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THE CURRENT STATUS OF IMPLEMENTING MORAL EDUCATION IN NON-PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HO CHI MINH CITY THROUGH A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Moral education plays an essential role in the holistic development of primary school students by fostering moral cognition, attitudes, and behaviors aligned with educational and social standards. This study examines the current status of implementing moral education content for students in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City from a participatory approach. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining theoretical analysis with survey data collected from 150 primary school teachers and 50 school administrators. The study focuses on three core components of moral education: moral cognition, moral attitudes and emotions, and moral behavioral skills, in accordance with the 2018 General Education Curriculum. The findings indicate that moral education content is implemented at a relatively frequent level; however, its overall effectiveness remains moderate and uneven across content areas. Moral attitudes and behavioral skills were evaluated more positively than moral cognition, while the cultivation of patriotic awareness and related behaviors emerged as the weakest aspect. Teachers' and administrators' assessments were highly consistent, reflecting shared perceptions of current practices and limitations. The study highlights the need for more systematic, coordinated, and participatory strategies to enhance the effectiveness of moral education in non-public primary schools.

KEYWORDS: Moral education; Participatory approach; Primary education; Moral cognition; Moral behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

Moral education for students is a fundamental and important task in primary education, aiming at the comprehensive development of students' personalities. The essence of moral education lies in consciously transforming social norms and requirements into students' cognition, attitudes, and behaviors in their relationships within the family, school, and society [1,2,3,4]. Moral education activities are conducted everywhere and at all times, requiring the participation of parents, the community, teachers, and schools in educating students. Therefore, moral education for primary school students from a participatory approach is an inevitable requirement [3–5].

The 2018 General Education Curriculum at the primary level sets the goal of forming and developing five moral qualities in students: “patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility,” along with required standards regarding students’ cognition, attitudes, and behaviors [1]. To date, the primary education curriculum has been implemented in Ho Chi Minh City for five years and has achieved many notable results in terms of student quality. However, during the implementation of moral education content in accordance with the objectives and requirements of the curriculum, several shortcomings remain in primary schools [5–8]. This article shares theoretical and practical issues related to the implementation of moral education content for students in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City from a participatory approach.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Methodological Framework

This study employed a combination of theoretical and empirical research methods to examine the implementation of moral education in the context of primary education from a participatory approach. The theoretical component focused on the systematic analysis of the 2018 Primary Education Curriculum and relevant pedagogical and moral education literature. This analysis emphasized the core dimensions of moral cognition and moral behavior, which constitute essential components of moral education for primary school students. The synthesis of these sources provided the foundation for constructing the theoretical framework and developing research instruments aligned with the study’s key concepts [1–5].

The empirical component involved questionnaire surveys and analysis of teachers’ educational products to investigate the current status of moral education implementation in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. These methods were designed to capture stakeholders’ participation in moral education activities and to assess the extent to which moral cognition and moral behavior are addressed in educational practice.

Quantitative data were processed using a five-point Likert scale to evaluate the level and outcomes of moral education implementation within primary education settings, as follows:

Level 1: Completely not implemented (very weak);

Level 2: Not implemented (weak);

Level 3: Implemented infrequently (average);

Level 4: Implemented frequently (fair);

Level 5: Implemented very frequently (good).

2.2. Theoretical Basis of Moral Education Content for Students in Non-Public Primary Schools in Ho Chi Minh City from a Participatory Approach

Moral education is understood as a pedagogical process that is purposefully and systematically organized to promote students' moral development within the context of primary education. This process is implemented under the guiding role of teachers and the active participation of students through educational activities and social interactions, aiming to form and develop moral cognition, moral attitudes, moral beliefs, and moral behavior in accordance with curriculum objectives and socially accepted moral standards [2,3,5]. In this respect, extracurricular activities are defined as “educational activities organized outside regular classroom hours, aiming to expand and enhance the effectiveness of comprehensive education for students” [8].

Within primary education, moral education content focuses on shaping behavioral norms, fostering positive emotions, and developing essential life skills through both teaching and experiential educational activities. The ultimate goal of moral education is the comprehensive development of students' personalities. According to the 2018 Primary Education Curriculum, moral education content is structured around three interrelated dimensions—cognition, attitudes, and behavior—which correspond to five core moral standards: patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility [1–4].

