

An Analysis of Content Design and Age Appropriateness in Crime Prevention Education for Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the design and age appropriateness of crime prevention education in Chinese secondary schools, emphasizing the alignment between legal content and adolescent cognitive development. Drawing on interdisciplinary theories from education, developmental psychology, and criminal law, the paper analyzes existing curricular limitations, including excessive or vague content, lack of real-life relevance, and insufficient differentiation by age group. Comparative insights from the United States, Germany, and Japan highlight effective strategies such as spiral curriculum models, participatory instruction, and community-police-school collaboration. Based on these findings, the study proposes a five-pronged framework for optimizing crime prevention education in China, including content differentiation, diversified delivery methods, stakeholder collaboration, and national curriculum standardization. The paper contributes to the development of a scientifically grounded, age-sensitive, and socially responsive legal education framework aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency and promoting legal literacy among youth.

Keywords: Crime prevention education; Legal literacy; Juvenile delinquency; Age-appropriate pedagogy; Civic education

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1. Introduction

With the rapid transformation of society and the advancement of digital media, adolescents are increasingly exposed to complex environments and risk factors that may lead to criminal behavior. This stage of life is characterized by psychological immaturity, cognitive limitations, and underdeveloped legal awareness, making youth especially vulnerable to deviant influences. Recent developments in China show a troubling rise in early-onset juvenile delinquency, greater offense concealment, and diversification in criminal conduct, ranging from cybercrime to gang involvement. While the overall crime rate has declined, youth crime remains persistently high and socially damaging.

Punitive measures alone fail to address the multifaceted nature of juvenile delinquency. A proactive strategy rooted in education—particularly during middle and high school years—is essential. These years represent a formative phase when students are forming critical moral values and civic behaviors. Legal education at this juncture can profoundly influence their behavior and legal consciousness.

However, the implementation of crime prevention education in China suffers from multiple systemic shortcomings. These include content that is either overly simplistic or inappropriately complex, teaching methods that fail to engage, and curricula that lack differentiation based on students' cognitive

development. In some instances, fear-based approaches dominate, while in others, sensitive but essential topics are censored. Such pedagogical mismatches reduce learning effectiveness and may disengage students.

This study adopts a conceptual policy review and comparative case analysis methodology, focusing on how secondary-level legal education content can be designed to align with standards aligned with adolescent cognitive development. It integrates insights from developmental psychology, pedagogy, and criminal law, and draws comparative lessons from the United States, Germany, and Japan. By doing so, it seeks to offer theoretically grounded and practically feasible recommendations for reforming crime prevention education in China.

2. Literature Review

Juvenile delinquency has long been a persistent and evolving social issue, and it remains a key area of interdisciplinary research across criminology, education, psychology, and law. Within this context, “crime prevention education” has increasingly gained scholarly attention as a fundamental strategy to reduce youth offending. In particular, legal and crime prevention education during the secondary school years—its content design, pedagogical methods, and age-appropriateness—has emerged as a focal point at the intersection of theoretical research and educational practice. This section provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature to

identify established theoretical foundations, practical outcomes, and existing research gaps.

2.1. Research on Juvenile Delinquency

A robust theoretical system has been developed both domestically and internationally to explain the causes and characteristics of juvenile delinquency. From a macro-structural perspective, scholars such as Norval Morris and Gordon Hawkins proposed the Social Control Theory, emphasizing that family dysfunction, the breakdown of school disciplinary systems, and deteriorating community environments are critical factors contributing to youth crime. In China, scholar Wang Zhiqiang (2016) pointed out that juvenile delinquency has become increasingly diversified, intelligent, and organized. cyberspace has emerged as a new platform for youth misconduct (Wang, 2016).

In recent years, the trend of younger juveniles engaging in criminal behavior has garnered widespread attention. Li Li (2020), based on an analysis of court judgment data over five years, revealed that the crime rate among adolescents aged 14 to 18 remains consistently high. Furthermore, while minors under 14 are not subject to criminal liability, their unlawful behaviors have shown increasing levels of violence and organization. These findings underscore the importance of early-stage educational interventions and provide a problem-oriented foundation for designing effective crime prevention curricula(Li, 2020).

