

Latest Trends in Teaching and Learning Methods in Moral Education: An Analysis

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the latest trends in teaching and learning methods in Moral Education, particularly in the context of 21st-century education. The study reviews various instructional strategies and innovations that contribute to the effectiveness of moral teaching in secondary schools. Key trends identified include the shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to student-centered and technology-integrated approaches. Project-based learning (PjBL), game-based learning, reflective journaling, and collaborative learning are highlighted as impactful strategies for fostering moral reasoning, empathy, and ethical behavior. Additionally, the integration of digital tools such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence offers immersive platforms for students to engage in moral dilemmas and self-reflection. The findings also emphasize the importance of culturally responsive practices, such as storytelling and community-based moral learning, to promote values like respect, honesty, and responsibility. Through a synthesis of past empirical studies, this paper suggests that Moral Education is most effective when it combines interactive pedagogy, real-life relevance, emotional development, and cultural authenticity. The paper concludes that a hybrid, inclusive, and reflective approach is essential for equipping learners with the moral competencies needed in a rapidly evolving global society.

Keywords: Trend, Moral Teaching, Secondary School, Technology, 21st Century Learning

Introduction

Moral education remains a cornerstone of holistic student development, particularly in secondary schools where adolescents navigate complex social, emotional, and ethical challenges. As the world becomes increasingly digitized and diverse, moral education has gained renewed urgency, not only as a means of cultivating responsible citizenship but also of reinforcing cultural and spiritual values in youth. In many societies, including Indonesia and Malaysia, issues such as bullying, dishonesty, and intolerance continue to threaten the social fabric, underscoring the importance of embedding moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and ethical action into everyday learning (Hidayah, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2021).

The primary goal of this paper is to explore the current trends and innovations in teaching and learning methods related to Moral Education. While traditional lecture-based approaches have served foundational roles, 21st-century pedagogy demands more interactive, student-centered, and technologically integrated strategies. Innovative methods such as flipped classrooms, project-based learning, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) are gradually reshaping how moral values are taught and internalized (Teng et al., 2020; Novitsky, 2024). These changes reflect a broader shift towards education models that foster self-regulation, collaboration, and digital competence alongside character development.

The scope of this conceptual paper centers on secondary education, where students' moral cognition and emotional maturity begin to stabilize. According to Hidayah (2021), self-control and self-adjustment are critical internal factors that correlate strongly with students' moral behavior. Activities that promote interaction, reflection, and real-world moral engagement such as discussions, group work, and multimedia presentations that can strengthen these internal dispositions and lead to more consistent ethical conduct. Moreover, as demonstrated by Khamrayeva (2021), the integration of spiritual and moral education through culturally relevant materials and pedagogies, especially in language and reading classes, plays an essential role in shaping a student's moral consciousness.

In parallel, the emergence of smart classrooms and AI-driven learning systems offers new pathways for engaging students in moral learning. Teng et al. (2020) found that multimedia applications, including animation and audio-visual content based on Bloom's Taxonomy, help deepen students' understanding of moral issues by making learning more interactive and emotionally resonant. Similarly, Novitsky (2024) highlighted how AI tools like "PopBots" and "MiruBots" can foster technomoral resilience in children by simulating ethical dilemmas and promoting reflective thinking in real-time.

This paper will also discuss the evolving nature of the Moral Education curriculum, the theoretical underpinnings of moral development, and the effectiveness of new pedagogical and assessment strategies. By examining various dimensions—ranging from emotional intelligence and universal values to cognitive moral reasoning and technological infusion—this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how moral education is being reimagined to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Latest Trends in Moral Education in the 21st Century

The review of recent empirical studies underscores a clear transformation in the delivery of Moral Education in the 21st century, reflecting a shift from traditional didactic approaches to more dynamic, student-centered, and technologically integrated pedagogies. One of the most prominent trends is the use of project-based learning (PjBL), as highlighted by Nurul Afiah Mohd Yusof (2021) and Salmiza Mohd Sahid & Shahabuddin Hashim (2024). In their studies, PjBL was shown to enhance students' active engagement in addressing real-life moral issues while developing 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and moral reasoning. This method enables students to connect moral theories to practical scenarios, positioning teachers as facilitators who guide reflective dialogue rather than merely delivering content.

