

Exploring the potential efficacy of communitarian-inspired approaches in addressing moral decline in secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effectiveness of communitarian-inspired Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCPs) in curbing moral decline in secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. Despite the 2001 ban on corporal punishment, moral decadence among students persists, revealing that existing ATCPs such as guidance and counselling are ineffective due to weak parental support, institutional disconnect, and lack of philosophical grounding. This study uses a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to capture the lived experiences of teachers. The study adopts the culturally-constitutive view of communitarianism, which fosters societal group accountability among families, schools, and neighborhoods. By combining African ethics with other types of dialogical models, such as Socratic and Platonic methods, the study suggests implementing moral dialogue, value-based education, and collaborative assessment instruments as an effective means of discipline and moral development. The results suggest that to be successful, the ATCPs must incorporate philosophical ethics and community participation to create moral communities in the Kenyan education system.

Keywords: Alternatives to Corporal Punishment, Communitarianism, Moral Decline, Moral Dialogue, Secondary Schools, Socratic Method, Platonic Dialogue, Teacher Experiences

I. INTRODUCTION

Moral decay in schools has been a significant issue worldwide, including in Kenya. This ethical corruption is taking the form of more violent actions, proliferating drug abuse, and overall misconduct among learners (Sanga, 2022; Yaghambe, 2013). This is particularly extreme in Kenya, where schools have been the battlegrounds of student revolt, riots, and arson. This sin suggests an underlying moral crisis among students. It has since been revealed that moral decadence is not only a symptom of societal demise but also an effect brought about by the failure of educational systems in instilling the much-needed character, values, and discipline in students (Simiyu & Stephen, 2021; Njoroge & Bennaars, 1990). The system has been shifting its focus to emphasize academic achievements at the expense of character building, resulting in an imbalance where nurturing moral values takes a backseat to passing exams. One of the primary causes of this moral decline is the erosion of the parental role in the educational process.

As a consequence, parents have increasingly lost interest in school matters, thus leaving the students with no guidance and support at home. This has made schools struggle to fill this gap. In addition, an anti-religious, materialistic culture has been established, which has further weakened the moral fabric that united communities (Oburu & Mbagaya, 2019; Kiambati, 2015). Educational unrest in Bungoma County, for example, has reached a level where violent protests, accompanied by the destruction of school property, have become alarmingly common and represent a severe moral crisis.

In this bid to deal with the issues, the Kenyan government outlawed corporal punishment in 2001 to be in line with international conventions like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). This was aimed at encouraging other, more humanistic methods of control in schools. However, even after the ban, vice is still rotting. Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCPs), such as guidance and counselling, restorative justice, and peer mediation, have also proven largely ineffective in preventing misdemeanours among students, as cases of indiscipline continue to rise (Agesa, 2015; Mayisela, 2017). This poses a significant concern regarding the effectiveness of the alternative measures in addressing the causes of moral corruption among students. Many teachers are not equipped or supported enough to provide those alternatives efficiently. Moreover, teachers, by and large, have not received proper training, nor have they been guided by well-formulated policies and philosophical reflection that could facilitate moral development in schools (Mtsweni, 2008; Makapela, 2006).

As has been observed, the ineffectiveness of ATCPs may be attributed to the lack of a clear philosophical foundation for the disciplinary measures implemented. Even though these alternative measures aim to curb violence and ultimately improve behavior, there are no plans to address fundamental cultural and moral gaps that also contribute to

indiscipline. In the current research, there is a need to fill this gap by examining how teachers experience the realm of student indiscipline in the post-corporal punishment world. A phenomenological stance will be employed to understand how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to these challenges. This paper recommends that the efficacy of ATCPs can be significantly improved once they are based on the communitarian ethical theory, which proposes a sense of collectivity and community, shared ethical values, and a strong emphasis on solid communal engagement (Etzioni, 1996; Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). The Communitarian approach is both wholesome and culturally sound, aligning with African values and traditions. Communal responsibility in ensuring that students develop moral roles is what communitarian ethics brings to the table through providing a framework upon which moral education can be instilled in day-to-day school activities. In this regard, the research paper proposes a more detailed approach to moral education in secondary schools, which should be based on the African communitarian tradition and classroom conditions of educators (Tempels, 1959; Matalino, 2008). It is with such a philosophical prism that it is possible to devise sustainable and culturally grounded mechanisms for instilling the concept of discipline and developing morals in Kenyan secondary schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The issue of moral decay among students in Kenyan secondary schools has become widespread to the extent that it not only impacts the personal growth of students but also the educational atmosphere. The ineffectiveness of current Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCPs), including guidance and counseling, restorative justice, and peer mediation, has contributed to the increase in indiscipline in schools, despite corporal punishment being legally banned in 2001. This has especially been seen in Bungoma County, where cases of student unrest, student violence, and other forms of indiscipline have increasingly become common (Aute, et al., 2020). The actual causes of this decline in morality are quite complex, spanning everything to inadequate parental involvement, disconnection with the institution, and lack of philosophical depth in the ATCPs, to a materialist and individualistic culture which supersedes whatever communal ethos exists (Oburu & Mbagaya, 2019; Kiambati, 2015). Educators perceive the current ATCPs as ineffective, as they often find themselves unprepared and unsupported in their application (Mtsweni, 2008; Makapela, 2006). The moral development of students lacks a clear and culturally relevant framework to address this aspect of their growth and development. This has led to a cycle of ineffective punishment, leaving educators and students without the valuable guidance needed to foster moral and ethical development. In light of these issues, the paper hypothesizes that the ineffectiveness of ATCPs is largely due to the absence of a philosophical basis behind their intervention, particularly in Kenyan society and its African ethical value system (Tempels, 1959; Matalino, 2008). The goal of this research study is to investigate the possibility of communitarian-informed disciplinary measures that focus on the collective responsibility and active participation of the community to address moral decline issues in schools, thereby providing a more sustainable and culturally appropriate solution.

