

Current Status and Contributing Factors of Moral Education Models in Middle Schools in the Context of the Internet

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Abstract Based on data regarding minors' internet use, this study systematically analyzes the major problems and their contributing factors in current moral education models in middle schools. The findings reveal that, although moral education has shown changes such as the integration of online and offline approaches and the expansion of content toward digital literacy, several issues persist, including the formalization of online moral education, the disconnection of content from students' real-life experiences, uneven teacher competence, weak home-school-community collaboration, and an over-reliance on quantitative evaluation. The contributing factors involve the increasing complexity of the online environment, the physical and psychological characteristics of adolescent students, and the lagging renewal of school concepts. The key to the transformation of moral education in middle schools in the internet context lies in reconstructing educational philosophy, improving the content system, enhancing teacher competence, strengthening collaborative mechanisms, and refining evaluation methods, so as to guide students toward developing a civilized, rational, and responsible digital lifestyle.

Key words Moral education, Moral education in middle schools, Internet, Digital literacy, Moral education models, Home-school-community collaboration

0 Introduction

Moral education is not only an essential component of school education but also a fundamental link in implementing the overarching task of cultivating virtue and nurturing people. The middle school stage is a critical period in which individuals gradually form their worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. During this stage, students have strong desires for knowledge, self-expression, and peer recognition, yet their social experience, self-control, and value-judgment abilities are still developing. Therefore, moral education in middle schools should not remain at the level of disciplinary constraints and behavioral management; rather, it should guide students to develop a sense of rules, a sense of responsibility, and the capacity for value discernment in their real-life contexts.

The prevalence of the internet has brought about structural changes to the growth environment of middle school students. Online platforms, short videos, social media, online games, learning software, and artificial intelligence tools have become deeply embedded in students' daily lives. While students gain more convenient access to information and greater opportunities for self-expression, they are also more susceptible to multiple influences, including fragmented information, entertainment-oriented content, algorithmic recommendations, online public opinion, and peer groups. Research on internet-related risks among minors indicates that issues such as internet addiction, exposure to inappropriate

information, cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and value deviations have become significant risks that cannot be overlooked in adolescent development.

From the perspective of school practice, the internet has not only provided new resources for moral education but also exposed the limitations of traditional models. Many schools have utilized official accounts, online thematic class meetings, internet-based questionnaires, moral education micro-lectures, and parent-school communication platforms to enhance the efficiency of information dissemination. However, if they merely transplant traditional didactic approaches to the online environment by requiring students to watch videos, forward articles, and complete check-in tasks, they are prone to falling into the superficial predicament of "activities without genuine engagement." Therefore, based on existing research and survey data, this paper conducts a systematic analysis of the practical foundations, major problems, contributing factors, and optimization pathways of moral education models in middle schools within the internet context.

1 Practical foundations

1.1 The internet has become a fundamental environment for middle school students' development Relevant surveys indicate that in 2023, the number of underage internet users in China reached 196 million, with an internet penetration rate of 97.3%; in 2022, the number was 193 million, with a penetration rate of 97.2%. In terms of terminal devices, the proportion of underage netizens using mobile phones to access the internet in 2022 reached 91.3%, indicating that internet use is characterized by portability, daily routine, and concealment. For moral education in middle schools, cyberspace is no longer merely an external supplement to students' lives, but rather an important arena for learn-

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ing, socializing, entertainment, and value formation.

1.2 The networked turn of value formation pathways for middle school students Internet use has first altered students' pathways of value formation. In the past, students' understanding of social and moral issues came primarily from classroom instruction, textbooks, teachers, and families; today, video platforms, comment sections, social group chats, and platform recommendations collectively shape their cognitive entry points. In 2022, 55.9% of underage netizens accessed news events via video platforms, indicating that students' understanding of public issues is increasingly influenced by online narratives and emotionally charged commentaries. Without adequate media literacy, students are prone to be swayed by one-sided viewpoints, traffic-driven logics, and group emotions.

1.3 The transformation of moral education carriers from offline to online-offline integration The traditional moral education in middle schools mainly relied on ideological and political courses, class meeting sessions, flag-raising ceremonies, thematic education, and school rule management. After the popularization of the internet, campus websites, WeChat official accounts, class group chats, learning platforms, and online questionnaires have gradually become tools for moral education. This change has improved the efficiency of information transmission and home-school communication, and also provided space for students to express opinions and participate in discussions. However, in some schools, online moral education still remains at the level of notification release, activity display, and task check-in; the increase in carriers does not necessarily mean an update in methods.

