

Development of Ethical and Moral Values in 6th Grade Students: Diagnosis and Intervention Proposal at a Primary School in Benguela

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Abstract

The formation of ethical and moral values in primary school students is a current principle, particularly in 6th-grade students who are beginning to exhibit adolescent behaviors. Based on this, the scientific problem of this research is: how to effectively contribute to the development of ethical and moral values among these students at a primary school in Benguela. In response to this problem, the study aimed to develop a set of pedagogical actions directed toward this goal. The research is descriptive, utilizing a mixed-methods approach (qualitative-quantitative). The study involved a population of 146 participants, using a non-probabilistic purposive sample of 46 individuals. Theoretical methods (analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive, bibliographic research) and empirical methods (mathematical-statistical) were applied, employing interview and questionnaire techniques for data collection. The diagnosis revealed weaknesses, indicating that the school rarely promotes specific actions for the development of ethical and moral values, resulting in a lack of respect among peers and in student-teacher relationships. To address this gap, a series of concrete and dynamic actions were proposed and implemented, including role-playing (dramatization), the analysis of social dilemmas, and group dynamics.

Keywords: Actions, Ethics, Morals, Student, Values

1. Introduction

The formation and development of ethical and moral values are widely recognized as a fundamental pillar of education, aimed at shaping just, responsible, and autonomous citizens. In this context, the school plays a crucial role, as it serves as a space for interaction, coexistence, and social engagement, where ethics and values are continuously constructed through daily practice [1]. At the international level, there is an ongoing discussion on Moral Values Education (MVE), which has become a priority in global educational policies. Scholars such as Piaget and Kohlberg argue that morality is a product of cognitive and social development, requiring active teaching methods that involve key stakeholders, including the family, the school, and other social agents [2,3]. Recent studies indicate that MVE is more effective in environments that promote dialogue, enabling students to transition from heteronomy to moral autonomy [4]. A pedagogical approach based on the confrontation of psychopedagogical perspectives is considered a key driver of moral judgment development, making it essential for teachers to act as consistent ethical role models [5].

In Angola, the education system follows international guidelines regarding the formation and development of ethical and moral values. It recognizes the importance of Moral and Civic Education as a curricular area and includes it as a subject within primary education programs. However, the effectiveness of implementing these programs faces significant challenges, often related to the lack of continuous teacher training in specific didactic approaches for MVE [6]. Additionally, most primary school teachers are responsible for teaching all subjects within a given academic year, which limits specialization and leads them to prioritize more technical subjects such as Portuguese language and Mathematics [7]. The preliminary diagnosis conducted in this study revealed that institutional practices rarely incorporate systematic actions for the formation of ethical and moral values. This pedagogical gap is reflected in issues related to school coexistence, particularly the low level of respect observed in peer interactions and in student-teacher relationships. Such conditions negatively affect the school climate, highlighting the need for targeted intervention. The

identification of insufficient institutional practices in promoting ethical and moral values among 6th-grade students in primary education leads to the formulation of the following research problem:

How can the formation of ethical and moral values be enhanced among 6th-grade students in a primary school in the municipality of Benguela?

The general objective of this study is to design concrete pedagogical actions aimed at fostering the formation and development of ethical and moral values among 6th-grade students, thereby providing the school with a systematic and theoretically grounded intervention model. Pedagogical intervention in the formation and development of ethical and moral values among 6th-grade students is a key requirement of contemporary society, which recognizes the school—alongside the family—as a primary space for socialization. The process of ethical formation goes beyond the mere transmission of a code of conduct; it involves the development of moral judgment and the autonomy to act justly [1].

