

# Spiritual and Moral Education of Schoolchildren as the Basis of Their Mental and Psychological Well-Being

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## Abstract:

This article is concerned with the concept of spiritual and moral education, its main components, and their relation with the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren. The conducted study has demonstrated a close connection between the spiritual and moral education of schoolchildren and their mental and psychological well-being. Throughout experimental research, the authors of the article have considered the spiritual and moral education of younger schoolchildren since this age is a crucial period for the formation of moral consciousness and self-consciousness, and the moral foundations formed at this age determine the person's future life.

**Keywords:** mental well-being, spiritual and moral education, younger schoolchildren.

## INTRODUCTION

A harmonious person possesses moral, spiritual, civil, intellectual, creative, physical, emotional and aesthetic qualities. Nowadays the spiritual and moral state (dignity) of personality and its education is a burning issue since material needs dominate over spiritual and moral ones, cutting-edge information technologies undermine interpersonal relations, the latest scientific achievements destroy the environment, respect for the older generation is lost, the desire to learn and be educated decreases, and the modern youth ignores the experience of previous generations.

Such spiritual and moral values as piety, conscience, beauty, dignity, duty, compassion, honor, respect, kindness, faith, love, veneration, tuition and friendship are opposed to cynicism, moral degradation, rudeness, a lack of spirituality, cruelty, aggressiveness, inability to understand each other, a lack of respect and justice.

The person's spiritual and moral education was highly valued at all times, and today it becomes even more important. The modern society is decaying in terms of morality, i.e. civil marriages are gaining popularity, the younger generation can be accused of soullessness, unbelief and aggressiveness. These traits manifest themselves in the behavior of not only adults or adolescents but also teenagers and even younger schoolchildren.

The spiritual and moral education of children is among the most acute problems that parents, state and society face. To study this problem from a scientific viewpoint, one should consider spiritual and moral education as a special educational sphere, which has its own methods, structure, goals and implementation techniques. The stated problem draws much attention to the correlation of spiritual-moral components and mental-social health in the person's individual development, the importance of socialization based on spiritual and moral prescriptions that could lay the foundation of the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

The notions of "spirituality" and "morality" are not identical. There is no unambiguous definition of these concepts (see Table 1).

The spiritual and moral education of a child comprises the formation and development of the following components: universal human values; national values; social values; family values.

The family takes the first step in the formation of the child's personality. In this regard, parental instructions, talks, personal examples and family traditions have strong influence on the formation of spirituality. Unfortunately, most modern parents are not able to take full care of the spiritual development of their children. They primarily strive to satisfy material needs of their child without paying enough attention to the formation of higher,

moral and spiritual interests. As a result, the positive potential of education within the family significantly reduces.

Another important phenomenon in the person's spiritual and moral education is the school which carries out a purposeful educational process in accordance with the programs approved at the official level.

Thus, the person's active and rightful existence in the society requires compliance with moral and social requirements, as well as the mastery of spiritual and moral norms and values while maintaining mental and psychological well-being. This fact emphasizes the correlation spiritual-moral components and mental-social health in the person's individual development, the importance of socialization based on spiritual and moral prescriptions that could lay the foundation of the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

In modern science, psychological well-being is defined as an integral characteristic that includes the schoolchild's mental and social health and their dominant positive emotional states. A positive psycho-emotional state is an integral characteristic of the psyche's activity for a certain period (relatively long and weak in intensity) that is marked as a positive emotion and is subjectively experienced as a good state of health and a positive attitude. A positive psycho-emotional state the presentation of the schoolchild's positive experiences includes well-being and activity, emotional calmness, learning interest, satisfaction with educational results, a positive mood [5, 6]. Positive relationships with peers are also a socio-psychological variable associated with high satisfaction with one's life.

Western scholars widely use the "psychological well-being" term, i.e. psychological well-being interpreted as mental comfort, the consistency of mental processes and functions, a sense of integrity, inner balance. [7]

L. Kulikov's definition reveals a connection between mental well-being and health. He notes that mental health is not only the adequacy and purposefulness of behavior and activity, consistency in acts and actions, but also the coordination of many processes and well-being, satisfaction with one's life; full-scale development and harmonious work of all mental functions; the state of mental well-being characterized by the absence of painful mental outbursts that regulates behavior and activity depending on the surrounding reality. [8]

The authors of the article believe that the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren should be regarded as a favorable psycho-emotional state characterized by activities ensuring positive interpersonal interaction with the environment, the formation of communicative skills; influences the development of cognitive processes, the students' understanding of various emotional states, and the manifestation of empathy in accordance with communicative situations.

