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Tracking Online Interest in Labor Education in China: Insights from Baidu Index

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this article is to explore the extent of public focus on labor education. **Methods:** This study makes use of the Baidu Index as a tool for research and selects “labor education” as the keyword for a systematic collection and analysis of relevant data, spanning from November 19, 2018, to November 19, 2024. **Results:** Between 2018 and 2024, the search trend for “labor education” exhibited two distinct fluctuations. The first fluctuation had a slight peak and then rose gradually. The second peaked and then declined. Geographically, interest in labor education shows a consistent increase from the western to the eastern regions. In terms of population structure, females constituted the majority, individuals aged between 20 and 29 years old showed the greatest interest. **Conclusions:** As a research tool, Baidu Index effectively illustrates public interest in labor education and its correlation with national policy promotion.

Keywords: Baidu index, Labor education, Online interest, Big data, Data mining

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1. Introduction

A historical analysis of the development of education in China reveals a consistent and persistent need for labor education. In 2018, President Xi Jinping emphasized the critical importance of labor education during the National Education Conference, elevating its status to unprecedented heights (National Education Conference, 2018). Significantly, in 2020, the Chinese government issued several pivotal documents, among which the “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Labor Education in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Universities in the New Era” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, State Council, 2020) and the “Guidance Outline for Labor Education in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Universities (Trial)” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China). These initiatives have attracted significant attention from various sectors of society. Furthermore, the newly updated “Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” in 2021 revised the statement of education policy from “cultivating socialist builders and successors with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physique, and aesthetics” (The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, 2015) to “cultivating socialist builders and successors with all-

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round development in morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labor” (The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, 2021). This amendment officially acknowledged the legal standing of labor education.

The introduction of these policy documents and legal provisions underscores a governmental commitment to labor education and provides a crucial foundation for its implementation. To some extent, it addresses the prevailing issues among young people, who often undervalue the fruits of labor, lack motivation to labor, and are unfamiliar with the principles of labor. Nevertheless, altering the perspectives, routines, and capabilities of young people about labor cannot be achieved solely through education provided in school-base-education; it requires a supportive broader environment. Because of its inherently social nature, labor education is particularly susceptible to the constraints of the social system and cultural context in which it is implemented. If the social environment remains unchanged—if society does not respect workers or the fruits of their labor, or if the distribution system is perceived as unjust—then it is unrealistic to expect schools to shoulder the responsibility of labor education alone (Tan and Guo, 2023). Only when labor education is recognized as a vital aspect of social education can it develop sustainably, leading to tangible changes in the attitudes of young people. This illustrates that the successful advancement of labor education depends not only on its own initiatives but also on robust societal collaboration. In this context, this study aims to examine and explore public interest in labor education.

The development and popularization of internet technology have transformed the field of educational research. This transformation has led to the emergence of a data-intensive scientific research paradigm, enabling researchers to shift their focus from merely obtaining data to extracting valuable insights from vast amounts of information (Wen and Wu, 2018). Currently, social science research is paying more and more attention to the analysis of Internet search data, and many scholars have begun to use Internet search data as a new source of research data to explore various behavior patterns in society (Yao and Qing, 2024). The Baidu Index, a data-sharing platform based on Baidu user search data, provides researchers with powerful data support. According to the China Search Engine Industry Research Report (Industry Research, 2023), Baidu Search boasts an industry penetration rate of 96.3% among monthly active users across all platforms, maintaining a leading position in key metrics such as “high visibility,” “rich resources,” and “comprehensive content.” This data underscores the diversity, richness, and comprehensiveness of the Baidu Index as a data resource. Through the Baidu Index, researchers can not only understand the search trends related to specific topics but also conduct in-depth analyses to accurately identify public needs and preferences. At present, the Baidu Index has been applied in various fields of educational research, including studies on Inclusive Education (Long et al., 2022), Children’s Mental Health (Tan et al., 2022a), Master of Physical Education (Tan et al., 2022b), and Moral Education (Jie et al., 2024). However, its application in the field of labor education remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to use the Baidu Index as a tool to explore public interest in labor education, clarify the practical challenges faced in this area, and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of labor education.

