

Influence of Home Ecology and Moral Upbringing on Moral Development of Junior High School Pupils in the Cape Coast Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

There appears to be a notable gap in the literature concerning home ecology and moral upbringing within the Ghanaian context. This study aims to address this gap. Employing a descriptive survey design with a quantitative approach, the study used a simple random sampling technique to select eight Junior High Schools in OLA Circuit in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Purposive sampling was employed to select 25 Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers and 30 parents. Data collection was facilitated through a questionnaire. The analysis involved descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics, thus, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), to address the research questions and hypotheses. The study revealed that the home is the foundational environment for nurturing morality and character formation, equipping pupils with practical moral reasoning and executive function skills. Moreover, schools, social media, peer influences, and extracurricular activities, such as clubs, sports, and games, play significant roles in moral development. It was also found that challenges persist in developing pupils morally. These include inadequate parental involvement, ineffective parenting styles, exposure to inappropriate media content, and the presence of unqualified Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers. The correlation between home ecology and moral development was very high, positive, and statistically significant ($r = .905^{**}$, $p < .000$). Likewise, the correlation between moral upbringing and moral development was positive and statistically significant ($r = .755^{**}$, $p < .005$). This indicated that engaging pupils in real-life moral practices and teaching them to apply moral principles in everyday situations positively influences their moral development. To reinforce pupils' moral development effectively, it is recommended that the home, school, media, religious institutions, and stakeholders collaborate to ensure a unified approach to strengthen moral values consistently within the sociocultural context. It is also recommended that parent-school partnerships be reinforced through effective regular communication, collaborative activities, and integration of practical moral education into the curriculum with interactive and real-life scenarios. Furthermore, implementing media literacy programs is indispensable for pupils to evaluate media content, thus mitigating the adverse effects of inapt media exposure.

Keywords: Morality, Ethical Values, Home Ecology, Moral Upbringing, Moral Development

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There is pressing predictability to address the factors influencing character development and spiritual values in youths from diverse backgrounds (Nakayama, 2019; Rakhmonova, 2021). This urgency is heightened by the growing global concern over the apparent erosion of conscience and remorse among young people, culminating in a widespread moral crisis in many countries. The contributing factors include inadequate parenting, greediness, and an insatiable desire for wealth and material possessions, which incite these youths to resort to violence at the slightest provocation (Lickona, 2012; Emmanuel, 2021). Likewise, intolerance, media violence (on television, radio, and the internet), and the neglect of character and ethical values in schools impair this situation (Lickona, 2012). Therefore, instilling ethical values within the educational context is critical, as it significantly influences the moral development of young individuals both within the school setting and beyond (Ginner-Hau, Ferrer-Wreder, & Allodi, 2021; Shavkatovna, 2021).

Immoral behaviours propelling students toward various vices such as mischief, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, theft, smoking, and debauchery indicate a looming moral crisis within our society (Gatiss, 2021). The pertinent question is how this moral decline can be averted. Integrating character education, spiritual and ethical values into school curricula can overwhelmingly influence the moral fabric of students, fostering ethical virtues such as respect, responsibility, justice, truthfulness, trustworthiness, self-discipline, and moral courage (Lickona, 2012; Musling, Ismail, Darmi, Kamaruddin, & Jaffar, 2021; Shavkatovna, 2021). Character and ethical values instruction is self-motivated, encouraging students to lead lives worthy of emulation. Home ecology is often the initial foundation for moral development. As children interact with neighbourhood friends, various factors help them cultivate more nuanced moral principles (Speidel et al., 2020; Hidayah, 2021). Subsequently, teachers and parents must inculcate a clear sense of right and wrong in young people, enabling them to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. This foundational guidance is significant, as it equips students to live upright lives and make informed decisions, regardless of where they find themselves (Speidel et al., 2020). In crux, the combined influence of home and school on students' moral judgment, learning, and development significantly enhances their decision-making processes. This comprehensive education nurtures their growth into responsible and respected individuals (Schuster, Hyafil, & Moreno-Bote, 2019).

Imparting ethical values in junior high schools in Ghana is a highly effective approach for educating students to make well-informed moral decisions daily. The school, home, and community are ultimate social agents in shaping the moral fabric of pupils, guiding them toward lives worthy of emulation (Ginner-Hau et al., 2021). Kraut (2018) asserts that the fundamental responsibility of nurturing a morally upright child resides in teachers, parents, community members, and other moral authorities, such as schools and various religious organizations within a given sociocultural context. No child is born with the insight to discern right from wrong, and it takes adults' support to develop this competence and knowledge. It is usually a disheartening experience for parents and teachers when children fail to portray the anticipated moral standards within the public space. This inevitability emphasizes the decisive role of moral education in imparting values, skills, and ethical awareness to children (Bansal, 2020). This perspective is in sync with Roosevelt's assertion, cited in Shaurya (2021), that an educational system focusing solely on developing critical thinking while neglecting moral education produces individuals who may be a menace to society. Furthermore, educating students about teamwork, adherence to rules and codes of conduct, assisting others, and celebrating their achievements should be recognized as fundamental mechanisms of a value-based educational system (Shaurya, 2021).

Over the years, educators have formulated various theories concerning moral development and how children learn to discern right from wrong. The most prominent among these are the theories of Piaget (1962) and Kohlberg (1954; 1984), which elucidate the sequential processes involved in children's moral development.

