

# The Current Situation, Problems, and Improvement Path of Rule of Law Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Chaoshan Area

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**Abstract:** Rule of law education in primary and secondary schools is an educational process to popularize legal knowledge, establish legal awareness, and cultivate the ability to respect, abide by, and use the law for the special group of primary and secondary school students. The research found that rule of law education in primary and secondary schools in Chaoshan has yielded positive outcomes. However, there exist problems such as uneven synergy, incomplete inclusion of teachers and students, shortage of adequately trained professional teachers, and the need for enhanced organizational support. The relevance and effectiveness of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools will be enhanced by clarifying the target tasks, enhancing the effectiveness of the classroom, creating an atmosphere of the rule of law, and strengthening organizational support.

**Keywords:** Education; Rule of law education; Youth; Primary and secondary schools

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## 1. Introduction

Rule of law education in primary and secondary schools is a long-term fundamental project for building a rule of law in China, an inevitable requirement for implementing General Secretary Xi Jinping's important exposition on strengthening rule of law education for young people, and a major component of the implementation of the Eighth Plan for the Popularization of the Law. Since the implementation of the Rule of Law Education Outline for Young People in 2016, rule of law education curricula offered by primary and secondary schools have been in an overall good condition and the system of rule of law vice-principals (counselors) has been put into practice. Primary and secondary school students have a certain sense of rules and awareness of the rule of law and are generally willing to use legal means to protect their rights, and rule of law education in primary and secondary schools has achieved obvious outcomes. However, challenges persist, including weak awareness of secondary school students in knowing and using the law, frequent incidents of bullying and violence in schools, and the phenomenon of secondary school students breaking the law and committing crimes. Scholars have

carried out a wide range of research and exploration on how to improve the effect of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools, analyzing the status quo and problems of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools from different perspectives, and proposing the improvement of the evaluation mechanism<sup>[1]</sup>, revolutionizing teaching materials<sup>[2]</sup>, strengthening the construction of rule of law resources<sup>[3]</sup>, improving the guarantee mechanism<sup>[4]</sup>, and other initiatives. It has been two years since the implementation of the Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) for Rule of Law Publicity and Education in the National Education System. In order to examine the actual effectiveness of the rule of law education in primary and secondary schools, the author conducted field research on the situation of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools in Chaoshan, discovered certain problems, and put forward the path of improvement.

## **2. The current situation of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

In this research, the team visited the education bureau and some middle schools and elementary school in Shantou, Shanwei, Jieyang, Chaozhou, etc. The team talked with the cadres of the education bureau and some representatives of teachers and students, and at the same time, representatives of teachers and students in primary and secondary schools were asked to submit the research questionnaire. The research questionnaire was divided into student volume and teacher volume, and a total of 2,129 valid questionnaires were recovered. Among them, 1,936 student papers were recovered. Among the participating students, 55% were elementary school students and 45% were secondary school students (including vocational secondary school students). The proportion of urban and rural students was roughly the same. Among the 193 teachers' responses, 84.9% were elementary school teachers and 15.1% were secondary school teachers. The research team also searched for relevant information through the Internet to get a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools in Chaoshan.

### **2.1. Effective implementation of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

Schools regularly carry out various types of rule of law education activities and have become the main channel through which students acquire legal knowledge (general knowledge). The survey showed that 77.2% of students said they mainly acquired legal knowledge from school. More than 96% of the teachers and students said that their schools held at least one lecture on rule of law education a year, convened one class meeting on the theme of rule of law education, organized one viewing of rule of law micro-classes, propaganda films, and movies, and used at least one of the bulletin boards, electronic screens, and banners for rule of law propaganda. More than 82% of the students said that their schools held at least one legal knowledge competition and carried out one "morning reading of the Constitution" activity in a year. The top three activities among teachers that were considered to be effective in rule of law education were the creation of a model school for ruling schools according to law (47.7%), the publicizing of posters and banners in schools (45.6%), and the morning reading of the Constitution (45.1%). Students' overall satisfaction with the various types of rule of law education activities was not high, at only about 60%.

