



# A Preliminary Study on the Shift from “Rule of Law Curriculum” to “Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept”

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**Abstract.** Against today’s backdrop of resolute adherence to the path of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics, it is indispensable to promote the rule of law education and enhance the legal literacy in colleges and universities our pursuit of national rejuvenation. Scholars have conducted plenty of studies on promoting the “Law-Related Curriculum” from the conceptual level, but little is known on how to integrate awareness of laws into curriculum in practice. To tackle this problem, this paper discussed the shortcomings of the Rule of Law Education among college students, proposed the idea of changing from “Rule of Law Curriculum” to “Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept”, and analyzed how to improve Rule of Law Education and Legal Literacy of students by applying Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Feynman’s Pyramid Learning Theory, and enhancing teaching Legal Literacy in the Principle of combining direct with indirect experience.

**Keywords:** Legal literacy of college students · Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept · Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

## 1 Introduction

On December 6, 2021 at the 35th collective study of the Political Bureau of the 19th Central Committee, Xi Jinping proposed that efforts should be made to adhere to the correct direction in building the legal system, uphold the Party’s leadership and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and implement the Chinese socialist rule of law theory. Since the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese government has been adhering to the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. As the successors of socialism, college students are the backbone of the future development of the motherland. The hopes of a country and the future of a nation lie in the hands of the young generation. Young Chinese have always played a vanguard role in the quest for national rejuvenation. Therefore, strengthening their awareness of laws and enhancing their legal knowledge are crucial to the prosperity of the country. However, there is relatively weak legal consciousness among college students, which

seriously restricts their overall growth and well-rounded improvement. The mission and burden of cultivating law-abiding, law-knowing and law-respecting socialist successors rest on the shoulders of colleges and universities. How to improve the legal literacy of college students in the background of “Internet+” era is a significant new issue faced by all colleges and universities.

Based on the four databases of CNKI, this paper searched the literature about “college students’ legal literacy” or “college students’ legal literacy”, with the time span limited from 2016 to 2022, and a total of 183 relevant papers were found. Among them, 157 were journal articles, 13 were master’s theses, 12 were foreign language journals, and 1 was a conference paper. According to the topics of the literature, the researches focus on “rule of law education”, “legal system” and “rule by law”. Wang J, Zhong Q proposed that we should increase relevant professional law courses, increase the proportion of legal teachers and create a good legal environment on campus [1]. Ma R defined dimensions of undergraduates’ rule-of-law literacy and discussed the strategy of cultivating law literacy for college students is studied from five levels: school, government, society, family and new media [2]. Si WC proposed an innovative concept of rule of law education for contemporary college students: integration, guiding, coordination and linkage [3]. Based on Marxist anthropology and rule of law concept, Wang HM studied the effectiveness of rule of law education in colleges and universities through effective teaching theory, and Taylor’s curriculum principles [4]. Zheng YJ found that college students expect innovative forms and carriers of invisible rule of law education based on a questionnaire study of 3731 college students in 11 colleges and universities in different provinces [5]. Xu XY proposed the concept of independent legal education and enhanced the proportion of legal education courses to enhance college students’ legal awareness [6]. A recent study by Huang ZW, Huang LF and Yang HW suggested that the proportion of legal practice courses should be increased [7]. Qing S and Zhou TH proposed the ways and methods for college teachers to take the lead in learning and abiding by the law and using the concept of law to educate people [8].

However, most of the literature focused on how to promote the Rule of Law Curriculum in colleges and universities from the conceptual level, but few studied how to integrate rule of law education into the curriculum and teaching materials in practice.

To sum up, experts and scholars in higher education at home and abroad have studied the theories and methods of enhancing college students’ legal literacy in the context of the Internet era from different perspectives, and they have achieved certain results. Taking college students as a research object, this paper analyzes the problems that still exist in improving college students’ legal literacy in the information technology era and discusses optimization and improvement strategies on how to integrate rule of law education into the curriculum and teaching materials in practice.