In parallel, game-based learning and simulation have proven effective in engaging learners. According to Siti Faridah Musa (2020), the incorporation of moral-based games stimulates motivation and allows students to explore values through interactive scenarios. Such approaches not only support deeper understanding but also cultivate essential soft skills like empathy and teamwork. The advancement of digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) has further enriched moral pedagogy. Studies by Jaekwoun Shim (2023) and Melissa Novitsky (2024) demonstrate that tools like virtual reality and social robots can enhance moral sensitivity, empathy, and technomoral resilience. These innovations provide immersive and emotionally resonant learning experiences, allowing students to navigate complex ethical situations within safe, simulated environments.

Additionally, interactive and reflective strategies such as the use of value-based learning modules (Hafizah Ibrahim & Rosnani Hashim, 2022) and journal writing (Nur Aina Shamsudin, 2023) play a critical role in promoting self-awareness and moral introspection. These methods empower students to engage with values on a personal level and reflect on their own actions and beliefs. Furthermore, collaborative learning environments, as described by Amirul Hakim Zakaria (2019), promote dialogue, empathy, and moral development through shared inquiry and peer interaction.

Finally, cultural and holistic approaches remain vital. Studies by Indah Suciati et al. (2023) and Wohabie Birhan et al. (2021) stress the importance of integrating local wisdom, family influence, and storytelling in moral education. These elements ensure that moral instruction is contextually relevant and inclusive. Together, these findings affirm that effective Moral Education in the 21st century requires a hybrid approach—one that combines modern pedagogical innovation with traditional moral foundations to develop ethically conscious, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible learners.

Table 1.1

Trend and Learning Method in Moral Education

Title	Author	Description	Trend and Learning Method
Penerapan Nilai Moral Melalui Kaedah Pembelajaran Berasaskan Projek (PjBL)	Nurul Afiqah Mohd Yusof (2021)	1. PjBL increases active student engagement in solving moral issues. 2. Students relate moral values to real-life problems. 3. Teachers act as facilitators guiding value reflection.	Teaching Method Teacher & Student
Integrasi Pembelajaran Berasaskan Permainan dalam Pendidikan Moral	Siti Faridah Musa (2020)	1. Moral games increase student motivation and interest. 2. Students better understand moral concepts through simulation. 3. Encourages critical	Teaching Method Student

		thinking and group collaboration.	
Penggunaan Modul Interaktif Nilai-Nilai Murni dalam Pembelajaran Moral	Hafizah Ibrahim & Rosnani Hashim (2022)	1. Interactive modules deepen understanding of noble values. 2. Suitable for students of varying abilities. 3. Enables dialogue and value reflection.	Teaching Method Student
Kesan Pembelajaran Kolaboratif terhadap Penerapan Nilai Moral di Sekolah Menengah	Amirul Hakim Zakaria (2019)	1. Group collaboration helps students evaluate moral actions in real situations. 2. Discussions nurture empathy and respect. 3. Strengthens social dimension of morality.	Teaching Technique Student
Penggunaan Refleksi Jurnal dalam Mengembangkan Kesedaran Diri Moral	Nur Aina Shamsudin (2023)	1. Students show increased moral and self-awareness. 2. Reflective writing helps evaluate moral actions. 3. Connects values with daily experiences.	Teaching Method Student
Investigating the Effectiveness of Introducing Virtual Reality to Elementary School Students' Moral Education	Jaekwoun Shim (2023)	1. VR learning improves moral sensitivity. 2. No significant effect on moral judgment. 3. Enhances cognitive, emotional, and social moral development through cooperation.	Digital Technology Student
Can AI Help Make Us Better Humans? Exploring AI for Enhanced Moral Education in Early Education	Melissa Novitsky (2024)	1. AI and social robots enhance empathy and moral reflection. 2. Promotes technomoral resilience in early learning. 3. Proposes MiruBots as a value-sensitive AI education tool.	AI Application Technology & Pedagogy
Character and Moral Education Based Learning in Students' Character Development	Indah Suciati et al. (2023)	1. Improves academic outcomes and mental health. 2. Emphasizes both internal (curriculum) and external (family, society) influences. 3. Utilizes local wisdom and six pillars of character.	Holistic Strategy School, Teacher, Parents

