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Reconstructing a Core Literacy-Aligned Primary School Labor Education Curriculum System: Barriers and Systemic Solutions

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Abstract: With the global shift towards cultivating twenty-first-century core competencies, labor education has increasingly become a fundamental cornerstone of holistic education systems worldwide. In China, the comprehensive 2022 curriculum reform officially elevated labor education to the status of an independent, compulsory course, reflecting a profound national commitment to fostering practical skills and moral development among young learners. However, despite these progressive policy advancements, significant structural deficiencies within the current curriculum design have substantially hindered its practical effectiveness and overall pedagogical impact. This paper systematically constructs a robust theoretical framework that intricately links the principles of core literacy with the foundational goals of primary school labor education. Through rigorous analysis, the study identifies three key implementation barriers currently impeding progress: highly fragmented educational objectives that lack cohesive progression, severely decontextualized instructional content that fails to resonate with students' lived experiences, and disjointed evaluation mechanisms that inadequately measure genuine competency acquisition. To address these critical challenges, this research proposes a comprehensive, four-dimensional systemic reconstruction path designed to seamlessly integrate labor education into the broader academic ecosystem. By realigning curriculum standards, optimizing pedagogical strategies, enriching contextual learning environments, and establishing authentic assessment rubrics, the proposed model ensures a more cohesive educational experience. Ultimately, the findings provide highly actionable, evidence-based strategies to significantly improve primary school labor education in China, while simultaneously offering valuable theoretical insights and practical paradigms for global educational reform initiatives focused on holistic student development.

Keywords: Primary school labor education; Core literacy; Curriculum reconstruction; Holistic education; Educational policy implementation

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1. Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a significant transformation in global education, shifting from a traditional knowledge transmission model to a focus on cultivating core competencies [1]. Core literacy, defined as the essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for lifelong learning and social adaptation, has emerged as the central focus of educational reform worldwide. Unlike traditional subject-based education, core literacy emphasizes holistic development, aiming to nurture critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and social responsibility. As society continues to evolve, education must go beyond the mere transmission of knowledge to equip students with the skills required to solve complex problems and navigate an ever-changing world.

Labor education, as an educational approach that integrates hands-on practice, cognitive development, and value formation, offers unique benefits in this regard. By engaging students in practical labor activities, labor education fosters skills such as manual dexterity, problem-solving, teamwork, and social responsibility. It not only emphasizes the learning of practical skills but also helps students understand the social value of labor, promoting both physical and mental well-being and contributing to the

development of well-rounded personalities. In the rapidly changing social environment, labor education plays a crucial role in preparing students to adapt to future challenges.

In China, the 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan marked a milestone by establishing labor education as an independent compulsory course. This policy reflects the growing recognition of labor education's importance in cultivating students' core competencies and aligning them with real-world needs. However, despite strong policy support, the majority of primary schools still face challenges in constructing a scientific and systematic labor education curriculum. As a result, labor education has often been marginalized, with its implementation characterized by formalization and limited integration into the overall educational framework. Existing research has primarily focused on isolated teaching strategies rather than the alignment of the curriculum with core literacy. This paper seeks to address this gap by systematically analyzing key implementation barriers and proposing actionable, targeted strategies for the reconstruction of labor education systems in primary schools.

2. Theoretical Framework: Core Literacy and Labor Education Alignment

Core literacy and labor education are fundamentally aligned in their educational goals and approaches. Both emphasize the importance of developing well-rounded individuals who are equipped not only with knowledge but also with the practical, emotional, and social skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world. Core literacy, defined as the essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for lifelong learning and social adaptation, seeks to cultivate a comprehensive set of abilities in students. This aligns closely with the goals of labor education, which integrates practical tasks with cognitive and moral development, helping students acquire not only hands-on skills but also the ability to solve real-world problems and work collaboratively [2].

Labor education, in this context, serves as a practical framework for cultivating core literacy. By engaging students in meaningful, hands-on activities, labor education enables them to develop the practical skills required to succeed in the workforce while also promoting critical thinking, creativity, and ethical values. It provides a way for students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations, which is essential in today's rapidly changing society. At the same time, core literacy provides a clear educational direction for the design of labor education curricula, ensuring that labor activities are not merely about performing tasks but also about fostering a broader set of cognitive and emotional skills [3].

