

The current situation and practical path of cultivating high school students' legal literacy in the new era

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ABSTRACT

The cultivation of legal literacy among high school students is a foundational project for the comprehensive rule of law in China, crucial to the future construction of the country's legal system. From a practical perspective, it has been found that there are issues such as weak awareness, missing content, and scarce practical opportunities in the current legal literacy education for high school students. These problems can be attributed to the limitations of educational guidance and insufficient collaborative efforts in nurturing talent. Under the overarching theme of "governing the country according to law," there is an urgent need to improve the legal curriculum system, establish a multi-party collaborative education mechanism, and innovate immersive educational models. These initiatives will help internalize and externalize legal literacy, enhance high school students' legal thinking and action capabilities, and lay a solid foundation for the construction of a law-based society.

KEYWORDS

new era; high school students; legal literacy; current problems; practical path

1 Introduction

The rule of law is an essential component of the core socialist values. The "Outline for Legal Education of Young People" sets out the goals for legal education in high school: "to enable students to gain a relatively comprehensive understanding of the basic framework, systems, and legal knowledge of China's socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics; to strengthen their awareness of abiding by the law, enhance their rule of law consciousness, firmly establish the concept that rights come with obligations, and initially develop the ability to participate in legal practices and correctly protect their rights." However, the cultivation of legal literacy among current high school students still faces numerous challenges, such as the monotonous methods of imparting legal knowledge and weak practical components, which make it difficult for students to convert theoretical knowledge into practical application skills. Therefore, there is an urgent need to optimize the curriculum system, establish a collaborative education mechanism, and introduce diversified teaching methods such as case analysis and mock trials to lay a solid foundation for achieving the goals of legal education for high school students.

2 The current situation and problems of cultivating legal literacy of high school students in the new era

2.1 The legal consciousness and the concept of rule of law are weak

"Make abiding by the law a shared pursuit and spontaneous action of all people." In the comprehensive promotion of building a rule-of-law society, significant results have been achieved. "Respect for the law" is the fundamental prerequisite for learning, observing, and applying it. Students should first develop an awareness of respecting the law, which means understanding what the rule of law is, actively studying the law, complying with it, and using it effectively. However, in terms of legal awareness, many high school students' understanding of legal knowledge remains superficial, lacking deep comprehension and practical application skills. For example, some students only have a basic understanding of fundamental laws such as the "Protection of Minors Law of the People's Republic of China," but they are very vague about the deeper logic of legal procedures and rights and obligations. For instance, when dealing with liability for infringement, many students cannot accurately determine the elements of an infringement, and they lack a clear understanding of how to resolve issues through legitimate legal channels; at the level of legal consciousness, some high school students even feel a sense of distance from the law, thinking that it is something unrelated to them, making it difficult to connect legal knowledge with real-life situations. This situation often leaves high school students unsure of how to use their legal knowledge to protect their rights when faced with actual problems.

2.2 The legal education system and content are insufficient

Legal education is a crucial pathway for cultivating high school students' legal literacy.^[1] There are evident

shortcomings in the legal education system and content, primarily reflected in the lack of systematic course arrangements, targeted approaches, and practicality. From the perspective of curriculum design, legal education occupies a small proportion in the high school curriculum system, with legal knowledge often presented in fragmented "knowledge points," lacking systematicness and practicality, making it difficult for students to deeply understand the essence and application of law. Meanwhile, the new curriculum standards explicitly outline the need to guide courses in diverse ways, fostering independent, collaborative, and research-based learning. Currently, legal education suffers from monotonous teaching methods, with interactive and participatory approaches like case studies and mock trials being relatively scarce. These methods fail to stimulate students' interest in learning and their proactive participation, thereby affecting the effectiveness of legal education. In terms of teaching content, the updating of legal knowledge is out of sync with the rapid development of real society, making it difficult for students to access up-to-date legal cases and issues, which limits the improvement of legal literacy. Therefore, universities need to reform the legal education system, strengthen the systematicness, relevance, and practicality of legal education content, enhance students' ability to apply legal knowledge to solve problems, and cultivate them into new-era citizens with a strong sense of law and rule of law.

