
PROMOTING ETHICAL LITERACY: SUGGESTING CIVICS AS A COMPULSORY SUBJECT IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN PRIMARY CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Promoting ethical literacy in students has become increasingly important in a time of complex ethical dilemmas. This study examines the possibility and effects of introducing civics as a compulsory subject in Pakistan at the primary level in Federal government schools. Using a qualitative approach, the study collects significant information on attitudes, expected benefits, and concerns regarding the inclusion of ethics as an essential subject by combining a review of the literature, and interviews with all relevant stakeholders, including parents and teachers. Additionally, it suggests a thorough strategy for putting civics education into practice, considering how it may help young students develop moral principles and responsibilities. This research aims to provide useful information to curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers to support primary school students' early acquisition of moral principles and civic engagement. The results are anticipated to influence educational policies and strategies, supporting the inclusion of civics as a compulsory subject to develop socially conscious individuals from the beginning of their schooling.

KEYWORDS

Ethical literacy, civics, moral principles

INTRODUCTION

The term "ethics" originates from the Greek word "ethos," which means "character"

or "conduct." Ethics include not only individual behavior but also the practices of groups and authorities. Philosophers and moral ethicists have historically been divided into two factions. When thinking about ethics in terms of the individual and society, two groups of thinkers prioritize the individual over society (Graham, 2011; Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004; Sullivan, 1986; Warnick & Silverman, 2011). Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls believe the individual is more important, while Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Dewey believe society comes first. In schools, ethics include both individual and group activities.

The term "ethics" is defined differently by teachers, parents, and administrators based on their own experiences and perspectives (Davies & Harre, 2001). Some use phrases like "right," "moral," and "values," while others use "policy," "code of conduct," and "professionalism." Educators usually agree on the importance of ethical decision-making and the necessity of training students in this area.

Cultivating ethical literacy and civic participation among students has become increasingly important for preserving democratic norms and promoting responsible citizenship. Educational institutions are important in promoting ethical understanding, moral reasoning, and civic participation among young people. However, the need for a formal framework for ethical teaching, especially at the basic level, remains a major challenge. The purpose of this literature review is to explore existing research and scholarly discourse on the topic of improving ethical literacy through the inclusion of Civics as a compulsory subject in primary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical literacy and civics education

Ethical literacy is defined as the ability to identify, comprehend, and critically assess ethical concerns, difficulties, and societal duties. It includes moral thinking, empathy, integrity, and the ability to make ethical decisions (Chapin, 2017). Civic education, on the other hand, aims to transmit the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for active and responsible civic involvement. Individuals are encouraged to develop democratic values, civic virtues, and a sense of social responsibility (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006).

It might be argued that education is likewise an ethical activity. Education can influence whether students are nice or antagonistic. The goal of ethical education is to empower students to make decisions based on their free will. Teaching standards are simple, but teaching ethics is necessary for effective compliance. Consequently, teaching ethics plays a vital role in schooling. While the future of these students may have a strong professional background but it will not be sufficient. Aristotle stated, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

The importance of ethical literacy and civics education in primary schools

Primary schools serve as the foundation for children's ethical literacy and civic engagement. Early exposure to moral dilemmas and civic conceptions establishes the framework for the development of ethical beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that determine people's lifetime civic identities (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Research indicates that including ethical and civic education in primary school curricula increases social cohesion, strengthens democratic institutions, and builds a culture of civic duty (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Integrating civics as a required topic in primary schools has various advantages for increasing ethical literacy and civic involvement among students. First and foremost, civics education gives students a basic grasp of democratic ideas, government structures, and civic responsibilities (Galston, 2003). Students gain the information and abilities needed to actively participate in democratic processes and engage meaningfully in civil society by studying concepts like citizenship, democracy, and social justice (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Furthermore, civics education promotes critical thinking, civic awareness, and empathy in pupils (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). Students learn to examine ethical challenges, explore many views, and make educated decisions through discussions of current events, case studies, and role-playing activities (Galston, 2003). Civics education promotes a culture of civic discourse and tolerance in classrooms by fostering open communication and respectful debate (Parker, 2003).

