**Full Length Research**

# Navigating character formation: The role of values-based education in Kenyan secondary schools

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**ABSTRACT:** Students' character formation has become a primary focus in educational systems worldwide due to its long-term impact on students' and a nation's future progress. Although Kenya has elements of character formation enshrined in key foundational and legal documents, there is little research on the role of values-based education in students' character development. This study investigates the role of values-based educational practices and their influence on students' character development in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study is grounded in the Ecological Systems Theory, emphasising the interconnected nature of various factors that affect students' character development. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data were collected using a mixed-methods approach, comprising, questionnaires, interviews, and Focus Group discussions. The research findings reveal that teachers face challenges in devoting sufficient time to values education due to an overemphasis on academic performance and a strenuous workload, which limit the effectiveness of different programs and practices related to character formation. Secondly, inadequate parental involvement in supporting and reinforcing values was identified as a significant hindrance to students' character development. The study recommends establishing a supportive school culture that fosters students' character development, where stakeholders explicitly collaborate to teach and model values. This collaborative effort is vital to bridging the gap between theoretical and practical execution, ensuring students are equipped with the character traits necessary for success in their academic and personal lives. The study concludes that a pressing need exists to enhance values-based education initiatives within public secondary schools to inculcate values necessary for fostering responsible, well-rounded, and ethical citizens. This research will contribute to the ongoing implementation of competence-based curriculum in Kenyan schools, particularly by highlighting the importance of stakeholders' collaboration in character formation programs for students. The research may contribute to solutions for addressing delinquent behaviour among students in public schools.

**Keywords:** Basic Education Act, conducive environment, Ecological Systems Theory, holistic education, indiscipline.

## INTRODUCTION

Young people are a major driving force for a nation's future and progress. This driving force is entirely composed of students in both basic and higher learning institutions. Nonetheless, the declining moral values among students in these institutions of learning as evident in increasing levels of indiscipline in and outside schools continue to raise questions and deep worrying concerns to the public (Daud *et al.,* 2023) because a declining morality produces social challenges which have long-term negative impacts on individuals and a country's development. For instance, the prevalence of unruly conduct, including verbal abuse, violence, bullying, cultism, drugs, substance abuse, and sometimes murder in institutions of learning, underscores a persistent gap between the aspired educational ideals and their practical realisation. This article examines the urgent need for values-based education for students' character development.

True education extends beyond merely transmitting

knowledge and skills to instilling essential moral values for a holistic individual's growth and development. According to Martin Luther King Jr., true education must extend beyond intellectual development to character development (Simpson, 2018). A mix of intelligence and character requires formal learning institutions and informal channels to prioritise a balance in learners' mental, physical, social, psychological and spiritual development. The impact of this holistic development ripples outwards and influences individuals' environment, including their school's social groups, peers, family and society. Values-based education is a foundation for building a robust values system in schools, particularly for learners, enabling individuals to navigate life's complexities with a mix of intellect, wisdom and ethics. Daud *et al.* (2023) confirm that modern educational systems must balance "hard skills" and "soft skills," ensuring the development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Students' character development has been a consistent theme among philosophers and psychologists, underscoring the weight of tradition and the need for continuity. The Greek philosopher Aristotle viewed the formation of students' character as essential for virtuous living and citizenship (Lu, 2024). In one of his books, *'The Republic'*, Plato's assertion states that a country's character depends on the quality of its people's character (Wycliffe, 2016). Highlighting the importance of good character, Hossian and Ghani (2018) explain that any noticeable national progress depends on the development of its youth, from whom the country's character is mirrored. This development highlights the acquisition of values as central to an individual's ability to differentiate right from wrong (Gamage *et al.*, 2021).

Beyond philosophical and theoretical perspectives, students' character development is also a concern of the Divine. After God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, He instructed them saying, "Teach them to your children, and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about…and write them on the doorposts of your houses and your gates so that you and your children may live" (The African Bible, 1999, Deut. 6:6 – 9; 11:19 – 20). Further, the Bible emphasizes the importance of early character training, instructing parents to train children how they should go so that even when they become old, they would not depart from acquired behaviour (The African Bible, 1999, Prov. 22:6). Adults, whether consciously or not, influence students' character through instructions, their actions and examples. Biblical texts reinforce the roles of parents, teachers, and the school's community in instilling and reinforcing values as significant components for students' character development.

Moreover, international organisations such as UNESCO recognise the importance of values education in achieving sustainable goals (Rieckman, 2017). Education for sustainable development must be grounded in values education to foster understanding, tolerance, peace, respect, accountability and harmony while navigating this rapidly growing world. With the advancement of technology and nuclear weapons, nations under UNESCO cannot thrive and achieve sustainable goals without equipping the future workforce with the right tools for survival and progress in the implementation process. In addition, addressing societal challenges requires holistic preparedness of individuals, with education prioritizing character formation, primarily at home and in schools. Therefore, studying values-based educational inculcation practices and their significant role in shaping individuals for positive societal change is crucial.

