



DEVELOPING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: THE ROLE OF 'TARBIYA' (MORAL EDUCATION) LESSONS IN SHAPING THE LEGAL CULTURE OF YOUTH

Jumanova Khafiza Kholiqulovna

Doctoral candidate, navoi state university, uzbekistan

hafizajumanova52@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. The formation of a law-abiding, rights-conscious, and actively engaged citizenry is among the central objectives of contemporary educational policy in post-Soviet Central Asian states and across the broader developing world. This paper examines the pedagogical potential of “Tarbiya” (moral education) as a curricular instrument for cultivating the legal culture of youth in secondary and higher educational institutions. Drawing on sociological survey data, comparative educational policy analysis, and established frameworks from civic education scholarship, the study argues that properly structured “Tarbiya” lessons function not merely as a vehicle for value transmission but as an active site where students construct normative orientations toward law, rights, duties, and democratic participation. The paper further identifies structural weaknesses in existing “Tarbiya” curricula—including an overemphasis on compliance-based moral instruction and insufficient engagement with students' rights and legal agency—and proposes a competency-based, rights-oriented reform model aligned with international standards of civic education. Findings suggest that integrating legal literacy components into “Tarbiya” pedagogy significantly enhances students' capacity to engage constructively with legal institutions and to exercise active citizenship in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Tarbiya, moral education, legal culture, active citizenship, civic education, youth, legal literacy, educational reform, rights-based pedagogy, Central Asia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary democracies and transitional states alike face a shared challenge: how to cultivate a generation of young people who understand their rights and obligations, engage constructively with legal and civic institutions, and exercise moral agency in complex pluralistic environments. This challenge has intensified in the context of rapid digitalization, growing information disorder, weakening of traditional community structures, and rising civic disengagement among youth globally. Educational systems are widely recognized as the primary institutional mechanism through which societies can systematically address this challenge.

Among the curricular instruments available to educators in Uzbekistan and comparable post-Soviet contexts, the subject of “Tarbiya”—derived from the Arabic root meaning 'upbringing,' 'cultivation,' and 'moral formation'—holds a distinctive and underexplored



position. Unlike formal law-related subjects, “Tarbiya” is taught from the earliest years of schooling and permeates the daily relational fabric of educational institutions. Its scope encompasses personal virtue, interpersonal ethics, civic responsibility, and cultural identity. Precisely because of this breadth, “Tarbiya” occupies a uniquely strategic position for transmitting not only moral values in a narrow sense but also the normative orientations toward law and collective life that constitute what scholars term 'legal culture.'

The concept of legal culture, as developed in the sociological jurisprudence tradition following Lawrence Friedman's foundational typology, encompasses the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral dispositions that shape how individuals and communities interact with legal norms and institutions. A population with a developed legal culture does not merely obey the law out of fear of sanction; it understands the purpose of legal norms, exercises its rights proactively, contributes to the rule of law through civic participation, and holds institutions accountable. The cultivation of such a legal culture among youth is, therefore, both an educational and a democratic imperative.

This paper proceeds from the premise that the relationship between “Tarbiya” instruction and legal culture formation has not been adequately theorized or empirically investigated. While considerable scholarship exists on civic education in post-Soviet states and on Islamic moral pedagogy in Central Asian contexts separately, the specific nexus between “Tarbiya” as practiced in contemporary Uzbek schools and the emergence of legal consciousness in students has received little systematic scholarly attention. The present study aims to address this gap by: (1) establishing a theoretical framework linking moral education to legal culture development; (2) analysing the current content and methodology of “Tarbiya” instruction in relation to legal culture objectives; (3) identifying structural weaknesses in existing practice; and (4) proposing a reform model oriented toward rights-based civic competency.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MORAL EDUCATION, LEGAL SOCIALIZATION, AND LEGAL CULTURE

2.1 Legal Socialization and the School as a Normative Environment

Legal socialization—the process through which individuals acquire the values, beliefs, and competencies that orient them toward the legal system—begins well before formal legal instruction occurs. Developmental psychologists from Jean Piaget onward have demonstrated that children construct moral and normative frameworks through everyday social experience, including the experience of rules, fairness, authority, and consequences in institutional settings such as the family and the school. The school, as a micro-polity governed by rules, hierarchies, and procedures, constitutes what political theorist Amy Gutmann termed a 'deliberative community': a site where democratic virtues and legal orientations are either cultivated or foreclosed depending on the relational and pedagogical norms that prevail.

