

29

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CULTIVATION

OF SUSTAINABLE YOUTH: INTERSECTION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN NATIONAL-SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

CULTIVO DE JUVENTUD SOSTENIBLE: INTERSECCIÓN DE TEORÍA Y PRÁCTICA EN LA EDUCACIÓN NACIONAL-ESPIRITUAL

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to analyze some of the most important elements to consider for an adequate implementation of national-spiritual education, specifically highlighting its application in the context of Azerbaijan. The recent decline in moral and ethical values, along with ways to reverse these negative trends, are of particular importance when it comes to educating young people in accordance with crucial considerations in terms of development and moral values. Although it is considered that we are in a period of gestation of a new type of youth, mostly influenced by Western culture, the author points out that preventing the deterioration of spiritual and moral values in parallel with material values must be on the agenda of each country. The key role played by the educational field and educational workers is highlighted, who, taking into account the possibilities of the intersection between theory and practice in national-spiritual education, can contribute to young people preserving patriotism, tolerance, multicultural values, cultural traditions, and the historical memory of their nations. The article shows that, although there are numerous writings by authors on the problems of the spiritual and moral development of today's youth, the issues of improving moral culture and the role of universal values have not been sufficiently studied. For this reason, some ethical-cultural and development theories are analyzed in the work, addressing orientations and paths to raise stable, nationally, and morally formed youth.

Keywords: Development theory, Ethical-cultural development, Spiritual culture, Virtue ethics, National spirit

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar algunos de los elementos más importantes a considerar para una adecuada implementación de la educación nacional-espiritual, destacando específicamente su aplicación en el contexto de Azerbaiyán. La reciente disminución de los valores morales y éticos, junto con las formas de revertir estas tendencias negativas, son de particular importancia cuando se trata de educar a los jóvenes de acuerdo con consideraciones cruciales en términos de desarrollo y valores morales. Si bien se considera que estamos en un período de gestación de un nuevo tipo de juventud, influenciada mayoritariamente por la cultura occidental, el autor señala que prevenir el deterioro de los valores espirituales y morales en paralelo a los valores materiales debe estar en la agenda de cada uno. país. Se destaca el papel clave que desempeña el campo educativo y los trabajadores de la educación, quienes, teniendo en cuenta las posibilidades de la intersección entre teoría y práctica en la educación nacional-espiritual, pueden contribuir a que los jóvenes preserven el patriotismo, la tolerancia, los valores multiculturales, las tradiciones culturales y la memoria histórica de sus naciones. El artículo muestra que, aunque existen numerosos escritos de autores sobre los problemas del desarrollo espiritual y moral de la juventud de hoy, las cuestiones de la mejora de la cultura moral y el papel de los valores universales no han sido suficientemente estudiadas. Por ello, en el trabajo se analizan algunas teorías ético-culturales y del desarrollo, abordando orientaciones y caminos para formar una juventud estable, nacional y moralmente formada.

Palabras claves: Teoría del desarrollo, Desarrollo ético-cultural, cultura espiritual, ética de las virtudes, espíritu nacional.

INTRODUCTION

In the current world in which we live, the processes occurring at the beginning of the third millennium are accompanied by the loss of national and moral values across all spheres—social, material, and spiritual. Although this era is seen as the period of shaping a new type of youth, it predominantly mirrors the influence of Western culture. Considering the above, the prevention of the decline in spiritual and moral values should be a priority for every country. Particularly, the field of education and educators should contribute to the youth in preserving patriotism, tolerance, multicultural values, cultural traditions, and the historical memory of each nation. We must succeed in instilling such values in the youth so they remain loyal to the motherland and the state, evolving from their historical roots and traditions while safeguarding what is cherished and native to them. In this regard, there is a folk saying: “Own your past to build your future” (Ismayilova, 2023).

