

# Beyond Indoctrination: A Critical Examination of Integrating the Moral Domain in Moral Education

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## Abstract

This article discusses a critical approach to moral education that goes beyond traditional indoctrination methods, focusing on the integration of moral domains holistically. Traditional moral education is often seen as a passive transfer of values, but this approach is less effective in shaping students who are capable of critical thinking and reflective moral decision-making. This study emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, empathy, and moral autonomy in developing ethical and responsible students. The role of teachers as facilitators and ethical models is also discussed, especially the challenges of ensuring moral neutrality in classrooms that respect cultural diversity. This study uses a qualitative approach, including literature analysis and case studies, to explore the implementation of the moral domain in moral education in Malaysia. Findings indicate that approaches such as service learning and the use of personal narratives can enhance students' understanding of moral dilemmas, despite challenges such as social inequality and the influence of social media echo chambers. This article emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educators, policymakers, and society in building an inclusive moral education ecosystem. In conclusion, reflective moral education offers a critical approach to shaping a generation of students who are prepared to face the ethical challenges of the future.

**Keywords:** Integrating, Moral Domain, Moral Education, Value

## Introduction

Moral education is a fundamental element in the global education system, with the goal of forming students who are not only intellectually excellent but also have moral integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. In the era of rapid globalization and technology, ethical dilemmas such as the misuse of artificial intelligence, social inequality, and the spread of false information are becoming increasingly complex. Moral education can no longer rely on traditional didactic approaches, which tend to emphasize the passive transfer of values without training students to think critically or make independent moral decisions (Hermawan & Kusniasari, 2023). Therefore, there is an urgent need to adopt a holistic and reflective approach that is more in line with modern realities.

The importance of integrating the moral domain in the teaching and learning process lies in its ability to help students understand, appreciate, and apply moral values in their lives. Formal approaches, such as value discussions in the classroom, help build students' cognitive foundations in understanding moral dilemmas. Meanwhile, informal approaches, such as service-learning activities or community visits, strengthen the emotional and behavioral domains by providing students with direct experiences (Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021). The combination of these two approaches allows students to not only understand moral values but also to practice them in real-world situations.

This study is increasingly relevant because it not only touches on the interests of individuals, but also has an impact on society as a whole. Students are the main beneficiaries of moral education, where they are educated to understand and address moral issues through this integrated approach. Teachers, on the other hand, act as facilitators and ethical models who guide students to explore various moral perspectives in an atmosphere that respects cultural diversity (Niu & Liu, 2022). In addition, this study is also important for policymakers, who can use the results of the study to improve moral education curricula, making them more practical and inclusive. Ultimately, society also benefits through the formation of a more responsible young generation who are prepared to face global ethical challenges.

This study not only proposes new methods, but also evaluates the effectiveness of strategies such as the integration of the three moral domains cognitive, emotional, and behavioral into subjects such as language and social sciences. This strategy is important to ensure that students not only understand moral theory, but are also able to connect the theory to real-world situations. However, challenges such as social inequality, lack of resources, and the influence of social media echo chambers continue to be obstacles that require special attention (Yang & Xu, 2023). Therefore, this article aims to critically examine this approach, assess its impact on moral education, and propose strategic measures to overcome existing challenges.

### **The Perils of Didactic Moral Education and its Persistence**

Traditional moral education often relies on a transmission model, in which established moral codes and values are passively transmitted from teachers to students. This approach risks reinforcing indoctrination, by ignoring the complexities of moral reasoning as well as the cultural and social context in which morality is applied. As Kohlberg (1971) argued, purely didactic methods fail to develop students' critical moral reasoning abilities, causing them to simply accept values without considering the complexities or conflicts that may arise in the real world. In addition, moral codes themselves are not monolithic entities. Differences in culture, society, and religion lead to value conflicts, which can leave students confused or alienated when their views do not align with the values being taught (Steć & Kulik, 2021).

Despite criticism, the appeal of didactic moral education remains strong. One reason is that this approach offers educators a clear structure, especially when faced with societal concerns about moral decline among students (Yang & Xu, 2023). Educators often find comfort in using this clear moral framework, which reduces uncertainty in teaching. In addition, standardized tests often prioritize memorization and basic understanding of ethical principles over critical thinking skills, creating pressure on teachers to adhere to a more directed and mechanistic approach (Kozhevnikova, 2020).

However, there is evidence that didactic models also have critical limitations. As Norlin (2020) describes, these models often neglect the importance of interaction between students and the lesson, which can lead to a rigid and meaningless learning process. Alternatively, a more dialogic approach, which emphasizes students' participation in active moral exploration, has been suggested as the way forward (Rucker, 2020). This is where modern pedagogical approaches that combine didactic and reflective elements are needed to address the shortcomings of didactic moral education.

