



Exploring the context of teaching character education to children in preprimary and primary schools

Wohabie Birhan^{a,*}, Gebeyehu Shiferaw^b, Alem Amsalu^c, Molalign Tamiru^b, Haregewoin Tiruye^d

^a Applied Developmental Psychology in Department of Psychology, Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

^b Curriculum and Instruction in the Department of Education, Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

^c Educational and School Leadership in the Department of Education, Ethiopia

^d Social Psychology in the Department of Psychology, Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Character education
Children
Fairy tales
Parents
Teachers
Moral education

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to explore the contents of moral and character education for children and the pedagogy or approach employed by parents and teachers to teach character and moral education for children. The study was conducted in 18 schools found in East Gojjam, West Gojjam and Awi administrative zones. Preprimary and primary school teachers (N = 272) and one of the parents of children (N = 272) participated in the study. Concurrent mixed design was employed and quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using questionnaire and document analysis respectively. Descriptive statistics was employed to analyze the quantitative data and thematic analysis was applied to analyze qualitative data. The study found that among the six categories of character (caring, honesty, emotional intelligence, responsibility and respect) parents emphasized on teaching children to be honest (M = 2.6, SD = 0.46) and responsible (M = 2.48, SD = 0.38) to their actions and behaviors. Teachers give high emphasis for teaching children to be respecting and caring to others and to Fairness (M = 2.62, SD = 0.43) and Respect (M = 2.63, SD = 0.37). Advising is the most frequently used common approach used by parents and teachers. Besides, using fairy tales with animal characters and songs are mostly found to be important approaches to teach character education about right and wrong behaviors to children. The study reveals that there are pieces of moral and character contents included across different subjects. Yet, there is a challenge in providing character and moral education as a separate subject in schools and failure of parents and teachers to be good role models for children. This implies that the Ministry of Education shall plan character and moral education to be offered as a separate subject for preprimary and primary school children and parents and teachers need to work in collaboration to teach character and moral education for children.

1. Introduction

The term “character”, refers to basic moral values such as caring, honesty, justice, responsibility and respect for themselves and others (Character Education Partnership, 2003 cited in Heidari, Nowrozi, & Ahmadpoor, 2016) while character education means a systematic, comprehensive and planned approach to teach moral values. Likewise, moral development is defined as the process through which children acquire the concepts of right and wrong as well as the ability to regulate behavior to adhere to standards deemed appropriate by society (Kochanska, 1994; Prosic-santovac et al., 2018 cited in Termini &

Golden, 2014).

Moral education is defined as a form of education that aims to promote students’ moral development and character formation (Nucci and Narvaez, 2008 cited in Han, 2014).and it consists of virtue ethics, moral reasoning, and moral emotion-based education.

Moral is a social construct and children born in each society are expected to learn the values and morals of their society. Every society needs young children to learn its moralistic values so that the children develop into moral adults later (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Schools are the major institutions for preparing children for life, both academically and morally. Yet, little is known about how teachers enact social and

* Corresponding author. PO box: 269, Debre Markos University, Ethiopia.

E-mail addresses: wohabie_birhan@dmu.edu.et, eyob.wohabie1993@gmail.com (W. Birhan), shifegebu2011@gmail.com (G. Shiferaw), alemamsalu96@gmail.com (A. Amsalu), molalignfikru@gmail.com (M. Tamiru), haregewointiruye@gmail.com (H. Tiruye).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100171>

Received 15 January 2021; Accepted 19 May 2021

Available online 31 May 2021

2590-2911/© 2021 The Authors.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

moral value programs in the classroom (Johansson, Brownlee, Cobb-moore, & Boulton-lewis, 2011).

The history of moral and character education is as old as the history of human beings and education. For example, moral education is thought to have existed during the time of Classic thinkers, like Aristotle, Plato and Confucius (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Societies employed moral education to socialize children (Thompson, 2002) during those days.

Morally right and wrong behavior may not be a universal behavior across cultures and there may not be the same moral standards in all societies. Yet, the common moral values which children growing in many societies include honesty, compassion, loyalty, respect, trust, responsibility, kindness, trustworthiness, integrity, passionate, reliable, and dependable (Pike, 2010) ethic, virtuousness, and model citizen (Temiz, 2016) and fairness, are included (Knight & LaGasse, 2012; Martin, 2012 cited in Mei-ju, Chen-hsin, & Pin-chen, 2014; Dorothy, 2003). (Fallis et al., 2013; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008).

