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Exploration and Practice of the "Three-Three Teaching Research · Four-Link Guided Learning · Large and Small Classrooms" Three-in-One Teaching-Research Paradigm for Rule-of-Law Education: A Regional Teaching-Research Model in the Context of Integrating Ideological and Political Theory Courses across Primary and Secondary Schools

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Abstract: In response to practical problems in the integrated construction of ideological and political theory courses across primary and secondary schools—namely, insufficient articulation between school stages, a weak linkage between teaching research and teaching practice, and insufficient unity of knowledge and action—this study constructs a three-in-one teaching-research paradigm for rule-of-law education. Grounded in the Curriculum Standards for Ethics and the Rule of Law in Compulsory Education (2022 Edition), the paradigm takes the cultivation of the core competency of rule-of-law awareness as its main line and "law in daily life" as its theme anchor, following the educational logic of "knowledge, emotion, will, and action." It consists of three components: "Three-Three Teaching Research" (three pillars of support, three pathways, and three focal points) at the teaching-research end, "Four-Link Guided Learning" at the classroom end, and "Large and Small Classrooms" (the campus "small classroom" and the societal "large classroom") at the practice end, forming an integrated operating mechanism of goal orientation, three-in-one structure, and cyclical improvement. Practice has shown that the paradigm effectively promotes the continuous construction and stage-by-stage advancement of students' rule-of-law literacy, enhances teachers' cross-stage collaborative education capacity, and provides a replicable practical model for the integrated construction of ideological and political theory courses in regional primary and secondary schools.

Keywords: Integration of ideological and political theory courses; Rule-of-law education; Teaching-research paradigm; Consistency of teaching, learning, and assessment; Core competencies

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1. Problem statement

Cultivating virtue and nurturing people is the fundamental task of education, and ideological and political theory courses are the key courses for fulfilling this task. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Party and the state have attached great importance to the construction of ideological and political theory courses in schools. Documents such as the Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era and the Work Plan for Comprehensively Promoting the Construction of "Great Ideological and Political Courses"[1-2] have been successively issued, advancing the integrated construction of ideological and political theory courses across primary schools, secondary schools, and universities from conceptual advocacy toward mechanism-based operation. The report of the 20th National Congress of the CPC further explicitly proposed "advancing the integrated construction of ideological and political education across primary schools, secondary schools, and universities,"[3] marking the elevation of integrated construction from policy deployment to the Party's program of action. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee further emphasized improving the mechanism of cultivating virtue and nurturing people and advancing the reform and innovation of ideological and political theory courses, charting the course for ideological and political education in the new era.

However, at the practical level, the implementation of integrated construction still faces three major obstacles. First, insufficient articulation between school stages: the course content of different school stages is characterized by repetitive material at low cognitive levels and lacks clear progression, and students' competency development often amounts to the accumulation of scattered knowledge points, making it difficult to achieve continuous construction and stage-by-stage advancement. Second, insufficient linkage between teaching research and teaching practice: teaching-research activities often remain at the level of isolated, event-based undertakings, lacking an institutionalized routine operating mechanism; lesson preparation and lesson polishing are done "occasionally," hindering the sustained refinement of classroom instruction. Third, insufficient unity of knowledge and action: rule-of-law education remains confined within the classroom; students may "know the legal provisions" but are not necessarily able to "make value judgments and practice the requirements of rules," and there is a tension between the closed nature of the classroom and the openness of practice-based education. Existing research also shows that in the practice of integration, there remain such real problems as overlapping and repetitive teaching content, uneven teacher quality, and imperfect evaluation mechanisms [4]; moreover, most related studies focus on theoretical elaboration at the macro level, while micro-level research grounded in regional practice is relatively insufficient [5].

The crux of the above problems lies in the lack of a systematic education paradigm that connects teaching research, the classroom, and practice. Based on regional realities, this study attempts to construct and verify the three-in-one teaching-research paradigm for rule-of-law education consisting of "Three-Three Teaching Research, Four-Link Guided Learning, and Large and Small Classrooms," with a view to providing an operable regional solution for the integrated construction of ideological and political theory courses across primary and secondary schools.