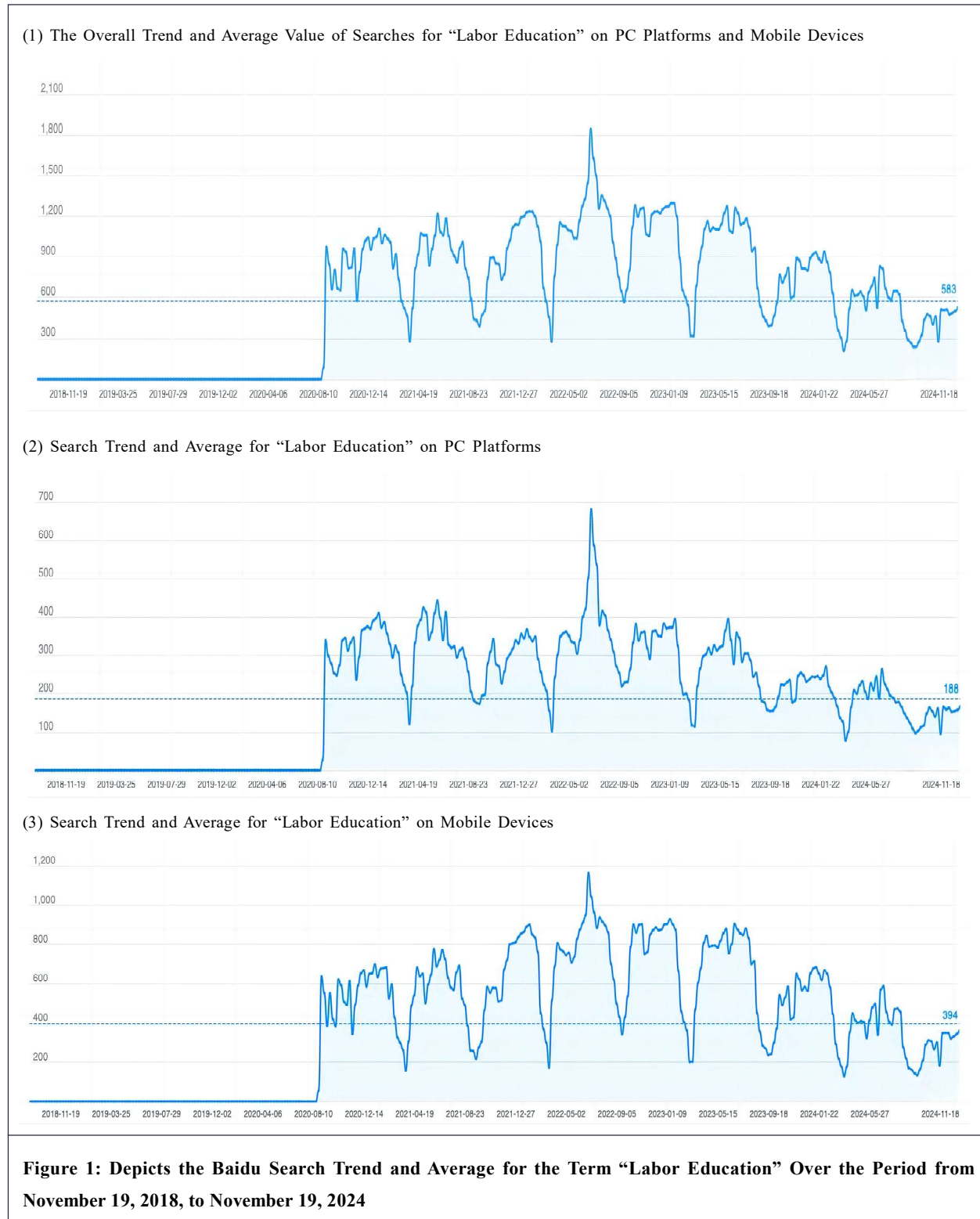
2. Materials and Methods

The Baidu Index is a big data platform developed by Baidu’s search engine, functioning similarly to Google Trends. It serves as a tool for analyzing the search behavior of internet users on the Baidu platform (Fang et al., 2020). Specifically, the Baidu Index employs algorithms to process and analyze the search behavior of a large number of users, ultimately generating a search frequency index presented in chart form. These indexes assist users in understanding the search popularity of specific keywords over designated time periods, as well as information related to user interests and focus. The platform primarily consists of three functional modules, including trend research, demand map, and audience portrait. These functions provide users with detailed and in-depth analyses of search behavior. In order to explore public concern regarding labor education, this study took the Baidu Index as the data source, using “labor education” as the search keyword. It systematically compiled and arranged relevant data from November 19, 2018, to November 19, 2024, revealing the dynamic evolution of public attention. This study is primarily concerned with the period from 2018 to 2024, a period during which President Xi Jinping placed considerable emphasis on labor education at the National Education Conference in 2018. As a result of this emphasis, labor education saw a notable increase in both status and visibility in public discourse and educational practice. This context provides an important policy and practical background for the study. By analyzing data from this period, the study aims to accurately capture fluctuations in public attention toward labor education and to explain the potential social, cultural, and educational motivations underlying these trends.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Trend Analysis of Online Attention to Labor Education

Figure 1 shows that the keyword “labor education” exhibits significant fluctuations over different time periods. In July 2020, searches for labor education experienced a significant increase, resulting in a small peak. Subsequently, the search volume for this keyword continued to trend upward until May 2022, when public attention to labor education reached unprecedented heights. During this period, the search volume peaked, reflecting substantial public interest and concern regarding this issue. However, since May 2022, the number of searches for labor education has declined, meaning a decrease in public attention to the topic.