Therefore, the psychological characteristic of mentally and psychologically safe children is as follows: they are happy and cheerful and discover the surrounding world not only with their mind but also with their feelings; they improve intuition and their personality; acquire the ability for self-reflection and stress tolerance; use their potential in complex life situations; fully reveal their personality from the emotional and behavioral viewpoint; are capable of self-criticism and give themselves adequate self-evaluation. These children fully perceive their personalities and at the same time are tolerant towards others, acquire spiritual values and give themselves a sense of purpose.

Criteria for the manifestation of the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren are as follows: tend to act instead of worrying about a particular situation, the optimal functioning of all mental structures that guarantee a mental comfort in the social environment, the development of personal qualities for a positive perception of oneself and others, altruism, creativity and responsibility.

Psychological well-being forms positive interpersonal relationships and produce positive emotions. Psychological well-being is subjectively manifested as a sense of completeness and value of life and is obligatory to realize the child's abilities and talents.

Thus, psychological well-being embraces mental and psychological health. It is also a necessary condition for the full development and functioning of schoolchildren in the society and the realization of their personal potential at various stages of growing-up.

The research objective is to determine how younger schoolchildren usually understand the meaning of moral actions. The authors of the article also aim to reveal the connection of spiritual and moral education with the psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

The research hypothesis is that the spiritual and moral education of schoolchildren lays the foundation for their mental and psychological well-being.

Table 1. Characterizing the concepts of "spirituality" and "morality"

Author	Definition
Ozhegov, S.I. [1]	Spirituality is the soul's property of being concerned with spiritual, moral and intellectual notions rather than material needs.
Stepashko, L.A. [2]	Morality is the person's commitment to socio-historical norms and values, as well as the evaluation given by others and society. Spirituality is the person's ability to be free, independent and self-sufficient.
Monoszon, E.I. [3]	Spirituality is a complex multi-structural phenomenon characterizing the person's inner world and manifesting itself in morality, good conscience, responsibility and serving others through virtuous relationships.
Ryzhov, V.V. [4]	Spirituality is an ability to distinguish and choose true values and honor them; something that makes sense of the person's and humankind life.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

A significant stage in the formation of the child's spirituality supported at the state level was the introduction of a course covering "Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" into school curriculum. This religious course is currently taught in the fourth grade. The discipline is concerned with religious-philosophical, cultural and educational-educational aspects. Parents together with children choose one of five modules, including the fundamentals of the Orthodox culture, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism or secular ethics. This year, 15,500 out of 42,400 Dagestanian schoolchildren of the fourth grade decided to study the Islamic culture [<http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4698556>].

The course aims to develop Islamic ethics of schoolchildren and familiarize them with basic Islamic values like truth, piety, goodness, dignity, duty, conscience or honor, which provides proper moral and ethical conditions for self-cognition and self-realization of a growing personality. In particular, it is the formation of empathy, compassion and joy; intellectual and cognitive abilities (the development of various types of attention, memory and mindset). Education should improve such positive character traits as benevolence, diligence, love for one's neighbor, compassion and optimism.

To attain this objective, the authors of the article used the following research methods: an individual ethical interview, anxiety test (R. Temml, M. Dorky, V. Amen), quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, statistical methods.

50 pupils from schools of Makhachkala took part in the study, including 25 schoolchildren of the 4th grade whose parents chose the module "Secular Ethics" and 25 schoolchildren of the 4th grade whose parents chose the module "Fundamentals of Islam".

During the interview schoolchildren were asked certain questions to define such basic values as truth, piety, kindness, love, beauty, dignity, duty, conscience, and honor that provide proper moral and ethical conditions for the self-cognition and self-realization of a growing personality. The interview also included questions related to an emotional sphere as a component of mental and psychological well-being (empathy, compassion, joy, etc.).

#### RESULTS

The analysis criteria reveal the nature and interpretation of the "well-being" concept. Most respondents connected well-being with the following notions: wisdom, friendship, good, charity, justice, courage and compassion.

The analysis has demonstrated that the level of moral values and emotional well-being was much higher for children studying "Fundamentals of Islam" than for those pupils who were studying "Secular Ethics."

It should also be noted that the "charity" indicator is very low among schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics" (20%) compared to the group studying "Fundamentals of Islam" (80%). The authors of the article have revealed a similar situation with regard to the "compassion" indicator (32% and 52%, respectively).

There were insignificant differences for such concepts as "freedom" (76% and 88%), "courage" (52% and 64%), "duty" (68% and 76%) and "fairness" (60% and 64%).

