

Moral Character Formation in Secondary Schools: Reflections on Approaches in Tanzania

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Abstract

The formation and promotion of moral character among students is an inevitable outcome of any holistic education process. To adjust to life demands, the education process is dutybound to empower students not only cognitively but also socially, emotionally and morally. This study investigates the approaches secondary schools in Tanzania employ as well as limitations they encountered in promoting students' moral characters. Owing to the nature of schools, collective-case study design was employed to explore the experiences of government, private and religious secondary schools on Mainland Tanzania. The study findings revealed four major approaches. The approaches are the use of school-based rules, religious teachings, voluntary clubs and students' character assessment. These approaches vary as they depend on the nature of school ownership. Despite its desirability, moral character formation in schools is constrained by the growing trade-off between moral and academic requirements in the school system. Consequently, moral formation efforts in schools constitute an add-on to academic business that is erroneously considered substantive mission of the school system. The study recommends for schools to place an equal priority on moral character formation, and adaption of a holistic view of education to strike a balance between academic and sociomoral domains of the students' development.

Keywords: moral/ ethical character formation, pro-moral character approaches

Introduction

Students in schools, like any other human beings, experience life in the world of good and evil. Regardless of their naivety, students continually get bombarded with situations (or moral dilemmas) that compel them to make moral and ethical choices in many spheres of their lives (Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, & Sanger, 2009). Thus, it is imperative for schools to operate as an avenue for moral character orientation (Durkheim, 1961; Thiroux & Krasemann, 2012). Indeed, for them to manage well their lives in school and beyond, schools should have in place moral character approaches that promote, challenge and cultivate the development of optimal competences for students to dispute and accept responsibly unpleasant consequences, as well as to conform constructively to legitimate directives (Nucci, 2005; Narveas & Lapsley, 2008).

An attempt to arrive at clarity on terms such as morals, ethics and character is evidenced to be amorphous in the body of literature. The literature acknowledges fluidity and synonymity in their usage and renders them interchangeable in their ordinary application (Corley & Marthur, 2014). Etymologically, the word ‘morals’ is a derivative of a Latin term *mores* which means customs or manners. Essentially, morals are principles, mainly cultural or religious, upon which individuals belonging to a group determine for themselves what is right and wrong (Chowdhury, 2016; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009).

Therefore, morality is the quality of being moral. The word ‘ethics’ originates from a Greek term, *ethos*, which means character, particularly the mental and moral qualities of an individual (Bhuyun, 2007). In addition, an associated term to *morals* and *ethics* is *values*: a general term which embodies matters of convictions that have intrinsic value and are worth striving for (Berkowitz, 2011). In this study, the term ‘moral character’ is used cumulatively to refer to a set of behaviour, attitudes and beliefs that are shaped by values a given society upholds. In this regard, moral formation, values education or character education embodies all attempts by schools, educators and caregivers to craft positive, pro-social and ethical inclinations and dispositions in students, including their academic attainments.

The claim of this article is based on the Virtue ethics theory whose thesis maintains that individual character can be constituted, promoted to display certain dispositions; moral character or virtuous character; prudence (Chowdhury, 2016). This view is antithetical to the Deontological theory of morality that places strict emphasis

on an individual's autonomy and duty to obey rules (Bhuyun, 2007; Kraseman & Thiroux, 2017). This assumption of the Virtue ethics theory resonates with the moral foundations of the African indigenous education as well as cultural orientations of Tanzanian societies whose philosophical foundations view the formation of students' moral character as the hallmark of educational undertakings (Anangisye, 2008). In particular, morality—in this case, appreciating and conforming to widely approved social values—has continued to be the desired end of education and socialisation (Anangisye, 2008; Berkowitz, 2011). Contrast can be made with the American (Western) countries where the Value clarification theory has for long been in operation. In the Value clarification theory, which has its roots in progressivism, moral and values education places emphasis on what people *individually* define (value) as important and how such values shape their day-to-day lives (Kirschenbaum, 2000). Implicitly, the virtue ethics approach takes precedence over socially approved morality despite value clarification approaches being individual-based.

