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A Study on the Labor Education Curriculum Design of "Health-Preserving Cooking" in Primary Schools Based on a Multi-Stakeholder Needs Survey

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the Healthy China 2030 Initiative, traditional Chinese medicine culture entering campus and labor education reform, this study takes the "Health Preservation and Cooking" course for senior primary school students as the research object. Questionnaire surveys and interviews were conducted among 104 students, 106 parents and 50 teachers. The results show that students expect hands-on practice, parents value healthy habits, and teachers focus on food safety. "Learning by doing" is widely accepted. Course implementation should be based on safety and professional support, and extend learning to families through home-school cooperation. Finally, this study puts forward suggestions on curriculum objectives, content, teaching, evaluation and home-school collaboration, providing empirical references for integrating TCM culture into labor education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Opportunities for Curriculum Innovation under the Intersection of Multiple Policies

In 2016, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "Healthy China 2030" Plan, clearly proposing to incorporate health education into the national education system and elevate the improvement of adolescents' health literacy to a national strategic requirement. [1] Meanwhile, the "Implementation Plan for Major Projects for the Revitalization and Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine" clearly states the need to "promote the integration of traditional Chinese medicine culture into campuses" and requires carrying out activities such as TCM culture interest groups and practice bases. [2] In 2022, the "Curriculum Standard for Labor Education in Compulsory Education" was issued, in which the "Cooking and Nutrition" task group for the third academic stage (Grades 5 and 6) requires students to be able to design recipes, prepare simple daily meals, and form the concept of healthy eating.[3]

In recent years, the in-depth advancement of the education digitalization strategy has provided new ideas for curriculum innovation. In 2022, the National Education Digitalization Strategic Action was launched and implemented, and the National Smart Education Public Service Platform has collected more than 130,000 high-quality resources for primary and secondary schools, forming a digital education resource center covering the entire process of basic education. [4] In 2025, the

Ministry of Education and eight other departments jointly issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Advancement of Education Digitalization", clearly proposing to "comprehensively promote intelligence and promote the role of artificial intelligence in driving educational reform", "focus on teachers and students to improve the digital literacy and skills of the whole people", and require "deepening the integration of artificial intelligence with scenarios such as teaching, learning, management, evaluation, and research". [5] The "Plan for Building an Education Power (2024—2035)" also includes education digitalization as an important content for deployment, emphasizing "promoting the role of artificial intelligence in driving educational reform". [6]

The intersection of multiple policies provides unique opportunities for curriculum innovation: the TCM concept of "preventive treatment of diseases" and the culture of "homology of medicine and food" are naturally consistent with dietary education, while the "Cooking and Nutrition" task group in labor education courses provides a practical carrier. The advancement of the education digitalization strategy has further provided technical conditions for curriculum resource development, online platform construction, and the application of intelligent tools.

1.2. The Gap between Knowledge Transmission and Behavioral Transformation

Existing studies have shown that simple knowledge transmission is difficult to achieve lasting changes in healthy behaviors. An intervention study by Pei Zhengcun et al. in Beijing Primary School found that school-based dietary nutrition education can significantly improve students' nutritional knowledge and health attitudes, but the changes in students' behaviors did not reach a statistically significant level. [7] A study by Zhang Qi et al. in Hangzhou drew a similar conclusion: although students' knowledge awareness rate and attitude support rate significantly improved after nutrition education, the improvement of behaviors such as picky eating and snack intake was still not significant.[8]

This research suggests that the curriculum design of health education needs to break through the "knowledge indoctrination" model and explore more practical and participatory paths. The "Health-Preserving Cooking" course combines TCM health preservation concepts with cooking practice, attempting to help students transform scattered life experiences into systematic health cognition through hands-on operation and personal experience, and gradually develop healthy eating habits in practice.

1.3. Research Questions

Curriculum design needs to respond to two basic questions: "for whom to design" and "what to design". "For whom to design" means understanding the attitudes, expectations, and concerns of the curriculum users—students, implementers—teachers, and supporters and collaborators of the curriculum—parents. "What to design" is to determine the curriculum objectives, content, teaching methods, and evaluation methods based on the above understanding.

Specifically, this study focuses on the following three questions:

First, what are students' cognition, interest, and needs for the "Health-Preserving Cooking" course? This includes students' existing cognition of TCM, interest preferences for curriculum content, expectations for teaching methods, concerns about safety and other issues, and willingness to practice after class. Second, what are teachers' attitudes, judgments, and support needs for the course? This includes teachers' recognition of the curriculum value, judgment of their own professional abilities, suggestions on curriculum content and resources, analysis of students' learning difficulties, and tendencies towards teaching methods and evaluation. Third, what are parents' expectations, worries, and willingness to cooperate with the course? This includes the foundation of family health preservation habits, recognition of the curriculum's support and value, main worries about curriculum

implementation, and preferences for home-school collaboration methods.

