



Reconceptualising Moral Character Education in Kenya's Primary School Teacher Education: Shulman's Knowledge Base, the Integrative Ethical Education Model, and a Backward Design Proposal

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Abstract

Primary school teachers in Kenya are widely expected to foster the moral development of their pupils; however, the primary school teacher education programme systematically neglects training in this aspect of their professional role. This conceptual and pedagogical-proposal study examines how Kenya's Primary Teacher Education (PTE) curriculum can be rethought to equip student teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective moral character education. Drawing on three theoretically complementary frameworks, Shulman's model of teacher knowledge base, Narvaez's Integrative Ethical Education (IEE) model, and Wiggins and McTighe's backward design model, the study contends that moral character education is not an optional add-on to teacher preparation but a core element of the teaching profession. Through critical analysis of national policy documents and extensive review of scholarly literature in teacher education, moral development, and curriculum design, the study identifies three structural gaps that have characterised not only the now-phased-out two-year P1 Certificate but also persist, unremedied, in its successor programmes, namely the 2016 Diploma in Primary Teacher Education (DPTE) and the 2024 Diploma in Teacher Education-Pre-Primary and Primary (DTE-PP&P): the lack of a dedicated moral character course, an assessment culture that values propositional knowledge over professional development, and curriculum overload that marginalises reflective and relational pedagogy. A five-outcome course framework is proposed, covering: the dual intellectual-moral nature of teaching; knowledge of children's moral development; the moral aspects of classroom practice; the four components of ethical expertise (ethical sensitivity, ethical judgement, ethical motivation, and ethical action); and Pedagogical Content Knowledge for moral character education. Assessment strategies and learning

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experiences aligned to each outcome are detailed. Implications for teacher education policy, Kenya's transition to the Competency-Based Curriculum, and future empirical research are discussed.

Introduction

In contemporary Kenya, where primary education is mandatory for all children aged six to fourteen years, and where students amass an estimated 15,000 hours of schooling before finishing secondary education (UNESCO, 2016), primary school teachers hold a uniquely influential role in shaping the moral development of future generations. This structural fact is clearly recognised in Kenya's national educational objectives, which have consistently aimed to produce citizens who are not only academically capable but also morally developed "happy and useful members of Kenya's society" imbued with the appropriate values and attitudes (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1984, p. xi).

Successive educational commissions have reaffirmed this aspiration. The Gachathi Report (Republic of Kenya [RoK], 1976, pp. 11–12) warned that "the schools as they are today do not have the capacity, time and even motivation to teach the values of the society ... the schools are geared entirely to the passing of formal examinations." Decades later, the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 (MoE, 2019) identifies similar concerns as unresolved. The introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 has given renewed urgency to the character formation mandate, explicitly requiring teachers to promote holistic learner development, including values and ethical citizenship (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2017). Yet, despite this policy shift, a review of the successor programmes to the PTE, specifically the three-year Diploma in Primary Teacher Education (DPTE, 2016) and the 2024 Diploma in Teacher Education (DTE-PP&P), which prepares teachers for CBC schools, reveals that no dedicated moral character education course has been introduced in either.

Yet, a significant gap remains between policy aspirations and professional preparation. Research consistently shows that teachers in Kenyan schools are ill-equipped to serve as moral character educators not because of a lack of moral commitment, but because the teacher education programme has never systematically prepared them for this aspect of their work (Women Education Researchers of Kenya [WERK], 2015; Kafwa et al., 2015; Ochula, 2012; Otewa, 2016). The primary school teacher education programme focuses almost exclusively on technical-methodological skills: subject knowledge, classroom management techniques, and examination preparation. The moral dimension of teaching, the reality that every interaction between teacher and learner carries moral significance and, intentionally or not, contributes to character formation receives no structured attention.

