

Applying Positive Moral Education Methods to Develop Moral Competence in Primary School Students in the Context of Educational Renovation

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Abstract: Moral education is one of the core tasks of primary education, contributing to shaping character, life attitudes, and appropriate behavior in students from the earliest years of life. As the 2018 General Education Curriculum shifts from a content-based to a competency-based approach, the teaching of moral education must likewise move away from one-way transmission of moral knowledge toward organizing experiential activities that allow students to construct their own moral values. This article analyzes the theoretical foundations of moral education for primary school students, assesses the current state of teaching methods used in the subject of Ethics/Moral Education, and, on that basis, proposes a system of methods along with principles and conditions for effective application, aiming to improve the effectiveness of moral education and meet the requirements for the comprehensive development of learners' qualities and competencies.

Keywords: moral education, teaching methods, primary school students, moral competence, 2018 General Education Curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Primary school age (6–11 years old) is the "golden" period for laying the foundations of character. At this stage, children's thinking is predominantly visual and image-based, making them highly receptive to moral norms conveyed through pictures, stories, and concrete situations, yet they are not yet able to generalize abstract moral categories the way adults can. For this reason, methods of teaching moral education to primary school students cannot rely on theoretical lecturing; they must instead be grounded in children's actual experiences, emotions, and behavior.

In practice, although the subject of Moral Education (now integrated into Moral Education and Experiential Activities under the 2018 Curriculum) has received considerable attention, many teachers still rely heavily on lecturing and explanation, which makes lessons dry, imposition-driven, and limited in their effectiveness at shaping moral behavior. Students may memorize the norms by heart without truly internalizing them as self-directed behavior in daily life. This highlights the urgent need to renovate moral education teaching methods in a direction that activates learners rather than merely instructing them.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. The concept of moral education for primary school students

Moral education is a purposeful, planned process of pedagogical influence carried out by educators to cultivate in students moral awareness (understanding of norms), moral feelings (attitudes and emotions), and moral behavior (habitual conduct) consistent with social values. These three components are dialectically related: correct awareness provides the foundation, feeling provides the motivating force, and behavior is the manifestation and the yardstick by which the outcomes of moral education are measured.

2.2. Psychological characteristics of primary school students relevant to moral education

- Visual and image-based thinking predominates, while the capacity for abstract reasoning remains limited.
- Emotional life is rich but still unstable; children are easily moved and prone to imitation.
- Moral behavior tends to be situational and depends heavily on the example set, and the evaluations given, by adults (parents and teachers).

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- The need for praise and recognition is very strong, so positive encouragement has a far greater impact than punishment.

2.3. Requirements of the 2018 General Education Curriculum

The 2018 Curriculum identifies five core qualities to be cultivated in students: patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility. The subject of Moral Education is designed to integrate the provision of knowledge with the organization of experiential activities, emphasizing teaching methods that foster students' initiative and active engagement, and placing greater value on self-awareness and self-regulation of behavior than on imposed instruction.

3. THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHING METHODS IN MORAL EDUCATION AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

3.1. Positive developments

Since the widespread implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum at the primary level, the awareness among school administrators and teachers of the position and role of moral education has shifted markedly. Many primary schools have taken the initiative to embed moral education not only within the Moral Education subject itself but also across experiential activities, flag-raising ceremonies, homeroom sessions, and other subjects such as Vietnamese Language and Natural and Social Sciences. A number of teachers have begun to move away from lecture-based instruction toward organizing storytelling, situation-handling, role-play, and group discussion activities, making lessons more engaging and closer to students' everyday lives. The application of experiential learning and the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) model in teaching Moral Education is likewise attracting growing interest among researchers and teachers, with early evidence pointing to its effectiveness in simultaneously developing students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral moral competencies (Du *et al.*, 2024; Ngo Thi Kim Hoan & Nguyen Diep Ngoc, 2024). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training has issued a handbook guiding moral and lifestyle education for students (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022), providing professional guidance that helps schools organize moral education activities systematically and, in a manner, aligned with the psychological characteristics of each age group.

3.2. Persisting limitations and shortcomings

Despite these positive developments, the application of moral education teaching methods at the primary level still exhibits a number of significant limitations overall.

First, one-way lecturing and explanation remain fairly common in many schools, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, where teachers face pressure from curriculum time constraints and a lack of supporting

materials. In many moral education lessons, students remain passive recipients, with few opportunities for experience, reflection, and drawing their own lessons — a situation that limits the transformation of awareness into sustained moral behavior (Tran Thanh Du, 2026).

Second, the assessment of moral education outcomes still leans heavily toward testing theoretical knowledge: students may correctly recite the moral norms they have learned without necessarily having internalized them as self-directed behavior in real life. International research points to a similar pattern: assessing morality is inherently a complex task, as it is difficult to establish clear measurement criteria for attitudes, emotions, and behavior, which often leads schools to favor quantitative, formalistic assessment over genuinely tracking learners' progress (Zhou & Gao, 2023).

Third, some teachers still struggle to design moral situations connected to the increasingly diverse realities of students' lives, especially as primary school children are ever more strongly influenced by social media and digital devices. This stems partly from a lack of time for in-depth methodological training and a shortage of concrete guidance materials on experiential approaches, leaving many teachers to fall back on traditional teaching habits even when they are aware of the need for renovation (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2019; Harmawati *et al.*, 2022).