The period of early childhood is the most formative stage that has long-lasting effect on an individual. Accordingly, children need to be socialized through learning the values, norms and traditions of their respective societies. It is during the period of early childhood that a child's character and personality as well as major social and moral values are transmitted (Jaramillo, World, Tietjen, & World, 2001).

Early childhood stage is a critical time in which children learn moral values such as honesty, compassion, loyalty, respect, trust, and responsibility from teachers and parents (Mei-ju et al., 2014). Although peers are important to influence character development of children, parents are a more influential source in the development of morality in children and the parent-child relationship is at the root of moral development (Honig, 1982; Kochanska; Liable & Thompson; Lamb, 1993; Pratt et al., 1999; Rudy et al., 1999; Smetana, 1999; Walker, 1999 cited in Termini & Golden, 2014). Thus parents need to be good models of children in developing prosocial behavior (Honig, Wittmer, & Donna, 1991).

Teaching morality to children at an early age has great importance for life. Research found that children who learn moral values of their society at an early age were found to exhibit harmonious social interactions throughout life and those children who have not learned morality were characterized by (Amollo & Lilian, 2017) juvenile delinquency, disrespect of others, drug abuse, school dropout, and conflicts in schools.

Moral education is the means by which societies transmit value system to the next generation and family and schools are the key institutions for this. It promotes mutual welfare, growth, and judging what is right over what is wrong (Thiroux 1998; cited in Nyabul, 2011). However, in recent years, there is a vacuum between the young and the old generation value systems. As a result, youth have been protesting and showing anti-social behavior such as drug use, sexual abuse, and burning of schools (Amollo & Lilian, 2017). Moreover, disrespect among children and adolescents in schools, teenage pregnancies and adolescents' drug use are on the increase due to failure to teach moral and character education during childhood (Mngarah, 2017). Because of societal and parental failure to socialize the young generation in line with the values and norms of the society, the new generation has been lacking moral and ethical issues. To fill this gap, providing character education is currently gaining momentum among politicians, educators and parents (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008) across the globe.

Childhood is the period when the sense of right and wrong behaviors are strongly developed through parents (Dababneh, Ihmeideh, & Al-Omari, 2010). However, Parents are mainly blamed for their children's immoral acts and behaviors. As they are responsible for proper care on the health of children, their physical development, and their overall education, they are also responsible for socializing them with a sense of moral values (Ceka, 2016) But the teaching of morality and value system is not an isolated responsibility. Instead, it is a collective responsibility of families, peers, teachers the media and the society at

large ((Lickona, 1988; Smetana, 1999; Zdenek & Schochor, 2007; Cowan, Pruett, Pruett & Wong, 2009; Ajayi, Haastrup & Arogundale, 2009; Oladipo, 2009; Adejobi, 2014 cited in Mngarah, 2017). In addition to parents, teachers need to be good models for the character and moral development of children and engage in morally good activities (Arthur, 2011 cited in Lapsley & Woodbury, 2016).

Failure to teach moral and character education to children by the society will have a severe consequence on the young generation. Homicide, pregnancy out of wed-lock and other antisocial behaviors are just some of the consequences of absence of character and moral education (Vitz, 2015). Moral breakdown within a generation leads breakdown of the whole integrity of the society and it has a negative consequence (Marashe, Ndamba, & Chireshe, 2009).

The aim of education in Africa is enabling individuals to survive in a society, cultivate good habits and develop good citizens capable of earning a good living (Adeyima and Adeyinka 2003 cited in Ladislaus & Stambach, 1997). Africans have several folktales reflecting of their values and traditions. Yet, these folktales are not integrated in the curriculum to be taught for children (Banda & Morgan, 2013). A recent study conducted in Zimbabwe showed (Marashe et al., 2009) that African traditional values are not included in the school curriculum.

