

Lived Experiences of Grade Six Teachers in Implementing Character Education Programs for Learners' Moral Development in Sectarian Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences of grade six teachers in implementing character education programs for learners' moral development in sectarian elementary schools. Specifically, it aimed to explore the lived experiences of Grade Six teachers in implementing character education, identify the instructional strategies and core values emphasized, and determine the perceived impact on learners' moral formation. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design, with data collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to capture recurring patterns and meanings. Findings revealed that character education was intentionally integrated into both curricular and co-curricular activities, with teachers emphasizing values such as honesty, respect, compassion, and responsibility. Instructional strategies included values integration in lessons, reflective activities, modeling of behavior, and faith-based practices. The results further showed that holistic engagement, consistent teacher modeling, and active involvement of families and the school community significantly supported the internalization of moral values among learners. However, challenges such as limited instructional resources, diverse learner backgrounds, and competing academic demands affected the consistency and depth of program implementation. The study concluded that sustained, intentional, and collaborative character education practices contribute significantly to the development of morally grounded, empathetic, and socially responsible learners. It implies that effective character formation requires a whole-school approach supported by strong teacher preparation, adequate resources, and active school-community partnerships. Strengthening these areas is essential to enhance the long-term impact and sustainability of character education programs in sectarian schools.

Keywords/phrases: Character education, elementary learners, moral development, sectarian schools, values formation

INTRODUCTION

Character education programs play a crucial role in the moral development of learners in selected sectarian elementary schools in Calinan, Davao City by fostering values such as respect, responsibility, and compassion within a faith-based context. Despite the recognized importance of character education programs in fostering learners' moral development, there is limited understanding of how these are effectively implemented in sectarian elementary schools, particularly in contexts like Calinan, Davao City. Existing studies highlight general benefits but often overlook how values such as respect, responsibility, and compassion are integrated into daily teaching and internalized by learners. This gap underscores the need to examine educators' lived experiences to better understand how character education functions in practice and its role in shaping morally grounded and socially responsible learners.

Character education programs in sectarian elementary schools in the United Arab Emirates encounter several significant challenges that affect the moral development of learners. One major issue is the cultural diversity within the student population, as these schools often serve children from various nationalities and religious backgrounds. This diversity complicates the creation of a unified character education curriculum that respects

different beliefs while promoting core moral values (Al-Issa, 2024). Additionally, the rapid pace of modernization and the pervasive influence of technology pose challenges in reinforcing traditional ethical principles. Learners are increasingly exposed to global media and social norms that may conflict with the values emphasized in character education, making it harder for educators to instill consistent moral guidance (Alhammadi & Aljunaibi, 2022).

Meanwhile, character education programs in mainly Catholic schools in Spain have significantly shaped moral development by integrating virtue ethics into both the formal curriculum and the broader school culture. One of the leading institutions in this movement is the Centro de Educación en Virtudes y Valores (CEV) at the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria (UFV), which offers a theoretical and practical framework grounded in Aristotelian virtue ethics (Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, 2023). Through programs such as the online *Educación del Carácter* specialist course, teachers are trained to cultivate virtues like prudence, justice, and transcendence, drawing on the CEV's "Marco para la educación en virtudes y valores" (Universidad Francisco de Vitoria – CEV, 2023).

Character education programs in sectarian (mainly Catholic) schools in Metro Manila play a vital role in students' moral development by integrating faith-based virtues with academic formation. In institutions such as Aquinas School in San Juan, Metro Manila, the school's motto "A man of truth, justice, joy, and compassion" reflects its commitment to forming not only knowledgeable students but morally grounded individuals. (Aquinas School, 2025). These schools often embed character formation in both formal and informal settings: religious education classes, chapel services, and service-learning (such as outreach) help students internalize core Christian values like integrity, compassion, and social responsibility (Aquinas School, Outreach, 2025). Empirical scholarship supports this moral mission; for example, a PhD study found that Catholic education in the Philippines deliberately emphasizes moral formation, integrating faith-based teaching across subjects and school life (Oliva, 2025).

However, despite this growing commitment, there remains a limited understanding of how these character education programs are consistently implemented and experienced across different sectarian elementary schools in Calinan. Existing accounts often highlight program presence and intended outcomes but provide insufficient insight into the actual processes, challenges, and variations in practice that influence their effectiveness. In particular, there is a lack of localized, experience-based evidence on how teachers translate these values into meaningful learning experiences and how learners internalize and apply them in real-life contexts. This gap underscores the need to examine the lived experiences of educators to better understand the effectiveness, consistency, and contextual relevance of character education programs in shaping learners' moral development.