Fourth, coordination among schools, families, and society in the moral education of primary school students remains inconsistent and poorly synchronized. In many cases, the values taught at school are not reinforced — and are sometimes even contradicted — by what students observe in their family environment or on social media, which undermines the internalization of moral norms. This is one of the gaps repeatedly highlighted by both domestic and international research as needing continued attention in order to improve the sustainability of moral education (Zhang *et al.*, 2022).

Fifth, although the use of digital technology and digital learning materials in teaching moral education has drawn interest from some schools, its application remains piecemeal and unsystematic, falling short of harnessing videos, interactive simulated situations, and other tools that could create vivid, engaging learning experiences suited to the visual, image-based thinking characteristic of primary school children.

Taken together, this picture reflects both genuine, commendable efforts at renovation and a considerable gap between the requirements set out in the 2018 General Education Curriculum and the actual capacity of many schools to organize moral education teaching. This underscores the pressing need to build and consistently apply a system of moral education teaching methods that is appropriate, feasible, and flexible enough

to be implemented across the diverse practical conditions found in primary schools today.

4. A PROPOSED SYSTEM OF METHODS FOR TEACHING MORAL EDUCATION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

4.1. Moral storytelling (education through narrative)

Stories, comics, and fairy tales with moral content are used to let students draw their own lessons. Teachers should select stories that are relatable, with clear characters and specific situations; after telling the story, they should facilitate open-ended discussion so that students analyze the characters' behavior themselves, rather than being handed a ready-made conclusion.

4.2. Role-play (acting out situations)

Students are placed in hypothetical moral situations (for example, finding a lost item, witnessing a friend being bullied, or apologizing for a mistake) and asked to demonstrate how they would respond. This method helps students experience the emotions of the parties involved, thereby building empathy — a crucial foundation for moral behavior.

4.3. Group discussion

Students discuss age-appropriate moral dilemmas, encouraging them to voice their own views, listen to their peers, and adjust their thinking accordingly. This method develops moral competence alongside communication and collaboration skills.

4.4. Role-modeling

Teachers, parents, and real people with real actions (classmates, well-known figures, historical characters) serve as models for students to emulate. Role-modeling should be accompanied by concrete analysis of "why this action deserves to be learned from," rather than generic praise alone.

4.5. Education through real-life experience and small-scale projects

Practical activities are organized — such as a "charity piggy bank" project, a "shared school-supplies corner," caring for plants, or visiting elderly people living alone — so that students practice values of

compassion, responsibility, and honesty in authentic contexts, rather than learning them only in theory.

4.6. Encouragement and reinforcement of positive behavior

Techniques of immediate, specific praise (praising the right behavior at the right moment) are applied, using tools such as a "moral corner," a "good-deeds tree," or a "praise box" to record students' positive moral behavior on a daily basis, helping to reinforce and sustain such behavior until it becomes habitual.

4.7. Integrating technology and digital learning materials

Short animated videos, interactive games, and infographics are used to illustrate moral norms in a vivid way suited to primary school students' visual thinking, while also increasing their interest in learning.

5. PRINCIPLES AND CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE APPLICATION

1. **Principle of visualization and situational grounding:** Every moral norm should be made concrete through situations, images, and stories that are close to students' everyday lives.
2. **Principle of respect and non-imposition:** The teacher's role is to guide and prompt, allowing students to draw their own conclusions, avoiding one-way, imposed explanation.
3. **Principle of unity among awareness, feeling, and behavior:** Every method should aim at all three goals simultaneously, not stop at merely providing knowledge.
4. **Principle of coordination among school, family, and society:** A moral-conduct notebook or a home behavior-tracking form should be used to ensure consistency in education.
5. **Condition regarding teacher competence:** Teachers need to be trained in designing situations, facilitating discussion and role-play, and assessing behavior rather than assessing knowledge alone.
6. **Condition regarding assessment:** Assessment should be renovated toward process observation, using behavior portfolios and qualitative feedback rather than relying solely on written tests.

6. ILLUSTRATIVE APPLICATION (SUMMARY OF A TEACHING ACTIVITY)

Topic: "I Am Grateful to My Teachers" (Grade 2 Moral Education)

Step	Activity	Method
1. Warm-up	Watch a short video about teachers' work	Visual – video
2. Exploration	Tell the story "The Most Beautiful Bouquet"; hold open-ended discussion	Moral storytelling
3. Practice	Role-play the situation "Meeting my former teacher again"	Role-play
4. Application	Group discussion: "What will you do to show gratitude to your teachers?"	Group discussion
5. Consolidation	Write or draw a thank-you message and post it on the class's "Gratitude Corner"	Experience – encouragement

7. CONCLUSION

Moral education for primary school students is a long-term process that requires the flexible combination of multiple positive teaching methods, centering on students' experiences and emotions rather than theoretical lecturing. Consistently applying storytelling, role-play, group discussion, role-modeling, real-life experience, and positive encouragement — while adhering to the principles of visualization, respect for learners, and coordination among educational stakeholders — will help transform moral knowledge into sustained, self-directed behavior in students, meeting the goal of character development set out in the 2018 General Education Curriculum.

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