

Article

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The Impact of Developing Moral Education on the Morality of Primary School Students in China

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of moral education on the development of students' morality in these institutions. It highlights the unique political and cultural characteristics of Chinese moral education, emphasizing its role in fostering values of communism and socialism with Chinese characteristics. The research examines the effective mechanisms implemented by the government and educational departments, the crucial role of moral education teachers, and the importance of textbooks in guiding students' moral development. The study finds that despite some challenges, moral education positively influences the moral growth of primary school students in China. Recommendations for policymakers, educators, and teachers are provided to enhance the effectiveness of moral education, ensuring it meets both practical and individual needs.

Keywords: moral education; Chinese primary schools; educational policy; cultural values

1. Introduction

In recent years, moral education has gained importance in Chinese primary schools. There are two major reasons for me to research this educational issue. One reason is that primary school provides the basis for children's learning and growth (Yang et al., 2022). It reminds us that moral development is a continuous process; the starting point needs to be clear and proper. Therefore, it is important to investigate the impact of moral education in Chinese primary schools on developing students' morality. Another reason is that moral education in China has different political and cultural characteristics. To be more specific, the Communist Party of China's 18th National Congress report specifically stated that "strengthening moral education for cultivating people" is the primary purpose of Chinese education. It demonstrates that moral education has strong governance for implementation (Huo et al., 2022). Moreover, Chinese moral education must foster in pupils strong values of communism and socialism with Chinese features that are committed to serving people (Xue & Li, 2021). In this essay, I will refer to moral education as a way to cultivate students' excellent moral qualities. It includes ideal and faith education, patriotism education, socialist core values education, and Chinese national excellent virtue education (Xue & Li, 2021). Especially, Chinese national excellent virtue education is at the core of primary school moral education (Huo et al., 2023). It focuses on transforming and guiding students to achieve great traditional culture virtues and qualities, such as self-discipline, self-improvement, and being trustworthy (Xue & Li, 2021; Huo et al., 2023). It has some differences in Western countries. In Western countries, moral education focuses not only on the curriculum but also on more activities to help students learn (Courtois,

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2015). Morality, as a moral character, includes three levels: good virtues for the motherland and people, public responsibility, and self-restraint. (Xue & Li, 2021). But in Western countries, the definition of morality is prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare that pertain to how people ought to relate to each other, which is a high distinction between China and Western countries (Baker, 2020). So this article stands in a Chinese context. I will argue that moral education has positive impacts on Chinese primary school students' morality. I will divide it into two levels: macroscopic and microscopic. At the macroscopic level, there is a focus on the effective mechanisms of moral education, especially in government and among official departments. At the microscopic level, it focuses on the teacher and textbook, which play two main roles in guiding primary students' moral development. The essay will provide some recommendations by analyzing these three support points for practice.

2. Positive Impacts of Moral Education on Chinese Primary School Students' Morality

2.1. The Effective Mechanism of Moral Education Has a Good Influence on Developing Primary School Students' Morality

The moral education mechanism, which guarantees students' moral development, depends on an efficient system directed by the government and educational official departments. The basic education department can receive clear instructions from the educational official department through an effective mechanism. The fact that the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Education (MOEPRC) revised the Guide to Moral Education in 2017 and stated clearly that using the code as a standard for student behavior in the Guide is a way of promoting students' morality in Chinese primary schools (Huo et al., 2022) appears to be a general guideline for moral education in primary schools, which might assist teachers in ensuring the lesson objective is correct. On the other hand, the official department, through an effective mechanism, can also provide comprehensive educational plans to meet the national moral education requirement (Zhou & Gao, 2023). This can help students develop their morality and keep up with the times. Moreover, to better improve students' morality, we need to design a moral education management plan with systemic and comprehensive content (Yang et al., 2022), which can be decided by the basic education department according to the mechanism's general direction.

While many findings point to the beneficial effects of an effective mechanism on the moral development of primary school students, some researchers argue that the mechanism's drawbacks will impede the development of students' morality. Firstly, the government and educational official departments in China, which lead the moral education mechanism, determined that the main goal of moral education is to emphasize ideal beliefs that are far removed from the realities of students' lives. They focus too much on theories and not enough on other spirits, such as striving, which makes primary school students unable to improve their overall qualities in moral development (Zhou & Gao, 2023). Secondly, the teaching approaches offered by the factors of the mechanism are not entirely appropriate for moral education in a specific school (Huo et al., 2022). When approaches are impractical, more time must be invested in modifying them, which will impede the development of students' morality. Moreover, the Chinese moral education mechanism doesn't provide a specific evaluation of students' morality (Zhou & Gao, 2023). Its failure to provide feedback to teachers and pupils during a teaching period will be an obstacle to improving teaching and learning qualities.