The peaks and troughs of the trend research module clearly demonstrate changes in public interest in “labor education”, which are intricately linked to relevant policies, social events, educational reforms, and other factors. Before 2020, labor education was influenced by the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education in 2001, which limited its scope by putting it into the Integrated Practical Activity Curriculum. The absence of national curriculum standards for Integrated Practical Activity Curriculum resulted in a lack of comprehensive operational procedures, leading to unsatisfactory development and marginalization of labor education (Sun and Kang, 2021). Moreover, the increasing prosperity of the market economy has fostered a strong pursuit of material wealth among some individuals, who view excessive consumption and hedonism as the ultimate values of life. In contrast, they regard labor aimed at meeting material needs and self-development as “alien”. This social and cultural atmosphere has reinforced negative perceptions of labor education, diminishing its positive image and diluting its presence in society (Zhao, 2022). Consequently, public attention to labor education has remained low. In March 2020, the state issued the “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Labor Education in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Universities in the New Era” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, State Council, 2020) in response to the phenomenon of young people belittling labor, being reluctant to work, and lacking knowledge of labor. This initiative addressed the long-neglected issue of labor education. Following this, labor education was elevated from a traditional educational form to a vital component of talent training. In July, the Ministry of Education released the “Guidelines for Labor Education in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Universities (Trial)” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2020)—which further specified the requirements of the aforementioned opinions, detailing what labor education entails, what should be taught, and how it should be taught. The issuance of this document provided clear guidance and standards for labor education, naturally attracting public attention.