Based on the analysis and discussion of the above three questions, specific suggestions for curriculum design are given.

2. Literature Review at Home and Abroad

2.1. Research Status in China

Research has revealed primary school students' acceptance of and interest in TCM culture. A survey by Shou et al. found that 62.24%–79.69% of Shanghai pupils had encountered TCM therapies, and 69.27% were interested in TCM health-preserving diets. Students preferred practical TCM activities and learning through social practice and specialized courses, with higher parental education correlating with greater curriculum recognition.[9]

Regarding curriculum construction, Hu and Xia developed a dual-track model combining TCM cultural learning with practical activities, designing hierarchical content based on students' cognitive stages.[10] Liu constructed a three-dimensional curriculum system :"Little Herbal Apprentice, Little TCM Doctor, Little Messenger" encompassing self-awareness, caring for others, and practical action through activities like learning, planting, and processing herbs.[11] Zhao explored interdisciplinary integration, developing a "3+1" teaching strategy that enabled upper-grade students to learn about herbal medicine across multiple subjects. [12]

Integrating TCM culture into labor education has emerged as an important innovative direction. Pan (2023) creatively utilized limited space at an urban primary school to establish a "Herbal Garden" and science hall, developing a comprehensive evaluation system ("Hundred Herbs and Thousand Flowers") that recognized both students and teachers.[13] Li (2024) constructed a three-stage "cognition–experience–creation" curriculum in a Lingnan school, increasing student labor participation from 62% to 98%, with 90% of students mastering multiple herbal labor skills. [14] Sun (2024) addressed rural schools' resource constraints by integrating on- and off-campus resources through the STEAM framework, realizing TCM culture integration across multiple subjects and expanding educational spaces through festival activities and family engagement.[15]

Despite these contributions, existing Chinese research predominantly relies on experience summaries and case descriptions, lacking empirical needs analysis. Most studies adopt a unilateral school perspective, insufficiently examining the divergent needs of students, teachers, and parents. Curriculum design recommendations remain general, with limited operational strategies for resource development, evaluation methods, or home-school collaboration mechanisms.

2.2. Research Status Abroad

International research on school-based cooking education has accumulated substantial empirical evidence. Ensaff et al. (2015) qualitatively examined the UK's "Jamie Oliver Kitchen Garden Project," revealing that school cooking programs not only enhanced students' cooking enthusiasm and food knowledge but also produced a significant "take-home effect"—students became agents of change influencing family dietary practices.[16] Yoshii et al. (2021) demonstrated through quasi-experimental research in Japan that short-term, structured cooking programs (three sessions including apple-peeling practice) significantly increased students' home cooking participation and improved cooking self-efficacy and attitudes.[17] Saha et al. (2020) confirmed that a six-week multi-component nutrition education intervention for primary school students, grounded in social cognitive theory, significantly improved students' nutrition knowledge, fruit and vegetable preferences, and cooking self-efficacy.[18]

Regarding mechanisms underlying dietary behavior change, Amini et al. (2016) showed that

comprehensive interventions encompassing nutrition education, parental guidance, physical activity, and school canteen improvements significantly reduced BMI z-scores and hip circumference among overweight Iranian students.[19] Beinert et al. (2021) identified a critical "knowing-doing gap" in Norwegian students—increased knowledge did not necessarily translate into changed food choices, suggesting knowledge transmission alone is insufficient. [20] Christensen and Wistoft (2022) found through large-scale survey research that students' active use of taste competence was the strongest predictor of learning outcomes, followed by frequency of home use, emphasizing that home-school collaboration is central rather than auxiliary to curriculum effectiveness.[21]

These international studies collectively demonstrate that school cooking education's value extends beyond classrooms, with home-school collaboration being essential for sustained effects. However, they predominantly focus on general cooking skills and nutritional knowledge, with insufficient attention to culturally specific dietary traditions. Methodologically, most infer curriculum effectiveness through post-intervention evaluation rather than systematically investigating stakeholders' needs during early curriculum development.

2.3. Research Gaps and Positioning of the Present Study

Synthesizing domestic and international literature reveals four research gaps. First, in-depth integration of TCM culture with the "Cooking and Nutrition" task group remains underexplored, with few examples where "medicine-food homology" concepts are truly embedded in kitchen-based curricula. Second, most studies adopt a unilateral school perspective, lacking systematic understanding of divergent needs among students, teachers, and parents. Third, the translation from survey findings to curriculum strategies is unclear, with insufficient operational design support. Fourth, digital tools remain largely unexplored in this field.

