
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teacher Education for Values Education Integration: A Review of the Literature

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| ABSTRACT

This literature review synthesises key arguments and research on values education within general education and teacher education with references to English Language Teaching (ELT). The review addresses two research questions concerning the core concepts of values education and the considerations for teacher education. A systematic search of databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar yielded thirty peer-reviewed sources, which were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that values education is widely recognised as integral to holistic development, offering benefits such as enhanced academic engagement, improved student well-being, and a more positive school culture. However, persistent challenges remain, including insufficient teacher training, a lack of theoretical consensus, and difficulties navigating diverse cultural and religious contexts. For successful values integration, teacher professional development plays a crucial role that requires a combination of theoretical grounding, practical strategies, reflective practice, and professional identity formation. The review also reveals a tension between universalist frameworks and contextually grounded approaches. Future research directions include international comparative studies, longitudinal and discourse-analytic investigations of classroom practice, and the development of targeted professional development programmes that equip educators to integrate values education ethically and effectively.

| KEYWORDS

Values education, moral education, holistic education, English Language Teaching, teacher education

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Introduction

The attributes of 20th-century education such as being standardized, secular, and scientific are still prevalent in current education systems internationally. A strong foundation in morality, values, and social justice is omitted in this model of education which was designed to produce workers and docile citizens, but not necessarily an ethical society. In the face of many global crises including military threats, environmental catastrophes, and social decline, this model of education cannot be sustainable and needs to move towards integrating values into mainstream education (Rafikov et al., 2021). This integration should aim for cultivation of moral development along with academic success (Kour et al., 2025).

Researchers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) critique the overemphasising of technical goals and advocate for a humanistic approach that addresses learners' emotional and psychological needs instead (Fitriyana & Aprison, 2025; Amini et al., 2025). Despite the importance of values education, teacher preparation programmes often lack adequate training, leaving educators ill-equipped to integrate it effectively (Thornberg, 2008). Professional development is therefore essential to help teachers embed values into practice (Gardner, 2004; Rohmana, 2020; Thornberg, 2008).

In the specific field of ELT, Yapar and AL-Balushi (2026) state that values education in ELT is shaped by cultural, religious, and pedagogical factors. Some of the key challenges include teacher attitudes, time constraints, and weak curricula. In addition, Islamic contexts prioritise faith-aligned instruction whereas Western approaches emphasise critical thinking and communication. There is an attempt to provide universal frameworks for values education in ELT although contextual integration is essential for ethical and effective practice (Yapar & AL-Balushi, 2026).

This paper aims to identify key arguments and research related to values education with a specific focus on teacher education providing a theoretical basis for implementation in real-world contexts.

In order to achieve the above objective, the following research questions were adopted:

1. What are the important concepts related to values education including its relevance, benefits and challenges?
2. What are the major considerations for teacher education for effective values education?

Methodology

This study employed a narrative literature review, a method suited for synthesising diverse sources to provide in-depth understanding, explore theoretical underpinnings, and establish historical context (Jahan et al., 2016; Thomas & Grigsby, 2024). Tools such as SANRA were used to evaluate and enhance quality (Baethge et al., 2019). The methodology was structured into five phases.

Phase 1: Defining Scope

The review aimed to identify key arguments and research in values education across general education, teacher training, and English Language Teaching (ELT). Sources included peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters from both Western and Eastern contexts, while conference proceedings and publications without full text were excluded.

Phase 2: Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the Library Catalogue. Terms such as *values education*, *moral education*, *citizenship education*, *English Language Teaching*, and *teacher education* were combined using Boolean operators, with reference lists also consulted.

Phase 3: Screening and Selection

Records were deduplicated, followed by title and abstract screening against inclusion criteria. Full texts were then assessed for eligibility, resulting in a final list of thirty sources.

Phase 4: Thematic Synthesis

Data were extracted iteratively, capturing details such as author(s), year, theoretical framework, methodology, and key findings. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, which were organised into higher-order themes to highlight areas of consensus, divergence, and theoretical gaps.