Educators must employ developmentally appropriate strategies to foster ethical values in students, such as storytelling, highlighting the consequences of characters' actions and inactions (Butean et al., 2021). Kohlberg's first stage, known as the 'pre-conventional stage,' pertains to children between the ages of 2 and 9. A notable characteristic of children at this stage is their adherence to rules and regulations, primarily to avoid punishment from teachers or parents. Their obedience is motivated by a desire to please adults within and outside the school milieu. The subsequent stage, termed the 'conventional stage,' encompasses children aged 10 to 15. At this stage, a defining trait is their discernment of social groups, such as parents and teachers, as authoritative figures. In the absence of teachers or parents, there is a likelihood that some children may misbehave.

The final stage, the 'post-conventional stage,' encompasses individuals from around 15 years old to adulthood. The critical moral characteristic of this stage is the adherence to the moral standards of society. Kohlberg's theory stresses the status of moral educators employing developmentally appropriate methods to guide students in cultivating ethical values, enabling them to evaluate situations regarding right and wrong (Malle, 2021). The aptitude of students to distinguish right from wrong and apply these lessons to make informed moral decisions in their daily lives is a multipart issue. This intricacy arises from the need to comprehend individuals with diverse moral perspectives and make moral judgments about their behaviour (Kohlberg, 1984). Like Piaget, Kohlberg's theory aids students in comprehending the virtues of ethical issues and developing insights to integrate effectively into society (Grant & Grant, 2018). Also, the moral development of students has a cognitive dimension, as reflection is necessary when they encounter moral dilemmas before making a judgment on the appropriate course of action.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past decades, individuals' nature and ability to discern right from wrong have been a significant global concern. Numerous researchers have highlighted the critical role of adult support and the perspectives of teachers and parents in fostering a sense of morality in pupils at school and home (Lori, 2021). The school and home ecology exemplify and mirror societal values, abetting pupils in developing an awareness of ethical behaviour. An inexorable issue is the apparent lack of commitment among teachers to the moral development of pupils, which can lead to early school dropout and subsequent moral crises (Booker, 2021). Societies worldwide grapple with increasing crime rates, pervasive arrogance, a widespread lack of conscience, and growing disrespect for authority figures (Kuehn, 2021). In this context, the school serves as both a social and moral agent, significantly shaping pupils' character into rational, socially proactive, and responsible citizens (Johnson, 2021). Nevertheless, pupils' behaviour should reflect the moral standards set by their teachers. If teachers fail to discipline students and provide appropriate emotional support, they risk raising ethically deficient pupils.

Religious and Moral Education (RME) programs have been integral to schooling since its inception, targeting to nurture positive attitudes, ethical values, and psychosocial skills in pupils (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NaCCA], 2019). It appears that the instruction of RME subjects in junior high schools has had little or no impact on the moral development of pupils. An intensifying incidence of pupils engaging in various moral and social vices, including theft, smoking, gambling, sexual immorality, scamming (internet fraud), and indecent dressing, tend to endanger their future (Abdi, 2018). This trend is not entirely surprising, as social and cultural dynamics influence pupils' morality. Nonetheless, it remains the duty of teachers and parents to coxswain pupils toward moral development.

Anecdotal evidence proposes that many pupils in Junior High Schools in Cape Coast Metropolis are engaging in immoral activities such as theft, sexual immorality (leading to teenage pregnancies and premature fatherhood), smoking, alcoholic consumption, gambling, and internet fraud. For instance, there is

a prevalent issue among young people involved in thefts, especially on the university campus and its environs, where these young people target vulnerable students for their phones, laptops, and money with sophisticated weapons. This is an indication that if the home, school, and other stakeholders do not take responsibility for nurturing pupils' moral development, their acquisition of ethical values would be compromised, potentially becoming a menace to society (Ngwokabuenui, 2015; Gui, Yasin, Abdullah & Saharuddin, 2020; Siddiqui & Habib, 2021). Numerous studies have predominantly focused on Senior High Schools and college students, exploiting qualitative methods for data collection (Addai-Mensah, 2020; Ampofo, 2021). Employing a developmentally appropriate approach is a powerful tool for molding the moral character of pupils during classroom instruction. Equally, if such strategies are not applied, children's ethical values may become questionable, hypothetically leading to societal issues like hooliganism (Solikhah, Imroatus & Budiharso, 2020). The relevant question is, to what extent can pupils' moral development be influenced to become upright individuals who adhere to societal rules and norms, promoting social harmony and making moral judgments that benefit society? Achieving this would create a conducive and peaceful society for people from all walks of life, which was the central focus of the current study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the perceptions of RME teachers regarding factors that influence pupils' moral development within the Cape Coast Metropolis?
2. What are RME teachers' views on the challenges associated with promoting pupils' moral development within the Cape Coast Metropolis?

HYPOTHESES

Three research hypotheses guided this study.

H_{o1} : There is no statistically significant relationship between the home ecology of pupils and their moral development

H_{o2} : There is no statistically significant relationship between the moral upbringing of pupils and their moral development

LITERATURE REVIEW

Piaget's Moral Development Theory

Between the ages of 4 and 7, children enter Piaget's initial phase of moral development, termed heteronomous morality or moral realism (Piaget, 1932). During this period, children perceive morality as rigid adherence to immutable rules established by authoritative figures such as parents, teachers, and God (Feldman, 2014). They believe that transgressions lead to immediate and severe consequences, a concept known as immanent justice. This stage prioritizes the consequences of actions over the intentions behind them, prompting children to assess others as good or bad based solely on the outcomes of their behaviours. For instance, a child who breaks multiple objects is deemed more deserving of severe punishment than one who breaks fewer items (Pinquart, 2021). Consequently, children's moral reasoning at this stage is

predominantly driven by a desire to avoid punishment from authority figures.