African children can be taught indigenous moral taughts and values such as preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holisticism (Banda & Morgan, 2013). For example, the Igbo of Nigeria tell stories for children to teach moral development and these stories have deductive nature. That is, themes are drawn from the story (Studies, 2016). Stories, fairy tales and play are the pedagogies by which children could be taught moral and character education. Stories are important for the character development of children by allowing them to identify good and evil acts of characters. Thus fairy tales that have animal characters and imaginary stories aid child moral development. In contrast to this, some scholars argue that fairy tales with bad characters such as Cinderella are dangerous to young children and such tales affect their life negatively in the future (Visikoknox-johnson, 2016).

Fairy tales help young children make sense of what it is to be human and helps them understand the world around them and they have positive impact on children's development (Visikoknox-johnson, 2016) and enhances their value development.

Vygotsky assumes that learning is a socially mediated activity and parents and the society at large are important agents for helping children to learn moral education. One of the pedagogical approaches to teach moral and character education are stories. The major concepts in his theory are Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and scaffolding.

Moral development occurs in the ZPD, among children by listening, reading and drawing a character from the story. Story telling enables children to internalize gradually moral values as their habits. When children are actively engaged in listening the story and involved in a story telling, then values and virtues are most likely to occur (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983).

The continuity of values, and norms of a given society across generations could only be guaranteed through the teaching of moral and character education to children (Termini & Golden, 2014). In the early days, African parents used stories and legends to instill morals and to teach the community's history and traditions and Oral literature was also used to teach abstract philosophical attitudes toward life, beliefs, practices, and taboos (Mbithi 1982 cited in Marito, Pence, & Evans, 2008). However, this practice has been weakened recently due to different reasons. One reason for this is that teachers have emphasized on cognitive aspects of the curriculum (Honig et al., 1991) more than affective aspects. That is, they have focused on literacy and numeracy than teaching children about cooperativeness, caring and other prosocial behaviors.

Family is the first school of a child and the learning of moral and character education begins at an early age at home. Parents are expected to teach the sense of right and wrong behavior to children at the earliest period. But, failure of parental involvement and guidance in the

teaching of moral education to children is very disastrous (Finn, 2009 cited in [Sonia, Hassan, & Sadia, 2014](#)). As a result of lack of parental guidance and supervision, today's children are exposed to media filled by false advertisements, developmentally inappropriate movies and television programs with themes of violence.

The need for character education programs is a hot issue these days across different nations. For example, because of the absence of moral education, school violence, truancy rates, and number of dropouts are on the increase ([Was, Woltz, & Drew, 2006](#)). Likewise, the immoral acts and characters of young people in Ethiopia recently could be due to absence of rational and moral thoughts and failure of parents, schools, and the community at large to transmit moral, ethical and value education to children. As a result of lack of moral and character education in Ethiopia, we have a generation that lacks character and violence prone. Besides, there is widespread corruption by civil servants, and children disrespecting of parents, teachers and the elderly.

The recent social and political problems such as killings, riots, displacing people and other anti-social behaviors that Ethiopia has been facing is due to lack of character and moral education. The investigators believe that education system in Ethiopia is also far from indoctrinating children with the moral and ethical values of the society.

Despite the availability of several local story books containing children's literature in Ethiopia, it is not researched to what extent schools and parents use these books to inculcate the moral values in the minds of children.

There is a policy gap in planning moral and character development of preprimary and primary school education in Ethiopia. This contradicts with the educational and developmental theories which claim that childhood is the foundation age for learning and the formation of character, moral and personality development. The Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education under its document (ESDP V) mentions about access and equity of preschool education ([FME, 2015](#)). However, it does not clearly state about how children's character and moral development could be enhanced through the preschool period.

Studies conducted in other nations found that ([Iqbal, Khanam, & Dogar, 2017](#)) those children from the private schools were better in moral development than those from the public ones. Likewise children in Ethiopia attend their education both in government and private schools. Yet, whether providing of moral and character education differs in the two sectors or not has not been researched in the Ethiopian context. Besides, no study was conducted to investigate approaches and contents of character and moral education for children.

The objective of this study was to explore the contents of moral and character education for children and the pedagogy employed by parents and teachers to teach character and moral education for children. Specifically, the study intends to explore the themes of moral and character education and investigate the extent to which fairy tales and story books are employed as resources for teaching moral and character education to preprimary and primary school children. The study also intended to explore the themes of moral and character education.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research design

Concurrent mixed design was employed to conduct the study since the objectives of the study demand both qualitative and quantitative data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously in the selected schools.

