the implementation effect and students' participation in primary school labor education, gaining an understanding of students' attitudes and experiences towards labor education.

4.1.2. Path Optimisation and Path Evaluation

The study, based on its results, proposed ways and suggestions for optimizing primary school labor education. This encompassed the optimization of teaching content, the improvement of teaching methods, and the enhancement of teacher training, among other aspects. Furthermore, the study proposed strategies for integrating primary school labor education with other disciplines and explored methods for interdisciplinary teaching. It also examined the potential for cooperation between primary school labor education, the community, and families, offering approaches to promote home-school collaboration. Finally, the study analyzed the feasibility of the proposed optimization methods, addressed implementation difficulties, and designed evaluation methods to assess their impact on primary school labor education.

4.2. Research Methods

This project mainly uses literature research method, survey research method and case study method to carry out the research. The study firstly established a more comprehensive theoretical analysis of the perspective through theoretical research and then constructed a survey analysis framework. On that basis, it designed the questionnaire, conducted sampling to carry out the survey, and performed data analysis based on the questionnaire responses. Subsequently, the study designed a targeted interview outline to further understand the previous status of labor education. Additionally, the study selected J primary school as a typical case for studying primary school labor education.

4.2.1. Literature Review Method

This study is conducted by reviewing relevant literature on China Knowledge Network, Wanfang Data, etc., and sorting out the connotations and objectives of labour education according to the "Guidelines for Labour Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Trial)", "Compulsory Education Labour Curriculum Standards", etc. issued by the Ministry of Education, thus laying the foundation for the subsequent research.

4.2.2. Survey Research Method

Questionnaire method: this study will be in the form of a questionnaire for the current situation of labor education, some primary school students and primary

school teachers to conduct a questionnaire survey, to understand the current situation of labor education, to explore the problems that exist in labor education, and the questionnaire for statistical analysis, in order to obtain a set of quantitative indicators, a true understanding of the educational aspirations of teachers and students.

Interview method: Based on the data analysis of the questionnaire survey, this study will select the objects to be interviewed through purposive sampling and conduct the interviews using a combination of online and offline methods. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews will be recorded throughout. On the one hand, a comprehensive survey was conducted among primary school students and teachers to understand the current situation of labor education, summarizing their proposals for labor education. On the other hand, from a macro level, visits were made to labor education demonstration schools and labor education bases for surveys.

4.2.3. Case Study Method

Using the case study method, this study will focus on the J City Labor Education Model School J School to conduct research and tracking interviews from the labor curriculum, labor activities, extracurricular labor studies and other aspects of the survey, qualitative analysis of the feedback data and quantitative summary, to provide a reference for its more scientific path to development.

5. Research Findings

Primary school students and teachers in W district of J city and S district of S city were the main sample objects, involving a total of 9 schools (3 rural primary schools and 6 urban primary schools), 98 questionnaires were distributed and 87 valid questionnaires were returned, with an efficiency rate of 88.8%. Among the participants, there were 42 primary school teachers and 56 primary school students, including 40 students from urban schools and 16 students from rural schools.

In this study, the main respondents were teacher F from J Primary School in J Town, teacher L from Y Primary School in H Town, student Z from S Primary School in S Town (first grade student in the city), student W from Z Primary School in J Town (third grade student), and student Hang from S Primary School in X Primary School in S Town (township school) (sixth grade student).

5.1. Perception of the Value of Vocational Training

Although most teachers and students positively affirm the value of labor education, there are still a few who have a biased understanding of it. Meanwhile, although students generally prefer practical labor education activities, they are still deficient in deep-seated intrinsic interest and motivation.

5.1.1. Most Teachers and Students Are Sure of the Value of Work-Based Education, While a Few are Biased

The survey shows that 72.4% of teachers and students believe that vocational

education is very valuable, and students in urban schools attach much more importance to vocational education than students in rural schools. Most primary school students believe that work education, as an important part of all-round development education, is conducive to improving practical skills and practical abilities, enhancing self-confidence and self-reliance, and cultivating students' team spirit and sense of social responsibility. However, 10.6% of teachers and students thought that work was only for relaxation and physical exercise, confusing the relationship between work and recreation and failing to fully understand the unique educational function of work. Among the reasons given by primary school students for the general value of work education, 32.0% of teachers and students think that they are not interested in work education, 60.9% think that work education increases the burden of school work, and 7.1% think that work education takes up time for playing. It can be seen that for the group of primary school students, the heavier burden of school work is the main reason why they attach less importance to work education.