From a participatory approach, moral education emphasizes the active involvement of students in the learning process, encouraging them to engage cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally in moral learning situations. In this approach, moral education content for primary school students comprises three fundamental components.

The first component focuses on the development of moral cognition, which refers to students' understanding and awareness of moral standards. Teachers are responsible for guiding students to correctly comprehend the meanings, manifestations, and significance of core moral qualities. Specifically, students are supported in understanding patriotism as love for their school, family, community, homeland, and nation; compassion as care and empathy toward others; diligence as eagerness and responsibility in learning and working; honesty as truthfulness, integrity, and accountability in words and actions; and responsibility as fulfilling duties toward oneself, family, school, and society. Through this process, students gradually develop moral awareness that serves as the cognitive foundation for moral attitudes and moral behavior [1,3].

The second component of moral education content focuses on the formation of positive moral attitudes, beliefs, and emotions toward core moral standards. Within the context of primary education, this component emphasizes the affective dimension of moral education, in which students develop emotional attachment and personal commitment to moral values through guided participation in learning activities. From a participatory approach, teachers play a facilitating role in creating learning environments that encourage students to actively express and internalize moral values.

Specifically, students are guided to demonstrate positive emotions and attitudes toward love for their homeland, country, and individuals who have contributed to society, thereby reinforcing patriotic values. They are encouraged to express personal viewpoints on compassion and to cultivate attitudes of empathy, care, and willingness to support others. In addition, students are supported in forming positive attitudes toward learning and daily work, fostering diligence in their relationships with themselves, their families, schools, and the wider society. Moral attitude education also includes guiding students to develop self-control and confidence in expressing personal opinions related to honesty in learning, social interactions, and labor. Furthermore, students are encouraged to articulate personal viewpoints and attitudes toward fulfilling responsibilities toward themselves, their families, schools, society, and the environment, while critically opposing irresponsible behaviors [1,3].

The third component concerns the development of moral behavior, which represents the practical manifestation of moral cognition and moral attitudes in students' everyday lives. In this component, moral education aims to support students in actively practicing behaviors aligned with established moral standards. Teachers guide students to engage in concrete actions that express patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility. Through repeated practice and participation in meaningful activities, students gradually form stable moral habits, enabling moral behavior to become an integral part of their daily conduct within school and social contexts.

Importantly, these three components—moral cognition, moral attitudes, and moral behavior—are not implemented in a linear or isolated manner. Instead, they are flexibly and integratively addressed depending on specific educational contexts and learning situations. Such integration allows students to develop a coherent moral framework in which understanding, emotional commitment, and behavioral practice mutually reinforce one another, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of moral education from a participatory perspective [1,3].

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extracurricular music activities play a significant role in developing musical performance competence for Grade 5 students in primary schools. By expanding learning beyond the formal classroom, these activities provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice musical skills, express emotions, and build confidence through real-life experiences.

To investigate the level and outcomes of implementing moral education in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City from a participatory approach, a questionnaire survey was conducted with 150 primary school teachers and 50 school administrators. The survey focused on key dimensions of moral education content, including moral cognition, moral attitudes, and moral behavior, in accordance with the objectives of the 2018 Primary Education Curriculum.

The collected data were analyzed to assess both the extent of implementation and the perceived educational outcomes across these dimensions. The results provide empirical evidence regarding current practices of moral education in non-public primary education settings, as well as insights into

similarities and differences in perceptions between teachers and administrators. The detailed findings are presented and discussed below.

Table 2.1 presents the current status of the implementation level of moral education content for students in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

Educational Content	Assessment of Implementation Outcomes					
	Teachers			School Administrators		
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank
1. Moral Cognition of Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)						
1.1. Helping students understand the nature of patriotism, identify its manifestations, and recognize the significance of expressing patriotic values.	3,43	0,778	8	3,46	0,780	7
1.2. Helping students understand compassion, identify manifestations of compassion, and recognize the significance of practicing compassion in interpersonal relationships.	3,38	0,772	12	3,36	0,742	12
1.3. Educating students to correctly understand the moral standard of diligence, identify manifestations of diligence, and recognize the significance of practicing diligent behaviors.	3,41	0,834	9	3,48	0,877	6