This study explores how primary school teacher education in Kenya can be revised to fill this gap. It is based on three theoretical frameworks whose complementarity provides both in-depth analysis and practical relevance: Shulman's (1987) model of teacher knowledge base; Narvaez's (2006, 2008) Integrative Ethical Education (IEE) model; and Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design model. Collectively, these frameworks offer a well-founded and locally relevant structure for a moral character education course within Kenya's primary school teacher training programme.



Methodology

This study is situated within an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, which holds that understanding educational phenomena requires engagement with the meanings, frameworks, and institutional structures through which practitioners and policy-makers construct professional knowledge (Bowen, 2009). A conceptual and pedagogical-proposal design is appropriate here because the gap under investigation, namely the systematic absence of moral character pedagogy from Kenya's primary school teacher education, is not yet amenable to empirical investigation: no course exists to pilot, no cohort of trained teachers exists to track, and no comparative data exists across PTTCs. Conceptual research that produces an evidence-based framework for policy dialogue and future empirical testing is, therefore, the methodologically defensible starting point.

This study employs a theoretical research design combining three complementary methodological approaches. The first is critical document analysis (Bowen, 2009), applied to a corpus of primary policy documents: the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017), the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 (MoE, 2019), the 2004 Primary Teacher Education syllabus (RoK, 2004), the 2016 Diploma in Primary Teacher Education curriculum (KICD, 2016), and the 2024 Diploma in Teacher Education curriculum (KICD, 2024), as well as the reports of the Ominde, Gachathi, Mackay, and Kamunge educational commissions. Documents were coded thematically for constructs relating to teacher knowledge, moral formation, and curriculum intent.

The second is a structured literature review of peer-reviewed research in teacher education, moral character development, and curriculum design, conducted using JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and AJOL. Search terms included "moral character education", "teacher education Kenya", "Shulman knowledge base", "Integrative Ethical Education", "ethical expertise", and "backward design curriculum". The review covered publications from 1983 to 2020, including the foundational works of Rest (1983), Shulman (1987), Narvaez (2006; 2008), Wiggins and McTighe (2005), and Campbell (2003; 2008), as well as recent empirical studies on moral education in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa. Sixty-eight sources met the inclusion criteria. Sources were excluded if they did not engage substantively with at least one of the three focal constructs (teacher professional knowledge, moral character formation, or curriculum design), or if they predated the foundational theoretical works structuring this analysis without offering an independent empirical or conceptual contribution. Grey literature was included only where it constituted official policy documents directly relevant to the Kenyan teacher education context.

The third is pedagogical-proposal methodology (Loughran, 2014): the development of a structured course proposal for moral character education in Kenya's Primary Teacher Education programme, designed using Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design model. This methodology is suitable for research aimed at producing evidence-based curriculum frameworks in contexts where direct empirical investigation is not yet feasible. The proposed course is offered as a model for policy dialogue and empirical pilot testing, rather than as a definitive solution.



Theoretical Framework

Shulman's Model of Teacher Knowledge Base

Lee Shulman's (1987) model of the teacher knowledge base identifies seven key knowledge domains essential for effective teaching: (1) content knowledge, (2) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), (3) general pedagogical knowledge, (4) curriculum knowledge, (5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (6) understanding of educational contexts, and (7) knowledge of educational aims, purposes, and values. PCK, the "special amalgam" that enables a teacher to present subject matter in ways accessible to diverse learners, is recognised as the signature knowledge domain of the teaching profession.

This study suggests that each of Shulman's domains has a moral dimension when teaching is understood as a practice that involves the whole person, not just cognitive outcomes. General pedagogical knowledge includes understanding the moral aspects of classroom climate, which Narvaez (2010) describes as the most fundamental condition for pupils' moral development. Knowledge of learners must include understanding their moral development paths and the "moral baggage" pupils carry from home and community (Narvaez, 2016). Knowledge of educational goals must align with Kenya's national aim of ethical citizenship. When extended to moral character education, PCK becomes the ability to turn developmental knowledge into subject-specific, age-appropriate moral teaching, what this study calls "PCK for moral character education."