2.2. Participants

Pre-primary and primary school teachers and parents of children, school principals, and school supervisors participated in the study. A total of 531 participants (250 preschool teachers; 250 parents or care takers, 25 school principals and 6 supervisors) were involved in the

study.

2.3. Study area

This study was conducted in three neighboring zones: East Gojjam, West Gojjam and Awi. These three zones have 19, 18 and 12 Districts respectively. Among these districts, eight of them (Guangua, Banja, Dangla, Jabi Tahnan, Dembecha, Dejen, Debre Markos and Machakel) were selected. Therefore, 3 districts from each zone were included and a total of 18 schools were included in the study. Among these schools, 14 of them were government schools while the rest 4 were private ones. With regard to the level, 20% of the schools were preprimary and the rest 80% of them were primary level schools.

2.4. Sampling techniques

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed to conduct the study. Probability sampling was applied to select Zones, districts, primary school teachers and parents. Non probability sampling technique was used to select preschool teachers, and supervisors.

2.5. Data collection methods

We employed questionnaire and document analysis as data collection tools. Questionnaire was employed to gather quantitative data from teachers and parents. We used both close and open-ended items in the questionnaire and the items of the questionnaire focused on two major themes: content and pedagogy of moral and character education. The questionnaire was self-constructed and pilot tested before the main data were collected.

In document analysis, social science textbooks for primary and pre-primary education were evaluated to check whether they contain contents of moral and character education for children. The document analyses was done to identify gaps related to content and pedagogy of teaching moral and character education.

Pilot test was conducted in three schools found in Debre Markos town to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items, before collecting data for the main study. Responses from the questionnaire items obtained from parents and teachers were fed into SPSS and then reliability was calculated using Chronbach alpha. The Chronbach alpha result for teachers questionnaire was 0.732 and 0.791 respectively. Based on the result, some of the items were deleted for they are redundant ones.

2.6. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean and qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Once quantitative and qualitative data had been analyzed separately, the findings were triangulated and discussed.

3. Results

This study was conducted to explore the contents of character and moral education for children and the pedagogy or approach employed by parents and teachers. This chapter presents findings obtained from quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Among parent participants, 57% were fathers and 34% of them were mothers. The rest 8.5% were guardians. Their literacy level ranges from not able to read and write to a first degree and above. Nearly 63% of the participants were government employees and 37% of them earn their living through private business.

With regard to teacher participants, 54.8% of them were from government schools and 19% of them were from private ones. However, the rest 25% did not indicate the type of school. Around 54% of teacher

participants teach in primary schools and 20% of them in preprimary schools.

4. Themes of character education

One of the main objectives of this study was to investigate the themes (contents) of character education. To achieve these we categorized parents' questionnaire items into five major category of themes: *responsibility, respect, honesty, emotional intelligence, and caring* and asked parents to rate the extent to which they emphasize on each theme to teach morality and character for their children.

As shown in Table 1, parents and guardians teach different contents of moral and character education for their children. Data analyses revealed that parents spend more time on teaching their children to be honest (M = 2.6, SD = 0.46) followed by teaching responsibility (M = 2.48, SD = 0.38). Teaching children to regulate their emotion (M = 2.47, SD = 0.46) and caring (M = 2.43, SD = 0.50) are relatively given less emphasis by parents respectively.

In teaching moral and character education, teachers give high emphasis to *fairness* (M = 2.62, SD = 0.43), *respect* (M = 2.63, SD = 0.37); and *caring* the elderly (M = 2.60, SD = 0.43). Teaching about issues of responsibility (M = 2.3, SD = 0.37) and honesty (M = 2.28, SD = 0.36) are relatively given less focus by teachers (see Table 2).

5. Pedagogy of moral and character education

Using a questionnaire, participants were asked the extent to which they apply the following pedagogies: storytelling, reinforcement, advising, role modelling and discussion.

