

Education and Moral Values in a Multicultural World: Medical Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The article explores the complexity of education and the profound significance of moral values in the development of young people's personalities and character, emphasizing the fundamental role of education in shaping society and promoting the good. It highlights the transition from cognitive to pragmatic values and their impact on education in the modern and postmodern eras. The article discusses the value crisis in the context of moral values and emphasizes the importance of moral education for navigating the complexities of a multicultural society, promoting universal moral values such as honesty, kindness, and tolerance. The results of a survey conducted among 120 students at the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Nicolae Testemițanu” reflect the recognition of the positive impact of moral values, but also a certain reluctance in accepting interethnic dialogue, thus illustrating the challenges and opportunities of moral education in a culturally diverse environment.

Keywords: Education, moral values, multicultural society, medical students.

JEL Classification: I12, I21, I23.

1.Introduction

Education is a complex art and not always easy to master. John Dewey asserted that education is not just a preparation for life, but is life itself. Through education, we have the power to shape and direct individuals, groups, and the entire society, changing the way people view life and transforming socio-cultural and political realities. Education allows us to discover new knowledge, experiences, patterns, and values. Its success closely depends on the values promoted, which not only guide individuals in society, but are also essential for understanding the truth and promoting the good. In today's globalized world, the significance of value-based education and its effects on young people is a prominent topic of discussion within academic circles, particularly concerning the role of moral values in shaping both individuals and the broader society.

In this article, we will define the concepts of education and value, elucidate the impact of the axiological crisis of modernity on education, and analyze the issue of education for moral values in a multicultural context.

2. Literature Review

Historically, the concept of education has always captured the interest of scholars. Initially, education was the main subject of meditation for philosophers, who analyzed and interpreted it through the lens of time and their contemporary realities. (1) Plato was the first thinker from ancient Greek antiquity who tried to put his educational ideas into practice by establishing the first philosophy school in Athens, named the Academy. Through his writings, he laid the foundations of the philosophy of education, opening educational perspectives that would be followed by all the great philosophers of education (Scheau, 2014, 48). (2) The first major Christian thinker of the Medieval Period to address the issue of education was Clement of Alexandria, a proponent of „education through culture” introduced within the School of

Alexandria. His ideas on education are presented in two fundamental works: in „Protrepticus”, he urges pagans to abandon idol worship and convert to Christianity; in „The Instructor”, he proposes replacing the term teacher with pedagogue, as in his view „God is the one who educates people, giving them a series of rules for moral conduct” (Scheau, 2014, 50). Augustine of Hippo, known historically as Saint Augustine, held the same belief. In his work „De Magistro”, the philosopher concludes: „The only teacher is Christ, for he is the inner teacher who teaches us, while words are used by man to express his ideas externally” (Scheau, 2014, 68). (3) For the modern era, the reflections on education by Jean Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Nietzsche are important. The Swiss philosopher argued that although we are born free by nature, we are perpetually in chains; therefore, to ensure the perfection of man, education must begin as soon as the individual is born, through three methods: 1. by nature (which offers us an inner development of our faculties and organs); 2. by people (which offers us the acquisition of skills and habits); 3. by things (which offers us the acquisition of experience about objects) (Scheau, 2014, 116). According to Friedrich Nietzsche, a German existentialist philosopher, the purpose of education is to form individuals capable of creating new values (Aiftinică, 1994, 51). (4) In postmodernity, education is more concerned than ever with the value system, with reconciling the plurality of values with their universality, with hierarchies, especially with the processuality and the access of education subjects to value (Păun, 2017, 26). It is noteworthy that a characteristic of the era remains the tendency of individuals to distance themselves from cognitive values, adopting pragmatic ones instead.

Nowadays, we live in a globalized world and we are facing a crisis of national and universal values. In this context, being aware of and promoting the moral values specific to various cultures would help us better understand each other and avoid potential conflicts. Moreover, an education focused on and through values could contribute to mitigating the seemingly inevitable spiritual decline of humanity. This aspect deserves to be discussed in the specialized literature.