Children progress into incipient cooperation morality between the ages of 7 and 10. At this phase, they begin to grasp that rules can be flexible and engage in cooperative play, emphasizing the value of friendships and social interactions (Curry, Mullins, & Whitehouse, 2019). They comprehend and adhere to game rules, which acquire a sociocultural aspect, enabling them to collaboratively adapt and establish rules with peers (Nucci, Turiel, & Roded, 2017). This stage signifies a transition from strict adherence to authority-imposed rules to appreciating the significance of cooperation and mutual understanding despite varied interpretations of rules among different children. The final stage, autonomous morality, emerges between ages 11 and 15. During this phase, children acknowledge that rules are social constructs that can be revised through consensus (Ansorge, 2020). They cultivate a sense of fairness and equality, advocating for punishment that emphasizes restitution over retribution, aiming to educate rather than merely penalize (Pinquart & Fischer, 2021). This stage prioritizes intentions over consequences and fosters comprehension of abstract moral principles such as justice and human welfare (Kim & Hachey, 2020; Chalik & Dunham, 2020). As children mature, they embrace the principle of perfect reciprocity, striving to treat others as they wish, signifying a significant advancement in their moral reasoning (Killen, Elenbaas, & Rizzo, 2018).

Kohlberg's Moral Development

Kohlberg's theory of moral development builds upon and extends Piaget's work, proposing that moral development in pupils unfolds through distinct stages influenced by their social and environmental contexts. According to Kohlberg, children's understanding of rules, moral decisions, and punishment evolves progressively rather than abruptly (Kurt, 2020). He argues that moral development is rooted in intellectual growth and moral reasoning, influencing how children differentiate right from wrong while considering others' perspectives (Kay, 2017). Kohlberg's extensive research identified three primary stages of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional, each with two sub-stages. Using storytelling techniques like the Heinz dilemma, he concluded that moral judgment develops systematically rather than randomly. In the pre-conventional stage, children's moral reasoning is externally motivated by fear of punishment and the desire for personal gain, adhering to rules set by authorities such as parents, teachers, and other social agents. This stage emphasizes compliance to avoid repercussions and the concept of social exchange, where actions are reciprocated based on personal benefit. Conversely, the conventional stage sees children internalize societal norms and rules, emphasizing mutual expectations and relationships based on trust, loyalty, and respect (Musling et al., 2021). Pupils' moral decisions at this stage reflect the values expected by their social environment, both within and outside school settings, contributing to social order and responsibility.

The post-conventional stage represents the pinnacle of moral development, where individuals internalize moral reasoning independent of external rules. They navigate ethical conflicts based on universal principles such as justice, fairness, and human rights, emphasizing individual rights and social contracts (Musling et al., 2021). Kohlberg recommends replacing traditional moral education with methods that foster pupils' moral reasoning through dilemma-based dialogues, democratic behaviour modelling, and content-integrated moral teaching (Githaiga, 2018; Ahmed, 2021). This approach aims to develop an educated citizenry capable of independent moral judgment, which is significant for distinguishing right from wrong and making sound decisions. In the Ghanaian context, this highlights the importance of nurturing pupils' moral reasoning abilities through regulated and thoughtful moral education in junior high schools.

Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), a renowned developmental psychologist, formulated the ecological systems theory, which delineates a comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse environmental factors

influencing pupils' development within sociocultural and historical contexts. This theory provides an insightful perspective for identifying the underlying causes of pupils' misbehaviour and devising alternative strategies to address such issues in Ghanaian societies by applying moral dilemmas. According to Bronfenbrenner, a pupil's development is shaped by multiple layers of their immediate environment, from direct interactions at home and school to broader societal values, laws, and practices (Guy-Evans, 2020). These layers, structured into the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem, interact within a specific sociocultural context, dynamic influencing the child's growth and behaviour.

The interactions within these systems profoundly influence pupils' academic performance, cognitive processes, behaviours, decisions, attitudes, and overall conduct (Lippard et al., 2018). To nurture moral development in pupils, educators and parents must consider both the immediate surroundings of the pupil and the broader environmental interactions. Establishing a positive school climate through an inclusive philosophy and appreciation for diversity can positively impact pupils' relationships within and outside the school environment. This comprehensive approach highlights the significance of supportive and nurturing environments for moral growth. The microsystem, the initial level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, consists of the immediate settings where the pupil resides, encompassing direct interactions with parents, teachers, siblings, neighbourhood friends, and classmates. This level of interaction is bidirectional, signifying that individuals can influence and be influenced by those in their environment (Guy-Evans, 2020). Positive interactions within the microsystem, such as fostering bonds with parents or a supportive school atmosphere, are dynamic for promoting moral development. In contrast, negative interactions can detrimentally affect a pupil's growth. Engaging pupils in activities promoting moral development and employing parenting strategies incorporating structured mentorship from elders can further reinforce their moral foundation (Nunes et al., 2020).

The mesosystem necessitates the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationship between a pupil's parents and teachers. These interactions can profoundly impact a pupil's development, with positive relationships between these entities enhancing the pupil's moral growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bradley et al., 2021). The exosystem encompasses formal and informal social structures that indirectly affect the pupil through their influence on the microsystem. For example, a parent's workplace atmosphere can impact their behaviour at home, thus affecting the pupil's moral development (Guy-Evans, 2020). The macrosystem comprises broader societal and cultural influences such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural values, which shape a pupil's moral development (Dewantara et al., 2020; Halsall et al., 2018). This level emphasizes the role of societal norms and cultural context in individual development. The chronosystem, the final component of Bronfenbrenner's theory, comprises the environmental changes that occur throughout a person's life, including significant life transitions and historical events impacting their moral development (Teraoka & Kirk, 2021). Modern influences such as social media and video games can also be integrated into the exosystem, highlighting the need to create an ethical environment around pupils to mitigate potential negative impacts. Recognizing these layers stresses the importance of collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and society in nurturing the moral growth of pupils.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided the study was the Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which provides a precise roadmap for understanding how the environment influences every facet of a pupil's development in sociocultural and historical contexts. The framework comprises five layers, and each layer indicates how a pupil is affected directly or indirectly by his environment, which also influences his thoughts, actions, and decisions.