The most frequently used pedagogy by parents to teach moral and character education for their children is advising (M = 2.6408, SD = , SD.41) followed by role modelling (M = 2.45 SD = 0.37). Approaches such as storytelling (M = 2.0453, SD = 0.45) and discussion (M = 2.0, SD = 0.45) are less employed by parents and guardians (see Table 3).

Teachers' data showed that *role modelling* (M = 2.74, SD = 0.34) and *advising* (M = 2.62, SD = 0.38) are two of the most frequently used pedagogies of teaching moral and character education to children followed by using reinforcement/punishment, and storytelling whose mean and standard deviation are (M = 2.35, SD = 0.36) and (M = 2.27, SD = 0.41) respectively. Role play is the least frequently used approach of teaching character for children by teachers (M = 2.1, SD = 0.43) (see Table 4).

5.1. Views on methods of teaching character and moral education

Teachers of primary and preprimary schools were asked to mention methods commonly applied while teaching moral and character for children. Their responses were categorized under the following themes: *monitoring children's daily practice in and out of school; recognizing and rewarding students who are good role models in adhering ethical behaviors in school; creating awareness for parent about child morality; helping children read and present poems as well as books containing national history; advising children to accept and respect rule of law and act accordingly; advising children to pray in the early morning and evening as well as during feeding time; advising children to respect and collaborate with each other; and helping parents to monitor their children moral behaviors at home.*

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of themes of moral education parents teach for children.

Theme	N	Mean	SD
Responsibility	272	2.4779	.37602
Respect	272	2.4338	.35321
Honesty	272	2.6048	.46168
Emotional Intelligence	272	2.4669	.46094
Caring	272	2.4311	.50649

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of themes of moral education teachers teach for children.

Theme	N	Mean	SD
Responsibility	204	2.3118	.36505
Respect	204	2.6287	.36929
Honesty	204	2.2794	.36218
Emotional Intelligence	204	2.5172	.42368
Caring	204	2.6046	.40041
Fairness	204	2.6209	.42767

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for different Pedagogies employed by parents to teach character education.

Type of Pedagogy	N	Mean	SD
Story telling	272	2.0453	.44811
Advising	272	2.6408	.40809
Role modelling	272	2.4499	.37183
Discussion	272	2.2001	.53705
Reinforcement and punishment	272	2.4008	.38650

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for different Pedagogies employed by teachers.

Type of Pedagogy	N	Mean	SD
Story telling	204	2.2658	.41021
Advising	204	2.6245	.37612
Role modelling	204	2.7402	.34030
Role Play	204	2.0971	.42968
Discussion	204	2.3260	.41177
Reinforcement and punishment	204	2.3529	.36077

Moreover, some teachers mentioned that they tell children about exemplary and ethical people; teaching *ethical behaviors through poem, national anthem and riddles/puzzles; advising children to learn how to apologize whenever they encounter conflict during their play time* and using positive reinforcement.

On the other hand, parents reported that they employ *developmentally appropriate TV programs, advise children to be altruistic and respect elderly people, avoiding physical punishment and discrimination among children, motivating children to attend religious education, helping children to make friendship with those children having good discipline and ethical behaviors, role modeling, avoiding unnecessary conflict in front of children, reading moral education books, and advising children to develop rational thinking.*

5.1.1. Views on contents of moral education

Teachers were asked to mention contents of moral education which they think are worth including in the curriculum. Primary school teachers mentioned that concepts like ethical and right behaviors, child psychology, child interaction, good behaviors such as respect, honesty, integrity, love of country, peaceful coexistence, knowing and appreciating national history, national values, biography of good mannered people, wise treatment of children and the elderly, and the right and duties of children, responsibility and accountability, equality, and problem solving skills are worth to be included.

Similarly, preprimary school teachers mentioned the following major contents to be included in the curriculum: family-neighborhood-community-school interaction; work culture, punctuality, respect, importance of peace and love for the nation; knowing and respecting ones own culture, tradition and custom;/ Ethiopianism; ethically good and bad behaviors, respecting elderly people, sharing resources; respecting others idea; open mindedness and honesty.

On the other hand, parents mentioned that to develop good character of children, moral education should be given as a separate subject at preprimary and primary levels. Moreover, contents dealing about

fidelity, honesty, generosity, love of country, rule of law, dignity, respect for national anthem, Ethiopian history; duties and responsibility of citizens; collaboration and support; effective resource utilization and saving have to be included.