Since then, labor education has gradually gained visibility and emerged a topic of public concern. In May 2022, the release of the “Compulsory Education Labor Curriculum Standards” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2022) marked the separation of labor education from Integrated Practical Activity Curriculum, establishing it as an independent national curriculum. This document profoundly articulates the necessity of creating an integrated labor education environment involving families, schools, and communities, while offering specific implementation suggestions that significantly enhance public attention to labor education. Subsequently, the search volume for “labor education” demonstrated two significant small peaks in September 2022 and October 2023, respectively. These fluctuations are closely related to the in-depth practice of labor education within the school-family-community integration. Currently, although the search volume for “labor education” shows a downward trend, this decline does not imply that public interest has entirely disappeared; rather, it may have entered a relatively stable phase of attention. Overall, changes in public interest in labor education are strongly correlated with the promotion of national policies. Labor education shows an obvious characteristic of exogenous motivation, which means that every time labor education receives attention, which is due to the promotion of external forces, rather than the endogenous motivation of labor education itself (Li and Qu, 2018).

In addition, the overall trends of PC searches and mobile device searches are similar, but there are obvious differences in search volume. Mobile devices exhibit a significantly higher search index compared to PC platforms. Specifically, the average search volume for mobile devices is 394, while for PC platforms, it is 188. This indicates that the public is more inclined to use mobile devices to explore labor education. The surge in this phenomenon can be directly linked to the ubiquitous presence and utilization of smartphones in our modern world. As indicated by statistics from the 43rd “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” (China Internet Network Information Center, 2019), by December of the previous year, the quantity of mobile internet users in China had skyrocketed to a staggering 817 million, with an additional 64.33 million individuals joining the ranks of mobile internet users within that same timeframe. The convenience and accessibility provided by mobile internet have established its position as one of the most popular ways to connect to the online world (China Internet Network Information Center, 2019). In reality, mobile internet users accounted for an astonishing 99.1% of the total user base in 2019. A deeper exploration of the available data as of December 2023 shows that China has successfully built a cumulative total of 3.377 million 5G base stations, effectively covering urban areas of all prefecture-level cities and counties (China Internet Network Information Center, 2024). The enhancement of this infrastructure provides extremely favorable conditions for mobile internet users to access the internet. With the ongoing optimization of mobile communication network technology and advancements in smartphone technology, it can be foreseen that the search index on mobile devices will continue to rise and far exceed the search index on PC platforms, becoming the main channel for obtaining information.

3.2. Spatial Analysis of Online Attention to Labor Education

In the spatial dimension, this study conducted a statistical analysis of the search index for “labor education” across regions, cities, and provinces (see Figure 2). From a regional distribution perspective, the search index for “labor

education” in East China significantly surpasses that of other geographical regions, demonstrating a strong concern for labor education in this area. In contrast, the regional search indices for North China, Southwest China, Central China, South China, Northwest China, and Northeast China are relatively low, although they still reflect some level of attention to labor education. At the provincial level, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shandong provinces exhibit high search indices, indicating that these provinces place greater importance on labor education than others in the country. Focusing on the urban dimension, cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou show particularly high search indices for “labor education”, revealing a strong emphasis on this topic.

