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PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING MORAL DECISION-MAKING COMPETENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Abstract. Moral decision-making competence is an essential component of the personal and social development of primary school pupils. It enables children to recognise ethically significant situations, interpret competing values, consider the perspectives of others, anticipate consequences, justify their choices, and assume responsibility for their actions. This article examines the pedagogical foundations for developing moral decision-making competence among primary school pupils through a conceptual analysis of established theories of moral development and research on contemporary educational practices. Particular attention is given to teacher modelling, age-appropriate moral dilemmas, collaborative reasoning, storytelling, role-play, reflective activities, and technology-supported learning. The analysis identifies five interrelated pedagogical conditions: a psychologically safe classroom environment, meaningful moral dilemmas, structured dialogic interaction, opportunities for responsible action and reflection, and cooperation between schools and families. The findings suggest that moral competence cannot be developed effectively through the memorisation of rules or the reproduction of socially desirable answers alone. Instead, it requires systematic opportunities for pupils to articulate their reasoning, consider alternative viewpoints, evaluate consequences, and revise their judgements through dialogue and experience.

Keywords: moral decision-making competence, primary school pupils, moral education, ethical reasoning, pedagogical conditions, moral dilemmas, reflective practice, primary education.

BOSHLANG‘ICH SINF O‘QUVCHILARIDA AXLOQIY QAROR QABUL QILISH KOMPETENSIYASINI RIVOJLANTIRISHNING PEDAGOGIK ASOSLARI

Annotatsiya. Axloqiy qaror qabul qilish kompetensiyasi boshlang‘ich sinf o‘quvchilarining shaxsiy va ijtimoiy rivojlanishida muhim o‘rin tutadi. Ushbu kompetensiya bolalarga axloqiy ahamiyatga ega vaziyatlarni aniqlash, turli qadriyatlar va manfaatlarni tahlil qilish, boshqa insonlarning nuqtayi nazarini hisobga olish, qarorlarning oqibatlarini oldindan baholash, o‘z tanlovini asoslash hamda xatti-harakatlari uchun mas’uliyatni his etish imkonini beradi. Mazkur maqolada axloqiy rivojlanishning nazariy yondashuvlari va zamonaviy ta’lim amaliyotlariga oid ilmiy tadqiqotlar asosida boshlang‘ich sinf o‘quvchilarida axloqiy qaror qabul qilish kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishning pedagogik asoslari tahlil qilinadi. O‘qituvchining shaxsiy namunasi, yosh xususiyatlariga mos axloqiy vaziyatlar, hamkorlikdagi fikrlash, hikoya va rolli o‘yinlar, refleksiv faoliyat hamda raqamli ta’lim vositalaridan foydalanishga alohida e’tibor qaratiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: axloqiy qaror qabul qilish kompetensiyasi, boshlang‘ich sinf o‘quvchilari, axloqiy tarbiya, axloqiy fikrlash, pedagogik shart-sharoitlar, axloqiy muammolar, refleksiv faoliyat, boshlang‘ich ta’lim.

ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ ПРИНЯТИЯ НРАВСТВЕННЫХ РЕШЕНИЙ У УЧАЩИХСЯ НАЧАЛЬНЫХ КЛАССОВ

Аннотация. Компетентность принятия нравственных решений является важным компонентом личностного и социального развития учащихся начальных классов. Она позволяет детям распознавать ситуации, имеющие нравственное значение, анализировать противоречивые ценности и интересы, учитывать точки зрения других людей, прогнозировать последствия своих действий, обосновывать выбор и принимать ответственность за его реализацию. В статье рассматриваются педагогические основы развития данной компетентности на основе теоретических концепций нравственного развития и научных исследований современных образовательных практик. Особое внимание уделяется личному примеру учителя, нравственным дилеммам, соответствующим возрастным особенностям учащихся, совместному рассуждению, рассказыванию историй, ролевым играм, рефлексивной деятельности и использованию цифровых образовательных средств. В результате анализа выделены пять взаимосвязанных педагогических условий: психологически безопасная образовательная среда, содержательные нравственные ситуации, организованное диалогическое взаимодействие, возможности для ответственных действий и рефлексии, а также сотрудничество школы и семьи. Обосновывается положение о том, что развитие нравственной компетентности не может ограничиваться заучиванием правил и воспроизведением социально одобряемых ответов. Оно предполагает создание условий для самостоятельного рассуждения, рассмотрения альтернативных точек зрения, оценки последствий и пересмотра первоначальных суждений.