Many schools also incorporate religious teachings and community activities that reinforce the importance of ethical behavior, helping learners develop a strong moral compass aligned with their faith traditions (Garcia, 2021). However, despite these positive efforts, the implementation of character education programs in Calinan still faces some challenges. Limited resources and training opportunities for educators can affect the consistency and depth of program delivery, with some schools struggling to fully integrate character education alongside academic demands (Department of Education Davao Region, 2023; UNICEF Philippines, 2022; Lacson, 2024; Santos & Cruz, 2022; Garcia, 2021). In this regard, the dissemination of the study's findings is essential in informing educators, school leaders, and policymakers about context-specific challenges and effective practices, thereby supporting the development of targeted interventions, professional development programs, and strengthened school–community partnerships to enhance the implementation and sustainability of character education initiatives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of grade six teachers in implementing character education programs for learners' moral development in sectarian elementary schools. It aimed to explore how these programs integrated values, virtues, and faith-based principles into both curricular and co-curricular activities, and how they influenced students' ethical reasoning, decision-making, and prosocial behavior. The study also sought to identify the strategies, teaching methods, and institutional practices that

educators and administrators employed to cultivate moral and spiritual growth, emphasizing the interplay between religious instruction and character formation.

Furthermore, the study aimed to assess the perceived impact of character education on learners' overall personal development, including their social responsibility, empathy, integrity, and commitment to ethical citizenship. It investigated the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, and students to understand how character formation was experienced and enacted in daily school life.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of grade six teachers in implementing character education programs for learners' moral development in sectarian elementary schools by addressing key aspects related to implementation, outcomes, and community involvement, to wit:

1. What are the experiences of Grade six teachers in implementing character education programs in sectarian elementary schools?
2. What strategies do Grade Six teachers use to effectively deliver character education programs that promote the moral development of learners?
3. Which core values do Grade Six teachers emphasize in character education programs to support the moral growth of learners in sectarian elementary schools?

Theoretical Lens

The moral development of learners in sectarian schools is guided by established theories that inform character education programs. Kohlberg's model highlights the progression from pre-conventional reasoning based on rewards and punishments to conventional and post-conventional stages shaped by social norms and universal principles. In practice, sectarian schools use stories, role-playing, and reflection to foster moral reasoning and principled decision-making. Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes modeling, imitation, and reinforcement, with teachers and peers serving as role models whose ethical behavior is observed and emulated. Praise, recognition, and corrective feedback strengthen learners' moral conduct and extend values into family and community life. Lickona's framework integrates moral knowing, feeling, and action, ensuring that learners not only understand ethical principles but also internalize and practice them through faith-based activities, community service, and reflective exercises. Together, these theories provide a holistic foundation for designing programs that nurture integrity, empathy, and responsibility in sectarian school contexts.

METHODOLOGY

It outlined the methodological and ethical guidelines that guided the research process, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. By presenting the qualitative assumptions, research design, informant selection, and data collection and analysis procedures, this chapter provided a systematic approach to exploring how character education programs influenced the formation of values, ethical behavior, and social responsibility among elementary learners. Furthermore, it discussed the researcher's role, ethical considerations, and strategies used to ensure the study's trustworthiness, thereby reinforcing the rigor and credibility necessary to generate meaningful insights into the implementation and impact of character education in sectarian schools within the Calinan District context.

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the role of character education programs in the moral development of learners in sectarian elementary schools in Calinan District, Davao City. By focusing on Grade Six teachers' lived experiences, the design enabled rich, contextual insights into how character education was implemented, perceived, and integrated into daily practice. Data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, revealing challenges, strategies, and values emphasized in moral formation. Phenomenology allowed the study to capture the essence of teachers'

shared experiences, providing meaningful understanding of moral development within sectarian school contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2023; van Manen, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were central to this study, given its focus on teachers, administrators, and potentially students in sectarian schools in Calinan District, Davao City. I upheld principles of social value, informed consent, protection of informants, risk-benefit balance, privacy, justice, and researcher competence (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Patton, 2023). The study generated insights to inform school policy and practice while minimizing risks by allowing participants to skip questions or pause interviews. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms, secure data storage, and restricted access to recordings. Equal opportunity for participation was maintained, and thick descriptions supported transferability. These measures fostered trust, safety, and meaningful outcomes for all stakeholders.