1.2 Research Question

What is the effectiveness of communitarian-based alternatives to corporal punishment (ATCPs) to resolve moral decay in secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Communitarianism, a philosophical ideology that opposes individualism, forms the foundation of this study; it asserts the moral significance of the community in shaping individual actions and values. In contrast to individualistic accounts of ethical theories, which prioritize autonomy, communitarianism emphasizes that people are deeply rooted in social connections and moral practices. The establishment of identity and moral development is perceived as the result of the combined efforts of families, schools, and communities in this holistic system (Etzioni, 1996; Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Communitarian ethics demand moral development through collective responsibility; therefore, discipline and character education should not be placed too heavily on the school. Instead, every social institution, including families, schools, and communities, should have its say in the formation of moral values and behavior. This community-based practice blends community ethos, community-based standards, and culture to frame disciplinary practices.

Additionally, communitarianism is closely linked to African indigenous philosophy, particularly the concept of interconnectedness as explicated by scholars such as Placide Tempels (1959) and Matalino (2008). Here, human conduct is relational, and any moral deviance is considered an interference with the communal and cosmic order. Its theory holds that effective moral development must be through mutual traditions and practices that enhance harmony, accountability, and equality. Communitarianism can thus be utilized as a culturally sensitive model for assessing and promoting alternatives to corporal punishment through restorative practices, moral conversations, engagement, and cultural immersion in communal values.

2.1.1 Title of Theory: Communitarian Ethics

Communitarian ethics is defined by the central idea of valuing community rather than individualism. This model emphasizes social relations as the foundation of morality and ethical responsibility within a group, rather than as an individual endeavor. Communitarianism challenges the individualist orientation of contemporary society, arguing that education can be defined not only as a means to prepare individuals to succeed in their own lives, but also as a way to shape their sense of duty towards the community. This school of thought helps facilitate moral dilemmas in schools by promoting a collaborative form of discipline and value-oriented education.

2.2 Empirical Review

The move to eliminate corporal punishment and adoption of alternative disciplinary practices has continued to emerge, especially after the international mobilization of children's rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Non-violent discipline methods adopted by many countries, including South Africa, Ethiopia, and the United States, are peer mediation, restorative justice, and guidance and counselling to ensure discipline without violence (Gershoff, 2008; Mokomane, 2020; Lustick, 2021). Nevertheless, in Kenya, ATCPs are poorly connected through national policy, and implementation in various schools is uneven (Mayisela, 2021). Although such alternative approaches are encouraged, it is unclear what effect they will have on slowing moral corruption in the schools, which are particularly prone to students being defiant and/or having behavioral problems (Ndembu, 2013; Ghati, 2023). Teachers' perceptions of ATCPs are usually ambivalent. However, although most teachers have agreed that non-violent methods, such as guidance and counselling, are important, they have regularly reported that these techniques are ineffective, time-consuming, or difficult to utilize because they lack sufficient training and support (Maphosa & Sumba, 2010; Singo, 2017; Mapuva, 2016). Some teachers have attempted to reintroduce corporal punishment surreptitiously or openly, suggesting that fundamental ontological and ethical beliefs regarding authority and discipline may not be addressed solely by policy changes (Mokomane, 2020).

In comparison to past studies, the research expands the perspective by highlighting the absence of a strong philosophical basis in existing disciplinary views, especially in ATCPs. Underlying these strategies is typically a lack of a coherent moral framework, resulting in a reactive approach that is out of touch with the socio-cultural realities of schools. The research supports the incorporation of communitarian morality, which emphasizes collective responsibility among family, school, and community in terms of moral values. Researchers such as Etzioni (1996) believe that providing moral communities in schools that foster values of unity and responsibility is indicative of the African indigenous education system, which is based on interconnectedness and community well-being (Tempels, 1959; Simiyu & Stephen, 2021). Finally, the approach to the study is phenomenological, aiming to change the way qualitative evaluations of ATCPs are conducted. It focuses on a deeper perception, interpretation, and reaction to disciplinary issues by teachers who practice them in their everyday work (Moustakas, 2012). The given point of view enables an approach that addresses/examines the question of why some tactics is effective. Others do not, with greater finesse in terms of the moral dilemmas possible in real life, the institutional constraints, and the social demands that establish the role of teachers in the post-corporal punishment world (Lenta, 2018; Sanderse & Cooke, 2021).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research method, based on the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA), to investigate the lived experiences of teachers in their efforts to manage moral decay in Kenyan secondary schools through the use of Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCPs). Such a method is especially appropriate for attempting to comprehend how individuals perceive their own experiences and interpret their social worlds, as explored in the complexities of teachers managing student discipline without corporal punishment.

The study applied both interpretive and critical theory methods to create knowledge based on common experiences through reflective interpretation. Such approaches enable a thorough investigation of how educators interpret and perceive their experiences with moral development and management in schools. The article aimed to identify the subjective meanings that teachers associate with disciplinary practices and the challenges they face in implementing ATCPs. With the aid of philosophical analysis and hermeneutic phenomenology, the research offers an in-depth understanding of the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that inform teachers' disciplinary approaches.