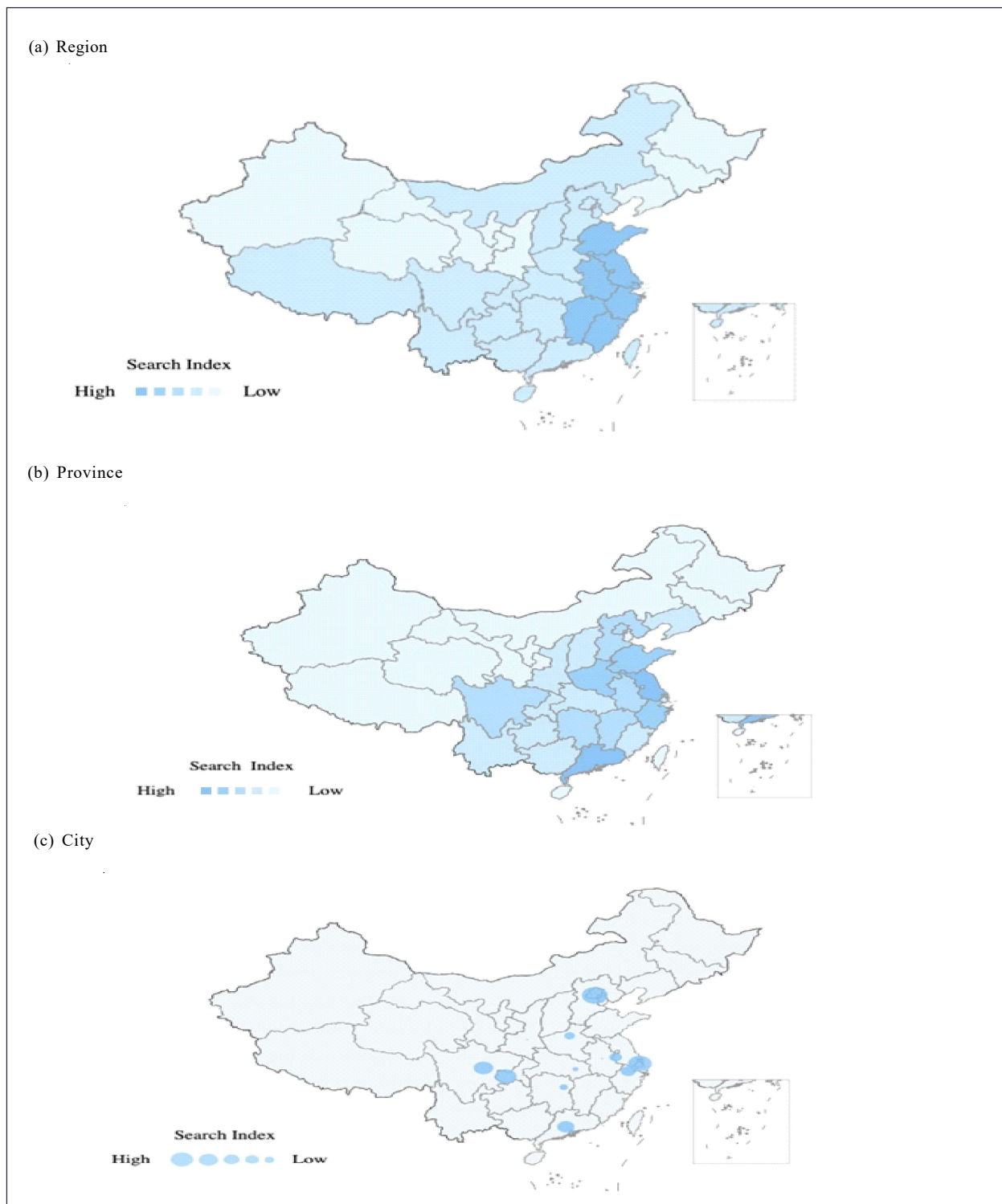


Figure 2: Illustrates the Geographical Distribution of the “Labor Education” Search Index from November 19, 2018 to November 19, 2024. The Picture Includes Three Parts: (a) Region, (b) Province and (c) City.

Overall, economically developed areas attach greater importance to labor education. This phenomenon can be analyzed from multiple dimensions. Firstly, the development of productivity constrains the scale and speed of educational development (Liu, 2006). Economically developed areas provide a solid material foundation for education, thereby offering more substantial support for labor education, which is reflected in various aspects, such as increasing financial investment in labor education and improving the labor education environment.

Secondly, productivity development affects the training specifications for talents. The coordinated development of optimizing regional talent structures and upgrading regional industrial structures is a requirement of objective laws (Zhang and Li, 2011). The industrial structure in economically developed areas is usually more diversified, and the quality requirements for talent are also higher. Labor education can not only enhance students' skills through participation in various labor activities but can also stimulate their sense of innovation. This inevitably encourages all sectors of society to pay more attention to labor education.