In Africa, values education has also been a momentous focus in youth education, especially during the traditional education curriculum. The emphasis on character development was also reflected in post-independence Africa's educational goals, where character-building systems involved transmitting moral knowledge, which covered knowledge on ethical values, moral reasoning and the ability to make morally guided decisions. Traditional African education success was manifested in the display of good habits and good personality in learners. However, Hossian and Ghani (2018) highlight that the introduction of Western education and the phasing out of African indigenous education led to a gradual decline in values-education as schools became hubs of cognitive development, high mean scores, elitism and good academic certification. Therefore, the focus on academic performance deprived students of fundamental values, which has continued to create a gap throughout students' entire lives in schools and society. As a result, cases of intolerant activities among graduates and students in schools, at home and in society continue to be recorded in African schools and society.

In South Africa, the reports of violence targeting teachers and students in schools in 2018 were alarming. Gous (2018) reported that a student fatally stabbed a teacher. This incident was followed by a serious address by the Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga, who warned that such an atrocity was intolerable and unacceptable. Relatedly, News24 (2018) unearthed similar incidents ranging from books, water, and stones thrown at teachers as well as assault, bullying, gun pointing and gun shooting to stabbing of teachers and students. Further, a learner was seen in a viral video throwing water on a teacher's face at Kimberley Boys' High School. At Fumana High School in Katlehong, another learner was accused of attempting to stab fellow learners at the school (News24, 2018). Moreover, at Kwamasakhane High School in KwaZulu-Natal, two learners were stabbed to death by a fellow learner (News24, 2018). Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020) associated these tragic realities with the gradual moral bankruptcy.

Kenya's national goals of education, as outlined in the Basic Education Act and in the Constitutional provisions, emphasize the importance of values education. These documents underscore the importance of integrating the

values of integrity, peace, cohesion, tolerance, and inclusion into teaching and learning to produce self-disciplined and ethical citizens. However, schools have continued to experience tragic realities resulting from students' general unrest and violence. According to the report by the National Crime Research Centre (2016), a wave of devastating arson erupted among 130 secondary schools, with 123 secondary schools across the country suffering significant loss of lives and damage to school property. Furthermore, Ashley and Kiambo (2022) explain the terrors of school fires that claimed lives and property and led to the imprisonment of the perpetrators. For instance, a Form Three student was found guilty of stabbing two teachers in Kisii (Otieno, 2021), while at Moi Girls High School, Nairobi, the arson attack, which some students orchestrated, left eight students dead and at least 10 seriously injured (Ondieki and Mutavi, 2017).

Negligence in values education for students' character formation leads to detrimental choices and behaviours, impacting schools, families and society. Student delinquency in Kenyan schools indicates a significant gap in the educational system, which directly manifests moral decline. Therefore, teaching and learning practices must be evaluated to address this pressing problem. These painful occurrences inspired the need to assess values-based educational inculcation practices and their influence on students' character development as sustainable interventions and strategies to address the waves of students' indiscipline and violent behaviour in secondary schools, particularly in Nairobi County. By investigating the roles of teachers and parents in inculcating values for students' character development, the researcher sought to offer insights into practical approaches to reinforce character development programs, reduce disciplinary issues, and foster a favourable home and school climate.

## METHODOLOGY

The study investigates the roles of values-based educational practices and their influence on students' character development in Nairobi County public secondary schools. The study was grounded in the Ecological Systems Theory, which describes the impact of the interconnected nature of systems on child development. The investigation was narrowed to microsystem and mesosystem strata because of their immediate and long-lasting effects on the students. Since the child is at the centre of the theory, parents and teachers are in proximity as they play their expected superior roles in students' character development in schools and at home.

The study's target population included 96 public secondary schools. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed to get a sample size of 252 respondents. The study employed descriptive survey designs and mixed-methods research methodology to gather primary and secondary data to analyse the research enquiry comprehensively. Primary data were obtained directly from the respondents through the administration of structured research instruments, including survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and Focus Group Discussions. These instruments facilitated the generation of original insights into the subject matter, providing an in-depth understanding of the research inquiry. Conversely, secondary data were derived from an extensive literature review, encompassing online scholarly articles, journals, books, and other relevant documents. Quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires for schools' principals and form-three class teachers, who rated values-based educational practices on a 1 – 5-point Likert-type Scale, namely Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Uncertain (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). On the other hand, qualitative data were obtained using semi-structured interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions. The semi-structured interview questions were used to gather in-depth insights from the deputy principals, guidance and counselling teachers in charge, and form-three parents' representatives. Focused Group Discussions were conducted with the form three students, where semi-structured questions were posed to each group for discussion. Quantitative and qualitative approaches provided comprehensive data, reducing potential response bias and the risk of groupthink, particularly in FGDs.