1.4 The expansion of moral education content from behavioral norms to digital literacy Students are not only required to abide by real-world campus rules, but also need to learn civilized expression, identify false information, protect personal privacy, resist online violence, use artificial intelligence tools appropriately, and bear the consequences of their digital behavior. In 2024, the proportion of adolescents who had used artificial intelligence products was 45.1%, indicating that school moral education must respond to emerging issues such as AI-assisted homework plagiarism, information distortion, technological dependence, and academic integrity. Research on the digital transformation of education also points out that technological applications must serve human development, rather than allowing platform logic to replace educational logic.

1.5 The shift of moral education subjects from single-school dominance to multi-stakeholder collaboration A large proportion of students' online activities take place within families and on off-campus platforms, making it difficult for schools to accomplish the entire educational process alone. Family communication styles, rule-setting, and role-modeling significantly influence adolescents' online behaviors, while social institutions, communities, public security and judicial departments, and online platforms should also assume responsibilities in cy-

bersecurity, rule-of-law education, and content governance. In reality, however, home-school-community collaboration remains insufficiently stable; schools provide more reminders than guidance, social resources participate mostly in episodic activities, and a sustained and effective feedback mechanism has not yet been established.

2 Major issues

2.1 The formalization of online moral education and the superficiality of educational effects A prominent issue in middle school moral education in the internet context is, first of all, the formalization of online moral education. Many schools have already launched online thematic activities, but common practices still revolve around forwarding notifications, watching videos, taking screenshots for check-in, submitting reflections, and displaying promotional materials. Students are heavily involved in the process, yet there is little value-based discernment. Such activities may appear diverse on the surface, but in essence they are merely a simple online transfer of traditional task-based moral education, making it difficult to genuinely touch the depths of students' thinking. If moral education evaluation focuses only on whether tasks are "completed," rather than on whether students "understand, identify with, and translate [the content] into action," the educational effectiveness of online moral education will be further undermined.

2.2 The disconnection of moral education content from students' real online life The problems that middle school students face online are often specific and complex, such as addiction to short videos, gaming expenditure, group chat conflicts, online verbal violence, privacy breaches, online rumors, the influence of internet pop culture, and improper use of artificial intelligence tools. However, moral education in some schools still relies mainly on advisory statements such as "Don't use phones," "Don't get addicted to the internet," and "Don't leak your privacy," lacking systematic discussion and guidance on deeper issues such as why students become addicted, how to discern information, how to handle online relationships, and how to define the boundaries of technology use.

2.3 The uneven competence of teachers in online moral education In the internet context, teachers need not only classroom management skills, but also the ability to understand online culture, identify cyber risks, organize case-based discussions, conduct online communication, and guide reflection on digital ethics. Some teachers are able to design moral education activities by integrating current online trends, while others lack sufficient understanding of the platforms, internet slang, and popular topics that students engage with, and tend to simply attribute online issues to students' poor self-control or "disobedience," resorting to one-dimensional measures such as confiscating mobile phones or delivering reprimands.

2.4 The loose and unstable home-school-community collaboration mechanism Students receive moral education at school, but a large amount of their internet use occurs within families and on social platforms. Some parents lack scientific methods of online education, either simply prohibiting or completely leaving their children unguided. Communication between schools and families often remains at the level of notifications and reminders, lacking targeted guidance on family education. Although social organizations, communities, and platforms may hold lectures or publicity campaigns, these activities are seldom followed up after they end, making it difficult to form a long-term, concerted educational effort.

3 Contributing factors

The formation of the above problems is related not only to the complexity of the internet environment, but also closely to the physical and psychological development characteristics of middle school students and the internal mechanisms of schools. The internet is characterized by openness, anonymity, interactivity, and immediacy. Short videos, games, and social media platforms satisfy students' needs for entertainment, escape from pressure, and gaining recognition through instant feedback; algorithmic recommendations may further reinforce students' interest preferences, gradually trapping them in specific information environments. Middle school students are in adolescence, yearning for independence and self-expression, yet lacking mature judgment and self-management abilities, thus they are more susceptible to the negative influences of the internet.