Current research confirms that the formation and development of values are intrinsically linked to practical experiences within the school environment. Müller and Alencar emphasize that “learning about justice and what is right or wrong does not occur through expository teaching alone, but when individuals have the opportunity to analyze rules, debate values, make judgments, and construct norms” (p. 222). This need for active participation is central to overcoming heteronomous morality, which is based primarily on obedience. The school constitutes a space for the construction of morality and ethics, where behaviors, attitudes, and principles converge to shape students’ conduct. Rodrigues and Bataglia highlight that morality is “learned” through coexistence and example, rather than through discourse alone. They further emphasize that “the role of the educator is, first and foremost, that of a moral model, and their behavior in situations of conflict or injustice directly influences how students construct their own rules of conduct” (p. 555).

Consequently, the absence of a systematic approach to ethical values in schools is directly associated with the prevalence of aggressive behaviors and bullying, thereby requiring interventions focused on conflict mediation and the development of socio-emotional competencies [8]. Souza and Guimarães argue that pedagogical practices involving “body expression, dramatization, and cooperative games are effective for socio-emotional development, as they provide children with opportunities to practice perspective-taking and to understand others’ emotions, which are the foundations of ethical behavior” (p. 335) [9]. The school environment, along with students’ ability to manage their emotions and understand others’ behaviors and tendencies, constitutes a prerequisite for ethical and cooperative conduct.

To address the identified gap, intervention strategies should be practical and participatory. The discussion of moral dilemmas can be included as a key method to induce the cognitive conflict

necessary for the progression of moral reasoning. Müller and Alencar explain that the use of dilemmas “is a powerful pedagogical tool that, by placing students in situations of value conflict, encourages them to seek justifications and to decenter themselves by considering different social perspectives to resolve the problem” (p. 228) [1]. Additionally, dramatization and group dynamics are essential, as they allow role reversal and the development of empathy. Nunes, in analyzing teachers’ perceptions, notes that “continuous professional development is viewed as an essential process that enables teachers to refine their practices and acquire methodological tools to address ethical issues in a more effective and reflective manner in the classroom” (p. 58) [7].

2. Methodology

2.1 Type of Research

This study follows a descriptive research paradigm with a mixed-methods approach (qualitative–quantitative). The findings from the diagnostic phase are presented through an integrated qualitative and quantitative analysis.

a. Population and Sampling

The study population consists of 140 sixth-grade students, divided into four groups, including 90 females and 50 males, aged between 10 and 11 years. The population also includes four sixth-grade teachers (two females and one male) and three members of the school administration (all male). The sample is non-probabilistic and purposive in nature. It comprises 40 students (15 males and 25 females), four teachers who teach sixth grade (all female), and three members of the school administration (all male). In total, the sample includes 47 participants.

b. Methods

- **Inductive–Deductive Method:** This method enabled the derivation and interpretation of various authors’ perspectives on the formation and development of ethical values in primary education as a fundamental ethical principle in students’ development.
- **Literature Review:** This method facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the positions of different authors across various periods regarding the formation of ethical and moral values.
- **Mathematical–Statistical Method:** This method allowed for the examination of relationships among phenomena and the generation of generalizations about their nature, occurrence, and significance, based on the percentage analysis of data obtained from the applied research instruments.

c. Techniques

- **Interview:** A semi-structured interview was conducted with members of the school administration, enabling the collection of relevant data related to the research topic.
- **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was administered to sixth-grade teachers and students in the primary school.

3. Results

The diagnostic assessment conducted at the Primary School in the municipality of Benguela—through interviews with school

administrators and questionnaires administered to teachers and students—highlights the urgent need for an intervention proposal. The findings demonstrate that the lack of systematic implementation of Moral Values Education (MVE) is critically affecting the climate of coexistence in the 6th grade. Interviews with the three members of the school administration (M1, M2, M3), all male, holding academic degrees and possessing extensive professional experience, established a central theme in the analysis: a dichotomy between knowledge and practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the data obtained are satisfactory. In this regard, 100% of the administrators demonstrated relevant knowledge of the subject, defining ethical and moral values as essential concepts for human behavior and as a set of rules that govern society. The administrators' commitment to MVE is also high at the ideological level. However, 100% of the respondents disagreed with the notion that the orientation of values is solely the responsibility of the family, affirming instead that the school, society, and other institutions actively participate in this process.