Phase 5: Quality and Rigour

The final manuscript was assessed using SANRA (Baethge et al., 2019), which evaluates explanation of the review's importance, statement of aims, description of the literature search, referencing, scientific reasoning, and presentation of data, ensuring transparency and quality.

Results

Definition of Key Terms

In the broad field of values education, terms like citizenship education, character education, and moral education are frequently used and therefore require some distinct features to be highlighted to avoid confusion. Citizenship education takes a more collective perspective, merging moral and political dimensions to cultivate informed, critically engaged members of society (Mills, 2021), which requires political awareness and skills for critical discussion (Gardner, 2004). On the other hand, character education concentrates on fostering morally valued traits such as honesty and empathy, often assuming that a "good citizen" is essentially the same as a "good person" (Nucci, 2014). Although these approaches overlap, character education focuses on personal moral qualities, whereas citizenship education addresses wider collective and political issues (Mills, 2021). Furthermore, character education has traditionally relied on top-down instruction, while citizenship education emphasizes rational independence and active, deliberative participation (Nucci, 2014). Moral education involves instructing students in ethical principles and peaceful coexistence, often functioning indirectly through the influence of role models and internalized social norms (Lovat et al., 2010).

Reasons for a Values Education Imperative

Several factors explain the growing emphasis on values education. Many countries have introduced educational mandates; for example, Australia made values education a policy focus in 2002 (Lovat et al., 2010). There has also been a shift away from values neutrality due to community pressure and renewed recognition that schools bear responsibility for personal integrity and social justice (Lovat & Toomey, 2009).

In England, values education has been shaped by policies around "Fundamental British Values" and a broader "character education" movement emphasising virtues such as "grit" and "resilience." This approach has faced criticism for marginalising political dimensions and benefiting from institutional support, including from conservative Christian organisations in the United States. Although distinct, these initiatives represent "two facets" of the contemporary emphasis on values education in schools (McDonnell, 2020).

Cultivating values such as respect, care, trust, and fairness is essential for individual and societal well-being, requiring collaboration across practice, research, and policy (Adalbjarnardottir, 2010). Values education is also central to character development, strengthening self-esteem, ethical judgment, and social responsibility which are some expectations strongly held by parents (Lovat & Toomey, 2009). It responds to societal concerns such as youth crime and alienation (Gardner, 2004), while addressing pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development (Gardner, 2004). The need to prepare young people for rapid global change, alongside a commitment to educating the "whole child" beyond academics, has further elevated its importance (Gardner, 2004; Lovat et al., 2010). Research indicates that values education contributes to positive school culture, improved relationships, and enhanced student engagement (Lovat & Toomey, 2009; Lovat et al., 2010).

Benefits of Values Education

There are many benefits of values education identified by researchers working in this field. These can be broadly grouped into two main categories: enhanced student outcomes and personal development; improved school environment and teacher engagement.

Enhanced Student Outcomes and Personal Development

Values education yields significant benefits across multiple dimensions. It enhances academic performance and engagement by fostering holistic learning environments that promote self-confidence and commitment to studies (Lovat, 2011; Lovat et al., 2011; Lovat & Toomey, 2009), with students demonstrating greater intellectual depth and participation, especially in collaborative activities. It also cultivates emotional maturity, improving well-being, trust, and respectfulness among peers and staff. Observable outcomes include reduced vandalism, fewer suspensions, and increased student focus and peer connection. Additionally, values education fosters active citizenship, with students becoming more responsible and respectful of school environments (Lovat et al., 2009). Introducing a shared values vocabulary encourages reflective thinking and ethically based behaviour, or "ethical intelligence" (Lovat et al., 2010).

Improved School Environment and Teacher Experience

Values education fosters improved relationships and a more positive school culture, as evidenced by the creation of democratic classrooms where students feel respected and are more inclined to seek assistance. Values education can create a positive school culture where values are explicitly discussed, reflected upon, and enacted across all school activities (Lovat et al., 2009).