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates a "health-preserving cooking" curriculum for upper primary students through surveys of 104 students, 106 parents, and 50 teachers, systematically analyzing multi-stakeholder needs to provide evidence-based curriculum design references for integrating TCM culture into labor education.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Methods

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, with questionnaires as the main method and interviews as a supplement. This design was chosen for two main reasons. First, it meets the needs of the research purpose: curriculum design requires understanding quantifiable issues such as “how many people support the course” and “what they worry about most”, as well as in-depth information such as “why they worry” and “what specific practices they expect”, which can only be obtained through further inquiry. Second, it fits the characteristics of the research participants: upper-grade primary school students can express their choices in questionnaires, but may struggle to fully articulate their thoughts in written form when answering open-ended questions. Interviews allow them to express their real ideas in a more natural way.

Specifically, questionnaire surveys were conducted first, followed by interviews. Questionnaire results were used to outline the general profile of the three groups, while representative cases were selected for interviews to further explore certain phenomena reflected in the quantitative data. The two types of data were mutually verified during the analysis stage: quantitative data illustrated the prevalence of phenomena, and qualitative data revealed the specific contexts behind them.

3.2. Research Participants and Research Tools

The student questionnaire was distributed to Grade 5 and Grade 6 students, with 104 valid responses collected. The questionnaire consisted of four parts: basic information and dietary labor habits, preliminary cognition of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), specific expectations for the “health-preserving cooking” course, potential concerns, and intentions for after-class practice.

A total of 106 valid questionnaires were collected from parents. The questionnaire included four sections: basic family information and health-preserving habits, support for and perceived value of the course, concerns about course implementation, and preferences for home-school collaboration.

Fifty valid questionnaires were collected from teachers, covering all subjects in primary schools. The questionnaire contained five parts: basic information and professional background of teachers, support for and willingness to participate in the course, judgments on course content and resources, preferences for teaching methods and evaluation, and open suggestions. Semi-structured interviews were adopted, with interview outlines designed separately for the three groups. A total of 4 students, 8 parents, 6 teachers, and 2 school administrators were interviewed, aiming to cover respondents with diverse backgrounds and ensure the diversity of information.

3.3. Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. The main analytical methods included: descriptive statistics to show the distribution of various options; cross-tabulation analysis to explore the relationships between different background variables; and multiple-response analysis for multiple-choice questions to calculate the response percentage and case percentage of each option.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The specific steps were as follows: two researchers independently read the transcripts repeatedly, conducted open coding, and marked meaningful sentences or paragraphs; then they classified and summarized the codes to form preliminary themes; the two sets of coding results were compared and discussed, and discrepancies were negotiated to determine the final themes; finally, the themes were compared with quantitative data to identify relationships of mutual verification or supplementary explanation.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Students' Interest and Curriculum Expectations

Survey data reveal strong student interest in course-related content. 91% of students are interested in the concept of "food as a health guardian," 78% in how food affects health, and 87% hold positive attitudes toward learning to cook. These three dimensions confirm students' enthusiasm for both the health-education and hands-on cooking components of the proposed curriculum.

Students' understanding of traditional Chinese medicine derives primarily from daily life and family practices. Interview excerpts describing parents making cassia seed tea or grandmothers using mugwort pillows highlight the experience-based nature of students' TCM knowledge, suggesting curriculum design should leverage these existing life experiences as entry points for more systematic learning.

Regarding content preferences, "learning basic cooking skills" and "learning about common health-preserving ingredients" were the most popular choices, significantly outpacing other options. This indicates that students desire practical, transferable knowledge applicable at home. For teaching methods, students favor explanation and demonstration supplemented by diverse formats, with 58% selecting teacher demonstration, followed by videos and hands-on group work. The frequently mentioned preference to "explain a little first, then do a little" reflects student expectations for

integrating theoretical instruction with practical application.

Students' primary concerns center on social embarrassment about poor performance and cognitive burden from memorizing herb names, each selected by over 60 respondents and substantially exceeding worries about operational difficulty or safety. This finding suggests curriculum design should prioritize confidence-building through high-tolerance introductory recipes and learning-by-doing approaches rather than rote memorization.

Regarding post-class practice intentions, over 80% of students expressed positive attitudes, with 44.23% indicating they would very much like to try at home and 39.42% willing to try with family assistance. These data provide a foundation for home-school collaboration.