Ключевые слова: компетентность принятия нравственных решений, учащиеся начальных классов, нравственное воспитание, этическое мышление, педагогические условия, нравственные дилеммы, рефлексивная деятельность, начальное образование.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of primary education extends beyond the acquisition of literacy, numeracy, and subject-specific knowledge. Primary school also plays a significant role in developing pupils’ moral awareness, social responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and capacity for independent judgement. During this period, children gradually learn to understand social expectations, distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, recognise the interests of others, and evaluate the consequences of their actions.

Everyday school life provides numerous situations requiring moral judgement. Pupils may need to decide whether to include a classmate in a game, how to respond when a friend breaks a rule, how to share limited resources, or whether to admit responsibility for a mistake. Such situations frequently involve competing

considerations, including friendship, honesty, fairness, loyalty, and responsibility. Consequently, moral education requires more than explaining rules or expecting pupils to obey instructions. It must also develop their ability to understand why particular actions are justified and how different choices affect other people.

In this article, moral decision-making competence is defined as the integrated capacity to recognise an ethically significant problem, interpret the values and interests involved, consider alternative actions, evaluate possible consequences, justify a decision, implement it responsibly, and reflect on its outcomes. This definition encompasses cognitive, emotional, social, and practical dimensions of moral development.

The development of this competence is particularly important in primary education because pupils are gradually moving from externally guided rule-following towards more reflective forms of judgement. However, this transition is neither automatic nor identical for every child. It depends on individual developmental characteristics, family experiences, classroom relationships, cultural expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

Research on moral education emphasises the importance of teacher modelling, storytelling, cooperative activities, structured discussion, and supportive classroom environments. Akram et al. (2023), for example, examined the pedagogical practices and challenges associated with cultivating moral values among primary school teachers in Pakistan. Their research highlights the relevance of practical educational strategies and the need to consider teachers' preparation for moral education.

Collaborative reasoning offers additional opportunities for pupils to explain their views, consider competing arguments, and revise initial decisions. Drama-based learning can likewise provide opportunities to explore different perspectives and examine the emotional consequences of behaviour (Feng, 2022). Technology-supported approaches may help pupils identify ethically significant features of a situation, although recognising a moral problem does not necessarily mean that a learner can evaluate alternative solutions effectively.

Despite these developments, an important pedagogical question remains: how can different instructional approaches be integrated into a coherent framework that supports the development of moral decision-making competence in primary school pupils?

The purpose of this article is to analyse the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of moral decision-making competence and to propose an integrated framework for its development in primary education.

The article addresses three research questions:

What conceptual dimensions constitute moral decision-making competence in primary school pupils?

Which pedagogical conditions can support the development of this competence?

How can these conditions be integrated into a coherent framework for classroom practice?

LITERATURE REWIEW

Theoretical Approaches to Moral Development

The theoretical foundations of moral education are associated with several perspectives explaining how children understand rules, values, social relationships, and responsibility. Piaget (1932) emphasised the development of moral judgement through social interaction, cooperation, and changing perceptions of fairness. Kohlberg (1984) further explored how individuals justify moral decisions, highlighting the importance of reasoning rather than merely choosing a particular action.