### **Fostering Critical Moral Reasoning: Benefits and Limitations**

A critical approach to moral education aims to foster students' thinking so that they can evaluate and make moral decisions based on a variety of ethical frameworks such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. This method provides students with the opportunity to analyze moral dilemmas in more depth and develop their own moral understanding (Cai, 2022). The use of strategies such as Socratic questioning and role-playing allows students to explore multiple moral perspectives while stimulating meaningful critical discussions. Research shows that engaging in complex moral situations helps students develop stronger critical thinking and moral understanding (Mejía, 2023).

However, this approach also has its limitations. Exposing students to multiple ethical frameworks can lead to relativism, where students have difficulty identifying a single "right" answer to a moral dilemma (Bleazby, 2020). This situation may create confusion and hinder the development of consistent values among students. Additionally, fostering critical thinking requires sufficient time and resources, making it challenging to implement comprehensively in large classes, especially in education systems that emphasize standardized testing (Akram et al., 2021).

Critical moral education requires support from multiple parties, including educators, educational institutions, and educational policies. Teachers need to be provided with adequate training to facilitate critical discussions and encourage students to explore a variety of moral perspectives. In addition, the provision of teaching resources such as interactive materials and digital technology can help enrich students' moral learning experiences (Niu & Liu, 2022).

By overcoming these challenges, a critical approach to moral education can offer an effective alternative to traditional didactic approaches. It can shape a generation of students who not only understand moral principles but are also able to apply them in real-world situations responsibly and reflectively.

### **Beyond the Classroom Walls: Moral Education in Action, with its Constraints**

Integrating the moral domain should not be limited to designated moral subjects. To make moral education more relevant, real-world applications are essential. Educators can leverage current events and controversies with a moral dimension as discussion material, which helps students apply their moral reasoning skills in practical contexts (Orzhel, 2022). In addition, service-learning projects provide students with opportunities to practice moral behavior directly, thus fostering empathy and a sense of social responsibility. A study by Noor and Salleh (2022) shows that service-learning can enhance students' moral dimensions through direct experience, including moral reasoning, moral emotions, and moral behavior.

However, the effectiveness of this method is often hampered by broader societal and systemic factors. One of the main challenges is the influence of social media algorithms and echo chambers that limit students' exposure to multiple perspectives. This phenomenon not only reduces students' ability to understand moral diversity, but can also reinforce existing biases and stereotypes (Lewing, 2020). Furthermore, economic inequality is a barrier to the implementation of authentic service learning. A study by Munusamy and Gurusamy (2023) shows that resource inequality can hinder students' opportunities to engage in meaningful community projects, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the learning experience.

To overcome these constraints, efforts need to be made to provide a more inclusive environment for moral learning through collaboration between communities, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Resch and Schrittester (2021) suggest that teaching that connects theory and practice, such as service learning, can foster more meaningful moral learning by engaging students in real-world situations. Efforts also need to focus on wisely integrating digital technologies to increase access to diverse learning resources (Petersen et al., 2020).

By overcoming these challenges, moral learning applied in real-world situations can empower students with more holistic moral skills and understanding. It also paves the way for building a generation that is more socially responsible and prepared to address the moral challenges of the future.

#### *The Role of Emotions and Personal Narratives, and Their Internal Power Dynamics*

While cognitive development plays an important role in moral education, emotions and personal experiences are undeniably influential in the moral decision-making process. Moral emotions, such as empathy, guilt, and pride, often act as catalysts in determining individual moral choices (Jiménez-Herrera et al., 2020). Educators can use narrative approaches, such as literature and films that depict moral dilemmas, to help students understand and experience the impact of morality from an emotional perspective (Przybylska & Nieduziak, 2023). Students' engagement with their personal narratives also allows them to reflect on the values and experiences that shape their own moral decisions.

However, challenges arise when emotions clash with reason in complex situations. As Wang et al. (2020) noted, the combination of negative emotions and a lack of social consensus often leads to inconsistent moral decisions. Therefore, educators must create a safe space where students feel free to voice their views, even if they may be unpopular. At the same time, they should be aware of their own emotions and implicit biases, as these can influence how moral discussions are conducted in the classroom (Spronk et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the power of emotions in the classroom can be a useful tool if used wisely. For example, encouraging students to share their personal experiences of moral dilemmas can enrich class discussions, thus fostering empathy between students (Verdorfer et al., 2021). However, educators need to ensure that these experiences do not create unnecessary emotional discomfort or stress among students.

Therefore, the integration of emotional elements and personal narratives in moral education requires a careful balance. By understanding the power dynamics in the classroom

and ensuring that a reflective approach is applied, educators can help students develop more holistic moral capacities.

