

Dilemmas and Countermeasures in Cultivating the Legal Literacy of Preschool Education Majors

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Abstract

The healthy growth of children requires high-quality preschool education. High-quality preschool education requires preschool education practitioners to respect and protect children's rights and teach in accordance with the law during the process of education and teaching. Improving the legal awareness of students majoring in preschool education is the key to ensuring the quality of education and children's rights and interests. At present, there are some problems in cultivating the legal literacy of students majoring in preschool education, such as the marginalization of relevant courses, fragmented legal knowledge, shortage of teachers in this field, and deviation in professional identity. These problems make it difficult for them to deal with educational disputes and industry transformation. Therefore, it is recommended to reconstruct the core legal curriculum system, precisely select legal regulations knowledge, integrate curriculum teaching with the qualification certificate examination, and incorporate legal knowledge into professional teaching and practice, so as to help students transform from "passively abiding by the law" to "actively applying the law" and lay a solid foundation for the rule of law in preschool education.

Keywords

Preschool Education Students; Legal Literacy; Cultivation Strategie.

1. Introduction

Under the national strategy of "ensuring care and quality care for young children," preschool education, as the starting point of lifelong learning, is undergoing a profound transformation from "scale expansion" to "quality improvement." China's Education Modernization 2035 explicitly calls for "strengthening education governance by law and building a comprehensive system of education laws and regulations." Furthermore, the Ministry of Education's Professional Competency Standards for Preschool Education Teacher Trainees (Trial) lists "law-based teaching competence" as a core professional attribute, emphasizing that teachers must possess an awareness of law-based teaching, comply with the Constitution, the Civil Code, the Education Law, the Teachers Law, the Law on the Protection of Minors, and other relevant laws and regulations, fulfill their obligations in educational practice, and consciously safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of both children and themselves.

However, in reality, legal risks in the field of preschool education are becoming increasingly frequent. With the introduction of the Preschool Education Law, the industry has set higher requirements for the training of professionals—preschool education students must not only master visible skills such as singing, dancing, and drawing but also develop a professional mindset centered on "protecting children's rights—ensuring compliance in educational practices—preventing and managing legal risks." Against this backdrop, this paper begins by analyzing the necessity of enhancing the legal awareness of preschool education students and explores the challenges and strategies in cultivating their legal literacy.

2. Enhancing Legal Awareness Among Preschool Education Students is Urgent

2.1. The Importance of Strengthening Legal Awareness

2.1.1. Establishing a Legal Foundation for Future Educational Practices

The professional conduct of preschool educators is consistently governed by legal frameworks^[1]. In daily childcare management—whether informing parents about a child's well-being to uphold their right to knowledge, exercising measured judgment in disciplinary actions, or clarifying liability following safety incidents—every action must align with legal standards. A lack of legal awareness can lead educators to unintentionally overstep legal boundaries. For example, mistaking routine "guidance" for a "right to punish" or conflating their role of "assisting in guardianship" with "full custodial responsibility" may spark legal conflicts. Thus, equipping preschool education students with robust legal literacy is essential to defining safe boundaries for their future practices, ensuring both legitimacy and professionalism in their work.

2.1.2. Legally Affirming Children's Agency

Modern preschool education has shifted from an "adult-centered" model to one rooted in "children's rights"^[2]. The Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines rights to survival, development, protection, and participation—core principles that educators must internalize. Students in this field must recognize that children are not passive recipients of authority but independent legal entities entitled to rights. This understanding transforms preschool education from a practice driven by tradition to one guided by legal and ethical principles.

2.2. The Urgency of Enhancing Legal Awareness

2.2.1. Navigating the Shift from "Experience-Driven" to "Legally Informed" Practices

Many preschool institutions are transitioning from traditional "Thanksgiving centers" to "professionally regulated educational settings"^[3]. This evolution demands that educators make decisions grounded in legal knowledge. When parents question the appropriateness of curricula or the compliance of meal plans, relying on experience alone is inadequate. Responses must draw from laws like the Preschool Education Landward guidelines such as the Early Childhood Education Framework to ensure credibility and compliance.