Participants of the Study

This study involved nine Grade Six teachers from three sectarian elementary schools in Calinan District, Davao City. Selected through strict inclusion criteria, all informants were actively engaged in Christian Living Education and character formation activities, serving as advisers with at least one year of relevant experience. They represented schools with varying program maturity: one with a long-established character education program, another in its early stages, and a third serving culturally and socio-economically diverse learners. This diversity provided rich, experience-based narratives on program implementation, challenges, and strategies. The sample size of nine was appropriate for phenomenological research, aligning with methodological recommendations of 5–25 participants to achieve depth and data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2020; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Research Instrument

This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews with Grade Six teachers in sectarian schools in Calinan District, Davao City to explore their lived experiences of character education programs. Supplementary tools included field notes and observation checklists, all designed in line with study objectives. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to participants. This approach yielded rich narratives on program design, teaching strategies, challenges, and impacts on students' moral development.

Data Collection Procedure

To explore teachers' lived experiences with character education programs in sectarian elementary schools in Calinan District, Davao City, I employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with Grade Six teachers, supplemented by classroom observations, field notes, and a reflexive journal. Preliminary school visits established rapport and ensured ethical collaboration, while inclusion criteria focused on teachers actively engaged in character education and Christian Living Education. Interviews provided deep insights into curriculum integration, teaching strategies, challenges, and perceived impacts on learners' moral and spiritual growth. Observations and field notes enriched the contextual understanding, while triangulation enhanced credibility. This approach generated nuanced accounts of how teachers experienced and understood character education's role in shaping students' moral development.

Data Analysis

I analyzed interview transcripts, field notes, and classroom observations using an inductive phenomenological approach, coding significant statements and clustering them into themes such as integrating faith in instruction, teachers as moral mentors, and challenges in holistic moral development. Cross-case comparisons, triangulation, member checking, and reflexive journaling ensured credibility, producing a coherent narrative of teachers' lived experiences and the impact of character education on learners' moral and spiritual growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Grounded in the context of sectarian education, the findings illuminate how moral development is cultivated through integrative, reflective, and Christ-centered practices embedded in everyday teaching and learning processes. The discussion further highlights how teachers intentionally design meaningful experiences, promote self-reflection, and model core values to support learners' ethical formation. Through thematic analysis, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of how character education programs contribute to shaping morally grounded and socially responsible learners within the unique cultural and institutional context of sectarian elementary schools in Davao City.

Main Theme One: Integrative and Reflective Character Formation

Table 1: Experiences of Grade Six Teachers in Implementing Character Education Programs in Sectarian Elementary Schools

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Significant Statements
Integrative and Reflective Character Formation	Holistic Engagement	<i>"Pinaagi sa among structured nga 5-Year Development Plan ug regular nga espiritwal nga mga kalihokan sama sa Misa, akong nabantayan ang makahuluganon ug dugay nga epekto niini sa paghulma sa mga values sa mga estudyante."</i> (IDI_I001) [Through our structured 5-Year Development Plan and regular spiritual activities like Mass, I have observed a meaningful and lasting impact on students' values formation.] <i>"Ginasulod gyud nako ang mga values nga gitudlo sa eskwelahan ug ginapaangay kini sa nagbag-o nga panginahanglan sa mga estudyante aron masiguro ang holistikong partisipasyon sa character education."</i> (IDI_I003) [I intentionally integrate school-based values and adapt them to the evolving needs of learners to ensure holistic engagement in character education.] <i>"Gitan-aw nako ang character education dili isip lahi nga subject, kundili usa ka butang nga natural nga nakasulod sa akong adlaw-adlaw nga pagtudlo ug pakig-interact sa mga estudyante."</i> (IDI_I009) [I view character education not as a separate subject, but as something naturally embedded in my daily teaching and interactions with students.]
	Shaping of Pedagogy	<i>"Tinuyo gyud nako nga iapil ang tinuod nga mga sitwasyon sa kinabuhi sa akong leksyon aron matabangan ang mga estudyante sa paghimo og etikal nga desisyon ug pagsabot sa moral nga responsibilidad."</i> (IDI_I002) [I deliberately incorporate real-life situations in my lessons to guide students in making ethical decisions and understanding moral responsibility.] <i>"Ang pag-integrate sa tinuod nga konteksto sa kinabuhi nagtugot sa mga estudyante nga ma-internalize ang mga values ug magamit kini sa ilang adlaw-adlaw nga kasinatian."</i> (IDI_I004) [Integrating real-life contexts allows learners to internalize values and