When school rules are experienced as legitimate, explicable, and consistently applied, students develop what legal socialization scholars call 'procedural legitimacy beliefs'—the conviction that legal processes are fair even when outcomes are unfavorable. These beliefs are among the strongest predictors of law-abiding behavior and civic engagement in



adulthood. Conversely, authoritarian school environments characterized by arbitrary rule enforcement, absence of student voice, and punishment without explanation tend to generate cynical or alienated orientations toward legal authority, regardless of the explicit content of civic education lessons.

2.2 The Concept of Legal Culture and Its Educational Dimensions

Lawrence Friedman's distinction between 'internal legal culture' (the legal culture of legal professionals and institutions) and 'external legal culture' (the legal culture of the general population) provides a useful conceptual anchor for educational analysis. “Tarbiya” instruction operates primarily on the domain of external legal culture: it shapes the values, expectations, and behavioral dispositions of ordinary young citizens toward law, rights, and civic obligation. Within this domain, scholars have further distinguished between 'passive' legal culture—characterized by compliance, submission, and avoidance of legal institutions—and 'active' legal culture—characterized by rights-awareness, proactive use of legal mechanisms, and participatory engagement with governance.

Active legal culture, in this framework, requires three mutually reinforcing competency clusters: cognitive (knowledge of legal norms, rights, and institutional procedures), attitudinal (positive orientation toward the rule of law, trust in legitimate institutions, rejection of corruption), and behavioral (capacity and willingness to exercise rights, engage in civic processes, and hold institutions accountable). A “Tarbiya” curriculum oriented toward legal culture formation must, accordingly, address all three competency clusters rather than limiting itself to cognitive information transfer or attitudinal compliance training.

2.3 “Tarbiya” in the Context of Islamic Educational Philosophy and Contemporary Civic Education

The concept of “Tarbiya” carries deep roots in the Islamic educational tradition, where it denotes the holistic formation of the human person—intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social—in accordance with divinely ordained principles. Classical Islamic scholars such as Ibn Khaldun and al-Ghazali conceived of “Tarbiya” as encompassing justice, social responsibility, and the obligations of community membership alongside personal piety. This tradition contains substantial resources for civic education: the emphasis on *adl* (justice), *maslaha* (public interest), *shura* (consultation), and *amanah* (trustworthiness in public responsibility) provides a moral vocabulary that resonates with contemporary democratic and rule-of-law values.

Contemporary Uzbek educational policy has sought to integrate “Tarbiya” within a secular-civic framework that honors this heritage while aligning with international educational standards. The National Curriculum Framework of Uzbekistan (revised editions 2017, 2022) explicitly identifies the formation of 'a responsible citizen who knows and observes the law' as a core educational outcome. However, the translation of this policy objective into classroom practice has been uneven, and the mechanisms through which Tarbiya instruction is expected to contribute to legal culture formation remain underspecified at the curricular level.



3. “TARBIYA” INSTRUCTION AND LEGAL CULTURE: ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PRACTICE

3.1 Curriculum Content Analysis

A systematic content analysis of “Tarbiya” curriculum documents, textbooks, and lesson plan templates used in Uzbek secondary schools (grades 5–11) reveals several recurring thematic domains: personal virtue (honesty, diligence, cleanliness, respect for elders), family values (filial piety, gender roles, household responsibility), national identity (pride in Uzbek history and culture, loyalty to the state), civic duty (obedience to laws and regulations, participation in community activities), and social responsibility (environmental care, concern for vulnerable groups). Legal content appears predominantly within the 'civic duty' domain and is typically framed in terms of obligations rather than rights.

This framing reflects a compliance-oriented model of legal socialization in which the primary message conveyed to students is: 'the law exists and you must follow it.' While norm compliance is indeed a foundational component of legal culture, an exclusively compliance-focused curriculum fails to equip students with the cognitive and attitudinal resources needed for active citizenship. Specifically, the following critical dimensions of legal culture are systematically underrepresented in current “Tarbiya” content: (a) the concept of individual legal rights and their practical exercise; (b) the mechanisms through which citizens can challenge unlawful decisions; (c) the role of civil society and civic associations in democratic governance; (d) critical evaluation of legal norms and institutions; and (e) the relationship between moral judgment and legal obligation in cases of tension.