2.2. The Concept and Function of Crime Prevention Education

Crime prevention education is fundamentally a subcategory of legal education, emphasizing proactive interventions through educational means before delinquent behavior occurs. American scholar David Farrington (2007) proposed the “developmental prevention” theory, advocating for embedding legal education throughout the entire growth process of youth. This approach aims to instill legal awareness and a sense of social responsibility during the formative cognitive stages to reduce future criminal risk(Farrington, 2017).

In China, crime prevention education is typically integrated within courses such as "Ideological and Political Education" and "Morality and the Rule of Law." In recent years, policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education, such as the *Regulations on Vice Principals for Legal Affairs in Primary and Secondary Schools (Trial)* (2021) and the *Outline for Juvenile Legal Education*, have emphasized the importance of increasing legal awareness and preventive instruction during basic education. According to scholar Ma Hao (2021), crime prevention education should not only focus on cognitive learning but also stress behavioral regulation and psychological guidance, thus achieving both educational and disciplinary goals(Ma, 2021).

However, there are significant challenges in practice. On one hand, the content of crime

prevention education in many schools remains superficial and lacks systemic coherence. On the other, some schools adopt a “shock-and-awe” approach, such as showing crime documentaries or inviting incarcerated individuals to share their stories. While these methods may offer short-term deterrent effects, they can also harm students' psychological well-being. Li Xiaomei (2019) warned that excessive reliance on fear-based education could cause anxiety, fear, or even resistance among students, thereby undermining the intended educational outcomes(Li, 2019).

2.3. Studies on Content Design in Legal Education for Secondary Students

Currently, the content of legal education at the secondary level mainly centers on constitutional, civil, and criminal law fundamentals. Textbooks such as *Morality and the Rule of Law* and *Ideological and Political Education* serve as the primary carriers of crime prevention instruction. Textbook content analysis shows that although criminal law-related material has gradually increased, it remains abstract, lacks relevance, and often fails to connect with practical concerns. Wu Lei (2022), through a comparative study of textbooks used in provinces such as Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Beijing, found that criminal law content often suffers from "high difficulty in low-grade books" and "content redundancy in upper grades." These issues hinder alignment between students' cognitive development and instructional design(Wu, 2022).

Additionally, curricula often do not differentiate between grade levels, leading to a mismatch between the difficulty of educational content and students' comprehension abilities. For instance, middle school school students are primarily guided by emotional cognition and behavioral imitation and may not be suited for complex legal theories. In contrast, senior high school students can handle advanced legal concepts such as “elements of crime” and “minimum age of criminal responsibility.” However, most current textbooks fail to reflect such grade-level differentiation, resulting in a disconnect between teaching content and students' developmental stages.

2.4. Research on Age-Appropriate Legal Education

The principle of age-appropriateness originates from educational and developmental psychology. It asserts that educational content should align with learners' age-specific characteristics and cognitive development. In the context of legal education, this principle is equally vital. Theoretical contributions from Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg demonstrate that adolescents at different developmental stages vary significantly in terms of moral judgment and abstract reasoning abilities. In light of this, Li Hong (2017) argued that legal education in secondary schools should follow a step-by-step, progressive structure based on students' psychological development to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach(Li, 2017).

Recent domestic research has begun to address

the issue of age-appropriateness in legal education. Feng Shiyong (2020), through field studies, found that middle school students struggle to understand complex legal terms, recommending the use of "case + discussion" approaches rather than rote memorization of legal texts. For high school students, who possess a stronger capacity for abstract reasoning, in-depth analysis of legal responsibilities and the consequences of criminal behavior can be introduced to foster legal thinking. These studies offer empirical support for designing age-segmented crime prevention curricula in secondary schools (Feng, 2020).

In summary, existing literature provides a relatively rich understanding of the causes of juvenile delinquency, the significance of legal education, and general approaches to content design. However, many studies remain confined to educational psychology and lack practical integration with legal content, especially the developmentally tailored legal instruction. Few have analyzed actual textbook content in relation to common types of juvenile offenses, resulting in a gap between theory and practice. Therefore, this paper builds upon existing research and centers on the principle of age-appropriateness to systematically examine the current status, challenges, and potential improvements of crime prevention education in secondary schools. It aims to establish a multi-tiered, logically structured, and methodologically diverse system to enhance educational effectiveness and realize the goal of "measured instruction and targeted guidance."