To enforce morality, schools in Tanzania and elsewhere, among other things, ought to form and sustain the stable moral character of students (Latzko, 2012; URT, 2014). Although students develop their moral character both in and out of school (see, Anangisye, 2018), it is logical to claim that the place of schools in moral character formation is increasingly more important and indispensable (Durkheim 1961; Malti & Latzko, 2010). To begin with, studies have shown that students spend most of their active time in schools more than they do with their parents, peers, religious engagement, and media (Hattie, 2012; Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1999). Indeed, in building the rationale for moral education in schools, Emile Durkheim stated:

Contrary to the popular notion that moral education falls chiefly within the jurisdiction of the family, I judge that the task of the school in the moral development of the child can and should be of the greatest importance (Durkheim, 1961, p.18).

Second, the holistic view of ideal education emphasises on schools catering not only for academic development function but also for students' development in social, moral and emotional domains (Dall'alba, 2009; Gupta & Fisher, 2011; Sands, 2011). Globally, there has been a wave of awakening in research to ensure that the education provided inside and outside of the school system addresses and challenges students in more than just their cognitive abilities (World Economic

Forum, 2016; UNESCO, 2006). Third, globally students in schools are increasingly involved in immoral acts such drug abuse, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery and assault (Kirschenbaum, 2000; Massati, 2013). Indeed, students in schools encounter many moral dilemmas, which require a heightened sense in making both rational and morally-sound decisions necessary for self and social and ecological wellbeing (See, Anangisye 2018).

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory, secondary school age students enter decisive social systems: the *microsystem* and *mesosystem*. These social systems (imbued in schoolage) work to influence students' pace and characteristics of their acquisition, adaptation and conformity to social norms, virtues and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Pertinent to the ecological systems theory, schools are both autonomous and correlate systems capable of forming and sustaining students' moral character and vice versa; thus, socialisation (Malti & Latzko, 2010; Raufelder, Bukowski & Mohr, 2013). Essentially, socialisation is the process of acquiring norms, to which all members of society conform (Chowdhury, 2016).

The necessity for the strength of moral and ethical character among individuals and students, in particular, cannot be overemphasised. The impetus for moral and ethical character development among students is reflected in local, regional and universal educational endorsements (URT, 2014, UNESCO, 2009). Moral and ethical values permeate social, political, economic and cultural spheres of students' lives. For instance, moral and ethical character forms an essence of human existence (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2012; Nucci, 2005). Second, ethical values provide pillars for sustainable development: They guide and regulate human behaviours as they interact among themselves and with their environment (Nucci, 2005; Berkowitz, 2011).

Third, the globalisation of our societies has given rise to multiculturalism, which induces the learning of new value systems, on the one hand, and presents a challenge to protect locally appreciated values of society, on the other (URT, 2014). In this nexus, students need awareness as a pre-condition for them to take an active role in the discussion on moral and ethical issues and, eventually, make informed choices (UNESCO, 2006; Thomas, 1990).

Fourth, moral and ethical characters act as drivers of instrumental efficiency in professional and industrial contexts (Anangisye, 2008; Raun & Sunari, 2000). For instance, adherence to universal principles of ethics has resulted customarily in

improved conditions for democratic living, respect for human worth, responsibility, coexistence and mutual understanding (Gardiner, 2000; Nucci, 2005).

Fifth, operationally, possession of strength in character has to do with how human beings relate to others, that is, both human and non-human. Morality and ethics are, therefore, a *sine qua non* for promoting mutual welfare, creativity and growth (Mathur & Corley, 2014). In particular, these are vital in the attainment of self-identity as human beings strive for what is right over what is wrong, what is acceptable over what is unacceptable within a given social unit (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2012).