2. Overall construction of the paradigm: Rationale and operating mechanism

2.1. Construction logic: One main line, one anchor point, and four-stage progression

The construction of this paradigm follows the logical main line of "goal orientation—structural support—cyclical improvement." At the goal level, it aligns with the Curriculum Standards for Ethics and the Rule

of Law in Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)[6], focusing on the five core competencies of political identity, moral cultivation, rule-of-law awareness, sound personality, and sense of responsibility, with rule-of-law awareness as the key focus of cultivation. At the content level, it takes "law in daily life" as the theme anchor, draws on the design philosophy of learning progressions of "centering on core concepts and following coherent learning pathways" [7], and achieves spiral advancement across school stages around the same theme. At the process level, it follows the education logic of "knowledge, emotion, will, and action"—which is highly consistent with the generative mechanism of the core competency of rule-of-law awareness, namely "cognitive foundation, emotional connection, volitional drive, and behavioral externalization" [8]—so that competency cultivation moves from cognition toward practice.

On this basis, the paradigm forms a three-in-one structure: at the teaching-research end, "Three-Three Teaching Research" weaves a network, answering the questions of "who researches, what to research, and how to research"; at the classroom end, "Four-Link Guided Learning" closes the loop, answering the questions of "how goals are implemented and how learning occurs"; and at the practice end, "Large and Small Classrooms" connect the whole, answering the questions of "how knowledge is transformed into action and how action feeds back into belief." The three are not merely parallel or juxtaposed components, but three links on the same educational chain, ultimately converging into the overarching goal of "cultivating virtue and nurturing people—the core competency of rule-of-law awareness," and operating cyclically, with "goal orientation, three-in-one structure, and cyclical improvement" serving as the institutional guarantee.

2.2. The teaching-research end: Weaving an integrated network with "three-three teaching research"

"Three-Three Teaching Research" refers to three pillars of support, three major pathways, and three focal points. The three pillars of support are teaching researchers, master-teacher studios, and ideological and political theory course teaching-research groups: teaching researchers set the direction, master-teacher studios serve as the backbone, and school teaching-research groups ensure routine implementation, forming a tiered structure for regional teaching research. In response to the reality of a shortage of full-time teachers in the region—with a total of 46 full-time and 122 part-time teachers across primary, junior high, and senior high schools, especially at the primary school stage—this study insists that integrated construction cannot "wait until the staffing is complete before starting." Instead, it builds a network based on the existing teacher teams, forming cross-stage teaching-research teams with full-time and part-time teachers of ideological and political theory courses from primary, junior high, and senior high schools, connecting the "leadership" of municipal studios with the "implementation" of district studios, and undertaking the tasks of regional teaching-research leadership, cross-stage joint teaching research, and teacher echelon cultivation.

The three major pathways are moving forward collectively, leveraging external expertise, and engaging in innovative practice: collective progress is achieved through themed teaching research such as cross-stage joint teaching-research conferences and study of the new curriculum standards; regional teaching-research capacity is enhanced by drawing on municipal teaching-research activities; and innovative practice is pursued through the exploration of new pathways for classroom and after-school assignments. The three focal points are team building, class observation and evaluation, and themed teaching research. Among them, class observation and evaluation does not pursue a "one-time lively event," but a replicable teaching-research procedure: around the same theme, the same lesson is taught with different designs across school stages and

schools; after lesson demonstration, the discussion returns to the new curriculum standards and stage goals for segment-focused seminars; ultimately, the outcomes are consolidated into shareable resources such as teaching designs, assignment designs, and micro-lectures, enabling the resource-sharing and transferability of teaching-research achievements.