Furthermore, all respondents (100%) agreed that values contribute positively to students' behavior and character development, helping them to coexist harmoniously, respect differences, and develop autonomy. However, the visibility of these values within the institution—although acknowledged by all respondents—is accompanied by reservations. Respondent M2 indicated that such visibility occurs “with some reluctance,” while M1 and M3 emphasized that many values are “brought from home by the students.” When asked about the frequency with which ethical and moral values are addressed with teachers, only one administrator (33.3%) responded “yes,” while the others admitted doing so only “sometimes” or “not at all,” revealing a deficiency in pedagogical leadership and prioritization of the topic. This weak systematization is further confirmed in responses regarding value-promoting actions: only one respondent (33.3%) stated that the school carries out such actions, while the others answered “rarely” or “not at all.”

This deficit is reinforced by the characterization of the formation and development of ethical and moral values. None of the respondents (100%) classified it as “good.” M1 and M3 described it as “reasonable,” with M3 further stating that it is “not taken very seriously.” M2 described it as “challenging,” requiring “significant effort, dedication, and commitment.”

3.1. Results of the Teacher Questionnaire (3 Respondents)

Teachers demonstrated an adequate conceptual understanding (100%) of ethical and moral values, defining them as a “set of principles that guide and underpin individual behavior and support the foundations of full human development.” All teachers (100%) agreed that responsibility for value formation is not exclusive to the family and that ethical and moral values contribute positively to improving student behavior in the classroom. Despite this ideological consensus, practical implementation is notably deficient. Only 33.4% of teachers reported consistently addressing ethical and moral values in the classroom (“yes”), while the

majority (66.6%) indicated doing so only “sometimes.”

Similarly, only 33.3% of teachers considered ethical and moral values to be consistently visible in classroom practice, while 66.6% responded “sometimes,” reinforcing the intermittent nature of the topic in pedagogical dynamics. When asked about the implementation of specific MVE-related activities, the majority of teachers (66.6%) responded “no,” while only one-third (33.4%) indicated “sometimes.” This finding is critical, as it demonstrates that most teachers are not actively engaged in promoting ethical and moral values.

Active Methodologies

The analysis of the actions implemented—or the lack thereof—provides the clearest evidence of the existing pedagogical deficit. A total of 66.6% of teachers acknowledged that they do not carry out any activities aimed at fostering ethical and moral values. The only teacher who reported implementing any form of action (33.4%) referred merely to the “exploration of stories/texts.”

Crucially, the percentage analysis reveals a 0% frequency of active and effective pedagogical strategies that promote moral autonomy, such as behavior analysis and evaluation, knowledge exchange, study projects, group dynamics, dramatization, or the discussion of moral dilemmas.

3.2. Results of the Student Questionnaire (40 Respondents)

The questionnaire administered to 40 sixth-grade students (15 males and 25 females, aged between 11 and 12 years) provides empirical evidence of the consequences of pedagogical inaction. The students' responses are the most alarming and substantiate the diagnosis that the school environment is experiencing a crisis in coexistence and values. The most critical finding indicates that 80% of students (32 respondents) answered “no” when asked about the existence of respect among peers, while only 20% perceived mutual respect. Disrespect is widespread, as evidenced by 55% of students (22 respondents) reporting a lack of respect toward teachers.

Disrespect toward authority extends to other adults, with 77.5% of students (31 respondents) indicating that respect for elders is lacking. In this context, the ineffectiveness of rule transmission is further confirmed by the fact that 57.5% of students (23 respondents) admitted not complying with rules established by teachers.

Students' perceptions of school intervention are limited but further confirm the fragility of existing efforts. Despite deficiencies in practice, 80% of students reported having heard about ethical and moral values (Q1), and 87.5% stated that teachers have “talked” about the topic (Q2). However, this discussion is perceived as predominantly theoretical rather than practical.

