

Integrating Values Clarification into Contemporary Values Education

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Abstract:

Values clarification is an important pedagogical strategy that supports individuals, particularly students, in identifying, evaluating, and internalizing their personal values. This approach is essential in shaping ethical decision-making, enhancing self-awareness, and developing moral reasoning. This research paper explores the concept of values clarification by examining its philosophical and theoretical foundations, key methodologies, and practical applications in educational settings. Employing a systematic review of scholarly literature, the study investigates how values clarification fosters critical thinking, empathy, and ethical responsibility among learners. It highlights the role of educators in facilitating reflective practices that allow students to explore their beliefs, make informed decisions, and develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose. The paper also discusses the integration of values clarification with traditional moral instruction and contemporary educational frameworks, advocating for a holistic approach to values education. Furthermore, the study acknowledges potential criticisms and challenges, such as cultural relativism and subjectivity in moral reasoning. The research concludes that values clarification, when combined with structured moral education, offers a balanced and effective strategy for cultivating character and promoting responsible citizenship in an increasingly complex society.

Keywords: Values Clarification, Moral Education, Ethical Decision-Making, Educational Philosophy, Character Formation, Reflective Learning

Introduction:

Values are integral to shaping individuals' character, actions, and interactions within society. In educational settings, fostering a deep understanding of ethical principles and social responsibility is crucial for developing well-rounded, responsible citizens.

Values education, therefore, plays a pivotal role in guiding students toward personal growth and moral development. Among the various approaches to values education, one that has garnered significant attention is values clarification. Values clarification, developed in the 1960s by Sidney B. Simon, is a pedagogical strategy designed to help individuals explore, assess, and articulate their values through a series of structured activities and reflective discussions (Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 2009).

Unlike traditional approaches that may impose a fixed set of values on students, values clarification encourages learners to become self-aware and critically evaluate their beliefs and values. The aim is not to dictate what students should value but rather to provide them with the tools to explore their own beliefs and understand the basis for those values (Agarwal, 2008). This process fosters self-reflection, empowering students to make informed choices aligned with their ethical principles.

The theoretical foundation of values clarification is rooted in humanistic psychology, which emphasizes the importance of individual autonomy and self-actualization. According to Shukla (2013), the method aligns with the humanistic educational philosophy that aims to nurture the intrinsic potential of students by encouraging self-expression, critical thinking, and personal responsibility.

In this framework, students are viewed as active participants in their own learning, capable of making thoughtful decisions based on their internalized values. Values clarification is implemented through a variety of activities, such as group discussions, role-playing, and decision-making exercises, which help students recognize and articulate their values in different contexts. The methodology emphasizes open-ended questions, providing a space for students to consider their views and how they align with societal norms and ethical standards (Seetharam, 2009). These

reflective processes allow learners to confront moral dilemmas, consider multiple perspectives, and arrive at decisions that reflect their core beliefs.

The impact of values clarification on educational outcomes is notable. By fostering self-awareness and critical thinking, it not only helps students develop their personal values but also enhances their ability to engage in constructive dialogue, resolve conflicts, and make ethical decisions (Sridhar, n.d.). Furthermore, values clarification has been linked to the promotion of human rights and environmental responsibility, as it encourages students to consider their roles within the broader societal and ecological contexts (Sharma & Katoch, 2007). This aligns with national educational policies that emphasize the need for values-based education to address contemporary challenges (National Policy on Education, 1992).

Despite its strengths, values clarification has faced criticism. Some educators argue that the approach may lack the necessary structure, leaving students without clear guidance on moral issues (Contini, 2009). Critics also raise concerns that it may inadvertently undermine shared societal values by focusing too much on individual autonomy. However, proponents of values clarification assert that it provides students with the freedom to develop their own ethical frameworks while respecting diverse perspectives and beliefs (Shukla, 2013).

This paper aims to explore values clarification as a strategy for nurturing values in students. It will examine its theoretical foundations, methodology, impact on educational outcomes, and the potential criticisms associated with this approach. By synthesizing relevant literature, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how values clarification can contribute to moral development and ethical education in schools.