The concepts forming the basis of the schoolchild's mental and psychological well-being have roughly the same indicators: "friendship" (96% and 96%), "justice" (60% and 64%) and "good" (92% and 96%). Despite almost identical indicators, schoolchildren understood these concepts in different ways:

"Good" – schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics" understood it as material goods, politeness, reasonableness; pupils who study "Fundamentals of Islam" associated it with peace of mind, peace in their country, love and help to one's neighbor;

"Justice" – the first group thought it was when parents do not punish them for no fault; the second group believed it was the balance of life;

"Friendship" – the first group used this notion to describe situations when they visited different institutions and did lessons together with their fellow pupils; the second group used this word for a close person who would share both joy and sorrow, and never betray.

The anxiety test conducted in these two groups have demonstrated that 13 children (26%) have a high level of anxiety (8 pupils studying "Secular Ethics" and 5 pupils studying "Fundamentals of Islam"), 21 children (42%) have an average level of anxiety (12 pupils studying "Secular Ethics" and 9 pupils

studying "Fundamentals of Islam"), and 16 children (32%) have a low level of anxiety (5 pupils studying "Secular Ethics" and 11 pupils studying "Fundamentals Islam").

The mathematical processing with the Student's t-test has shown significant differences ( $t_{\text{empirical}} = 5.35$   $p < 0.01$ ) in the anxiety index (AI) between the groups of schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics" and "Fundamentals of Islam", with anxiety indicators of the first group higher.

#### DISCUSSION

The analysis of the answers provided by younger schoolchildren has proved that most pupils of this age have elementary ideas of morality and can use them as guidelines to consider their own actions and the behavior of others. In this regard, there is a dynamical growth in the level of spiritual and moral education and better psychological well-being of children studying "Fundamentals of Islam" compared to schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics".

However, the child's life is not limited only to the educational process. Thus, extracurricular activities, including interpersonal relationships, additional courses, games, etc. where the child feels more relaxed, is not success-oriented and is not afraid of getting a bad evaluation, also play a crucial role in the spiritual and moral education of the younger generation.

It should be noted that a close connection between the spiritual-moral education and the mental-psychological well-being of schoolchildren is conditioned by the fact that spirituality and morality are most efficiently implemented in the process of communication and interpersonal, i.e. in the process of social interactions. Interpersonal relationships are a specific channel for obtaining information. Due to this type of relationships, schoolchildren are included into a specific group interaction that contributes to the development of appropriate social skills and abilities to obey collective discipline and learning how to defend their rights and interests. The competitiveness of mutual relations typical of this particular age and social level (a factor absent in other spheres of communication) helps schoolchildren evaluate their own actions and actions of others and forms more adequate self-assessment, which among the factors of psychological well-being. A group affiliation, the pursuit of solidarity and mutual assistance, the desire to receive the same attitude in return ensure the emotional well-being of schoolchildren.

The school community is one of the priority groups to which children want to belong. However, this officially organized collective is an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it is designed by adults and develops under their direct and indirect actions. On the other hand, the school community develops spontaneously since communication and interaction between its members occur not only in accordance with officially established norms but also under the influence of an informal component forming in the process of free interactions and mostly depending on the nature of interpersonal relationships. One cannot ignore the fact that the above mentioned informal component includes the social stratification of schoolchildren, especially noticeable in large cities and determined by the financial situation of their family, as well as certain ambitions and means for their realization.

From this perspective, there is a need to organize and conduct special pedagogical tuition aimed to support the communicative formation of schoolchildren and the development of the moral sphere in this process.

This tuition should be based on a subject-subject interaction and dialogue which implement the tasks in hand according to the principles of equality, mutual understanding, respect and empathy. The process is facilitated by the creation of a psychologically comfortable environment, the establishment of personal contacts between the teacher and children on the basis of

a parity partnership with due regard to moral and ethical norms and values; the support of the emotional well-being of schoolchildren; the use of verbal and non-verbal means of interaction; the provision of conditions for self-expression and overcoming the inferiority complex of some children by mastering communicative knowledge and skills and developing social abilities.

Social abilities (extraversion, the balance of neuro-psychic processes, external attractiveness, benevolence towards others, empathy) are the main properties that contribute to mental and psychological well-being. Describing characteristic features of these abilities, the authors of the article should emphasize that each of them is manifested in various types of communication (i.e., is generalized), and is not created and developed through purposeful education but is rather through an interaction between the child's inborn properties and their socio-cultural development.

Unlike social abilities, communicative knowledge and skills are formed on their basis and are the result of more or less purposeful education and upbringing. In addition, they are not universal, i.e. communicative knowledge is "tied" to a specific communicative situation. At the same time communicative knowledge is based on the actualization and conscious application of relevant knowledge, whereas communicative skills are the result of certain actions made by the conditioned reflex, i.e. as a general complex of certain actions ("automated").