Socialisation, then, requires being welladapted to the pattern of customs, behaviours and values of one's respective social group (Klaassen, 2012). Conventionally, education leads to improved individual-borne competencies. On the contrary, the indication of moral character is in form of one's conformity to socially-acceptable values and behaviours (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008). Yet, academic attainment and character development processes are not necessarily products of formal education system or schooling. In other words, unless schools have a vested interest in moral character formation, they could operate without a deliberate focus on the students' moral and character development approaches let alone implement such approaches with ease. Despite its educational significance, schools oftentimes place a higher premium on cognitive or academic attainment than on the students' character development (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008). This is evidenced by the discrepancy in time and efforts devoted to the two aspects in schools (Kitabu, 2009; Masath, 2013).

Nevertheless, Tanzania's post-colonial educational reforms placed a special impetus on the role of schools in the formation and promotion of moral characters within the context of the Socialism and selfreliance philosophy (URT, 2010; Ndunguru, 1984). The translation of the Socialism and Self-reliance in Tanzania's schools demanded that students appreciate the values of respect for dignity and freedom, embrace the notion of critical thinking and collective pursuit for the common good, love and respect for work (Nyerere, 1967). These values would, in turn, produce selfreliant school graduates committed to partaking in the efforts for social emancipation (Ndunguru, 1984; Nyerere, 1967). To orient students efficiently to those competencies, the aims and goals of education, its contents and methodologies have to be sociallyrelevant as a strategy towards fostering social utilitarianism as opposed to individualcentred advancement (URT, 2010).

However, the implementation of Education for Self-reliance during the hegemony of the Socialist ideology faced many challenges on its conception, translation and adoption stages (Ishumi, 2000). The time before its official demise in the 1990s and beyond witnessed the strongest influx of values. The values drifted over social, political, economic as well as educational spheres. Although the philosophy of Education for SelfReliance (an appendage of socialism) appears to have survived the turbulence of value pluralism, its existence in the nexus of prevalent capitalist practice, provides a challenge for schools to redefine their role, approaches and their relevance (URT, 2014). Experience in schools now calls for proper ethical considerations. It calls for up-to-date approaches that address issues of behaviour using ethical and moral yardstick than the usual measurement of achievement and success. There is also a need for schools to revive and cultivate among students pro-social competencies, collective interest as opposed to the growing self-interest and individualism.

Statement of the problem

Despite the Education and Training Policy's emphasis on schools operating as avenues for moral character formation and promotion (URT, 2014; URT, 2010), studies show that schools in Tanzania are continually bombarded by cases of immoral and unethical character among their students (Masath, 2013). The commonly reported cases include fights and violence, drug abuse and sexual immorality (Masath, 2013). Others include dislike for work, acts of sabotage, laziness and theft (Kitabu, 2009). Arguably, the prevalence of these behaviours in schools does not only destroy the moral order of schools, but also contaminates students with noble character (Nucci, 2005; Malti & Latzko, 2010; Thomas, 1990). In fact, subject contents taught to students in schools are valueloaded and that point to particular moral and ethical orientation, especially when teachers can seize the opportunity to engage in moral and ethical reflection. This study identifies and examines pro-moral character approaches in secondary schools. In this context, the study sought to answer the question: How do secondary schools in Tanzania promote students' moral character?

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a collective-case study design to explore the experiences of teachers and schools with the formation and promotion of students' moral

character (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The rationale for the use of collective cases was justified by the need to gather diverse experiences from three categories of schools in Tanzania. These categories of secondary schools in Tanzania are: (1) religiousbased (Christian and Islamic), (2) government (co-school), and (3) private schools. In all these categories, co-education schools were preferable to single-sex schools in a bid to explore gender-related experiences of pro-character approaches. Besides gathering context-rich and unique experiences of the pro-character approaches, the use of collective case design facilitated the comparing of experiences between schools.