The rule of law education curriculum in primary and secondary schools is universal. Surveys show that 9.3% of students take four hours of the course a week, 10.4% take three hours of the course a week, 49.7% take two hours of the course a week, and 30.6% take one hour of the course a week. Closed-book assessment was adopted for 53% of the rule of law education courses, other assessment methods were utilized for 18% of the course, and 29% had no assessment. Teachers' self-assessment of the teaching effect of the rule of law education course was 81.2%, while students' evaluation was 65.7%. The rule of law education materials were evaluated to be 63.2% good and 35.8% fair.

Primary and secondary school rule of law vice-principals (counselors) have been provided. The percentage of those who have confirmed the existence of rule of law vice-principals is 86.5%, and the percentage of those who have confirmed the existence of rule of law counselors is 59.6%. The top three units from which vice-principals and rule of law counselors are sourced include the police stations of the Public Security Bureau, the courts and procuratorates, and the judicial bureaus, with 27.5% coming from their own units. The proportion of vice-principals and rule of law counselors who came to school at least once a semester to carry out activities was 80.9%, and the proportion of those who came more than twice was 38.9%. The top three main tasks were, respectively, to give a report on the rule of law, which accounted for 81.35%, to correct students' undesirable behaviors, which accounted for 68.4%, and to coordinate the work of governance in the vicinity of the school, which accounted for 65.8%.

## **2.2. Highlights of the synergy of external forces in rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

- (1) Judicial organs have sent laws to schools: The Procuratorate of Jieyang City and the Intermediate People's Court innovatively produced one-minute short videos and cartoons on the rule of law. With the help of new media such as cloud classrooms, webcasts, and microblogs, they innovated to promote the rule of law and made compact disks that were distributed to schools for broadcasting. The Procuratorate of Puning Municipality, in conjunction with the Education Bureau of Puning Municipality, organized a lecture on the rule of law in schools, and simultaneously presented a batch of pamphlets, posters, and rule of law education videos and other materials to the schools. Focusing on topics such as prevention of bullying in schools, prevention of drowning, prevention of cybercrime, and prevention of drug abuse, the prosecutors used diversified teaching methods such as story teaching, scenario simulation, and interpretation of the law through cases, to inform teachers and students of the Civil Code, the Law on the Protection of Minors, the Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, the Law on the Promotion of Family Education, and the Penal Law, as well as other provisions of the law that are closely related to young people.
- (2) Protecting the healthy growth of young people: The Shantou City Procuratorate has issued 181 supervision and guardianship orders in response to serious guardianship failures, and has provided one-on-one guidance on family education, urging "hands-off parents" to raise their children in accordance with the law. Through collaboration with public security, education, civil affairs, and other departments, a mandatory reporting and entry query system has been established. In the past two years, there had been promotion of more than 20,000 employment inquiries in industries with close contact with minors, and dismissal of eight people with a history of bad deeds. Zero tolerance has been shown for crimes against minors, and 328 people have been severely prosecuted. The focus is on maximizing education, probation, and rehabilitation for minors involved in crime. According to the law, approval for the arrest of 238 people were not granted, 55 people were not prosecuted, while 275 minors involved in more serious crimes faced prosecution <sup>[5]</sup>. The Jieyang City Procuratorate, in conjunction with the Municipal Civilization Office, the Youth League Municipal Committee, the Municipal Women's Federation, the Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau, the Qihang Social Work Service Centre, and the Tianhe Institute of Psychology, invited psychological counselors, social workers, family education instructors, and other public-spirited and caring people to carry out thematic activities on the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the guidance of family education.
- (3) Visiting and researching to ensure the implementation of the system: Leaders of the Jieyang City

Procuratorate often visit primary and secondary schools for talks and research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the school's system of "No. 1 Procuratorial Recommendations," mandatory reporting, staff induction inquiries, the responsibility system for the popularization of the law, and the role of a rule of law vice-principal, etc. These visits also serve to coordinate and solve problems that may not be adequately addressed.