1.4. Educating students to correctly understand honesty, identify its manifestations and significance, and learn appropriate ways to cultivate honesty.	3,36	0,843	14	3,44	0,779	8
1.5. Educating students to correctly understand responsibility, identify its manifestations, recognize the significance of cultivating responsibility, and learn ways to develop this moral quality.	3,39	0,831	11	3,34	0,764	13
2. Education of Positive Attitudes, Beliefs, and Emotions toward Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)						
2.1. Students are guided to express positive emotions, feelings, and attitudes toward patriotism, including love for their homeland, country, and individuals who have made significant contributions to society.	3,44	0,726	7	3,40	0,721	10
2.2. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints on compassion and demonstrate positive engagement with compassionate values.	3,37	0,735	13	3,38	0,718	11
2.3. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints, attitudes, and	3,56	0,828	2	3,56	0,828	4

emotions toward diligence in relation to themselves, their families, schools, and society.						
2.4. Students are guided to demonstrate honesty in learning activities, social relationships, and work-related contexts.	3,46	0,670	6	3,80	0,600	1
2.5. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints and attitudes toward fulfilling responsibilities to themselves, their families, schools, society, and the surrounding environment.	3,40	0,816	10	3,30	0,781	14
3. Moral Behavior Skills Consistent with Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)						
3.1. Students actively practice behaviors that demonstrate patriotism.	3,34	0,790	15	3,26	0,658	15
3.2. Students actively cultivate compassionate behaviors and oppose actions that contradict compassionate values.	3,53	0,806	4	3,42	0,695	9
3.3. Students actively develop habits and behaviors related to diligent learning and working, and apply acquired knowledge to everyday life.	3,54	0,830	3	3,54	0,830	5
3.4. Students actively develop habits and	3,58	0,827	1	3,58	0,827	3

behaviors that demonstrate honesty.						
3.5. Students actively develop habits and behaviors that demonstrate responsibility.	3,48	0,830	5	3,70	0,671	2
Overall average score	3,45			3,47		

According to Table 2.1, the level of implementation of moral education content in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City was assessed at a frequent level, but remained close to infrequent implementation on the five-point Likert scale. The overall mean score reported by teachers was 3.45, while that reported by school administrators was 3.47. This indicates a high degree of consistency between the two groups in evaluating the current status of moral education implementation. Although moral education content is implemented relatively regularly, none of the items reached a high level of implementation (no mean score of 4.0 or above), suggesting that the overall intensity and effectiveness of implementation remain moderate.

When examined by content groups, slight differences were observed among the three components presented in Table 2.1. The group “Moral Behavior Skills Consistent with Core Moral Standards” tended to receive relatively higher mean scores than the other two groups. In contrast, the group “Moral Cognition of Core Moral Standards” showed comparatively lower levels of implementation. The group “Education of Positive Attitudes, Beliefs, and Emotions toward Core Moral Standards” was positioned between the two. These findings indicate that, while all three dimensions of moral education are addressed at a moderate level, activities related to moral cognition appear to receive less emphasis than those related to attitudes and moral behavior.

From teachers’ perspectives, the highest-rated item belonged to the group “Moral Behavior Skills Consistent with Core Moral Standards,” specifically the item “Students actively develop habits and behaviors that demonstrate honesty” (mean = 3.58), indicating frequent implementation. This suggests that teachers prioritize behavioral manifestations of honesty in their moral education practices. Conversely, the lowest-rated item was also within the moral behavior group, namely “Students actively practice behaviors that demonstrate patriotism” (mean = 3.34), reflecting an infrequent-to-moderate level of implementation. This result highlights patriotic behavior education as a relatively weak aspect of moral education in non-public primary schools.

Administrators’ evaluations showed a similar pattern. The highest-rated item was “Students are guided to demonstrate honesty in learning activities, social relationships, and work-related contexts” (mean = 3.80), which belongs to the group “Education of Positive Attitudes, Beliefs, and Emotions toward Core Moral Standards.” This was the highest mean score across the entire table, indicating administrators’

strong recognition of efforts to foster honesty across multiple domains. In contrast, the lowest-rated item was again “Students actively practice behaviors that demonstrate patriotism” (mean = 3.26), confirming consensus between teachers and administrators that patriotic behavior education represents the least effectively implemented component.