Study site

Dar es Salaam and Coast regions were selected as study sites as they provided a fair representation of religious-based, private and government-owned secondary schools. The proximity of the two regions offered a sizable number of schools that met the age criteria to select from. In all the three categories of schools under review, the age criteria was predominant for selecting schools with more than 10 years of existence. The time was deemed adequate for the school to have well-established pro-morality culture in school. In addition, co-education schools were preferred to generate rich and gender-related experiences in matters of moral formations. Under the religious-owned category, schools that belong to Christian and Islamic denominations were selected. Table 1 presents a summary of the schools under review and their characteristics:

Table 1: Summary of schools by category of ownership

Name of school	Type of school	Category of ownership
School A	Co-education	Government
School B	Co-education	Private
School C	Co-education	Islamic school (religious)
School D	Co-education	Christian school (religious)

Source: Field data, 2017

Population and sampling

Teachers and students were the target population of this study. Purposive selection of school categories was conducted based on the criterion that schools had a minimum of 10 years of operation (by 2017). This threshold was deemed necessary in generating stable and wellgrounded experiences of schools and teachers in the students' pro-moral formation approaches. Purposive sampling was deployed

to select heads of school, discipline teachers, teacher counsellors, dormitory teachers and class teachers (a total of 7). These teachers are on daily basis directly responsible for discipline enforcement and character formation in schools (URT, 1997). Students in senior classes (form Three and Four; both boys and girls) were sampled on the assumption that they had long experience in schools and could present valid information on their experiences of pro-moral approaches. Purposive sampling was also employed to select students. In this case, students in leadership position were selected.

Data collection

Data collection took place in 2017 through focus group discussions and documentary review. Focus group discussions or FGDs helped to generate data from teachers and students. Heterogeneity in the groups' composition was ensured by selecting teachers in charge of discipline, counselling, dormitories and classes; giving a total of ($n=28$) for teachers participants and ($n=20$) for students participants, that is 7 teachers and 5 students per every school. Forms Three and Four students were preferred to others as they were more familiar with activities related to moral formation in the school than those in the lower classes. In each case, FGDs were preceded by briefing participants on the aims of research to boost their confidence to provide valid information. The discussions took place shortly after teaching sessions and lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. The audio-recording of these FGD proceedings and were supplemented by field notes. The review of documents was aimed to complement data from the FGDs. Documents reviewed include respective schools' vision and mission statements, disciplinary records books, school rules and regulations and the 1997 guidebook for heads of school in Tanzania.

Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis of both *priori* and *emergent* themes for the data collected in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Recorded FGDs were transcribed into textual transcript soon after every session. The thematic analysis of data transcripts data followed six stages of Clarke and Braun (2013). First, general familiarisation with data that involved a thorough reading of every FGD group discussion transcript and noting down initial analytic observations. Second, data coding which meticulous reading of the transcript, constant comparison, and systematic indexing and labelling of information that corresponded to particular pro-character approaches, their characteristics (*modus*

operandi), their successes and limitations. Third, searching and aggregating major themes based on the link established in stage 2. Fourth, reviewing themes and checking for harmony with their features and across the themes. Fifth, defining and naming themes based on evidence of their characteristics and overall fitness to question under study. Sixth, writing up a story, weaving it with evidence of verbatim in a coherent and persuasive way contextualised in the literature about moral character formation. Relevant information from documents were manually indexed, identified with the themes (above) and integrated in the thematic findings.

Findings of the study

Three major themes which correspond to moral character approaches emerged in the thematic analysis. These pro-character approaches are school rules, religious teachings, voluntary clubs, brother/sister mentoring. Findings reveal that the promotion of moral character among students constitutes one of the desired school goals. In this regard, schools subscribed to different approaches depending on the nature of school ownership, school vision, resources endowment and availability of boarding facility. Major approaches are presented as follows:

i. School rules and regulations

Schools rules formed one of the important approaches through which students' moral character was promoted in schools. School rules are centrally constructed by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (URT, 1997). In addition, schools reserve the right to formulate regulations that fit local conditions of their schools. School rules served as a unifying criterion for shared values that are in line with the broad goals of education. In particular, the administration of school rules had implicitly and explicitly translated into virtues such as respect for oneself and others, the dignity of other school members. The rules demanded respect to national coat of arms, respect to national flag and citizens' rights, respect to national currency and national anthem. Enforcement of uniformity was another area focusing on the school rules. For instance, uniformity in the school dress (code) that matches with school activities, uniformity in food taken at school and possession of electronic materials (gadgets), especially in boarding school. Some schools enforced uniformity in the amount of pocket money to be retained by the students. In this regard, one teacher from private school B had this to say:

(...) School rules are very important in maintaining good conduct of our students. We have strict regulations that prevent students from possessing extra materials and clothes. We forbid them to make

sure that our students are uniform. If you leave them to come with anything from their homes, materials such as expensive outfits or mobile phones or eating foods they want, we will certainly end up propagating differences of students' parental socio-economic backgrounds. If that happens they will not work together peacefully as some will feel inferior and start to envy others. That may even cause theft among them. We want, as the school, to minimize such differences and help our students cooperate and focus on their studies only.

Uniformity was considered critical for reducing disparities which were inevitable results of students' family social economic backgrounds. School rules on uniformity were considered helpful in promoting collaboration among students who could otherwise project serious differences owing to their varied parents' and guardians' socio-economic backgrounds. In particular, teachers in a day school reported the challenge of enforcing uniformity among students as they spend most of their time at home. Consequently, student-community ties and resulting influences on students' daily life were too high to be controlled in day school environment. Other virtues included attendance and punctuality, personal and environmental hygiene (URT, 2014). In addition, school rules highlighted disciplinary offences and their associated punishments (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1997).

Findings from focus group discussions held with headmasters and teachers unveiled the following problems: Firstly, perceived trade-off and conflicting views (in private schools) between disciplinary enforcement and commercial interest to retain an appropriate number of students in schools. Teachers narrated that there were situations where students with disciplinary problems could not be expelled from school for fear of wasting school earnings. Secondly, there was variation in commitment among teachers in enforcing obedience to rules and regulations. This finding was further reiterated by students that teachers were not equally strict in enforcing morality and obedience to school rules and regulations. The variation among teachers has rendered school rules less significant and uncoordinated as an approach in schools. Teachers narrated that because of this tendency some students have conditioned themselves to observing school rules only when a strict teacher is on duty or around.

Thirdly, inadequacy in the scope of school rules prompted teachers in the schools to uphold the assumption that moral character is denoted by obedience of school

rules. Unfortunately, though obedience of school rules may indicate a student's moral character, there are more attributes of moral character schools can nurture. Fourthly, teachers reported that the schools' effort to form and promote moral character was hampered by low support from the parents. To them, effective moral character formation can occur when strong partnerships between teachers and parents are enhanced. These partnership are further weakened by the fact that a considerable proportion of students in day schools relocated from their homes to live in private hostels or hired rooms near schools. In the hostels, students were free to decide for themselves their lifestyles and relationships in which to get involved.

ii. **Religious teachings**

Religious teachings were one of the primary sources of morality and, thus, formed one of the approaches to moral character formation in all the categories of schools. Non-religious (private and government) schools worked collaboratively with religious leaders of dominant faiths (mainly Moslems and Christians). Each week students voluntarily attend religious teachings session slotted in the school timetable. In this regard, teachers were optimistic that, although they did not directly enforce religious values in school religious teachings they were helpful in inducing obedience to school rules.

However, in religious schools, both Islamic and Christian, this approach had paramount significance in orientating students around the religious morality of a given religion. It was established that not only were the religious teachings regarded as a mere means towards building morality and character but were also ends in themselves. Findings from two cases are presented as follows:

School C: Islamic School

In describing their motivation for using Islamic religion teachings for enforcing morality among their students, the headmaster in the School C said:

...In fact, what we learn from the Quran and correct tales of the prophet Mohammad S.A.W. is that, firstly, education is a basic instrument, which a Muslim must acquire for him/her to live an Islamic life and be a good follower, Khalifa, of prophet Mohammad S.A.W. Secondly, we also learn that in Islam, there is no segregation of religious and secular education. Education is important in enabling a human being to fulfil the goal of being here on earth,

which is to be a good follower of Allah. We Islamize everything as we care and teach our students. We have a long run focus on preparing our students into leaders and professionals with integrity in future...