Shulman's model thus serves a dual function in this paper: as a diagnostic framework, identifying the knowledge domains underdeveloped in Kenya's PTE programme from a moral education perspective; and as an architectural blueprint, demonstrating that the professional knowledge infrastructure for expert subject teaching, when consciously directed toward moral character development, can support expert moral character education without requiring a wholesale restructuring of the existing programme.

Narvaez's Integrative Ethical Education Model

Darcia Narvaez's (2006; 2008) Integrative Ethical Education (IEE) model synthesises two historically opposed traditions in moral education: the traditional character education approach, which emphasises the formation of intuitive virtue, and Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive-developmental approach, which prioritises explicit moral reasoning. The IEE model argues that both the intuitive and deliberative dimensions of moral functioning are essential, and that expert moral character is their integration, cultivated through expert-guided practice rather than inherited through virtue or instilled through doctrine.

The content framework of the IEE model is based on Rest's (1983) identification of four psychological processes that mediate between moral perception and moral action. Ethical sensitivity involves recognising morally significant features of a situation, noticing who may be harmed, exercising perspective-taking, and understanding the emotional stakes for others (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). Ethical judgement refers to the ability to determine the morally best course of action, using moral reasoning frameworks and contextual wisdom (Rest et al., 1999). Ethical motivation is the tendency to



prioritise moral concerns over competing interests, such as examination pressure, institutional demands, or peer approval (Narvaez, 2006). Ethical action is the ability to carry out moral intentions with skill and persistence despite obstacles (Rest, 1983).

The IEE model's expert-novice framing is central to its relevance for teacher education: just as content expertise is developed by immersing a novice in mentored, authentic practice alongside an expert, ethical expertise is developed by immersing student teachers in a morally rich learning environment guided by teacher educators who model ethical-pedagogical practice and make their moral reasoning visible.

Wiggins and McTighe's Backward Design Model

Wiggins and McTighe's (2005; 2006) backward design model recommend a three-stage process for curriculum planning. Stage 1 specifies desired learning outcomes, categorising three levels of content significance: content worth familiarity (broad awareness), content essential for knowledge and application (professional application), and enduring understandings, the deep insights that extend beyond specific content. Stage 2 determines acceptable evidence of achievement and aligns assessment methods with the required depth of understanding. Stage 3 plans learning experiences and instruction to accomplish the outcomes outlined in Stage 1 and is evaluated through Stage 2.

This model is adopted in this study because it disciplines the curriculum designer to begin with clearly articulated professional outcomes rather than with content coverage, a discipline especially important for moral character education, which risks remaining episodic or superficial if not anchored in coherent, systematically assessed professional learning goals.

While each of these three frameworks has been applied individually within teacher education scholarship, their triangulation in the present study constitutes an original theoretical move. Shulman's (1987) knowledge base model has not previously been systematically extended to moral character education in a sub-Saharan African teacher preparation context; the IEE model has rarely been operationalised as a content framework for a formal teacher education course; and backward design has not previously been used to structure a moral pedagogy proposal within an African national curriculum reform. Most significantly, the conceptual extension of Pedagogical Content Knowledge into a domain of moral character pedagogy, which this study terms "PCK for moral character education", represents a contribution that Shulman's own formulation did not make explicit and that has not previously been theorised for the Kenyan context. The synthesis offered here is not merely additive; it produces a curriculum logic that neither framework alone could generate.

Analysis: The Current Landscape of Moral Character Education in Kenyan Primary School Teacher Education

Historical Roots of the Deficit: From Indigenous Education to the Present

Moral character formation was the cornerstone of African Traditional Education (ATE) in Kenya. In pre-colonial Kenyan societies, every adult community member actively engaged in the moral development of the young through structured initiation, apprenticeship, oral traditions, and role



modelling (Fafunwa, 1974; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). The educator in this system was not a subject specialist but a community elder, a person of proven moral character whose pedagogical authority was linked to personal development. Character education and intellectual growth were regarded as interconnected pursuits.