4 Optimization paths

4.1 Updating educational philosophy and incorporating cyberspace into the moral education field Schools should not simply regard the internet as a factor that interferes with learning, nor should they treat online platforms merely as tools for issuing notifications. Instead, they should incorporate cyberspace into the field of student development. Moral education should pay equal attention to both real life and online life, guiding students to abide by rules, respect others, express themselves rationally, and take responsibility in both spheres. The goal of moral education is not only to help students make fewer mistakes, but also to help them develop autonomous judgment and self-regulation abilities.

4.2 Improving the content system of digital literacy education Schools can design a series of courses covering internet civility, information discernment, cybersecurity, privacy protection, awareness of internet law, artificial intelligence ethics, and digital learning integrity, and integrate them into ideological and political courses, class meetings, information technology classes, and comprehensive practical activities. The educational content should be as close as possible to students' real lives, for example, by using cases such as short-video addiction, online group chat conflicts,

AI-assisted homework plagiarism, and the spread of online rumors, to guide students in analyzing behavioral consequences, discerning value conflicts, and thereby forming clear rules of action.

4.3 Enhancing teachers' competence in online moral education Schools should, through specialized training, case seminars, homeroom teacher workshops, and resource database construction, help teachers understand students' internet culture and master methods such as internet risk identification, internet case discussion, online communication, and psychological support. When facing students' internet-related problems, teachers should avoid simple suppression, but rather make comprehensive judgments by integrating academic stress, peer relationships, family communication, and psychological needs, and help students improve their self-management abilities through supportive guidance.

4.4 Building a stable home-school-community collaborative education mechanism Schools should, through parent schools, online lectures, family education guidance manuals, and case-based communication, help parents acquire scientific methods of internet education, avoiding either simply confiscating mobile phones or leaving children completely unguided. Communities, public security and judicial departments, social organizations, and online platforms should also participate in cybersecurity education, rule-of-law education, psychological support, and content governance, forming a multi-dimensional education framework featuring school guidance, family companionship, social support, and platform responsibility.

4.5 Improving moral education evaluation methods with emphasis on process and development Moral education evaluation in middle schools should shift from a single quantitative approach to a process-oriented, development-oriented, and comprehensive one, paying attention not only to students' real-campus behavior but also to their performance in internet civility. It should record not only activity participation but also value understanding, behavioral reflection, and habit formation. For online moral education, the focus of evaluation should not be on how many check-in tasks students have completed, but on whether they have improved their ability to discern information, manage time, take internet responsibility, and exercise self-regulation. Schools may also establish evaluation methods that combine student self-assessment, peer evaluation, teacher observation, and parent feedback, so that evaluation results truly serve educational improvement rather than being simply used for ranking or point deduction.

5 Conclusions

In the context of the internet, middle school moral education models are shifting from offline classrooms and campus activities to online-offline integrated platforms, from traditional behavioral norm education to education on digital literacy, media literacy, digital ethics, and artificial intelligence responsibility, and from single-school dominance to home-school-community collaboration.

Statistical data show that the internet penetration rate among minors has remained at a high level, and mobile phones, short videos, online games, video news, and artificial intelligence products are profoundly influencing middle school students' learning lives and value formation processes.

However, from the current practical perspective, moral education in middle schools still faces problems such as the formalization of online moral education, the disconnection of content from students' real internet lives, the uneven competence of teachers in online moral education, the instability of home-school-community collaboration mechanisms, and an over-reliance on quantitative evaluation. The formation of these problems is related not only to the complexity of the internet environment and the physical and psychological developmental characteristics of middle school students, but also to the insufficient updating of school moral education philosophies, inadequate teacher training and support, insufficient play of the role of family education, and the lagging of evaluation guarantee mechanisms.

Therefore, the transformation of middle school moral education in the context of the internet should not remain at the level of technological application, but should instead promote an overall restructuring of philosophies, content, methods, subjects, and evaluation systems. Only by incorporating cyberspace into the field of education, integrating digital literacy into moral education content, embedding interactive experiences into moral education methods, involving families and society in the educational community, and including online behavior in moral education evaluation, can we help middle school students develop correct value judgments, good behavioral habits, and responsible digital citizenship

awareness in the complex internet environment.

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rative governance. In the future, the practical effects of different models should also be examined through questionnaires, interviews, action research, and intervention experiments, so that moral education in middle schools can become more targeted, sustained, and effective.

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