## **2 The Significance of Enhancing the Legal Literacy of College Students**

### **2.1 The Need for Construction of the System of Socialist Rule of Law with Chinese Characteristics**

Xi Jinping pointed out that economic development and social justice cannot be separated from the rule of law. College students shoulder the burden of the future of the nation, and play a pivotal role in the process of building the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, it's vital to promote college students' legal literacy, help them consciously comply with laws and regulations and maintain social order, and ultimately forming a law-respecting and law-abiding social culture. According to Ma YL, the legal literacy of college students includes core elements: mastering the basic legal knowledge, possessing a good awareness of the rule of law, the ability to solve problems by law, and having firm legal beliefs [9].

### **2.2 Use the Sword of Law to Defend Legitimate Rights**

While the ever-improving Internet technology has brought a huge amount of learning resources to college students that can break the time and space limitations, it has also brought hidden traps. Over the past 10 years, campus loans, nude loans, part-time job scams outside the campus, employment contract traps, and online romance scams have been frequently reported in the news. In particular, Internet scams are on the rise year by year. As the main users of the Internet are college students, and many of them lack law-related knowledge, not fully aware of illegal acts on the Internet, not to mention being able to clarify their rights and obligations in the virtual community on the Internet, it is urgent to strengthen the cultivation of legal literacy of college students and to enhance their legal awareness, helping them use legal weapons to protect their legitimate rights and interests.

### **2.3 Prevention and Control of Campus Crimes**

As a major social problem nowadays, campus crime tends to grow every year. Due to the lack of legal literacy, a small number of college students commit crime on the spur of the moment. The sensational cases include: the 2004 case of a university student, Ma Jiajue, who killed four people in a row, and the 2011 case of a university student in Japan who killed his mother, and so on. In addition to such vicious criminal cases, there are also common illegal crimes such as Internet rumor spreading, academic plagiarism, Internet fraud and intellectual property infringement. Promoting the legal literacy among college students and advancing the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics in higher education are of great significance to prevent college students from committing crimes.

### **3 Problems of Rule of Law Education in Colleges and Universities**

#### **3.1 “Electric Cramming Teaching Method”**

The phenomenon of “electric cramming teaching” is common in the current PPT classroom teaching of rule of law. College students complain that they have difficulty in digesting and absorbing what they have learned because of too much theoretical knowledge. This teaching method, which is against the principle of teaching acceptability, leads to lower satisfaction of college students in terms of the rule of law education.

Xunzi, a well-known educator in Chinese history, believes: “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”. He attached great importance to the role of practice. If students take teacher’s rule of law lessons without putting the knowledge into practice, they will forget what they have learned quickly; On the contrary, If they practice after learning, they can master the principle of law thoroughly and vividly. However, it must be noted that in rule of law education, we tend to focus on the theory rather than practice, causing students only superficially understand the legal principles. And when it comes to the real situations, they will be stuck in a dilemma and get into trouble.

#### **3.2 Relative Lack of Legal Awareness Among College Students**

After analyzing and studying the legal knowledge and legal quality education cultivation of college students, Zhang Xiaoling and Min Hao concluded that the rule of law is widely agreed and respected among college students, but a considerable number of college students still think that interpersonal relations and authorities are more important and useful than law when in trouble [10]. The current rule of law education in colleges and universities fails to satisfy students’ expectation. As some college students lack legal knowledge of the rule of law and lack confidence to solve problems by law, they would turn to interpersonal relations or even use force when their legitimate rights and interests are infringed.

#### **3.3 Incoordination Between “Fostering Virtue Through Education” and “Fostering Rule of Law Through Education”**

Xi Jinping pointed out that we should adhere to combining the rule of law and the rule of virtue in running the country and works to raise the ideological and moral standards and scientific and educational levels of the entire nation. However, the reality is that there is obvious incoordination between “fostering virtue through education” and “fostering rule of law through education”. To begin with, there is incoordinate development between the ideological, political education and rule of law education in the curriculum and the design of courses. Few teaching staff possesses both moral and legal knowledge at the same time. Naturally, it is difficult for them to nurture a new generation of capable young people who have both moral and legal knowledge and thus are well-prepared to join the socialist cause. Furthermore, the integration of ideological and political elements into non-ideological courses has been extensively achieved, but the integration of rule-of-law elements into non-law-related courses is rarely seen, and actually, only law-related courses involve legal knowledge.