Learning Moral Education Through Project-Based Learning	Salmiza Mohd Sahid & Shahabuddin Hashim (2024)	1. PBL fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and moral reasoning. 2. Enhances student engagement and 21st-century skills. 3. Integrates real-life moral dilemmas into learning.	Teaching Method Pak21
Exploring the Context of Teaching Character Education in Preprimary and Primary Schools	Wohabie Birhan et al. (2021)	1. Storytelling, fairy tales, and advising are effective. 2. Focuses on values like honesty, respect, and responsibility. 3. Highlights the lack of formal character education curriculum.	Traditional Method Parents & Teachers

Development of the Moral Curriculum

The development of the moral curriculum in the 21st century reflects an ongoing transformation aimed at aligning educational goals with contemporary societal, emotional, and civic challenges. Across diverse national contexts, there has been a deliberate shift toward moral curricula that are modular, integrative, and life-relevant—ensuring that values education is not only taught, but lived and practiced.

In China, the moral education curriculum (MEC) has undergone significant reform since the early 2000s. As Tang and Wang (2020) explain, curriculum design now emphasizes morality and life, and morality and society, with content aligned to students' daily experiences, civic participation, and cultural heritage. These reforms demonstrate a clear evolution from didactic ideological instruction to a curriculum that integrates moral, political, legal, and emotional education. Furthermore, moral instruction is scaffolded by thematic modules such as "Life and Philosophy" and "Politics and Rule of Law," which expose students to real-life ethical reasoning, civic duties, and multicultural awareness.

Similarly, Pike et al. (2020) advocate for virtue-based moral curricula, emphasizing the development of virtue literacy the understanding and practice of character traits like integrity, courage, and empathy. Their work with the "Narnian Virtues" project illustrates how literature and story-based instruction can serve as a foundation for personal moral reflection and behavioral application, thus embedding character development across the curriculum.

These approaches support a broader trend toward integrating civic, emotional, and digital competencies into moral education. Curriculum designers now seek to foster student agency through tasks that promote reflection, social interaction, and technological engagement ensuring that moral content remains relevant in digitally connected and culturally diverse classrooms. In essence, the moral curriculum has evolved from static value transmission into an active, holistic framework that prepares students to become empathetic, critically aware, and socially responsible citizens.

Development of Moral Development Theories

Understanding how students develop moral reasoning, empathy, and values requires a multidimensional theoretical lens. Three key aspects are central to this discussion which are cognitive development, emotional development, and the integration of moral values into daily school life. These dimensions offer insights into both how students think about morality and how they live it out through consistent routines, school culture, and emotional intelligence.

Cognitive moral development is most famously articulated by Lawrence Kohlberg, who expanded on Piaget's constructivist view of developmental stages. Kohlberg proposed six stages of moral reasoning across three levels which are pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. These stages represent increasingly complex ways of justifying moral actions, from obedience to avoid punishment (Stage 1) to adherence to universal ethical principles such as justice (Stage 6) (Mathes, 2019). Cognitive growth is stimulated by moral dilemmas that require individuals to reason beyond personal interests, thus allowing learners to internalize more abstract moral concepts through structured reflection and discussion.

Emotional development is another crucial facet. Goleman's (1995) model of Emotional Intelligence (EI) includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—all of which are essential for moral behavior. Emotional regulation and empathy enable students not only to understand ethical situations cognitively but also to respond with compassion and integrity. Mertens et al. (2022) further emphasize the role of emotional self-regulation and self-esteem in enhancing resilience and psychological well-being among adolescents, suggesting that moral growth is not purely cognitive but deeply rooted in affective awareness.