The UNDP asserts that people are the true wealth of every state, and development policy in any field should serve people (Colby et al., 1983, p. 17; United Nations, 2000). This forms the central thesis of the concept of human development. Human development is a multifaceted concept that esteems individuals and their quality of life, advocates for the expansion of choices, opportunities, and skills across various domains, and underscores shared values such as peace and security, justice and dignity, as well as health and education (Neumayer, 2012; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For Azerbaijan, which aspires to elevate its statehood standards in the 21st century, the concept of human development serves as a paradigm that holds utility both analytically and practically (Pürhani et al., 2022). For example, the Azerbaijani heroic epics, such as *Kitabi-Dede Gorgud* and *Koroglu*, serve as a source of education and morality for the Azerbaijani people, highlighting the importance of national-spiritual values. These epics have been studied by various scholars, including European intellectuals, who recognized the educational, national, spiritual, and moral values embedded within them (Yusifova, 2021). Then, within the Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, alongside the principles of state policy in the educational realm, the primary aim of education is delineated as producing “modern-minded and competitive specialists who uphold and advance national-moral and universal values, possessing a broad worldview, can assess initiatives and innovations, and attain theoretical and practical knowledge” (Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2009, p. 5).

To accomplish this educative goal, it is important to implement national-spiritual education (NSE) as a very important aspect of curricula teaching, understanding

national-spiritual education as the holistic development of individuals by integrating national cultural values, spiritual growth, and educational principles. As a field, NSE aims to nurture individuals who are balanced in physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects, with a strong connection to their cultural heritage and values. This form of education emphasizes the importance of instilling national traditions, customs, and moral values alongside academic knowledge. It involves teaching spiritual dimensions alongside practical and intellectual aspects, ensuring a well-rounded education that includes the development of spiritual potential. Therefore, national-spiritual education is seen as a vital component in various educational systems, promoting a deeper understanding of cultural identity, values, and traditions while fostering personal growth and societal harmony (Kuzdeubayeva et al., 2021; Turmudi et al., 2017; Zhang, 2023).

Therefore, the theory of national moral education rests on a holistic comprehension of the cultural, moral, and social values that constitute a nation. The goal of national moral education is to nurture a sense of identity, citizenship, and ethical responsibility within individuals within the framework of a particular country. Simultaneously, under theories of cultural identity, the national identity of a citizen of any given country underscores how national-moral and cultural values and norms mold the moral convictions of individuals, along with the impact of cultural context on cognitive and moral development. Considering this, the objective of this work is to analyze what in the author’s opinion are some of the most important elements to consider for an adequate implementation of national-spiritual education, specifically highlighting its application in the context of Azerbaijan. In this sense, the research also notes how the process of personality formation based on national and moral values is related to the moral development of the personality, as well as psychosocial development.

The practical importance of this research lies in the fact that the application of proven scientific-methodological materials, together with the pedagogical conditions for the spiritual and moral education of students, enables a purposeful and efficient improvement of the educational process in modern institutions. This will result in a significant increase in the levels of spiritual and moral development, both of the institutions themselves and of their students.

DEVELOPMENT

Moral rules include national values as well as human values. The first group includes rules specific to one nation, and the second group includes rules followed by all nations. For example, respect for elders, respect for women, and care for parents, in public places are widespread

moral rules among the Azerbaijani people, such as letting women go in front, which are our national values. Spiritual qualities such as truth, justice, and freedom are universal values (Ahmadov, 2010, p. 495). Then, virtue ethics is closely aligned with national-spiritual education, paying attention to the development of virtuous character traits in young people. Emphasizing virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and loyalty can contribute to the moral development of individuals in a national context.

Another example of ethics is communitarian ethics, which emphasizes the importance of community and shared values to young people. In the context of national moral education, these ethical theories emphasize the development of moral virtues that serve the welfare of society and the nation and see the intersection of theory and practice in national moral education in the integration of social learning, social identity, civic education, and other developmental theories for the cultivation of sustainable youth. In this direction, as an example of social learning theory, it is appropriate to emphasize the role of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory in learning and modeling through observation in moral development (de la Fuente et al., 2023). In the national moral education of young people, this theory can be used to emphasize the influence of role models, and cultural and social expectations on ethical behavior.

As a direction of social learning theory, social identity theory examines how individuals include themselves and others in social groups, and national-ethical education aims to understand how individuals identify and behave with their national groups, to develop strategies for developing a sense of collective morality and responsibility, and to create opportunities to put the theory into practice. At the same time, it contributes to national moral education by integrating with the theories of civic education to form young people in the spirit of national-moral values, emphasizes the importance of open dialogue, critical thinking and civic participation, strengthens ethical responsibility in the national context, and this approach encourages testing theory and practice by actively participating in public policy development to form young people in the spirit of national-moral values, that is, the integration of learning into national-spiritual education connects ethical principles with practical practices. Therefore, in the education of sustainable youth, developmental theories can be considered an important element of the intersection of theory and practice in the spiritual and national education of young people. According to Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, the stages of moral development provide an important framework for understanding the progression of

moral thought (Carmichael et al., 2019; Gibbs et al., 2007; Karadag, 2021).