Challenges in Promoting Ethical Literacy at the Primary Level

Despite the widely acknowledged relevance of ethical literacy and civic education, various obstacles prevent their effective implementation in elementary schools. One key difficulty is a lack of dedicated curriculum time and resources for civics instruction in primary schools (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Civics education is frequently overlooked in favor of basic academic courses like mathematics and language arts, resulting in students' weak comprehension of civic concepts (Galston, 2003). Furthermore, the lack of standardized assessments and accountability mechanisms for civic education exacerbates its marginalization in the primary school curriculum (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Without formal evaluation procedures, educators may prioritize courses that are subject to high-stakes testing, reducing the value of civic learning (Torney-Purta & Amadeo 2003).

Best Practices for Integrating Ethical Literacy at the Primary Level

Several best practices have been found for successfully implementing civics teaching in primary schools. First and foremost, civics education should be interwoven throughout the curriculum rather than being treated as a separate subject (Parker, 2003). Educators can reinforce civic concepts and demonstrate their applicability

across many situations by incorporating civic principles into current topics such as social studies, language arts, and even mathematics (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). Furthermore, civics education should include active learning practices that promote student participation and engagement (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Hands-on activities, simulations, community service projects, and experiential learning opportunities allow students to apply civic knowledge and skills in real-world settings (Gould & Baldwin, 2004). Educators can create a feeling of civic efficacy in pupils by integrating classroom learning with community experiences (Parker, 2003).

Finally, increasing ethical literacy by making civics a compulsory subject in primary schools has enormous promise for growing responsible citizenship and establishing a culture of civic involvement. Despite the hurdles and obstacles, including civics education in primary school curricula has several benefits for students, teachers, and society as a whole. Civics education provides students with the knowledge, skills, and values required for active engagement in democratic processes, preparing the next generation of citizens to negotiate ethical quandaries, uphold democratic norms, and contribute to the greater good.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the potential benefits of integrating civics as a compulsory subject in primary classes to enhance ethical literacy and civic awareness among students.
2. To assess the views of school principals, primary school teachers, and parents of the students on introducing civics as a compulsory subject.
3. To determine the readiness and capacity of federal government primary schools to implement civics education effectively.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the potential benefits of introducing civics as a compulsory subject in primary classes?
2. What are the views and perspectives of school officials and parents about the implementation of civics education as a compulsory topic in primary classes?
3. To what extent do teachers in federal government primary schools possess the necessary skills and training to deliver civics education effectively?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methods and experiences related to fostering ethical literacy in primary school settings are investigated in this study using a qualitative research design. Because they enable a thorough examination of individuals' viewpoints, actions, and interactions in their natural environments. To fully explore the real-life experiences of teachers and children in primary schools as they engage with ethical issues and challenges, a phenomenological study design was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to select

people who could provide valuable insights into the topic being studied. The population consisted solely of FG schools, with a sample size of 3 principals of federal government schools in Malir Cantt, Karachi, 7 primary teachers of FGPS Malir Cantt, Karachi, and fifteen parents chosen at random on the day of the Parents Teacher Meeting. The data collection tools and techniques include structured and semi-structured interviews, which were done with primary school teachers, principals, and parents to gain insight into the strategies, barriers, and outcomes connected with teaching ethical literacy in the classroom. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their ethics education experiences, views, and instructional methodologies.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to examine qualitative data gathered from interviews with principals, primary school teachers, and parents of primary school students. This ongoing procedure involves coding transcripts, recognizing recurring themes and patterns, and deciphering the underlying meanings hidden in the data. Using thematic analysis, I wanted to uncover the important elements impacting the promotion of ethical literacy in elementary schools and generate a complete knowledge of the phenomena.