3.2 Pedagogical Methods and Their Implications for Legal Culture



Beyond curriculum content, the pedagogical methods employed in “Tarbiya” instruction carry independent implications for legal culture formation. Observations and teacher survey data indicate that “Tarbiya” lessons in Uzbek secondary schools are predominantly delivered through direct instruction (teacher-centered lecture and moral exemplification), recitation of approved texts and maxims, and individual reflection exercises. Collaborative deliberation, role-playing legal scenarios, structured discussion of rights dilemmas, and student participation in rule-making are rare.

This methodological profile is significant because research in civic education consistently demonstrates that active, participatory, and deliberative pedagogical approaches produce substantially stronger gains in civic knowledge, democratic attitudes, and political efficacy than passive instructional methods. Students who regularly participate in structured discussions of controversial issues, engage in simulations of legal and civic processes, and exercise genuine voice in school governance develop more sophisticated and stable civic and legal orientations than students whose civic formation is confined to receptive learning. The current Tarbiya methodology thus undermines the very civic outcomes it nominally pursues.

3.3 Sociological Evidence: Youth Legal Culture in Contemporary Uzbekistan

Survey research conducted among university students in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Namangan (N = 840, 2021–2023, stratified sample across institutional types) reveals a



complex picture of youth legal culture that is consistent with the curricular patterns described above. Respondents demonstrate relatively high awareness of general legal prohibitions (what one must not do) but significantly lower awareness of procedural rights, constitutional guarantees, and mechanisms for legal protection. Approximately 68% of respondents could not correctly identify the primary functions of the Constitutional Court; 74% had never consulted any legal reference resource independently; and only 31% expressed confidence in their ability to protect their rights effectively if violated by a state institution.

At the attitudinal level, respondents display a characteristic pattern of 'passive legalism': strong normative endorsement of law-abiding behavior combined with low efficacy beliefs regarding the capacity of ordinary citizens to influence legal outcomes. This pattern is precisely what compliance-oriented moral education tends to produce: young people who accept the authority of law but do not see themselves as active participants in the legal system. The gap between normative endorsement and civic efficacy represents the primary target for reform.

4. TOWARD A RIGHTS-ORIENTED, COMPETENCY-BASED REFORM OF “TARBIYA” PEDAGOGY

4.1 Principles of the Reform Model

The reform model proposed here is grounded in four organizing principles derived from international civic education scholarship and adapted to the Uzbek educational context. First, rights-centeredness: legal culture formation must be anchored in the concept of individual rights as the foundational unit of legal-civic identity, not as an afterthought to the discussion of duties. Second, deliberative methodology: the dominant instructional mode should shift from transmission to structured dialogue, enabling students to reason about, question, and apply legal and moral norms in realistic contexts. Third, procedural authenticity: students must have repeated, genuine experience of fair rule-making and grievance resolution within the school itself, as the school's internal legal culture models the external legal culture students are expected to embrace. Fourth, developmental appropriateness: legal culture objectives must be sequenced across grade levels in alignment with cognitive and moral developmental research, moving from concrete rule-understanding in early grades to abstract constitutional reasoning in later secondary education.

4.2 Curriculum Integration: Legal Literacy Modules within “Tarbiya”

Concretely, the proposed reform model envisions the integration of four legal literacy module clusters within the existing “Tarbiya” curriculum structure, requiring no additional curriculum time but a reorientation of approximately 30–35% of existing lesson content:

- Module I (Grades 5–6): Rights in Everyday Life — my rights at home, at school, and in public spaces; what to do when I feel treated unfairly; the concept of equality.
- Module II (Grades 7–8): Constitutional Foundations — the Constitution as a social contract; fundamental rights and freedoms; the concept of rule of law versus rule of persons; how laws are made.



–Module III (Grades 9–10): Legal Mechanisms and Civic Agency — how to access legal protection; the role of courts, ombudsman, and civil society; case studies of rights violations and their resolution.

–Module IV (Grade 11): Democratic Participation and Legal Reform — how citizens participate in lawmaking; the relationship between morality, law, and justice; youth as agents of legal and civic change.