The theoretical roots of this alignment can be traced to the educational philosophies of prominent thinkers who emphasized the connection between learning and doing. The theory of "learning by doing" argues that knowledge is best acquired through active engagement with the world around us, rather than through passive absorption of information. Learning becomes meaningful when students are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge to solve practical problems, which is exactly what labor education offers. Similarly, the concept of the "unity of teaching, learning, and doing" emphasizes the importance of integrating classroom instruction with real-life experience. Education should not be confined to theoretical knowledge but should include active participation in real-world tasks. These ideas resonate strongly with the goals of labor education, where students learn not just through books but through the application of knowledge in practical, often collaborative, settings.

Structurally, the alignment between core literacy and labor education is clear in the way that both seek to develop students' intellectual, practical, emotional, and social capabilities. Labor literacy, which is the core objective of labor education, includes a combination of concepts, skills, habits, and values related to work. These elements directly correspond to the four dimensions of core literacy. Labor concepts help students understand the significance of work and its role in society, which aligns with the cognitive aspect of core literacy. Labor skills develop practical competencies, which are central to the practical dimension of core literacy. Labor habits, such as responsibility, perseverance, and diligence, are crucial for emotional and attitudinal development, aligning with the

emotional aspect of core literacy. Finally, the labor spirit, which encompasses values such as teamwork, social responsibility, and ethical behavior, speaks directly to the value-based dimension of core literacy.

In essence, a labor education curriculum aligned with core literacy focuses on developing labor literacy—encompassing both skills and values—while simultaneously fostering the broader competencies that are essential for success in the 21st century. Through this alignment, labor education not only teaches students the value of hard work but also helps them develop the critical thinking, creativity, and moral responsibility necessary for lifelong success.

3. Core Values of Core Literacy-aligned Labor Education

3.1. Advancing Moral Education Through Practical Experience

Labor education is arguably the most direct pathway to fostering moral qualities in students. A well-structured curriculum encourages students to understand that all forms of labor—whether manual, intellectual, or artistic—contribute to the common good and deserve recognition. Through the practical experience of engaging in labor, students not only learn about the importance of work but also gain a deeper appreciation for the effort and dedication it requires. By participating in various labor activities, such as cleaning, community service, or project-based tasks, students encounter both the challenges and rewards of working, which in turn cultivates qualities like perseverance, responsibility, and respect for others. These experiences provide invaluable opportunities to shape students' character, teaching them that hard work and dedication are essential elements of personal growth and social contribution [4].

In addition to promoting individual virtues, labor education also fosters a strong sense of collective responsibility. As students work together on tasks, they learn the importance of cooperation and teamwork, understanding that success is often a result of shared effort and mutual respect. This collaborative aspect of labor education helps students develop empathy and a deeper sense of social responsibility. By embedding moral lessons into practical experiences, core literacy-aligned labor education enhances students' moral development in ways that traditional classroom instruction cannot. Research confirms that when moral education is integrated into labor practices, students exhibit stronger ethical behavior, better interpersonal skills, and a more profound commitment to their community, laying the foundation for responsible, socially conscious citizens.

3.2. Serving as a Link for the Integration of Five Educations

Labor education holds a unique and comprehensive value in education by integrating moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. It serves as a bridge that connects these five aspects, helping students develop in a holistic manner. One of the key benefits of labor education is its ability to break down the barriers between traditional disciplines, enabling students to see the connections between theory and practice. In intellectual education, labor education provides a practical application field where students can use the knowledge they have gained in subjects like mathematics, science, and languages. By applying these abstract concepts to real-life tasks, students are able to transform theoretical knowledge into tangible skills, enhancing their understanding and reinforcing what they have learned in the classroom.

Furthermore, labor education contributes significantly to physical education. Many labor activities require physical effort, which helps students build physical strength, endurance, and coordination. Whether through gardening, cleaning, or community service, students engage in activities that not only improve their physical health but also promote teamwork and cooperation. In terms of aesthetic education, labor education offers students the opportunity to explore creativity and develop an appreciation for beauty. Activities such as handicraft making, environmental beautification, or even artistic gardening enable students to discover and create beauty in their surroundings,

nurturing both their artistic sensibilities and practical skills. Through these experiences, labor education becomes an essential link that connects all five educations, fostering a well-rounded and balanced development in students [5].

3.3. Preparing Students for Lifelong Development

In the digital intelligence era, the demand for practical ability, innovation, and adaptability has never been greater. As the pace of technological and societal change accelerates, students must be equipped with the skills to navigate an increasingly complex world. Core literacy-aligned labor education plays a critical role in preparing students for this future. By focusing on solving real-world problems through labor, this type of education helps students acquire practical experience that is directly applicable to their daily lives and future careers. Unlike traditional academic learning, which often remains abstract and theoretical, labor education encourages students to engage actively with challenges, enabling them to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative skills that are essential in the modern world.

