

Parental Engagement and Moral Development of Learners: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Secondary Schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract- Moral development among learners in Kenyan secondary remains a critical concern with challenges such as strikes, arson, violence, and widespread indiscipline persisting despite alternatives to corporal punishment. This phenomenological study examined teachers' lived experiences regarding parental engagement in fostering moral development in Bungoma County secondary schools. Data were collected from deputy principals and guidance counsellors through unstructured interviews and analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Findings revealed inadequate parental involvement, defensiveness, poor role modeling, and institutional disconnects that undermine moral formation. Conversely, communitarian principles emerged as critical in nurturing moral development. The study recommends enhanced parental engagement, communitarian-inspired policies, and integration of moral dialogue into education.

Keywords: Parental Engagement, Communitarianism, Moral Development, Phenomenology

I. INTRODUCTION

The moral development of learners constitutes a fundamental responsibility of every educational system. In Kenya, this responsibility has gained renewed emphasis with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which recognizes parents as primary stakeholders in their children's moral formation (Mwangi & Githui, 2020). The CBC framework empowers parents to instill moral values, guide children in making appropriate choices, and collaborate with teachers to address behavioral challenges (KICD, 2019).

Despite policy frameworks, moral decline in Kenyan secondary schools remains persistent. Destructive behaviors including arson, strikes, drug abuse, bullying, and violence against teachers have generated significant concern among stakeholders (Kiprotich & Mbugua, 2018). Bungoma County exemplifies this crisis, experiencing frequent school unrest and fires resulting in injuries, arrests, and property destruction (Wanjala et al., 2019).

The abolition of corporal punishment in 2001 through the Children's Act introduced alternative disciplinary approaches including guidance and counselling, peer mediation, and restorative justice. However, moral decline continues, with teachers expressing frustration that existing alternatives lack philosophical grounding and fail to instill discipline effectively (Macharia & Wanzare, 2017).

Most research has focused on evaluating alternatives to corporal punishment effectiveness, with limited exploration of parental and community roles in moral formation (Simatwa, 2022). This gap is significant given the African communitarian worldview, where education is viewed as collective responsibility involving families, elders, and wider society (Nyerere, 2019).

This study investigates teachers' lived experiences regarding parental and communitarian support in moral development. It explores how parental involvement, role modeling, and school collaboration contribute to moral formation, examining how communitarian strategies may offer sustainable frameworks for discipline in Kenyan educational contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Moral Decline in Kenyan Secondary Schools

Indiscipline in Kenyan secondary schools manifests through arson, theft, violence against teachers, student strikes, and disregard for authority (Kimani & Kinyanjui, 2020). Between 2016-2019, over 200 schools nationwide experienced unrest, with many incidents involving fires causing significant infrastructure damage (Mutua et al., 2021). These behaviors extend beyond property destruction to encompass psychological and social dimensions, including substance abuse, cyberbullying, and aggressive behaviors compromising school safety (Ochieng & Koech, 2019).

Research suggests moral decline is multifaceted, influenced by socioeconomic factors, technological changes, and shifting cultural values. Rapid urbanization and global media exposure have introduced moral challenges that traditional disciplinary approaches struggle to address (Sang et al., 2018). Additionally, increasing single-parent households and economic pressures have altered family structures that historically supported moral development.

2.2 Parental Engagement in Moral Development

Parents serve as primary socialization agents, fundamentally shaping children's moral compass through modeling, guidance, and behavioral expectations. Research demonstrates that children's conduct often reflects parental behavior patterns, highlighting the importance of parental role modeling (Ndungu, 2020). When parents exhibit integrity and responsibility, children internalize these values and demonstrate appropriate school behavior.

However, contemporary challenges have complicated parental roles. Teachers report encountering parents who defensively protect children against disciplinary measures, even when wrongdoing is evident (Kiprotich & Mbugua, 2018). This defensive stance undermines school authority and reinforces inappropriate behaviors. Such responses may stem

from misguided loyalty, lack of policy understanding, or broader institutional mistrust.

Effective parent-school collaboration requires regular dialogue, shared understanding of disciplinary approaches, and consistent messaging between home and school environments (Macharia & Wanzare, 2017). Economic pressures and changing family structures also affect parental capacity for moral guidance, with many parents facing work commitments that limit engagement time (Wanjala et al., 2019).

2.3 Communitarian Approaches to Education

Communitarianism emphasizes collective responsibility, shared values, and community life's moral significance in shaping individual character. This framework aligns with traditional African educational approaches, where moral formation was embedded in community life through elder, parent, and peer involvement (Nyerere, 2019). The communitarian perspective views moral development as collective enterprise requiring coordinated stakeholder efforts.

African indigenous education systems integrated moral formation into daily community interactions. Elders served as moral guides, parents modeled appropriate behavior, and peer groups provided social reinforcement (Ochieng & Koech, 2019). This holistic approach ensured consistent moral messaging and supportive character development environments.