2.3 The ability to apply the law and protect rights is weak

"When the awareness of rights fails to translate into concrete actions for rights protection, and when legal knowledge does not internalize as a mindset for problem-solving, legal education remains superficial." In terms of rights protection, when faced with school bullying or social disputes, students often fail to use legal tools correctly to defend their own interests, generally showing a lag in their ability to apply the law. They frequently choose to yield and hope that things will resolve themselves, or resort to violence instead of seeking legal solutions, which clearly reveals their lack of faith in the law and weak skills in applying it and protecting their rights. The weakness in applying the law and protecting rights essentially reflects a disconnect between knowledge and action among students. This leads them to be passive or inadvertently violate the law when their rights are infringed upon. For example, some students mistakenly believe that "as long as they don't commit murder or arson, it's not a crime," while being completely unaware of specific provisions in the Public Security Administration Punishment Law regarding hooliganism and intentional injury. Another example is that when asked why they should not seek legal solutions, many students think "litigation is too troublesome" or fear "being protected." The lack of legal knowledge and awareness makes them lack confidence and courage when facing legal issues, further exacerbating their deficiencies in applying the law and protecting their rights. This situation not only affects the protection of individual students' rights but also has a negative impact on the progress of the rule of law in society.

3 Causes of legal literacy among high school students in the new era

3.1 The limitations of educational orientation

Under the influence of traditional examination-oriented education, high school education places greater emphasis on knowledge acquisition, with improving test scores as the primary goal and the college entrance examination as the ultimate objective. The limitations of this educational orientation restrict students' all-around development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor aspects. Legal education, a crucial component for promoting comprehensive student development, is often marginalized. Legal education occupies a small portion of the high school curriculum and lacks sufficient focus, especially in areas such as curriculum design, teacher allocation, and resource investment. Enhancing legal literacy among high school students requires a comprehensive and multi-level educational system. Legal education should be integrated into daily teaching, not confined to specific classes. However, schools lack clear goals and plans for cultivating students' legal literacy, leading to superficial education that fails to truly resonate with them.^[2]

3.2 The mechanism of collaborative education is missing

The cultivation of legal literacy among high school students is a systematic project. In its implementation, schools, as the main battleground, bear crucial responsibilities. However, many schools have yet to establish effective collaborative education mechanisms, and the joint efforts of families, society, and educational institutions remain insufficient. At home, parents lack legal knowledge and do not place enough emphasis on their children's legal education, failing to provide positive guidance in daily life. On the societal front, the concept of "governing the country according to law" has not been fully internalized, leading to underutilization of social educational resources. Particularly, legal education activities struggle to effectively connect with school education, leaving high school students lacking comprehensive social support for improving their legal literacy. Meanwhile, there is a lack of effective communication and coordination among schools, families, and society. This lack of teamwork in education leads to problems and gaps in how high school students learn

about the law, which makes it harder for them to develop legal knowledge effectively.

3.3 The form of legal education is monolithic

We should conduct legal education from multiple perspectives and through various channels. However, the forms of legal education that high school students currently encounter are generally monotonous, mostly confined to classroom lectures and theoretical studies, neglecting students' needs for practical experience and emotional engagement. The dissemination of legal knowledge often takes place through moral education courses, where teachers focus more on explaining legal statutes, lacking interactive and experiential methods such as case analysis, mock trials, and legal knowledge competitions. This type of instruction makes it difficult for students to closely integrate abstract legal knowledge with real life, thereby reducing their interest and effectiveness in learning. More importantly, this monotonous teaching approach fails to stimulate students' proactive exploration and deep thinking, affecting their profound understanding and internalization of the spirit of law. Additionally, extracurricular activities for cultivating legal literacy are limited, mostly taking the form of lectures and seminars, with low student participation and enthusiasm. A single form of legal education cannot truly achieve the goal of fostering legal literacy or develop students' ability to apply legal knowledge to solve practical problems.

4 Practice path of cultivating high school students' legal literacy in the new era

4.1 We will improve the legal education curriculum system

High school legal education should transform traditional teaching models and no longer focus on "peripheral" knowledge but should be like subjects with breakthroughs in knowledge, such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Schools should incorporate legal education into the core curriculum of high school, reasonably increasing the proportion of legal education courses. Following a tiered training model, different course contents should be set according to the three stages of high school. For example, Grade 10 should offer foundational courses on "Legal Knowledge in Daily Life"; Grade 11 should offer courses on "Observation of Social Law," focusing on issues like school bullying; Grade 12 should offer courses on "Law and Public Life," combining practical situations to continuously improve students' legal literacy. At the same time, legal education should be integrated into the teaching of all subjects, emphasizing case studies and mock trials. In the implementation of these courses, problem-solving-centered curricula should guide students through discussions, research, and analysis to deepen their understanding of legal principles and spirit. Through diversified course settings, legal education can be closely linked with students' daily lives, achieving both internalization and externalization of legal knowledge. Additionally, schools should actively organize and encourage students to participate in relevant legal activities, such as volunteer services and debate competitions, allowing them to learn and experience the law through practice and gradually establish a sense of rule of law.^[3]

Integrating legal education into subject courses is the first step in schools' efforts to reform and cultivate students' legal literacy. Secondly, it is necessary to establish a new legal education curriculum system, such as developing school-based courses to achieve "precision irrigation." Based on the region where the school is located and in combination with local laws and regulations, compile case-based textbooks that closely relate to students' lives, ensuring that the teaching content is both practical and targeted. At the same time, invite legal experts to give regular lectures to enhance the authority and appeal of the courses, allowing students to experience the power of law in real-life situations and gradually develop a legal mindset and problem-solving skills.