The introduction of Western formal education during the colonial period disrupted this integration. Mission schools prioritised literacy, Christian religious instruction, and academic preparation, progressively marginalising indigenous approaches to moral formation (Bogonko, 1991; Sifuna & Otiende, 2009). Post-independence governments recognised the resulting deficit and attempted to restore character education by introducing values-related subjects—Social Education and Ethics, Life Skills, Guidance and Counselling—into the curriculum (Nyambwari et al., 2013; Otewa, 2016). These interventions remained additive, however. They inserted character-related content without reconceptualising the teacher's professional formation or equipping teacher educators to prepare student teachers as intentional moral character educators.

The consequences are backed by empirical evidence. WERK's (2015) national survey revealed that Kenyan teachers lack knowledge, skills, and motivation in moral character education. Ochula (2012), Githaiga et al. (2014), and Otewa (2016) document signs of moral decline among Kenyan youth, including examination malpractice, student unrest, and corruption, which point to a systemic failure of character education in schools rather than individual moral lapses. Narvaez (2010) and Campbell (2003) clearly state: such systemic failure requires systemic reform, beginning with teacher education.

Structural Gaps in the Current Primary Teacher Education Programme

Absence of a dedicated moral character education course

The 2004 PTE syllabus (RoK, 2004) does not include any course that explicitly addresses the moral dimensions of teaching, professional ethics, or preparation for moral character education. Religious Education and Guidance and Counselling are offered as subject areas but are regarded as knowledge domains to be transmitted to pupils, not as professional development for student teachers as moral educators. The programme's implicit assumption that moral agency arises naturally from subject matter and pedagogical skills is challenged by decades of research showing that such transfer does not occur without explicit preparation (Campbell, 2003; WERK, 2015). Critically, this absence is not confined to the now-phased-out P1 Certificate programme. A review of the three-year Diploma in Primary Teacher Education (DPTE) introduced in 2016, and its 2024 successor, the Diploma in Teacher Education (DTE-PP&P), reveals an identical structural omission. While both programmes expand coverage of child development, curriculum studies, and inclusive education, neither includes a course dedicated to moral character pedagogy or the professional formation of teachers as moral educators. The gap identified in 2004 has persisted across two successive curriculum reforms.

An assessment culture inimical to moral formation

70% of the PTE assessment is administered by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) through summative examinations (Ole Katitia, 2015). This structure necessarily prioritises propositional knowledge and sidelines the development of reflective, relational, and dispositional competencies;



precisely the capacities that moral character education requires. Student teachers trained within this system learn that what matters in teaching is the transmission of examinable knowledge; the moral dimensions of their work are rendered invisible within the assessment framework. The DPTE and DTE-PP&P programmes have introduced micro-teaching and some portfolio components, representing a partial shift in assessment culture. However, these reforms do not extend to moral character formation: no assessment instrument in either programme explicitly evaluates student teachers' growth as moral educators, their ethical sensitivity, or their capacity to create a morally intentional classroom environment.

Curriculum overload that crowds out reflective pedagogy

The PTE programme requires teachers to cover many subjects in a short span of time (Ole Katitia, 2015). MoE (2019) highlights curriculum overload as a persistent structural issue. In this context, the ongoing reflective engagement necessary for the formation of a moral educator, including journaling, analysing ethical dilemmas, peer dialogue, and extended mentoring, lacks formal structure within the programme. The DPTE programme, at 3,000 instructional hours over three years, represents a significant expansion compared to the two-year P1 Certificate programme; the DTE-PP&P extends coverage further still. Yet in neither successor programme has structural space been created for the sustained reflective and relational engagement that moral character formation requires. More hours in the programme have not translated into better provision for moral pedagogy: the problem is not one of duration but of curricular priority.

The Moral Dimensions of Teaching as Professional Knowledge: A Theoretical Analysis

A critical analysis of the literature shows that the moral aspect of teaching is not an extra skill beyond Shulman's knowledge base model but is woven into the domains that Kenya's PTE programme has most persistently neglected. Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) demonstrate that six aspects of everyday classroom practice are morally rich: classroom climate, language use, power and authority relations, cultural diversity and representation in the curriculum, curriculum planning, and teacher agency. Every pedagogical decision in each of these aspects carries moral significance and, for better or worse, influences who pupils are becoming as moral individuals.