		apply them meaningfully in their everyday experiences.] <i>“Ang akong pagtudlo nag-uswag gikan sa usa ka istrikto nga tigpatuman sa mga lagda ngadto sa usa ka mentor nga naggiya sa mga estudyante sa praktis sa etikal nga pagdesisyon.” (IDI_I006)</i> [My teaching evolved from being a strict rule enforcer to a mentor who guides students in practicing ethical decision-making.]
	• Reflective Practice	<i>“Human sa matag activity, mag-engage kami og reflection aron matabangan ang mga estudyante nga maproseso ang ilang mga kasinatian ug masabtan ang kahalagahan sa pagtabang sa uban.” (IDI_I001)</i> [After each activity, we engage in reflection to help students process their experiences and understand the value of helping others.] <i>“Kung ang mga estudyante mag-oberbar ug mag-reflect sa ilang kaugalingong binuhatan, mas ma-aware sila kung giunsa niini naapektuhan ang uban.” (IDI_I006)</i> [When students observe and reflect on their own actions, they become more aware of how their behavior affects others.] <i>“Mas mahimong epektibo ang character formation kung ang mga estudyante makahimo og personal ug emosyonal nga koneksyon sa mga values nga gitudlo.” (IDI_I009)</i> [Character formation becomes more effective when students establish personal and emotional connections with the values being taught.]
	• Evolving Practices	<i>“Gibag-o nako ang akong pamaagi sa classroom management gikan sa silot ngadto sa dayalogo, accountability, ug paggiya.” (IDI_I001)</i> [I shifted my classroom management approach from punishment to dialogue, accountability, and guidance.] <i>“Gipulihan nako ang punitive discipline og ‘repair talks,’ nga nagtugot sa mga estudyante nga modawat og responsibilidad ug ayuhon ang ilang mga binuhatan.” (IDI_I005)</i> [I replaced punitive discipline with ‘repair talks,’ allowing students to take responsibility and correct their actions.] <i>“Mas nahimo akong pasensyoso ug masabton, nga mas gipili nako ang paggiya kaysa dayon nga pagtul-id sa binuhatan sa mga estudyante.” (IDI_I008)</i> [I became more patient and understanding, choosing to guide rather than immediately correct students’ behavior.]

Table 1 presents the main theme Integrative and Reflective Character Formation. It captures how Grade Six teachers in sectarian elementary schools in Davao City perceive character education as a dynamic, lived, and continuously evolving process embedded within their daily teaching practices. Teachers do not treat values formation as an isolated instructional component; rather, they integrate it holistically into both academic and spiritual dimensions of learning while engaging in ongoing reflection to refine their approaches, a practice aligned with contemporary views that effective character education is contextually embedded and experiential in nature (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; Nucci & Narvaez, 2023). This theme is further explained through the subthemes of Holistic Engagement, which emphasizes the integration of values across academic and spiritual activities; Shaping Pedagogy, which highlights how character education informs and transforms instructional strategies; Reflective Practice, which underscores teachers’ continuous self-assessment and refinement of

approaches; and Evolving Practices, which reflects the adaptive and responsive nature of character education in meeting the changing needs of learners.

Grade Six teachers in sectarian elementary schools experience the implementation of character education as both a purposeful and demanding aspect of their instructional role. They commonly integrate values formation into daily lessons, routines, and some school activities, drawing on the school's religious and moral framework to shape learners' behavior and decision-making. Teachers report that character education is most effective when it is modeled consistently, embedded across subjects, and reinforced through rituals such as prayers, reflections, and service-oriented tasks. Through these practices, teachers observe improvements in learners' respect, responsibility, and empathy, indicating that character education can positively influence classroom climate and student relationships.

However, teachers also encounter several challenges in sustaining these programs. One major difficulty is balancing academic demands with values integration, especially within time-constrained schedules and performance-driven expectations. Teachers note that while character education is emphasized institutionally, translating it into measurable outcomes and consistent student behavior remains complex. Variations in learners' home environments, exposure to conflicting values, and differing levels of parental support further complicate implementation. In some cases, teachers experience uncertainty in addressing behavioral issues, particularly when learners demonstrate resistance or when disciplinary approaches may conflict with the nurturing principles of character formation.