4.3 Methodological Recommendations

To operationalize the reform model's deliberative methodology principle, the following pedagogical approaches are recommended for systematic integration into “Tarbiya” instruction: (1) Structured Academic Controversy—a research-supported discussion format in which pairs of students argue opposing positions on a rights dilemma before synthesizing a reasoned conclusion; (2) Legal Role-Play and Moot Courts—simulation of legal proceedings at age-appropriate levels of complexity, enabling students to inhabit different roles (plaintiff, defendant, judge, advocate) and to reason from multiple normative standpoints; (3) Community Problem-Solving Projects—collaborative identification of a local civic or legal problem and development of a proposed solution, presented to school administration or local government; and (4) Student Rights Councils—institutionalized student voice bodies with genuine procedural authority over specified domains of school life, creating authentic experience of participatory governance.

These methodological innovations require substantial investment in teacher professional development, since the pedagogical competencies they demand—facilitation of structured dialogue, management of controversial issues, coaching of collaborative inquiry—differ substantially from those required for transmissive instruction. A phased teacher training program, potentially delivered through regional educational development centers in partnership with civil society organizations with civic education expertise, is therefore an essential component of any serious implementation strategy.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this paper supports the central thesis that “Tarbiya”, as currently practiced, represents an underutilized and partially misdirected resource for legal culture formation. Its underutilization stems from the narrowness of its legal content—focusing on obligations and prohibitions while neglecting rights, mechanisms, and agency. Its misdirection stems from the compliance-oriented pedagogical culture that surrounds it, which produces passive rather than active legal orientations in students.

The proposed reform model is not a wholesale replacement of “Tarbiya's” moral formation objectives but rather an expansion and reorientation. The ethical foundations of “Tarbiya”—honesty, justice, responsibility, care for others—are entirely consonant with the values underpinning a developed legal culture. What is needed is the translation of these abstract virtues into concrete civic and legal competencies: an honest person who knows nothing of due process or constitutional rights cannot exercise active citizenship, however virtuous they may be in personal conduct.





A critical consideration for implementation is the relationship between legal culture education and the political context in which schools operate. Rights-oriented civic education necessarily involves teaching students that they possess rights vis-à-vis the state, that institutions can behave unlawfully, and that citizens are entitled to seek redress. In contexts where state institutions themselves have uneven commitments to rule-of-law principles, this creates an inherent tension between educational objectives and institutional realities. Managing this tension thoughtfully—neither avoiding the subject to the point of irrelevance nor producing cynicism through an exclusively critical stance—requires careful curriculum design and skilled teacher facilitation.

Finally, the reform agenda outlined here aligns with Uzbekistan's own stated policy commitments under the New Uzbekistan development strategy, which identifies legal consciousness among citizens as a priority outcome of educational modernization. The alignment between the proposed reform model and official policy creates a favorable implementation environment, provided that curricular reform is accompanied by genuine investment in teacher preparation, assessment reform, and the transformation of school governance cultures toward greater procedural transparency and student participation.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that “Tarbiya” (moral education) lessons constitute a strategically significant but currently underperforming instrument for the formation of active legal culture among Uzbek youth. Through a theoretical framework linking legal socialization research, legal culture theory, and civic education scholarship, combined with analysis of curriculum content, pedagogical methods, and sociological data on youth legal culture, the study has identified a fundamental gap between the compliance-oriented model currently embedded in Tarbiya instruction and the rights-oriented, participatory model of legal culture demanded by contemporary democratic governance.

The proposed reform model—grounded in rights-centeredness, deliberative methodology, procedural authenticity, and developmental appropriateness—offers a structured pathway for closing this gap without abandoning the moral formation objectives that give Tarbiya its educational distinctiveness. The four legal literacy module clusters and the associated pedagogical innovations represent not a foreign imposition on an established tradition but a deepening and concretization of values—justice, responsibility, civic integrity—that lie at the heart of Tarbiya's intellectual heritage.

The broader implication of this study extends beyond the Uzbek context. In educational systems across Central Asia, the Middle East, and other regions where moral education traditions blend Islamic pedagogical heritage with post-colonial state-building objectives, the challenge of transforming moral formation into civic competency is widely shared. The “Tarbiya” case offers both a cautionary example of how compliance-oriented moral education can inadvertently suppress active citizenship and a constructive model for how moral education can be reimagined as a foundation for legal culture formation. Further comparative and longitudinal research—particularly studies measuring the long-term civic outcomes of



reformed “Tarbiya” instruction—is urgently needed to build the empirical base necessary for sustainable policy reform in this domain.

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