

Exploration of New Models of Moral Education in Middle Schools in the Context of the Internet

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Abstract Based on data on internet usage by minors, this paper analyzes the environmental changes and practical foundations faced by moral education in middle schools, and constructs a new five-in-one model of secondary school moral education consisting of "value guidance, digital empowerment, life practice, collaborative co-education, and development evaluation." The model takes cultivating virtue and nurturing talents as its fundamental principle, with a focus on internet literacy and digital responsibility. Through pathways such as building an internet literacy curriculum system, constructing integrated online-offline platforms, carrying out project-based practical activities, strengthening the teacher-student dual-subject relationship, and establishing a home-school-community collaborative governance mechanism, the model incorporates cyberspace as a significant field for students' moral growth. It is also supported by operational mechanisms and safeguard measures, aiming to promote moral education from external discipline to internal identification, thus providing a reference for moral education practices in middle schools in the internet era.

Key words Internet, Middle school moral education, New model, Internet literacy, Digital moral education, Home-school-community collaboration

0 Introduction

Moral education is a crucial component in implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talents in middle school education. The middle school stage is a critical period during which students experience rapid physical and mental development, gradual formation of values, and increasing self-awareness; their moral cognition, affective attitudes, and behavioral habits are highly malleable. Traditional moral education in middle schools mainly relies on classroom teaching, thematic class meetings, campus activities, class management, and school rules and regulations, playing a significant role in cultivating students' behavioral norms, collective consciousness, and ideals and beliefs. However, after the internet has become deeply embedded in students' lives, the spatial scope, target subjects, content, and methods of moral education all face a fundamental reorientation.

The internet is not merely an information tool; it is also a vital space for students to acquire knowledge, express emotions, build relationships, and form value judgments. Short videos, online games, social media platforms, learning applications, and artificial intelligence products influence students' attention allocation, interaction styles, and moral judgment in various ways. The openness, anonymity, interactivity, and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms of cyberspace expose students to rich resources while simultaneously confronting them with risks such as information cocoons, internet addiction, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy leakage, and utilitarian values. Therefore, moral educa-

tion in middle schools must shift from merely managing the real campus environment toward integrated online-offline education.

The so-called new model of moral education in middle schools does not simply mean adding online platforms, virtual class meetings, or moral education public accounts. Instead, it revolves around students' real online lives to restructure the objectives, content system, implementation pathways, collaborative mechanisms, and evaluation methods of moral education. Based on existing research on online moral education, internet literacy, the digital transformation of education, and adolescent cyber risks, and combined with data on minors' internet usage, this paper proposes a new five-in-one model of "value guidance, digital empowerment, life practice, collaborative co-education, and developmental evaluation," with the aim of providing a reference for moral education practices in middle schools in the internet era.

1 Practical basis and model framework

1.1 Practical basis The continuous expansion of internet usage among minors constitutes the direct basis for the necessary transformation of moral education in middle schools. Relevant surveys show that in 2023, the number of minor internet users in China reached 196 million, with an internet penetration rate of 97.3%; in 2022, the figure was 193 million, with a penetration rate of 97.2%. These data indicate that the internet is no longer an external variable affecting the growth of middle school students, but rather an integral part of their living world. If moral education still focuses only on the classroom and the campus, it will be difficult to grasp the authentic process of students' ideological formation.

In terms of devices used, mobile phones remain the primary tool for minors to access the internet. In 2022, 91.3% of under-age internet users used mobile phones to go online, and their internet engagement exhibited characteristics of routinization, fragmentation, and concealment. While students are able to access in-

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formation, participate in interactions, and engage in entertainment at any time, they are also more likely to develop undesirable habits when lacking guidance. Therefore, moral education in middle schools needs to incorporate mobile phone usage rules, online time management, platform content discrimination, and digital self-discipline abilities into routine educational content.

Internet culture has also changed students' cognitive styles. Middle school students understand social events through bullet-screen comments, comment sections, social groups, and platform recommendations, and they also express emotions, gain recognition, and form value judgments in online interactions. Internet culture can both broaden horizons and stimulate creativity, but it may also lead to information superficiality, emotionalization of value judgment, and blurring of behavioral boundaries. Research on internet literacy points out that students should not only learn to acquire information, but also learn to evaluate information, participate rationally in online public life, and bear the consequences of their digital actions.