### **The Challenge of Neutrality and the Teacher's Role**

A critical approach to moral education requires recognition of the teacher's own moral framework. Complete neutrality is difficult to achieve because teachers bring their personal values and beliefs into the classroom. However, to foster critical thinking and moral reflection among students, teachers are encouraged to acknowledge their values transparently, while creating a space for open dialogue and respect for diverse perspectives (Lindqvist et al., 2020). Teachers' ability to navigate this challenge is essential to ensure that students feel respected and heard, without any pressure to conform to a particular view.

In addition, the role of teachers is not only to facilitate discussions, but also to act as ethical models who demonstrate moral behavior through their own actions. Studies show that teacher ethics play a significant role in shaping students' personalities and fostering a classroom culture that values empathy, compassion, and social justice (Nazifah & Khairat, 2023). By highlighting values such as politeness, responsibility, and honesty, teachers not only influence students academically but also build a strong moral foundation in their lives.

However, the power dynamics in the classroom add complexity to the effort to achieve this balance. Educators must ensure that their interactions with students are fair and free from implicit bias. Sachdev and Gupta (2021) emphasize the importance of protecting students' autonomy in the learning process, especially when discussions involve sensitive moral issues. In addition, teachers should also strive to reduce the power gap between themselves and students to create an inclusive learning environment.

A major challenge in fulfilling this role is the need for continuous training to increase ethical awareness among teachers. According to Yildiz (2022), providing opportunities for teachers to understand ethical principles through professional development courses can help them deal with moral dilemmas that may arise in the classroom. With a systematic approach and adequate support, teachers can play a more effective role in guiding students to become ethical and responsible individuals.

### **Implications for Moral Education**

Moral education plays an important role in shaping individuals who are not only intellectually excellent, but also ethically and socially responsible. In an increasingly complex modern world, the implications of moral education need to be viewed from multiple dimensions to ensure that it is relevant and effective in shaping students' moral values.

One of the main implications is the need for a holistic approach to moral education. Studies show that integrating cognitive, emotional, and social aspects in moral curricula can help students understand moral issues more deeply and build well-rounded personalities (Chen et al., 2023). Educators need to balance moral theory with practical applications, such as service learning and personal narratives, to ensure that students not only understand moral values but are also able to practice them in real-world situations (Sandibaeva, 2023).

In addition, the development of teachers as ethical models in the classroom is critical. Teachers need to not only impart moral values, but also model appropriate ethical behaviour. This requires ongoing support through professional training that focuses on ethical principles and critical pedagogy. According to Khashimova (2021), developing ethical and knowledgeable teachers helps create a classroom environment that values justice, empathy, and critical reflection.

Another important implication is the need for a more flexible curriculum to accommodate cultural diversity and societal values. Morality is not a uniform concept, and cultural and social differences must be respected in the educational process. As discussed by Mejía (2023), successful moral education is one that is able to combine traditional values with modern moral norms to form individuals who are responsive to global challenges.

Technology plays an important role in today's moral education. In the digital age, students are exposed to multiple perspectives through social media, but also face the risk of bias and echo chambers that narrow their understanding of moral issues. Therefore, educators need to use technology wisely to provide ethical and diverse learning materials (Cai, 2022).

### **Conclusion: Moral Education as a Journey with Ongoing Challenges**

Moral education is not simply the transmission of static values; it is a dynamic process that requires continuous reflection, innovation, and adaptation to the challenges of the times. In the context of the complex and diverse modern world, moral education plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and moral autonomy among students. By engaging students in deep moral discussions, using reflective approaches and open dialogue, educators can help build students' capacity to make informed and responsible moral decisions (Chazan, 2021).

However, challenges in moral education are inevitable. Studies show that social pressures, cultural differences, and the influence of digital media often complicate efforts to achieve the objectives of holistic moral education (Zheng, 2021). For example, in the digital age, students are exposed to a variety of conflicting perspectives, which require them to develop the ability to evaluate and interpret information wisely. In this regard, educators need to play a proactive role by providing a safe space for students to explore moral dilemmas, while guiding them towards solutions based on universal values (Sandibaeva, 2023).

Furthermore, professional development for educators is critical. Teachers need not only to have a deep knowledge of ethical principles but also the ability to be inspiring ethical models for students. This requires ongoing training and structural support to ensure that teachers can effectively handle moral discussions, without bias or social pressure (Valvi et al., 2023).

In conclusion, moral education is a journey that requires collective efforts from all parties - educators, policymakers, society, and students themselves. With an inclusive approach that focuses on critical thinking and moral reflection, moral education can become

a solid foundation for building a generation that is responsible, ethical, and prepared to face the moral challenges of the future.

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