3. Results And Discuss

3.1. Theoretical Foundation of Crime Prevention Education in Secondary Schools

Crime prevention education, as an interdisciplinary pedagogical practice integrating criminal law, pedagogy, psychology, and sociology, must be grounded in solid theoretical foundations to be effectively implemented. Particularly at the secondary school level, when adolescents are undergoing critical stages of cognitive development and value formation, the design of educational content must not only follow legal and policy guidelines but also align with educational principles and psychological development stages to truly achieve its intended goals. This section systematically elaborates on the theoretical foundation of crime prevention education in secondary schools from the perspectives of legal education functions, state governance rationale, educational functions, adolescent psychological characteristics, and the principle of age appropriateness.

3.1.1. Functional Positioning of Legal Education

From a national governance perspective: Early prevention and risk control.

In the national governance framework, legal education serves as an essential mechanism for cultivating legal awareness, maintaining social order, and fostering citizens' compliance with the law. As a core component of legal education, crime prevention education fulfills foundational functions such as early identification, early

intervention, and early correction. It is the concrete expression of the criminal policy principle of "prevention first." From a risk governance viewpoint, juvenile delinquency is not merely an individual problem but a potential societal risk, characterized by significant externalities and group contagion (Bandura, 2001).

Modern governance theory emphasizes the forward movement of social control measures—intervening through education and institutional mechanisms before issues arise. By delivering targeted legal knowledge and behavioral boundaries during adolescence, the likelihood of juveniles breaking the law can be significantly reduced, helping them avoid entanglement with the criminal justice system. This "soft law" approach offers a compelling means of guiding behavior and achieving a balance between maintaining social stability and supporting individual development.

From an educational perspective: Value shaping and behavioral regulation.

Beyond cognitive instruction, schooling serves as a critical site for moral and civic formation and the internalization of social norms. As a form of behavioral regulation, crime prevention education should, under the premise of respecting students' subjectivity, utilize curricular instruction, moral education activities, and hidden curriculum approaches to guide students in developing a clear sense of right and wrong as well as legal boundaries.

John Dewey posited that the primary goal of education is to prepare individuals for social life. In this sense, legal education becomes a bridge that helps young people understand social norms and adhere to legal order (Dewey, 1916). Michel Foucault, on the other hand, described modern education as possessing "disciplinary power"—a power that transforms external norms into internal mechanisms of self-regulation through continuous discursive and institutional arrangements (Foucault, 1977). Thus, crime prevention education in schools should not merely be a process of rote legal instruction but should construct a comprehensive educational cycle of "discipline–reflection–internalization."

3.1.2. Theoretical Basis for Age-Appropriate Education

The concept of age-appropriate education emphasizes that educational content and methods must align with the developmental stage of the learner. The age-appropriateness of crime prevention education is not only a prerequisite for educational effectiveness but also a reflection of respect for and protection of adolescents' developmental rights.

Cognitive and psychological characteristics of secondary school students.

Middle school school students (approximately ages 12–15) are typically in the "pre-formal operational stage" as defined by Piaget's theory of cognitive development. While they possess emerging abstract thinking skills, their cognition

still relies heavily on concrete experiences and tangible representations. They also display heightened self-awareness, emotional volatility, and strong peer influence, coupled with relatively weak legal judgment and self-control. Therefore, legal education at this stage should prioritize vivid, life-oriented expression through storytelling, role-playing, and behavioral simulation to help students comprehend the consequences and boundaries of their actions (Piaget, 1977).

Senior high school students (approximately ages 16–18) transition into the "formal operational stage," where abstract reasoning and logical thinking improve significantly. They develop critical thinking and self-reflection capacities, enabling them to understand more complex legal concepts such as "constituent elements of a crime" and "principles of sentencing." Additionally, they begin to engage with broader societal issues and questions of justice and fairness. Thus, crime prevention education at this level should involve structured legal instruction, training in legal reasoning, and the cultivation of legal values and social responsibility.