In similar vein, during a focus group discussion held with the teachers in School C it emerged that the orientation to morality that was informed by the Islamic faith was the overriding objective of the school. The students in the school were, as a rule, supposed to accept and conduct themselves according to Islamic teachings. To this end, the entire school community—teachers and caregivers in the school—were implored to abide by Islamic principles. These principles demanded students to observe, among others things, prayer, relationships, appropriate dress code including “hijab” for female students, greetings and paying respect to elders. To enforce obedience to these principles, punishments of different magnitudes were administered to deviating students.

School D: Christian Schools

Findings from a Christian school revealed that biblical teachings and church dogma were taught to students to nurture their morality. As indicated in the case of the Islamic school, morality and display of good character by students was an act of obedience to God. Moreover, teachers believed that the training of students to fear God would help solve many immoral and indiscipline problems. In this regard, the Headmaster said:

*...The Holy Bible in **Proverb 22:6** orders us to train a child in the way he should go, and when he/she is old, he/she will not depart from it...the Word of God is the only way to enable our students to build a relationship with and later fear God.....to promote acceptable morals, which is in line with the Word of God, we do not simply enforce rules and regulations, we think the school can do better by cooperate in guiding our students towards moral maturity besides providing rules. We make sure that instead of fencing the school compound to avoid truancy, for example, we make sure that fences are within their hearts...to enable that in our school, every teacher is a good disciplined teacher...*

The second statement affirms the expectation that efforts to promote moral maturity among students were the central focus of the school. This explains the level of moral recognition attached to religiosity in terms of students not only knowing

and obeying school rules but also internalising them as a guide in making moral choices. This supports the allegory that unless fences are built within students' hearts, efforts to build physical fences around the school would prove futile.

Findings obtained from the focus group discussions held with teachers supported the role of religious teachings in the formation and promotion of moral character among students. Specifically, the teachers reported that the fear of God was, indeed, the reason behind some students being disciplined and wellbehaved. On the other hand, teachers in government schools cautioned that some religious teachings given to students may not necessarily be in harmony with the wider accepted moral principles of a secular society. In this regard, some teachers opined that despite differences in the religious orientations, religious teachings in schools should embrace the national values of unity, respect for diversity (co-existence), solidarity and dignity. They insisted on the need for religious teachings' curricula to be subjected to review and approval by government organs to balance them and avoid extremism.

iii. **Voluntary club activities**

Some schools employed voluntary club activities. These club activities were mainly on topical issues of the society. A particular teacher in a school was appointed to serve as a co-ordinator or guardian of a given club. Activities of these clubs were conducted in line with the laid down local, national and international agreements. The common club activities which featured during the FGDs held with teachers included environmental care and preservation clubs (*Mali Hai Club*); HIV/AIDS awareness clubs, Scout Clubs, Human rights clubs, Anticorruption clubs, Life skills and gender sensitisation clubs (*Jitambue*). In connection with these voluntary clubs, the headmistress of School A said:

In our school, we have different clubs. The clubs are established by students themselves and teachers provide guidance. They deal with topics such as Human Rights and corruption. I see this as a powerful strategy through which our students can learn about useful values and adjust their own character accordingly. We have had some students who turned into good leaders in these clubs and made other students to imitate their good ways.

The formation of voluntary and student-based clubs was one of the collaborative approaches to developing students' morality and ethical character because students

worked actively on their own volition. Students, on the other hand, affirmed that their participation in voluntary club activities such as MaliHai had helped them to acquire knowledge and values necessary for the preservation of vegetation and forest resources. They took a direct role in the day-to-day running of their activities in attaining the goals of the clubs. Table 1 captures specific examples of virtue/character from club activities as gathered from the teachers and students:

Table 2: Club activities in schools and their perceived virtue/moral character

Sn.	Club activities	Overriding aim(s)	Values/virtues
1.	Mali Hai club	Students' awareness of protection of forests.	Environmental ethics, sensitivity to natural resources
2.	HIV/AIDS and Life Skills club	Knowledge on HIV/AIDS and self-awareness. Capacity-building for informed decisions on different matters of life	Sexuality, self-awareness, dignity
3.	Scout club	Fostering dedication to community service when in need.	Co-operation, courage, self-reliance, solidarity
4.	Human rights and Anti-corruption club	Knowledge and awareness of human rights and corruption. Capacity building for their active involvement	Respect for human rights, sensitivity to issues of violation of human rights and corruption in society.
5.	Gender-related clubs	Knowledge and awareness of gender issues. Empowerment in dealing with gender issues at family, school, society levels.	Self-awareness, courage, positive attitude to decisionmaking, respect for gender differences, confidence for participation.