### 3.4 “Rule of Law Curriculum” ≠ “Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept”

The concept of transforming ideological and political curriculum into Curriculum ideology and politics enlightens us that the Rule of Law Curriculum can also be transformed into Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept”. Rule of law courses, professional courses for students majoring in law, have limited coverage. However, curriculum with the rule of law concept can be permeated into the teaching of various non-law-related courses, exerting a subtle influence on college students gradually and accumulatively, and at last greatly. However, the reality is that most colleges and universities are still implementing the Rule of Law Curriculum instead of the Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept, failing to achieve the target of fostering rule of law through education comprehensively. Besides, most teachers lack an understanding of the curriculum with the rule of law concept, still spoon-feeding the students with law-related knowledge.

## 4 Optimization Strategy: “Rule of Law Curriculum” → “Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept”

The purpose of transforming ideological and political curriculum into Curriculum ideology and politics is to cultivate students imperceptibly. Similarly, we should change the status quo of rule of law education in colleges and universities, which is only limited to law-related courses. Integrating the rule of law concept into the teaching of various non-law-related courses not only avoids “spoon-feeding” teaching, but also can maximize the positive effects of educating people in an imperceptible and comprehensive way. When teaching non-law-related courses, university teachers are supposed to fully tap into the rule of law elements in the teaching materials and courses, and imperceptibly integrate the rule of law concept and legal knowledge into the class, so as to nurture the legal value orientation and legal ideology of college students, and truly achieve the coordination of between the ideological, political education and rule of law education in the curriculum and the design of courses. “In the process of implementing Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept, colleges and universities have to make a concerted effort to improve the quality of education. Accordingly, teachers in colleges and universities are expected to take measures from the following aspects.

### 4.1 Using Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory as a Guide

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as is shown in Fig. 1, Maslow divided human needs into five categories progressing from basic to complex: physiological needs, security and safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. People are motivated by certain human needs. Self-actualization needs is at the peak of the pyramid, which is closely related to sense of achievement and personal growth. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory enlightens us that we should attach great importance to students’ self-actualization needs in the rule of law education in colleges and universities. Teachers are supposed to explore the needs of college students in their actual life and learning, so as to stimulate their strong motivation to learn rule of law, give full play to their subjective initiative, and achieve the best learning effects. Furthermore, rule of law

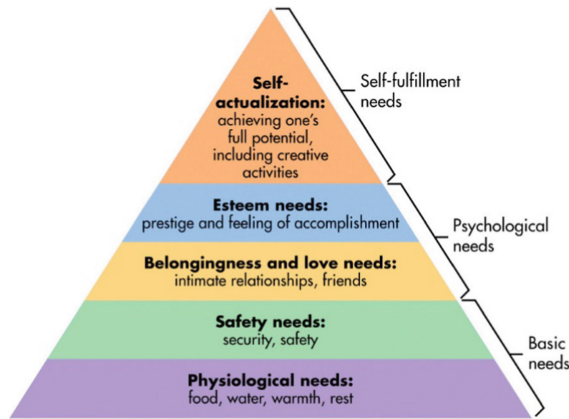


Fig. 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

education and publicity in colleges and universities should be implemented according to students' interests, so as to stimulate their learning motivation to the maximum extent. At the same time, relying on multimedia and Internet technology, we can further enrich the contents and teaching forms of rule of law education to inspire more college students to participate in learning rule of law knowledge and further improve their legal literacy. Teachers should prepare lessons with the hot issues of social concern, and differentiate the contents according to different majors and grades. For example, students majoring in computer science have a higher demand for knowledge of law on cybercrimes, while college students who are hunting for jobs have a higher demand for the knowledge of employment agreement regulations and the labor law.

## 4.2 The Principle of Combining Direct and Indirect Experience

Cramming rule of law knowledge into students' mind can lead to emotional communication barriers between teachers and students. Students passively accept and learn the knowledge, thus the learning efficiency will be obviously unsatisfactory. In order to avoid “electric irrigation” and “preaching from the book”, teachers need to follow the principle of combining indirect with direct experience, emphasizing the transmission of book knowledge while also inspiring students to explore and discover and think independently. Confucius once said “A tutor should not enlighten his students unless he tried but failed to think over the problem and find the solution”. He emphasized the importance of guiding and inspiring students. Thus, the theory of rule of law needs to be combined with the practice of rule of law in order to reap the greatest effectiveness.