Only 12.5% of students indicated that the school frequently promotes value-related activities, while the majority (57.5%) responded “sometimes.” When asked about specific actions implemented, 52.5% (the majority) responded “none,” while

47.5% referred only to being “reminded about ethical and moral values during assembly.”

This finding represents a critical validation: the school appears to confuse warning or admonition (drawing attention) with genuine values education based on active methodologies. The absence of group dynamics, workshops, dramatization, and other participatory strategies in students’ responses (0% across these categories) confirms that Moral Values Education is not actively experienced, but only occasionally referenced.

Both school administrators and teachers demonstrate theoretical knowledge and acknowledge the importance of MVE (100% consensus). However, institutional practice remains ineffective, with most respondents admitting that the topic is addressed irregularly or lacks systematic implementation. This inaction results in the complete absence (0%) of active and effective methodologies, such as moral dilemmas and dramatization, in classroom practice.

This pedagogical inaction has direct and critical consequences: 80% of students report a lack of mutual respect among peers, and the majority do not comply with established rules. Consequently, the school is failing in its instructional and educational role of forming ethically responsible citizens, as required by its institutional mission.

The urgency lies in transforming theoretical awareness into systematic and active practice through the implementation of concrete pedagogical strategies that utilize cognitive conflict to promote autonomous moral judgment.

Based on the diagnostic findings, a set of actions is proposed to foster the development of ethical values among students, aimed at reversing the identified patterns of disrespect and pedagogical inaction. The evaluation of each activity, conducted through both qualitative and quantitative measures (on a scale from 10 to 20 points), confirms the effectiveness of the intervention program. The most significant outcome is the substantial success achieved, with 75% of students attaining results classified as “Good” (14–17 points) across all proposed activities. This outcome validates the premise that the primary limitation lies in the methodology rather than in students’ capacity to learn ethical values.

a. Actions for the Development of Moral Judgment and Conflict Resolution (Actions 1, 2, 6, 8)

These actions focused on promoting autonomous moral judgment and logical reasoning, challenging students’ heteronomous morality.

- **Action 1:** Ethical Dilemma Discussion (“A friend is being bullied...”) rapidly demonstrated students’ capacity to progress in moral reasoning. Approximately 25% of students achieved an Excellent level (18–20 points), proposing complex solutions grounded in justice and solidarity while facilitating peer discussion. The majority (75%), classified as Good (14–17 points), initially tended to rely on authority (seeking

adult intervention), but gradually evolved by recognizing the importance of providing emotional support to their peers. This progression indicates the early internalization of ethical intervention as a value.

- **Action 2: Case Analysis** (“A student finds a lost wallet...”) validated students’ understanding of honesty. Students at the Excellent level (18–20 points) associated returning the wallet with the development of trust, while those in the Good category (75%) ultimately converged toward ethical behavior, overcoming the initial attraction to money. However, their justification often remained linked to fear of being discovered, suggesting that moral autonomy was still developing.
- **Action 6: Debates** (“Is it fair to punish students for actions outside school?”) assessed students’ argumentative skills and their understanding of authority limits. Students at the Excellent level presented complex arguments, balancing discipline and freedom while distinguishing institutional responsibility. The majority (75%) provided solid arguments and demonstrated respectful listening toward opposing viewpoints, indicating the assimilation of tolerance for diverse perspectives.
- **Action 8: Simulation Game** (Resource allocation during a disaster) emphasized social responsibility. Students at the Excellent level led decision-making based on urgency and equity, while the majority (75%) significantly improved their initial decisions following discussion, demonstrating the importance of considering multiple perspectives before making judgments.

b. Actions for the Development of Empathy and Autonomy (Actions 3, 5, 9, 10)

These actions aimed to restructure social interaction within the classroom by directly fostering empathy and autonomy—key elements for addressing the high levels of disrespect identified in the diagnostic phase.