Moreover, the hands-on nature of labor education helps foster adaptability—a key trait in an era marked by rapid technological advancements. As students tackle diverse tasks, from collaborative projects to service learning, they learn how to approach problems with flexibility and resourcefulness, adjusting their strategies based on the specific demands of each situation. This adaptability not only benefits students in their academic endeavors but also in their professional and personal lives, where the ability to navigate uncertainty and change is crucial [6]. Ultimately, by integrating labor education into the curriculum, students are better prepared to face the challenges of the future, equipped with the skills and mindset necessary for continuous learning and growth throughout their lives.

4. Key Implementation Barriers

4.1. Fragmented Objectives Devoid of Core Literacy Orientation

One of the most prominent issues in labor education is the fragmentation of its curriculum objectives, which lack alignment with core literacy. In many schools, curriculum goals across different grade levels are vague and disconnected, leading to a lack of coherence in the progression of labor education. As a result, the content often becomes repetitive in the lower grades, while higher grades fail to build on the foundational skills students have already developed. Instead of fostering a well-rounded understanding of labor, most educational systems prioritize the mastery of basic technical skills, neglecting critical elements such as labor concepts, habits, and the work ethic that should be integral to the labor literacy framework. This misalignment weakens the overall educational value of labor education, reducing it to superficial skill training rather than an educational experience that builds moral, intellectual, and social competencies. Without a systematic, core literacy-oriented approach, students are deprived of the opportunity to fully develop a well-rounded understanding of labor, and this limits the impact of labor education in shaping their values and competencies [7].

4.2. Decontextualized Content Disconnected from Real Life

Another significant barrier to effective labor education is the disconnection between the content of the curriculum and real-life contexts. Much of the labor education content is currently limited to routine, mundane tasks such as classroom cleaning or personal hygiene, which have little relevance to students' daily lives outside of school. These activities fail to demonstrate the practical value of labor, resulting in disengaged students who see little reason to participate. Additionally, the content is often arranged in a random, unstructured manner, without clear links to other subjects or real-world applications [8]. This lack of logical progression and interdisciplinary integration undermines the educational potential of labor education. To make labor education truly impactful, it needs to be rooted in real-world scenarios, linking academic knowledge with practical applications in the students' own lives and communities. Without this context, labor

education remains an isolated subject, disconnected from broader learning objectives, and does not engage students in ways that can lead to deeper understanding or sustained interest. Research indicates that this disconnect between labor education and real-world relevance is a primary reason for its marginalization and formalization in schools.

4.3. Disjointed Implementation and Evaluation Mechanisms

The current implementation and evaluation mechanisms for labor education present significant challenges. In many schools, labor education is marginalized within the curriculum, overshadowed by the emphasis on exam-oriented education. Consequently, labor education is often reduced to a series of lectures or isolated activities that lack continuity and integration into the broader educational framework. Practical, hands-on labor experiences are minimal, and essential resources—such as dedicated teachers or practice bases—are frequently insufficient or unavailable. Additionally, the evaluation of labor education typically focuses solely on task completion, with limited attention to the process, emotional engagement, or development of core competencies. This result-oriented approach to evaluation fails to capture the comprehensive impact of labor education, particularly its potential to foster critical thinking, emotional growth, and teamwork. Without a holistic, process-oriented evaluation system that rewards not only task completion but also growth in labor literacy, students have little incentive to engage meaningfully in labor education [9]. This narrow evaluation approach further reinforces the formalized and superficial implementation of labor education, restricting its ability to contribute to students' overall development.

5. Systemic Curriculum Reconstruction Path

5.1. Building a Hierarchical, Progressive Objective System

The reconstruction of the labor education curriculum begins with the establishment of a hierarchical, progressive objective system centered on labor literacy. This system should break down the overall goals of labor education into three key dimensions: knowledge and skills, processes and methods, and emotional attitudes and values, all of which align with the core literacy framework. It is essential that the curriculum objectives are tailored to students' cognitive development, ensuring a logical progression of learning across grade levels. In the early grades, the focus should be on cultivating self-care skills and nurturing an initial interest in labor. By the middle grades, students should engage in more complex tasks that develop daily labor skills and foster a sense of responsibility. In the upper grades, the curriculum should emphasize service labor abilities, innovation, and the ability to approach labor challenges with creativity. Aligning these objectives with 21st-century core competencies significantly enhances the educational effectiveness of labor education, ensuring that students not only acquire technical skills but also develop the critical thinking, responsibility, and adaptability required for success in the future [10].