3. Values Supporting Education

Values and the development of human consciousness have always been central topics in Philosophy, with interpretations closely linked to the historical and social contexts of their times.

- For the ancient period, the reflections on values by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are memorable: (1) According to Socrates, good is a universal and eternal value, and the highest wisdom is to distinguish good from evil. In this context, we recall his testament left to the younger generation: „The evil of misery and the evil of gold corrupt and embitter man alike. Since I believe in the change of man, how could I not believe in the change of the entire community? I do not know from which side to persist for success, but I know that everything will happen again only through man. I have been long alone against the hydra of evil, now you are many... Receive from me, you young people, my knowledge gained at the end of my life. And start from my last knowledge to a new knowledge. Just as the world has changed before us, so it will change after us. But for this, a single pair of hands and one brain is not enough. And you be those who will carve the path of change for the world towards the better” (Socrates). (2) The supreme purpose of all Plato's thought was the promotion of values such as goodness, beauty, justice, and the harmony of the non-contradictory, specifically, a single principle of value, in which all these aspects are given. Regarding the significance of moral values in the ideal state envisioned by Plato, all virtues are alive: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (Plato, 2001, 23). (3) In Aristotle's view, the disciple of Plato, every art and every investigation seems to aim at a certain good, so it is rightly asserted that the good is what all things aspire to. Goodness is associated with happiness, which grants a state of pleasure to individuals. To achieve this happiness, one's life must align with virtues (Scheau, 2014, 33). For Aristotle, the morally upright and virtuous individual possesses the capacity to

- perceive moral virtues such as goodness, justice, freedom, responsibility, and temperance, to know them, without seeking to intuit them from a higher principle (Buzatu, 2014, 8).
- The values of antiquity are forgotten in the Medieval Era, the new spiritual values deriving from the concepts of Respublica Christiana, Christianitas, Ecclesia. All medieval political thought relied on the idea of Christianity, from which arose aspirations towards the unity of people under a single leader: the emperor in the temporal space, the pontiff in the spiritual one (Nistor, 2012, 8).
 - Beginning with the Renaissance, we witness gradual changes in the individual's way of thinking, as they learn to value life, status, and the role they hold in society. The principle of individualism gradually replaces collectivism, changing people's attitudes towards life, imbuing it with meaning and value. The Renaissance individual will strive for a rich spiritual life, perfection, respect, dignity, and independence. However, according to René Guénon, „far from constituting a recovery, the Renaissance and the Reformation mark a much deeper decline, sealing the definitive rupture from the traditional spirit, both in the realms of science and the arts, as well as in the religious domain” (Guénon, 1993, 45) In the 19th century, studies and theories about the world of values continued to be developed, laying the foundations for a new specialized discipline - axiology. The most important contributions were made by the German philosophers Hermann Lotze and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as the Neo-Kantian School of Baden, represented by Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert (Calugher, 18). According to the promoters of the new discipline: (1) „Value is what is considered true, and the principle of normativity is utility” (Friedrich Nietzsche); (2) „Values are eternal and absolute principles, independent of both the real world and human subjectivity, forming an a priori universe” (Wilhelm Windelband); (3) „Values are a universe in themselves, transcendent to any object or subject and constitute the foundation of objective reality” (Heinrich Rickert).

Currently, we are witnessing the axiological crisis of modernity, which, according to UNESCO experts, points to intellectual decentralization, the refuge of some philosophers in horizons of reflection devoid of axiological significance, and the silence of others is because they do not understand and do not sense the tumultuous time in which they live, failing to grasp the essence of the era they are going through (Bețivu, 2021, 49).

Therefore, education is closely linked to the knowledge and promotion of values, which represent the essential and enduring pillars of any society, having a profound impact on human life and behavior. Throughout history, each society has developed its own educational system, centered on a set of relatively stable fundamental values, which have defined its identity and purpose in relation to other ethnic groups, races, cultures, or denominations.