### **2.3. Evident effectiveness of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

Students have a full understanding of the significance and importance of conducting rule of law education. The survey shows that 92.6% of students believe that rule of law education is relatively or very important to them. The top three rule of law education activities that students want to carry out the most include classroom teaching (77.38%), watching movies and videos (72.2%), and holding theme class meetings (71.1%). The top three types of legal knowledge that students would like to learn about the most are the Law on the Protection of Minors (78.4%), the Constitution (69.9%), and the Civil Law (69.1%).

Students' awareness of the rule of law has generally increased. The survey shows that when faced with the question of how to seek help when their rights are violated, more than 50% of the students chose to reflect this to their parents and teachers, while 46% chose to defend their rights by legal means such as filing a complaint, reporting to the police, or suing. When confronted with the question of when a friend was being bullied, whether they would retaliate against the other at the friend's request, 67.2% of the students said definitely not, only 3.3% of the students answered definitely will, the rest said it depends on the situation. When faced with the question of whether they would wait for a red light if there was no traffic, 82.8% answered that they would definitely wait for a red light. When confronted with the question of whether they would stop someone from pushing an electric car into the elevator, the choice of silence accounted for 8.3%, reminding the individual accounted for 31.7%, and stopping the individual accounted for 60%.

Teachers' and students' learning of the law and law-abiding conscientiousness is still to be improved. When asked about the number for consumer rights, only 83.5% provided the correct answer. The new criminal law stipulates that the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 12 years old, but only 14.6% of the students answered correctly. When asked whether any of their teachers or students had been prosecuted, 5.2% said that some students had been prosecuted and 3.6% said that some teachers had been prosecuted.

## **3. The main problems of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

The interviewed teachers identified the main deficiencies listed in the questionnaire that may exist in the rule of law education in our schools, the top five include lack of professional teachers, lack of special financial support, lack of family and social participation, lack of scientific evaluation system, insufficient rule of law education resources. The top three disapproved aspects are lack of deep understanding of the opinions and connotations of rule of law education, lack of attention to rule of law education in schools, and lack of a strong atmosphere of ruling schools according to law. The proportion of those who are neutral towards all kinds of deficiencies is around 40%. It is evident that teachers tend to look for reasons externally and are unwilling to explore reasons within themselves or their schools. From the results of the research, the author believes that the current problems in rule of law education in primary and secondary schools also include the following aspects.

### **3.1. Uneven external synergy in primary and secondary education on the rule of law**

The joint participation of the government, the judiciary, society, and the family is an important external synergistic force for rule of law education in primary and secondary schools, which is an essential guarantee for

enhancing its effectiveness. From the results of the survey, the government and the judiciary are subject to the legal responsibility system and other rigid constraints, the participation of the government and the judiciary in the rule of law education in primary and secondary schools results in significantly stronger conscientiousness and effectiveness than the social forces and families. The survey shows that only 5.2% of the rule of law vice principals or rule of law counselors come from law firms. Judging from the sources of small videos on the popularization of the rule of law currently available on the Internet, most of them come from the judiciary, and there are very few rule of law resources produced by the self-media. Influenced by factors such as cultural education level and parent-child communication barriers, the effect of rule of law education in the family is not ideal. The Shantou City Procuratorate issued 181 supervision and guardianship orders in response to serious guardianship failures, urging parents to raise their children in accordance with the law. Even within the judiciary, there are regional and systemic imbalances. From the results of field interviews and Internet research, Jiayang City and Shantou City in the Chaoshan region have done a better job of prosecuting minors and publicizing and educating them about the law, while other cities and counties have not done much well. The procuratorate system is again much better than the court system in providing synergistic assistance.