To prevent cognitive biases, the research instruments were reviewed by experts before and after the pilot study. The research instruments were then pre-tested in two public secondary schools, including two principals, two deputy principals, four form three class teachers, two Guidance and Counselling teachers, two form three parents' representatives, and a Focus Group of twelve form-three students. Piloting helped to edit, check for clarity, eliminate language ambiguity, and enhance the respondents' comprehension of the instruments. In addition, clear instructions regarding anonymity and providing honest feedback were written on the questionnaires and communicated verbally to the respondents before data collection. Moreover, the researcher ensured that schools participating in the pilot study were excluded from the actual study sample. Validity of the instruments was tested through expert review, while the reliability of the tools was verified using the test-retest method. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, and presented in frequency tables and percentages. On the other hand, Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using narrative descriptions and verbatim quotes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research instruments response rate

The questionnaires were distributed to 48 principals and 48 form three class teachers. Due to the impact of COVID-

**Table 1.** Questionnaires, interviews and FGD return rate.

| Respondents | Sample | Response | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Principals | 48 | 46 | 96 |
| F3 Class Teachers | 48 | 46 | 96 |
| Deputy Principals | 48 | 30 | 54 |
| G& C Teachers | 48 | 32 | 58 |
| Form 3 Students | 48 | 48 | 100 |
| F3 Parents' Reps | 12 | 12 | 75 |
| Total | 252 | 214 | 85 |
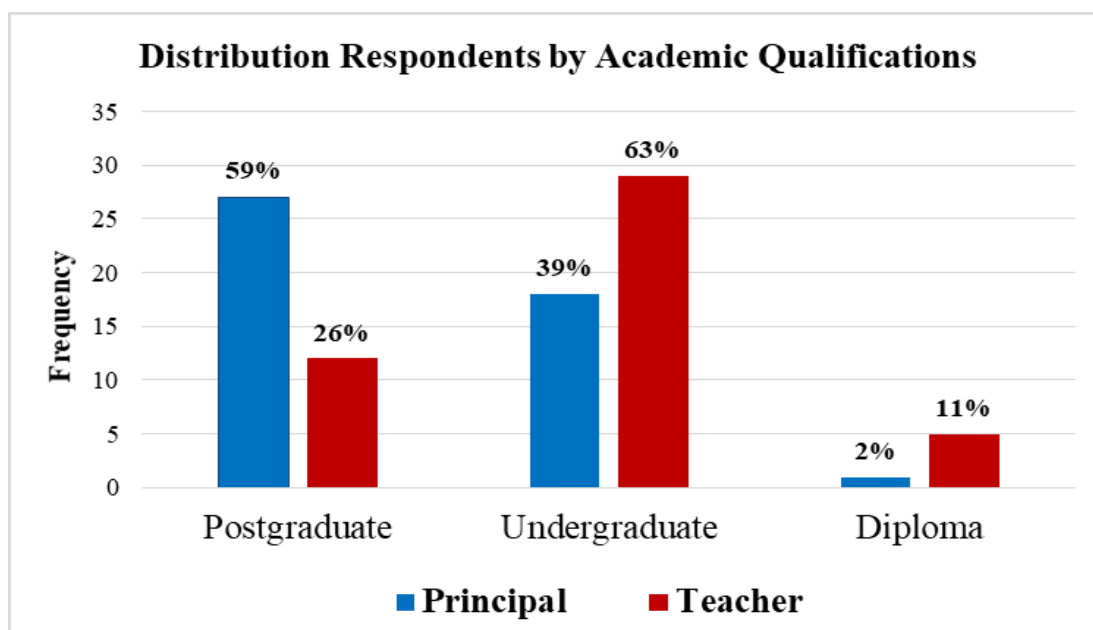


**Figure 1.** Academic qualifications of teachers and principals (N=92).

19, two principals and two form three class teachers did not return their questionnaires as Kenyan schools were immediately closed, and the researcher could not access them. In addition, 16 and 18 interviews were not conducted for the guidance and counselling teacher in charge and deputy principals, respectively. Table 1 shows the response rate, with 214 (85%) respondents participating in the study.

**Sociodemographic information of the respondents**

This section includes respondents' professional qualifications and duration of service in the teaching profession. The two features were essential to the study because students' character development is a practice that requires time to influence through a continual and intentional transmission of values. Figure 1 suggests that principals and form three class teachers could influence student character development because they had undergone formal and professional training in acquiring the essentials for intellectual and student character formation. Similarly, Figure 2 shows data relating to the distribution of respondents according to the number of years in their teaching profession. The results indicated that principals and Form Three class teachers had worked long enough to impart values that contribute to students' character formation. It is expected that the longer one stays in the service, the higher the mastery of content in terms of knowledge, skills, and values for students' holistic formation. Hence, their ability to integrate these domains is paramount in the ongoing character formation of learners. Traditionally, teachers with more extended experience are assigned roles of guidance and counselling in most schools. However, this was not so for most schools, as highlighted by one of the respondents:

*Some of our teachers, including those in charge of the guidance and counselling department, are very young. Therefore, they may not have sufficient experience to*
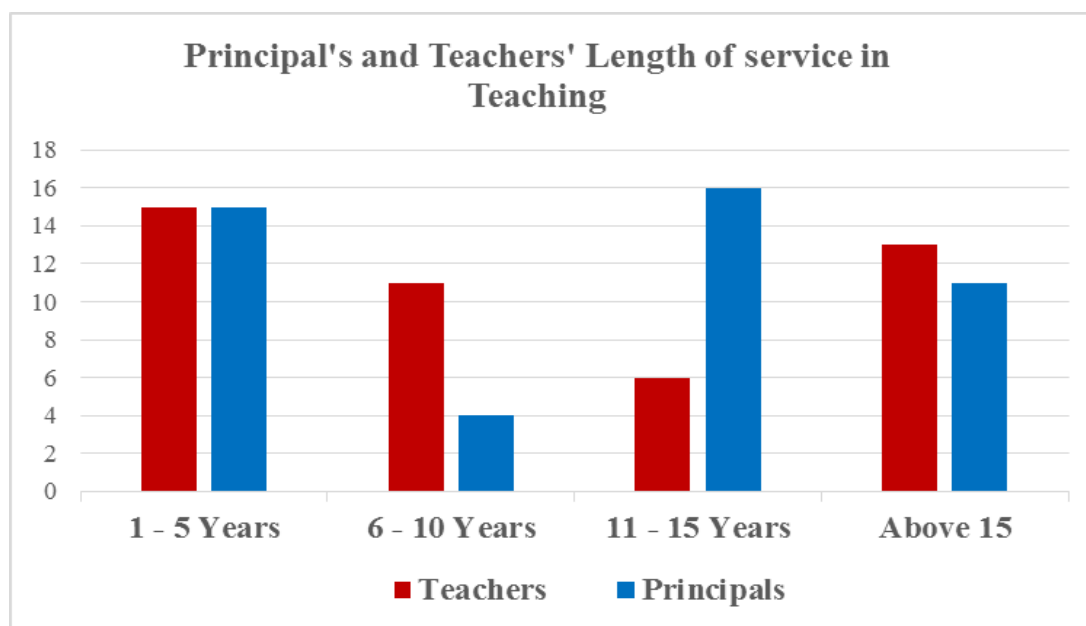
**Figure 2.** The respondents' length of service in their current position (N=92).

*guide learners, especially on matters that directly or indirectly affect them….* (DP2)

**The role of teachers in the inculcation of values for students' character**

Students' mentorship programs, such as guidance and counselling and Life Skills Lessons, were introduced in Kenya's secondary schools to help learners acquire social-emotional skills, which are key to students' character development. These skills enable students to develop coping mechanisms when faced with modern challenges and stress, thereby enhancing their resilience and adaptability. The findings on the role of teachers in inculcating values for students' character as illustrated in **Figure 3** show that 95% (87/92) of the respondents approved that the competitive examination pressures usually overtook the students' mentorship programs by teachers, whereas 4% (4/92) were undecided and 1% (1/92) disagreed with the statement. In addition, when responding to the question of whether teachers have enough time to teach values through these programs and during curriculum instructions, 66% (61/92) of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 23% (21/92) agreed, and 11% (10/92) were undecided. Besides, assessing students' ability to take responsibilities with or without the teachers' supervision showed that 60% (55/92) were in disagreement with the statement, whereas 30% (28/92) agreed with the statement, and 10% (9/92) were undecided.

Further, 87% (80/92) of the respondents did not agree with the statement that teachers are not good role models to students, while 10% (9/92) agreed with the statement,

and 3% (3) had a neutral opinion. 71% (65/92) of the respondents disagreed with the practice of teaching values during curriculum instructions, whereas 22% (20/92) agreed with the statement, and 8% (7/92) were undecided. Slightly more than half of the respondents, 61% (56/92), responded that teachers' ability to exercise their responsibility and authority in disciplining errant students had lessened over time, whereas 30% (28/92) disagreed with this statement, and 9% (8/92) were undecided.

Based on the above findings, it is evident that most respondents (95%) (87/92) agreed that competitive academic programs overtake students' mentorship programs and inculcation of values in public schools, neglecting students' emotional intelligence aspects that are necessary in navigating their daily lives. The finding is similar to that of Wamahiu (2017), which states that a culture of high mean scores, competitive examinations, and academic ranking were primarily the main focus in most public schools. This culture pressures Kenyan teachers and drives them away from teaching values that support the development of students' self-management skills and coping strategies for healthy and productive lives. It is essential to note that focusing on academic performance and excellence risks students' acquisition of soft skills and values, which are crucial to social, career progress and national cohesion.