Despite these challenges, teachers develop adaptive strategies to strengthen character education in their classrooms. They employ reflective activities, storytelling, role-playing, and real-life applications to make values more meaningful and relatable. Collaboration with colleagues and engagement with parents are also identified as important practices in reinforcing desired behaviors beyond the classroom. Over time, teachers gain deeper insights into the importance of consistency, modeling, and relational teaching in fostering character development. These experiences highlight that effective implementation of character education in sectarian schools requires not only structured programs but also supportive environments, continuous teacher development, and strong school-home partnerships to sustain learners' moral and personal growth.

Main Theme Two: Experiential and Intentional Moral Development Strategies

Table 2: Strategies Grade Six Teachers Use to Effectively Deliver Character Education Programs that Promote the Moral Development of Learners

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Significant Statements
Experiential and Intentional Moral Development Strategies	Intentional Design	<i>"Ang mga magtutudlo tinuyo nga nag-integrate og espesipikong mga values sama sa respeto sa lain-laing subjects aron mahimong consistent ug makahuluganon ang character education."</i> (IDI_I001) [Teachers intentionally integrate specific values, such as respect, across various subjects to make character education consistent and meaningful.] <i>"Maampingon nako nga gina-design ang mga leksyon nga naglakip og Bible stories, reflection, ug role-play aron masuportahan ang pagsabot sa mga estudyante sa moral nga mga prinsipyo."</i> (IDI_I003) [I carefully design lessons that incorporate Bible stories, reflection, and role-play to support students' understanding of moral principles.] <i>"Gina-align nako ang core values sa curriculum goals, school mission, ug developmental needs sa mga estudyante aron masiguro ang relevance ug effectiveness."</i> (IDI_I008) [I align core values with curriculum goals, school mission, and learners' developmental needs to ensure relevance and effectiveness.]

	• Measurable Moral Growth	<i>“Gina-assess nako ang moral development sa mga estudyante pinaagi sa makita nga mga kausaban sa ilang binuhatan, reflection journals, ug interaksyon sa ilang mga kauban.” (IDI_I002)</i> [I assess students’ moral development through observable behavior changes, reflection journals, and peer interactions.] <i>“Sa paglabay sa panahon, nabantayan nako ang pag-improve sa respeto, pagkaminud-anon, ug pagpakabana sa uban sa mga estudyante, nga nagpakita sa ilang moral nga pagtubo.” (IDI_I003)</i> [Over time, I notice improvements in students’ respect, honesty, and care for others, indicating their moral growth.] <i>“Gina-monitor nako ang progreso sa mga estudyante pinaagi sa self-assessments, reflection activities, ug group sharing sa ilang mga kasinatian.” (IDI_I008)</i> [I monitor students’ progress using self-assessments, reflection activities, and group sharing of experiences.]
	• Engaging Moral Activities	<i>“Ang role-playing activities makatabang sa mga estudyante nga makonektar ang moral nga mga leksyon sa tinuod nga sitwasyon sa kinabuhi, nga makapalambo sa empathy ug etikal nga pagsabot.” (IDI_I001)</i> [Role-playing activities help students connect moral lessons to real-life situations, enhancing empathy and ethical understanding.] <i>“Ang mga kalihokan sama sa ‘Secret Kindness Agents’ nagdasig sa mga estudyante nga aktibong magpraktis og kindness sa makalingaw ug makahuluganon nga paagi.” (IDI_I005)</i> [Activities like ‘Secret Kindness Agents’ encourage students to actively practice kindness in enjoyable and meaningful ways.] <i>“Ang ‘Classroom Post Office’ nagpalambo sa pag-appreciate ug pag-recognize sa positibong binuhatan sa mga estudyante.” (IDI_I006)</i> [The ‘Classroom Post Office’ promotes appreciation and recognition of positive behavior among students.]
	• Self-Reflection	<i>“Narealize nako nga ang mga estudyante kinahanglan og oportunidad nga ipraktis ang mga values imbes nga maminaw lang sa lecture bahin niini.” (IDI_I001)</i> [I realized that students need opportunities to practice values rather than simply listen to lectures about them.] <i>“Padayon nako nga ginabago ang akong teaching strategies base sa tinuod nga aplikasyon sa mga estudyante sa mga values sa ilang kinabuhi.” (IDI_I003)</i> [I continuously adjust my teaching strategies based on students’ real-life application of values.] <i>“Pinaagi sa reflection, gipili nako nga mahimong mas pasensyoso, masabton, ug mapinanggaon ngadto sa akong mga estudyante.” (IDI_I005)</i> [Through reflection, I chose to become more patient, understanding, and compassionate toward my learners.]

