

THEORY

AND CURRENT PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS' MORAL UPBRINGING

TEORÍA Y PROBLEMAS ACTUALES DE LA FORMACIÓN MORAL DE LOS ESTUDIANTES

Rahimakhanim Rzabala Mammadzade

E-mail: ragimaxanum.mamedzade@mail.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2256-3185>

Azerbaijan University of Languages. Azerbaijan.

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ABSTRACT

Moral education is an important element of holistic human development and social cohesion, particularly in an era marked by technological disruption, environmental and health crises, and conflicts that have led in many cases to social fragmentation. While existing literature emphasizes the fundamental role of families and educational institutions in cultivating ethical behavior, contemporary challenges such as digital misinformation, declining trust in traditional authorities, and tensions between cultural identity and universal values underscore critical gaps in addressing the dynamic needs of modern moral pedagogy. This paper analyzes some benefits of, and challenges to overcome by, the theory of moral education of students in the educational context of Azerbaijan following a historical, pedagogical, and cultural approach. Through theoretical analysis and observation, it was found that: (1) moral education should be systematically integrated into all curricula, combining theoretical instruction, discussions on ethical dilemmas, and community-oriented activities; (2) Cultural values such as patriotism, respect for elders, and national dignity play an important role in civic responsibility; and (3) it is important for educators to balance tradition with adaptability to address changing social norms. We highlight the need to expand collaboration between families, schools, and policymakers to implement scalable moral education frameworks. This will enable the promotion of pedagogies that help foster empathy, critical thinking, and resilience among future generations.

Keywords: Moral education, Ethical pedagogy, Cultural values, Educational framework, Azerbaijan.

RESUMEN

La educación moral es un elemento importante del desarrollo humano holístico, así como para la cohesión social, particularmente en una era marcada por la disrupción tecnológica, crisis ambientales y sanitarias, así como conflictos que han llevado en muchos casos a la fragmentación social. Si bien la literatura existente enfatiza el papel fundamental de las familias y las instituciones educativas en el cultivo del comportamiento ético, los desafíos contemporáneos, como la desinformación digital, la disminución de la confianza en las autoridades tradicionales y las tensiones entre la identidad cultural y los valores universales, subrayan las brechas críticas en el abordaje de las necesidades dinámicas de la pedagogía moral moderna. En este trabajo se analiza algunos beneficios, y retos a superar por parte de la teoría de la educación moral de los estudiantes en el contexto educativo de Azerbaiyán siguiendo un enfoque histórico, pedagógico y cultural. Mediante el análisis teórico y la observación se encontró que: (1) la educación moral debe integrarse sistemáticamente en todos los planes de estudio, combinando instrucción teórica, debates sobre dilemas éticos y actividades orientadas a la comunidad; (2) los valores culturales como el patriotismo, el respeto por los mayores y la dignidad nacional juegan un papel importante en la responsabilidad cívica; y (3) es importante que los educadores equilibren la tradición con la adaptabilidad para abordar las normas sociales cambiantes. Destacamos la necesidad de ampliar la colaboración entre las familias, las escuelas y los responsables de las políticas para implementar marcos de educación moral escalables. Esto permitirá la promoción de pedagogías que ayuden a fomentar la empatía, el pensamiento crítico y la resiliencia entre las generaciones futuras.

Palabras clave: Educación moral, Pedagogía ética, Valores culturales, Marco educativo, Azerbaiyán.

INTRODUCTION

Moral education has been a fundamental pillar in the construction of cohesive societies and in the integral development of the human being since the dawn of civilization. In the educational context, this process is beyond the mere transmission of technical or scientific knowledge to enter the sphere of values, attitudes and ethical decisions that define human coexistence (Rehren & Sauer, 2024). Nowadays, where the world is marked by social, technological and environmental crises, moral education has taken renewed urgency (Bauer & Hermann, 2024). In this regard, contemporary educational systems face the challenge of forming not only critical minds, but also citizens aware of their individual and collective responsibility. To do this, it is necessary to recognize that moral education is not an optional complement to education, but part of its essential core (Gao & Wang, 2021; Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023). In the words of the philosopher Aristotle, “moral excellence is the result of habit” (McSherry, 2016; Pradhan, 2024) and it is in the classroom where these habits—such as honesty, empathy and respect—can be systematically cultivated.