Principals review based on thematic analysis of the interview

One approach to bringing civics education into current disciplines is to use case studies, role-playing activities, and debates to encourage students to think about ethical challenges important to each subject area. For example, in literature classes, students can examine the moral problems characters face in novels. While teachers are often well-equipped with pedagogical skills, they may lack the necessary training or resources to effectively teach ethics. It is critical to provide professional development opportunities and resources for teachers to improve their understanding of ethical theories, encourage ethical discussions, and incorporate ethical concepts into their teaching methods. Making ethics a mandatory topic can improve the overall school atmosphere by instilling a culture of integrity, respect, and responsibility. It can encourage healthy social connections, limit instances of misconduct, and foster a supportive learning environment in which ethical ideals are respected and implemented. One problem is ensuring that the curriculum is comprehensive and culturally sensitive, recognizing multiple perspectives and ethical frameworks. Furthermore, it may be difficult to balance academic rigor with relevant and age-appropriate considerations of ethical themes.

Teachers review based on thematic analysis of the interview.

While many teachers were enthusiastic about establishing ethical ideals in their students, not everybody felt fully prepared to teach ethics effectively. Additional

training and resources on ethical education could significantly increase teachers' confidence and competence in tackling ethical issues in the classroom. Children are developing a moral compass and learn about what is right and wrong. An ethics course gives them structured advice and chances to investigate ethical principles in a safe and supportive setting. So, including a dedicated civics education course in the school curriculum is critical, particularly at the primary level. It may be difficult to handle varied cultural and religious perspectives on ethics respectfully and inclusively. A civics education subject can provide several benefits to young learners. It can help students gain empathy, respect for others, and critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, it creates the groundwork for ethical decision-making and fosters a sense of responsibility for oneself and the community.

Making civics an obligatory subject could improve the overall school atmosphere by cultivating a culture of empathy, integrity, and mutual respect. It can help to create a more harmonious and inclusive educational environment in which kids feel respected and supported in their moral growth. Additionally, one idea for incorporating ethical education into existing courses is to include moral difficulties and character-building tasks in storybooks, history classes, and group discussions. For example, in social studies lectures, students can debate the value of honesty and integrity through stories, or they can investigate issues of fairness and justice.

Parents review based on thematic analysis of the interview.

Parents advocate for civics education in the school curriculum. They believe it's crucial for developing knowledgeable citizens.

Some parents overlook or are unconcerned about civics education. Little appreciation for its significance. Not actively opposing or advocating for it.

Parents are worried about biased knowledge in civics education & are afraid that specific political beliefs may be encouraged, leading to manipulation.

Some parents prioritize practical skills over civics theory-based education and want to focus on disciplines like math, science, or language arts.

Parents prefer teaching civics and ethical values at home, providing personalized, values-based education. Parents got worried about the overloaded curriculum if civics education is added to the curriculum.

Making civics a compulsory subject in federal government primary schools has enormous potential for boosting ethical literacy and civic involvement among young students. This study endeavor revealed numerous major results and anticipated outcomes after a thorough examination of the subject. To begin, the incorporation of civics into the primary curriculum is supposed to improve students' understanding of democratic concepts, civic responsibilities, and societal values. Students can build a firm foundation in ethical thinking and decision-making by introducing concepts like

citizenship, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at a young age, preparing them to be responsible and involved citizens in the future.

Furthermore, civics education can develop students' critical thinking skills, empathy, and tolerance, allowing them to accept other viewpoints and participate constructively in democratic discourse. Students can develop the skills and attitudes required for active civic involvement, including respect for the rights and opinions of others, through interactive learning experiences such as debates, simulations, and community projects. Furthermore, making civics a compulsory subject in federal government primary schools is predicted to have a good impact on social unity, democratic governance, and sustainable development. Civics education can help establish a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society by providing students with the knowledge, skills, and values required to contribute to their communities' well-being.

Additionally, incorporating civics into the primary curriculum can help to prevent social problems like indifference toward civic duties, discrimination, and disrespect for the rule of law. Schools can assist address the core causes of societal challenges and develop a culture of respect, tolerance, and cooperation among citizens by instilling a sense of civic responsibility and ethical awareness in students as early as possible. Finally, increasing ethical literacy by making civics a compulsory topic in federal government primarily benefits students, communities, and society as a whole. Civics education may empower students to become aware, responsible, and active participants in crafting a better future for themselves.