The "best interests of the child" and the age-appropriateness principle under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) stipulates that "in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration," and particularly emphasizes the "age appropriateness" of services and legal systems (UNICEF, 1989). This principle

mandates that education content, disciplinary measures, and judicial interventions should be tailored to the developmental level and cognitive capacity of minors and must not cause psychological harm under the guise of education or discipline (Hart & Pavlovic, 2020).

Applying this principle to legal education means that adult-oriented legal content, case analyses, or deterrence strategies cannot simply be transplanted into juvenile education. Instructional design must follow a progression that respects cognitive differences and developmental needs. For example, primary and early secondary education should focus on "risk awareness and boundary recognition," while later secondary education can escalate to "understanding responsibility and asserting rights." This progressive legal education model better protects children's rights and fosters their intrinsic motivation to comply with the law.

3.2. Problems in the Content Design of Crime Prevention Education in Middle Schools

As a vital component of legal education in secondary schools, crime prevention education plays a key role in cultivating students' legal awareness, preventing deviant behavior, and enhancing self-protection skills. However, the effectiveness of such education relies heavily on aligning the content with students' cognitive and psychological development stages—that is, ensuring content aligns with students' developmental levels. At present, crime prevention education in many middle schools suffers from

misalignment between the content and students' age-specific comprehension levels. The primary issues include excessive or overwhelming content that exceeds students' developmental readiness, vague or censored content that avoids sensitive yet relevant topics, and a disconnect between instructional material and the real-life experiences of adolescents. Such pedagogical deficiencies compromise educational impact and may engender cognitive dissonance or emotional aversion among learners, ultimately discrediting the purpose of legal instruction.

3.2.1. Excessive Content Beyond Age-Appropriate Development

“Over-education” describes the introduction of content that exceeds students' cognitive and emotional maturity, particularly in lower secondary grades, often through fear-inducing or shocking materials. These practices may induce psychological distress, foster disengagement, and ultimately undermine the educational goals of motivation and legal literacy.

In current crime prevention efforts, some schools pursue shock value by introducing severe criminal cases—such as homicide, rape, robbery, or extreme campus violence—to illustrate abstract legal principles in a sensationalized manner. While aiming to instill a sense of deterrence, this strategy often disregards the emotional and cognitive immaturity of younger students, particularly those in grades 7 and 8. Exposure to graphic details of crime scenes and victim suffering may trigger

intense psychological discomfort. For instance, a middle school screening of a documentary on juvenile homicide led to student anxiety, nightmares, and an increased reluctance toward legal education, especially in the absence of psychological support from teachers.

Furthermore, lectures and mock trials sometimes overload students with technical legal terminology and complex statutes, without considering their ability to comprehend systemic legal frameworks. This adult-centric approach distances students from the content and may foster a perception of the law as abstract, cold, or irrelevant, ultimately undermining the educational warmth and moral direction that legal instruction should provide.

3.2.2. The Problem of Vague and Censored Educational Content

In contrast to excessive education, many schools adopt a vague or overly sanitized approach to legal content, especially regarding real risks encountered by teenagers—such as cybercrime, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. This form of content censorship severely limits the practicality and realism of legal instruction.

Typically, schools emphasize general slogans like “Obey the law, start with yourself” or “Strengthen legal awareness for a harmonious society,” which, while ideologically sound, offer little actionable guidance or context-specific insight. Students hear broad messages but lack the concrete knowledge needed to navigate real-world legal dilemmas.

More concerning is the deliberate avoidance of sensitive but critical topics. For fear of parental backlash or concerns over propriety, schools often omit or gloss over discussions of sexual assault, online scams, and harassment. Such avoidance ignores the increasingly complex digital environment in which students operate, leaving them ill-prepared for actual threats such as cyber extortion, online grooming, and identity theft. Without candid, age-appropriate legal guidance, students remain vulnerable to victimization or may unknowingly commit unlawful acts.