Source: Field data, 2017

On the other hand, study findings indicate that voluntary clubs in schools face the following challenges: first, clubs are voluntary both in their establishment in schools and students' participation. Study findings have also shown the variability in the club activities from one school to another. Variability and voluntary nature appear to suggest differences in moral and character experiences given to schools secondary country-wide. As membership and participation of students in club activities are not mandatory, consistency in the orientation of all students to the same moral character is not guaranteed. Second, club activities in schools are concentrated in government schools and in urban areas than in private secondary schools located in rural areas.

iv. **Students' character assessment**

Focus group discussions held with teachers and students revealed that character assessment featured was one of the approaches used in all the schools under review. The character assessment approach was regularly carried in the schools using special forms (called selfform). The following was recorded during one of the FGDs held with teachers in School A:

We regularly conduct character assessment with our students. Character assessment selfforms are an important requirement for all the examinations classes. We are required, as a school, to submit character assessment together with the students' academic continuous assessments. [However] we do not conduct character assessment with all the students because it is timeconsuming despite its usefulness.

Under this approach, it was established that a list of moral and character dispositions including co-operation, hard-work, respect for teachers, punctuality, care for school property, smartness, cleanliness, responsibility and selfdirectedness were listed on the special report form. The report forms are then graded by a panel of teachers after considering the students' conduct in relevant dispositions. The character assessment reports are combined with academic reports and provide feedback to parents and students in addition to facilitating record-keeping. The use of character assessments in the schools under review served the following purposes: first, for the evaluation of students' behaviour at school as observed by teachers in different occasions. Secondly, for the students' evaluation of their respective character to allow for behavioural change and adjustment, especially in cases where teachers had poorly rated the student in question.

Despite its usefulness in the students' moral character formation, the approach had inherent drawbacks. The weaknesses were first, improper administration because some teachers only got to know about some students on the assessment date and, thus, grading was unreliable. Second, there was poor follow-up of the assessment reports because a higher priority was given to the students' academic merit, especially on matters of selection and placement. Third, academic merit-driven mode of evaluating of the students' achievement by authorities ignored their character attributes. Fourth, character assessment was not done for all the students in schools. Teachers reported to have customarily conducted character assessment for students in classes with national examination principally to fulfil

the character assessment grades as required by the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA).

Discussion of findings

Despite being one of the prominent approaches to promoting morality among students, the use of the school rules approach has strictly focused on compliance with the requirements of rules as opposed to moral and character formation, that is, the moral quality of the students, whether they obey the school rules or not. Arguably, there is little evidence that compliance with the school rules “assertive measure” aids the development of the students’ sense of morality when the reverse should have been the case (Chowdhury, 2016; Nucci, 2005). There is not enough evidence showing that schools help students to internalise these school rules before they are “commanded” to comply with them. In fact, strict enforcement of rules in schools appears to have contributed to the deteriorating teacherstudent relationships in schools (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Raufelder *et al.*, 2013). Students do not necessarily learn to be moral or attain moral character by learning to obey rules that others make for them (Liberante, 2012). Besides school rules, schools ought to devise other context-relevant and collaborative approaches to promoting students’ morality and their moral decision-making. This approach could engage students in reflecting on their moral worldviews and develop practical and analytical skills essential in dealing with the moral dilemma facing their generation.

