

# Teaching Moral and Ethical Values Through Game-Based Learning

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*This study explores the use of game-based learning to effectively teach moral and ethical values, employing the experiential learning theory). The research question seeks to understand how moral and ethical values can be taught through game-based learning. The literature review underscores the influential impact of games on behavioral patterns and cultural norms, emphasizing their relevance in teaching ethics. Engagement through game-based learning is discussed to enhance student involvement in the learning process, and the challenge of selecting appropriate games for ethical education is addressed, introducing the EPIC framework as a valuable tool for educators in game selection for teaching moral and ethical values.*

## Introduction

Core values like honesty and integrity are integral for success across various life domains. Scholars, exemplified by Turbill (2015), have expressed apprehensions regarding the efficacy of traditional face-to-face methods in imparting these values. Game-based learning offers a promising avenue for effectively teaching moral and ethical values by leveraging the historical use of games and play as educational tools (Schrier, 2019).

## Research question

Building on the successes observed in the educational use of games over the past two decades, according to Schrier (2017), this study answers the question below:

How can teachers leverage games to teach moral and ethical values?

## Theoretical framework

We employed the experiential learning theory David Kolbs et al. (2014) developed to facilitate a thorough understanding of this research. This theory underscores the significance of experiential learning in the educational process and is

divided into four key phases. The first involves the practical experience of engaging in real-life activities, which is critical for grasping concepts and gaining hands-on expertise. Second, learners observe and reflect upon their experiences. Third, learners conceptualize a theory or model based on their observations, and finally, learners plan how to test this theory or model in future experiences.

Applying this theory to our study, it is crucial to acknowledge that different professions require different experiences; for example, the experiences needed by an engineer differ from those required by a medical doctor, educator, and so on. These cognate experiences are integral to professionalism. Given this background, the game offers a neutral learning environment that enables learners to act out a variety of scenarios, engage in experimentation, and acquire knowledge through active participation (citations). Following a gaming session, students self-reflect to evaluate their performance and consider strategies for enhancement. They subsequently conceptualize and strategize for their successive gaming encounters. This cyclic process resonates with the core objective of imparting moral and ethical values, which can be challenging when employing traditional teaching methods.

## Literature review

Because games play a very crucial role in experiential learning, teaching abstract concepts like ethics with games has been the subject of increasing attention. In a study, Khodabandeh and Garavand (2020) acknowledged parents' vital role in children's education. They encouraged them to take a fundamental principle seriously in the world of games, which is to understand and think at the child's level while engrossed in the games. They described such a good teaching strategy. They exemplify the need to defend the national value system of people against hidden intentions inherent in games, especially Western ones that may pose a significant threat to the younger generations, who are continually becoming much more fascinated by games.

In the qualitative study by Anggraini and Wahyuni (2021), religious and moral values are said to be essential in early childhood education, being the foundational level of their lives. Hence, there is a need for all hands to be on deck regarding the development of children's moral and religious values, aimed at a better society. The authors also posited that children learn quickly when knowledge is embedded in play. To develop the moral and religious values of a child, therefore, the hope is that games can provide vital support, like in the case of the "cublak-cubla suweng" game, which bears values such as cooperation, proactiveness, creativity, accuracy, and responsiveness (Anggraini & Wahyuni, 2021).

Playing games involves making a lot of critical decisions. According to Staine et al., (2019), cognitive psychologists noted moral decision-making as a dual process: implicit intuition and explicit reasoning. While implicit intuition indicates a cognitive process that happens automatically, explicit reasoning is rational and requires deliberate efforts. Staine et al. (2019) believe that the designers of serious games find the interaction between implicit and explicit cognitive processes very relevant. Susi et al. (2007) define serious games as games designed for other purposes besides pure entertainment. Against the backdrop that serious game design is often based on the constructivist view; a view that learners can construct knowledge when they are motivated, Staines et al. (2019) designed a model based on moral psychology and serious games. Such a motivational component of serious games underscores the widespread application of serious games in various fields to enhance learning experiences.

To our knowledge, the ongoing discussion needs an explicit exploration of how games, designed for educational purposes beyond entertainment, address the intricate moral decision-making process identified by cognitive psychologists like Staine et al. (2019).

## Methods

Our literature review followed the Cresswell (2018) outline by first prioritizing pertinent terms such as "ethics," "morals," "game-based learning," and "ethics and games." Subsequently, we searched Google Scholar, the University Library system, and the ERIC database to locate relevant academic literature, employing peer-reviewed journals as an inclusion criterion, and ranked the search results to concentrate on the most valuable materials. We proceeded to scan and map related literature and categorized the results topically. We synthesized literature to provide clarity and coherence in the study.