Furthermore, there is a common belief that, in the Chinese context, strong governance is necessary to increase the success of moral education implementation (Huo et al., 2022). As the official department uses different comment methods to confirm the implementation, the assessment of workers' performance will be affected. Chinese moral education, in the same way, emphasizes the active cultivation of students' morality within the framework of an official policy-driven system (Huo et al., 2022). This illustrates even more how an efficient mechanism offers solid assurance for the application of moral education.

Given this context, we ought to enhance the systematic implementational mechanism for progressively enhancing individuals' moral values (Xue & Li, 2021). The moral education mechanism not only decides the key policy of moral education to give schools and teachers a general direction but also supervises the fundamental education sectors to implement the educational plans. Even though there are some barriers caused by the Chinese social environment, the traditional Chinese mechanism can make it more efficient. In conclusion, I suggest that the moral education mechanism has positive impacts that outweigh the negative impacts on developing Chinese primary school students' morality.

2.2. Moral Education Teachers Have Beneficially Impacted the Morality of Chinese Primary School Students

Moral education teachers play a positive role in developing primary school students' morality, which can be observed from two perspectives: the teacher's morality and the teacher's professional quality. From a teacher's morality perspective, since ancient times, we have always had high requirements for teacher morality, long influenced by Confucian culture. Teachers' morality determines the quality of teaching, which deeply impacts the effectiveness of education (Li et al., 2020). This heritage of high-morality teachers has been carried into the modern era, with increasing awareness that moral standards for teachers must evolve to meet the needs of a globalized society (Li et al., 2020). From the perspective of a teacher's professional quality, to develop students' morality rather than just their knowledge of morality, greater emphasis is now placed on teachers' exceptional professional qualities in moral education in addition to their morality. According to Xue and Li (2021), moral education teachers need to have higher professional quality to cultivate students' value beliefs through educational activities. To ensure that the moral education teacher performs at the highest teaching level possible, diverse teaching approaches can be used to deliver religious and moral values to students (Zhang et al., 2022), and they can also revise the curriculum and alter the teaching approach (Liang, 2016).

In contrast to evidence suggesting that moral education teachers positively influence pupils' moral development, an alternative perspective illustrates that it can be challenging for teachers to contribute to moral education in China. In the Chinese context, teachers' teaching has been restricted by examination-oriented pedagogy, which focuses on helping students prepare for examinations (Liang, 2016). This phenomenon shows that Chinese society's needs are more focused on students' academic outcomes, compelling teachers to align with this trend. This barrier hinders teachers from updating creative teaching approaches to help students understand Chinese moral values. Additionally, to meet these societal needs, teachers often ignore the comprehensive quality, moral development, and key abilities of the new curriculum (Tang & Wang, 2021). This major barrier separates theory from practice and adheres to steady views of moral education that concentrate on ideal beliefs. These issues reflect that teachers' perspectives on moral education have not undergone substantial change (Tang & Wang, 2021), and teachers need to improve their teaching concepts in the modern era.

Furthermore, there is a general argument that moral education teachers have a positive influence on developing primary school students' morality. Several conditions support the quality of moral education teachers. Firstly, Chinese moral education teachers undergo a strict selection process to confirm their ideology and ensure they align with the government and the Communist Party of China (Li et al., 2004). This ensures that pupils receive the correct moral values from their teacher, helping students develop their morality and meet the needs of Chinese society in the future (Zhu & Liu, 2004). Secondly, moral education teachers play a vital role in the moral education curriculum (Zhang et al., 2022). From the perspective of the teaching process, a teacher's attitude and behavior serve as a guideline for primary school students, acting as a model. Obviously, teachers' work extends beyond the classroom to include collaboration with parents, adults, and the com-

munity, which is crucial (Zhang et al., 2022). Ultimately, despite some barriers to conducting creative and diverse teaching strategies, moral education teachers are effective agents in delivering culture and values and facilitating communication among those involved in developing primary school students' morality.

2.3. Textbooks Have Positive Impacts on Chinese Primary School Students' Morality

Textbooks of moral education play a crucial role in developing Chinese pupils' morality, as reflected in their direction and content. According to TSE and Zhang (2017), the textbook has a key role in transmitting cultural values that establish standards of knowledge and cultural norms. Therefore, it might be considered a useful strategy for enhancing pupils' formation of morality and character. Specifically, moral education textbooks in China have a single guideline that highlights the goal of creating modern civic consciousness (Li et al., 2004; Tang & Wang, 2021). This is an important measure to ensure a reasonable connection between different grade levels, keeping the general target of Chinese moral education in mind. From a content perspective, the moral education textbook has a well-organized structure (Lu & Gao, 2004). This structure provides clear and logical content, helping teachers arrange the teaching sequence and aiding students in understanding the connections between each moral concept. It is also usually based on educational experiments (Li et al., 2004), helping students better realize moral values through specific events.