In addition, 71% (65/92) of the respondents disagreed with the assertion that teachers teach values during curriculum instruction. Although some respondents (22%) agreed, the implication is that the pressure of syllabus coverage and producing good KCSE results hinders teachers from teaching values during instruction. Consequently, students' character formation is not effectively
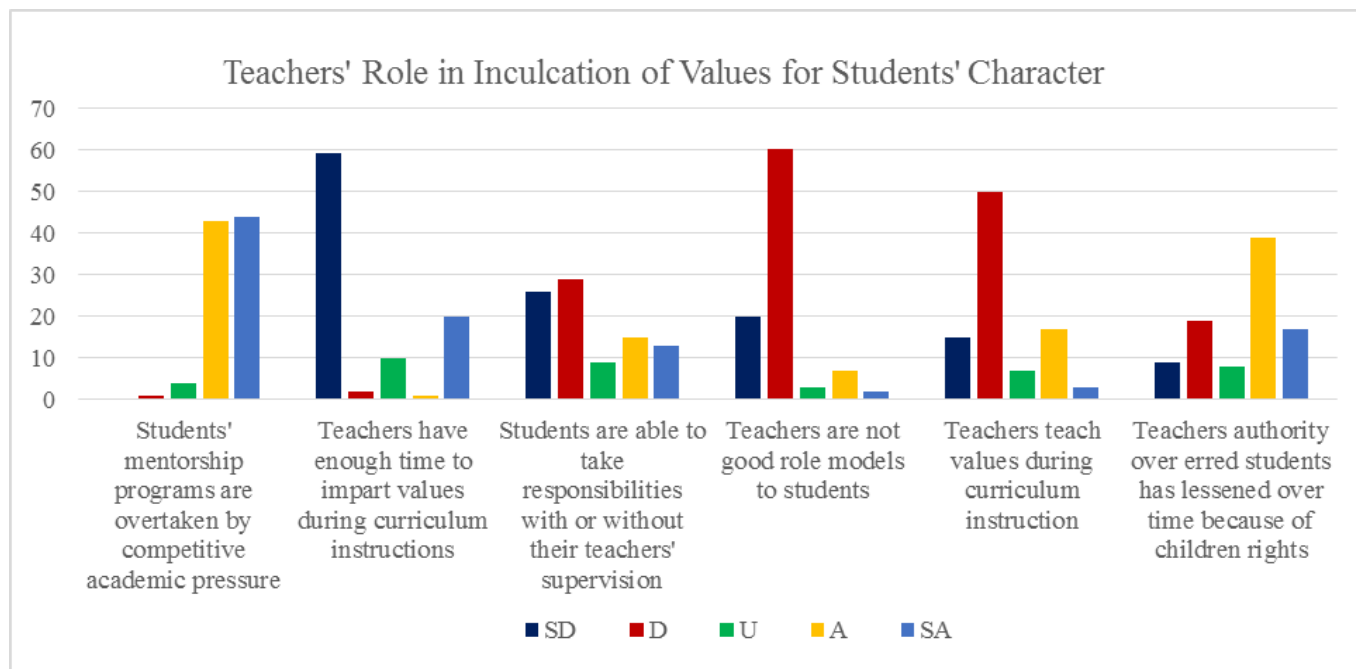
**Figure 3.** Teachers' role in inculcating values for students' character (N=92).

done. Coupled with this finding is the general disagreement by 66% (61/92) of respondents who felt that teachers did not have enough time to impart values during formal curriculum instruction. Instead, they focused on the cognitive syllabus coverage and completion of the workload. Although students' character development is hinged on values education, the practice was not taken as seriously as part of the teachers' responsibility. Moreover, most FGD students agreed with the findings, with some stating that:

*Teachers can teach us values if they do not have too much pressure to produce the best grades at the end of the year. As a result, they do not teach values, but academics take over the aspects of values. (S1).*

Further, a majority of teachers who are in charge of guidance and counselling programs had similar views that:

*Some of the Programs, such as Life Skills, Guidance & Counselling, and School Families, that our school has established to impart values are not frequently offered due to time constraints. Sometimes, we do academic work in place of these programs…. When we provide counselling sessions to students, the emphasis is mainly directed to academic performance (T1).*

Subsequently, another significant finding from this study was that teachers are good role models to students, as 87% (80/92) of respondents disagreed with the statement that teachers were not good role models. Role modelling is one of the most significant ways to impact students'

character development. The findings show that teachers were seen to meet the expectation of exhibiting good examples to students by demonstrating positive and admirable traits. By being living role models to students, students expressed more trust for teachers than their counterparts, the parents. However, teachers' secondary role should not be confused with the primary role that parents play in students' character development. One of the FGD students supported this assertion, noting that:

*Teachers are our immediate role models. Some of them have qualities we want to imitate that can make us better students. They do their best to mentor and help us to be good, and are most of the time more than our parents because we have them always, and they try to listen to us…. (S3).*

Nevertheless, the finding on whether the teachers' ability to exercise their responsibility and authority in disciplining errant students had lessened in public schools was agreed upon by 58% of the respondents. The results are supported by Segalo and Rambuda (2018), whose findings on some selected South African public schools showed that teachers were not sure about disciplining students, mainly when it came to human rights principles that were charted in the Republic of South Africa constitution and the South African Education Act of 2000, respectively. Lastly, the confirmation of these findings was evident in Kisii High School, where a form three student stabbed two teachers with a knife, rendering them unconscious, and publicly bragged that he had punished the teachers after refusing to bow to the punishment given

to him for being late (Abuga, 2021).