Data collection mostly involved unstructured phenomenological interviews. These interviews were conducted with four deputy principals and guidance counsellors in secondary schools located in Bungoma County, a region experiencing an increasing trend of student indiscipline. The participants have been chosen strategically, as they are all individuals with firsthand experience in the realization of ATCPs and can contribute valuable knowledge to the session about the applicability and usefulness of these strategies.

Along with the interviews, literature and policy texts were reviewed to put the study into a wider context and compare the data with existing knowledge in the field of ATCPs and disciplinary approaches to education.

The process of data analysis was conducted according to the traditional IPA steps, which incorporate bracketing (to reduce the researcher's bias), phenomenological reduction (to focus on the core of the experiences reported by participants), and the construction of both first- and second-order constructs, which were then combined into themes. The process enabled the identification of major themes, trends, and conclusions regarding the experiences of teachers with ATCPs and their attitudes toward moral education.

The study employed triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Triangulation was conducted by cross-checking the information in different sources (interviews, literature, and policy documents) to ensure consistency and validity. Member checking allowed participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented. Reflexivity was used throughout the research process to reflect on the researcher's influence on the study and to mitigate potential bias.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 The Lived Experiences of Teachers on Parental Support in Moral Issues of Learners

The main objective of the study was to seek the relevance of communitarianism in addressing moral decline among secondary school learners. The study, therefore, aimed to investigate parental involvement in their children's moral issues. The following are the lived experiences of parents on the moral development of their children. In GC1, we see a dynamic where some parents feel overwhelmed in managing their children's behaviour and, as a result, turn to teachers for support ("Mwalimu huyu mtoto amenishinda mnisaidie"). Translated as "Teacher, I have failed with this child; please assist me," this phrase exposes a sense of parental inadequacy and perceived helplessness. Hermeneutically, this implies a change in traditional roles, as parents, who previously held authoritative influence, have now partially ceded it to teachers. This reflects a broader societal trend of increasingly delegating authority and guidance to external institutions. This dependence may be indicative of parents' internal conflicts regarding authority or a reaction to the complexities of the modern social environment, emphasising a potential decline in parental influence or a lack of confidence in their role as disciplinarians. The lived experiences in GC2 revealed a disconnect between parents, schools, and the government, necessitating a bridge that would connect the common sense of all stakeholders, including schools and parents, who share a common interest in mentoring learners. Hermeneutically, this distance represents the potential failure of communication and the disparity in values or goals between these parties.

If the separate approaches to moral education and discipline are not unified somehow, both parties might act in disconnection, leading to the possibility of inconsistent student instruction. The missing gaps mean that the educational system lacks a crucial supporting system, and this explains the significance of working partnerships where all stakeholder roles are defined, appreciated, and interrelated. When the parents have a strong religious foundation, GC3 suggests that most of them are supportive, and in most cases, their children are not problematic. This statement implies that through religion, one can instill discipline, respect, and a unique moral code that befits the school. This also implies that religious structures offer a platform with greater stability to control conduct and whose moral limits are clear-cut, thus giving rise to self-control and deference to authority in a child. However, it remains to be seen what positive role the civilian institutions can take in shaping values. As this implies, schools cannot always succeed in instilling discipline in isolation without a shared cultural or moral foundation.

In GC4, supporting parents and defensive parents are distinguished. When confronted with their child's misbehaviour ("kwani hii ndio kitu umeniitia"), certain parents respond defensively, suggesting that they do not share the school's perspective on discipline. This defensiveness may be an indicator of larger social changes in the relationship to authority in general, and especially when parents sense that the teacher is questioning their authority or judgment. This defensiveness suggests a value difference between parents and the school, possibly a difference in approaches to discipline or parenting styles. It highlights the modern-day struggle between autonomy and accountability, especially to single parents or those with problematic conditions who may feel most vulnerable or inadequate, and this may, in turn, cause them to react negatively to issues of discipline. A communitarian approach to discipline in school can develop a sense of community within the school, where individual students, teachers, parents, and administrators collaborate to provide positive and supportive learning experiences. Instead of being punitive, this method can unfold by investigating the underlying causes of misbehavior and discussing them together. Different systems, therefore, within communitarianism, can be enforced to monitor the learner's progress, as discussed below.

The following table illustrates the first- and second-order constructs derived from the phenomenological interviews, highlighting key themes related to parental support for students' moral development. The analysis reveals the recurring patterns and sentiments expressed by teachers regarding parental involvement and its implications for school discipline.



Table 1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Transcripts (IPA) from first to second order constructs and derived themes on the lived experiences of teachers on parental support on moral development of their children

Table 1

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Teachers' Lived Experiences Regarding Parental Support in the Moral Development of Their Children

First-order constructs	Second-order constructs	Derived themes
GC1 Parents are willing to help, but they appear helpless in front of their children; they therefore depend on the intervention of the teachers, <i>Mwalimu huyu mtoto amenishinda mnisaidie</i> Others are defensive of their children when called upon, siding with them, which undermines the whole process.	Lack of moral authority over their children	Lack of sufficient parental support
GC2 There is a missing gap; there is no proper link between parents and the school, even the government.	Lack of proper coordination among the institutions that are meant to develop morality among the learners	Lack of collective responsibility (communalism)
GC3 Most parents with a strong religious background are very supportive, and their children tend to cause us fewer problems with issues of indiscipline.	Collective responsibility among the institutions that are meant to build morality	Communism bears fruit if engaged.
GC4 It depends on who. Some are very defensive of their children when they are found. In some are like " <i>kwani hii ndio kitu umeniitia, mnaniita kwa kitu ambacho hakina maana simunge kumbatiana nacho badala ya kuniita</i> Mistakes. Parents are often unable to control their learners, particularly those who are single parents. Some of them are poor role models, and they cannot control their learners.	Lack of parental support as a result of poor role models among them, and a defensive attitude	Lack of communalism in the bringing up of the children