5.1.2. Students' Preference for Practical Work Training but Lack of Intrinsic Interest

In the interviews with the three students, it was found that the practical activities that students generally liked and "found fun" (Z-I-20240116), such as "learning agriculture" during spring and autumn trips, cooking activities, and handmade creations in creative workshops, were difficult to carry out in schools because few schools had the capacity to provide such activities. It is difficult to carry out such practical activities in schools because few schools can provide such work activities, which require certain work equipment and space, resulting in a lack of student interest in work activities in schools.

5.2. Implementation of Labour Education

Although all schools have introduced labour courses, there is a general lack of systematic arrangements and professional guidance for these courses, resulting in an uneven distribution of educational resources. At the same time, there is an obvious shortage of teachers, with a lack of professional teachers specializing in labour education, and the content of labour education is often divorced from real life, leading to a lack of interest on the part of students.

5.2.1. All Schools Offer Labour Education Courses, but the Courses Lack Systematic Arrangements and Guidance

After the trial implementation of the Guidelines for Labour Education in Primary and Secondary Schools and Universities, the labour education curriculum has basically achieved 100 per cent coverage in urban and rural schools, and the surveyed schools have all set aside one hour a week for labour education in their curricula. However, because classroom teachers and subject teachers take turns teaching the class, labour education has basically been reduced to empty talk. "It is done occasionally, but it is basically taken over by

the language class” (H-I-20240115), “It is only done when the superiors have a task to assign some homework” (L-I-20231101), “We have a work week in the first week of May every year, which corresponds to a different theme for each year group, and the rest of the year there are very few work lessons” (F-I-20240113). Although 42.53% of teachers and pupils do have work education every week, it is likely to be routine activities such as cleaning rather than systematic curriculum teaching. Of course, work education is not only carried out in work classes, which account for 14.94% of extra-curricular activities and class meetings, which account for 20.96% of curriculum teaching, is also not a viable option for work education.

5.2.2. Unbalanced Educational Resources

Urban and rural labour education resources are also unbalanced, and there are some differences in the educational resources of provincial capitals and non-provincial capitals. Due to their high level of economic development and rich educational resources, urban areas have more high-quality teachers and are relatively more reasonable in designing labour courses. Urban areas have better training facilities and places, such as workshops and practical training bases, etc., while rural areas have relatively poor training facilities and are unable to provide abundant labour training resources.

5.2.3. Lack of Teachers Specialised in Vocational Education

Due to the lack of specialised university curricula, there is a shortage of professional labour education teachers in many schools. Some teachers have not received relevant training and lack the ability to teach labour skills, so they don't know “what to teach” and “how to teach”, which may be counterproductive and suppress students' enthusiasm and interest in labour education. This may be counterproductive, suppress students' enthusiasm and interest in labour education, and affect their learning and development in labour education. In general, students only have “specialised personnel to teach labour skills when they go to off-campus study bases” (H-I-20240115), and they can only give “dry lectures” (Z-I-20240116) due to the lack of equipment in schools, which is not practical and useful. (Z-I-20240116), which lacks practicality and interest.

5.2.4. The Content of Labour Education Is Not Related to Real Life, and Students Are Not Interested in It

The systematic teaching of labour education is based on well-developed labour teaching materials. More than half of the respondents' schools use unified textbooks for teaching, which has the advantage of a more perfect system and the disadvantage of rigid content. For example, the labour book in the first book of grade 6 is divided into four units: improving labour tools, designing recycling of electronic waste, negotiating and formulating rules of the creative class, and designing community recreational facilities. The main content of the improvement of labour tools is the exploration, improvement and production of labour tools;

the main content of the design of the regeneration of electronic waste is to investigate the consumption of electronic products, to explore the internal structure of electronic products and design them; the main content of the design of community recreational facilities is to investigate the use of community recreational facilities and the existing problems, and to make suggestions for their better development. However, these themes are not closely related to the students' real life, so the students are not interested in them. Some of the work skills taught in the book are not in line with the students' future career development and social needs, and lack practicality.

6. Research Conclusions

After a series of previous studies, the following conclusions were drawn from this study.

6.1. Importance of Work Education in Primary Schools

Primary school work education is an important way to cultivate students' practical ability and work consciousness, and it has an important influence on students' physical and mental health, character cultivation and future development. Labour education requires students to perform various tasks with their own hands, such as cleaning the classroom, planting small vegetables, and so on. These activities can train students' hand-eye coordination, operation skills and manual skills, laying the foundation for their future life and study. Through work, students can experience the feeling that there is a reward for their work, so that they can realise the importance of work, know how to appreciate the fruits of their labour, and develop good work habits and values. In addition, through work, students can learn to be grateful and share, and enhance the spirit of teamwork.