For instance, despite repeated directives from the Ministry of Education to enhance child sexual abuse prevention education, many schools substitute euphemisms like “safety awareness” or “cherish life” instead of directly addressing consent, boundaries, or reporting mechanisms. As a result, students often lack the vocabulary and judgment to respond effectively to abuse or seek help. This omission constitutes a form of educational negligence, contradicting both China’s *Law on the Protection of Minors* and *Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency*, as well as the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which emphasizes age-appropriate knowledge for children’s development (Finkelhor, 2009).

3.2.3. Disconnection Between Teaching Content and Adolescent Realities

While crime prevention education in middle schools has seen some innovation in delivery methods—such as mock trials, school-based legal

weeks, and guest lectures—its content often remains disconnected from the real-life challenges adolescents face. This lack of contextual relevance makes the instruction abstract, unengaging, and less effective.

Teenagers commonly encounter issues such as school bullying, online harassment, gaming addiction, criminal liability thresholds, and peer group misconduct. However, these pressing concerns are often overlooked or only superficially addressed in class. For example, while bullying may be mentioned in passing, there is typically no clear explanation of what constitutes bullying, how victims are legally protected, or the potential legal consequences for perpetrators. Students are left uncertain about how to recognize or respond to such situations.

Moreover, legal education often fails to employ case-based or life-oriented teaching strategies. Without relatable scenarios or experiential learning, students struggle to connect legal concepts with their daily lives. The use of dense legal doctrine, divorced from relatable peer experiences, leads to the perception that law is distant and irrelevant. For example, recent changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility—directly impacting many students—have largely gone unaddressed in classroom instruction, missing a crucial opportunity to discuss responsibility, rights, and moral growth.

3.3. Lessons from Foreign Approaches to Crime Prevention Education and Age-Appropriate

Design

With the continuous evolution of global public security and the changing nature of juvenile delinquency, crime prevention education has become an integral part of primary and secondary school curricula in many countries. In contrast to the relatively coarse and non-differentiated implementation in China's secondary education system, many nations have developed comprehensive, systematic, and age-appropriate educational frameworks tailored to the cognitive development levels of children and adolescents. Notably, the United States, Germany, and Japan have accumulated extensive experience in curriculum design, implementation pathways, and collaborative mechanisms that are valuable for China to reference and adapt.

3.3.1 United States: Integrating Crime Prevention into Grade-Specific Civic Education

The U.S. secondary education system places strong emphasis on early cultivation of legal awareness and social responsibility, embedding crime prevention education within the broader framework of civic education. The curriculum is designed using a "spiral progression" model, where content is differentiated by grade level to align with students' cognitive abilities, life experience, and risk exposure (Blais & Gagnon, 2020).

At the middle school level, the curriculum focuses on cognition and understanding, covering basic legal concepts, social norms, individual

rights and obligations, and governmental structures. Teaching methods include textbooks, class discussions, and interactive games. For instance, many states include a "My Rights and Responsibilities" unit, where students engage in group discussions around real-life legal issues such as cyberbullying, digital piracy, and vandalism.

At the senior high level, the content deepens to include practical topics such as the causes of juvenile crime, the structure of the criminal justice system, juvenile courts, and consequences of illegal behavior. Methods such as mock trials, role-playing, and dramatizations are extensively used to simulate real legal environments. In California, for example, mock trials are a required component of legal education, allowing students to play the roles of judges, lawyers, defendants, and witnesses to fully experience the judicial process.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice collaborates with the Department of Education to implement the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, which delivers nationwide anti-drug and anti-violence education to middle and high school students. Police officers deliver 10–12 weeks of interactive instruction tailored by grade level, focusing on cognitive learning for younger students and critical thinking and decision-making for older students, thus creating a systematic and age-appropriate educational pathway.

3.3.2. Germany: Participatory Legal Education Grounded in Criminal Law Literacy

Germany emphasizes the participatory nature of legal education, aiming to enhance students' legal awareness, reflective thinking, and social responsibility rather than relying on deterrence or punitive messages. The Federal Center for Civic Education, in cooperation with state education departments, develops grade-tiered textbooks for late primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary students.

In middle school, "Social Studies and Law" courses introduce everyday legal issues, the distinction between morality and law, and the juvenile justice system. Lessons are often case-based—for example, exploring whether fare evasion on public transport constitutes a crime. Teachers guide students through analysis, debate, and self-expression rather than offering definitive answers, encouraging legal reasoning and peer dialogue.