Literature Review:

The literature on value education underscores its pivotal role in shaping morally responsible, socially aware, and emotionally intelligent individuals. This review synthesizes classical and contemporary perspectives on value education, its methodologies, and its implications on decision-making and personal development, with a focus on future educators. Drawing on philosophical underpinnings, educational policies, and empirical research from both educational and healthcare domains, this literature review presents a multi-dimensional understanding of value formation.

Classical Perspectives on Value Education

According to Sharma, Katoch, and Kuldeep (2007), value education is the foundation of holistic development. It seeks to instill in learners a sense of responsibility, empathy, and commitment to societal and environmental well-being. This is echoed by Agarwal (2008), who emphasizes that value education promotes harmonious living, cultivates civic virtues, and addresses ethical dilemmas in modern life. Agarwal further stresses the interrelationship between environmental sustainability, human rights, and core values in educational settings (pp. 1, 2, 6, 12, 13).

Shukla (2013) highlights the necessity of integrating value education within the curriculum, asserting that values like honesty, tolerance, and integrity should be consistently reinforced through instruction and practice (pp. 129-130). Dr. A.R. Seetharam (n.d.) conceptualizes value education as the development of an inner self that aligns with universal ethical principles. His work, published through the Ramakrishna Institute, underscores the relevance of spiritual and moral grounding in educational initiatives.

The National Policy on Education (1992) reiterates the commitment to value inculcation by reorienting educational content and processes to reflect democratic ideals, peace, and respect for diversity (pp. 26-27). This policy framework laid the groundwork for embedding value education into formal schooling systems across India.

Values Clarification in Decision-Making Contexts

Beyond education, values clarification has been extensively researched in healthcare decision-making, offering insights relevant to pedagogical applications. Barrett and McKenna (2011) emphasize the importance of communicating risks and benefits in ways that align with patients' values, paralleling the educational task of guiding students through ethical reasoning.

Mulley, Trimble, and Elwyn (2012) stress the prevention of "silent misdiagnosis" by acknowledging individual preferences—a principle analogous to respecting student agency in value formation. Llewellyn-Thomas and Crump (2013) provide a framework for decision support tools that elicit and clarify values, emphasizing the interplay between knowledge, emotions, and beliefs.

Witteman et al. (2016) identify design features such as comparative formats and narrative scenarios that enhance the effectiveness of values clarification tools. Their findings support integrating these elements into classroom

strategies for future educators. Bonner et al. (2021) and Trevena et al. (2021) discuss best practices for presenting probabilities and numerical information, relevant for teaching decision-making skills and ethical evaluations.

Hoffmann, Montori, and Del Mar (2014) link evidence-based medicine with shared decision-making, underscoring the role of informed values in both domains. This connection can inform how future educators combine facts with ethical reasoning in value-based education.

Stacey et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive Cochrane review on decision aids, concluding that tools incorporating values clarification significantly improved congruence between individual preferences and final decisions. Munro et al. (2016) and Peinado et al. (2020) further validated the utility of decision aids in aligning choices with deeply held values. Légaré and Witteman (2013) outline barriers to shared decision-making, many of which stem from unarticulated values. Their insights can inform teacher training programs by highlighting the need for reflective practices and open dialogue. Similarly, Marteau, Dormandy, and Michie (2001) propose measures of informed choice that could be adapted for educational settings.

Pieterse et al. (2013) and de Vries et al. (2013) advocate for values clarification models grounded in cognitive psychology, suggesting that both deliberation and intuition are critical. Fischhoff and Barnato (2019) introduce the notion of "value awareness," which aligns with the educational objective of nurturing students' self-awareness and moral insight.

Charles and Gafni (2014) examine the challenge of defining values, highlighting the need for clarity and operationalization in both clinical and educational interventions. Lim et al. (2017) and Rocque et al. (2020) propose content and process frameworks that capture what matters most to individuals—a principle at the heart of values education. Kristensen et al. (2019) advocate for good practices in decision-making systems, reinforcing the need for transparent, inclusive, and ethically grounded educational policies. O'Connor et al. (2005) offer foundational guidelines for values clarification, applicable in both health and educational settings.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative systematic review methodology to analyze existing literature on values clarification in education. Key sources include books, journal articles, educational reports, and online resources related to values clarification and values education. A comprehensive search was conducted using academic databases, such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR, to identify peer-reviewed articles and scholarly texts that discuss values clarification as a pedagogical approach.