Finally, productivity development influences the choice of educational content and the organization of teaching methods (Liu, 2006). Economically developed areas have inherent advantages in capital, technology, equipment, talent, and other aspects, providing favorable conditions for innovation and expansion in labor education. On one hand, these areas can actively expand and enrich the content of labor education, including modern technological innovation, cutting-edge digital technology, and intelligent manufacturing; on the other hand, they will place greater emphasis on deep cooperation with social enterprises. For example, Zhejiang Province was the first to propose the concept of "new labor education" and put it into practice. By effectively combining social resources, it established new labor education communities led by schools, such as "school + farm," "school + farmers," and "school + enterprise," making labor education a common responsibility of society as a whole (Zhang et al., 2022).

3.3. Demographic Structure Analysis of Labor Education Online Attention

During the period from October 1, 2024, to October 31, 2024, a comprehensive study was conducted to explore the significance placed on "labor education" across different age groups. The data collected painted a clear picture - individuals in the 20-29 age bracket emerged as the most enthusiastic participants in "labor education," making up an impressive 32.58% of the total population under scrutiny. Conversely, those aged 50 and older exhibited the least interest, with their attention amounting to just 3.52% (refer to Figure 3). Figure 3 clearly illustrates those individuals in

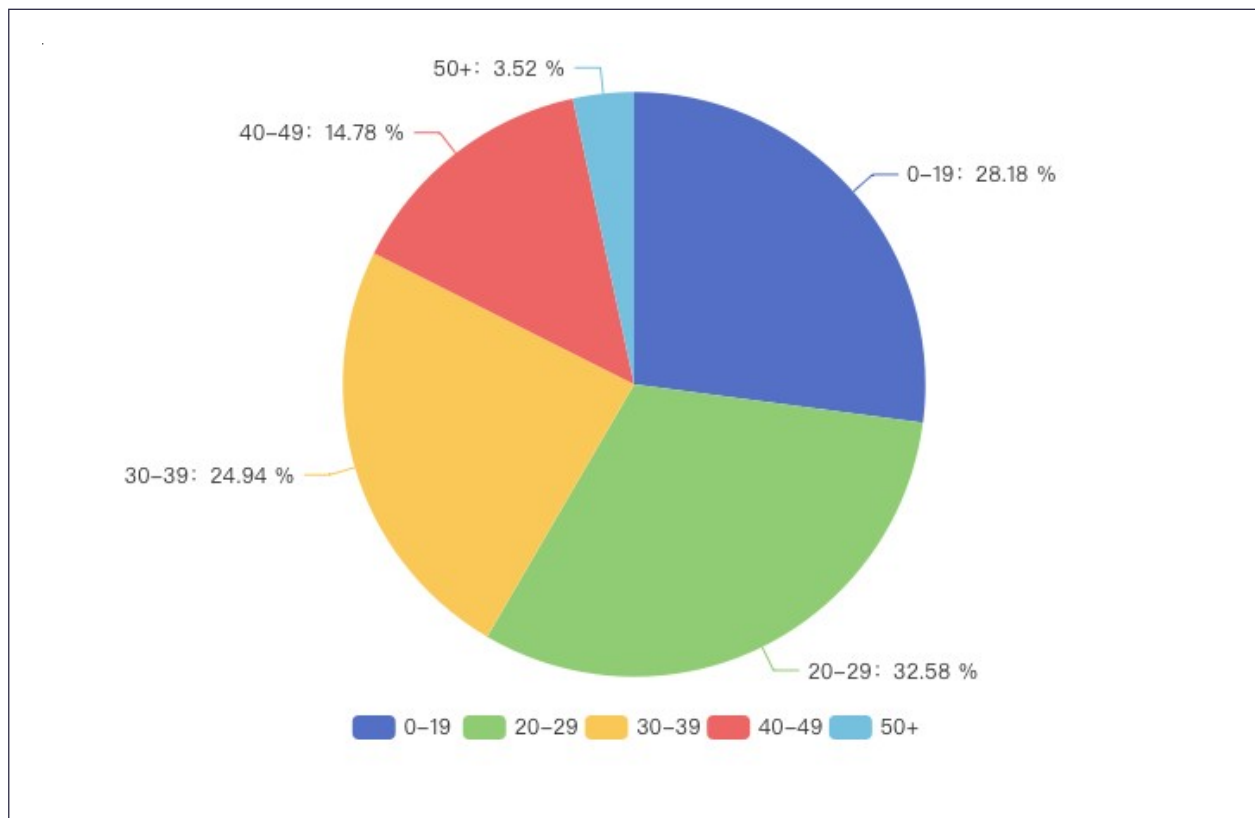


Figure 3: Age Distribution of the Public Attention with Labor Education Online

the 0-19, 20-29, and 30-39 age groups dominate the attention given to labor education, which is closely related to the widespread implementation of labor education. In recent years, labor education in primary and secondary schools has made significant progress in curriculum development, teaching staff, practice base construction, labor education evaluation, and school-family-community cooperative education (Li and Chen, 2024). The 0-19 age group constitutes the primary audience