National-moral education can take advantage of this theory to prepare interventions for the developmental stages - age-appropriate activities - for the formation of youth in the national-spiritual spirit. An alternative perspective that emphasizes the importance of empathy and relational ethics may offer an action plan that emphasizes the importance of compassion and care in national-spiritual education, complementing traditional theories of moral development. In this sense, national-spiritual education should manage the balance between promoting culturally specific values and recognizing universal ethical principles. It is also important to take into account the cultural, historical, and social context of the specific nation that developed the theory of national moral education while accepting general ethical principles. Theoretical frameworks should be flexible enough to accommodate diverse perspectives among young people while promoting a common moral foundation that contributes to the sustainability and well-being of both individuals and society as a whole. Thus, the formation of sustainable youth in the national-spiritual spirit requires the theory to be substantiated by experience. The reflection of experiences in national-spiritual education is an important aspect that contributes to the comprehensive development of sustainable youth. Incorporating reflective practices increases the effectiveness of moral education by encouraging young people to consider, analyze, and internalize their experiences in the context of national values and ethics.

The fact that the reflection of experiences plays an important role in national and moral education is underscored by its connection to internalized values. Through reflection, individuals can connect their personal experiences with the values promoted in national spiritual education. This process helps to internalize moral principles by relating theoretical concepts to real-life situations. National spiritual education encourages young people to think critically about their experiences and examine the ethical dimensions of their actions and decisions. It develops critical thinking skills that enable young people to analyze situations from a moral perspective. Reflection allows young people to consider the cultural context of their experiences.

In the field of national moral education, it is also relevant to understand how cultural values influence personal and public ethical perspectives. Through reflection, young people can assess the impact of their actions on the wider community and nation. This process helps instill a sense of social responsibility by emphasizing the role each person plays in contributing to the well-being of society.

Reflecting on challenges and ethical dilemmas allows young people to learn from their own experiences. This in turn contributes to character development by developing resilience, perseverance, and the ability to manage moral complexities. It enables young people to explore their identity in a national context during identity formation. It facilitates an understanding of one's role as a responsible and ethical member of the national community and contributes to a sense of belonging.

Reflection is an essential element for young people to improve their moral behavior by reflecting on the adaptation of behavior for the sustainable development of youth. This self-awareness strengthens the commitment to continuous improvement by aligning personal actions with national values over time. Reflective practices require the promotion of empathy. Considering the perspectives of others promotes empathy, an important quality for understanding and respecting different moral views in a national context. Integrating theory into practice bridges theoretical moral principles and practical application in line with ethical principles. Young people can assess how well they transfer national values into their daily lives, encouraging a more meaningful and authentic adherence to ethical standards. At this time, linking theory and practice includes providing practical learning opportunities for national moral values. Reflection becomes an important step in connecting these experiences to the theoretical frameworks embedded in the educational curriculum. Reflective practices create opportunities for open dialogue. Young people can share their thoughts with peers and educators, fostering a collaborative learning environment where diverse perspectives are taken into account.

The education of sustainable youth in the national and moral spirit is related to the provision of human rights and freedoms, which are one of the main conditions of sustainable human development: "Human rights and human development share the same goal and the same mission - to ensure freedom, well-being, and dignity for all people everywhere. It must ensure these freedoms:

- Freedom from discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, national origin and religion;
- Freedom from want by living a decent standard of living;
- Freedom to develop and realize one's human potential;
- Freedom from fear – attacks on personal integrity, torture, arbitrary detention, and other violence;
- Freedom from injustice and violations of the rule of law;
- Freedom of belief, speech, participation in decision-making and association;

- Freedom to obtain a decent job without exploitation."

These rights and freedoms are reflected in the first international document establishing the universality of human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Although the Declaration is not an international agreement (convention or pact) and has only a declarative nature, it has had a significant impact on the development of human rights principles during the half-century period (Murashov, 2010, p. 1).