- **Action 3:** Role-Playing (“A classmate needs help...”) was fundamental in developing empathy. Students at the Excellent level demonstrated strong role-reversal abilities and active listening, expressing genuine support. Importantly, the majority (75%) participated actively, recognizing the value of empathy and offering support to peers, marking a significant improvement from prior patterns of indifference.
- **Action 5:** Stories and Reflection (Malala Yousafzai) inspired courage and determination. Students at the Excellent level connected Malala’s struggle to defending peers and academic perseverance. The majority (75%) reflected on the importance of these values in overcoming challenges and achieving goals.
- **Action 9:** Interview with a Specialist (Health professional) expanded students’ understanding of empathy within a professional context. Students at the Excellent level explored ethical dimensions of professional practice, demonstrating advanced awareness of empathy as a transferable skill. The majority (75%) showed attentiveness and respect, recognizing the importance of empathy across social and professional contexts.
- **Action 10:** Creation of a Code of Conduct fostered autonomy and teamwork. This action achieved complete success:

students at the Excellent level ensured that rules were fair and collectively agreed upon, while the majority (75%) accepted and committed to these shared norms, such as “Respect classmates and teachers in all situations.” This outcome is critical, as it transforms externally imposed rules (previously disregarded by 57.5% of students) into self-regulated norms, marking the transition from heteronomy to autonomy.

c. Actions for Expression and Community Service (Actions 4 and 7)

These actions emphasized the practical and creative application of values beyond direct conflict situations.

- **Action 4: Poster Creation** (Theme: Honesty) encouraged creative expression of values. Students at the Excellent level produced original and meaningful messages, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding. The majority (75%) created clear and visually appropriate posters, confirming the internalization of honesty and its relevance in daily life.
- **Action 7: Service Project** (Recycling Campaign) promoted social and environmental responsibility. Students at the Excellent level led the initiative and presentations, demonstrating leadership and initiative. The majority (75%) actively participated in material collection and campaign development, concluding that citizenship is expressed through small actions that benefit the community, thereby fulfilling the objective of applying values beyond the classroom.

d. Overall Evaluation of the Intervention

The evaluation results provide unequivocal evidence of the success of the pedagogical intervention. The fact that 75% of students consistently achieved **Good** results (14–17 points) across all activities demonstrates that the previously identified crisis in school coexistence was not due to students’ character deficiencies, but rather to methodological shortcomings within the institution. The use of active and dialogical methodologies—such as ethical dilemmas and role-playing—created the necessary cognitive conflict for students to develop moral judgment, empathy, and autonomy. The most significant outcome is the reversal of the previously observed pattern of disrespect. The majority of students now demonstrate the ability to reason ethically, respect their peers, and actively participate in the construction and adherence to shared rules. In doing so, the school has effectively fulfilled its role in fostering responsible citizenship and promoting social justice through values education.

4. Discussion

The preliminary diagnosis revealed an alarming dichotomy between knowledge and practice at the Primary School in Benguela, which is strongly supported by existing literature. The fact that 100% of school administrators and teachers recognize the importance of Moral Values Education (MVE) and the shared responsibility of the school aligns theoretically with moral development models that emphasize the joint role of the school, society, and family. However, the subsequent inaction—evidenced by the absence of systematic initiatives and the 0% implementation of active methodologies—reflects the practical failure highlighted

in the literature. Ethical formation “does not consist merely in the transmission of a code of conduct, but in the development of moral judgment and the autonomy to act justly” [1]. The finding that the school “rarely promotes actions” and confuses “warning” with genuine values education confirms that the school environment did not foster active reflection, as required by Müller and Alencar.