### **3.2. Incomplete inclusion of teachers and students in rule of law education activities**

On “open days,” the judiciary invites representatives of teachers and students to visit, so that they can enhance their understanding of the functions and operations of State institutions. The Open Day is generally held once a year, and the research shows that it is mainly open for the children of cadres and workers in the system, and does not cover all teachers and students. “Mock court” activities involve prospective students playing roles in simulated legal scenarios using selected materials, often derived from actual cases. While these activities require significant effort and time to organize, they typically involve only a small number of participants, leading to a less impactful experience compared to directly observing live trials. The survey shows that there are fewer activities like organizing mock courts, visiting rule of law education bases, and participating in open days of public prosecutors and law enforcement agencies. 31% of the teachers interviewed said they had not participated in mock courts, 11% said they had not visited rule of law education bases, and 18.8% said they had not participated in open days of the judiciary; and more than 20% of the students said they had not participated in any of the three activities mentioned above. Individual districts and counties have not yet built rule of law education bases. The survey showed that 60.6% of the teachers interviewed explicitly stated that rule of law education bases had been constructed in their districts and counties, 7.8% had not, and 31.6% were unsure whether any had been constructed.

### **3.3. Unsatisfactory staffing and training of teachers for rule of law courses**

Firstly, there are few full-time teachers for rule of law courses. According to the survey, 42% confirmed that there were full-time teachers of the rule of law in their schools, 27% confirmed that there were none, and 31% were unsure. The top three teachers who also teach rule of law courses are classroom teachers (74%), teachers of social studies (politics) (66.8%), and principals (vice principals) (55.4%). Secondly, there are few teachers with a background in law. 9.3% of the teachers of the rule of law courses in the school confirmed that more than half of them specialized in law, 40.2% confirmed that less than half of them specialized in law, and 50.5% were not sure. Thirdly, full-time and part-time teachers of rule of law courses mainly participate in relevant rule of law education online training. 69% said they had participated in relevant online training, and only 25% said they had participated in relevant field training.

### **3.4. Weak organizational supports for rule of law education**

Firstly, the special funding for rule of law education has not yet been fully covered. According to the survey, 19.6% of the teachers explicitly said that their schools had special funding for rule of law education, 10.4% explicitly said that they had no special funding, and 70% said they were not sure. Secondly, rule of law education lacks a scientific evaluation mechanism. The subject of evaluation, evaluation criteria, evaluation methods, and application of results are not clearly defined at present. Thirdly, the results of evaluation of rule of law education are not yet fully covered by linking them to performance appraisal. The survey shows that the evaluation of rule of law education is generally linked to the tenure of school leaders, the performance of teachers, and the comprehensive evaluation of students in general, accounting for 72.5%.

## **4. The path to improve the rule of law education in primary and secondary schools**

### **4.1. Raising awareness and clarifying objectives and tasks**

Rule of law education in primary and secondary schools must focus on the implementation of the fundamental task of cultivating morality and adhere to the cultivation and practice of socialist core values as the main line. With the Constitution as the core of education, it is necessary to focus on education on civil law, combined with education on the history of the Party, the history of new China, the history of reform and opening up, and the history of socialist development, as well as the enhancement of patriotism, collectivism, socialism, and in-depth education. It insists on the organic integration of education on the rule of law and the rule of law in schools, guides teachers and students to develop the habit of thinking and behavior of consciously abiding by the law, using the law in case of trouble, and relying on the law to solve problems, and constantly improves the conscientiousness and initiative of teachers and students in respecting and learning the law, abiding by the law, and using the law. In-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's thought on the rule of law, the Constitution, and the Civil Code should be carried out. The objectives, contents, methods, and approaches of rule of law education are designed in a categorized manner, taking into account the characteristics of each age stage. As far as objectives are concerned:

- (1) At the elementary school level, emphasis is placed on knowing the basic rules and common sense of life. These rules include being polite and orderly, avoid stealing, cheating, and littering, honoring elders, being helpful, obeying traffic rules, etc., and knowing how to use the most basic numbers for police, such as 110, 120, 122, 119, and so on.
- (2) At the junior high school level, emphasis is placed on the mastery of legal principles and general knowledge of the law. Students should know the basic principles and common sense of the Constitution, civil law, criminal law, procedural law, administrative law, and the main institutions of the state and their functions, be able to recognize common crimes, and learn to ask for help from school, parents, and the judiciary when their rights and interests are violated.
- (3) At the senior secondary level, emphasis is placed on building awareness of the rule of law and knowing the operation of state institutions. Students are encouraged to develop a sense of freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, to be able to analyze general legal phenomena correctly, to acquire more general knowledge of the law, and to be able to use legal means to protect their rights and interests.