Daily practice of values in classroom and school culture plays an equally vital role. A study by Tabassum et al. (2024) demonstrated that school culture including teacher behavior, classroom norms, and institutional values—strongly influences students' moral development. A positive, ethical school climate fosters responsibility, empathy, and social harmony. When teachers model ethical behavior and moral principles are embedded in daily routines, students internalize these values as part of their identity. Together, these theories support a holistic approach to moral education one that blends intellectual reasoning, emotional maturity, and consistent modeling of values in school environments

Advancement in Moral Pedagogy

In the evolving landscape of education, moral pedagogy has undergone significant transformation to align with 21st-century skills. Central to this advancement is the incorporation of PAK21 (Pembelajaran Abad ke-21), which emphasizes the integration of the 4C skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity into everyday teaching and learning activities. This pedagogical framework encourages active student participation and fosters a deeper internalization of moral values.

The study by Safri and Jamaludin (2022) underscores the importance of PAK21 in producing students who are not only intellectually competent but also morally grounded. They argue that traditional pedagogical models are insufficient for preparing students to navigate complex moral landscapes shaped by digitalization, globalization, and socio-cultural

diversity. Instead, PAK21-oriented moral education creates meaningful learning through group projects, reflective discussions, and problem-solving tasks that demand moral judgment and ethical collaboration.

Similarly, Samsani and Surat (2024) found that students exhibited a high tendency to master the 4C elements, particularly in moral-related contexts. Their study revealed that students responded positively when engaged in tasks that required moral reasoning, creativity in expressing ethical dilemmas, and teamwork to arrive at collective solutions. This suggests that PAK21, when aligned with moral content, significantly enhances students' moral and social cognition. Digital literacy integration further amplifies the impact of moral pedagogy. As explored by Mahmud et al. (2023), tools such as Padlet and other Web 2.0 platforms allow learners to engage in moral discussions in an interactive, collaborative, and reflective manner. These technologies empower students to explore moral issues in simulated real-world environments, encouraging deeper moral reasoning and peer interaction.

Ullah et al. (2023) emphasize the alignment between the 4Cs and project-based learning in tertiary education. Their work illustrates that when moral education is embedded in collaborative, cross-cultural, and communication-rich environments, students not only learn about values but also practice them actively making learning both meaningful and applicable. Novia et al. (2024) similarly advocate for learning models that humanize students by nurturing social skills and ethical awareness. They suggest that creativity and communication are not just technical skills, but moral tools for navigating a rapidly changing world. In sum, the advancement of moral pedagogy today lies in its ability to blend values education with innovative teaching strategies, thereby shaping learners who are morally responsive, digitally competent, and globally conscious.

Development of Moral Education Assessment

Assessment in moral education is no longer confined to written tests or rote memorization. The 21st-century shift towards holistic learning has paved the way for more nuanced, reflective, and skill-based assessments—especially those rooted in Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), inventive thinking, and alternative formats that prioritize learner autonomy and critical moral engagement.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) emphasize analysis, evaluation, and creation—key elements in fostering ethical reasoning. Kosasih et al. (2022) found that HOTS-oriented instruction in Islamic education significantly enhances students' ability to critically engage with values, make reflective judgments, and apply abstract moral concepts in real-life contexts. Integrating HOTS into moral education encourages learners not just to understand right from wrong but to justify their choices through ethical reasoning and value-based decision-making. Students are taught to reflect, challenge assumptions, and articulate their moral stances, leading to deeper moral internalization.

Inventive thinking, defined as the creative application of knowledge to new ethical situations, also plays an emerging role in moral pedagogy. Rebecchi et al. (2024) introduced the concept of responsible creativity, where learners are encouraged to innovate while considering ethical consequences. They argue that moral education should train students not just to follow norms but to creatively solve complex moral dilemmas with empathy and

foresight. This includes scenario-based assessments, ethical role-play, and design-thinking projects that require students to invent morally responsible solutions.

In response to these needs, alternative assessment methods are increasingly adopted. According to Loyens et al. (2023), project-based learning (PjBL) environments that use collaborative problem-solving and reflection have proven effective in cultivating both critical and creative thinking. Assessments in such models often include portfolios, performance-based tasks, and self-assessment tools—which allow students to track their moral development over time. These assessments provide a more authentic gauge of moral maturity compared to standard tests.