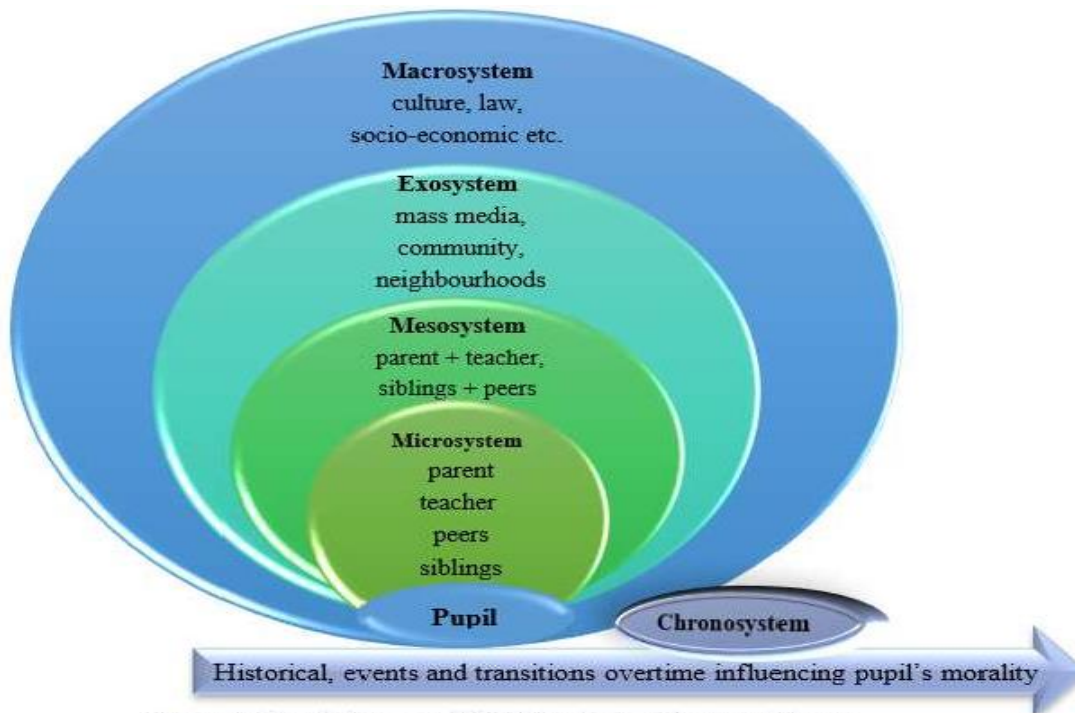


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory
 Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (2024)

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Morality

Morality is integral to individuals' lifestyles, influencing their daily lives and societal interactions. Moral traits such as honesty, mutual respect, and social responsibility are indispensable for pupils, as they affect their ability to lead fulfilling lives and make positive contributions to society (Hidayah, 2021; Schuster et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2021). Unfortunately, in Ghanaian society, rampant issues like robbery, murder, corruption, and violence detrimentally impact vulnerable individuals, highlighting a significant neglect of moral education within schools. This oversight leads to diminished academic performance, heightened immorality, indiscipline, and student violence. Cleveland and Bunton (2018) contend that addressing this problem requires integrating moral principles into the educational system to foster nation-building and human development. Morality encompasses a spectrum of concepts, including moral principles, accountability, identity, ethics, virtue, goodness, conscience, and law. These elements ensure personal safety and nurture harmonious interpersonal relationships (Altavilla et al., 2021; Diallo et al., 2021). Moral guidance enables individuals to make decisions that often require prioritizing the greater good over personal interests, advocating for an exemplary life devoid of discrimination (Alderdice, 2021). Pupils who stray from moral values by causing harm or disorder are often labeled as immoral. Moral education can arm pupils with the necessary understanding, principles, and values to make sound decisions, assume responsible citizenship, and navigate societal challenges without predisposition (Kurth, 2020; Lefkowitz, 2021). Incorporating moral education within the school curriculum is imperative for developing a well-rounded, ethically conscious student body. Such an approach addresses the current deficiencies in moral behaviour and equips pupils with the tools needed to thrive in a complex social role. By imparting these values early on, educators can help nurture a generation capable of contributing meaningfully to society while upholding principles of justice, fairness, and compassion.

Teachers are responsible for shaping pupils' moral development by imparting values-based education and fostering moral competence and self-discipline. Pupils' capacity to navigate social challenges is reinforced

through established moral standards, ethics, reasoning, and dialogue rather than through conflict or treachery (Wachira, 2014). The application of morality is context-dependent, influencing moral reasoning and judgments based on social marginalization and group participation. Morality encompasses social groups' conduct, values, and customs, directing individuals' behaviour according to socially accepted principles and rules (Gingo, 2017; Gingo, Roded, & Turiel, 2017). The significance of morality in education is emphasized by the necessity to create environments where pupils can discern right from wrong. Effective moral development necessitates a holistic approach involving both school and home settings. Teachers and parents must collaborate to provide consistent moral guidance, cultivating a culture of mutual respect, honesty, and social responsibility. Integrating moral education within the curriculum and everyday interactions can help address society's moral crises, ensuring that future generations can lead ethical lives and contribute to the greater good (Musling et al., 2021; Apatinga & Tenkorang, 2021). Embedding moral principles into the curricula, educators can foster a milieu where pupils are encouraged to develop sound moral reasoning and ethical behaviour. This comprehensive approach addresses current moral deficiencies and prepares pupils to face future societal challenges with integrity and responsibility. The collaboration between educators and parents is imperative in reinforcing these values, ensuring a unified effort in guiding pupils toward becoming morally upright and socially responsible individuals.