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) emphasises observational learning, self-regulation, and the influence of the social environment. Children develop moral understanding by observing teachers, parents, and peers. Rest (1986) identified four components of moral functioning: moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation, and moral implementation. These perspectives suggest that moral competence involves not only recognising right and wrong but also making justified decisions and acting responsibly.

Moral Education in Primary School

Moral education is most meaningful when pupils encounter values through practical classroom experiences rather than memorising rules. Akram et al. (2023) examined primary teachers' approaches to cultivating moral values, highlighting practices such as teacher modelling, storytelling, teamwork, and classroom activities.

Stories help children explore characters' motives, conflicts, and consequences, while open-ended questions encourage them to consider alternative actions and justify their opinions. Teachers should therefore create opportunities for pupils to connect moral principles with everyday situations and develop independent judgement.

Collaborative Reasoning and Dialogic Teaching

Collaborative reasoning enables pupils to explain their opinions, consider alternative viewpoints, and revise their decisions. Structured discussions are particularly valuable when moral situations involve competing considerations, such as honesty, friendship, and fairness.

Teachers can support these processes through pair work, small-group discussions, and reflective questions. Such activities encourage pupils to justify their choices while ensuring that all participants have opportunities to contribute.

Drama Pedagogy and Experiential Learning

Drama pedagogy allows pupils to explore moral situations through role-play and simulation. Feng (2022) examined drama-based moral education in a Chinese primary school, highlighting its potential to support empathy, dialogue, and independent thinking.

Role-play helps pupils understand different perspectives and examine the consequences of their actions. However, its educational value depends on effective teacher guidance and subsequent reflection on the experience.

Technology-Supported Moral Education

Digital technologies provide opportunities to explore contemporary moral issues, including online communication, privacy, and responsible information sharing. A 2023 study published in *Computers & Education: X Reality* examined virtual-reality-based moral education involving 162 elementary pupils in South Korea. The findings indicated improvement in moral sensitivity but no statistically significant improvement in moral judgement.

This distinction demonstrates that recognising a moral problem does not necessarily mean being able to make a justified decision. Therefore, digital activities should be combined with teacher-guided discussion and reflection.

Overall, the literature suggests that moral decision-making competence develops through the interaction of ethical reasoning, social learning, empathy, practical experience, and reflection. Integrating these approaches into a coherent pedagogical framework may help primary school pupils develop the ability to make informed and responsible moral decisions.

METHODOLGY

The article employs a conceptual-narrative review design. It does not report a new empirical experiment or claim to establish the effectiveness of a particular teaching intervention.

The analysis draws on established theories of moral development and selected scholarly publications addressing moral education, collaborative reasoning, drama pedagogy, and technology-supported learning. Priority was given to sources relevant to primary or elementary education and to theoretical perspectives with clear implications for classroom practice.

The literature was examined thematically through three analytical stages.

First, the conceptual dimensions of moral decision-making competence were identified. These included moral sensitivity, perspective-taking, ethical reasoning, consequence awareness, responsible action, and reflection.

Second, the pedagogical approaches discussed in the selected literature were compared. Particular attention was given to teacher modelling, storytelling, moral dilemmas, collaborative discussion, role-play, experiential learning, and technology-supported activities.

Third, recurring pedagogical implications were synthesised into an integrated framework intended to support the development of moral decision-making competence in primary school pupils.

The analysis was guided by the following principles:

Developmental appropriateness: learning activities should reflect pupils' age, language abilities, emotional development, and prior experiences.

Active participation: pupils should have opportunities to express opinions, compare alternatives, and justify their decisions.

Integration of reasoning and action: moral education should connect conceptual understanding with responsible behaviour.

Reflective learning: pupils should be encouraged to examine outcomes and reconsider their judgements.

Contextual relevance: examples and learning activities should reflect the social and cultural contexts in which pupils live.

The methodological approach has limitations. A narrative review does not provide the exhaustive coverage or reproducibility of a systematic review. Furthermore, the sources considered differ in research design, educational context, and outcome measures. Consequently, the proposed framework should be regarded as a theoretically grounded pedagogical model requiring further empirical investigation.