The intersection of theory and practice in national-spiritual education is an important aspect of developing and implementing effective educational strategies that provide both intellectual and moral development of individuals in a specific cultural and national context. National moral education aims to develop a sense of identity, values, and civic responsibility by contributing to the general welfare of society. How does the interaction between theory and practice manifest itself within this education? Let's analyze some elements:

- National-spiritual education is often based on philosophical principles and cultural values that form the basis of society. Theoretical frameworks include discussions of the role of education in preserving cultural heritage, promoting national identity, and inculcating ethical values.
- Educational theories guide the teaching methods used in national-spiritual education. These include a mix of traditional and modern pedagogical approaches adapted to the cultural and national context.
- During curriculum development and improvement, it is important to consider the impact of theoretical considerations on the inclusion of cultural and national content for the selection and integration of content that reflects the cultural, historical, and spiritual aspects of the nation. This content is then translated into practical curriculum design that aligns with the intended educational goals.
- Theoretical frameworks that emphasize ethical and moral development influence the inclusion of national moral values in the curriculum. Practical strategies for imparting these values are derived from educational theories of character development and ethical reasoning.
- Consideration of teacher training and professional development is based on the important role of teachers in providing national and moral education. Theoretical concepts related to cultural understanding, identity formation, and ethical instruction are included in teacher training programs.

- Application in classroom practices - practical approaches to the implementation of theoretical concepts are applied during the teachers' professional development. This includes strategies for creating a positive and inclusive learning environment that promotes national and spiritual development.
- Aligning assessments with educational goals: Theoretical considerations guide the development of assessments that measure both cognitive and moral development. Practical assessment tools should assess not only academic achievement but also character and values, in line with the broader goals of national-spiritual education.

Many examples can be mentioned of the practical application of theoretical concepts related to effective educational practices. For example, the first and second 44-day Karabakh wars in Azerbaijan are clear proof that Azerbaijan's youth was formed in the spirit of national and moral values. The heroism of young people who unhesitatingly shielded their lives from the enemy's bullets to protect the Motherland, their native land, and the presence of more than three thousand martyrs and thousands of veterans is an irreplaceable result of the upbringing of Azerbaijani youth in the spirit of national and moral values at the intersection of theory and experience. On the other hand, as a result of the successes achieved in the fields of music, sports, and science in many great halls and squares of the world, raising the Azerbaijani flag and singing our national anthem means the formation of Azerbaijani youth with national and moral values. These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of theory and practice against the backdrop of real-world events, the successful implementation of national-spiritual education, and its positive contribution to society, as the intersection of theory and practice in the national-spiritual education of sustainable youth.

But is important to highlight that these processes do not happen suddenly. Forming today's young people in the spirit of national and moral values against the backdrop of real-world events is not an easy, sudden process, but means overcoming a long and difficult path. This is a response to the call of time in front of education. Therefore, the intersection of theory and practice in national-spiritual education is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. Theoretical frameworks guide the development of educational strategies, curricula, and assessment tools, while practical implementation provides feedback that refines and validates theoretical foundations. This synergy is essential to create a meaningful and effective educational experience that aligns with the cultural and national aspirations of the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The rapid development of the modern world poses an urgent need to address the challenges arising in the formation of new generations of youth in the spirit of national and moral values. This educational process can help young people develop solidly and constantly in terms of loyalty and respect for these values. The research emphasizes the importance of promoting national and moral values through high-level education in this area. National-spiritual education helps young people achieve better self-knowledge, understand their abilities and interests, and gain resilience to develop themselves. Furthermore, it instills the principles of justice and law, allowing young people to lead a fair and respectful life in society. It also encourages the acquisition of work and responsibility principles. A key aspect is the importance of experience in the learning process of young people, where national spiritual education supports an educational process linked to practical experience. Likewise, it encourages independent thinking and respect for divergent opinions, which is emerging as a potential outcome of the research. These findings nourish the debate on strategies and principles that can contribute to young people being educated with a solid and sustainable upbringing, imbued with national and moral values, and prepared for the challenges of a changing world. The application of an integrative approach of theory and practice in national-spiritual education is seen as an ideal way for this purpose.

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