According to the reviewed literature, there appears to be a universal consensus among various authors and researchers that teachers play a significant role in values education, which is crucial in the formation and development of character in learners. The teachers' intentional implementation of values-loaded programs and practices can enhance students' academic success and, most importantly, prepare them to become compassionate, ethical, responsible, respectful and dependable members of society. The study's findings suggest that values-based education inculcation programs are explicitly integrated into the curriculum, encompassing life skills lessons, guidance, counselling, and other school-based initiatives. However, the practical implementation of these programs often falls short, with teachers shifting their focus to the academic development of learners, even though they have received proper training and the required length of time to make an impact. It seems vital for teachers to understand the importance of these programs and the need to implement them as part of the curriculum, as doing so would positively impact students' character and personalities, ultimately enhancing academic excellence. The findings highlighted the reasons for the rising indiscipline issues among students in many public schools, as the development of students' character, which is primarily based on values, is often overlooked.

## The role of parents in students' character development

The findings on parental involvement in students' character development Figure 4 indicate that a large majority of the respondents, 57% (52/92) respondents, disagreed with the statement that parents/guardians visit the school to monitor their children's character development, whereas 33% (30/92) agreed with the statement and 11% (10) had a neutral opinion. In addition, 92% (85/92) of respondents disagreed that parents play an active role in their children's character development, while 8% (7/92) agreed. Moreover, 85% (78/92) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that parents give adequate time to their children in teaching and modelling values, while 9% (8/92) agreed with the statement, and 7% (6/92) were undecided.

Further, 59% (54/92) disagreed that there is a strong teacher-parent collaboration in students' character development, whereas 9% (8/92) were uncertain and 33% (30/92) agreed. Among the study respondents, 70% (64/92) disagreed that parents support teachers' efforts in reinforcing students' character development, while 26% (24/92) agreed with the statement, and 4% (4/92) were uncertain. Upon assessing the efforts of schools to promote parental involvement, the majority of the respondents, 59% (54/92), disagreed that the schools create programs that involve parents in the character development of students, whereas 33% (30/92) agreed

with the statement, and 9% (8/92) were uncertain.

A significant finding of this study is that a substantial majority of the respondents, 92%, disagreed with the notion that parents play an active role in their children's character development. This suggests that the intended formation of students' character, which ideally requires parents to take the lead, often does not occur as teachers, who are already occupied with formal curriculum delivery and academic performance, are left to shoulder these responsibilities. Another key finding is that 85% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that parents devote sufficient time to their children to model and teach values. This finding suggests that children may seek guidance from uncensored sources, particularly the media, which could negatively influence their choices and behaviour.

Qualitative data revealed that parents had limited time with their children due to the demands and changes of modernity, as well as career requirements. As a result, they leave the parenting responsibilities to teachers, who feel a national obligation to educate and care for their children. Professor Magoha, the former Education Minister, seemed to reflect the above finding as he was quoted as blaming parents for the rising cases of indiscipline across the schools in the country. The Professor added that parents tolerate their ill-mannered children and fail to nurture them well.

*"There is something called tough love. Our current parents do not give even one per cent of tough love. …. It is a societal problem. We treat them as eggs and force them on principals in schools…."* (Mbati, 2021)

Moreover, quoting three of the interviewees and the focus group discussion respondents:

*The root of everything good or bad is the home environment and the immediate neighbourhood of the child. Children learn values at home. However, modern society and its demands for survival have pushed the parents away from their children, so who teaches these values? Some parents believe that teachers will teach and parents will learn, but the teacher only does their part. Parents who are usually absent can significantly affect a child's self-esteem, resulting in numerous adverse effects on a child's life. We have witnessed children on social media dancing with their counterparts, boys, in weird styles, but unfortunately, their parents are often unaware until they are sometimes informed. Regrettably, when they are told, they sometimes react, stating that their child is being falsely accused…. (GC4).*