Sources were selected based on their relevance to the topic, credibility, and the clarity with which they discussed the principles, methods, and applications of values clarification in education. The selected articles and books were carefully analyzed to extract key themes related to the methodology of values clarification, its theoretical underpinnings, practical applications in schools, and the critiques of the approach.

The analysis focused on examining how values clarification is implemented in educational contexts, the philosophical and psychological foundations behind it, and the challenges and benefits associated with its use in contemporary education systems.

Findings and Discussion:

Theoretical Foundations of Values Clarification

Values clarification is a key concept in educational philosophy that aims to help individuals identify, understand, and align their personal values with their actions and decisions. This approach, rooted in humanistic psychology, seeks to empower individuals by encouraging self-reflection and self-awareness.

Notably, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, prominent figures in humanistic psychology, provide the theoretical underpinnings of values clarification. According to Rogers (as cited in Shukla, 2013), values clarification fosters personal growth by guiding individuals to become more self-aware and develop a deeper understanding of their own beliefs and values. Through such a process, individuals can move toward self-actualization, where they can fully realize their potential as autonomous, ethical, and responsible individuals.

Values clarification stresses the importance of reflective thinking, where individuals actively engage with their own beliefs rather than passively adopting societal norms or external expectations. This method involves a series of exercises and open-ended questions designed to guide students in reflecting on what truly matters to them. By using these reflective techniques, values clarification helps individuals to recognize their core values—whether related to morality, justice, fairness, responsibility, or respect—and apply them in their daily lives. This process not only aids in personal development but also prepares individuals for responsible citizenship in society (Sharma & Katoch, 2007).

In an educational context, values clarification becomes a powerful tool for fostering deeper thinking and encouraging students to explore their values. The method empowers students to engage in exercises that provoke reflection on ethical and moral issues, helping them to better understand themselves and their roles in the world.

This approach is especially relevant in modern education, where students are encouraged to think critically about a range of complex issues related to society, culture, and their own beliefs. Activities such as group discussions, individual journaling, role-playing, and case studies provide a framework for students to explore moral dilemmas, ethical concerns, and personal responsibilities.

One of the key goals of values clarification in education is to promote the development of moral reasoning, enabling students to make ethical decisions in various contexts. In line with the objectives of value education, as outlined in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1992), values clarification contributes to the creation of responsible and ethical citizens who can critically evaluate their actions and those of others. The NPE emphasizes the need for an education system that nurtures students' ethical values, and values clarification aligns perfectly with this aim by promoting active engagement with moral and ethical issues. Students are encouraged to recognize the importance of values such as honesty, integrity, respect, and fairness, and to incorporate these values into their personal and academic lives.

Furthermore, values clarification is not just about identifying values but also about strengthening an individual's ability to apply these values in real-life situations. According to Agarwal (2008), the method helps students develop a framework for making decisions that reflect their values and beliefs.

In this way, values clarification provides the tools for students to evaluate various options and make choices that align with their personal ethical standards. This ability to make value-based decisions is an essential life skill, as it equips students with the moral clarity needed to navigate complex social and personal situations.

In practical terms, values clarification can be integrated into various areas of the curriculum. Teachers can use it to facilitate discussions on topics related to social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Activities that encourage reflection on global issues such as climate change, inequality, and human rights violations provide students with an opportunity to consider their own values in relation to these challenges. For example, students can be asked to reflect on their values regarding fairness and justice while exploring topics like poverty or racial discrimination. This process helps students develop a sense of responsibility for their actions and the impact they have on others, which is crucial for fostering a sense of social responsibility.