Moral education contributes to the holistic development of the student, balancing their intellectual growth with their emotional and social maturity. Recent studies in educational psychology indicate that students with a solid ethical foundation show greater resilience in conflict situations and better teamwork skills (Spohrer, 2024; Tillott et al., 2024). Schools, as social microcosms, have the responsibility of fostering these principles through structured programmes that integrate ethical dilemmas, debates and/or community projects. This is important since a democratic society requires citizens capable of discerning between what is just and what is unjust, of participating critically in public debates but also be able to respect human dignity. Furthermore, in the digital age, where misinformation and polarization undermine dialogue, moral education may act as an antidote to indifference and individualism. In this sense UNESCO recognizes ethical education is a key component for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those relating to peace, justice and the reduction of inequalities (UNESCO, 2023, 2025).

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, numerous studies have been conducted on the theory, practice, and actual problems of moral education expressing their views on various aspects of this issue in their textbooks and teaching aids (Abbasov, 2013, 2016; Abbasov et al., 2022; Ahmadov, 2014; Ahmadov & Bashirli, 2022; Ahmadov,

2013; Gasimova, 2004; Guliyev, 2011; Hasanov, 1997; Ismikhanov & Bayramov, 2022; Mukhtarova, 1993). They argue that through effective organization of spiritual education, many positive qualities that students have previously acquired are further developed. These include patriotism, honesty, truthfulness, simplicity, humility, camaraderie, friendship, kindness, respect for elders, justice, humanism, fairness, objectivity, principles, courage, bravery, heroism, love of peace, opposition to war, care for Azerbaijan’s flora and fauna, and protection of plant and animal life. These qualities represent only some components of spiritual education, as it encompasses dozens of constituent elements. Additional important tasks of spiritual education include developing caring attitudes, enlightenment, politeness, national identity, pride in our Motherland’s material and spiritual wealth, active life participation, and fostering personal and national honor and dignity.

Spiritual education and the acquisition of moral qualities are of utmost importance in a person’s life and activities. Each individual is shaped by various factors, both objective and subjective, internal and external. In higher education institutions, work on students’ spiritual education is conducted primarily through the training process - in lectures and seminars on individual subjects - as well as through extracurricular activities. Pedagogical faculties primarily utilize the resources of pedagogy, family pedagogy, family values, psychology, literature, and Azerbaijani history, among other disciplines. For events outside the auditorium, it is recommended to organize discussions on topics such as “A Person’s Sense of Dignity,” “Portrait of an Ideal Individual,” and “How to Protect the Honor of a Beloved Person.” Additionally, debates can be held on subjects including “What Makes a Worthy Child?” “Where Does the Homeland Begin?” “Family Honor,” and “Culture of Feelings.” Furthermore, conversations about “Self-education” and “Culture of Behavior in Relationships” are also beneficial. Taking this into account, this paper analyzes some of the benefits and challenges to be overcome by the theory of moral education of students in the educational context of Azerbaijan using a historical, pedagogical and cultural approach.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research employed two primary methods: theoretical analysis and observation. Spiritual education is closely interconnected with and influenced by each component in the system of personality education. Activities that include spiritual motivation and create spiritual relationships manifest themselves as important sources of personality formation. Spiritual education is carried out and directed

by parents in the family and by members of the pedagogical collective in secondary schools, institutes, and universities. This structure allows for the formation of important conditions for organizing and motivating spiritual behavior.

Moral principles, attitudes, and motives influence students' behavior and attitudes. These elements are integrated into various components of the system (mental culture, aesthetic culture, physical culture, legal culture, ecological culture, etc.) to achieve the comprehensive development and improvement of the educated person through spiritual manifestations such as mutual assistance, care, compassion, empathy, and sharing in joy and sorrow.

The tasks of spiritual education in higher educational institutions arise from the social position of the individual. A teacher who conducts spiritual education among students should have a clear understanding of its composition, content, components, purpose, tasks, principles, methods, and means. Pedagogy and psychology teachers are well versed in these issues. Teachers of other subjects should also be closely familiar with the essence, main issues, and current challenges of spiritual education. According to professor Abbasov, "the more important it is to develop a person's mind and thinking (mental education), the more important and necessary it is to form the spiritual world, spirituality, and positive moral qualities of the personality" (Abbasov, 2013, p. 187). He further states that "spiritual education, on the one hand, forms spiritual consciousness and feelings, spiritual thinking, spiritual understanding and judgments, and on the other hand, spiritual behavior" (Abbasov, 2013, p. 188).