Overall, both teachers and administrators rated items related to honesty, responsibility, and diligence—primarily within the groups of positive attitudes and moral behavior skills—more highly than items related to moral cognition, particularly cognition related to patriotism. The differences between teachers’ and administrators’ ratings were generally small, with most mean score differences below 0.2 points, indicating a high level of agreement between the two groups. Administrators tended to rate school-wide, behavior-oriented initiatives more positively, whereas teachers showed slightly higher ratings for cognition- and attitude-related items that are directly addressed in daily classroom instruction.

Regarding response consistency, most items exhibited standard deviation values ranging from approximately 0.7 to 0.8, with no value exceeding 0.9. This indicates a relatively high level of agreement among respondents and supports the reliability of the mean scores in reflecting the overall situation.

An analysis of teachers’ instructional records further revealed that moral education content is implemented primarily through the subject of Moral Education and experiential learning activities, while its integration into other subject areas remains limited. To further examine the effectiveness of moral education implementation, the following section analyzes the results presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 presents the current status of the outcomes of implementing moral education content for students in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

Educational Content	Assessment of Implementation Outcomes					
	Teachers			School Administrators		
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Rank
1. Moral Cognition of Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)						
1.1. Helping students understand the nature of	3,34	0,764	10	3,34	0,764	12

patriotism, identify its manifestations, and recognize the significance of expressing patriotic values.						
1.2. Helping students understand compassion, identify manifestations of compassion, and recognize the significance of practicing compassion in interpersonal relationships.	3,30	0,806	13	3,41	0,754	8
1.3. Educating students to correctly understand the moral standard of diligence, identify manifestations of diligence, and recognize the significance of practicing diligent behaviors.	3,47	0,709	1	3,38	0,660	10
1.4. Educating students to correctly understand honesty, identify its manifestations and significance, and learn appropriate ways to cultivate honesty.	3,40	0,748	6	3,40	0,748	9
1.5. Educating students to correctly understand responsibility, identify its manifestations, recognize the significance of cultivating responsibility, and learn ways to develop this moral quality.	3,45	0,779	2	3,42	0,777	7

2. Education of Positive Attitudes, Beliefs, and Emotions toward Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)

2.1. Students are guided to express positive emotions, feelings, and attitudes toward patriotism, including love for their homeland, country, and individuals who have made significant contributions to society.	3,44	0,779	3	3,44	0,779	6
2.2. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints on compassion and demonstrate positive engagement with compassionate values.	3,38	0,797	8	3,50	0,806	3
2.3. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints, attitudes, and emotions toward diligence in relation to themselves, their families, schools, and society.	3,43	0,820	4	3,52	0,806	2
2.4. Students are guided to demonstrate honesty in learning activities, social relationships, and work-related contexts.	3,39	0,782	7	3,46	0,727	5
2.5. Students are guided to express personal viewpoints and attitudes toward fulfilling responsibilities to themselves, their families,	3,42	0,785	5	3,54	0,830	1

schools, society, and the surrounding environment.						
3. Moral Behavior Skills Consistent with Core Moral Standards (Patriotism, Compassion, Honesty, Diligence, and Responsibility)						
3.1. Students actively practice behaviors that demonstrate patriotism.	3,32	0,926	11	3,36	0,911	11
3.2. Students actively cultivate compassionate behaviors and oppose actions that contradict compassionate values.	3,31	0,826	12	3,30	0,806	13
3.3. Students actively develop habits and behaviors related to diligent learning and working, and apply acquired knowledge to everyday life.	3,35	0,925	9	3,48	0,964	4
3.4. Students actively develop habits and behaviors that demonstrate honesty.	3,28	0,895	14	3,28	0,895	14
3.5. Students actively develop habits and behaviors that demonstrate responsibility.	3,26	0,770	15	3,26	0,770	15
Overall average score	3,37			3,41		

A comparative examination of the results presented in Table 2.1 (level of implementation) and Table 2.2 (implementation outcomes) reveals a consistent but uneven pattern in moral education practices in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. While the level of implementation was generally assessed as frequent at a moderate level, the corresponding outcomes tended to be lower, remaining at a moderate to fairly good level. This indicates a gap between how often moral education content is implemented and the extent to which it produces tangible educational outcomes.