RESULTS

The conceptual analysis identifies six interrelated dimensions of moral decision-making competence and five pedagogical conditions that support its development. These findings form the basis of a five-phase pedagogical framework for primary education.

Core Dimensions of Moral Decision-Making Competence. Moral decision-making competence comprises six interconnected dimensions:

Moral perception – recognising ethical issues involving fairness, honesty, harm, inclusion, and responsibility.

Perspective-taking – understanding the feelings, needs, and viewpoints of others.

Ethical reasoning – comparing possible actions and justifying decisions with relevant arguments.

Consequence awareness – anticipating the immediate and long-term effects of decisions.

Responsible agency – implementing decisions appropriately and accepting responsibility for actions.

Reflection and self-regulation – evaluating outcomes, learning from experience, and reconsidering previous judgements.

These dimensions interact throughout the decision-making process. Therefore, moral competence should be developed through continuous practice, discussion, and reflection rather than isolated lessons about individual values.

Pedagogical Conditions for Developing Moral Competence. The analysis identifies five principal pedagogical conditions.

A Psychologically Safe and Respectful Classroom Environment

Pupils need an environment where they can express opinions, disagree respectfully, and acknowledge mistakes without fear of humiliation. Teachers should encourage active listening, reasoned arguments, and respect for different perspectives while guiding pupils towards principles of fairness, honesty, and responsibility.

Age-Appropriate Moral Dilemmas and Storytelling. Moral dilemmas connect abstract values with familiar situations, such as sharing classroom materials, responding to dishonesty, or including a new classmate in a group. Stories and open-ended questions help pupils examine characters' motives, consider alternative actions, and anticipate consequences.

Collaborative Reasoning and Dialogic Interaction. Structured discussions encourage pupils to explain their choices, listen to alternative viewpoints, and reconsider initial judgements. Pair work, small-group discussions, and reflective questions can promote participation and strengthen ethical reasoning.

Role-Play and Experiential Learning. Role-play allows pupils to explore moral problems from different perspectives and examine the consequences of their actions. Classroom responsibilities, cooperative projects, and restorative conversations also provide practical opportunities to develop fairness, accountability, and respectful communication.

Reflection, Teacher Modelling, and School–Family Cooperation. Reflection helps pupils evaluate their decisions and identify possible improvements. Teachers reinforce moral principles through consistent and responsible behaviour, while cooperation with families extends moral learning into everyday life.

A Five-Phase Pedagogical Framework. Based on the analysis, a five-phase framework is proposed for developing moral decision-making competence.

Phase 1. Notice the moral problem. Pupils identify an ethical issue through a story, classroom situation, or age-appropriate dilemma.

Phase 2. Explore perspectives. Pupils consider the feelings, needs, interests, and responsibilities of those involved.

Phase 3. Deliberate and justify a decision. Pupils compare alternative actions, anticipate consequences, and explain their preferred choice.

Phase 4. Act responsibly. Pupils practise or implement an appropriate response through role-play or classroom activities.

Phase 5. Reflect and reconsider. Pupils evaluate the outcome, consider feedback, and identify lessons for future situations.

The framework is flexible and can be implemented in a 30–40-minute lesson or across several lessons. Its phases may be revisited when new information requires pupils to reconsider their decisions.

Application to Classroom Practice. Consider a situation in which a pupil discovers that a friend has copied another pupil's homework. Pupils first identify the conflict involving honesty, friendship, and fairness. They then consider the perspectives of everyone involved and compare possible responses, such as speaking privately to the friend or seeking the teacher's guidance.

Through role-play, pupils practise communicating their concerns respectfully. Finally, they reflect on whether their proposed response balances honesty, responsibility, and respect. This example demonstrates how moral education can connect ethical reasoning with practical action.