The educational process progresses through distinct stages. Ismikhanov and Bayramov identify these stages as:

- Familiarizing students with correct behavior, norms, and requirements
- Formation of attitudes towards those norms and requirements
- Instilling the motives and desire for correct behavior
- Formation of stable behavioral practices, customs, and habits
- The gradual transformation of systematic customs and traditions into personality traits (Ismikhanov & Bayramov, 2022, pp. 236–237).

We believe these principles can be applied both to students in general and to moral education, which is an essential component of education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morality in education throughout history has not been some static concept, but rather it is a dynamic phenomenon that shifts and changes to meet the different social, religious, and political changes of every era. Examples of such statement is shown next:

a) Antiquity and philosophical traditions

- Classic Greece: Virtue in Greek paideia was the end of education itself. Thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle explained knowledge and ethics as inseparable (Berg, 2014).
- Confucianism: In the East, Confucius stressed moral rectitude, ren, as the root of social harmony, integrating rituals and family roles into teaching.

b) Middle Ages and religious morality. With the rise of Christianity, Islam, and other religions, moral education became closely linked to religious doctrine. Monastic schools and madrassas transmitted values such as humility, charity, and obedience through sacred texts.

c) Enlightenment and secularization. A turning point came with the 18th century and thinkers like Kant, who contended that morality ought to be based on reason rather than tradition. Hence, the development of the concept of a universal ethics accessible via critical thinking provided the foundation for modern civic education (Miskocova, 2023).

d) 20th century: Between relativism and human rights.

The first was provoked by cultural pluralism and the atrocities of both world wars. During this time, authors like Kohlberg (Sanders, 2024), a moral development theorist, and Noddings, an ethicist of care, published their works on the importance of dialogue and empathy within education (Lee & Jue, 2024). In the same period, though, calls were also raised for education hinged on human dignity and social justice through various declarations, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

e) 21st Century: Challenges in the Digital Era. Modern moral education has to face a set of quite new challenges: the exposure to violence on the Internet, loss of authority by traditional institutions, and tension between cultural identities and universal values.

That historical journey shows that moral education has never been alien to social contexts, even though its ultimate goal remains unchanged: to guide students in the construction of an ethical life project capable of harmonizing personal freedom with collective responsibility. Spiritual education involves the formation of spirituality,

the enrichment of the human world, and moral purity. Spirituality is the main issue, a valuable asset that reflects a person's (in our study, a student's) attitude and behavior toward society, real events in society, themselves, their relatives, and those around them. To enrich spirituality, it is advisable to have a comprehensive, rather than one-sided, impact on the personality, directing the educational impact toward thinking, behavior and attitude, actions and deeds, as well as the emotional world of children, adolescents, and young people.

"Menaviyyat" is derived from the Arabic word "mana" and means the meaning and value of a person. This concept encompasses a person's inner purity, refinement of morals, and strength and purity of heart. Spirituality means that a person appears as they are, presenting their authentic self. It is the natural and intellectual essence of each person, characterizing their spiritual upbringing and inner world. Spirituality is a sign of the richness of a person's inner world. A spiritually rich person typically enjoys good and strong health and finds joy in life.

Although spiritual development continues throughout a person's life, moral qualities primarily begin to form during childhood, adolescence, early youth, and young adulthood, with positive, admirable qualities being strengthened in later years. A teacher working with students to develop their moral qualities must clearly understand the tasks facing moral education. These tasks include:

- Understanding well the essence of spiritual education, its purpose, and implementation methods.
- Forming spiritual awareness, spiritual thinking, and spiritual behavioral experience in students.
- Knowing and following the guiding principles for instilling, implementing, and developing moral qualities during activities.
- Effectively utilizing methods when conducting moral education among students.
- Developing moral feelings in students (patriotism, honor, dignity, conscience, integrity, chastity, trust, duty, responsibility, citizenship, etc.).
- Being aware of and able to use optimal ways of organizing spiritual education.
- Instilling moral character in students (being patient, enthusiastic, restrained, tolerant, responsible, punctual, organized, honest, truthful, caring, compassionate, etc.).
- Developing the ability to organize diagnostics and ex-

pertise of spiritual education.

- Cultivating moral attitudes in students (treating people with care, respect and sensitivity, maintaining composure in complex and unpleasant situations, being able to navigate difficult circumstances, showing selflessness in challenging times, being able to help others, etc.).

