

FORMING POSITIVE MORAL QUALITIES IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES: PATRIOTISM, HONESTY, AND KINDNESS.

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Abstract: This thesis examines the pedagogical potential of theatrical activities (staging, dramatization, role-playing) as an effective means of shaping positive moral qualities—specifically patriotism, honesty, and kindness—in preschool children (ages 3–7). Drawing on Vygotsky’s theory of play and social development, Bandura’s social learning theory, and the principles of socio-emotional learning (SEL), the study argues that theatrical activity creates a unique “emotional–moral laboratory” in which children can experience, practice, and internalize core values in a safe and engaging context. Through action research conducted in three preschools in Uzbekistan (N=120 children), qualitative and observational data were collected to analyze changes in children’s moral reasoning, empathic behavior, and value-oriented language. Results indicate that a structured program of patriotic, honesty-themed, and kindness-centered dramatizations led to a measurable increase in prosocial behaviors, more nuanced understanding of social virtues, and stronger identification with national and ethical narratives. The study concludes with practical recommendations for preschool educators on designing value-based theatrical activities that align with national educational goals and universal moral development.

Keywords: preschool moral education, theatrical activities, dramatization, patriotism, honesty, kindness, socio-emotional learning, Uzbekistan.

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

Early childhood is a critical period for moral and social development. During preschool years (3–7), children form their first understandings of right and wrong, empathy, fairness, and social belonging. In Uzbekistan, as in many societies, there is a growing emphasis on integrating national values—such as patriotism (*vatanparvarlik*), honesty (*rostgo’ylik*), and kindness (*sahiylik*)—into early education. However, traditional didactic methods often fail to engage young children emotionally or experientially.

Theatrical activities (including role-play, dramatization of stories, puppet theater, and guided improvisation) offer a dynamic, play-based pedagogical tool. Lev Vygotsky highlighted the role of play in the development of self-regulation and social cognition. Albert Bandura’s social learning theory further underscores the importance of observational learning and modeling—processes central to theatrical engagement. By assuming roles, following scripts, and interacting within imagined scenarios, children practice perspective-taking, emotional expression, and moral decision-making.

This study posits that structured theatrical activities can serve as a powerful medium for instilling the target values:

Patriotism is fostered through dramatizations of national folklore, historical episodes, and stories about local heroes, helping children connect emotionally to cultural heritage.

Honesty is explored through scenarios involving truth-telling, fairness, and consequence, allowing children to experience both the challenges and rewards of integrity.

Kindness is cultivated through role-plays centered on helping, sharing, and empathy, reinforcing prosocial behavioral scripts.



2. Methodology

Research design: A mixed-methods action research approach was employed, combining qualitative observation, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and analysis of children's verbal and behavioral expressions.

Participants: 120 children (aged 4–6) from three preschools in the Andijan region of Uzbekistan. Two experimental groups participated in a 12-week theatrical program, while one control group followed the standard preschool curriculum.

Intervention: The “Value-Based Dramatization Program” consisted of:

1. **Patriotic module:** Staging of Uzbek folktales, reenactments of national traditions (*Navruz*, family celebrations), and puppet shows about historical figures.
2. **Honesty module:** Skits on telling the truth, story dramatizations (e.g., “The Boy Who Cried Wolf”), and problem-solving scenarios about fairness.
3. **Kindness module:** Role-playing helping situations, dramatizing stories of friendship, and group improvisations on “how to make someone feel better.”

Each session included: Introduction and story presentation. Role assignment and rehearsal. Performance and group discussion. Reflection guided by questions like “How did the character feel?” “What was the right thing to do?”

Data collection: Pre- and post-observation checklists for prosocial behaviors. Audio recordings of children's discussions during and after performances. Teacher journals and reflective notes. Parent feedback surveys on observed changes in children's behavior at home.

Analysis: Thematic analysis of qualitative data; descriptive statistics for behavioral frequency counts.

3. Results

3.1. Observed Behavioral Changes

Patriotism: Children in the experimental groups showed increased use of national symbols in play, expressed pride in local customs, and demonstrated greater curiosity about Uzbek history and geography.

Honesty: Instances of voluntary truth-telling in conflict situations increased by approx. 40%. Children were more likely to articulate why “lying hurts trust.”

Kindness: Prosocial acts (sharing, helping, comforting) rose significantly. Teachers noted more inclusive play and verbal expressions of care.

3.2. Language and reasoning. Children began using value-laden vocabulary (“*vatan*” – homeland, “*rost*” – truth, “*mehr*” – kindness) more frequently and in appropriate contexts. During post-performance discussions, they showed improved ability to explain characters' motives and moral dilemmas.

3.3. Emotional engagement. Theatrical activities elicited strong emotional responses—children displayed empathy toward characters, expressed joy in patriotic stories, and showed remorse in honesty-themed plays. This emotional involvement appeared to deepen the internalization of values.

3.4. Teacher and parent feedback. Educators reported that the program enhanced group cohesion and made abstract values “visible and tangible.” Parents noted increased use of polite language, sharing behaviors at home, and questions about family heritage.

4. Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that theatrical activity is an effective pedagogical strategy for moral education in preschool settings. Key mechanisms include:

1. **Experiential learning:** Children do not just hear about values; they enact them, creating embodied memories.



2. **Safe exploration:** Through role-play, children experiment with moral choices without real-world consequences.
3. **Emotional resonance:** Stories and performances engage feelings, which are crucial for value internalization (Haidt, 2001).
4. **Cultural continuity:** Folktales and historical dramatizations link personal morality to collective identity, fostering patriotic attachment.

The study aligns with global SEL frameworks while offering a culturally grounded approach suited to Uzbekistan's educational context.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions:

Theatrical activities provide a developmentally appropriate, engaging, and effective method for fostering patriotism, honesty, and kindness in preschool children.

Values are better internalized when children actively participate in moral storytelling and role-playing.

This approach supports both socio-emotional development and cultural identity formation.

Practical recommendations for educators:

1. Integrate short, thematic dramatizations into the weekly preschool schedule.
2. Use locally relevant stories and folk narratives to teach values.
3. Combine puppet theater, costume play, and guided improvisation to maintain engagement.
4. Always follow performances with guided reflection, asking open-ended questions about feelings and choices.
5. Involve parents by sharing scripts, inviting them to performances, and suggesting follow-up conversations at home.

Policy implications:

Include drama-based moral education in national preschool curriculum guidelines.

Provide teacher training in theatrical pedagogy and value-based lesson planning.

Support the development of culturally relevant dramatic resources (story collections, puppet sets, lesson plans) for preschools across Uzbekistan.

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