The table below provides a synthesis of the teachers' views on effective strategies for curbing moral decline in schools. Their perspectives underscore the need to strengthen school rules, enhance parental involvement, and possibly reconsider the use of corporal punishment. These insights reflect the teachers' frustrations and the need for a more comprehensive, unified approach to discipline.

Table 2 Data analysis sheet with development from first to second-order constructs and derived themes on the teachers' thoughts on the proper approach in curbing moral decline in schools.

Table 2: Teachers' Perspectives on Effective Strategies for Curbing Moral Decline in Schools

First-order constructs	Second-order constructs	Derived themes
DP1: Strengthen school rules and read them with the learners so that when a learner makes a mistake, you refer to them and take the appropriate action	Emphasis on school rules	Use of laws (deontology)
DP2: Involve parents fully, as it is very effective. This will help you understand the background of the learner and their behaviour, and also have a punishment that will prevent learners from repeating the same mistake.	Involvement of parents, and more so, where it requires punishment	Parental engagement
DP3 The best approach is the use of both guidance and counseling, as well as the restoration of corporal punishment, in order to reduce the chances of creating a generation with no virtues.	Combining both G&C and CP	Moral dialogue
DP4: The government should consider involving teachers and other stakeholders in society when it comes up with some policies. They give us the task to implement without looking into what is exactly on the ground.	Public participation in policy-making	Abuse

4.2 The Lived Experiences of GC1 on Parental Helplessness and Teacher Intervention

The experiences of teachers in GC1 indicate that parents are frequently eager to assist but feel helpless in tackling their children's behavior, hence depending on teachers ("Mwalimu huyu mtoto amenishinda mnisisaidie" – "Teacher, I have failed with this child, please help me").

The lack of moral authority over their children signifies a societal trend where traditional family authority structures are weakened, leading to an imbalance in the moral upbringing process. From the reviewed literature, Simiyu & Stephen (2021) posits that parents have abandoned their noble duties of disciplining their children and they have left for teachers similar to this Kiambati (2015) points out that children's behaviour reflects the parents and parents have become workaholics and have failed to discipline their children, and endow them with less emotional attention ending up raising the moral flawed children. The study suggests that a communitarian approach—where moral development involves both family and community—could restore confidence among parents by creating a shared responsibility for learners' behaviour.

4.3 Lived Experiences of GC4 on Lack of Sufficient Parental Support - Parental Defensiveness and Poor Role Modeling

In relation to the aforementioned, GC4 presents a dual observation in which certain parents react defensively to their children's discipline issues, sometimes dismissing the school's concerns as inconsequential ("kwani hii ndio kitu umeniitia?"—"Is this really why you called me?"). Moreover, parents who struggle to manage their children, especially single parents, may unintentionally serve as inadequate role models. The theme, 'Lack of Sufficient Parental Support,' captures this by highlighting how defensive attitudes and poor parental modeling impede practical moral guidance. By adopting Communitarianism in Upbringing, schools, families, and communities can mutually assist one another, addressing deficiencies in individual parenting abilities and cultivating a shared dedication to ethical principles. The subsequent section proposes the role of the family as communitarian.

4.4 The Family as a Communitarian

According to Walker and Taylor (1991) communitarianism is a movement for moral renewal that calls for strengthening the family as a place where personal responsibility is first learned, and then the school as the second line of defence. This implies, therefore, that the family is the first training ground for morals, and the parent is the first teacher of the moral responsibility of the learner. As a teacher, the parent should train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it (King James Version Bible, 2024, Prov. 22:6). Old in the above statement could mean advanced in age. Therefore, when the child is old enough to attend school, he will be able to apply what he was taught at home and maintain it in the school environment. The parent is also the voice of authority to the child, and this should be maintained at all times.

The role of the family in instilling moral values in children is a key tenet of African communitarianism. Makwinja (2018) posits that the family is characterised by non-reciprocal and non-contractual dependence of children on parents; for him, the fundamental principle that governs families is respect. Respect is seen as the primary guiding principle for controlling behaviour within the family and in society at large, and it is exhibited through welcomes, bows, genuflections, and other gestures that indicate recognition of seniority that comes with age. On the other hand, the principle of restriction prohibits an individual from exercising unlimited freedom; individual interests are continually weighed against the needs of the larger society. This decreases friction between individuals and throughout the larger group. The above argument supports the theory of moral particularism, which emphasizes the special duties people have to their families, kin, community, and society. In this aspect, a child is taught to resist evil and uphold the good name that his ancestors have built over the years. When a child deviates from this path, the effects of their action shift to their family, and the action is considered a reflection of the child's household (Molefe, 2017).