Table 2 presents the main theme Experiential and Intentional Moral Development Strategies. It highlights how Grade Six teachers in sectarian elementary schools in Davao City deliberately design and implement learning experiences that allow students to actively practice, internalize, and live out moral values. Teachers emphasize that character education becomes more effective when it is both intentional in design and experiential in execution, ensuring that learners are not merely taught values in theory but are given concrete opportunities to apply them in real-life contexts. This approach reflects contemporary perspectives that underscore the importance of experiential learning and intentional instructional design in fostering moral reasoning and ethical behavior (Kolb, 2021; Lickona, 2021). This theme is further elaborated through the subthemes of Intentional Design, which focuses on the careful planning of value-centered lessons and activities; Measurable Moral Growth, which highlights the use of observable behaviors and reflective tools to assess students' character development; Engaging Moral Activities, which emphasizes the use of interactive and meaningful experiences to promote value internalization; and Self-Reflection, which underscores the role of reflective processes in deepening learners' understanding and personal connection to moral values.

Grade Six teachers employ a range of intentional and context-responsive strategies to effectively deliver character education programs that promote learners' moral development. Central to these strategies is the integration of values across subject areas and daily classroom routines, ensuring that character education is not treated as a separate component but as a continuous part of learning. Teachers model desired behaviors such as respect, honesty, and responsibility, recognizing that consistent demonstration reinforces students' understanding of moral principles. They also utilize storytelling, role-playing, reflective writing, and real-life scenarios to make abstract values more concrete and relatable, enabling learners to internalize ethical concepts through meaningful experiences.

In addition, teachers create structured yet supportive classroom environments that encourage moral decision-making and positive behavior. They implement clear expectations, use positive reinforcement, and facilitate discussions that allow learners to reflect on their actions and choices. Collaborative activities, such as group work and peer mentoring, are also employed to promote empathy, cooperation, and accountability among students. Teachers often integrate religious teachings, values-based lessons, and school-wide activities such as outreach programs or service-learning to strengthen learners' sense of social responsibility and moral awareness.

Furthermore, effective delivery of character education is supported by strong collaboration with parents and the wider school community. Teachers communicate regularly with families to reinforce values at home and involve them in activities that promote moral development. They also engage in continuous reflection and professional collaboration with colleagues to refine their approaches and address emerging challenges. Through these combined strategies, Grade Six teachers are able to create a holistic and consistent learning environment that nurtures learners' moral growth, emphasizing that character education is most effective when it is actively practiced, reinforced, and supported both inside and outside the classroom.

Main Theme Three: Christ-Centered Moral and Ethical Formation

Table 3: Core Values Do Grade Six Teachers Emphasize in Character Education Programs to Support the Moral Growth of Learners in Sectarian Elementary Schools

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Significant Statements
Christ-Centered Moral and Ethical Formation	Compassionate Values	<i>"Gipasiugda nako ang core values sama sa pagkamatitud-anon, respeto, responsibilidad, ug kalooy aron maggiya sa mga estudyante padulong sa matarong nga pamatasan."</i> (IDI_I002) [I emphasize core values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion to guide students toward moral uprightness.] <i>"Gipili nako ang mga values base sa ilang kahinungdanon sa tinuod nga sitwasyon sa kinabuhì ug panginahanglan sa pamatasan sa mga"</i>