Values education can make the role of teachers more enjoyable by fostering good relationships, which in turn positively affects student behaviour and engagement. This approach also enhances teacher well-being through community building and collegial support, leading to a unified school environment. It can also provide protection against drug use, with effects comparable to targeted prevention programmes. Furthermore, schools integrating values education observe calmer classrooms, reduction in behavioural issues, and reduced absenteeism and class-cutting (Gardner, 2004).

Challenges Related to Values Education

Educational Framework and Curriculum

Proponents of holistic education identify critical shortcomings in contemporary educational frameworks. The current system, rooted in the Industrial Revolution, is designed to equip students for industrial employment. This is evidenced by a focus on STEM subjects, standardised testing, age-based grouping, and teacher-led instruction, all of which impede holistic development (Rafikov et al., 2021).

Gaps in curriculum and policy also present substantial challenges. A lack of clear, comprehensible directives on how to address values in the classroom leaves teachers uncertain (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014). The national curriculum often neglects this aspect, leading to a fragmented approach, and teachers find it difficult to integrate values education across different subjects, especially in science and mathematics where the focus is often on syllabus completion. The influence of a "hidden curriculum" can also promote specific value systems, potentially undermining multicultural ideals (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014).

In the implementation of some government policies, there may be inequalities targeting certain ethnic or religious groups (McDonnell, 2020). This requires a critical and cautious approach to avoid causing alienation and stagnation which are against the overall aim of values education.

Theoretical Consensus

Beyond the general framework, challenges exist in defining and implementing values. Lack of a coherent societal framework, governmental assumptions about universal value acceptance in diverse contexts, and difficulties in agreeing on core values within school communities all contribute to the complexity (Gardner, 2004).

Theoretical diversity and the tension between absolutist and relativistic approaches to values, as well as the difficulty in assessing personal dispositions, add further layers of complexity to the teaching of values education effectively (Lovat et al., 2010).

Cultural Matters

Multicultural classrooms can present some challenges to values education as teachers may struggle to navigate diverse and potentially conflicting values among students. Values education is often reactive and unplanned, embedded in daily school life rather than systematically designed, which has limited the impact of educational initiatives (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014). This complexity is compounded by the difficulty of balancing universal and cultural values, alongside a lack of clear guidelines for how teachers can implement values education across different subjects; many schools lack direction from curriculum frameworks (Lovat et al., 2010; Gardner, 2004).

In a study conducted in the Turkish context, prospective English teachers demonstrated awareness of their multiple identities, prioritising their Turkish and Muslim identities while viewing learning English as a means to understand cultural differences and develop personal qualities such as flexibility and tolerance. They also emphasised the significant role of teachers in accurately presenting Western values during language courses (Atay & Ece, 2009).

Teacher Education and Training for Values Education

Teaching is fundamentally an ethical profession, as education is value-driven and aimed at benefiting students and society, necessitating ongoing professional development (Adalbjarnardottir, 2010). Teacher formation must prioritise the affective dimension: fostering self-awareness, empathy, and appreciation that relationships are central to learning (Gellel, 2010), while providing robust support across policy, practice, and research (Adalbjarnardottir, 2010).

Recognising diversity in teachers' beliefs is essential, as different goals in values education may require varied approaches (Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). Effective values education demands teacher training that integrates theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and critical awareness. A strong theoretical foundation equips teachers with an ethical lexicon beyond anecdotal practice (Thornberg, 2008), and values education must be framed as an overarching concept integrating moral, character, and citizenship education (Thornberg & Oğuz, 2016).

Bridging theory and practice enables trainee teachers to examine how personal values shape socially just pedagogies (Mead, 2022), which is vital given that many teachers feel unprepared for ethical dilemmas (Thornberg, 2008). Developing professional identity and authority is also essential, including recognising the informal curriculum in daily school life (Gardner, 2004; Thornberg, 2008; Mead, 2022).