Moral Education

Moral education is necessary for nurturing pupils' moral character and intelligence, which are critical for their personal development and self-esteem. It inspires moral habits that empower pupils to lead respectable lives and become valuable members of their communities (Narvaez, 2021; Abdullah & Za, 2018). Adapting moral education techniques to align with each stage of moral development enhances moral judgment and long-term ethical growth through progressive changes and life experiences (Figueredo et al., 2021). This development, informed by Kohlberg's model, encompasses moral reasoning, sensitivity, judgment, and behaviour, which are vital for establishing a moral framework that shapes ethics and moral philosophy. In Ghana, moral education is an evolving curriculum designed to instill communal values in pupils, preparing them to contribute meaningfully to societal progress (Sarah, 2021). Junior high schools strive to cultivate responsible, cultured individuals who positively impact society. By reinforcing the moral character and appropriate behaviour models, moral education prepares pupils with contemporary skills and desirable behaviours, empowering them to become innovative community members. It also aids pupils in understanding cultural values and promotes an educational system that aligns with national traditions and fosters integration (Han, 2019). Furthermore, moral education empowers pupils to resist peer pressure and make ethically sound decisions (Septriana & Nuryani, 2021).

Moral education involves instructing pupils to make judicious and responsible decisions regarding significant societal issues (Falade, 2015). It focuses on cultivating cognitive, social, and emotional skills crucial for moral reasoning, action, and sentiment. This educational process aids pupils in developing appropriate attitudes and behaviours in line with social and cultural norms, laws, and regulations. Comprehending societal values and their ramifications is vital for making well-informed choices about personal and societal conduct. Pupils must learn to evaluate the consequences of their decisions on their community, environment, and future generations. Moral education nurtures character development, equipping pupils to become exemplary role models and influential leaders (Sarah, 2021). It supports the creation of an ethical society centred on happiness, health, and social wellbeing. Schools, families, and communities play a crucial role in imparting moral principles and establishing a social environment that promotes behavioural control and moral development (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NaCCA], 2020). Effective moral education, whether at home or in school, enhances pupils' ability to navigate daily challenges successfully, reflecting self-discipline and other social virtues (Olivares & Ceglie, 2020).

Moral Development

Moral development involves discerning right from wrong and responding appropriately to ethical challenges. It involves the evolution of children's reasoning, attitudes, and behaviours in the face of moral dilemmas (Turiel & Gingo, 2017). From childhood through adulthood, moral development highlights morality's emergence, transformation, and comprehension, emphasizing the progressive understanding of ethical distinctions as individuals mature (Killen & Dahl, 2021). Unlike adults, pupils exhibit a different level of moral maturation, emphasizing the necessity of nurturing this growth at every developmental stage. Moral development is fundamental to personal growth and the advancement of societies, necessitating individuals to evaluate actions as morally right or wrong and to address injustices throughout their lives (Killen & Dahl, 2021). Experiences and developmental milestones in physical and cognitive domains shape this process. Pupils' moral judgments and character differ from those of adults due to these evolving cognitive processes. Thus, understanding how societal values are formed and adapted is essential for making informed decisions regarding personal and societal behaviour.

Cultural development and educational philosophies significantly shape moral growth, drawing from social, political, and religious contexts (Wiel & Kirsi, 2021). This multilayered concept incorporates cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions, guiding pupils to make thoughtful decisions about their conduct and values. Pupils should be encouraged to evaluate the repercussions of their choices on their communities, the environment, and future generations. Moral development nurtures cultural, social, and spiritual growth, fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity and positive interpersonal relationships (Hudson, 2021). In Ghana, Religious and Moral Education (RME) reinforces moral guidance provided by families and communities, tackling critical ethical issues such as corruption and negative social attitudes (NaCCA, 2019). RME supports pupils through moral dilemmas, imparting principles and attitudes that enable them to navigate challenges and engage constructively in social activities (Rook et al., 2021; Williams & Littlefield, 2018). With modern societal pressures, schools are dynamic in delivering this education, ensuring pupils develop into morally responsible and patriotic citizens (NaCCA, 2020). RME aims to educate responsible individuals within Ghanaian society, promoting creativity, confidence, and active participation (MoE, 2019). It imparts essential moral values such as kindness, respect, and humility, encouraging pupils to embody these traits (Young, 2019; Musling et al., 2021). According to Kohlberg, effective moral education assists pupils in adhering to rules due to a foundational sense of justice, which typically matures by age fifteen (Sommerville & Ziv, 2018; Mathes, 2021). This structured moral instruction is decisive for guiding pupils to make informed decisions and evolve into responsible adults.

Suttie (2015) examined the influence of parents on their children's early moral development, finding that parents' sensitivity to others' emotions and perceptions of injustice significantly impacts their children's moral upbringing. The home learning environment, extensively researched and quantified, underscores the role of parents as primary educators who shape their children's moral, cognitive, and social skills (Lehrl et al., 2020; Dinkel & Snyder, 2020). As the most influential figures in their children's lives, parents provide crucial moral guidance, care, and direction, playing a fundamental role in their holistic development. Children rely on their parents for security and guidance, underscoring the essential nature of parental influence in their growth and wellbeing. Shah (2017) used a descriptive survey methodology to investigate how family and school environments impact secondary school students' personalities and academic performance. The research revealed that family and school settings significantly influence the development of students' personalities and academic success. The study concluded that training for both parents and teachers is necessary to enhance children's academic performance and personality development.