When an individual's actions bring shame and a "bad name" to a family, it raises questions of moral probity, cultural compliance, and integrity. The fear that the actions of some individuals may tarnish the family name often serves as a cautionary reminder for parents to keep a close eye on their children, lest their actions lead to the destruction of the family's reputation. Thus, according to Isola (2009), the Yoruba would say, "a child not built up morally will sell the house built by the parents." This is why Africans will always say: *oruko rere san ju wura ati fadaka lo*, which translates to "a good name is better than riches. Communitarianism argues that the family is the microcosm in which children first observe, acquire, and exhibit the values and prosocial behaviour necessary for successful integration into the wider community. In part, the child's initiation is brought about by conscious effort on the part of parents and other caregivers, through reinforcing acceptable behavior and punishing or challenging unacceptable behavior.

However, the rate of moral decline witnessed in schools raises questions about whether the family is fulfilling its role in the moral upbringing of children. As evident in the research carried out by Simiyu and Stephen (2021), children raised by workaholic parents often fail to discipline them, and they typically provide less emotional attention, thereby raising flawed children. Kiambiti (2015) supports the above argument by stating that parents are failing to discipline

their children, as they are often more concerned about their own status and popularity than their children's lives and future. They go to the extent of abdicating their noble role to housekeepers to educate their children into all-around individuals. He further states that they prefer not to discipline their children, unintentionally spoiling them, hoping against hope that their children will become better and more mature. These suggest that materialism is what drives such parents. Mahatma Gandhi, however, once stated that earning money can never be the purpose of education. Therefore, it is evident that there is an issue within the family structures that needs to be addressed. As long as there are no moral structures within the family, which is the basis or foundation of morality, even if schools try to address the anomaly, the problem will persist because the foundation is flawed.

The role of the family in the moral development of learners has a special emphasis in the Kenyan government, as it has adopted a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) to enhance skills development and instill values in learners. Through this, parents have been empowered to become involved in their child's development. There are several roles that parents have been given in the CBC. Some of the roles related to this study include parents instilling and nurturing moral values, teaching and guiding children to make the right choices, and making them aware of the consequences. Additionally, parents should discuss observed character, behavior, and disciplinary issues regarding their children with teachers and take necessary action (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2019). The parents are therefore given authority over their children's moral development. The study, therefore, through a communitarian philosophy, examined how this can be realized.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that the family is of utmost importance in communitarian philosophy. It is, as stated by Etzioni, the springboard of morality. However, the lived experiences of the teachers contradict this view, as the teachers expressed that parents have abdicated their duties of parenting to them. Such sentiments align with the reviewed literature. For instance, Kiambati (2015) observes that parents are failing to discipline their children, and some are more concerned about their own status and popularity, rather than the lives and futures of their children. He further argues that some even think that textbooks and house help are responsible for educating their children, and some workaholic parents fail to discipline their children, ultimately raising morally flawed children.

The parents should be made aware that these morally flawed children will eventually grow up and become a burden to them. They have been allowed to raise children who will eventually become adults and work in various sectors. It is worth noting that, as they prefer not to discipline their children, unintentionally spoiling them in the hope that they will become better as they grow and mature, they are inadvertently spoiling the future spouses of others. They are spoiling people who are supposed to be responsible in society and the nation as a whole.

4.5 Aristotelian Habituation and Moral Development within the Family

The study argues that for a family to be effective and instill values in its children, it should adopt the Aristotelian concept of habituation. According to the Aristotelian view, the excellences of character, or moral virtues, are cultivated through habituation (Makwinja, 2018). It is the only method suitable for developing starting points in the ethical life Aristotle associates the excellences of character with an appropriate experience of pleasure, and the vices with an appropriate experience of pain. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the nature of bravery and its relation to pleasure and pain, emphasizing the importance of proper upbringing for moral excellence

"He who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this, or at least is not pained, is brave, while the pained man is a coward. Moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence, we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education" (Aristotle, 1999, NE 2.9, 1104b5 13)

Aristotle's argument revolves around the concept that moral education entails the process of moulding responses to experiences of pleasure and pain. He proposes that humans should cultivate the ability to get pleasure from virtuous activities and experience pain from vice in order to cultivate moral excellence. The concept of moral conditioning through the experience of pleasure and pain can be likened to the role of disciplinary measures in educational settings. Aristotle posits that the discomfort associated with negative actions serves as an incentive for individuals to refrain from engaging in them. In this context, corporal punishment could be interpreted as a means of fostering a "proper education" by causing students to associate suffering with misconduct, thereby discouraging such behaviours. Therefore, instances of pleasure and pain are integral to moral cultivation among learners. The child, therefore, needs to be brought up in a particular way so that he or she may delight and not be pained in instances that are meant to build them. Therefore, the home can be a good foundation for a deterrence effect, where children grow up knowing the consequences of their behavior. So, when they go to school and deterrence mechanisms are established at home, they will be more careful to avoid some unwanted behaviors.

The gap displayed in the previous discussions indicates that there are no deterrence mechanisms in schools to monitor the morals of learners; the challenges of balancing rights and responsibility, and the lack of moral dialogue can

only be addressed from the family setup. Hermeneutic phenomenology advocates for dialogue as a means of developing morals among the children. It is worth noting that corporal punishment has not been prohibited at the family level, and that is why some schools take the initiative of calling parents to schools to cane their children who misbehave in school literally, and the same parents spank their children in front of teachers. Whether this is ethically wrong or not, some schools reported that it works for them. The family can play its role as a community if proper structures are established within the family to prepare parents for their roles. There have been instances of outcry when parents are required to stay with their children in circumstances where schools have been closed for a longer period than necessary, such as during the COVID-19 shutdown in the country. Parents were not comfortable staying with their children, not because they were missing out on their academic progression, but rather because they were unable to control them. The same parents have also raised a concern that the CBC is involving them too much in their children's progress. It can be argued that these parents have not been prepared enough to handle their children. This suggests that the parents have not been adequately prepared for their roles.