for labor education, actively engaging in its practices as learners. Individuals in the 20-39 and 30-39 age groups primarily serve as organizational leaders, advocates, promoters, and executors of labor education. Together, these two age groups form the core participants in labor education. Through their involvement, they naturally increase their attention to labor education.

The relatively low attention to labor education among individuals over the age of 50 may be attributed to the profound influence of traditional labor values. In ancient Chinese society, there has always been a tradition of devaluing labor, particularly physical labor (Xia, 2020). This negative perception of labor is especially prominent in Confucianism, as represented by Mencius. In “Mencius,” Mencius states, “There are those who use their minds and there are those who use their muscles. The former rule; the latter are ruled” (Mencius, 2003). This perspective continues to significantly influence people’s concepts of labor. Consequently, aspects related to labor that possess material power and vitality have become negatively perceived within the cultural phenomenon (Chang, 1993). This may, to some extent, explain the current phenomenon of insufficient attention to labor education among individuals over 50 years old.

From the perspective of gender distribution, males accounted for 37.44% and females for 62.56% (Figure 4), indicating that females attach greater importance to labor education. Some studies have found that family education and social atmosphere tend to encourage females to take on more household responsibilities, alongside the influence of maternal learning awareness from childhood. These factors are key reasons why females identify more strongly with labor education (Wang and Xu, 2020). In China, family power dynamics emphasize females’ dependence on males, and the gender division of labor typically assigns men to work outside the home while women manage household duties (Wang and Wu, 2019). This role positioning leads females to focus more on the growth and education of their children. Labor education, as an important way of cultivating children’s independent living skills and sense of responsibility, is therefore naturally valued by females.