Moral Upbringing

Moral upbringing, which involves inculcating values and ethical norms in children, relies fundamentally on

the joint efforts of both teachers and parents, with the latter being the prime custodians of this process (Zhang & Wei, 2021). It involves the cultivation of manners, ethics, and responsibility, which form the foundation of a child's personality and perspective on the world and others. This formative process shapes pupils' behaviours and social interactions, significantly impacting their academic performance and moral development (Xiong et al., 2021). As children observe and interact with their environment, the family guides their moral development, highlighting its influence in shaping their behaviours and socialization.

Scholars from various fields have explored moral concepts such as virtues, wellbeing, and the common good (Tomasello, 2019; Zhang & Wei, 2021). Research indicates that moral development is reflected in behaviours that promote assistance and social engagement (Killen & Dahl, 2019; Hidayah, 2021). Children acquire various experiences through diverse family activities and are subject to numerous influences and expectations (Ceka & Murati, 2016). Quantitative studies highlight that morality is composed of interrelated components, highlighting the complex nature of moral growth (Morgan, Gulliford, & Kristjánsson, 2017; Krettenauer, 2020; Ng & Tay, 2020). Investigations into children's moral development reveal that upbringing imparts societal values, discipline, and norms, aiding children in distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (Hazra & Mittal, 2018). Parental guidance is significant in imparting civic rules and procedures, with active involvement in personality development through psychological methods being essential (Hazra & Mittal, 2018). Research on family dynamics and moral development emphasizes the importance of family members in socializing moral aspects such as emotions, cognitions, and behaviours, noting that effective family interactions significantly enhance moral outcomes (Laura & Madison, 2020; Dahl & Killen, 2018).

Challenges Associated with Promoting Moral Development of Pupils

Indiscipline among students is a pressing issue in contemporary education, frequently arising from insufficient moral guidance and an inability to discern right from wrong (Marino et al., 2020). Moral development is indispensable and must be reinforced at home and in educational settings to nurture well-rounded students intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Despite the ongoing efforts to impart moral education, educators encounter numerous obstacles, and societal criticism often overlooks the challenges schools and teachers face (Kok, 2018). A significant impediment to fostering moral growth is the amount of time students spend online, where exposure to potentially detrimental content such as pornography and gambling can adversely affect their moral judgment and behaviour (Morgan et al., 2017; Akram & Kumar, 2017). Moreover, outdated teaching methods can disengage students, while inadequate resources obstruct effective moral instruction (Okeke & Okoye, 2016). Although integrating technology into the classroom could support moral education, many schools lack the resources to implement these advancements effectively.

The effectiveness of teacher education plays a significant role in tackling these challenges. Inadequate training and a lack of qualified educators with expertise in moral education led to suboptimal instruction of moral principles (Roofe, 2018). Teachers need a profound grasp of moral concepts and theories to effectively engage students in ethical activities. The considerable pressure on teachers to serve as role models and mentors intensifies their stress, as they are expected to consistently exhibit moral behaviour inside and outside the classroom (Roofe, 2018; Mann & Gilmore, 2021). Another challenge arises from conflicts between school and family values. Students' families may perceive what is deemed morally exemplary at school as impractical or incorrect (Mann & Gilmore, 2021). For example, teachers might advocate for helping others, while parents may caution against assisting strangers due to safety concerns. These conflicting messages can confuse students' moral reasoning and create a disparity between school teachings and home practices (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Hutchings, 2021). The relationship between genetics and environment profoundly affects students' moral behaviour, with parental culture exerting a considerable influence (Trommsdorff, 2018). Teachers endeavour to instil moral values, but their efforts can be

undermined if parents do not support similar values at home (Ballard, 2018). The inconsistency between educational instruction and family practices can confuse students and impede their moral development. Teachers must navigate these divergent influences and strive to deliver a unified moral education despite varying family values.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed for this study. This design systematically describes phenomena, contexts, or populations (Munger, Guess, & Hargittai, 2021). The study adopted a quantitative approach to acquire comprehensive insights into pupils' moral development within their sociocultural setting. The target population included teachers, parents, and pupils from Junior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana. The sample comprised 25 Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers, 30 parents, and 186 pupils from JHS 3, totalling 241 participants. Purposive sampling was used to select parents, focusing on the biological parents of JHS 3 pupils who resided with them at the time of the study. Pupils were randomly chosen using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, as cited in Bukhari (2020). The study used research questionnaires to collect data.

Data Processing and Analysis

Analyses of the responses to the research questions were conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. It was essential to ensure that data analysis was done to determine the relationships among the variables. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed. The data was organized and analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26). Descriptive (frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics were used to analyze the responses from the questionnaire. In contrast, inferential statistics (Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, r) was used to analyze the strength and the linear relationship between each factor and pupils' moral development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Perceptions of RME teachers regarding factors that influence pupils' moral development

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
Home is the foundation for the moral development of the pupils.	—	—	8.0	92.0	3.9200	.27689
A teacher's personality affects the pupil's moral development.	—	—	12.0	88.0	3.8800	.33166
Extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs provide opportunities to learn and practice moral qualities like honesty, discipline, and respect.	—	—	76.0	24.0	3.2400	.43589
Effective teaching methods of moral education equip pupils to distinguish right from wrong.	—	—	16.0	84.0	3.8400	.37417
Parents' active involvement in shaping the moral fabric of their pupils.	—	—	4.0	96.0	3.9600	.20000
Peers have effects on pupils' willingness to obey moral principles in society.	—	—	52.0	48.0	3.4800	.50990