Contemporary educational systems can benefit from communitarian principles by fostering school-family-community partnerships. Such collaboration creates shared responsibility for moral development and ensures disciplinary approaches reflect community values while maintaining educational standards (Sang et al., 2018). Moral dialogue emerges as crucial pedagogical tool, engaging learners in reflective conversations about values, responsibilities, and ethical decision-making (Mutua et al., 2021).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative research design grounded in interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore teachers' lived experiences regarding parental engagement in moral development. The phenomenological approach was selected for understanding how teachers perceive and interpret their experiences managing student moral development without corporal punishment.

Study Location: Bungoma County, Kenya, was purposively selected due to documented challenges with student indiscipline and moral decline in secondary schools.

Participants: Four participants were purposively sampled: two deputy principals and two guidance counsellors from different secondary schools. Participants were strategically chosen based on direct involvement in implementing alternatives to corporal punishment and firsthand experience with parental engagement in disciplinary matters.

Data Collection: Unstructured phenomenological interviews lasting 60-90 minutes captured rich, detailed accounts of teachers' lived experiences. Open-ended questions explored perceptions of parental support, parent-school collaboration challenges, experiences with parental responses to disciplinary issues, and suggestions for improving parental engagement.

Data Analysis: Analysis followed IPA framework, moving from individual experiences to broader thematic understanding through systematic stages: transcript reading, significant statement identification, first-order construct development, second-order construct creation through interpretive analysis, and overarching theme derivation. Bracketing techniques minimized personal biases, while member checking enhanced credibility.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis revealed three primary themes: (1) Lack of Sufficient Parental Support, (2) Lack of Collective

Responsibility, and (3) Potential of Communitarian Engagement.

4.1 Theme 1: Lack of Sufficient Parental Support

Teachers reported inadequate parental support manifested through helplessness, defensiveness, and poor role modeling. One guidance counselor expressed: "Parents are willing to help, but they appear helpless in front of their children; they depend on teachers' intervention. Mwalimu huyu mtoto amenishinda mnisaidie" (Teacher, this child has defeated me, please help me).

This reveals significant shifts in traditional authority structures, where parents delegate moral guidance responsibilities to teachers. The statement captures parental defeat and helplessness that teachers encounter regularly, representing fundamental breakdown in parental confidence with profound moral development implications.

Teachers also reported defensive parental attitudes undermining disciplinary efforts. One deputy principal noted: "Some are very defensive when their children are found in wrongdoing, saying 'Is this really why you called me?'" This stance protects inappropriate behavior while sending conflicting accountability messages to learners.

Poor parental role modeling emerged as another concern, with teachers observing that parents struggling with behavioral challenges often fail to provide positive moral examples. This creates cycles where children bring unresolved behavioral patterns from home into school environments.

4.2 Theme 2: Lack of Collective Responsibility

Teachers identified significant disconnects between schools, parents, and government institutions. One guidance counselor observed: "There is a missing gap; no proper link exists between parents, school, and government." This represents more than communication breakdown, reflecting absent coordinated moral education approaches that isolate teachers.

Institutional coordination gaps manifest through schools implementing policies without sufficient parental input, creating inconsistent home-school messaging. Government policies regarding corporal punishment alternatives are introduced without adequate stakeholder consultation, creating implementation challenges teachers navigate independently.

Teachers expressed frustration with absent parent-school collaboration frameworks. While CBC curriculum emphasizes parental involvement, practical engagement mechanisms remain underdeveloped, leaving teachers uncertain about effectively involving parents beyond crisis intervention.

4.3 Theme 3: Potential of Communitarian Engagement

Despite challenges, teachers identified positive communitarian engagement examples. One guidance counselor noted: "Parents with strong religious backgrounds are very supportive, and their children cause fewer disciplinary problems." This highlights how shared values and collective moral development commitment produce positive outcomes.

Teachers recognized that collaborative parent-school-community efforts make moral development initiatives more effective. Religious communities provide consistent moral messaging reinforcing school efforts while offering additional parent support systems. The potential for moral dialogue emerged significantly, though underutilized in current practice.

CONCLUSION

Teachers' lived experiences reveal significant challenges in parental engagement for moral development, but also untapped improvement potential. Moral decline persistence reflects deeper systemic issues requiring more than school-based interventions alone. Teachers experience frustration with inadequate parental support, institutional disconnects, and absent coordinated moral education approaches.

However, the study identifies promising communitarian approaches emphasizing shared responsibility, moral dialogue, and collaborative engagement. When parents, schools, and communities work together with shared values and coordinated efforts, moral development outcomes improve significantly.

Current policy frameworks require substantial revision to address practical implementation challenges. The CBC curriculum's parental involvement emphasis needs operational support through training programs, communication frameworks, and institutional mechanisms facilitating meaningful school-family collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Parental Engagement: Implement regular forums, workshops, and seminars enhancing parents' moral guidance capacity through practical strategies, confidence building, and support network creation.

Develop Institutional Coordination: Establish formal government-school-community frameworks for coordinating moral development efforts, including clear roles, communication channels, and policy alignment.

Integrate Moral Dialogue: Incorporate structured moral dialogue sessions engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in values and behavioral expectations conversations.

Foster Community Partnerships: Actively partner with religious organizations, cultural groups, and community leaders to create comprehensive moral support systems providing additional role models and shared value reinforcement.

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