One of these key tasks is helping young students properly understand the moral and psychological foundations of interpersonal relationships. Another essential task is developing a culture of behavior in students. These tasks are inextricably connected. The majority of male students strictly follow their institutions' internal rules of discipline, prepare for lectures and seminars, participate in extra-curricular educational events, take an active part in their organization, and demonstrate organizational skills, initiative, and independence. They maintain friendly relations with their group mates and fellow university students. However, some students attempt to claim leadership in their groups and institutions, come unprepared to lectures, seminars, and exams, and enter into conflicts with their fellow students. Special attention and work on upbringing and self-education are necessary for these students. For this reason, educators, psychologists, writers, poets, and other well-known personalities have highly valued and continue to value family relationships, children's respect for their parents, elders, and the older generation.

Spiritual education has specific characteristics that emerge through social relations and spiritual values. As mentioned above, spiritual education has many components. Among them, patriotism stands as a premier spiritual quality. Patriotism is a rich, sublime, and extremely deep spiritual feeling that begins with the lullabies, songs, and rhymes sung by our grandmothers in the cradle. Instilling a sense of patriotism helps educate the younger generation to become exemplary citizens of our country and develop an active civic position. When individuals consider it their duty and responsibility to protect their land, ancestral homeland, identity, honor, and dignity - and act accordingly - they demonstrate civic maturity and true patriotism.

Patriotism is an immense and inexhaustible feeling that has formed in people since the emergence of homelands. The Azerbaijani people have protected their native homeland and lands from enemies for centuries. Although they have sometimes suffered defeats, they have not lost heart or stopped their struggle, fighting to ensure their sovereignty and holding their independence above all else. National patriotism has been a great force driving these victories.

The Azerbaijani people are peace-loving and have always lived in conditions of peace, brotherhood, and friendship with neighboring states. Azerbaijan has no claims to the territory of any state. Love for one's people, family, parents, relatives, and homeland are a sublime feeling that derives its source from love for parents, the family hearth, and relatives. Therefore, to foster love for one's homeland, children must be taught from a young age to love their family, land, village, region, city, republic, and country where they were born and raised.

The system of moral education draws its ideological foundations from society's existing moral and ethical norms. The formation of national self-awareness, pride, and dignity in students is a crucial part of moral education. Instilling these feelings gives students a sense of pride and honor in our people, nation, and country's material and spiritual wealth, including Azerbaijan's nature, flora and fauna, people, famous personalities, culture, and art. Despite facing many difficulties and pressures throughout history, Azerbaijan has preserved its language, customs, traditions, and rich culture while achieving great success in science, art, and culture. The Azerbaijani army possesses unique strength and power and stands ready to protect our country from enemy aggression.

One of the most important components of moral education is teaching respect for elders. This respect primarily encompasses parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, and older people, along with protecting their reputation. There is a proverb that states: "Respect the elders, and you will grow up too."

There is deep truth in those words. BA Abbaszadeh wrote a story called "Respect the elders..." In that story, the importance of respecting elders found beautiful expression. Here is the story:

"Nadir lived a few steps away from his school. That's why he often went to school by bus. Nadir had a peculiar habit: as soon as he saw an empty seat on the bus, he would quickly sit down. He would turn his face to the window so that when someone else boarded the bus, he wouldn't have to give up his seat. One day, Nadir was going to school. As usual, he was looking out the window, but he heard conversations on the bus. It was the voice of his classmate Tofiq:

'Uncle, please sit down.'

'Oh son, don't worry.'

The voice was heard again:

'Uncle, there's room here, come and sit down.'

'Hey kid, don't worry. There's a guy here, I want him to give me a seat.'

The voice approached Nadir. The man was standing over Nadir's head. The voice sounded familiar to him. When Nadir turned his face, he saw his father" (Abbasov, 2016, p. 280). The story has tremendous educational value. The logical conclusion from this incident is that one should give up their seat to older people on public transport. This is a moral duty. Moreover, one should respect elders now so that they will receive the same respect when they grow old.

The joys, excitement, worries, and sufferings of fathers and mothers intertwine with those of their children in family life. This creates sincere relationships between parents and children. Therefore, we can say that the foundations of young people's spiritual development are formed in the family. The daily behavior and attitudes of parents and other older family members, their interpersonal relationships, and how they conduct themselves both inside and outside the family leave deep impressions on children's hearts, with parental example having lasting influence.