However, another angle on this debate suggests that moral education textbooks have some negative impacts on improving primary school students' morality, particularly from a content perspective. According to TSE and Zhang (2017), the textbooks lack humanistic and practical dimensions of moral education. The core message of the textbook still centers on ideal beliefs, which can be a barrier for students to practice moral values in real life. Another issue is that the content of textbooks cannot suit all grades of primary school students. For example, moral education textbooks at the higher levels of primary school lack sufficient text reading and rely too much on picture reading (TSE & Zhang, 2017). As pupils grow and their mental state develops, cartoons can help low-level students understand moral values and maintain their interest. However, high-level students need to change their thinking modes to suit a more mature environment, indicating a gap between low and high levels in Chinese primary schools. Moreover, Chinese moral education textbooks are characterized by politicization (Tang, 2022). They have a definite direction and focus too much on social demands, which may restrict teachers' and students' capacity to think creatively about moral education.

Furthermore, the evidence presented shows that textbooks on moral education have a significant impact on students' moral development. Initially, a moral education textbook can be seen as an important resource for teaching and learning (TSE & Zhang, 2017). According to Ye (2022), textbooks and teachers are important to consider together. Teachers can use the curriculum materials to improve their teaching quality. Textbooks provide evidence for teachers to change their pedagogy to suit the new curriculum standard. The content of textbooks has also started to take a new direction, becoming more life-oriented (Tang, 2022). Indeed, textbooks are designed to be more significant and relevant to the real-world experiences of children today (TSE & Zhang, 2017), addressing the problem that Chinese textbooks are far from students' real lives. In summary, the positive effects of moral education textbooks on students' moral development exceed the negative ones. They provide a standard of Chinese morality and culture and concentrate on the development of civic duty, which is highly beneficial in Chinese society. Moreover, whether studying or teaching Chinese moral education, we cannot break away from the textbook.

3. Recommendation

To improve Chinese primary school students' morality, this study analyzes the effects of the moral education system, the moral education teacher, and the moral education

textbook on the moral development of Chinese primary school students. These three components of moral education undoubtedly help pupils grow their morality, but they also have some problems that need to be fixed. I believe that policymakers, educators, and teachers should be involved in enhancing Chinese moral education based on current studies. From the official department perspective, the county government, educational administrative department, and school constitute one vertical system. There are two suggestions for developing moral education. First, it should build a specific evaluation system for moral education implementation (Zhou & Gao, 2023). In the formulation of moral education, not only can the government and education departments participate in the formulation of this evaluation system, but more significantly, basic educational institutions like schools can as well. This can help to promote the evaluation's practicality and better reflect the issues with moral teaching. Then, the official department focuses on ideal beliefs and political things and ignores individual needs. (Huo et al., 2022; Zhou & Gao, 2023) Because of this, they should pay more attention to practical and individual levels. Based on the standpoint of a moral education teacher and textbook, it can be seen as a complementary relationship in moral education. The teaching resources of moral education are not only textbooks. According to Liang (2016), teachers can use social work practice to improve students' morality. Moral education teachers in primary school should explore more creative approaches to fulfilling individual needs, which can help them in the future. Additionally, we can encourage teachers to reflect on the textbooks' questions promptly. It can help textbooks suit modern primary school students. Not only teachers' reflections are enough to reform textbooks, but the educators who wrote the moral education textbook also need to keep a life-oriented direction, strengthen the humanistic perspective of the content, and try to improve the free space of the textbook so that teachers and students can think about it (TSE & Zhang, 2017; Tang, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to determine what impact moral education has on Chinese primary school students' morality. The studies reveal that moral education has positive impacts on Chinese primary school students' morality. In this article, I have three sub-points, which can be divided into macroscopic and microscopic levels. From a macroscopic level, I focused on how the mechanisms play a positive role in students' moral development and emphasized that the government and education departments should have strong governance to ensure the effectiveness of moral education implementation. From a microscopic level, I focus on moral education teachers and textbooks. From a teacher's perspective, I demonstrated that a good teacher's morality is a model for students to learn from in real life, and professional quality can improve students' learning effectiveness. The textbook aspect focuses on the textbook content and direction. I found that a textbook is a good tool for teaching and learning because it can deliver moral values clearly and directly. It can improve the effect of moral education in Chinese primary schools. This study also discovered the negative impacts of each part, which can help readers know where we need to improve in Chinese moral education. The article can encourage the public to focus on the development of pupils' morality. However, what I lack in my article is that it does not mention the vertical moral mechanism's impact and ignores the impact of moral education teachers' training on improving students' morality.

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