Based on thematic analysis, the review revealed key findings relating to the benefits of employing games to teach ethics, selecting suitable games to teach ethics, and the roles of games in culture preservation.

## Themes

### Why games?

Generally, games are credited with many benefits that educators can leverage in this age and time. They make a powerful and lasting impact, especially on young children, as players are always willing to stay committed to gameplay for as long as possible, even when it distracts and reduces productivity. Indeed, many studies have attested that games can influence children's behavioral patterns and cultural norms as well as make content more personally relevant to learners (e.g., Schrier, 2019; Khodabandeh & Garavand, 2020; Anggraini & Wahyuni, 2021).

In a descriptive study, Khodabandeh and Garavand (2020) established and recognized games as excellent means through which "producers' concepts 'are conveyed to the target audience, more often children, who are easily fascinated by games. Anggraini and Wahyuni (2021) highlight getting used to being friendly, introducing honest behavior, introducing sporty behavior, introducing polite behavior, teaching a sense of tolerance, teaching cooperation, and training children's creativity as virtues that games, especially local games, offer the gamers. Recall that younger students are easily motivated and attracted to playing games and carrying out game-related activities. In view of this, Anggraini, R., & Wahyuni, A. (2021) indicated a significant impact on the social interaction of each child in doing the cubak-cublak Suweng. While video game experts are skilled at tracking objects and making quick, accurate decisions, traditional games typically involve singing and playing (Walter et al., 2008). Schrier (2019) argues that games should be used to promote moral and ethical behavior in the pursuit of humanity's betterment.

### Engagement through game-based learning

Educators face many difficulties engaging students in teaching and Learning; they battle for their attention amidst distractions with the advent of emerging technologies. Appropriating games in the learning process can increase students' engagement (citations). It can support learners changing views and keep them fully engaged within the classrooms. Khan et al. (2022) utilized the Game-Based Learning approach to design a self-paced-cybersecurity platform where students could learn different walk-through challenges, given the right tools to enhance better engagement.

### Choosing appropriate games

Educators often face challenges in selecting suitable teaching and learning games, particularly those that incorporate moral values. This section introduces relevant theories and a framework for identifying and choosing games aligned with ethical principles. Various research studies, including those by Haidt & Bjorklund (2007), Kohlberg (1984), Lapsley & Narvaez (2005), and Rest (1983), apply a cognitive approach to elucidate moral structure and function. Schrier's (2015)

Ethics Practice and Implementation Categorization (EPIC) framework emerges as a valuable tool for educators, providing a structured approach to choosing video games that support the teaching of moral and ethical values (Schrier 2017). The EPIC framework encompasses educational objectives, emphasizing ethical awareness, emotional intelligence, character development, and knowledge of critical ethical concerns. Additionally, it outlines educational strategies associated with effective ethics education. While the framework aids in classifying games, Schrier (2017) extends the criteria to include factors such as availability, mainstream popularity, ethical considerations, and player responses when making game selections for ethical teaching.

## Analysis

Based on the themes that emerged, this study reflected the contributions of various scholars, such as Khodabandeh and Garavand (2020), who argued that some foreign games usually come with predetermined goals that are capable of eroding cultural values, thereby advocating for incorporating indigenous content in game development. Anggraini and Wahyuni (2021) highlighted the role of traditional games in connecting family members and promoting cultural values.

Finally, Khan et al. (2022) underscored the capacity of game-based learning to facilitate the comprehension of complex concepts.

Additionally, the preservation of cultural and moral values through games, especially traditional games, is emphasized. Traditional games are acknowledged as essential in promoting religious and moral values among individuals from childhood, fostering lifelong bonding and engagement within families (Wahyuni, 2021). Overall, the major findings point to the potential of game-based learning in addressing the complexities of teaching moral and ethical values, as summarized in the chart below.

**Figure 1**

*Summary of the findings from the literature*



## Implications

Including moral principles through games in the curriculum is crucial for tech-savvy students who are easily drawn to games and play.

## Conclusion

An extensive study on the effects of games on students' academic achievement is highlighted in the literature review, which also emphasizes the significance of discovering extra advantages and aims, particularly in encouraging moral and ethical development. The emphasis is on how educators can use games or game elements to teach students moral values effectively, realizing that teachers can use games to impact outside of the classroom, where students spend a large portion of their waking hours.

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