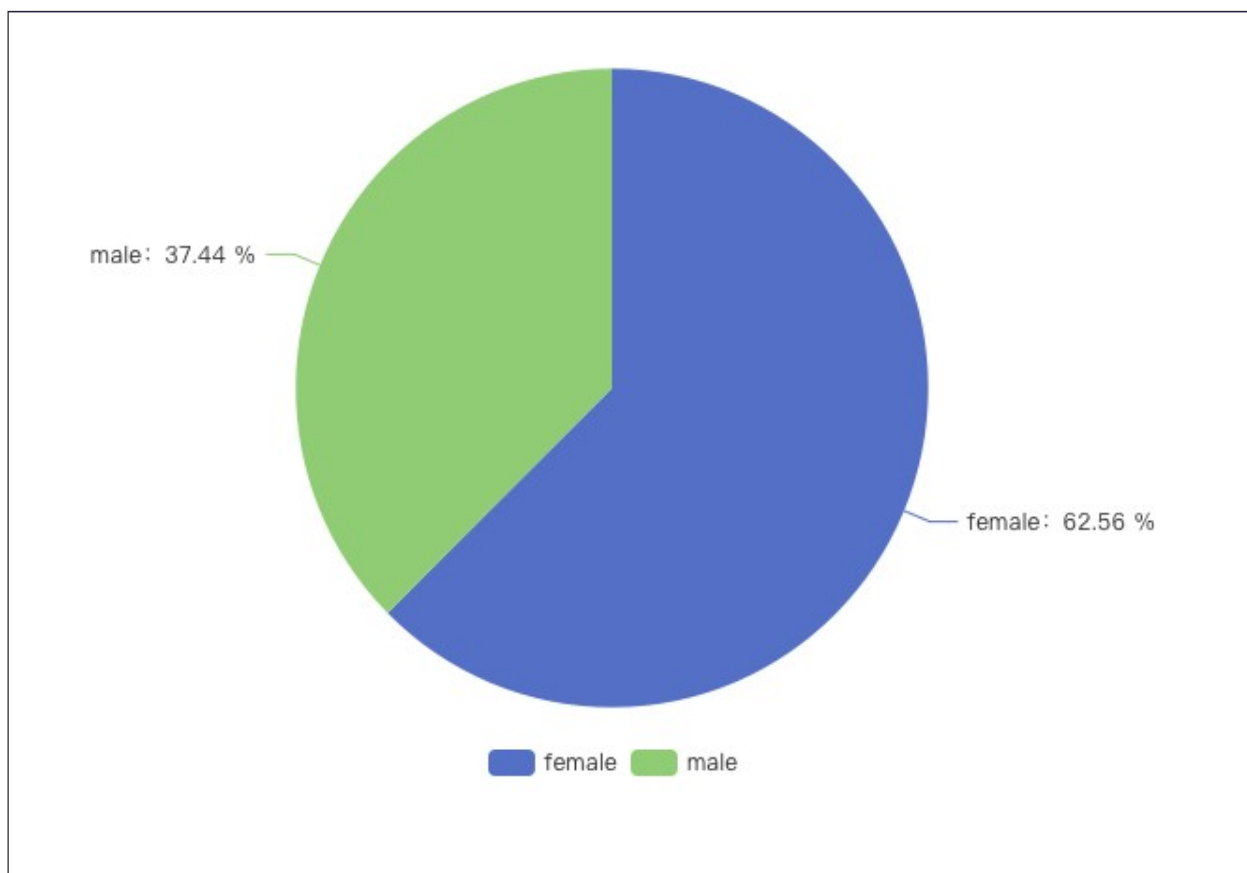


Figure 4: Gender Distribution of the Public Attention with Labor Education Online

4. Conclusion and Limitation

As a research tool, Baidu Index effectually reveals the online interest of the public to labor education by presenting the space-time distribution and characteristics of public search behavior. However, the Baidu Index does not represent everyone's views, and this limitation primarily arises from the following aspects. First, there is a limitation in the data source; since the data of Baidu Index mainly comes from the Baidu search engine, only the search behavior of users utilizing Baidu is included in the statistics. Second, the user group of the Baidu Index may exhibit certain age and geographical biases. For instance, users from specific age groups or regions are more likely to use alternative search engines. Finally, there are limitations in data processing. Baidu Index may employ filtering strategies that obscure the true opinions of some users. Therefore, the functionality of Baidu Index requires further optimization.

The study found that over the past six years, while the search volume for "labor education" fluctuated and changed periodically, it exhibited a trend of gradual growth, closely linked to the promotion of national policies. From a spatial perspective, attention to labor education shows a trend of gradual improvement from the west to the east within the geographical spectrum, primarily focusing on the developed urban areas along the eastern coast. In terms of age demographics, individuals aged 20 to 29 pay particular attention to labor education, while in terms of gender demographics, females attach greater importance to labor education than males.

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