2.2.2. Preventing the "Domino Effect" of Legal Disputes

As societal legal awareness grows, previously overlooked details in education—such as the adequacy of safety protocols during nap times or potential privacy violations in displaying children's artwork—are now scrutinized. Mishandling these issues risks triggering cascading disputes. Proactively cultivating legal awareness during students' training phase is critical to resolving conflicts before they escalate.

3. Current Challenges in Cultivating Legal Literacy Among Preschool Education Students

The Ten Professional Guidelines for Kindergarten Teachers in the New Era explicitly mandates that preschool educators possess strong legal awareness, respect the authority of law, and regulate their professional conduct accordingly to prevent violations. However, the current cultivation of legal literacy among students in this field remains fragmented, passive, and insufficient.

3.1. Marginalized Curriculum Design Fosters Passive Learning

Many universities still lack dedicated courses on preschool education law. Where such courses exist, they are often offered as electives with minimal credit hours, and over half of institutions assess students solely through non-rigorous evaluations^[4]. By relegating legal education to optional status, schools inadvertently signal that legal knowledge is merely "theoretical backup" rather than an essential professional skill. Consequently, students prioritize visible competencies like music or art instruction while treating legal studies as a last-minute exam chore. This passive learning cycle stifles critical engagement with how laws shape educational practices, leaving future educators unprepared to navigate real-world legal boundaries.

3.2. Fragmented Knowledge Hinders Holistic Understanding

Students typically encounter legal concepts through isolated ethics case studies—for example, learning about anti-corporal punishment policies from child abuse scandals or safety obligations from school accident reports. While these vignettes highlight rules like "no physical discipline" or "immediate medical response," they fail to connect dots between children's rights, educational boundaries, and legal accountability. When faced with complex scenarios—such as addressing parental concerns over teaching methods or managing injuries—students struggle to apply fragmented knowledge, trapped in a cycle of "knowing principles but lacking practical integration."

3.3. Interdisciplinary Faculty Shortages Undermine Expertise

Preschool education law, an interdisciplinary field blending pedagogy and jurisprudence, demands instructors with dual expertise. Yet most faculty teaching these courses possess backgrounds solely in coeducation, not both^[5]. This structural gap has tangible consequences: many teacher-training institutions cannot offer such courses due to staffing limitations. Even where programs exist, instruction often remains superficial, reduced to rote legal definitions without contextualizing laws within educational practice. The result? A "knowledge deficit" that leaves students ill-equipped to translate legal theory into professional decision-making.

3.4. Misaligned Perceptions of Legal Literacy's Role

Compounded by marginalized curricula and patchy instruction, students often view legal compliance as a defensive tactic—merely "avoiding trouble"—rather than a proactive tool for professional growth. Few recognize that legal literacy serves not just as a "safety net" against risks but as a "compass" for ethical, evidence-based teaching. This cognitive disconnect relegates legal knowledge to the periphery of their professional identity—a "familiar-yet-foreign puzzle piece"—rather than integrating it as a cornerstone of reflective, rights-based pedagogy.

4. Effective Strategies to Enhance Legal Literacy Among Preschool Education Students

4.1. Strengthening Foundations: Building a New Legal Curriculum System

4.1.1. Interposition Legal Education: From "Marginal Elective" to "Core Requirement"

Higher teacher-training institutions should revise preschool education programs to elevate legal courses from optional add-ons to core requirements, aligning them with fecundation subjects like Preschool Grandchildren Psychology. Mandatory courses such as Preschool Education Laws and Regulations must be established to underscore their role as "professional conduct guidelines." Starting in their first year, students should develop a mindset of "teaching by the law," laying a robust legal foundation for their careers.