*Our parents do not spare time from being busy with their businesses. Their help as far as our upbringing is concerned is minimal – they pay our school fees and provide our food. We miss our time together; when they are not with us, we need someone to listen and understand*
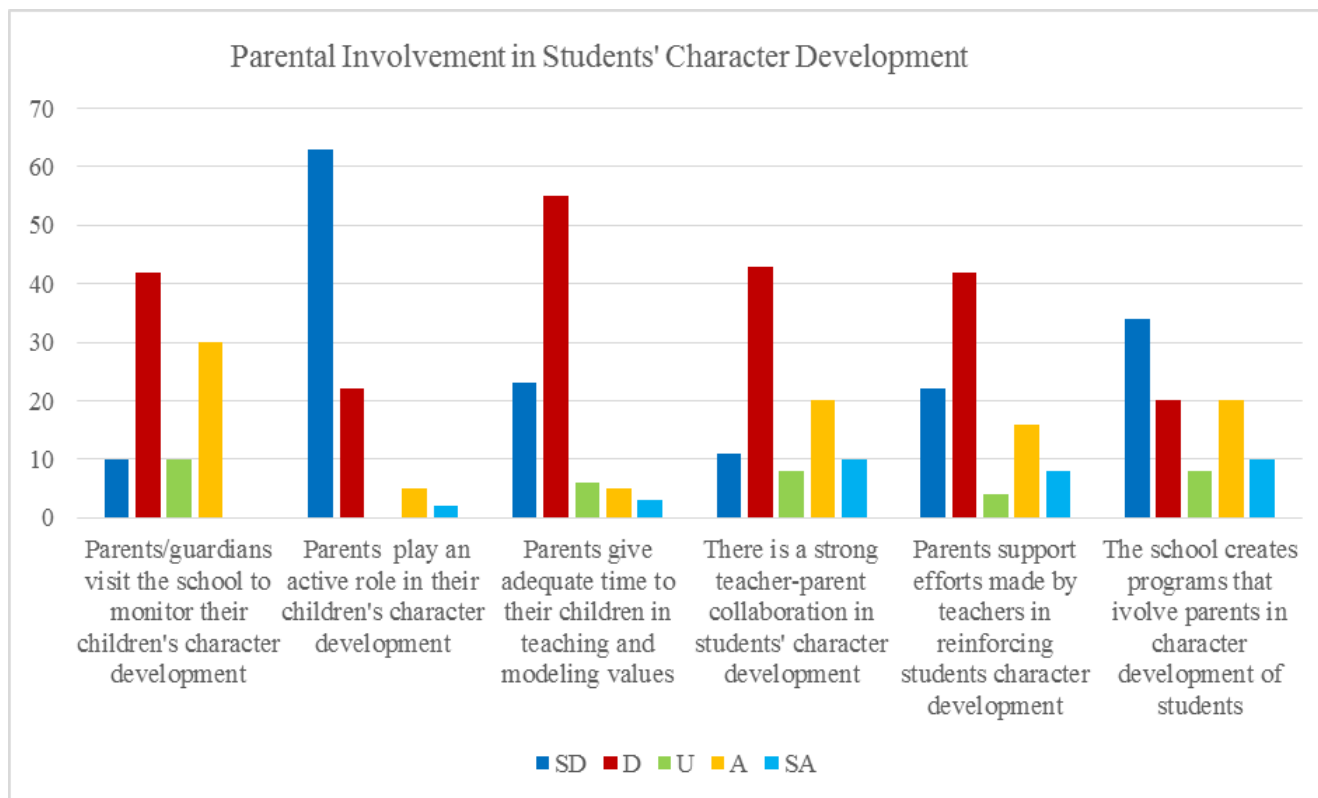
**Figure 4.** Role of parental involvement in students' character development (N=92).

*our problems, but they are not there. Sometimes, we become depressed, and we do bad things, which eventually become habits…. (S3)*

*Unfortunately, we parents cannot spend as much time with our children as we wish. I am expected to report to my place of work at 8.00 a.m. and leave the workplace at 5.00 p.m. This means I leave home earlier than 6 a.m. to avoid car traffic and arrive on time to report to work. Usually, my children are still asleep then, and by the time I return home, they are asleep. This is a hustle we cannot avoid. I love my children, but I must work to cater to their needs. I know they are missing something that might affect them tomorrow…. (P2)*

*Our school is surrounded by a community that is not very supportive, especially regarding drug and alcohol abuse. Recently, we invited all fathers to come to school and speak to the boys. It was discouraging as some of the parents arrived at the meeting late and drunk and could not participate. Boys whose parents came from drug families felt ashamed, and their* self-esteem *lowered. (GC8)*

The findings indicate that a lack of active parental engagement and partnership with schools hinders the modelling of positive behaviours and the creation of a

supportive atmosphere essential for children's value acquisition. Parental involvement significantly influences students' mindsets and character traits such as resilience, honesty, trust, kindness, and respect. Parents shape their children's personalities and promote personal growth by fostering a supportive environment, encouraging dialogue, and modelling positive behaviour. Conversely, insufficient parental engagement may lead to personality dwarfism and reduced confidence, particularly during crises. The 2010 Kenyan constitution emphasises the role of parents in children's growth and values education. However, parental involvement is declining due to career demands, leaving children without adequate guidance and support. This lack of interaction creates a risk as children turn to external influences for help, which can adversely affect their behaviour. Respondents in interviews highlighted the need to address this gap, stressing the importance of quality time for parents and children to engage and teach values effectively, stating that:

*Parents have a very active role in their children's character development right from birth. The child sees the parent first before anybody else does. It is clear today and in our modern society that this role is dwindling, as parents expect more from us teachers than from themselves. Parents want us, teachers, to perform their roles as much as we do ours, but it is impossible because our role is to*

*teach and implement the curriculum, parents' roles are primary and ours, secondary and the two cannot be swapped…. (GC12)*

Another significant finding indicated that 70% of respondents felt parents do not support teachers' efforts to reinforce students' character development. The findings suggest that imparting acceptable values to learners is a collaborative effort in which the parents and the school community play a critical role. Parental involvement in schools is an obligatory prerequisite for the effective implementation of values education. These findings reflect a failure by crucial stakeholders to establish alliances in implementing programs and practices that are crucial for students' character development.

## Conclusion

This study examined the role of parents and teachers in students' character development in public secondary schools in Kenya, aiming to provide insights into curbing students' indiscipline in schools. Preparing and producing ethical and moral citizens does not happen in a vacuum. Within the microsystem and mesosystem strata, the immediate social and environmental factors the student's home and school environment, where different persons play different roles to influence and shape the student's behaviour, personality, and character. When student fail to acquire proper guidance and positive formation within the microsystem, they do not have adequate tools to fit in other layers during their growth and developmental years. Children will, therefore, seek attention through inappropriate behaviour or from the wrong places or persons, as explained in the secondary data review.

One of the study's significant findings was that in pursuing high grades and academic achievement, teachers often faced an overloaded workload and time constraints that led to prioritizing more academic programs and formal curriculum over students' character development programs, such as life skills education. As a result, essential elements that nurture students' moral and ethical growth were overshadowed, limiting opportunities for holistic development.

Secondly, the role of parents in their children's character formation entails providing the expected affection, time, attention, and security by creating a welcoming home environment that supports their children's emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social, and psychological well-being. However, quantitative and qualitative data indicated significant shortcomings. There is a lack of parental engagement and partnership with their children and teachers in fostering character development. Particularly, due to modernity and career demands and expectations, parents did not devote enough time to interacting and engaging with their children. Hence, parenting roles relating to character formation were left unattended, leading their children to seek uncensored and unaccep-

table alternatives to deal with their fears and confusion, some of which led to violent behaviour.

## Recommendations

As the world transitions into a technological era, a person's commitment to essential values of integrity, moral choices, empathy, responsibility, accountability, respect, compassion, kindness, among others, is requisite for an individual's moral compass in pursuit of elevating themselves and society. Formation of students' character through formal or informal education requires effective partnership and engagement by all parties, particularly parents and teachers. This cooperation is key in addressing the challenges faced by students and the modern, global and inevitable changes they encounter.

Hence, the study recommends increased collaboration between parents and educators to support and reinforce values education, ultimately benefiting students. The benefit of this collaboration will have a cascading and rippling effect on societal harmony and peaceful co-existence. Additionally, the study recommends that principals and teachers monitor and evaluate both academic and non-academic school programs to ensure they are effectively implemented for students' all-around development. Moreover, through the Teachers Service Commission, the Ministry of Education should exclusively deploy guidance and counselling professionals who are not teachers to reduce burnout and workload, allowing teachers effectively and holistically implement the curriculum. This establishment would strengthen learners' ongoing formation and increase their openness and confidence in sharing their issues.

Further, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the principal should develop innovative programs for the ongoing training of teachers and parents, equipping them with strategies for values education. Such programs will create awareness of the need for parents and guardians to create quality time with their children and a conducive environment for character formation at home. Establishing parent-teacher sessions, such as workshops and seminars on values education and character programs, can encourage parental involvement and partnership with teachers and the school environment. By working together, positive character formation loopholes will be established and addressed effectively. Hence, students will not be left alone to seek help from negative peer groups, uncensored social media and internet materials that often endorse values that contradict moral values.

## Contributions

The study has contributed to the literature on character education in Kenya's schools and offered materials for future researchers. In addition, the study has provided significant insights into students' character development,

particularly in Kenya, for parents, teachers, and people interested in education. The study's findings may inform, to a greater extent, the ongoing efforts to implement the Competency-Based Curriculum in Kenyan schools, ensuring that previous mistakes, such as the disregard of values education during teaching and learning and overemphasis on academics are eliminated. Applying these findings will integrate moral values in teaching and learning to cultivate admirable character in students. Hence, there will be fewer cases of indiscipline and crime in schools and eventually a flourishing society.

## Further research

This research was limited to immediate social factors, such as teachers and parents, that directly influence students' character development. Future researchers may investigate other Ecological Systems Theory factors, such as the exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, among others, and their influence on students' character. Secondly, a study evaluating the Competence-Based Curriculum and its impact on students' holistic development may be possible. In addition, a comparative analysis can be conducted between private and public schools to compare and contrast the differences in students' character development.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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