		<i>estudyante.” (IDI_I003)</i> [I select values based on their relevance to students’ real-life situations and behavioral needs.] <i>“Ang core values gipili base sa misyon sa eskwelahan, Kristohanong pagtulon-an, ug developmental needs sa mga estudyante.” (IDI_I008)</i> [Core values are chosen based on the school’s mission, Christian teachings, and the developmental needs of learners.]
	• Embodied Values	<i>“Ipakita sa mga estudyante ang core values pinaagi sa ilang adlaw-adlaw nga mga binuhatan ug pakig-interact sa sulod sa classroom ug sa komunidad.” (IDI_I001)</i> [Students demonstrate core values through their daily actions and interactions within the classroom and community.] <i>“Nabantayan nako ang pagpakita sa mga values sa leadership, kooperasyon, ug service-oriented nga pamatasan sa mga estudyante.” (IDI_I004)</i> [I observe values being reflected in students’ leadership, cooperation, and service-oriented behaviors.] <i>“Gipakita sa mga estudyante ang moral nga pagtubo pinaagi sa mga kusog-loob nga buhat sa kindness, pagkamatatud-anon, ug responsibilidad.” (IDI_I006)</i> [Students show moral growth through spontaneous acts of kindness, honesty, and responsibility.]
	• Living-out Values	<i>“Makakat-on ang mga estudyante nga ibutang sa aksyon ang ilang mga tinuohan pinaagi sa serbisyo ug pakig-engage sa komunidad.” (IDI_IDI_I001)</i> [Students learn to translate their beliefs into action through service and community engagement.] <i>“Ang mga kalihokan sama sa ‘Wrinkled Heart’ epektibong nagpakita sa dugay nga epekto sa kindness ug kakulang sa kindness.” (IDI_I005)</i> [Activities like the ‘Wrinkled Heart’ effectively illustrate the lasting impact of kindness and unkindness.] <i>“Ang mga inisyatibo sama sa ‘Gratitude Tree’ makatabang sa mga estudyante nga kanunay nga mailhan ug mapraktis ang pagpasalamat.” (IDI_I006)</i> [Initiatives such as the ‘Gratitude Tree’ help students consistently recognize and practice appreciation.]
	• Modeling Values	<i>“Kinahanglan nga ang mga magtutudlo mahimong modelo sa integridad, pinaagi sa pagpakita sa mga values nga ilang gitudlo.”(IDI_I002)</i> [Teachers must serve as role models of integrity, demonstrating the values they teach.] <i>“Nagtuo ko nga importante kaayo nga ipakita gyud sa buhat ang mga values nga akong gitudlo aron makita kini sa mga estudyante sa</i>

		<i>praktis.” (IDI_I005)</i> [I believe it is essential to live out the values I teach so students can see them in practice.] <i>“Ang padayon nga pagmodelo ug pagpalig-on sa mga values dako kaayo og impluwensya sa paglambo sa karakter sa mga estudyante.” (IDI_I009)</i> [Consistent modeling and reinforcement of values significantly influence students’ character development.]
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Table 3 presents the main theme Christ-Centered Moral and Ethical Formation. It reflects how Grade Six teachers in sectarian elementary schools in Davao City experience both the challenges and meaningful responsibilities of embedding character education within their daily instruction. Teachers recognize that values formation is not merely an added component of teaching but a central mission that shapes learners’ faith, behavior, and overall development. Grounded in Christian teachings, educators intentionally integrate moral and spiritual values into their pedagogy, ensuring that instruction goes beyond academic content to nurture ethical awareness and faith-based character.

Despite the difficulties posed by students’ varying backgrounds and behavioral concerns, teachers remain committed to cultivating values that are both spiritually anchored and socially relevant. This perspective aligns with contemporary views that emphasize the importance of faith-integrated education, teacher intentionality, and contextual responsiveness in effective values formation (Revell & Arthur, 2021; Thornberg & Oğuz, 2022). This theme is further articulated through the subthemes of Compassionate Values, which emphasize the development of empathy, kindness, and care; Embodied Values, which reflect how values are internalized and demonstrated through actions; Living-out Values, which highlight the application of moral principles in real-life contexts; and Modeling Values, which underscore the essential role of teachers as exemplars of Christian moral and ethical behavior.

Grade Six teachers in sectarian elementary schools emphasize a set of core values that anchor character education and guide learners’ moral development. Foremost among these are respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion, which are consistently integrated into classroom routines, subject lessons, and school activities. Teachers stress respect for self, others, and authority as foundational to positive behavior, while responsibility is cultivated through accountability in tasks, decision-making, and adherence to rules. Honesty is reinforced through academic integrity and truthful communication, and compassion is developed by encouraging empathy, kindness, and sensitivity to others’ needs. These values are often aligned with the school’s religious teachings, strengthening their moral significance and relevance to learners’ daily lives.

In addition, teachers highlight faith, integrity, discipline, and cooperation as essential values that shape learners’ character within a sectarian context. Faith is nurtured through prayer, reflection, and participation in religious practices, helping learners connect moral actions with spiritual beliefs. Integrity and discipline are emphasized in maintaining consistency between values and actions, guiding students to make ethical choices even in challenging situations. Cooperation is promoted through group activities, peer support, and collaborative learning, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility among learners. Through these values, teachers aim to develop not only morally upright individuals but also socially responsible members of society.