4. Promoting moral values in a multicultural environment

Moral values play a crucial role both for individuals and society, shaping people's character and influencing their behavior, encouraging honesty, goodwill, dignity, and responsibility. These values are deeply linked to the fundamental, universal, and innate emotions of human beings, as well as to the experiences accumulated throughout life. Based on common values, each person defines their own set of norms and rules of behavior, which are in harmony with the moral ideals of the society in which they live and are educated.

Currently, discussions about a crisis of moral values in a multicultural context are becoming more frequent. Each culture is based on a unique system of values, which may seem foreign or even inconceivable to members of other cultures. However, essential moral values such as kindness, honesty, generosity, dedication, respect, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness, and modesty are recognized and cultivated in all cultures. These universal values can guide young people in navigating the complexities of a multicultural society, helping them to achieve a respectable social role and status, overcome cultural differences, ignore stereotypes and

prejudices, and oppose disrespect and violence. Fundamental moral values, present in all cultures, are vital for supporting moral education in a multicultural environment.

In this framework, moral education is a process of transmitting values aimed at shaping the character and personality of young people in accordance with the moral ideals of society. Education based on moral values facilitates the understanding and acceptance of a diversity of values, beliefs, and convictions, and influences individuals' perceptions of other ethnic groups. It also contributes to the adoption of behavior appropriate to different cultural environments. In an intercultural and multicultural context, moral education must be oriented towards developing young people's awareness of belonging to a common multicultural environment, thereby overcoming differences and emphasizing the importance of similarities. This is achieved through a complex ensemble of educational activities and modern teaching techniques, which are essential for shaping the moral profile of the personality.

In a multicultural context, the objectives of moral education focus on developing moral consciousness, which includes both cognitive and affective aspects, and on forming appropriate moral behavior. It is crucial not only to familiarize young people with the variety of value systems but also to facilitate their understanding of the differences and similarities between them, as well as the acceptance of new and unfamiliar elements. The moral behaviors adopted must respect the specific norms and rules of multicultural communities.

The content of moral education in a multicultural context should focus on the dynamics between individual and another individual, individual and group, and individual and society. It is essential for young people to understand that the principle of unity in diversity offers them the opportunity not only to acquire new knowledge, habits, and behaviors but also to share their own values, thus creating harmonious relationships with others. The promotion of universal moral values and achieving a desired balance in family, group, and society can be effectively accomplished through dialogue.

The role of the educator in a multicultural society is to recognize and raise awareness among young people about the unity and diversity of moral values. They must cultivate in young people skills and habits of moral behavior appropriate to the cultural context, to guide, support, and direct them towards correct and effective moral actions, essential for successful sociocultural integration. Young people, who are in constant comparison with others, strive to adapt to novelties and understand the unknown, identifying similarities and differences, evaluating the moral impact of their actions, and maintaining consistent moral behavior in multicultural situations.

In a multicultural society that aspires to interculturality, it is essential to overcome ethnocentric and xenocentric attitudes, promoting cultural relativism instead. This encourages young people to view positively, appreciate, and tolerate ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, which are inevitable aspects in today's world. To avoid communication barriers, it is vital to promote universal moral values such as kindness, philanthropy, honesty, dedication, respect, cooperation, compassion, forgiveness, and altruism. At the same time, we must develop intercultural communication skills, which include awareness, sensitivity, and behavior appropriate to the intercultural context. Typically, individuals with intercultural competencies do not exhibit ethnocentric or xenocentric tendencies but are open to communication and easily adapt to new people, places, and situations.