Social media influences pupil's moral development in real-life situations.	–	–	64.0	36.0	3.3600	.48990
Mean of means / SDs					3.6686	.16351

Source: Field Data (2021) Strongly Disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D) =2, Agree (A) =3, and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4

Table 1 shows that perceptions of JHS teachers as to the factors that affect the moral development of pupils have a high mean of means score (3.7) and the standard mean score (0.2). Parents are actively involved in shaping the moral fabric of their pupils with a mean score ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.2$). The home serves as the foundation for the moral development of the pupils ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.3$). Similarly, the teacher's personality affects pupils' moral development within or outside the school setting ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.3$). Also, the effective teaching methods of moral education in a class environment equip pupils to distinguish right from wrong ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.4$). One of the factors also indicated the influence of peer groups convincing pupils to conform to a specific moral behaviour ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.5$). The content from the social media is a factor ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.5$). Extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs provide opportunities to learn and practice moral qualities like honesty, discipline, and respect. ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.4$).

The findings revealed that teachers regard parental involvement as significant for shaping pupils' moral development. This assertion is supported by Musling et al. (2021), who stress the significance of parents fostering ethical traits such as obedience, discipline, and compassion. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems philosophy asserts that multiple environmental layers influence a child's development, including family, school, and cultural values. Parenting styles significantly affect moral development, with authoritative parenting proving more effective than authoritarian or neglectful approaches (Masitah & Sitepu, 2021). Furthermore, the home ecology is acknowledged as the primary setting for moral development, offering essential support for moral reasoning and executive function skills (Jin et al., 2021). Lukman et al. (2021) and Puyo (2021) concur that teachers' personalities and attitudes positively impact pupils' moral growth. This is in sync with Kohlberg's (1984) that moral principles emphasize problem-solving over mere indoctrination. Moreover, peer influence also shapes pupils' adherence to moral principles, although opinions vary on whether this influence is mainly beneficial or harmful (Rook et al., 2021; Ragan, 2020; Vitória et al., 2020), and the media's influence on moral perspectives is acknowledged, with exposure to inapt content potentially leading to negative repercussions (Heller, 2021; Yadav & Chakraborty, 2021). Also, extracurricular activities are valued as opportunities to cultivate moral virtues, reinforcing the perspectives of Ng (2021) and Kuehn (2021), who highlight the significance of imparting values through these activities while reinforcing them at home.

Table 2: RME teachers' views on the challenges associated with promoting pupils' moral development

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
Pupils' peers heavily influence pupils; negative peer pressure can lead to immoral behaviours.	–	–	46.0	54.0	3.8400	.37417
A lack of parental involvement and reinforcement at home can undermine these efforts.	–	–	26.0	74.0	3.4400	.42470
Pupils are often exposed to content on the media that promotes values contrary to those taught in RME.	–	–	16.0	84.0	3.4240	.50662
Not all teachers feel adequately prepared or qualified to teach moral education.	–	–	68.0	32.0	3.3200	.47610

Teachers encounter challenges of inconsistent reinforcement of moral values at home.	–	–	28.0	72.0	3.7200	.45826
Teachers also face challenges when societal values conflict with the moral teachings they aim to impart.	–	–	36.0	64.0	3.6400	.48990
Diverse and sometimes conflicting parenting styles such as can also pose a challenge.	–	–	24.0	76.0	3.7600	.43589
There is often a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities focused on moral education.	–	–	40.0	60.0	2.8300	.51112
Mean of means / SDs					3.497	0.46408

Source: Field Data (2021) Strongly Disagree (SD) =1, Disagree (D) =2, Agree (A) =3, and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4

Pupils are influenced by their peers, and negative peer pressure can lead to immoral behaviours such as dishonesty, bullying, and substance abuse ($M = 3.8400$, $SD = .37417$). There are diverse and sometimes conflicting parenting styles, which can pose a challenge ($M = 3.7600$, $SD = .43589$). Teachers encounter challenges of inconsistent reinforcement of moral values at home ($M = 3.7600$, $SD = .43589$). Teachers also face challenges when societal values conflict with the moral teachings they aim to impart ($M = 3.6400$, $SD = .48990$). While teachers strive to instil values in the classroom, a lack of parental involvement and reinforcement at home can undermine these efforts ($M = 3.4400$, $SD = .42470$). Pupils are often exposed to content in the media that promotes values contrary to those taught in RME ($M = 3.4240$, $SD = .50662$). In essence, not all teachers feel adequately prepared to teach moral education. However, some teachers may lack confidence in their ability to address complex moral issues or feel unsupported by their school administration ($M = 3.3200$, $SD = .47610$). There is often a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities focused on moral education ($M = 2.8300$, $SD = .51112$).

Educators face numerous formidable challenges in promoting pupils' moral development. One of the main issues is the detrimental effect of peer pressure, which can lead to unethical behaviours such as dishonesty, bullying, and substance abuse (Adams, 2023; Houdek, 2020). This challenge is impaired by the diverse and often conflicting parenting styles and inconsistent reinforcement of moral values at home. This is in sync with Rathbun's (2021) assertion that a lack of parental involvement and support at home significantly undermines teachers' efforts to inculcate values in the classroom. Moreover, teachers struggle when societal values contradict the moral teachings they aim to impart. This finding aligns with Ballard's (2018) perspective that each child uniquely interacts with their environment, and what they absorb from their surroundings influences their thoughts and behaviour. Children raised in different cultural contexts receive distinct inputs from their environments, leading to potential discrepancies between classroom teachings and home practices. Consistent with this, Trommsdorff (2018) argued that moral values result from the interplay between heredity and environment, and thus, parents' culture profoundly impacts their children's moral behaviour. This notion is corroborated by Agbenorsi's (2021) report, where two first-year students with dreadlocks were denied admission by the Achimota Senior High School authorities in Greater Accra, Ghana. Similarly, Hutchings (2021) and Meckler (2020) highlighted that parents enrolling their children in school do not necessitate the uncritical acceptance of all cultural practices; the school maintains its standards and rules.