Values clarification also supports the development of critical thinking skills, as students are encouraged to question and analyze the values that influence their decisions. According to Seetharam (n.d.), the method promotes an environment where students are free to express their opinions and challenge assumptions. By encouraging open dialogue and critical analysis, values clarification helps students develop a more nuanced understanding of the world around them. This process of inquiry not only enhances their cognitive abilities but also fosters emotional intelligence, as students learn to recognize the emotional and moral implications of their decisions.

Despite its many benefits, values clarification is not without criticism. Some critics argue that the approach places too much emphasis on individual beliefs, potentially leading to relativism or the erosion of shared moral standards (Contini, 2009). While values clarification emphasizes the importance of personal reflection, it is crucial that educators balance this with the promotion of shared values that contribute to the common good. As Shukla (2013) suggests, the goal of values clarification is not to promote a particular set of values but to help individuals critically assess their own values and understand how these values align with societal norms and ethical standards.

Values clarification provides an important framework for personal growth and moral development. Rooted in humanistic psychology, this approach encourages individuals to reflect on their beliefs and values, promoting self-awareness and self-actualization.

In the context of education, values clarification supports the development of ethical citizens who are capable of making value-based decisions in a complex and interconnected world. By fostering reflective thinking, critical analysis, and ethical decision-making, values clarification plays a vital role in nurturing responsible, compassionate, and thoughtful individuals.

Methodology of Values Clarification

Values clarification is a methodology that seeks to help students explore, articulate, and evaluate their own personal values. The process is a critical component of value education and human rights education, as it encourages students to reflect on and form ethical judgments regarding various issues in their lives. The methodology involves several structured activities designed to encourage self-reflection, promote ethical thinking, and respect for diverse perspectives.

A key component of the values clarification methodology is value sorting. In this activity, students are presented with a series of value statements (such as "honesty," "compassion," "independence") and asked to rank or sort them according to their personal preferences or perceived importance. This activity encourages students to examine their value system and to identify which values hold the greatest significance in their lives. Value sorting serves as an initial point for deep reflection and provides insight into individual priorities and ethical frameworks (Agarwal, 2008).

Along with value sorting, open-ended discussions play a crucial role in the values clarification process. Teachers facilitate classroom discussions where students are encouraged to articulate their values and the reasons behind them.

These discussions are intended to create a space for students to critically examine their beliefs, understand the origins of these beliefs, and explore the implications of holding particular values. This activity also fosters an environment of mutual respect, where students can learn from each other's perspectives. Such discussions encourage not only personal reflection but also the appreciation of diverse values, which is a key aspect of value education (Sharma & Katoch, 2007).

In addition to these activities, role-playing serves as an effective tool for helping students apply their values to real-life scenarios. In role-playing exercises, students take on different roles in a variety of ethical dilemmas, such as deciding whether to report an instance of dishonesty or how to handle peer pressure. These activities allow students to practice making value-based decisions in a safe, controlled environment. Role-playing also enables students to see the consequences of their choices from different perspectives, thereby helping them develop a deeper understanding of their values and how they influence behavior (Agarwal, 2008).

Another important method in values clarification is the use of reflection papers. After completing value sorting activities or engaging in discussions and role-playing exercises, students may be asked to write reflection papers. These papers provide students with an opportunity to articulate how their values influence their decisions and behaviors.

The reflection process helps students solidify their understanding of their personal values and allows them to explore how their beliefs shape their interactions with others. Writing reflection papers can also encourage students to critically assess their values, identify areas for growth, and refine their ethical reasoning (Sharma & Katoch, 2007).

The methodology of values clarification emphasizes creating a nonjudgmental, supportive environment where students can explore and challenge their beliefs. The primary aim is to help students develop a well-defined ethical framework that they can apply to their personal and academic lives. By engaging in activities such as value sorting, open-ended discussions, role-playing, and reflection, students are encouraged to critically reflect on their values, make thoughtful ethical decisions, and respect the diverse value systems of others. These activities foster personal growth while promoting an understanding of universal human rights, social responsibility, and respect for diversity (Shukla, 2013).

The values clarification methodology aims to empower students to make informed, ethical choices based on a deep understanding of their own values. The process not only enhances students' personal development but also contributes to a more compassionate, inclusive society. As students become more aware of their values and the values of others, they are better equipped to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and contribute positively to their communities (Shukla, 2013).