It is worth noting that African indigenous education was grounded in several philosophical principles, one of which was Preparationism, whereby the function of teaching and learning was to equip children with the skills appropriate for their various roles in society (Simiyu & Stephen, 2021). The training was mostly gender sensitive. Girls were taught how to become good mothers and how to handle and support their husbands after marriage, and boys were prepared to become good fathers, warriors, and farmers. Based on the above observation, family and parenting were crucial in the AIE. However, as pointed out in the literature review and the study's background, the rise of a competitive world has led to formal education being viewed from an economic perspective as an industrial process where human products are manufactured to serve various parts of the economy. Education is preparing individuals for a career and not for a family. This could be the reason why parents are not readily available for their children. Therefore, to address the problem, it is necessary to borrow from the AIE, whereby education on parenthood should be incorporated into the curriculum. This can be done in all institutions of higher learning and tertiary colleges.

4.6 The School is a Communitarian

4.6.1 The lived experiences of GC2 on Disconnect among Institutions

GC2 identifies a "missing gap" in the collaboration among parents, educational institutions, and the government, resulting in disjointed initiatives in moral education. This gap, which elaborates on the theme of a lack of proper coordination among institutions, suggests that each stakeholder operates independently, thereby limiting a cohesive impact on learners' moral development. The resulting theme, collective responsibility among institutions, highlights that communal practices rooted in communitarian philosophy can foster collaboration among diverse entities. By promoting consistent values and common rules, incorporating moral education into family, school, and government systems may boost community cohesion, creating a better and more cohesive environment for moral growth.

4.6.2 Lived experiences GC3 on Religious Values as a Supportive Moral Framework

GC3 suggests that parents with strong religious values tend to be more supportive, and their children often exhibit less discipline. This observation suggests that collective responsibility yields favourable results, as a shared moral framework within the family environment reinforces the ideals promoted in school. This highlights that communal moral education, grounded in religious or cultural beliefs, provides children with distinct moral boundaries, leading to fewer behavioural issues. This demonstrates that a communitarian strategy can ensure consistency in moral education across various environments, highlighting the effectiveness of communalism in cultivating self-discipline and respect among learners.

According to Etzioni's observations, the school assumes a prominent role in addressing the moral concerns of students, serving as a secondary authority in this regard. This study asserts that once a child has been habituated within the family, the educational institution assumes the role of fostering additional growth through moral reasoning. Consequently, it is imperative to establish institutional mechanisms within educational settings to monitor and assess the moral growth of students. Nevertheless, it has been discovered from the reviewed literature and lived experiences that obstacles exist within educational institutions that render it unfeasible to effectively address students' behaviours, according to Simiyu & Stephen (2021). Schools have neglected the moral dimension of education, resulting in a decline in achievement scores, increased indiscipline, and behaviour problems.

A theme that emerged from the teachers' lived experiences is their sense of helplessness in regulating children when corporal punishment is prohibited. This implies that the teacher lacks adequate strategies to cater to the contemporary learner on matters of morality effectively. This study thus concludes that there is an urgent need for teachers who adopt the Socratic Method and incorporate Platonic dialogue to address the moral decline observed in students. The study thus incorporated the use of Platonic dialogue within a communitarian framework to examine learners' behaviours, to foster a community of learners that includes Socratic teachers, parents, and the learners themselves.

4.7 The Role of Moral Dialogue in Education

Moral dialogue, as discussed earlier, is one of the key pillars of communitarian philosophy. Education, from the communitarian viewpoint, encompasses more than the mere transmission of knowledge; it also serves to foster moral and ethical development. Moral dialogue offers a platform for individuals to engage in thoughtful discussions about values, ethics, and the common good. The reviewed literature in this study highlighted a critical gap in the existing methodologies employed in teaching subjects that aim to instill values in students. Simiyu and Stephen (2021) contend that these approaches are predominantly didactic, resulting in passive learning experiences where students internalise information through rote memorization. According to Munene (2016), this pedagogical approach is reflected in the poor state of discipline in Kenyan secondary schools. Munene attributes this to the approaches taken in moral development, noting that examinations are frequently prioritized over the moral values intended to be instilled in students.

The concerns expressed are significant; they imply that students may achieve academic success in courses that emphasise moral education but fail to possess the requisite moral values. This apparent contradiction suggests that the instructional approaches are excessively didactic and passive, devoid of opportunities for meaningful value-related dialogue between teachers and students. To address this, the study adopted a communitarian philosophy that emphasises collective responsibility through moral dialogue. In this approach, the instillation of values is viewed as a collaborative effort that involves the learner's interaction with their family, community, and school. This approach, in contrast to traditional didactic methods, recognizes the importance of dialogue in the acquisition of value. The research employed the Socratic Method, a dialogical approach developed by Plato, within the realm of education, with the aim of achieving the aforementioned goal. This approach is consistent with communitarian philosophy as it promotes ethical growth and moral discourse among students as a community. The method recognizes the value of engaging students in meaningful discussions that go beyond memorization and focuses on encouraging moral and responsible behavior in a broader social context.

4.7.1 Platonic Dialogue as a Means of Cultivating Morals among the Learners

The integration of Plato's dialogues into the secondary school curriculum in Kenya, with the intention of imparting moral principles, perfectly aligns with the tenets of the Contemporary Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Due to their focus on problem-solving and critical thinking, which are two fundamental competencies of the CBC, Plato's dialogues are notably pertinent and advantageous in the present educational landscape.