5.2. Developing Life-oriented, Interdisciplinary Content

The content of labor education should be organized around the principle of "from life to life," making it relevant to students' real-world experiences and modern societal needs. To achieve this, the curriculum should be divided into three primary modules: daily life labor, productive labor, and service labor. Each module should include age-appropriate activities that allow students to engage with tasks that are meaningful to their everyday lives. For example, in the lower grades, students might focus on household chores or organizing community events, while in higher grades, they might engage in more complex service projects or productive labor related to local industries. In addition to its real-life relevance, the content must be interdisciplinary, incorporating knowledge from various subjects such as mathematics, science, Chinese, and art [11,12]. Thematic activities that combine labor education with these subjects will enable students to apply their academic knowledge in practical contexts, enhancing their understanding of both the subject matter and the tasks at hand. This interdisciplinary approach will allow labor

education to complement and enhance students' learning across the curriculum, reinforcing the connection between academic knowledge and its real-world applications.

5.3. Innovating School-family-community Collaborative Implementation

A successful labor education system requires a collaborative approach that extends beyond the classroom. To achieve this, schools should implement a project-based, experiential learning model that involves not only teachers and students but also families and local communities. The creation of campus practice bases—such as vegetable gardens, handicraft workshops, or sustainability projects—will allow students to engage with real-world tasks and collaborate with peers, teachers, and external experts. These bases will provide students with opportunities to apply their learning in practical settings, making labor education more engaging and meaningful. Families should play an active role by implementing grade-appropriate labor task lists, ensuring that students continue their engagement with labor activities outside of school hours. Additionally, local communities and enterprises should be involved by offering off-campus practice opportunities, such as internships or service projects, which expose students to different kinds of labor in diverse contexts. Systematic reviews of existing models confirm that school-family-community collaboration is critical to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of labor education, as it provides students with a broader, more holistic learning experience that extends beyond the school environment [13].

5.4. Establishing Literacy-focused Comprehensive Evaluation

To truly assess the impact of labor education, it is essential to move beyond the narrow, result-oriented evaluation systems currently in place. A multi-dimensional, process-oriented evaluation system should be adopted, focusing not only on task completion but also on the development of key competencies such as critical thinking, teamwork, and innovation [14]. Evaluation should involve multiple stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and social practitioners, who can provide diverse perspectives on students' progress. The system should assess both labor skills and emotional development, emphasizing the growth of students' labor literacy—how effectively they apply their knowledge and skills in practical contexts and develop socially responsible attitudes and behaviors. Process evaluations, such as observation records and labor logs, should be used alongside result evaluations, such as work displays and project reports, to provide a comprehensive view of students' progress. This approach enables continuous feedback, helping to identify areas for improvement and motivating students to further develop their labor literacy. Research indicates that such comprehensive evaluation systems enhance student participation and significantly foster the growth of labor literacy, as they encourage students to engage deeply in labor education and appreciate its broader educational value [15].

6. Conclusion

Reconstructing a core literacy-aligned primary school labor education curriculum system is a comprehensive and systematic project that requires addressing key elements such as curriculum objectives, content design, implementation strategies, and evaluation methods. The current labor education system, as demonstrated in this paper, suffers from fragmented objectives that lack clear alignment with core literacy, content that is disconnected from real-life applications, and disjointed implementation and evaluation mechanisms. These issues prevent labor education from reaching its full potential and limit its ability to contribute effectively to students' overall development. The proposed four-dimensional reconstruction path—comprising hierarchical objectives, life-oriented content, collaborative implementation, and comprehensive evaluation—provides a structured framework for overcoming these challenges and ensuring that labor education can fulfill its intended role.

The need for high-quality labor education is more urgent than ever in the context of the 21st century, as it is essential for cultivating well-rounded individuals equipped with both practical skills and the core competencies required for lifelong learning and social

adaptation. Labor education is not just about teaching students how to perform tasks; it is about fostering critical thinking, innovation, responsibility, and adaptability – skills that will serve students in their academic, professional, and personal lives. By continually optimizing and improving the labor education system, schools can ensure that labor education becomes a key pillar of holistic education, effectively preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

As this paper suggests, a labor education system that is aligned with core literacy and continuously adapted to the needs of society will not only enhance students' academic and practical abilities but also play a pivotal role in shaping responsible, socially conscious citizens who are prepared to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

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