Formative Assessment of Moral Competence. Assessment should focus on pupils' reasoning and participation rather than their ability to reproduce expected answers. Teachers can observe whether pupils can identify moral problems, recognise affected individuals, propose alternative actions, justify decisions, consider consequences, respect different viewpoints, and reflect on outcomes.

These indicators can be assessed through discussions, written reflections, role-play, and classroom activities. Assessment should remain supportive and developmentally appropriate, recognising differences in pupils' communication abilities and learning needs.

The proposed indicators are intended for formative classroom use and require further empirical validation before they can be used as a standardised assessment scale.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that moral decision-making competence is a multidimensional outcome involving moral awareness, ethical reasoning, empathy, responsible action, and reflection.

An important distinction exists between moral compliance and moral competence. While compliance involves following rules, competence requires understanding their purpose, evaluating competing responsibilities, and justifying decisions. For example, pupils should not only avoid excluding classmates but also understand why inclusion matters and how to promote it.

The findings also highlight the importance of integrating different pedagogical approaches. Storytelling introduces moral problems, collaborative reasoning develops judgement, role-play supports perspective-taking, and reflection connects learning with practical experience. Teachers play a central role in facilitating discussions, encouraging independent reasoning, and guiding pupils towards fairness, honesty, respect, and responsibility.

Emotional and social factors, including empathy, friendship, and peer pressure, also influence moral decisions. Therefore, learning activities should help pupils understand different perspectives while maintaining a psychologically safe classroom environment. Digital technologies may complement these activities, but they should be combined with guided discussion and explicit reasoning tasks.

Implications for Uzbek Primary Education. The proposed framework can be adapted to Uzbekistan's educational context, including the aims of the *Tarbiya* subject. Local stories, family traditions, and community experiences can help pupils explore honesty, hospitality, justice, mutual assistance, and responsibility.

For example, classroom discussions about helping friends or sharing resources can encourage pupils to balance loyalty with honesty and understand the importance of fairness. Cooperation between schools and families can further reinforce these values while supporting respectful dialogue and independent judgement.

Limitations and Future Research. This article presents a conceptual review rather than an empirical study; therefore, the proposed framework has not yet been experimentally validated. Further research should examine its feasibility and effectiveness in Uzbek primary schools, particularly its influence on pupils' ethical reasoning, perspective-taking, and responsible behaviour.

Future studies should also consider differences in pupils' developmental and communication needs and investigate whether improvements in moral decision-making are sustained and transferred to everyday situations.

CONCLUSION

Moral decision-making competence is an important component of the personal and social development of primary school pupils. It involves recognising ethically significant situations, understanding the perspectives of affected individuals, evaluating alternative actions, anticipating consequences, justifying decisions, acting responsibly, and reflecting on outcomes.

The conceptual analysis indicates that this competence cannot be developed effectively through the memorisation of moral rules or direct instruction alone. Pupils need systematic opportunities to discuss meaningful situations, articulate their reasoning, encounter alternative viewpoints, practise responsible behaviour, and learn from the consequences of their decisions.

Five mutually reinforcing pedagogical conditions have been identified: a psychologically safe classroom climate, age-appropriate moral dilemmas and storytelling, structured collaborative reasoning, experiential learning and responsible action, and reflective practice supported by adult modelling and school–family cooperation.

These conditions have been integrated into a five-phase pedagogical framework comprising noticing, exploring, deliberating, acting, and reflecting. The

framework provides a flexible structure for incorporating moral education into everyday primary school teaching and connecting ethical concepts with practical experience.

For Uzbek primary education, the model offers a basis for adapting moral learning activities to local cultural traditions, family practices, and educational objectives while supporting pupils' ability to reason independently and act responsibly.

The framework should nevertheless be regarded as a theoretically grounded proposal rather than a validated intervention. Further empirical research is needed to evaluate its feasibility, refine formative assessment indicators, and determine whether improvements in moral reasoning and decision-making transfer to pupils' everyday lives.

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