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LEARNING TO CARE: ETHICAL EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL FUTURE

Abstract

Today's world is navigating an intricate web of challenges from climate disruption to digital transformation that compounded by widening social gaps and systemic educational shortcomings.While education is often assessed in terms of academic achievement and workforce preparation, its ethical role remains undervalued. This article argues that education must be rewired to serve both people and the planet by strengthening ethical learning from early childhood through the digital age. Drawing on educational philosophy, early childhood education research, and recent studies on digital learning, the paper highlights early childhood as a critical period for value formation. It examines the role of storytelling, family–school partnerships, inclusive education, and the responsible use of digital technologies in fostering ethical awareness and care. Particular attention is given to the challenges and opportunities of ethical education in digital environments. The article emphasizes that education should not only develop knowledge and skills, but also nurture responsibility, empathy, sustainability, and moral agency. Rewiring education in this way is essential for addressing global challenges and for building a more just, humane, and sustainable future for both present and future generations.

Annotatsiya

Zamonamiz o‘zaro bog‘liq bo‘lgan bir qator global muammolar bilan yuzlashmoqda. Jumladan, iqlim o‘zgarishi, ijtimoiy tengsizlik, tezkor raqamlashtirish va ta'lim sohasidagi inqiroz ushbu muammolar sirasiga kiradi. Ta'lim ko‘pincha akademik natijalar va mehnat bozoriga tayyorgarlik nuqtayi nazaridan baholansa-da, uning axloqiy vazifasi yetarlicha e'tiborga olinmaydi. Ushbu maqolada ta'limni inson va sayyora manfaatlariga xizmat qiladigan tizim

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sifatida qayta yo‘naltirish zarurligi asoslab beriladi. Ta’lim falsafasi, ilk bolalik ta’limi bo‘yicha tadqiqotlar hamda raqamli ta’limga oid zamonaviy ilmiy manbalarga tayanilgan holda, ilk bolalik davri qadriyatlar shakllanishining muhim bosqichi sifatida yoritiladi. Maqolada hikoyachilik, oila va ta’lim muassasalari hamkorligi, inklyuziv ta’lim hamda raqamli texnologiyalardan mas’uliyatli foydalanishning axloqiy ongni rivojlantirishdagi o‘rni tahlil qilinadi. Xulosa sifatida, ta’lim nafaqat bilim va ko‘nikmalarni, balki mas’uliyat, empatiya va barqaror fikrlashni ham rivojlantirishi zarurligi ta’kidlanadi.

Аннотация

Современный мир сталкивается с комплексом взаимосвязанных глобальных вызовов, включая изменение климата, социальное неравенство, стремительную цифровизацию и кризис в сфере образования. Несмотря на то что образование часто оценивается с точки зрения академических достижений и подготовки к рынку труда, его этическая роль остается недостаточно осмысленной. В данной статье утверждается, что образование должно быть переосмыслено и «перенастроено» в интересах человека и планеты путем укрепления этического воспитания с раннего детства до цифровой эпохи. Опираясь на философию образования, исследования в области дошкольного образования и современные работы по цифровому обучению, автор подчеркивает ключевую роль раннего детства в формировании ценностей. В статье анализируется значение повествования, партнерства семьи и образовательных учреждений, инклюзивного образования и ответственного использования цифровых технологий в развитии этического сознания. Подчеркивается, что образование должно формировать не только знания и навыки, но и ответственность, эмпатию и устойчивое мышление. Такой подход необходим для построения справедливого и устойчивого будущего.

Keywords: ethics of education, early childhood education, digital learning, sustainability, values education, social responsibility

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Kalit so‘zlar: ta’lim axloqi, ilk bolalik ta’limi, raqamli ta’lim, barqaror rivojlanish, qadriyatlar ta’limi, ijtimoiy mas’uliyat

Ключевые слова: этика образования, дошкольное образование, цифровое обучение, устойчивое развитие, ценностное воспитание, социальная ответственность

1. Introduction

The modern world is experiencing a combination of serious global challenges. Climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, armed conflicts, and rapid digital transformation have increased uncertainty and vulnerability across societies. Alongside these visible crises, there is a less obvious but equally dangerous problem: a crisis in education. Millions of children lack access to quality learning, while many education systems focus mainly on academic performance and technical skills, often neglecting ethical development [9].

Education is not only a means of economic growth or professional training. It shapes how individuals interact with others, how they use technology, and how they relate to the natural environment. Without ethical foundations, knowledge and technological progress may deepen inequality and environmental damage rather than reduce them [1]. For this reason, education carries a strong moral responsibility toward society and future generations.

Recent global discussions emphasize the need to rethink education as a system that serves both people and the planet [9]. This perspective highlights the interconnectedness of human well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Ethical education cannot be postponed until adolescence or adulthood. Values, attitudes, and moral habits begin to form in early childhood through daily interactions, stories, routines, and relationships [3].

At the same time, children are growing up in an increasingly digital environment. Digital technologies influence how children learn, communicate, and understand the world. While these tools offer new educational opportunities, they also raise ethical concerns related to empathy, responsibility, and inequality [7].