Moreover, teachers underscore the importance of empathy, service, and accountability in sustaining moral growth beyond the classroom. Learners are encouraged to engage in service-oriented activities, outreach programs, and acts of kindness that translate values into action. Accountability is reinforced by guiding students to reflect on their behavior and understand the consequences of their actions. These core values are not only taught explicitly but are also modeled and consistently reinforced by teachers, creating a values-rich environment that supports holistic moral development. Overall, the emphasis on these core values reflects a comprehensive approach to character education that integrates cognitive understanding, emotional awareness, and ethical action in learners’ daily experiences.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings illuminated how the intentional, consistent, and integrative implementation of character education, as experienced by teachers, significantly influences not only learners' moral behaviors but also their emotional development, social interactions, and value formation. Teachers' lived experiences revealed that sustained exposure to values-based instruction grounded in Christ-centered moral and ethical formation and reinforced through modeling, reflection, and experiential activities enabled students to internalize core values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion. These values were not only understood conceptually but were also manifested in learners' daily actions, interactions, and decision-making processes within both classroom and community settings.

Moreover, the results underscored that the effectiveness of character education lies in its holistic and continuous application across instructional practices, classroom management, and school-wide initiatives. Drawing from teachers' lived experiences, the study highlights how integrating values across academic and spiritual dimensions, coupled with reflective and adaptive pedagogical approaches, strengthens the impact of character formation. Similar to how consistent feedback enhances learning in academic domains, the regular reinforcement and embodiment of values through structured programs, reflective practices, and engaging moral activities contributed to the development of learners' moral awareness, ethical reasoning, and sense of accountability. Consequently, learners demonstrated measurable moral growth through observable behaviors, active participation in value-driven activities, and their capacity to translate beliefs into action, reflecting the transformative role of character education programs in sectarian elementary school contexts.

Implications

The results of the study on the Lived Experiences of Grade Six Teachers in Implementing Character Education Programs in the Moral Development in Sectarian Elementary Schools carry several practical implications, particularly within the context of sectarian elementary schools in Davao City. Drawing from teachers' lived experiences, the findings emphasize that character education must be consistently, intentionally, and holistically implemented to effectively support learners' moral development. Teachers revealed that the regular modeling, integration, and reflection of values within daily instruction enable students to monitor their behavior, recognize moral expectations, and correct inappropriate actions before they become habitual. This practice reflects Social Learning Theory, where learners acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. When teachers embody ethical conduct, they become influential role models, shaping students' moral behavior while simultaneously supporting their progression through Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, as learners gradually move from externally driven compliance toward internalized moral principles.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that values education, as experienced by teachers, must be actionable, experiential, and contextually grounded. Teachers emphasized the importance of designing learning experiences—such as role-playing, service engagement, and reflective activities—that allow learners to practice values in authentic contexts. This aligns with Thomas Lickona's framework of character education, which integrates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Through these experiential strategies, teachers scaffold learners' moral understanding, enabling them to transition from guided participation to independent ethical decision-making. These lived experiences underscore that character formation becomes more meaningful when learners actively engage in applying values rather than merely discussing them in abstract terms.

In addition, the study reveals that teachers employ diverse and multimodal strategies to address the varied developmental, emotional, and social needs of learners. Approaches such as storytelling, reflection journals, peer interaction, and community-based activities allow students to engage with values cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. These practices reflect the reciprocal interaction emphasized in Social Cognitive Theory, where personal, behavioral, and environmental factors interact to influence learning. Teachers' experiences show that such varied strategies not only enhance engagement but also support learners across different stages of moral development by providing opportunities for reasoning, discussion, and perspective-taking.

Overall, the findings affirm that character education, when grounded in teachers' lived experiences and implemented through intentional, experiential, and reflective practices, plays a transformative role in shaping learners' moral identity and values formation. By fostering classroom and school environments where values are consistently modeled, practiced, and reinforced, sectarian elementary schools contribute to the development of morally grounded, reflective, and socially responsible individuals who are capable of making ethical decisions and contributing meaningfully to their communities.

Future Directions

Drawing from teachers' lived experiences, future research and practice should strengthen and sustain values-based education across learners, teachers, parents, and school communities. For learners, longitudinal studies can examine how reflective practices, modeling, and experiential learning shape moral identity and empathy over time. For teachers, studies may explore diverse pedagogical approaches, professional development, and strategies for balancing structured and spontaneous values integration. For parents, research could investigate how home practices reinforce school-based moral instruction, strengthening continuity in value formation. For the school community, examining collaborative frameworks, service-learning, and faith-based activities can reveal how shared values shape climate and relationships. Finally, future researchers may expand studies across contexts and grade levels, develop systematic tools for assessing moral development, and explore the long-term impact of character education on civic engagement and ethical decision-making.

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