This process of values clarification is not limited to classroom activities but extends into real-world decision-making. By teaching students how to reflect on their values, the methodology helps cultivate a generation of individuals who are capable of thinking critically, making responsible choices, and contributing to a society that values ethical behavior, respect for others, and social justice (National Policy on Education, 1992).

Impact of Values Clarification on Students

Values clarification is an educational method that aids students in understanding and exploring their own values, which can significantly influence their moral development, ethical reasoning, and decision-making processes. This method encourages students to reflect on their personal beliefs and how these beliefs shape their interactions and behaviors in various social contexts. As a result, values clarification plays a pivotal role in developing responsible and socially conscious individuals who are capable of navigating complex ethical dilemmas. The growing body of research on this topic suggests that values clarification not only supports students in personal development but also enhances their ability to make thoughtful and informed decisions.

At its core, values clarification helps students identify, examine, and prioritize the values that influence their behavior. By engaging in exercises that require them to reflect on situations involving ethical choices, students are encouraged to think critically about their beliefs and how those beliefs align with societal norms.

As Seetharam (n.d.) suggests, values clarification is an essential tool in helping students understand how their ethical principles impact their actions in the broader social framework. By considering different perspectives and evaluating the consequences of various actions, students develop a more nuanced understanding of what it means to act ethically.

Research supports the idea that values clarification enhances students' moral reasoning abilities. According to Agarwal (2008), the process of values clarification involves students critically engaging with ethical issues, which strengthens their capacity for moral judgment. This form of self-reflection not only increases students' awareness of their values but also enhances their empathy and social responsibility. By considering how their actions affect others, students become more attuned to the needs and perspectives of those around them. This shift toward greater empathy and social engagement has profound implications for fostering a more compassionate and responsible society.

One of the primary outcomes of values clarification is an increased sense of personal responsibility. When students are encouraged to reflect on their values, they develop a greater understanding of their role in society and the ethical implications of their actions. Sharma and Katoch (2007) emphasize that values education is not merely about imparting knowledge; it is about nurturing responsible individuals who can make decisions based on their understanding of moral principles.

Through values clarification, students learn to take ownership of their decisions and actions, recognizing that their choices have far-reaching effects on both themselves and others. Furthermore, values clarification helps students challenge assumptions and societal norms that may not align with their personal ethical beliefs. This critical thinking process empowers students to make decisions that reflect their values, even in the face of external pressures.

As Shukla (2013) notes, values clarification promotes a deeper understanding of human rights and social justice, encouraging students to question the status quo and advocate for positive change in their communities. In this way, students not only develop a more robust sense of personal responsibility but also become agents of change who are willing to stand up for what they believe is right.

Values clarification exercises encourage students to consider a wide range of perspectives, which enhances their ability to empathize with others. By reflecting on how their actions may impact different groups, students become more attuned to the needs and experiences of others. This increased empathy fosters a sense of social responsibility, as students recognize the importance of acting in ways that promote the welfare of others. According to Seetharam (n.d.), values clarification helps students see the interconnectedness of individuals within society, making them more aware of their responsibilities to others.

Moreover, values clarification can lead to greater social engagement. As students become more aware of the ethical issues affecting their communities, they are more likely to take action to address these concerns. Agarwal (2008) points out that values clarification can inspire students to become active participants in their communities, whether through volunteer work, activism, or other forms of social engagement. This sense of responsibility extends beyond the classroom, influencing students' behavior in the broader context of their lives.

Values clarification also fosters critical thinking, particularly in relation to ethical decision-making. By engaging in reflective exercises, students learn to evaluate situations from multiple perspectives, weigh the consequences of their actions, and make decisions based on their core values. This process enhances their ability to navigate complex moral dilemmas and make choices that are consistent with their ethical principles.

Sharma and Katoch (2007) argue that values education helps students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to assess the ethical implications of their actions. This ability to think critically and make informed decisions is essential not only for personal growth but also for contributing to society in meaningful ways. As students learn to analyze ethical issues from various angles, they become more adept at recognizing the complexities of moral decision-making and are better equipped to make choices that reflect their values.