Teachers, as moral agents in Bandura's (2001) terms, exercise intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflection regarding their students' development. Campbell (2003; 2008) distinguishes two dimensions of teacher moral agency: as moral persons (embodying virtues such as honesty, fairness, care, and patience in professional conduct) and as moral educators (intentionally guiding students towards ethical understanding and practice). Both dimensions require professional formation; neither arises solely from subject matter expertise.

The implication is clear: to enhance moral character education in Kenya's primary schools, reform must start not within the schools themselves but in the teacher education programme. Teachers who have not been shaped as moral character educators cannot, regardless of policy directives, perform that role effectively once in-service (Narvaez, 2010; WERK, 2015). This is the foundation on which the proposed course framework is built.



Discussion: A Backward Design Framework for a Moral Character Course in Kenya's Primary School Teacher Education

This section outlines the three stages of a proposed moral character education course for Kenya's primary school teacher education programme, organised using Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design model. The course is conceived as an integrated professional element woven throughout both years of the PTE programme, not as an additional subject but as a conscious reorientation of professional development towards the moral aspects of the student teacher's role.

Stage 1 – Identifying Desired Learning Outcomes

Five desired learning outcomes are identified for the proposed course. Table I presents these outcomes, their level of required understanding in Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) framework, and their relationship to Shulman's (1987) knowledge domains.

Table I: Desired Learning Outcomes for the Proposed Moral Character Course

#	Learning Outcome	Understanding Level	Shulman Domain(s)
1	Teaching as a dual intellectual and moral endeavour	Content worth being familiar with	General pedagogical knowledge; Knowledge of educational ends & values
2	Theories and trajectories of children's moral development	Important to know and do	Knowledge of learners; Context knowledge
3	The six moral dimensions of teaching: climate, language, power, culture, curriculum, teacher agency	Important to know and do	General pedagogical knowledge; Curriculum knowledge; Context knowledge
4	The four IEE components of ethical expertise and strategies for cultivating them in pupils	Enduring understanding	Content knowledge; PCK for moral character education
5	PCK for moral character education: planning, executing, and assessing moral character development within one's subject area	Enduring understanding	All Shulman domains (integrated)

Note. PCK = Pedagogical Content Knowledge; IEE = Integrative Ethical Education (Narvaez, 2006; 2008).

Outcome 1 concerns the essential orientation. In line with Lortie's (1975) analysis of teacher socialisation, student teachers enter training colleges with implicit theories of teaching, formed over



years of observing as pupils, that equate teaching mainly with the delivery of academic content. This "apprenticeship of observation" must be explicitly identified and critically challenged before more complex moral pedagogy can be built upon it. Outcome 1 confirms that every teaching act, regardless of subject or intention, impacts who pupils are becoming as moral individuals.

Outcome 2 offers the developmental framework in which moral character pedagogy is situated. Narvaez's (2016) Triune Ethical Theory is especially relevant, highlighting three distinct moral orientations in children: security ethics (self-protective, fear-based), engagement ethics (care-focused, relational), and imagination ethics (principled, communally responsive), which reflect varied developmental backgrounds shaped by early experiences and the environment. Teachers who can recognise these orientations in their pupils can adapt their moral teaching accordingly.

Outcome 3, the moral dimensions of teaching, forms the core of the course's professional knowledge. Its aim is not just awareness but disciplined, professional application: student teachers should cultivate the analytical ability to recognise the moral importance of their daily pedagogical decisions and the practical skills to navigate them intentionally. This outcome addresses Buzzelli and Johnston's (2002) six morally saturated dimensions of classroom practice, paying particular attention to the Kenyan multicultural classroom.