Respect for parents and protecting family honor and dignity are extremely important duties and responsibilities of every child. The care, kind attitude, and affection of fathers and mothers serve as a great school of upbringing for children. Among the components of moral education, the development of honor and dignity occupies an important place. Honor is understood as society's and individual citizens' approval and evaluation of a person's behavior, actions, and attitude. Honor is also a person's understanding and protection of their own dignity and self-esteem. There are both personal and national dimensions to honor and dignity. Personal honor and dignity relate to the individual, while national honor and dignity involve protecting the honor and dignity of one's people and nation, even going to war if necessary. While protecting the honor and dignity of the Motherland, a person simultaneously guards their own honor and dignity. A student's honor and dignity are closely related to their civic duty. This civic duty contributes to the development of national consciousness and the formation of love and respect for their people's history, culture, and art.

The members of the pedagogical collective who carry out students' spiritual education are guided by several educational principles:

1. Clarity of purpose in spiritual education.
2. Linking spiritual education with life, peaceful constructive work in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and people's selfless labor.

3. Considering students' individual and gender characteristics during character development.
4. Taking into account students' age characteristics during spiritual education.
5. Uniformity in requirements.
6. Maintaining optimism.
7. Balancing respect and demandingness for students.
8. Ensuring systematicity and continuity in spiritual education.
9. Fostering joint activity between educator and educated during spiritual education.

Members of the pedagogical team use educational methods during both formal training and extracurricular activities for moral education. These methods include:

1. Methods that form consciousness (also called persuasion methods).
2. Methods that form the organization of activity and behavioral experience (also called indoctrination methods).
3. Methods that stimulate activity and behavior (also called methods of encouragement and punishment).
4. Methods based on the educator's personal example.

Nasir al-Din Tusi highly valued the role of persuasion in education, considering it an essential type and means of educational method. In his work "Akhlāqī-Nasirī," he wrote:

The first condition of education is that you should not let a child sit or play with people who can spoil his nature. Because a child's soul is simple, he quickly takes on the character of those around him. It is necessary to educate a child with virtues that engender kindness and love, especially through persuasion that affects the mind, consciousness, and perception... (Tusi, 2005, p. 168).

There is deep truth in N. Tusi's words.

A student who understands their own honor and dignity comprehends their freedoms and rights, clearly recognizes that they and their people have equal rights with other peoples and nations, and takes an uncompromising stance against any unpleasantness (Tusi, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

Moral education is one of the fundamental components of human development. As the first teachers, parents have a big responsibility to instill in children kindness, honesty and respect while school should instill moral values as part of the curriculum and not as an additional supplement. Moral education has undergone significant

changes throughout history adapting to social, religious and technological transformations. From the virtues in Greek philosophy to the problems of the digital era such as internet violence and the erosion of authority of traditional guidebooks, moral education remains true to its mission of forming ethical citizens who can weigh personal freedom against collective responsibility.

Today society faces unprecedented challenges in moral education. Globalization, social polarization and exposure to toxic digital environment requires innovative approach to ethical development. Because of that moral education requires comprehensive pedagogical approach. Theoretical training consists of: lectures, debates, analysis of ethical dilemmas; while practical activities are community projects and extracurricular initiatives that encourage empathy and cooperation. Teachers should set an example for students by pulling them into the path of ethical behavior. Success is based on clarity of purpose, respect for individual characteristics and balance between demands and support. Thus, in this article was argue how moral education cannot be thought of separately but is intertwined in the fabric of cultural tradition, patriotism and other values.

In Azerbaijan, honor, national dignity and protection of historical and natural heritage are part of the value structure. Patriotism is encouraged since childhood years; it relates family love with greater social dedication. The challenges remain, such as some students' misbehavior like unpreparedness and regional tensions. All these problems require special guidance and self-assessment. However, in general terms it is accepted that effective implementation of moral education programs requires coordination of family, school and society for consistency in moral upbringing. On the theoretical level Azerbaijani scholars have made significant input especially A.N. Abbasov and M.A. Ismikhanov who emphasized the inseparability of intellectual and spiritual development. What the authors say is that moral education is more than consciousness; it is ingrained habits and behaviors. Moral education is a practice under construction, which means balancing global changing situations with universal and cultural values. All this will work if there would be systematic inclusion at all levels of education and serious commitment and development of critical-empathetic dialogue among new generations. This holistic approach will make moral education neither irrelevant nor useless in solving current social problems but will stick to its foundational ethics.

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