We should carry out rule of law practical activities, such as “Legal Publicity Day”, “Knowledge Contest on Rule of Law” and “Speech on Rule of Law and Me”. More Law Promotion Clubs should be established to let more college students experience the sense of achievement brought by learning the rule of law, expanding their vision of the rule of law and improving their legal literacy imperceptibly. At the same time, we should make full use of information technology, such as bringing law programs (especially Luo Xiang's video lectures), promoting legal publicity via APPs like Mooc and NECC.

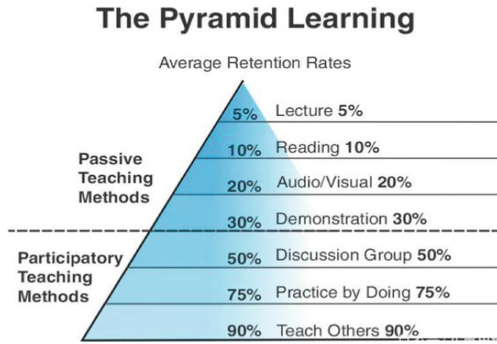


Fig. 2. The Pyramid Learning

Moreover, off-campus platform for law-based practice can be carried out. For example, encourage students to college students voluntarily give lectures or take other activities in elementary schools to improve children’s awareness of law, and law firms to provide opportunities for college students to sit in the court and observe the proceedings. With these methods, students will unconsciously abide by law, turn to law when they need assistance, and rely on law to solve their problems.

### 4.3 Feynman’s Pyramid Learning Theory

As can be seen from Fig. 2, Feynman concluded that by passive teaching methods, students will only achieve at most 30% of the knowledge retention, while by participatory teaching methods, including group discussion, practice by doing, and teaching others, students can have a better command of the knowledge. Feynman emphasized the importance of teaching others, for it has the best learning efficiency. Through teaching peers and practical exercises, students are guided to change from passive indoctrination to active output.

The Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept should be implemented with following Feynman’s Pyramid Learning Theory, avoiding indoctrination and carrying out more creative activities like teaching law-related knowledge to others. In this way, teachers and students will exchange their roles, and students will generate more knowledge input, thus forcing them to absorb more knowledge and promoting their sense of achievement and pride. Therefore, passive learning will be transformed into active learning, which activating students’ inner motivation, and maximizing the students’ mastery of legal knowledge.

### 4.4 It Takes a Good Blacksmith to Make Good Steel

AS an old saying goes, it takes a good blacksmith to make good steel. In order to achieve coordination between “fostering virtue through education” and “fostering rule of law through education”, we should attach importance to the leading role of teachers.

Teachers’ own legal literacy must be improved in order to better integrate the concept of rule of law and legal knowledge into the various courses, guiding college students’

value orientation of rule of law and improving legal awareness, truly realizing the target of curriculum with the rule of law concept. On the contrary, teachers with weak legal literacy will have trouble in cultivating a group of students with strong legal literacy. Therefore, universities should pay more attention to teachers’ legal literacy training, set up special funds on rule of law education training for teachers, increase policy support, and comprehensively advance the assessment system of teachers’ legal literacy level. At the same time, we should attach great importance to the supervision and management of college teachers by strictly implementing the relevant laws and regulations, punishing teachers who break the law, and establishing a group of college teachers who understand, respect and abide by the law.

## 5 Conclusion

In summary, strengthening the rule of law education plays a significant role in the process of national rejuvenation in the new era. It is not only the requirement of building the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics but also the need for preventing campus crimes. This paper concluded that the problems of rule of law education in colleges and universities include the electric cramming teaching method, lack of legal awareness among college students, the incoordination between “fostering virtue through education” and “fostering rule of law through education”, and the misunderstanding between Rule of Law Curriculum and Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept. In order to solve these problems and integrate awareness of laws into curriculum in practice, this paper proposed a method of transforming from Rule of Law Curriculum to Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept, and discussed how to promote Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept and enhance college students’ legal literacy from the following four aspects: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, principle of combining direct and indirect experience, learning Feynman’s Pyramid Learning Method and improving teachers’ legal literacy. Further research should be done to research the effectiveness of Curriculum with Rule of Law Concept.

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