Outcomes 4 and 5 embody the core understandings that underpin the entire course. Outcome 4, mastery of the IEE model's four components of ethical expertise, equips student teachers with both the theoretical understanding of what moral character education aims to develop and the practical instructional strategies to foster each component in pupils. Outcome 5, PCK for moral character education, functions as the culminating, integrative skill: the ability to apply developmental theory to subject-specific, age-appropriate, and contextually relevant moral character pedagogy. This distinguishes a teacher who understands moral development from one who can teach it effectively.

The proposed five-outcome framework is directly relevant to Kenya's ongoing transition to the Competency-Based Curriculum. The CBC's Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017) identifies citizenship as a core competency and positions values (among them integrity, social cohesion, and responsibility) as cross-cutting strands embedded across all learning areas rather than confined to a single subject. This design logic mirrors the argument of the present study: that moral character development is not a standalone subject, but a professional orientation woven through every act of teaching. A student teacher who has achieved Outcome 5 (PCK for moral character education) is precisely the kind of teacher the CBC's values strand requires: one who can make the moral dimensions of any subject area explicit, intentional, and pedagogically purposeful. The proposed course framework thus functions not only as a remedy for a historical deficit but as a direct preparation for the professional demands of CBC implementation.

Stage 2 – Determining Acceptable Evidence

Assessment strategies are differentiated according to the depth of understanding required by each outcome, reflecting backward design's insistence that evaluation criteria are established at the planning stage rather than appended to instruction as an afterthought.



For Outcome 1, formative quizzes and short reflective writing tasks provide adequate evidence of broad familiarity: "Distinguish between teaching as an intellectual enterprise and as a moral endeavour, drawing on two examples from your own experience as a learner." For Outcomes 2 and 3, which require professional application, richer instruments are needed: oral examinations in which student teachers explain developmental theories and their instructional implications; collaborative case study analyses of classroom moral dilemmas; and annotated lesson plans that identify the moral dimensions present in a specific teaching episode and propose strategies for leveraging them constructively.

For Outcomes 4 and 5, which require enduring understanding and the exercise of PCK for moral character education, assessment shifts to portfolio-based, sustained artefacts: reflective journals maintained throughout the course; personal essays on the relationship between the student teacher's own moral formation and their emerging pedagogical identity; and a detailed lesson plan demonstrating how a specific sub-skill of each IEE component can be cultivated within the student teacher's subject area and classroom context. These artefacts serve simultaneously as assessment instruments and as professional resources that graduate teachers carry into their in-service careers.

A key principle across all five levels is prioritising formative over summative assessment. Moral professional formation involves long-term dispositional change rather than short-term knowledge retention. Therefore, assessment must demonstrate evidence of developing professional identity, deepening reflective skills, and gradually incorporating moral character pedagogy into teaching practice, aspects that conventional KNEC-administered exams cannot measure.

Stage 3 – Developing Learning Experiences and Instruction

Learning experiences are chosen based on their alignment with both the content of the proposed course and the pedagogical principles of the IEE model, since a moral character course delivered solely through didactic instruction would be self-defeating. The IEE framework argues that ethical expertise develops through immersive, authentic, expert-mentored practice; therefore, learning experiences must foster structured opportunities for student teachers to encounter, analyse, and practise moral-pedagogical reasoning in conditions that resemble the complexity of real classrooms.

Biographical and autobiographical reflection

The course begins with an in-depth autobiographical reflection. Student teachers are encouraged to explore their own moral development: the values passed down by family and community, the cultural legacy shaping their perceptions of right and wrong, and the teachers who demonstrated, either positively or negatively, what it means to teach with moral purpose. Through guided journaling and small-group discussions, this activity uncovers the beliefs formed through observation that might limit the development of a broader moral approach to teaching and begins to foster what Husu and Tirri (2020) describe as the moral stance of the teacher, a reflective, principled attitude towards students' development that underpins effective moral character education.