In high school, topics expand to include fundamental criminal law principles, justice system operations, social conflict, and crime analysis. German pedagogy emphasizes real-life context by inviting legal professionals to present real cases, and by assigning tasks like writing legal opinions or simulated judgments on complex issues such as cyberbullying or the criminal liability of minors.

Germany's standout feature is its de-emphasis on deterrence. Instead of fear-based education, it promotes understanding the rationale behind laws, empathizing with others' circumstances, and

making lawful decisions through rational deliberation—thus reducing the likelihood of delinquency from its roots.

3.3.3. Japan: A Triadic Model of School, Police, and Community Participation

Japan has developed a tripartite cooperation model involving schools, police agencies, and local communities to implement juvenile crime prevention education. It organizes content based on students' developmental stages and integrates legal awareness into everyday experiences.

At the late elementary and middle school levels, Japan embeds rule-of-law consciousness into the "Morals and Society" curriculum, focusing on core civic behaviors such as "do not bully," "respect public property," and "respect others' rights." Community patrol officers and juvenile police counselors regularly visit schools to teach about legal risks and crime prevention. Classroom instruction is supplemented with "crime prevention workshops" addressing specific issues like harassment, kidnapping, and bullying, often using local case studies and students' lived experiences.

At the high school level, courses address more complex legal issues such as the age of criminal responsibility, the juvenile justice system, cybercrime, and the protection of minors' rights. A course titled "Law and Society" is commonly offered as an elective. Japanese educators widely use guided learning methods, whereby sensitive or complex topics are introduced gradually and

explored through inquiry-based learning, animations, dramatizations, and experiential activities rather than through coercive or fear-based instruction.

Furthermore, Japan's Ministry of Education and the National Police Agency co-issued the Basic Guidelines for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention, which regularly update instructional content by age group. For instance, elementary school curricula focus on preventing behavior driven by curiosity, while middle school addresses understanding legal consequences, and high school emphasizes causal reasoning between actions and consequences. This nationally coordinated framework ensures the educational content aligns well with students' cognitive and emotional development stages.

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The evolving patterns of juvenile delinquency in China are characterized by increasing complexity and a trend toward younger offenders, making crime prevention education in secondary schools an urgent and strategic necessity. However, current legal education content in Chinese secondary schools suffers from significant limitations, such as a lack of systemic structure, misalignment with adolescents' cognitive development, and insufficient practical engagement. Drawing on educational practices in the United States, Germany, and Japan, and considering the realities of China's educational system, this paper proposes five key strategies to enhance the content design of

crime prevention education in secondary schools.

4.1. Scientifically Differentiated Content by Educational Stage: Building a Progressive Curriculum

The principle of age appropriateness requires a sound understanding of adolescents' cognitive and psychological development. Crime prevention education content should be tailored using a scaffolded approach that advances from basic awareness to the cultivation of legal reasoning.

Junior Secondary Stage (Middle School): The emphasis should be placed on foundational legal awareness and behavioral orientation. Content may include basic legal norms, students' rights and responsibilities, identification of common offenses such as bullying and cyber harassment, and fundamental knowledge of laws such as the Juvenile Protection Law. Training on basic self-protection skills (e.g., against sexual assault or fraud) should also be introduced in an accessible and engaging manner.

Senior Secondary Stage (High School): Legal content should expand in both depth and complexity. Students at this stage can be introduced to topics such as the elements of crime, criminal responsibility, and sentencing principles. Issues such as cybercrime, fraud, and the legal analysis of current events can promote critical thinking and moral reasoning. Emphasis should be placed on developing students' analytical skills and awareness of social responsibilities.

4.2. Constructing a Diversified Content Framework: Responding to Real-World Adolescent Challenges

Effective crime prevention education must go beyond rote legal instruction and address the concrete risks adolescents face.

Content Enrichment: Education should cover a broad range of legal risks relevant to students' daily lives, such as bullying (physical, verbal, and online), digital privacy and online fraud, drug prevention, gender equality and sexual assault awareness, and protection against domestic violence and school discrimination.