5.2. Challenges against implementing moral education

Teacher participants reported that there is lack of attention given by the government for moral and character education. They addressed that racism/ethnocentrism, media influence, failure to work cooperatively among teachers, parents and community members on children character, lack of discharging responsibility among teachers and students, failure of parents to monitor their children especially after schooling time, parents' lack of responsibility and awareness about their children character, and misconception (attributing teachers as the main cause for children' misconduct); conflicts, lack of adequate role model/exemplary teachers in school; carelessness among teachers and poor teacher-child-family relation to be the main challenges against building good moral and character of children.

Textbook analysis was used as an additional data collection instrument. Accordingly, environmental science text books of preprimary and primary schools were analyzed to check whether these books contain character and moral contents.

Five environmental textbooks (one O class, and four Environmental science textbooks from grade 1–4) were analyzed to check the extent to which these textbooks contain contents of moral and character education.

The textbooks contain the following moral education themes: tolerance, respect; peaceful coexistence and religious diversity. self-awareness; hard working, patience, hopefulness, sharing resources, understanding others' problem; helping the elderly, respecting guests; justice, respecting rule of law, equality, honesty, humanity, fairness and tolerance.

6. Discussion

This study attempted to explore the contents and pedagogy of teaching moral and character education in pre-primary and primary school children. The study found that among the six categories of character (caring, honesty, emotional intelligence, responsibility and respect) parents emphasize on teaching children to be honest and responsible to their actions and behaviors. On the other hand teachers give high emphasis on teaching children to show respectful behavior to others and caring the elderly.

Teachers argued that honesty, integrity, love of country, peaceful coexistence, knowing and appreciating national history, national values, accountability, equality, and problem solving skills are missing in the curriculum and thus children lack moral and character in their behaviors and actions.

Meanwhile, parents expressed their concerns that including moral and character contents in the curriculum could be effective if and only if moral and character education is taught as a separate subject matters. They mentioned that in the earlier times, moral education was offered as a separate subject in Ethiopia and its omission in the present curriculum has created a gap in moral values on the young generation. As a result, children and youth have been engaging in immoral acts.

Despite teachers' argument about the absence of moral and character education, we analyzed textbooks of preprimary and primary education and found several themes of character and moral education.

With regard to the extent to which current moral education contents fit to indigenous values, we identified that respect of the elderly, helping the poor and the destitute, and responsibility are some of the Ethiopian values and customs.

Thus, we hypothesize that the problem lies not on the absence of moral and character education contents. Instead, failure of the school and parents to inculcate these value systems in the minds of children so

that children will value them and characterize themselves with these behaviors. This implies that the approach for teaching moral and character education both at school and home need to be revisited.

Parents employ approaches like storytelling to teach about morality and shaping character of children, advising children to do morally right things, using role models of good behavior, discussion with children, and using Reinforcement and punishment based on the behavior of children. In relation to stories, Banda and Morgan (2013) note that Africans have several folktales reflecting of their values and traditions though they are not integrated in the curriculum to be taught for children.

In this study, we found that giving advice is the most frequently approach that parents use to shape children's character while role modeling and advising are two of the most extensively used approaches used by teachers. In line with this, theoretical literature states that parents and teachers need to be good models of children in developing prosocial behavior (Honig et al., 1991).

Qualitative data analysis from teachers' questionnaire showed that teachers teach good character using riddles/puzzles; by making children to apologize and admit their wrong behaviors and using role models to their students and advising children to be altruistic and respect elderly people and so on. Text book analysis showed that using fairy tales with animal characters and songs are mostly found to be important approaches to teach about right and wrong behaviors.

Parents and teachers suggested that the new generation has become characterless due to the little focus given to the teaching of moral and character education in the preprimary and primary schools. Besides, failure to work cooperatively among teachers in shaping children's character, lack of discharging responsibility by teachers and failure of parents to monitor their children especially after schooling time, lack of adequate role models and/exemplary teachers in school; carelessness among teachers and students; are the main reasons for immoral acts and bad character of the young generation. On the other hand, teachers argued that lack of parent support in managing children's moral character, lack of understanding of the rights and duties properly among children and absence of role models in the community are some of the factors contributing to the bad behavior of children and adolescents.