The purpose of this article is to explore how education can be rewired to support ethical learning from early childhood to the digital age. By connecting early value formation, ethical responsibility, and sustainability, the paper argues that education must prepare learners not only with knowledge and skills, but also with moral awareness and responsibility toward people and the planet.

2. Ethical Foundations of Education

Education has always been closely connected to ethics. Classical educational thought emphasizes that learning is not value-neutral. Education shapes character, behavior, and social responsibility.

Early philosophers argued that education should develop moral habits and virtues before focusing on abstract reasoning. Ethical behavior is learned through practice, repetition, and example rather than through rules alone [2]. From this perspective,

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education is responsible for forming individuals who can act responsibly within society.

Modern educational thinkers further developed this idea by describing education as a social and moral process. Education prepares individuals for participation in shared social life and teaches cooperation, communication, and respect for others [1]. Ethical education is therefore inseparable from democratic values and social responsibility.

Contemporary ethics of care highlights the importance of relationships, empathy, and responsibility. Ethical behavior emerges through care for others, attentiveness to needs, and responsiveness to vulnerability [11]. In educational settings, this means recognizing children as developing moral agents whose dignity and well-being matter.

3. Early Childhood as the Ethical Core

Early childhood is a decisive stage for ethical development. During this period, children form basic attitudes toward themselves, others, and the world. Long before children can explain moral principles, they learn values through emotional experiences, imitation, and social interaction [3].

Storytelling plays a central role in early ethical learning. Fairy tales, folk stories, and narratives help children distinguish between right and wrong, kindness and cruelty, justice and injustice. Stories develop moral imagination and empathy by allowing children to identify with characters and reflect on consequences [4].

Family–school partnerships further strengthen ethical foundations. Families provide children's first moral environment, while early education institutions introduce shared rules, cooperation, and social responsibility beyond the home. When teachers and parents collaborate respectfully, children experience consistency and emotional security, which supports ethical development [5].

Inclusive education is another important ethical dimension. Learning environments that respect diversity and support individual needs help children develop tolerance, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Inclusion represents a moral commitment to equality and dignity, not only a pedagogical strategy [11].

Research shows that high-quality early education produces long-term academic and social benefits, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds [10]. These findings support the ethical argument that early childhood education is a powerful tool for reducing inequality and promoting social justice.

4. Ethical Learning in the Digital Age

Digital technologies have transformed childhood and education. Children encounter screens, digital media, and online communication from an early age. These changes create both opportunities and ethical challenges.

Digital tools such as storytelling platforms, visual media, and interactive technologies can enhance engagement, creativity, and understanding. When used thoughtfully, they support exploration and inclusive learning, especially for young children who benefit from multisensory experiences [6, 8].However, digital environments also present risks. Online communication often reduces emotional

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cues, making it easier to act without empathy. Inequality in access to technology and digital skills can deepen existing social gaps. Issues such as online bullying, data privacy, and excessive screen use raise serious ethical concerns [7].Ethical digital education requires more than technical skills. It must foster care, empathy, respect, and responsibility in online interactions. Teaching children how to transfer ethical behavior from real-life relationships to digital spaces is essential [7].Educators play a key role in guiding children's digital experiences. Technology should support learning and human connection, not replace them. Ethical responsibility must remain central in digital education.

5. Ethical Rewiring of Education in Uzbekistan's 2030 Vision

Uzbekistan's "2030 Strategy" sets ambitious goals for building a fair, prosperous, and sustainable society. Among its top priorities is the transformation of the education system from early childhood onward. The strategy emphasizes full coverage of preschool education, modernized school infrastructure, and the integration of new-generation digital tools in learning. These reforms present a critical opportunity to embed ethical education from the start. Additionally, the strategy highlights the moral upbringing of youth and the importance of fostering national values. Digital development is also accelerating, with significant investments in IT access and education. This underscores the urgent need to guide digital learning with ethical responsibility.[13] By aligning this research with the national development vision, the paper emphasizes that ethical education is not only a global need, but a national imperative for Uzbekistan's future.

6. Discussion

Rewiring education for people and planet requires moving beyond fragmented reforms. Ethics cannot be treated as an additional subject; it must be embedded in how education is organized, taught, and experienced.

The integration of early childhood education, ethical responsibility, digital learning, and sustainability reveals a shared principle: ethical learning develops through relationships, practice, and lived experience. Education that balances tradition with innovation can prepare learners to navigate complexity with care and responsibility [1, 11].

Educators, families, and policymakers share responsibility for shaping education systems that prioritize human dignity and planetary well-being over narrow performance indicators.

7. Conclusion

Education stands at a critical crossroads. In an era of global crises and rapid technological change, education must do more than transmit knowledge and skills. This article has argued that ethical learning begins in early childhood and must be consciously extended into the digital age. By rewiring education around care, inclusion, sustainability, and responsible use of technology, societies can prepare learners to contribute positively to a shared future.

Reimagining education in this way is not optional. It is an ethical necessity for people and planet alike.

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