DISCUSSION

Education must prioritize the development of ethical literacy, particularly in light of the complicated and interconnected world of today. The ability to recognize and resolve moral quandaries and act morally and responsibly toward others and oneself is referred to as ethical literacy. Making civics a required subject in elementary school is a good method to help pupils become more ethically literate.

First and foremost, civics education gives students a strong foundation in the concepts of democracy, citizenship, and government. Students gain a sense of civic responsibility and an appreciation for the value of acting morally in both their personal and social lives by learning about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. This information gives them the tools they need to make wise decisions, engage with their communities, and contribute to the betterment of society.

The rationale behind making civics a required topic in elementary schools is the significance of fostering ethical literacy in children at a young age. Empathy, respect for variety, and a sense of justice are just a few of the positive social behaviors that

children who are exposed to early on in life are more likely to display. By giving children a strong foundation in civics, we can foster these principles and assist them in developing into responsible people who make valuable contributions to society. An implementable plan is necessary for civics education to be implemented in government schools. The curriculum must first be created, making sure that it is age-appropriate and in line with the goals that primary school pupils are expected to study.

Second, making civics a required topic in elementary school contributes to the development of moral principles like empathy, decency, justice, and integrity. Students are taught the value of treating others fairly and with respect through engaging in lectures, debates, and activities. They also learn to value diversity in their communities and get a knowledge of social justice concerns. We can assist in forming kids' moral compass and motivate them to make good decisions throughout their lives by instilling these principles in them at a young age.

A detailed plan is necessary in order to effectively execute this recommendation in government schools. First and foremost, teacher preparation courses must to be offered in order to provide instructors with the information and abilities they need to properly instruct civics. This will guarantee that educators can present captivating lessons that encourage moral judgment, critical thinking, and engaged citizenship. In addition, the curriculum must be developed with the developmental needs of primary school pupils in mind, taking into account their age. Incorporating interactive teaching techniques like role-plays, debates, and group discussions is essential to making the subject matter interesting and applicable to students' everyday experiences.

Furthermore, collaborations can be formed with nearby government agencies and community organizations to give students practical experiences and chances for civic involvement. Study visits to government offices, volunteer work, and talks by prominent citizens can all help students develop a deeper sense of civic duty. To sum up, making civics a required topic in elementary school is an important first step in encouraging pupils to be ethically literate. We can provide kids with with the values, information, and abilities they need to grow up to be morally upright citizens by giving them a solid foundation in civic education. Careful preparation and cooperation between educators, legislators, and community stakeholders are necessary to put this recommendation into practice. But the long-term advantages of a society with ethical literacy make it an investment worth making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In an era distinguished by complex ethical concerns, the need to promote ethical literacy among students has grown. This study investigates the feasibility and impact of making ethics a compulsory subject in school curricula. The study's goal is to

investigate the attitudes, perceived benefits, and concerns of key stakeholders—principals, teachers, and parents—about the incorporation of ethics education.

The research solely uses a qualitative strategy for data collecting and analysis, but a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys, interviews, and assessments to get full data is also possible. Surveys and ethical literacy evaluations can also be used to gauge students' attitudes toward the value of ethics instruction, anticipated advantages, and potential issues.

The study may also include a pilot implementation in selected schools, where an ethical curriculum module is introduced as a mandatory topic, with data collected during the pilot program to assess implementation, student participation, and initial outcomes. A comparative analysis can be carried out by integrating control schools that do not have an ethics program and analyzing academic performance, behavioral results, and general school culture.

Longitudinal tracking can also be used to monitor the long-term influence of ethics education on students' ethical literacy, academic performance, and post-graduate success. Furthermore, case studies of schools that have effectively integrated ethics into their curricula can provide valuable insights into best practices and techniques.

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