In line with Education 4.0 and Industry 5.0 frameworks, Swarup (2023) emphasizes the integration of design thinking into education. This approach, applied to moral education, requires students to develop ethical solutions to real-world challenges, thereby enhancing both inventive thinking and moral responsibility. Collectively, these assessment trends align with the broader goals of 21st-century education shaping learners who are not only morally competent but also adaptive, reflective, and socially responsible.

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Suggestions for Improving Moral Education Teaching Practices

Effective moral instruction begins with teachers who are well-equipped not only with pedagogical knowledge but also with deep personal engagement in value education. Madin et al. (2022) emphasize that the value-semantic orientation of teachers plays a pivotal role in nurturing ethical learners. Their study suggests that professional development (PD) programs should not only enhance instructional techniques but also cultivate teachers' personal value systems, reflective thinking, and moral identity. Bowman et al. (2022) further reinforce this by showing that exposure to targeted PD significantly improves teachers' ability and willingness to integrate technology meaningfully, especially when value beliefs are explicitly addressed.

Moral development thrives in dialogic and collaborative settings. Loyens et al. (2023) highlight that problem-based and project-based learning (PBL/PjBL) environments naturally foster critical and higher-order thinking in moral contexts. Group discussions, ethical debates, and case studies allow students to engage with differing perspectives, enhancing their ability to reason morally and act empathetically. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to structure classroom activities around shared inquiries and real-life ethical dilemmas that demand joint exploration and solution.

Connecting moral education to students' lived experiences strengthens its relevance. Kosasih et al. (2022) argue that HOTS implementation is more effective when teachers use

familiar, contextually grounded content that challenges students to think critically. Incorporating community issues, environmental ethics, or school-based ethical projects fosters a deeper moral connection and reinforces values such as social responsibility, empathy, and justice. Teachers should be empowered to innovate and reflect on their teaching of moral values. Rebecchi et al. (2024) introduce the concept of responsible creativity, which urges educators to design morally grounded learning experiences that are both engaging and ethically responsible. Integrating tools like design thinking, ethical simulations, and digital storytelling supports this goal. Reflection sessions and peer-sharing platforms can also provide spaces for teachers to adapt and evolve their pedagogical strategies based on classroom realities.

Conclusion

The landscape of Moral Education is undergoing significant transformation in response to the demands of the 21st century. This conceptual paper has explored various emerging trends, theoretical foundations, pedagogical advancements, and assessment innovations that shape how moral values are taught and learned in secondary education today. As students are increasingly exposed to complex ethical issues in a digitally connected and multicultural world, educators must adopt strategies that are not only relevant but also responsive to these new realities.

The integration of 21st-century learning principles—such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (PAK21)—into moral pedagogy reflects a paradigm shift from passive to active moral engagement. Student-centered approaches like project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and values-driven storytelling enhance learners' capacity to reason ethically and apply values in diverse real-life contexts. Furthermore, the use of digital tools, virtual platforms, and AI-infused learning environments has expanded the scope of moral inquiry, making it more interactive and reflective of students' lived experiences.

The paper also highlighted the evolving nature of moral curriculum, now structured around modular, theme-based content infused with civic, emotional, and global competencies. Alongside this, cognitive and emotional development theories by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Goleman support a holistic view of moral learning that values both intellectual reasoning and emotional intelligence. Assessment in moral education has likewise progressed, emphasizing higher-order thinking, inventive problem-solving, and authentic, performance-based evaluations. These strategies help cultivate not just moral knowledge, but moral habits and self-awareness.

To sustain these advancements, continuous professional development for teachers is vital. Educators must be supported in integrating ethical content with innovative pedagogy while reflecting critically on their roles as facilitators of moral development. Encouraging community engagement, collaborative learning, and responsible creativity will further ensure that Moral Education prepares students to become thoughtful, empathetic, and ethically grounded citizens. In essence, the future of Moral Education lies in its ability to blend timeless values with evolving educational strategies—ensuring that students not only know what is right but are also equipped to act on it in a rapidly changing world.

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