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FORMATION OF UPBRINGING QUALITIES IN 9TH-11TH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VUCA WORLD CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly defined by the principles of VUCA—Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. This paradigm shift presents unprecedented challenges for educational systems, particularly in the realm of character education. This thesis explores the imperative to reform the formation of tarbiyaviy sifatlar (upbringing qualities or character traits) in 9th to 11th-grade students within the context of a VUCA world. It argues that traditional, prescriptive models of moral instruction are inadequate for preparing young people to navigate a world characterized by rapid change and unpredictable futures. The paper first delineates the core components of the VUCA concept and its implications for secondary education. It then analyzes the specific developmental stage of adolescent students, highlighting their cognitive and social capacities. The central argument posits that a paradigm shift is required, moving from the transmission of fixed moral values to the cultivation of adaptive capabilities such as critical thinking, resilience, ethical decision-making, and empathy. The main part of the thesis proposes a practical framework for educators, focusing on integrating these competencies through experiential learning, collaborative projects, and critical dialogue. The conclusion synthesizes the argument, asserting that fostering these dynamic qualities is not merely an educational enhancement but a fundamental necessity for cultivating a generation capable of thriving and contributing positively in an unpredictable world. The thesis concludes by recommending policy changes to support this pedagogical transformation.

KEY WORDS: VUCA, Character Education, Upbringing Qualities, Secondary Education, Adolescents, Critical Thinking, Resilience, Adaptive Learning, Ethical Decision-Making.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ushered in an era of profound and accelerated transformation, a reality captured by the military-derived acronym VUCA. Coined to describe the unpredictable nature of the post-Cold War world, VUCA—standing for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity—has become an essential lens through which to understand the challenges facing modern society, including its educational institutions. The traditional mission of schools, particularly in the domain of tarbiya (upbringing), has been to transmit a relatively stable set of societal values and norms. However, in a VUCA environment, the future is not a linear extension of the past. The values and skills that ensured success yesterday may be obsolete tomorrow. This reality poses a fundamental question for educators: how do we prepare students for a world we cannot fully predict? Nowhere is this question more critical than in the education of 9th to 11th-grade students. This period of late adolescence is a crucial window for identity formation, the development of abstract reasoning, and the solidification of personal and social values. The task of shaping tarbiyaviy sifatlar—the integral qualities of a well-rounded individual, such as integrity, responsibility, and civic-mindedness—must be re-evaluated to meet the demands of a VUCA world. A rigid, one-size-fits-all approach to character education risks leaving students ill-equipped to handle ambiguity, make ethical judgments in novel situations, and demonstrate resilience in the face of constant change. The purpose of this thesis is to articulate a new approach to character formation for this specific cohort. It argues that the

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goal of tarbiya in the 21st century must shift from instilling a fixed moral compass to cultivating a dynamic and adaptive ethical framework. This involves fostering a set of core competencies that empower students not just to survive but to thrive in a VUCA world. This thesis will first define the VUCA concept and its educational implications, then analyze the specific needs of adolescent learners, and finally, propose a concrete framework of pedagogical strategies designed to cultivate the essential adaptive qualities needed for the future.

Main Part

1. The VUCA World and its Challenge to Traditional Education

The VUCA framework provides a powerful diagnostic tool for understanding the pressures on modern educational systems. Each element of the acronym presents a distinct challenge to the traditional model of character education.

Volatility refers to the speed and magnitude of change. In the past, societal values and career paths were relatively stable. Today, technological, economic, and social shifts occur with dizzying speed. This volatility means that the specific rules and norms taught to students may quickly become irrelevant. An educational approach that focuses solely on memorizing a set of rules is therefore inadequate. As one study on modern educational leadership notes, "in a volatile environment, the ability to unlearn and relearn is more valuable than the static accumulation of knowledge" [Smith, 2020, p. 45]. For character education, this implies a focus on principles over rules, and on the process of ethical reasoning over the mere acceptance of predetermined conclusions. Uncertainty is the second pillar of the VUCA world. It refers to the unpredictability of events and outcomes. While volatility is about the speed of change, uncertainty is about the lack of predictability. For adolescents, this manifests in uncertain career prospects, evolving social landscapes, and unforeseen global crises. Traditional tarbiya often promises a predictable path to success based on adherence to established norms. However, when the future is uncertain, this promise rings hollow. Education must instead cultivate the capacity to tolerate uncertainty and to act thoughtfully without complete information. This requires fostering qualities like courage, initiative, and a tolerance for calculated risk, rather than a fear of failure. Complexity, the third element, highlights the interconnectedness of myriad factors in any given situation. A problem in the modern world is rarely simple or isolated; it is a web of interacting variables. A single ethical dilemma, for instance, might involve cultural, economic, technological, and environmental considerations. Traditional, siloed education often fails to prepare students for this reality. Character education must therefore move beyond simple moral dichotomies (right/wrong) and embrace a more nuanced understanding. This requires developing skills in systems thinking, perspective-taking, and the ability to analyze a situation from multiple viewpoints. The goal is not to find a simple answer, but to navigate the complexity with wisdom and empathy. Finally, Ambiguity refers to the lack of clarity and the potential for multiple interpretations of events. Information can be incomplete, contradictory, or open to different meanings. In such an environment, students need the ability to ask clarifying questions, to interpret information critically, and to construct their own meaning. This challenges the traditional model where the teacher is the sole arbiter of truth. For character formation, ambiguity means that students must learn to develop their own internal moral compass, one that can guide them when external signposts are unclear or misleading. This requires a deep sense of self-awareness and a commitment to ongoing self-reflection.