Ethical dilemma analysis and structured moral reasoning

Case study analysis and structured moral dilemma discussions provide the cognitive scaffolding for ethical judgement and sensitivity (IEE Outcomes 3 and 4). Student teachers engage with dilemmas



drawn from Kenyan primary school contexts: a teacher discovering that a high-achieving student has been cheating; a teacher suspecting a child is experiencing domestic violence; a teacher needing to teach curriculum content that misrepresents or omits the cultural heritage of minority pupils. Working within structured discussion groups, student teachers identify conflicting moral values, explain the reasoning behind various responses, and develop the moral problem-solving skills that Rest et al. (1999) identify as central to ethical judgement.

Lesson design for moral character development

Lesson planning for moral character development is the primary method for developing PCK in moral character education (Outcome 5). Student teachers create, peer-review, and refine lesson plans that highlight specific opportunities within their subject areas to foster IEE components. A mathematics lesson on resource distribution becomes a chance to promote ethical sensitivity to equity. A language arts lesson on persuasive writing offers an occasion to explore the moral responsibilities involved in communication. A social studies lesson on community roles becomes a platform for ethical motivation through civic engagement. This process makes the hidden moral curriculum of every classroom explicit and equips teachers to navigate it with purpose and skill.

Mentored ethical practice during teaching practice

The teaching practice component of the PTE programme provides the most vital environment for fostering ethical behaviour and integrating the four IEE components into real professional practice. However, for this to occur, teaching practice supervision must explicitly focus on moral character education rather than merely on technical and methodological skills. Supervising teachers and teacher educators in colleges need training to observe, discuss, and provide formative feedback on the moral aspects of student teachers' practice, including the quality of their classroom environment, the moral sensitivity shown in their language and interactions, and the deliberate ways they incorporate the moral dimensions of their subject teaching to encourage character development.

Conclusions

This study argues that the ongoing failure of moral character education in Kenya's primary schools fundamentally stems from issues in teacher education. It suggests that addressing this problem requires a systematic rethinking of the primary school teacher education curriculum to incorporate structured professional development focused on moral character pedagogy. Three broadly significant conclusions emerge.

Firstly, the same domains of professional knowledge that Shulman (1987) identifies as essential for expert subject teaching are also needed for expert moral character education, provided they are intentionally aimed at that goal. This finding has significant practical implications for the CBC transition: moral character development does not need to be added as a separate subject to an already busy teacher training programme but can be embedded as a deliberate professional focus within existing knowledge areas, especially PCK, knowledge of learners, context knowledge, and understanding of educational purposes. This finding is particularly urgent given that the DTE-PP&P



(2024), the programme currently preparing teachers for CBC schools, similarly contains no dedicated moral character education course or formally assessed moral pedagogy competency.

Second, the IEE model's four components of ethical expertise offer a rigorous, empirically based content framework for moral character teacher education that is pedagogically manageable, suited to Kenya's multicultural schools, and professionally recognised within a secular, pluralistic educational system. By framing moral character as expertise rather than as innate virtue or religious observance, the IEE model makes character education the professional duty of every teacher and teacher educator, rather than a specialised function for religious studies instructors.

Third, the backward design model shows that a morally ambitious and intellectually rigorous course can be developed within the structural limits of Kenya's PTE programme, provided the design starts with clearly defined professional outcomes rather than content coverage. The five-outcome framework proposed in this study, from foundational orientation to the development of PCK for moral character education, forms a coherent, progressive professional development pathway that spans the two years of training and creates assessment artefacts of enduring professional value.

For future researchers, the most urgent priorities are: empirical studies of current teacher educators' knowledge and practice in moral character pedagogy in Kenya's PTTCs; participatory action research to pilot the proposed course framework; and longitudinal studies tracking the moral character education practices of graduate teachers in their primary school classrooms. For policy-makers, the immediate priorities are: commissioning a pilot of the proposed course framework within the revised PTE programme; incorporating moral character pedagogy competencies into the selection and professional development of teacher educators; and reforming the PTE assessment architecture to include portfolio-based, formative instruments that capture professional identity development alongside knowledge acquisition.

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