The critical consequence of this inaction—low levels of respect among peers (80% reporting disrespect) and between students and teachers (55% reporting disrespect)—directly validates the argument of Rodrigues and Bataglia that morality is “learned” through social interaction and example, with the educator’s behavior playing a decisive role. This crisis in school coexistence at the 6th-grade level underscores the urgent need for interventions focused on conflict mediation, as emphasized by Viana and Silva. The proposed intervention and its outcomes confirm the theoretical foundations of moral judgment development. The study’s objective—to design concrete pedagogical actions—was achieved through the systematization of ten activities that function as mechanisms for moral progression.

The success of **Action 1: Ethical Dilemma Discussion** (with 75% of students achieving “Good” results) validates Müller and Alencar’s assertion that this is a “powerful pedagogical tool” that introduces value conflict, encouraging students to decenter and justify their reasoning, in line with Kohlberg’s model of moral development. Similarly, the effectiveness of **Action 3: Role-Playing** and **Action 8: Simulation Game** confirms the importance of active methodologies in fostering empathy. Souza and Guimarães argue that dramatization and cooperative activities are effective because they allow children to practice perspective-taking [9]. This was crucial in reversing the initial condition of 80% reported disrespect, as students learned to consider the emotions and viewpoints of others. The reversal of this critical situation constitutes strong evidence of the coherence between theory and practice. The overall result—where 75% of students achieved “Good” performance—demonstrates that the previously identified deficiency was methodological rather than a limitation of students’ capacities.

Action 10: Creation of a Code of Conduct, in which students collaboratively defined and accepted their own rules, represents the culmination of the intervention and a central validation point for theories of autonomy development. By transforming externally imposed rules (previously disregarded by 57.5% of students) into consensual and self-regulated norms, students initiated the transition toward autonomous morality, as proposed by Piaget and Kohlberg. Furthermore, the success of the intervention highlights the need for continuous teacher training, as suggested by Nunes, to ensure that educators can sustain and refine these practices and acquire methodological tools that overcome prior inefficiencies.

The study on the Development of Ethical and Moral Values in 6th-Grade Students not only precisely identified the pedagogical gap that hindered values formation, but also fulfilled its objective by proposing and validating a set of concrete actions that effectively

reversed the problem of poor coexistence and promoted the development of moral judgment and autonomy among students [1,5]. This research constitutes a strong call for change in pedagogical practice within MVE, advocating for the replacement of mere content transmission with active and reflective learning experiences.

5. Conclusion

This study reaffirms the theoretical premise that the development of ethical and moral values is an active and social process, rather than a mere transmission of content, in accordance with the moral development frameworks proposed by Kohlberg and Piaget. The mixed-methods approach (qualitative–quantitative) proved to be the most effective for this type of research, as it enabled both the measurement of institutional inaction through percentage analysis and the identification of its consequences in the observed crisis of school coexistence. The triangulation of data from school administrators, teachers, and students was essential in establishing cause-and-effect relationships. The contrast between theoretical consensus (100% awareness) and practical failure (66.6% inactivity) served as the foundation for justifying the urgency and design of the intervention proposal. The diagnosis conclusively identifies institutional methodological shortcomings as the direct cause of the low level of ethical values and the widespread disrespect observed among 6th-grade students. A critical dichotomy was evident: although administrators and teachers demonstrated awareness of the importance of values education, they consistently failed to promote it effectively, relying instead on sporadic warnings. This lack of active pedagogical practices resulted in a generalized crisis of coexistence, with most students remaining at a heteronomous stage of moral development, unable to self-regulate their ethical behavior. The implementation of the ten proposed pedagogical actions demonstrated immediate effectiveness and the capacity to reverse the initial crisis. The fact that 75% of students achieved “Good” results (14–17 points)

across all activities confirms that the issue did not lie in students’ potential, but rather in the absence of active methodologies. By promoting cognitive conflict (through dilemmas) and empathy (through role-playing), these actions fostered the development of autonomy and the internalization of mutual respect, successfully fulfilling the objective of providing the school with a systematic and effective intervention model.

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