In relation to the challenges (Oxenber, 2008) warns that failure to teach character education for children has negative outcomes like retarding children's social and emotional development as well as their academic achievement.

The current finding indicates that there is a problem of taking responsibility by parents and teachers in shaping the character of children. That is, parents blame teachers for failing to shape their children's behavior while teachers attribute that it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children what is morally right and wrong at home. In line with the current finding, several scholars in the field (e.g Lickona, 1988; Smetana, 1999; Zdenek & Schochor, 2007; Cowan, Pruett, Pruett & Wong, 2009; Ajayi, Haastrup & Arogundale, 2009; Oladipo, 2009; Adejobi, 2014 cited in Mngarah, 2017) underline that the teaching of morality and value system is not an isolated responsibility. Instead, it is a collective responsibility of families, peers, teachers the media and the society at large.

Failure to teach character and moral education could result in either in the exclusion of moral contents in the curricula or due to using developmentally inappropriate pedagogy. Our finding reveals that there are several contents included in the textbooks to shape the character of children. Yet, inculcating these contents in the minds of children could happen if and only if developmentally appropriate pedagogy is applied. Besides this, teachers have to be good role models for children and need to work to the extent of helping children identify with good moral values and characterize with these moral values. Furthermore, both teachers and parents have to be good role models to young children in school and home settings.

We found that children have become characterless and they show immoral acts both at home and in the classroom. For instance, Parents

mentioned that children disobey orders from family members in doing household chores and disrespect older family members. Similarly, teacher participants argued that children do not show morally acceptable behavior in the classroom. Instead, they mock at teachers and they do not stand up when a teacher enters to the classroom. This implies that parents and teachers should work in collaboration to develop the good character and morality of children.

Government ignorance to provide moral and character education as a separate subject at the grass root level was also the most underlined cause for having citizens who are irresponsible, cruel, self-centered, and lack of knowledge in indigenous values.

6.1. Limitation of the study

We planned to conduct this study using questionnaire, document analysis, observation and Focus Group Discussion. However, we were not able to conduct observation and focus group discussions for schools were suddenly closed following the advent of COVID 19.

Funding source

This research was funded by Debre Markos University Research and Technology Transfer Directorate.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no any financial or negative personal relationship which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this research work.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those preprimary and primary school teachers, school principals, district educational bureaus in East Gojjam, West Gojjam and Awi Zones and parents who supported us during the data collection process. We would also like to acknowledge Debre Markos University for funding this project.