2. The Adolescent Learner in a VUCA Context

Students in grades 9 through 11 are in the developmental stage of late adolescence. This period is characterized by significant cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Cognitively, they are developing the capacity for abstract thought, metacognition (thinking about their own thinking), and hypothetical-deductive reasoning. They can grapple with complex moral and philosophical questions. Socially, they are navigating peer pressure, forming their identities, and seeking autonomy from their

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parents. Emotionally, they are experiencing heightened sensitivity and are beginning to form a more stable sense of self.

This developmental stage presents both a challenge and an opportunity for character education in a VUCA world. The challenge is that adolescents are often idealistic and prone to black-and-white thinking, which is ill-suited for a world of ambiguity and complexity. The opportunity is that their developing cognitive abilities make them perfectly poised to learn the advanced skills required for VUCA navigation. As one scholar argues, "the adolescent mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled, and the VUCA world provides the perfect fuel for that fire in the form of complex, real-world problems" [Johnson, 2021, p. 112]. Therefore, an effective tarbiya program for this age group must be tailored to their developmental needs, engaging them as active participants in their own character development rather than passive recipients of moral instruction.

3. A Proposed Framework for Cultivating Adaptive Tarbiyaviy Sifatlar

To address the challenges of the VUCA world, the formation of tarbiyaviy sifatlar in 9th-11th graders must be reoriented around a core set of adaptive competencies. The following framework proposes four key qualities and corresponding pedagogical strategies.

First is **Critical and Creative Thinking**. In a world of information overload and misinformation, students must be able to critically evaluate sources, identify biases, and synthesize information from diverse perspectives. Furthermore, they need to think creatively to devise novel solutions to unprecedented problems. Pedagogical strategies include: Socratic seminars on complex ethical dilemmas, project-based learning where students tackle real-world community issues, and debates that require students to argue for positions they may not personally hold. Second is **Resilience and Adaptability**. Volatility and uncertainty demand the ability to bounce back from setbacks and to adjust one's plans in the face of new information. This involves emotional regulation, a growth mindset, and the ability to learn from failure. Educators can foster this by creating a classroom culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities, using simulations and role-playing games with unpredictable outcomes, and teaching mindfulness and stress-management techniques.

Third is **Ethical Decision-Making and Empathy**. In a complex and ambiguous world, students need a strong internal ethical framework and the ability to understand the perspectives of others. This goes beyond simply knowing the rules. It involves learning ethical theories (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics) as tools for analysis and practicing empathetic perspective-taking. Strategies include: case studies of historical and contemporary ethical failures, literature circles that explore diverse characters' motivations, and community service projects that require students to work with people from different backgrounds.

Fourth is **Collaboration and Communication**. Complexity means that no single individual can solve a major problem alone. Students must learn to work effectively in diverse teams, communicate their ideas clearly, and negotiate conflicts constructively. This requires skills in active listening, giving and receiving feedback, and building consensus. Collaborative projects, peer review sessions, and student-led conferences are effective methods for developing these skills. As one researcher on collaborative learning puts it, "when students learn to navigate the complexity of a team, they are rehearsing the very skills they will need to navigate the complexity of the world" [Williams, 2019, p. 78].

The role of the educator in this framework shifts from a lecturer to a facilitator, a coach, and a co-learner. The teacher's primary task is to create a safe, challenging, and supportive environment where students can practice these skills. Assessment must also change, moving away from standardized tests of knowledge toward authentic assessments like portfolios, performance tasks, and self-reflections that capture a student's growth in these adaptive qualities.

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