Themed teaching research establishes the construction idea of "one main line and three-stage progression" [9-10]: the primary school stage focuses on moral enlightenment and rule awareness, achieving the goal of "perceiving rules" through picture-book-based, activity-based, and life-oriented approaches; the junior high school stage focuses on the establishment of rule-of-law awareness, achieving the goal of "identifying with the rule of law" through case-based, issue-based, and project-based approaches; and the senior high school stage focuses on political identity and rational spirit, achieving the goal of "practicing the rule of law" through issue-based teaching and value guidance. In this way, a pathway of integrated curriculum, integrated teaching research, and integrated practice is formed.

2.3. The classroom end: Achieving consistency of teaching, learning, and assessment with "four-link guided learning"

For teaching research to take root, the classroom must ultimately be transformed. "Four-Link Guided Learning" is the main path through which the paradigm takes deep root in the classroom. Its essence lies in making "consistency of teaching, learning, and assessment" an operable closed loop—that is, the teacher's teaching, the students' learning, and the assessment of learning all revolve around shared goals [11], with each of the four links having a clearly defined function.

The first link, "guided learning to elicit thinking," addresses "why to learn." It adheres to competency orientation and context-inspired learning, engages students' prior experience through the integration of current-affairs material and AI-generated contexts, and makes goals and success criteria explicit from the outset, so that students know the learning direction and achievement markers as soon as class begins. The second link, "self-directed learning and inquiry," addresses "on what basis one can learn." Students learn independently according to the standards and construct knowledge on their own, while teachers patrol, ask follow-up questions, and capture confusions to diagnose learning conditions; self-directed learning guidance comprises four elements: task, method, time, and feedback. The third link, "presentation and exchange," addresses "how rule-of-law awareness is internalized." Through tiered tasks, presentation and peer evaluation, issue-based deliberation, and value clarification, students are guided from "knowing legal provisions" to "understanding rights and obligations and making value judgments"; teachers' guidance follows two principles: pose probing questions instead of giving direct answers, and elevate value guidance beyond the specific case when broader sublimation is needed. The fourth link, "feedback and summary," addresses "whether one has learned and where to go next." Through in-class mastery checks, tiered assessment, and the immediate display of model answers, assessment drives teaching; with the aid of AI-supported evaluation and extension into real-life contexts, classroom assessment is connected to growth beyond the classroom.

To prevent the four links from deviating from their intended functions, the paradigm is equipped with a four-dimensional evaluation standard: the goal-orientation dimension requires competency orientation, measurable goals, and explicit success criteria; the teaching-implementation dimension requires complete four links, integration of current-affairs material, issue-based deliberation, self-directed learning guidance,

precise guidance, and AI support; the learning-occurrence dimension requires student agency, intellectual engagement, authentic and effective self- and peer-evaluation, and the unity of knowledge and action; and the feedback-improvement dimension requires in-class testing, assessment-driven teaching, tiered assignments, and extension into real-life contexts. In this way, the unity of competency orientation, stage-based progression, consistency of teaching, learning, and assessment, and AI support is achieved.

2.4. The practice end: Connecting the loop of knowledge and action with "large and small classrooms"

In this paradigm, "large and small classrooms" are not "in-class plus out-of-class," but a complete loop of "knowledge—emotion—will—action." The small classroom on campus emphasizes cultivating people through culture: at the environmental level, it builds rule-of-law culture corridors and rule-of-law-themed bulletin boards; at the curriculum level, it carries out morning Constitution readings, themed class meetings, and themed speeches; and at the activity level, it holds rule-of-law essay contests, skits, and knowledge competitions, forming an integrated rule-of-law culture education model of "environment—curriculum—behavior." The large classroom of society emphasizes practicing knowledge through action: it partners with relevant departments for collaborative construction and carries out practical activities such as moot courts, court study tours, legal-outreach lectures, presentations by youth legal-outreach volunteers, the skit contest "Telling the Law through Skits, Promoting Growth through the Law," and the selection of "Young Rule-of-Law Ambassadors," creating a "moving rule-of-law classroom" that guides students to complete practical experience and value internalization in real settings while empowering student growth.