The authors of the article consider communicative training as the most acceptable means for the formation and development of communicative knowledge and skills of schoolchildren as a manifestation of morality and mental and psychological well-being. Within the framework of this training classes are conducted in the form of role-playing games and enable to improve the child's competence in the sphere of interpersonal relations, create opportunities for independent analysis and elimination of the existing communicative, perceptive, interactive difficulties, better self-cognition and knowledge of their classmates, ensure the acquisition of certain moral experience.

It is important to mention that playing roles should not be constricted by certain rules but on the child's own experience, their understanding of any given situation, their moral beliefs, orientations and attitudes.

The efficiency of a role-playing game is explained by the fact that, on the one hand, it grants schoolchildren the opportunity to expand and deepen the corresponding theoretical knowledge, and, on the other hand, it helps to test this knowledge on practice and check whether it is correct and appropriate.

It is possible to attain this end if there is a certain sequence of stages in conducting classes, namely:

The first stage: the creation of a favorable psychological environment in the group.

The second stage: setting tasks by creating life-like images and situations that should be identified and played out.

The third stage: the organization and self-organization of schoolchildren's activities through a combination of the proposed images and situations with regard to their practice.

The fourth stage: the improvement of the identified shortcomings by redirecting schoolchildren's activities to themselves and their lives.

The fifth stage: the reflection and assessment of this "game", the realization of acceptable and unacceptable behavioral patterns in various situations, the enrichment of moral experience.

To ensure the effectiveness of this training, it is necessary to build it on real life situations, play out various conflicts, situations of acquaintance, argument and cooperation. These situations should be simple to understand, contain several aspects of morality, offer several options for a possible solution, i.e. they should be problem-based.

The last provision is especially important since the formation of interaction skills involves not only the performance of certain behavioral actions, but also the training of mental activities and constant intellectual tension. S. Rubinstein noted that the initial moment of thinking and an impetus to intellectual activity is a problem-based situation with a conflict between what is given and what needs to be clarified [9, p. 191].

While choosing situations to play out, teachers should make sure that the chosen situations reflect the real life of schoolchildren and contain problems significant for them. Otherwise, children can take a position outside the situation since it does not arouse their vital interest, and its solution is not based on their own views and beliefs but is presented by the teacher, which contradicts such a condition of the child's moral formation as freedom in the context of their mental and psychological well-being.

Freedom provides the child's desire for independence and presupposes the ability to independently determine their actions in conformity with the formed worldview and act on their own decisions. Acting in a certain way, children make a moral choice between good and evil, moral and immoral. The subjective parameter of freedom is the development of personal consciousness, through which children acquire the ability to perform moral acts independently, without external pressure. The state of complete moral freedom is achieved only when a conscious necessity grows into a personal moral orientation, becomes an internal need of an individual.

Personal freedom is regulated by spiritual, moral and social norms that are worked out by the society and ensure its effective life's activity.

Alongside communicative training, different group activities should be introduced into the pedagogical tuition for the spiritual and moral development of schoolchildren used as the basis for their mental and psychological well-being. The pedagogical value of group activities is determined by the fact that they enable to interpret the actions of a particular schoolchild into the act of each group member. Various group activities focus on individuality as a universal value and contribute to spiritual and moral self-realization through a creative activity in which the group is involved.

Group creative activities help develop schoolchildren's knowledge and skills of ethical communication, and the consolidation of spiritual and moral norms that determine their readiness for moral behavior in real life situations. In addition, group creative activities improve logical and critical thinking, the ability to reflect, learn to objectively evaluate their own actions and deeds of others, focus on a moral choice, overcome stereotypes, conscious barriers towards others, which greatly contributes to mental and psychological well-being.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Spiritual and moral education is an important component of socialization that grants schoolchildren the

opportunity to purposefully learn and represent moral norms and values. To attain this end, spiritual and moral education should be based on the child's active role, conditions for their fullest self-realization and the correction of the existing shortcomings. This type of education serves as a foundation for mastering the spiritual values recognized by some particular society, facilitates constructive interpersonal contacts, attracts classmates to communicate in a group as a model of real interactions leading to mental and psychological well-being.

The study conducted by the authors has demonstrated that a significant positive effect on spiritual education of schoolchildren as the basis of their mental and psychological well-being is provided by the lessons on "Fundamentals of Islam" which teach children to sympathize and empathize, develop a proper way of thinking and communication among fellow pupils, form such character traits such as benevolence, diligence and love for one's neighbor.

In this regard, an effective method of spiritual and moral education is communicative training that gives schoolchildren the opportunity to master rules of social interaction based on spiritual and moral values, check their rightfulness in various communicative situations, exercise their freedom, make independent decisions and take part in group activities based on the possibility of children to manifest their moral and social activity.

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