Berkowitz (2011) highlights peer interaction through cooperative learning—which yields academic and character benefits when combined with social goals—and moral dilemma discussions, which stimulate moral reasoning. Teachers also need analytical tools to critically examine social values during lessons (Feng, 2017), and mentoring by experienced practitioners provides significant support (McDonnell, 2020). Reflective practice is indispensable, requiring time to analyse actions from multiple ethical perspectives (Gardner, 2004; McDonnell, 2020). All teaching is values-laden, and educators must recognise how their own values, institutional values, and students' values interact within the political and social dimensions of teaching (Mead, 2022).

Teachers often lack adequate preparedness for values education, citing insufficient training that fails to provide theoretical grounding or practical strategies (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014; Thornberg, 2008). This is worsened by the absence of a shared ethical language and limited engagement with research, which hinders both professional development and practice; in Sweden, for

example, many teacher students receive no satisfactory training in conflict management (Thornberg, 2008). Professional development must help teachers reflect on their own values rather than focusing solely on curriculum content (Gardner, 2004; Adalbjarnardottir, 2010). Moreover, even teachers who feel adequately trained find implementing values education in subjects like English exceptionally demanding and time-consuming (Chung & Ho, 2025).

Implications for Future Research

The study of the moral dimensions within language teaching is nascent, presenting several significant avenues for future research. Johnston and Buzzelli (2008) suggest further research to be conducted in specific contexts. They state that a comprehensive understanding necessitates discourse-analytic investigations across diverse contexts, acknowledging that moral interpretations vary considerably across cultural and national boundaries. It is crucial to avoid assuming that the moral frameworks of one region are universally applicable to other countries, or even consistent within a single nation (Johnston & Buzzelli, 2008). This view contrasts with frameworks that identify a universal set of values.

Moreover, due to the profound impact of cultural variations in values on educational practices, international and comparative studies of language classrooms in different national settings are essential to enrich this field.

Thirdly, curriculum and coursebooks represent a critical site for exploring moral values. The moral implications of selecting specific vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and pragmatic competencies, as well as the representation of cultures and values within these materials, warrant thorough investigation.

Fourthly, the intersection of language teaching and power, particularly its moral aspects, requires closer scrutiny. This includes examining the influence of expatriate teachers and the portrayal of different cultures, highlighting the under-researched nexus of personal moral beliefs, political power, and language pedagogy.

Finally, the role of religious beliefs in language teaching demands further exploration. Expanding beyond existing work on evangelical Christianity, research should encompass other Christian denominations and religions, addressing the complex moral dilemmas arising when teachers' personal religious convictions impact classroom instruction and student interactions (Johnston & Buzzelli, 2008).

According to Mangubhai (2007), longitudinal studies should be conducted that triangulate interview data with observations of teachers' morally oriented behaviour and the techniques they use to convey moral messages. Such observations in the classroom would allow for a more detailed picture of how teachers' conduct reveals a moral framework.

Conclusion

This narrative literature review had two objectives: to identify key arguments and research on values education in general education and teacher education. Synthesising sources from diverse contexts, the review aimed to establish a theoretical foundation for future empirical research.

The findings indicate that values education is widely recognised as intrinsic to holistic education. The literature demonstrates benefits such as enhanced academic performance, improved student development, and a more positive school environment. However, persistent challenges remain, including a lack of theoretical consensus, inadequate teacher training, insufficient curriculum guidance, and difficulties navigating diverse cultural and religious values. Teacher education emerged as central, requiring not only theoretical knowledge and practical skills but also self-awareness, reflective practice, and professional identity.

Several future research directions emerge: international comparative studies on values education in ELT across cultural settings; longitudinal and discourse-analytic research on how moral values are negotiated in classrooms and materials; investigation into the intersection of teacher beliefs, religious convictions, and institutional mandates; and targeted professional development programmes to equip educators with practical strategies and reflective capacities for integrating values education effectively and ethically into language classrooms.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Claude in order to check for language errors. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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