References

- Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2006). Moral education and character education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35(4), 495–518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240601012204>.
- Amollo, O. P., & Lilian, G. K. (2017). Teacher position in spurring value based education in early learning in Nairobi county , Kenya. *Addressing Support of Values in School Environment*, 6(3), 194–203. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n3p194>.
- Banda, D., & Morgan, W. J. (2013). *Folklore as an instrument of education among the Chewa people of Zambia Folklore as an instrument of education among the Chewa people of Zambia*, (July). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-013-9353-5>.
- Ceka, A. (2016). *The Role of Parents in the Education of Children*, 7(5), 61–64.
- Citizenship, E., Johansson, E., Brownlee, J. M. L., Cobb-moore, C., & Boulton-lewis, G. M. (2011). *Practices for teaching moral values in the early years : A call for a pedagogy of participation*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197910397914> (June 2014).
- Dababneh, K., Ihmeideh, F. M., & Al-Omari, A. A. (2010). Promoting Kindergarten children's creativity in the classroom environment in Jordan. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(9), 1165–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430902872950>.
- Dorothy, P. (2003). Character education in America. *Montessori Life*, 15(2), 32–34. Retrieved from http://login.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62157948?accountid=14816%0Ahttps://catalog.library.vanderbilt.edu/discovery/openurl?institution=01VAN_INST&vid=01VAN_INST:vanui&url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:o
- Fallis, A., Madkur, A., Narvaez, D., Lapsley, D., Silvia, A., Steedly, M. M., et al. (2013). Understanding the importance of character education. *The Asian Conference on Language Learning*, 3(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.
- FME. (2015). *Education Sector Development Programme V (ESDP V), (Esdp V), 2008–2012*.
- Han, H. (2014). Analysing theoretical frameworks of moral education through Lakatos's philosophy of science. *Journal of Moral Education*, 43(1), 32–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2014.893422>.
- Heidari, M. H., Nowrozi, R. A., & Ahmadpoor, P. (2016). Recognition and applying character education approaches in schools. *Review of European Studies*, 8(3), 125. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v8n3p125>.
- Honig, A. S., Wittmer, & Donna, S. (1991). *Helping Children Become More Prosocial*.
- Iqbal, S., Khanam, A., & Dogar, A. H. (2017). A comparative study of moral development of students from private schools and Deeni Madrasah. *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education (JRRE)*, 11(2), 113. Retrieved from <http://www.ezplib.ukm.my/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=129128088&site=eds-live>.
- Jaramillo, A., World, B., Tietjen, K., & World, B. (2001). *Early Childhood Development in Africa: Can We Do More for Less ?* (Vol. 56).
- Ladislau, S., & Stambach, A. (1997). Cultural identity in an African Context : Indigenous education and curriculum in East Africa. *Folklore Forum*, 28(1), 3–27.
- Lapsley, D., & Woodbury, R. (2016). Moral-character development for teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 38(3), 194–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2016.1194785>.
- Marashe, J., Ndamba, G. T., & Chireshe, E. (2009). The teaching of African traditional religion in primary schools in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities. *Religious Education*, 104(1), 38–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080802615325>.
- Marito, G., Pence, A., & Evans, J. L. (2008). *Africa ' s Future , Africa ' s Challenge*.
- Mei-ju, C., Chen-hsin, Y., & Pin-chen, H. (2014). The beauty of character education on preschool children ' s parent-child relationship. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 143, 527–533. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.431>.
- Mngarah, D. (2017). *Toward children ' s moral development in Tanzania : Do they speak the same Language ?* 17, 4.
- Narvaez, D., & Lapsley, D. K. (2008). Teaching moral character: Two alternatives for teacher education. *The Teacher Educator*, 43(2), 156–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730701838983>.
- Nyabul, P. (2011). Moral education and the condition of Africa. *Thought and practice. A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya*, 1(1), 31–42. <https://doi.org/10.4314/tp.v1i1.46305>.
- Oladipo, S. E. (2009). *Moral Education of the Child : Whose Responsibility ?*, 20(2), 149–156.
- Oxenbergl, L. (2008). *The effects of character education on the behavior of 5th grade students*.
- Prosic-santovac, D., Bitew, Wohabie Birhan, Shiferaw, Gebeyehu, Gashe, Alem Amsalu, Simegn, Molalign Tamiru, & Mengistu, Haregewoin Tiruye (2018). The socializing role of fairy tales in childhood education prosi ć -Santovac , Danijela . 2014 . ' the socializing role of fairy tales in childhood education ' . In P.ć i ć Tvrtko, et al. (Eds.), */English Language and Anglophone Literatures in Theory* (September).
- Sonia, O., Hassan, S. M., & Sadiā, J. (2014). The role of family in teaching religious and moral values to their children in urban areas : A case study of Lahore (Pakistan). *Pakistan Vision*, 16(No. 1), 258–273.
- Studies, A. (2016). Mgbakoigba. *Journal of African Studies*, 6(1), 1–9. July 2016., 6(1).
- Temiz, N. (2016). An example of 'character education' course design in the Light of 'experienced centred' design for higher education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(36), 144–155.
- Termini, K. A., & Golden, J. A. (2014). Moral behaviors: What can behaviorists learn from the developmental literature? *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*, 3(4), 477–493. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100818>.
- Thompson, W. G. (2002). *The Effects of Character Education on Student*.
- Visikoknox-johnson, L. (2016). The positive impacts of fairy tales for children. *Hohonu*, 14.
- Vitz, P. C. (2015). *The use of stories in moral Development : New psychological reasons for an old education method*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.6.709> (October).
- Was, C. A., Woltz, D. J., & Drew, C. (2006). Evaluating character education programs and missing the target: A critique of existing research. *Educational Research Review*, 1(2), 148–156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2006.08.001>.