Taking the immersive ideological and political theory course performance on "cybersecurity" as an example, it is possible to present how "articulation" is implemented intuitively: the primary school lesson "The New World of the Internet" enlightens students about rules through a "dream journey back to an ancient schoolhouse," while junior and senior high school lessons deepen cognition around "Rejecting Internet Temptations and Preventing Online Fraud," achieving "one theme, three school stages, one performance" and transforming stage progression from abstract goals into perceptible forms of practice.

3. Practical mechanisms and innovations

The effectiveness of the paradigm's operation depends on three mechanism innovations. The first is mechanism innovation: networked linkage breaks down barriers between schools and school stages, recombines teachers from primary, junior high, and senior high schools, and transforms lesson preparation and lesson polishing from "occasional" event-based teaching research into institutionalized routine arrangements, advancing teaching research from "loose collaboration" toward a "teaching-research community." The second is path innovation: with AI support and a points-based evaluation as the fulcrum, integration is advanced from "conceptual slogans" toward "closed classroom loops," making technology a genuine support rather than a mere decoration for the consistency of teaching, learning, and assessment. The third is carrier innovation: with "one theme, three school stages, one performance" as the connecting carrier, the classroom is extended beyond the curriculum and the school is connected with the outside, making competency growth visible and tangible and truly making articulation "visible."

4. Practical outcomes

Through sustained practice, the educational outcomes of the paradigm have gradually emerged at four levels: students, teachers, curriculum, and practice. At the student level, a shift has been achieved from "knowing rule requirements" to "practicing rules and the rule of law"; at the teacher level, from "sporadic competition participation" to "cross-stage collaborative education"; at the curriculum level, from "insufficient stage articulation" to "vertical progression of competencies"; and at the practice level, from "small classrooms as the main venue" to "coordinated joint education through large and small classrooms." The integration of ideological and political education is no longer a mere accumulation of content, but continuous growth oriented toward core competencies. These outcomes are corroborated by 49 pieces of supporting material, 12 participating schools, more than 160 teachers involved, and 36 achievements at the provincial, municipal, and district levels. They have helped students move from knowing rules to obeying rules, from understanding the rule of law to applying it in practice, and from being able to express themselves to taking responsibility. An integrated education pattern of "vertical articulation of curricula, horizontal collaboration of teachers, and unity of knowledge and action among students" has initially taken shape.

5. Reflections and prospects

This study still has three aspects to be deepened. The first is the question of articulation: although the standards for articulating goals across school stages have taken initial shape, they still need further refinement; the next step will be to improve the system of goals connecting school stages so that progression standards become clearer and more measurable. The second is the question of AI: the deep application of AI remains insufficient and teachers' application levels are uneven; future efforts will focus on research into AI-integrated innovation and dedicated teacher training programs to enhance the depth, breadth, and equity of technology use. The third is the question of collaboration: parents and rule-of-law practice resources have not yet been systematically integrated into the curriculum; going forward, we will build a collaborative education community of family, school, and society and expand the fields and mechanisms of practice-based education.

6. Conclusion

In the integrated construction of ideological and political theory courses across primary and secondary schools, the hardest part is not "lining up" the school stages, but "joining goals into a ladder," "weaving teaching research into a network," "closing the loop of the classroom," and "anchoring growth in individuals." The exploration of the three-in-one teaching-research paradigm for rule-of-law education of "Three-Three Teaching Research, Four-Link Guided Learning, and Large and Small Classrooms" shows that only by guaranteeing integrated operation with mechanisms, classroom transformation with closed loops, and the connection of knowledge and action with practice can rule-of-law education achieve a deep transformation from knowledge transmission to competency cultivation and from stage segmentation to connected progression. In the future, we will continue to improve this paradigm, making quiet yet steady progress in education and pursuing ever-greater refinement in nurturing students, so as to consolidate the rule-of-law foundation for cultivating a new generation of people capable of shouldering the great task of national rejuvenation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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