Based on the above changes, this paper proposes a new five-in-one model for moral education in middle schools. This model takes fostering virtue and nurturing talents as its goal, prioritizes internet literacy and digital responsibility, adopts online-offline integration as its pathway, uses students' real-life issues as contexts, relies on home-school-community collaboration as its support, and employs process-oriented evaluation as its safeguard. Its core is not to replace education with technology, but to use digital technology to expand educational resources, enrich educational contexts, strengthen process feedback, and ultimately serve the development of students' complete personality and awareness of digital responsibility.

1.2 Model framework This study constructs a "four-dimensional linkage" internet-based moral education model framework for middle schools, with the fundamental orientation of fostering virtue and nurturing talents, and with four main dimensions: online moral cognition, digital behavioral norms, online value identification, and moral practice development. The model, grounded in the open and interactive communication characteristics of the internet, transforms the traditional didactic moral education approach. It relies on online moral education platforms, new media channels, and digital educational resources, while integrating a collaborative mechanism that combines school leadership, family cooperation, and social empowerment. Through the combination of online regular value guidance, education on internet ethical norms, training in distinguishing harmful information, and offline practical implementation, it forms a closed-loop education model of "online immersion – two-way interaction – internalization and externalization – long-term consolidation," effectively enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of moral education in middle schools in the new era.

2 Implementation paths

2.1 Building a curriculum system of "internet literacy + moral judgment" Moral education in middle schools should

make internet literacy curriculum-based, thematic, and routine, designing modules around the following content: online rules and legal awareness, information discernment and rumor prevention, online communication and language civility, privacy protection and data security, short videos and online aesthetics, online gaming and time management, and artificial intelligence ethics and learning integrity. Each module should adopt a combined approach of case introduction, problem discussion, task practice, and reflective summary, so as to avoid empty and didactic preaching.

2.2 Building an integrated platform of online resources and offline activities Online platforms serve well for content delivery, case collection, survey administration, and ongoing feedback, whereas offline activities are more conducive to deep discussion, affective engagement, and hands-on practice. Schools may implement a closed-loop cycle that follows the sequence of "online pre-exposure → offline discussion → online reflection → sustained tracking." For instance, in a thematic program on internet civility, teachers can begin by posting cases and guiding questions on the online platform, then facilitate small-group discussions, role-plays, and value-clarification exercises during offline class sessions. Afterwards, students submit reflective journals, and teachers use the feedback to refine subsequent instructional interventions.

2.3 Creating moral education activities that are problem-oriented and project-based In the context of the internet, the problems students face are often contextual and comprehensive. Schools can carry out project-based practices around students' real confusions, such as "one-week mobile phone usage log," "value analysis of short-video content," "online rumor identification campaign," "building civil comment sections," and "AI-assisted learning integrity convention." In these projects, students collect data, analyze problems, propose solutions, and present their results, thus transforming from passive recipients into active participants, and enhancing their self-discipline, cooperation, and awareness of public participation.

2.4 Strengthening the dual-subject relationship of "teacher guidance + student agency" In the internet era, teachers are no longer the sole center of students' information sources; students may be more familiar with certain platforms, internet language, and hot topics than teachers. Teachers should transform from one-way managers into guides, companions, and value-dialogue partners, proactively understand students' internet culture, and avoid simply classifying all internet phenomena as negative issues. For online content that students like, teachers can guide them to analyze value expression, aesthetic taste, and behavioral impact; for online risks, they should help students understand the mechanisms of risk, rather than only imposing prohibitive requirements.

2.5 Establishing a collaborative governance mechanism involving families, schools, and communities The family constitutes the primary daily context for students' online activities. Parental communication, the establishment of clear rules, and attentive companionship are critically protective factors in promoting

healthy internet use among adolescents. Schools should therefore offer practical guidance to parents (for example, collaborating with them to set reasonable screen-time schedules, family rules for mobile phone use, structured parent-child communication protocols, and agreements on online consumption) rather than resorting to simply confiscating devices or adopting a laissez-faire approach. In addition, schools may partner with community organizations, public security and judicial authorities, mental health services, and internet platforms to forge a multi-stakeholder support network that encompasses legal education, safety awareness, psychological counseling, and content governance.