4.2 We will build a multi-party collaborative education mechanism

Establish a collaborative education mechanism involving families, schools, and society to form a united force in legal education. At the school level, communication and cooperation with parents should be strengthened through parent-teacher meetings, home visits, and parent learning programs. These efforts aim to disseminate legal knowledge to parents, enhance their awareness of the rule of law, reinforce parents' responsibility for educating their children about legal matters, and ensure that parents can provide proper legal guidance to their children in daily life. Additionally, actively establish partnerships with social institutions such as judicial authorities and law firms, inviting professional legal experts to campus to conduct "Legal Education on Campus" activities. Furthermore, schools should regularly assess the effectiveness of legal education, promptly adjust teaching strategies, and ensure educational quality. At the family level, parents should transform from "education bystanders" into "partners in legal education," actively engaging with their children to discuss legal issues and fostering a family atmosphere of the rule of law. Parents should proactively learn legal knowledge, such as through online platforms like the "Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China," and participate in "Family Legal Councils" to delve into legal studies relevant to their children. At the societal level, social

organizations should leverage their resource advantages to provide diverse legal education resources and platforms, such as community legal lectures and mock trial competitions, enriching students' legal experiences and forming a comprehensive network of legal education.

Under the multi-party collaborative education mechanism, schools, families, and society work closely together to build a three-dimensional legal education network, fostering a strong legal atmosphere that supports students' comprehensive growth. In this all-encompassing, multi-level educational model, students not only acquire legal knowledge in class but also gain practical experience and reinforcement at home and in society, thereby truly internalizing and externalizing the spirit of the rule of law.

4.3 Innovate the model of legal education

Actively innovating the model of legal education requires starting with students' interests, creating immersive learning environments such as case analysis, mock trials, and role-playing, and allowing students to experience the seriousness and fairness of the law firsthand. In case analysis, it is essential to make "problems reflect life," selecting cases closely related to students' lives to guide them in analyzing and discussing, fostering critical thinking. For example, when explaining the criminal responsibility of minors under the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, a case like "a 16-year-old student causing minor injuries by helping a friend fight" can be introduced. Such an instance creates situational teaching, where students are organized and guided to play roles as police officers, prosecutors, and lawyers, discussing whether it constitutes the crime of provoking trouble. Students are required to propose defense and prosecution opinions from different perspectives, deepening their understanding of legal provisions through debate and enhancing their legal awareness. In mock trials, the goal is to achieve "realism," having students wear judicial robes and simulate real courtroom procedures, from indictment to defense, personally participating in every step, deeply understanding the importance of legal procedures and evidence. Through role-playing, students not only master legal knowledge but also develop empathy and a sense of responsibility, truly appreciating the significance of law to individuals and society. Through this immersive learning, students closely integrate legal provisions with real life, strengthening their legal awareness.

With the support of information technology, schools should proactively leverage technological power to empower interactive scenarios, breaking through the spatial limitations of traditional education and helping students better understand and apply legal knowledge. For example, using VR and AR technologies to create virtual courtroom settings, allowing students to experience the trial process firsthand, and developing interactive legal knowledge games to deepen their understanding of legal statutes through gamified learning. At the same time, establishing online legal consultation platforms to provide real-time legal answers, helping students resolve legal puzzles in their daily lives, further solidifies the effectiveness of legal education. The deep integration of technology and education allows legal education to transcend traditional classrooms and permeate every aspect of life. In an environment where virtual and real worlds intertwine, students subtly enhance their legal literacy, forming beneficial habits of abiding by the law voluntarily, seeking legal advice when encountering issues, and solving problems through legal means, laying a solid foundation for building a harmonious society.

5 Conclusions

"The path of legal education, though arduous and long, will surely bear fruit with perseverance." In the context of the new era, cultivating legal literacy among high school students is a long-term and specific task that holds significant importance for national legal system construction and social harmony and stability. To address the issues of fostering legal literacy among high school students today, it is essential to actively analyze the causes and take comprehensive measures, such as improving the curriculum system, establishing a multi-party collaborative education mechanism, and innovating immersive legal education models. By combining these strategies, we can work together to create effective ways to truly improve students' understanding of the law, their knowledge of legal principles, and their ability to apply legal skills, which will help build a strong base of talent for a society that follows the law.

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