While the benefits of values clarification are widely acknowledged, there are also some criticisms of this approach. Some argue that values clarification may undermine traditional moral standards by allowing students to define their own values without sufficient guidance from teachers or external sources. Lisa Marie Contini (2008) contends that values clarification, by encouraging students to independently explore their values, could potentially lead to relativism, where no value is considered superior to another. Critics fear that this approach may dilute the importance of universally accepted ethical principles, such as honesty and respect for others.

Despite these concerns, proponents of values clarification argue that the process is not about promoting moral relativism but rather about fostering a deeper understanding of personal values within a broader ethical framework.

According to the National Policy on Education (1992), the aim of values education is to cultivate well-rounded individuals who are capable of making ethical decisions based on their personal beliefs while respecting the rights and values of others. Therefore, values clarification is not meant to replace traditional moral teachings but rather to complement them by encouraging students to think critically about their values and how they align with the values of society.

Values clarification is an effective educational tool that plays a significant role in students' moral development and decision-making abilities. By encouraging self-reflection and critical thinking, values clarification helps students identify their personal values and understand how these values shape their behavior in various social contexts.

Through this process, students develop a sense of personal responsibility, empathy, and social engagement, which contributes to their growth as responsible and ethical individuals. Despite some criticisms, values clarification remains an important component of values education, offering students the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs, challenge assumptions, and make informed decisions that align with their ethical principles.

Conclusion:

Values clarification stands as a significant pedagogical approach in the realm of character and values education. It serves as a powerful tool for helping students articulate and internalize their own beliefs by engaging in personal reflection, active inquiry, and ethical reasoning. Rather than prescribing a rigid moral code, values clarification encourages learners to thoughtfully explore their values, understand the consequences of their actions, and make informed moral decisions. In doing so, it supports the development of autonomy, self-awareness, and a strong sense of personal and social responsibility.

This strategy is particularly relevant in today's rapidly changing and culturally diverse society. As students navigate complex moral landscapes shaped by globalization, digital media, and social change, the ability to critically evaluate beliefs and actions becomes increasingly essential. Values clarification empowers students to make ethical choices rooted in reasoned judgment rather than blind conformity or external pressures. It creates a safe and respectful classroom environment where diverse viewpoints can be expressed, examined, and respected, thereby promoting inclusivity, empathy, and open-mindedness.

Despite its strengths, the values clarification approach is not without criticism. One of the major concerns is its potential to lead to moral relativism, where all values are seen as equally valid regardless of their ethical implications. Critics argue that without a firm moral framework or guidance from the teacher, students may struggle to distinguish between constructive and destructive values. Additionally, some educators and parents worry that values clarification might undermine traditional moral teachings or cultural norms, particularly in more conservative contexts.

However, these concerns can be addressed by integrating values clarification with other complementary strategies, such as values education, moral development theories, and culturally responsive teaching.

When used alongside structured ethical discussions, service-learning experiences, and role modeling by teachers, values clarification becomes a balanced and effective method for character development. It does not replace moral instruction but enriches it by helping students connect abstract values with real-life situations and personal experiences.

The role of the teacher is also critical in the successful implementation of this approach. Educators must act as facilitators of dialogue rather than moral authorities, guiding students through reflective processes without imposing specific beliefs. Proper training and thoughtful curriculum design are essential to ensure that values clarification activities are meaningful, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive.

Looking ahead, future research should continue to investigate the long-term impacts of values clarification on students' moral reasoning, behavior, and identity formation. There is a need for longitudinal studies that explore how this approach shapes students' values over time, particularly in varied educational and cultural settings. Additionally, more empirical data is needed to support the integration of values clarification into mainstream curricula and to assess its effectiveness in promoting responsible citizenship, ethical awareness, and emotional intelligence.

Values clarification remains a promising and dynamic educational strategy. When thoughtfully implemented, it can contribute significantly to the holistic development of learners, nurturing individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded and socially conscious.

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