3 Operation mechanism and guarantee

3.1 Operation mechanism For the new model of moral education in middle schools to operate effectively, it requires the joint support of goals, content, methods, evaluation, and safeguard mechanisms. In terms of goal mechanisms, the focus should expand from mere behavioral norms to the cultivation of digital personality. The so-called digital personality refers to the value judgments, awareness of rules, sense of responsibility, interpersonal qualities, and self-management abilities that students display in cyberspace. Students should not only abide by rules in real life but also express themselves rationally, respect others, be honest and trustworthy, and protect privacy in cyberspace.

In terms of content mechanisms, moral education should move from a single thematic focus toward a comprehensive competency framework, integrating ideals and beliefs, moral character, legal awareness, mental health, media literacy, internet security, artificial intelligence ethics, labor practice, and social responsibility. In terms of methodological mechanisms, the approach should shift from indoctrination and control toward dialogue and experiential learning, guiding students to form judgments in real-world problems through case discussions, situational simulations, project-based inquiry, peer support, growth records, and reflective journals. Research on the digital transformation of education also reminds us that technology application must serve educational goals and human development, and that platform logic should not be allowed to replace educational logic.

In terms of evaluation mechanisms, the approach should shift from quantitative inspection toward growth portfolios. Digital technology can record students' growth processes, but it should not reduce students to scores, rankings, and labels. Schools can document students' development and changes in internet literacy, collective participation, self-management, sense of responsibility, and civil expression, comprehensively employing self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher observation, and parent feedback. The purpose of evaluation is not punishment or ranking, but to help students identify problems and achieve continuous improvement.

In specific implementation, developmental evaluation can be divided into five categories of indicators: value judgment, online behavior, self-management, digital responsibility, and collaborative participation. Value judgment focuses on whether students can

explain their reasoning for making online information judgments; online behavior focuses on civil expression and privacy protection; self-management focuses on the balance between online time and learning tasks; digital responsibility focuses on reasonable use of AI tools and academic integrity; and collaborative participation focuses on students' responsible performance in class co-governance, family communication, and social practice.

3.2 Guarantee In terms of guarantee, the first priority is to prevent the tendency of over-technologization. The internet provides tools and resources for moral education, but the core of moral education remains human growth, which requires teachers to have an in-depth understanding of students' emotions, circumstances, and developmental needs. Second, simple control should be prevented. When facing issues such as mobile phones, short videos, and games, prohibition is necessary under certain conditions, but without value explanation and capacity building, students may only comply superficially. Third, students' privacy and dignity should be protected. Digital evaluation should adhere to the principle of minimum necessity and the principle of educational purpose, avoiding excessive recording, public criticism, and labeling. Finally, teacher training should be improved to enhance teachers' understanding of internet culture, internet ethics, media literacy, psychological risks, and artificial intelligence ethics, so that the new model can be truly implemented.

4 Conclusions

In the context of the internet, the core issue facing moral education in middle schools is not whether students go online, but how to guide them in forming correct value judgments, good behavioral habits, and a healthy digital character in cyberspace. The internet penetration rate among minors remains persistently high, and mobile phones, short videos, online games, and artificial intelligence products profoundly influence the growth of middle school students. The traditional moral education model, which relies mainly on classroom preaching, disciplinary management, and offline activities, has become increasingly inadequate for students' current real-life realities.

In this study, we propose a new five-in-one model for moral education in middle schools, integrating value guidance, digital empowerment, life practice, collaborative co-education, and developmental evaluation. The model emphasizes fostering virtue and nurturing talents as its fundamental principle, prioritizes internet literacy and digital responsibility, uses authentic life problems as contexts, adopts online-offline integration as the pathway, relies on home-school-community collaboration as its support, and employs process-oriented evaluation as its safeguard. Its value lies in treating cyberspace as an important field for students' moral growth, incorporating internet literacy, AI ethics, media discernment, and digital responsibility into the content of middle school moral education, and promoting a shift from external discipline to internal identification through project-based practice and collabora-

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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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