4.2. Targeted Content: Aligning Laws with Professional Scenarios

Focus on high-frequency legal issues in preschool settings by curating core regulations tied to daily practices. Build a three-dimensional framework ("rights–duties–responsibilities") through three key categories: Rights Protection Laws: Core documents like the Law on the Protection of Minor sand the Convention on the Rights of the Childclarify legal boundaries for children's survival and protection rights. For example, analyzing "judicial standards for identifying child abuse/neglect" or "legal requirements for collecting children's private information" helps students identify violations in caregiving. Professional Conduct Laws: Leveraging the Teachers Law and Kindergarten Operating Regulations, emphasize limits on disciplinary authority and procedural rules. Topics like "prohibitions on disclosing personal information in parent-teacher chats" establish compliance baselines for teacher-student interactions. Safety Liability Laws: Using the Civil Code and Kindergarten Management Regulations, outline liability logic for accidents and emergency protocols. Scenario-based training—e.g., simulating "liability allocation for playground injuries"—sharpens students' risk assessment and evidence-management skills.

4.3. Integrating Exams and Teaching: Linking Certification to Learning Goals

While classroom instruction is vital for legal literacy, pairing it with mandatory certification exams (e.g., kindergarten teacher qualifications) can amplify engagement and outcomes^[6].

4.3.1. Exam-Driven Learning Strategies

Frame certification exams as motivational tools. By emphasizing the importance of obtaining qualifications, educators can ignite students' intrinsic interest in legal knowledge, transforming passive memorization into active exploration. This approach fosters enthusiasm, boosts confidence, and cultivates a dynamic learning environment.

4.4. Blending Theory and Practice: Embedding Legal Knowledge Across Learning

Cultivating legal literacy among preschool education students is a systematic endeavor that demands collaborative efforts across multiple fronts. Within higher education, specialized legal courses alone are insufficient. It requires integrating legal education into other disciplines while bridging theory with practice—a holistic approach essential for comprehensively strengthening students' legal awareness and competence.

4.4.1. Multidisciplinary Integration: Achieving Comprehensive Legal Education

To fully embed legal education across curricula, educators must incorporate both explicit legal statutesandimplicit legal principles into diverse courses. For instance, in Child Mental Health Education, instructors can integrate the Law on the Protection of Children's Rightsto explain foundational concepts of children's rights and legal safeguards. Through case studiesandgroup discussions, students explore how to uphold children's rights in education, healthcare, and social participation. This approach not only highlights current challenges in rights protection but also equips students with strategies to advocate for children through educational and social initiatives.

Beyond the classroom, institutions should organize field visits to child welfare agencies and facilitate dialogues with legal professionals. By observing real-world applications of child protection laws, students gain firsthand insight into the critical role of the rule of law in safeguarding children. Such experiential learning fosters a deeper appreciation for legal frameworks, motivating students to proactively enhance their legal literacy.

4.4.2. Ractice-Based Learning to Reinforce Legal Competence

Theory alone is insufficient. Partner with courts, legal aid centers, or prisons to create practicum sites where students observe legal proceedings or discuss real cases with

professionals. During internships, host seminars led by practitioners to dissect laws relevant to kindergarten operations. Such experiential learning not only solidifies legal understanding but also instills disciplined professional habits, preparing students for ethical, compliant careers.

5. Conclusion

In today's society, providing high-quality preschool education is essential for fostering children's holistic development. Against the backdrop of advancing the rule of law in education, legal literacy has shifted from an "optional skill" to a "survival necessity" for preschool educators. As professionals in this field, educators must deeply understand and actively uphold children's rights while conducting teaching activities in strict compliance with legal standards. Thus, enhancing legal literacy among preschool education students is an urgent imperative.

Only when students internalize and operationalize legal literacy—transitioning from passive compliance to proactive application of the law—can they truly safeguard children's rights, teach with legal integrity, and infuse the preschool education sector with legal vitality. This transformation will empower the industry to evolve from "experience-driven" to "professionally regulated," mitigate disputes, and advance preschool education within a legal framework. By doing so, we lay a robust foundation for children's healthy development and ultimately realize the vision of "ensuring care and quality care for every child."

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