4.2. Teachers' Supportive Attitudes and Resource Needs

Teacher support for the proposed curriculum is substantial. 72% of teachers support or strongly support the course, and 70% recognize its educational value. While 86% would serve as lead teachers and 68% as assistants, 56% simultaneously selected "not directly involved for now but supportive." Interviews revealed the explanation: teachers worry about inadequate TCM knowledge but remain willing to participate with professional support, indicating enthusiasm requires external support to translate into action.

Regarding content priorities, teachers emphasize health awareness and scientific literacy over pure skill acquisition. Safety standards, scientific inquiry, and basic health knowledge ranked highest, while basic cooking techniques were secondary. This preference echoes student needs, suggesting curricula should integrate safety norms, scientific principles, and health knowledge into hands-on practice rather than focusing on the quantity of dishes mastered.

Resource needs follow a three-level hierarchy. Hardware represents the most urgent shortage, with nearly two-thirds prioritizing dedicated cooking classrooms and safety equipment. Second, complete teaching tools and ingredient kits indicate needs for standardized materials. Third, teacher guides and external expert collaboration address professional support requirements.

Evaluation methods reveal tension between ideals and reality. Teachers ideologically recognize performance tasks and process-oriented observation, reflecting agreement that evaluation should focus on authentic student performance. Practically, however, traditional grading systems prevail due to time constraints. Badge systems and work exhibitions receive moderate support but lag behind traditional grading. This suggests balanced approaches: regular badges for process documentation, semester grades for institutional compliance, and occasional exhibitions visualizing outcomes.

4.3. Parental Support Willingness and Core Concerns

Parental support shows important nuance. While 60% of parents explicitly support the course, 25% adopt wait-and-see attitudes, and 15% oppose it. However, 85% express willingness to cooperate with post-class practice, with only 6% unwilling. This discrepancy indicates that parental concerns target implementation quality rather than whether the course should exist.

Parents' value perceptions are balanced across six expectations, with "cultivating healthy eating habits," "stimulating scientific interest," and "enhancing parent-child interaction" ranking slightly higher. This balanced distribution suggests parents seek multiple outcomes through a single course rather than isolated skill training.

Concerns concentrate on three levels. Teacher professional competence worries 58% of parents, corresponding with teachers' self-reported reluctance. Secondary concerns include overly professional content and excessive time demands, both reflecting content-life compatibility issues. Nearly half worry about superficial implementation, indicating parents care about substantive change. One father's comment crystallizes these concerns: "We don't expect many dishes—just that he knows

what's healthy and willingly eats it."

For home-school collaboration, parents prefer lightweight, visible, low-effort interactions. Sharing classroom photos with brief comments in parent groups suffices; explicit praise from teachers motivates children more effectively than parental reminders. Parents explicitly reject lengthy written feedback due to time constraints.

4.4. Integrated Analysis of Stakeholder Perspectives

Consensus exists across all three stakeholder groups. All affirm hands-on practice as the core form of the course. All recognize that cultivating health awareness is more important than learning isolated skills. All accept that curriculum design should start from life experiences. Students' primary motivation is making food themselves; teachers confirm student preference for hands-on activities; parents believe learning occurs through doing.

Divergences reveal complementary dimensions requiring integration. Students prioritize what to make, teachers emphasize safety and inquiry, while parents balance knowledge acquisition with concerns about content appropriateness. Teachers believe usefulness drives student motivation, but students prioritize immediate tangible feedback. Students worry about memorization, teachers focus on conceptual abstraction, and parents emphasize teacher capacity and safety.

These divergences are not conflicts but multiple perspectives that curriculum design must integrate. Student interest serves as the starting point of learning, teacher safety concerns form the bottom line for implementation, and parental expectations provide space for curriculum extension. The task of curriculum design is to strike a balance among these diverse demands.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1. Curriculum Objective Design

Based on stakeholder needs, curriculum objectives can be designed at three levels. The first-level objective is "to make it successfully." Students' concerns about poor performance and parents' observations of children's fear of failure after unsuccessful attempts highlight successful experience as the first threshold to overcome. The second-level objective is "to understand it." Through hands-on practice, students gradually learn ingredient functions, food matching principles, and safety rules through repeated operation rather than rote memorization. The third-level objective is "willing to take it home." Students remake dishes at home and explain their characteristics to family members, connecting classroom learning with family practice as supported by 83% parental willingness to cooperate and students' repeated expressions of wanting to cook for their families.