As it is, the promotion of moral character in schools operates within the confines of deontological assumptions with a strict focus on obedience and “discipline”. This focus is rather narrow in the moral formation discourse as it tends to limit the effectiveness of moral formation (Liberante, 2012). This is also true of religious teachings and secular school rules approaches. The Virtue ethics theory, which informs the central claim of this article, characterises the current approaches as *linear* and lacking of the multifaceted nature of potential agencies in moral formation (Lickona 1991; Thiroux & Krasemann, 2012). In addition, the promoral approaches widely serve as *means* for some schooling-borne *ends* such as academic achievement or the “ideal” school life. This polarised perspective is rather inadequate as it limits the necessity of moral character in schooling and school life alone. Morality is a necessity for life (Chowdhury, 2016). This view demands that moral values oriented in school to be an integral part of the wider values students ought to emulate at home and in the wider society. Indeed, as Dewey has argued in Palmer (2001), education is a social process that entails living and

not just preparing for it. In this regard, schools should cherish and promote the moral character of the wider society by making such values more explicit to the students and as an integral part of the schools' sub-culture.

Closely related to the club activities is the *holistic* view of moral formation in schools. In schools, the holistic approach to moral formation requires deliberate efforts to saturate schools with ideal values (Narveas & Lapsley, 2008). This could allow students to reflect on the moral values and moral requirements as human-centred convictions or constructs necessary for life and not mere *means* or constraints in the schooling business (Mathur & Corley, 2014). Also, the holistic view entails a school-wide approach that involves all the agents and the mainstream in their role in engendering moral formation (Berkowitz, 2011). After all, it is a truism that, schools or teachers cannot work in isolation and succeed in fostering students' moral character formation. As such, there is a need to redefine and restructure the roles of parents and guardians in shouldering moral formation in support of the schools' endeavour.

Expanding on the notion of holism that teaching morality should include the entire society, Fenchmaster et al. (2009, p. 11) in his article, Teaching morally and teaching morality, states:

... a culture or society must have morality as part of its fabric, built in and evident [...] society that are not 'thick' with what others call the 'particularities' of various associations, communities, cultures, and religious identities, cannot adequately engender moral character education among their young, even if they set out to do so as a matter of teaching morality as a specific content. In short, programmes of moral education do not work very well in the absence of being embedded in morally attentive societies

In other words, the notion of holism demands that efforts to form and promote moral character should be an integral part of the same efforts being exerted in the wider society and across "responsible" agencies. This condition singly appears centripetal in efforts aimed to sustain and produce meaningful moral and character education in schools.

Conclusions and recommendation

The argument of this article rests on the Virtue ethics theory whose thesis maintains

that the formation of virtuous character is a deliberate process by the structures responsible for bringing up children (Bhuyun, 2007). This position is antithetical to the deontological theories that subscribe to moral absolutism and advocate for strict adherence to the rules, that is, the duty to obey rules and regulations. Practically, the Virtue ethics theory locates schools in a position to orientate students in pro-social competencies and virtuous character using daily activities, situations and relationships prevailing within schools and beyond. From the reflection of the findings of this study the following conclusions are made:

Pro-moral approaches exist in schools whereby school rules, students' character assessment and religious teachings appear to be the major approaches employed by the schools. Enforcement of school rules and students' character assessment is, however, hampered by a skewed emphasis on academic achievement than on wider social domains of the students' life. The interpretation of values and efforts in moral formation appear erroneously inclined towards academic achievement. In addition, there exist evidence of inconsistencies in values and character traits formed by schools among the students. The difference in the approaches and on how they are applied in schools offers unwarranted confidence in the harmony of values orientation in schools. This study, therefore, argues and recommends that efforts for moral character formation in schools may prove futile if the approaches are not redefined, re-oriented and restructured to embrace the holistic view of moral values. In the same vein, the re-orientation of approaches should ensure that moral character formation in school reflects and bears significant meaning to the students' real life. Indeed, the overarching notion of moral character formation in schools should embrace the fact that moral and character requirements are vital in school life and beyond. Implicitly, efforts steering the formation and promotion of moral character in school should be given a national-wide nudge and dimension to ensure the uniformity and relative emphasis in all approaches carried out in Tanzania.

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