5. Methodology

Considering previous discussions, we aimed to explore the attitudes of young non-medical students of various nationalities towards the influence of moral values on personal development and the necessity of promoting these in the educational process. To achieve this goal, we established the following objectives: to analyze the impact of moral values on students' personal development and their integration into the educational process; to evaluate the contribution of

moral value-based education in uniting young people from diverse cultures; to determine the influence of individual perceptions of ethnocentrism on intercultural interactions; and to investigate whether ethnocentrism is a barrier in promoting moral values. The method used for this study was a survey conducted from February to March 2024. It involved a total of 120 students from the General Medicine Department at the Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy. Participants were equally divided, including 40 Romanian students (25 girls, 15 boys), 40 Russian students (30 girls, 10 boys), and 40 Indian students (26 girls, 14 boys), all aged between 20 and 24 years. The printed questionnaires were personally distributed. They included four questions: 1. Can moral values influence young people's personal development and their integration into education? 2. Can moral value-based education unite young people from different cultures? 3. Are you someone who views your own culture as the centre of the world? 4. Is ethnocentrism a barrier to intercultural communication? To calculate and interpret the survey results, we used descriptive statistics, presented in a table.

<i>Categories of respondents</i>	<i>Can moral values impact students' personal development and their integration into education? (%)</i>	<i>Can moral value-based education unite young people from different cultures? (%)</i>	<i>Do you consider yourself an ethnocentric person? (%)</i>	<i>Can ethnocentrism be a barrier in promoting moral values? (%)</i>
<i>Medical students</i>				
<i>Russian</i>	85	95	75	75
<i>Indian</i>	98	95	55	55
<i>Romanian</i>	75	90	70	60

Table 1

6. Results and Discussions

The survey results indicate that the majority of respondents recognize a positive impact of moral values on students' personal development and support their integration into education (Romanian medical students - 75%, Indian - 98%, Russian - 85%). Additionally, the majority of medical

students agree that education based on moral values could unite young people from different cultures (Romanian medical students - 90%, Indian - 95%, Russian - 95%). Regarding ethnocentrism, Russian and Romanian students appear to be less ethnocentric compared to their Indian counterparts (Romanian medical students - 70%, Indian - 55%, Russian - 75%); moreover, the majority of respondents, regardless of nationality, recognize that ethnocentrism can become a barrier in promoting moral values (Romanian medical students - 60%, Indian - 55%, Russian - 75%).

Therefore, moral education in a multicultural context is a process of transmitting moral values, aimed at shaping the character and personality of young people according to the moral ideals of a multicultural society. Education focused on moral values can facilitate the coming together of young people from different cultures, overcoming ethnocentric barriers and stimulating changes in thought and action. Moral values such as goodness, responsibility, justice, humanity, love, and common sense can create opportunities for establishing a constructive and profound dialogue between members of different cultures and denominations.

7. Conclusions

The article „Education and Moral Values in a Multicultural World: Medical Students' Perspectives” explores the complexity of moral education in the context of increasing global interconnectedness and cultural diversity. Through a historical and philosophical analysis, as well as a specific case study on medical students, the article highlights the importance and impact of moral values-based education in both the professional and personal development of future physicians. (1) The importance of moral values in education is undeniable, and the multicultural context of the modern world adds an additional layer of complexity. Moral values not only guide individual behavior but also provide a framework for respectful and effective intercultural interaction. (2) The study clearly shows that students recognize the role of moral values in their personal and professional development. It also highlights that education

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promoting moral values can contribute to the unity among young people from different cultural backgrounds, fostering tolerance and intercultural understanding. (3) Ethnocentrism, often identified as a barrier in intercultural communication and collaboration, is acknowledged by students as an impediment to the effective promotion of moral values. This underscores the need for educational strategies that combat prejudice and cultivate an openness to cultural diversity. (4) Education based on moral values is essential not only for training competent professionals but also for developing responsible global citizens who can navigate and appreciate the cultural diversity of the contemporary world. The role of educators is crucial in shaping this framework, by promoting open dialogue and encouraging mutual respect and understanding.

In conclusion, integrating moral values into the educational curriculum of future physicians is vital not just for professional training but also for cultivating a global consciousness. Such education not only prepares students for professional challenges but also equips them to be ethical and empathetic leaders in the increasingly interconnected multicultural society of the 21st century. This approach not only meets the immediate needs of medical education but also contributes to a broader foundation for peace and global understanding.

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