6.2. The Effectiveness of Labour Education in Primary Schools Is Remarkable, but There Are Still Some Drawbacks

The education system has kept in mind the important entrustment of General Secretary Xi Jinping, guided by the top-level design, supported by the curriculum reform of the whole school period, and focused on home-school collaborative education, constantly improving and strengthening the labor education system, sounding the call to comprehensively strengthen labor education in primary and secondary schools in the new era. However, looking at the primary school where the author's survey respondents are located. There are still disadvantages such as lack of teachers, boring teaching content and fragmentation, which urgently need to be solved by further research.

7. Research Suggestions

In order to comprehensively improve the quality of labor education, the importance of labor education in society as a whole should be emphasized and the

in-depth development of labor education in all aspects should be promoted; at the same time, the labor education curriculum system should be improved to promote the enrichment and improvement of school curricula; communication between home and school should be strengthened, and the positive role of home-school cooperative education should be brought into play; diversified methods of evaluation and feedback should be adopted, such as the evaluation method of the filing bag; and cross-disciplinary integration and construction should be promoted in order to cultivate students' comprehensive literacy and innovation ability.

7.1. Raise the Importance of Labour Education in Society as a Whole and Promote the Development of Labour Education in All Aspects

Education departments and schools should raise the importance of labour education and include it as an important part of school education. Starting from improving the professional curriculum for teacher training students, organising a special team to conduct research on labour education (e.g. City H has set up the New Era Labour Education Research Institute, which is composed of experts from the Provincial Academy of Educational Sciences and other units in the Academic Advisory Committee of the Research Institute), and training primary school teachers in labour education, and improving the literacy of in-service teachers in labour education through high-quality classroom competitions and lectures. Teachers will be trained in vocational education.

7.2. Improve the Curriculum of Labour Education and Promote the Development of School Curriculum

Schools should reasonably establish the curriculum content and activity forms of labour education according to the age characteristics and development needs of primary school students, and focus on cultivating students' practical abilities and practical skills. Schools can be creative in developing school-based curricula, not confined to the uniformly issued teaching materials, and innovate according to the characteristics and actuality of the school, so as to make up for the shortcomings in the development of the national curriculum.

7.3. Promote Home-School Communication and Play the Role of Home-School Cooperative Education

Schools should strengthen communication and cooperation with parents to increase parents' awareness and attention to work education. Encourage parents to continue cultivating their children's work skills at home, and alter the parents' concept that "children's study is the only important thing". At the same time, teachers should consider the difficulty and amount of homework when assigning homework, so as not to turn homework into "parental homework" and avoid the emergence of "substitute work" and "posing for pictures".

7.4. Use Multiple Evaluation and Feedback Methods Such as File Bag Evaluation

At present, the evaluation of the vocational training course is mainly done by displaying the students' work and summarising the activities, and the respondents did not use the file bag evaluation. The course evaluation of labour education courses should not be limited to forms such as static verbal evaluation or periodic evaluation lists, but should move towards dynamically generated file bag evaluation. Efforts should be made to achieve one file bag per semester to record students' individual units, focusing on the practical process of students' participation in labour, as well as students' feelings and expressions about their labour experiences.

The presentation of students' work can take different forms, such as physical display, video display, demonstration display, speech display, network display, etc. Evaluation can be done through self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. Students should not only combine the opinions of self-assessment and other assessment to reflect on teaching and clarify the direction of improvement, but also take the work activities of a certain theme as a point of time to achieve summative reflection. Teachers should be good at finding students' flash points and progress points in the evaluation process, and be careful not to discourage motivation.

7.5. Promote Interdisciplinary Integration and Construction

In designing the content of the work curriculum and arranging the work assignments, attention is paid to the connection between various disciplines. In the current subject curriculum of elementary schools, subject knowledge related to work education, such as traditional cultural knowledge on diligence, thrift and work in language, making illustrations in art and observing plants in science, etc., is screened out and integrated into the teaching content of work education according to different work topics. The integration of curriculum resources at the level of logical form requires the incorporation of other disciplines' ways of thinking into labour practice, such as abstract thinking and logical reasoning in mathematics, to form new labour education activities with the themes of robot modelling and 3D printing. All labour curricula ultimately point to the value level, and the formation of the values of respect for labour and love for labour should be carried through all aspects of the whole process of labour education [5].

Conflicts of Interest

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

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