### **4.2. Dedication to teaching and enhancing the effectiveness of the classroom**

Classroom teaching is the only way to achieve full coverage of rule of law education, so it is important to give full play to the role of the classroom as the main venue for teaching. Taking into account the physical and mental characteristics of primary and secondary school students, we have promoted teaching methods such as

video viewing, case law, interactivity, storytelling, and situational simulation, and have made efforts to enhance the effectiveness of classroom teaching. Implementing the relevant national curriculum programs and subject curriculum standards, schools that have the conditions to do so strive to improve the proportion of class time for rule of law education. Rule of law content, such as rules, discipline, and order, is integrated into education and teaching, strengthening the cultivation of the spirit and awareness of the rule of law. To establish and improve the rule of law class teaching observation, collective lesson planning and other teacher training mechanism are required to create a number of rule of law class boutique online courses. Efforts have been made to enhance the professional teaching ability of teachers of rule of law courses. The training of teachers in rule of law courses should be strengthened. Arrangements have been made for teachers with a professional background in law to teach rule of law classes, implementing the system of rule of law vice-principals and rule of law counselors, and allowing cadres in judicial organs and lawyers with a professional background in law to serve as part-time teachers. Platform resources should be fully utilized and the role of new media should be maximized to enhance the effectiveness of the classroom <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **4.3. Joint efforts to create an atmosphere of the rule of law**

Schools should run the schools and improve the system of governance in accordance with the law, integrate law popularization into school education, teaching, and day-to-day management, reflect it in the student code, teaching rules, code of conduct, and other management systems, and constantly improve the ability to govern schools and teach in accordance with the law. We strictly abide by all laws and regulations, fairly deal with the problems of teachers and students suspected of violating discipline and law, and effectively safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of teachers and students. With the help of special days such as the National Constitution Day, Traffic Day, and National Security Day, daily publicity and education are carried out in conjunction with security, anti-drug, national defense, disaster prevention, mitigation and relief, as well as prevention of student bullying, cyber fraud, personal abuse, and human trafficking, and in-depth practical education on the rule of law. Additionally, schools can promote the construction of a culture of the rule of law on campus, popularize knowledge of the rule of law, and promote the spirit of the rule of law through various forms of songs, dances, moot courts, knowledge competitions, situational drama exhibitions, voluntary activities, and emergency drills. Moreover, schools should strengthen exchanges and communication with the National People's Congress, the People's Court, the People's Procuratorate, public security organs, judicial and administrative organs, and other units <sup>[7]</sup>, in order to jointly promote rule of law education for young people. They are cooperating to promote community and family education in the rule of law for young people, strengthening the guidance and management of social forces involved in publicizing and educating the rule of law in the education system, and improving the mechanism for popularizing the rule of law through a combination of government purchasing, social investment, and public welfare sponsorship.

### **4.4. Improving the mechanism and strengthening organizational support**

The main responsible comrades of each school should be in accordance with the requirements of the duties of the first person responsible for promoting the rule of law, and strengthen the daily guidance and supervision of the rule of law education in primary and secondary schools. It is necessary to incorporate the funds for the popularization of the rule of law into the annual budget of the unit, and set up special funds. It is also crucial to link the evaluation of rule of law education in primary and secondary schools with the evaluation of principals' fulfillment of their duties, teachers' performance appraisal, and students' comprehensive assessment, and to promote the participation of social forces in the third-party evaluation of rule of law education. In addition,

schools should improve the evaluation standard system, focusing on several important indicators such as the coverage rate of teachers and students, the regular implementation of educational activities, the environment of the rule of law, the rule of law curriculum class schedule, the professionalization of the rule of law teachers, the implementation of the rule of law vice-principal system, and pay attention to whether there are cases of student bullying, theft, robbery, and cheating, fights and brawls, and inappropriate relations between teachers and students, and other disciplinary and criminal cases. It should be noted that standards should differ between urban and rural schools.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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