In the domain of moral cognition, Table 2.2 shows that content related to students' understanding of diligence was ranked first among cognitive outcomes by teachers ($M = 3.47$) and evaluated at a comparable level by administrators ($M = 3.38$). This finding aligns with Table 2.1, where this content area was also implemented relatively frequently. Similarly, content related to responsibility awareness was among the top-ranked cognitive outcomes for both respondent groups (T: $M = 3.45$; A: $M = 3.42$). The consistency between implementation level and outcomes suggests that repeated exposure contributes positively to students' moral cognition. However, the fact that these outcomes did not reach a high level indicates that moral cognition has not yet been fully internalized.

By contrast, other cognitive contents—such as understanding compassion and honesty—were ranked lower within the cognitive group, despite being implemented at a comparable frequency according to Table 2.1. This discrepancy suggests that implementation alone, without appropriate pedagogical strategies, may be insufficient to produce strong cognitive outcomes.

A clearer convergence between implementation level and outcomes is observed in the area of moral attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. In Table 2.2, the item “Students demonstrate responsible attitudes toward themselves, their families, schools, and society” was ranked first overall by administrators ($M = 3.54$), while attitudes toward diligence were ranked second among all items ($M = 3.52$). These outcomes correspond closely with Table 2.1, where attitude-related content was implemented at a relatively higher level. This alignment suggests that moral education practices—particularly those involving collective activities and experiential learning—are more effective in shaping students' moral attitudes and emotional engagement.

In contrast, outcomes related to moral behavior skills consistently appeared among the bottom-ranked items in Table 2.2. Notably, behaviors expressing responsibility were identified as the lowest-ranked outcome by both teachers and administrators ($M = 3.26$). Other behavioral contents, including practicing honesty and compassion, were also ranked among the lowest, despite Table 2.1 indicating that these behaviors were addressed at a comparable implementation level. This divergence highlights a critical limitation: although moral behaviors are formally implemented, students face difficulties in translating moral cognition and attitudes into stable and habitual moral actions.

Overall, the rank-based comparison between the two tables reveals a gradual decline from implementation level to educational outcomes across the three dimensions of moral education. Moral attitudes tend to occupy top-ranked positions, moral cognition remains at a moderate level, while moral behavior skills consistently fall into bottom-ranked positions. This pattern underscores the need for moral education approaches that move beyond frequency of implementation toward deeper, participatory, and practice-oriented strategies that support the transformation of moral understanding and attitudes into consistent moral behavior.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Moral education for students in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City has been implemented across three fundamental dimensions, including moral cognition, moral attitudes and emotions, and moral behavior skills. The research findings indicate that the implementation of moral education content has achieved initial and relatively positive outcomes, particularly in enhancing students' moral awareness and fostering favorable attitudes toward core moral standards such as diligence and responsibility. These results suggest that non-public primary schools have made efforts to integrate moral education into teaching activities and school life, contributing to a moderate to fairly good level of overall effectiveness. Nevertheless, the level of implementation remains uneven across different moral content areas, with several aspects of moral cognition and moral attitudes—especially those related to patriotism, compassion, and honesty—showing only modest results. This reflects the fact that moral education in non-public primary schools has not yet fully realized its potential in shaping comprehensive moral development among students.

More importantly, the findings reveal that the education and cultivation of moral behavior skills, which represent the ultimate and most practical goal of moral education, remain a significant challenge. Compared to moral cognition and attitudes, moral behavior outcomes tend to fall into the lower ranks, indicating that students still face difficulties in translating moral knowledge and positive attitudes into consistent moral actions in everyday learning, social relationships, and real-life contexts. This gap highlights the need for greater attention from both teachers and school administrators in non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City to strengthen the practical dimension of moral education. In particular, moral education should be implemented in a more coherent and systematic manner, with increased emphasis on experiential activities, behavior-based learning, and continuous moral practice. Such an approach would help ensure consistency between moral awareness, moral attitudes, and moral behaviors, thereby contributing to the improvement of educational quality and the sustainable development of moral education in non-public primary education.

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