Case-Based Instruction: Introducing real-life cases or simulations can foster emotional engagement and contextual understanding. Examples include mock trials involving juvenile offenses, analysis of high-profile bullying cases, or classroom debates on controversial legal dilemmas. These activities promote judgment, empathy, and legal awareness through participatory learning. For instance, pilot programs such as the "Legal Education Demonstration School" project launched in Zhejiang province have introduced age-tiered legal modules with positive feedback from both students and educators. In Shanghai, mock trial programs jointly organized by local courts and middle schools have become institutionalized as part of the annual civic education week, demonstrating feasible local adaptations. Evidence-based evaluations of youth crime prevention initiatives have demonstrated

that participatory and contextually grounded instructional strategies—such as real-life simulations and scenario-based learning—can significantly reduce delinquent behavior and enhance students' legal understanding (Hennigan & Heath, 2000).

4.3. Innovative Teaching Methods: Enhancing Engagement and Interaction

Pedagogical effectiveness hinges on teaching methods that promote active student involvement and contextual immersion.

Role-Playing and Simulation: Activities such as mock trial, school conflict mediation, and legal consultancy role-play enhance students' sense of involvement. Students may assume roles such as perpetrator, victim, school official, or police officer to understand multiple perspectives. Legal-themed theater or student-created materials (e.g., comics, legal handbooks) can foster creativity and agency.

Digital Tools and Gamification: Technology should be leveraged through legal education animations, microfilms, and interactive games such as "Legal Maze" or "School Law Adventure." Online mock trial platforms or AI-assisted judgment tools can enhance accessibility and comprehension while making learning more engaging. As Witte (2018) highlights, participatory approaches in legal education not only increase student engagement but also cultivate a stronger sense of ownership, critical thinking, and contextual relevance, which are essential for

fostering long-term legal awareness and responsible citizenship(Witte, 2018).

4.4. Building Collaborative Mechanisms: Multi-Stakeholder Involvement

Crime prevention education requires a collaborative ecosystem involving educational institutions, judicial entities, community organizations, and legal professionals.

Empowering “Rule of Law Vice Principals”: While the appointment of legal vice principals has been institutionalized, their roles are often symbolic. Their responsibilities should be clearly defined to include participation in curriculum design, delivering thematic lectures, facilitating case counseling, and coordinating preventive interventions. Performance evaluation and incentive systems should be established to ensure effectiveness.

Creating Cross-Sector Collaboration Platforms: Partnerships among law faculties, law firms, prosecutors, and schools should be institutionalized. Law schools can co-develop curricula and host educational exchanges. Legal professionals can provide practical instruction on rights defense and legal procedures. Prosecutors and judges can engage in classroom teaching and organize courtroom visits. Local education bureaus should build centralized legal education resource libraries to support frontline teachers.

4.5. Developing Age-Specific Curriculum Standards: Ensuring Scientific and Standardized

Content

The core of age-appropriate education lies in the alignment between content complexity and students’ cognitive and emotional capacity. Currently, legal education lacks unified national standards, resulting in inconsistencies and content outdatedness.

Developing a National Legal Education Framework: Led by the Ministry of Education in coordination with judicial authorities, a comprehensive “Outline for Legal Education by Age Group” should be developed. This should define clear educational objectives for different levels: rule-following for elementary school, legal knowledge and rights awareness for junior secondary, and legal reasoning and civic responsibility for senior secondary. The curriculum should include modular topics like “Bullying Prevention,” “Online Conduct,” and “Gender Equity,” with graded complexity and application levels.

Content Review and Risk Control Mechanisms: To avoid sensationalism or psychological harm, a tiered content review system should be implemented. Legal topics should be classified by sensitivity level and reviewed by expert panels comprising legal scholars, educators, and psychologists. Parental and student feedback loops should also be institutionalized to ensure responsiveness and appropriateness. A disciplinary system must be established for violations involving extreme or inappropriate content.

By refining curriculum structure, enriching instructional content, innovating teaching methods, establishing collaborative mechanisms, and developing clear content standards, crime prevention education in Chinese secondary schools can become more effective, scientifically grounded, and responsive to students' needs. These efforts are essential to fostering a generation of law-conscious and socially responsible citizens.

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