5.2. Curriculum Content Organization

Survey data suggest curriculum content should follow a logical progression from introductory to systematic, and from daily life to formal knowledge. The introductory stage should employ simple, high-success-rate dishes to address safety and confidence concerns. While students most desire to learn about health-preserving ingredients and basic cooking skills, 64% of teachers reported insufficient cooking facilities and 52% of parents expressed safety worries. Therefore, the course should begin with recipes requiring no complex knife skills or open flame, such as fruit tea, health-preserving porridge, and cold dishes.

The overall framework can be organized seasonally. Students expressed interest in learning seasonal health preservation, and parents mentioned traditional seasonal cooking practices. Dividing the course into spring, summer, autumn, and winter units, each featuring one representative seasonal

dish, embeds abstract knowledge within students' familiar life rhythms. Each unit addresses seasonal ingredients, corresponding bodily needs, and cultural origins of traditional practices.

Specific knowledge points should connect to concrete ingredients. Students' primary concern about memorizing herb names suggests starting with familiar ingredients such as hawthorn, mung beans, pears, and goji berries. Students first observe, taste, and practice, then encounter relevant concepts naturally during operation, significantly reducing memory burden.

5.3. Teaching and Evaluation Strategies

Each lesson should follow an "explanation first, practice later" sequence. Students consistently expressed expectations for integrated theory and practice, and no teacher favored lecture-only methods. Accordingly, each practical session can allocate 15 minutes for teacher demonstration and key instruction, followed by 30 minutes for group hands-on practice.

To address students' varying cooking experience levels, rotating roles within groups can be implemented. Given that 52% of students regularly help with cooking while nearly half have limited experience, assigning roles such as ingredient preparer, safety supervisor, operator, and recorder allows less experienced students to begin with supportive tasks before progressing to direct cooking.

For evaluation, a combined approach of daily badges, final exhibitions, and grading is recommended. Daily badges recognizing safety, food matching, and cleanliness provide ongoing process documentation. An end-of-semester exhibition where students present their dishes to invited parents makes learning outcomes visible. A final evaluation form recording accumulated badges, representative dish photos, and specific teacher comments satisfies institutional grading requirements while respecting teachers' preference for process-oriented recognition.

5.4. Digital Support

Survey data reveal clear demand for an online platform. Although 86% of teachers expressed willingness to participate, 56% indicated they were not ready for direct involvement, suggesting teachers require ready-made teaching materials. A platform providing lesson plans, presentations, task sheets, instructional videos, and ingredient lists for direct download would address this need. Additionally, the platform can serve as a display window where photos of student work are uploaded for parental viewing without requiring individual teacher messages.

An AI teaching assistant could support multiple functions: querying recipes for specific seasons, providing ingredient information with safety tips, responding to unexpected questions in class, and addressing student inquiries after class. However, teachers remain responsible for safety supervision, group collaboration, and emotional support during practical sessions.

5.5. Home-School Collaboration Paths

Survey results indicate home-school collaboration requires lightweight interaction. While 83% of parents expressed willingness to cooperate with after-class practice, they explicitly rejected lengthy written feedback. A simple "family task card" for each lesson—listing dish name, ingredients, and key steps on one side and a small family task on the other—provides an efficient solution. Students complete tasks at home, parents upload photos to class spaces, and teachers offer weekly recognition through group messages.

An end-of-semester "Parent-Child Health-Preserving Banquet" inviting parents to cook with children at school makes learning outcomes visible. Parents witness children's growth from picky eating to trying new foods, and from inability to independent cooking.

Teaching safety requires systematic design. With 52% of parents expressing safety concerns and

64% of teachers reporting inadequate facilities, safety notices should be distributed for parental signature before the course begins. Child-safe kitchen utensils should be provided. The first lesson should employ the simplest recipes allowing students to produce safe edible products without knives or open flame, establishing an initial "I can do it" experience that foundations subsequent learning.

6. Conclusions and Prospects

Integrating the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers outlines the framework for a health-preserving cooking curriculum. Students' desire for hands-on practice, parents' focus on healthy habits, and teachers' emphasis on food safety are not contradictory but represent multiple dimensions requiring balance. This balance starts from daily life experience, uses familiar ingredients as a foundation, and maintains hands-on practice as the core thread throughout.

Safety concerns and lack of teacher confidence are two key challenges—the former addressed through simple introductory recipes, the latter through comprehensive teaching resource packages. Lightweight home-school interaction, such as task cards or brief praise, meets parents' willingness to cooperate without adding burden.

Study limitations include a narrow sample, cross-sectional design, and lack of practical testing—highlighting needs for longitudinal research, broader sampling, and pilot implementation. Given current policy support and stakeholder enthusiasm, the key lies in translating these forces into an actionable curriculum.

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