Educators are responsible for nurturing students' social, emotional, and psychological development (Hansen, 2019; LeTrende, 2018). However, many teachers feel uneasy, unprepared, or hesitant to discuss controversial, political, or contentious topics with their students (Martin & Spencer, 2020). Also, pupils' exposure to media content that contradicts the values imparted in moral education further complicates teachers' efforts. Not all educators feel prepared or confident to teach moral education, particularly when addressing complex moral issues or lacking support from their schools and the media. This challenge is

intensified by the absence of ongoing professional development opportunities focused on moral education, limiting teachers' ability to impart moral values effectively. This corroborates with Heller (2021), who posits that the media can significantly influence pupils' moral perspectives and behaviour, positively and negatively, impacting their future moral judgments and reasoning. Yadav and Chakraborty (2021) revealed that much of the content pupils explore online, such as explicit material, gaming fraud, and betting, has a detrimental effect on their moral development.

Hypotheses

Table 3. Relationship between Home Ecology and Moral Development

Pearson Correlation	Moral Development (MD)
Moral Development (MD)	1
Home Ecology (HE)	.905**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	

Table 3 validates that the correlation between home ecology and moral development is highly positive and statistically significant ($r = .905^{**}$, $p < .000$). Consequently, hypothesis one (H_1) was supported, signifying that when pupils receive considerable support in developing moral values from their homes (family, school, and media), their morality will be highly positive and developed. In essence, a nurturing home ecology provided by parents, teachers, peers at school, and media collectively enhances pupils' moral development. This assertion validates the findings of Rose et al. (2018), McFadden, et al. (2019), Snyder (2020), and Younas et al. (2021) that the home ecology significantly influences pupils' social, psychological, physical, emotional, and moral development, as well as their overall wellbeing.

Table 4: Relationship between Moral Upbringing and Moral Development

Pearson Correlation	Moral Development (MD)
Moral Development (MD)	1
Moral Upbringing (MU)	.755**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

The correlation between moral upbringing and moral development was highly positive and statistically significant ($r = .755^{**}$, $p < .005$). Therefore, hypothesis two (H_1) was established. This indicates that engaging students in real-life moral practices and teaching them to apply ethical principles in everyday scenarios positively impacts their moral growth. The findings highlight that experiential moral education and practical engagements significantly enhance pupils' moral development (Rudolph, 2020). This aligns with Zhang and Wei's (2021) prerogative that moral upbringing encourages pupils' good manners and ethics, enabling them to become well-disciplined and responsible members of society.

FINDINGS

The study's findings highlighted several significant factors influencing pupils' moral development. Teachers indicate the importance of parental involvement in nurturing ethical qualities and supporting moral reasoning at home, aligning with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems philosophy. However, conflicting parenting styles, predominantly ineffective ones like authoritarian and neglectful approaches to parenting, challenge pupils' behaviour. The personality and preparedness of teachers to impart moral education play a decisive role in pupils' moral growth. Many educators, however, often feel ill-prepared or unsubstantiated when addressing complex moral issues, a situation heightened by a lack of professional development

opportunities. Similarly, peer influence is a double-edged sword, positively and negatively affecting pupils' adherence to moral principles. Exposure to inappropriate media content further complicates efforts in moral education. Nonetheless, extracurricular activities are essential for instilling moral values, stressing the importance of hands-on moral upbringing. The hypotheses were statistically significant, implying that active home support and practical moral upbringing contribute meaningfully to moral development, highlighting the necessity of a collaborative effort from home, school, media, and the broad community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the fundamental role of parental involvement, peer influence, and media in shaping pupils' moral development. The home is the cornerstone for inculcating moral values, where supportive parenting practices significantly strengthen pupils' moral reasoning and executive function skills. The challenges, such as inconsistent value reinforcement at home, societal conflicts with classroom teachings, and negative peer pressure, complicate this endeavour. Despite these hurdles, educators remain committed to fostering moral growth through practical experiences and real-life moral applications, highlighting the importance of experiential moral education. The findings reinforce that a concerted effort from family, school, media, and the broader community is significant for the holistic moral development of pupils. Moreover, it was indicated that there should be a necessity for ongoing professional development for teachers to impart moral values effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance pupils' moral development, it is worthwhile for schools to encourage robust partnerships with parents to ensure consistent reinforcement of moral values both at home and in the classroom setting. Parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting styles that effectively balance discipline with compassion, as this approach has been shown to promote moral growth significantly. Schools should incorporate practical moral education and real-life ethical problem-solving into the curriculum, allowing students to apply moral principles in perceptible contexts. Moreover, teachers should receive ongoing professional development to arm them with the skills and confidence needed to address complex moral issues and seamlessly integrate moral education across various subjects. Schools should also establish supportive environments that diminish negative peer pressure and foster positive peer influence. Also, implementing media literacy programs would enable students to critically assess media content, helping them navigate and resist negative influences. In essence, extracurricular activities (games and sports, clubs) should encourage moral values, reinforcing these lessons within the school and home ecology.

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