4.8 Plato's Dialogue as a Model

The study adopted two models of Platonic dialogue as suitable approaches to instilling morals through value clarification. These are the *Meno* model and the *Theaetetus* model.

In *Meno*, a brief dialogue occurs between Socrates and a young slave boy. The dialogue exhibits characteristics of discourse that may be classified as Socratic. Socrates engages in a demonstration with a slave boy to illustrate how he can employ questions to accomplish two things: first, disprove the boy's arrogance that he knows something when in fact he does not (Plato, *Meno* 82b- 84e); and second, guide him to the correct conclusions (Plato, *Meno* 84e-85b). This is intended to demonstrate that the slave boy possessed the genuine opinions the entire time; all that was required was for Socrates, in his capacity as an educator, to extract them through the use of the appropriate series of questions. In this sense, the educator will be referred to as a Socratic teacher.

The Socratic teacher employs their existing knowledge to pose thought-provoking questions about the subject matter under discussion, thereby guiding students, identifying flaws in their answers, and ultimately steering them towards insightful and meaningful responses.

This approach facilitates learners in cultivating reflective thinking skills through guided reasoning, thereby promoting active engagement rather than passivity. According to Lenta (2018), increased active engagement in the process of understanding reasoning systems is likely to result in improved and enduring mastery of the subject matter.

The *Meno* model of teaching facilitates the establishment of a communal environment among learners, wherein they gather and actively participate in moral discourse under the guidance of a Socratic teacher. This can be achieved through the implementation of subjects that instill moral values, such as ethics, and the strengthening of life skills education in educational institutions. The instructional approaches employed should adhere strictly to Socratic methods, including techniques such as brainstorming, discussion, and case studies.

The Socratic method of dialogue entails the utilisation of questioning and critical thinking as a means to foster the intellectual and moral development of individuals. Through the integration of this approach within the realm of education, Socratic teachers strive to facilitate learners' exploration and comprehension of moral truths, as opposed to merely imposing pre-established values, such as school rules.

Through the dialogue, Socrates undertakes to demonstrate that all learning is recollection, and thus "teaching" would simply be provoking memory (Plato, *Meno* 81e-82b). This is what Socratic education entails. In this approach,

the teacher can help the learner not only to recollect themselves but also guide the learner to the correct answer. In the *Meno*, therefore, Socrates uses questions to teach positive facts about a subject, based on the knowledge he possesses and can also impart to his learner.

In the context of education, a teacher who adheres to communitarian principles adopts the Socratic Method as a pedagogical approach, thereby assuming the role of a facilitator of dialogue rather than a traditional instructor. They establish a setting in which learners are motivated to inquire, contemplate, and actively participate in substantial dialogues about matters of morality and ethics. This approach cultivates a sense of responsibility and collective engagement among individuals engaged in the learning process.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the implementation of this approach would entail the utilisation of case studies, ethical dilemmas, and real-world illustrations as catalysts for fostering meaningful dialogues. The teacher can introduce open-ended questions, encourage students to consider various perspectives, and facilitate a discussion that takes into account the moral aspects of different issues.

The use of case studies provides a realistic and similar approach to introducing topics that are intended to facilitate moral development, such as life skills and ethics. These situations are diverse, involving issues relevant to the morality that the instructor intends to instill, through which the learners can explore practical implementation. The simplest task of the teacher is to carefully select examples that prompt deep thinking about moral principles.

The teacher employs the Socratic questioning technique to facilitate the process by which students critically review and analyze the case studies provided to them. The method triggers critical thinking skills and active participation. To foster students' examination of the ethical aspects of various situations, questions can be formulated to prompt them to articulate their thoughts and perspectives. The teacher facilitates a reflective process in which students establish connections between the presented scenarios and their personal experiences. The establishment of a personal connection serves to enhance individuals' understanding of the applicability of moral values in their daily lives.

A subsequent period of introspection will be pursued through a personal development session (PDS). The personal development session establishes a secure environment in which students are allowed to freely articulate their thoughts and emotions, aligning with phenomenological principles. During this session, students are encouraged to share personal experiences, recount the challenges they have faced, and discuss the strategies they have employed to overcome these challenges. The establishment of an open forum in the classroom cultivates a climate of trust and community among the students.

During the personal development session, the instructor gains valuable insights into the students' lives. This comprehension enables the recognition of situations that necessitate further assistance. The educator assumes the role of a facilitator in identifying instances where parental involvement, guidance, and counselling may be required; thus, they attend to the holistic needs of the learners.

A fundamental principle is to underscore that the instruction of these subjects is not oriented towards examinations. There is a shift in emphasis from conventional assessment metrics to the cultivation of pragmatic and relevant competencies. The assessment process may encompass various methods, such as project-based evaluations, presentations, or portfolios, which serve to demonstrate the practical application of values rather than merely repeating information.

The emphasis on the Socratic teacher being a facilitator brings the second model of Platonic dialogue, which is the *Theaetetus* model. In this model, Socrates describes his philosophical questioning as a distinct craft which he compares to the craft of midwifery (Plato, *Theaetetus* 149a-151d). Whereas midwives help others to deliver bodily children, Socrates helps others deliver the offspring of their souls. Just like a midwife may even decide to promote miscarriage, Socrates alludes that those offspring who are not worth bringing up, the midwife could decide to promote miscarriage, so falsehood should be exposed to death. In *Theaetetus*, the learners have within them some sense, and can exercise a highly developed skill by which they can bring that knowledge "into the light. The teacher, as a midwife, therefore helps the learner to be autonomous in moral formation, as his work is to facilitate moral development.

Plato's conceptualization of dialogue, thus, holds significant importance in the problem of moral decline. Plato posits that the function of dialogue is to transiently broaden the perceptual faculties of individuals.

The school plays a significant role in fostering communitarian values, thereby facilitating moral reasoning and promoting rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is primarily intended for individuals who have not undergone the process of habituation within a familial context.

According to Plato, if an individual is not habituated adequately in their youth, they will have a wrong conception of virtues and will forever be corrupted (Seventh Letter, 326c). This entails that to develop into a full, virtuous person, one must be properly habituated from youth.

This means that learners who are poorly habituated pose problems for the school's administration, and the methodological approaches used to inculcate values in such learners are faulty. In such scenarios, the teachers often appear helpless. Plato's concept of rehabilitation reveals a theory of transformation for individuals who have had a bad

upbringing. Therefore, Socratic dialogue becomes essential in such a case. Dialogue, as emphasised by existential phenomenology, is one of the educational ideals. To them, educational endeavours are considered a dialogue.

Additionally, Plato argues that well-habituated individuals not only recognise virtuous actions but also desire to carry them out because they have developed a preference for them and actively pursue opportunities to do so. Adopting the Plato approach will thus benefit the student in two ways: first, he will be able to recognise and execute virtuous actions, both of which are aspects that current methodological approaches in school have not adequately addressed and two will help in moral upbringing of individuals who were not properly habituated at the family level.

By employing the *Meno* and *Theaetetus* framework within the context of communitarianism, educational institutions and families can establish collaborative groups aimed at assisting parents in managing control and discipline, as well as fostering cooperation with teachers regarding the expected standards and behaviour of their children. It is recommended that learners be provided with a self-assessment tool to evaluate their moral judgement about a specific concept. Both the teacher and the parent will be provided with a similar one in order to assess the same learner. Upon the conclusion of the evaluation, it is imperative to facilitate a dialogue involving the parent, the learner, and the teacher.

There should then be a specific date on the school calendar, distinct from the normal academic day, when parents are invited to the school to discuss their children's moral development. Cases that require further discussion can now be referred to the Department of Guidance and Counselling. To conclude, the Platonic concept of dialogue, particularly the Socratic Method, when incorporated into an educational setting that aligns with communitarian philosophy, facilitates the creation of a dialogical atmosphere that fosters moral discourse and maturation among scholars in fellowship. Such a model considers the importance of having students participate in meaningful discussions beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge and strives to build a generation of conscientious and morally righteous individuals in the broader society.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCPs) were effective in reducing the incidence of moral decadence, which was increasing at an alarming rate in secondary schools within Kenya, especially in Bungoma County. The results also indicate that teachers are experiencing significant difficulty in applying ATCPs, primarily due to several reasons, including a lack of training, inadequate parental support, and a disjointed approach to discipline and moral education in schools, families, and communities. The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of teachers' lived experiences revealed that parental support plays a critical role in the success of these alternative methods. However, on the other hand, teachers were complaining about the poor parental support, and in many cases, parents were defensive or unable to control their children, which was a significant impediment. Furthermore, there was a considerable implication that the communitarian approach to discipline, noting that disasters can be solved through the mutual instillation of morality by parents, schools, and the community. Another lesson that the study taught us was that moral talk in schools may be important; students can discuss values and ethics with their parents and teachers. Through the adoption of communitarian ethics in the education system, the school will be a more successful moral community, where discipline is not the exclusive role of the teacher, but is shared and encouraged by the community. Finally, the paper concludes that communitarian ethics will provide ATCPs with a solid foundation for discipline, moral growth through mutual responsibility, moral conversation, and school-family-community partnerships. Such a change of outlook would go a long way toward making ATCPs more productive and, therefore, address the moral decay in Kenyan high school institutions.

5.2 Recommendations

The study suggests that Kenya's education system, particularly at secondary schools, should introduce a communitarian philosophy to its moral education system. This would entail the instability of collective responsibility by parents, teachers, students, and the community to nurture discipline and moral values. Another important point about this suggestion is that the role of moral development should not be perceived as a school task only; it should be a common task in which families and communities are engaged in providing moral stimulation for students. In addition, the paper highlights that the moral development of children should be a dynamic engagement on the part of parents. This involves parents getting involved in the moral development programs offered in school, attending the moral assessment, and collaborating with teachers to ensure consistency in the values between the school and home settings. Parents must actively engage in their children's moral education, supporting and reinforcing the same principles that schools aim to instill.

Additionally, the study recommends incorporating Platonic and Socratic practices of moral dialogue into the school curricula. Educators need to be well-equipped to teach morality through meaningful discussions that can transcend traditional school learning, allowing students to examine values and moral behavior. By doing so, it will enable students to better study moral concepts and develop their thinking and reasoning about ethical issues.

Furthermore, the study recommends that teachers engage in lifelong learning, focusing on the details of different disciplinary approaches, grounded in a philosophical basis of ethics. This involves training on dialogical approaches, especially the Meno and Theaetetus accounts of Platonic philosophy, as a way of strengthening moral thinking and motivating deeper interactions with students. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to foster a reflective and ethical learning environment that supports students' moral growth.

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