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English Language Education, AI, and Moral Values: Preparing Students for Ethical Challenges in a Digital World

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of English Language Education (ELE), artificial intelligence (AI), and moral values in preparing secondary school students in Kenya to navigate ethical challenges in a rapidly evolving digital world. With the increasing integration of AI-powered tools such as automated writing assistants, chatbots, and digital learning platforms in English language classrooms, concerns have emerged regarding academic integrity, overreliance on technology, and the erosion of critical thinking skills. Grounded in the understanding that language education plays a central role in shaping thought, communication, and value systems, this research investigates how ELE can be leveraged not only to enhance linguistic competence but also to promote ethical awareness and moral reasoning. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, drawing data from selected urban and semi-urban secondary schools in Kenya through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations involving both students and English language teachers. It explores the extent to which AI-integrated teaching influences students' understanding and practice of moral values, evaluates how curricula incorporate ethical considerations, and identifies challenges faced by teachers in fostering responsible AI use. Findings indicate that while AI tools significantly enhance language learning outcomes, their unregulated use contributes to increased instances of plagiarism, reduced learner autonomy, and limited ethical reflection. Additionally, the study reveals gaps in teacher preparedness and curriculum design in addressing digital ethics. The research concludes that English language classrooms offer a critical platform for embedding moral education within AI-supported learning environments. It recommends the development of clear policy guidelines, teacher training programs in digital ethics, and curriculum reforms that integrate moral values with language instruction. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing discourse on responsible technology integration in education and underscores the need to balance technological advancement with ethical development in preparing students for the digital age.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and modern information technology has significantly reshaped educational practices globally. In contemporary classrooms, AI-powered tools such as chatbots, automated writing assistants, and digital learning platforms are increasingly integrated into English language education to support teaching and learning processes. While these technologies enhance accessibility, efficiency, and language skill development, they also introduce ethical concerns related to academic integrity, responsible technology use, and students' moral development (Alnsour et al., 2025).

English language education plays a critical role in shaping students' communication skills, thinking patterns, and value systems. As English functions as the dominant global language for digital communication, online information, and AI-mediated interaction, it serves as a primary medium through which students engage with ethical issues in the digital world. Through exposure to texts, discussions, literature, and digital discourse in English classrooms, students encounter moral concepts such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and empathy. Consequently, the manner in which English is taught particularly in AI-supported learning environments can significantly influence students' moral values and ethical awareness (Ghani, 2024).

In the age of AI, students increasingly rely on digital tools for writing, research, and communication in English. This growing reliance has raised concerns regarding plagiarism, overdependence on AI-generated content, reduced critical thinking, and blurred boundaries between human and machine authorship (Zhao, 2025). These challenges highlight the need for English language education to extend beyond linguistic competence to include ethical guidance that prepares students to navigate moral dilemmas responsibly. This study therefore examines how English language education, in conjunction with AI and current information technology, can prepare students for ethical challenges in a dynamic digital world.

1.1 Background to the Study

Language has long been recognized as a powerful tool for shaping human thought, behavior, and moral understanding. In educational contexts, language functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a vehicle for transmitting cultural norms, social values,

and ethical principles. English language education occupies a particularly influential position due to its dominance in global communication, digital media, and technological innovation (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Recent research indicates that AI has transformed English language teaching by enabling personalized instruction, automated feedback, and interactive learning experiences (Sadigzade, 2025). AI-supported tools have been found to improve students' writing accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, and engagement in language learning. However, scholars caution that excessive or unregulated use of AI may negatively affect students' moral development by encouraging academic dishonesty, diminishing learner autonomy, and weakening ethical judgment (Alnsour et al., 2025).

Furthermore, ethical issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and intellectual property rights have become increasingly relevant in AI-enhanced language education (Ghani, 2024). English language classrooms, which emphasize reading, writing, speaking, and digital communication, provide an important space for addressing these ethical concerns. Through carefully selected learning materials, guided discussions, and responsible integration of AI tools, English language education can promote moral reasoning, ethical awareness, and digital citizenship among students (Nelson et al., 2025).

In a rapidly changing digital world shaped by AI and emerging technologies, there is a growing need to examine how English language education can intentionally support the formation of moral values. This study is therefore situated at the intersection of English language education, artificial intelligence, and moral education, with the aim of understanding how students can be prepared to face ethical challenges responsibly in the digital age.

1.2 Statement of the Problem (Context: Kenya and Africa)

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and modern information technology into education is rapidly transforming learning environments across the globe, including in Africa and specifically Kenya. In Kenyan schools, the teaching and learning of English the official language of instruction and a key medium for global communication has increasingly incorporated digital platforms, AI-assisted learning tools, and online resources to enhance students' language skills. While these innovations provide opportunities for improved learning outcomes, they also pose significant moral and ethical challenges that many schools are ill-prepared to address.

One critical problem in the Kenyan context is the lack of clear policies and guidance on ethical use of AI in education. Many students in urban and semi-urban schools rely on AI tools, such as automated essay writers, translation apps, and grammar checkers, for completing English language assignments. While these tools can enhance efficiency, they also increase the risk of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and dependency on technology, which undermines the development of critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills. In rural and under-resourced schools, limited access to digital tools and teacher training further exacerbates inequalities, creating a situation where moral education in digital contexts is inconsistent and often neglected.

Moreover, English language education in Kenya traditionally focuses on grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and examination performance, with limited attention to moral values, ethical reasoning, and responsible digital behavior. In a rapidly digitalizing society, where AI-mediated communication and online content dominate social interactions, students are increasingly exposed to misinformation, biased information, and unethical communication practices without sufficient guidance on evaluating or responding to these challenges. This gap risks producing learners who are linguistically competent but morally and ethically underprepared to navigate the complexities of a digital world.

Teachers themselves face challenges in integrating AI responsibly into English language instruction. Many Kenyan English language educators lack adequate training in digital literacy, AI ethics, and pedagogical strategies for promoting moral development through language learning. This limits their ability to mentor students on the ethical use of AI tools and to create classroom environments that foster moral awareness alongside language proficiency.

Despite these emerging issues, there is limited empirical research in Kenya and Africa that investigates the intersection of English language education, AI integration, and moral values development. Most studies focus on technological efficiency, language performance, or access to digital resources, with minimal attention given to ethical considerations and moral formation. Consequently, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding how English language education can be strategically used to prepare Kenyan students for ethical challenges in a digital world dominated by AI and modern information technology.

In summary, the problem this study addresses is the insufficient integration of moral and ethical education within English language instruction in Kenyan schools in the context of increasing AI and digital technology use. Addressing this problem is critical to ensuring that students in Kenya are not only proficient in English but are also ethically prepared to navigate the opportunities and challenges presented by a rapidly evolving digital society.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate how English Language Education can be leveraged to foster moral values and prepare students in Kenya for ethical challenges in a digital world dominated by artificial intelligence (AI) and modern information technology. Specifically, the study aims to examine the ways in which AI-integrated learning tools, classroom instruction, and English language curricula influence students' ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and responsible use of digital resources.

This study seeks to highlight the potential of English language classrooms not only as spaces for linguistic and cognitive development but also as platforms for moral education and digital ethics. By exploring the intersection of English language education, AI use, and moral values formation in the Kenyan context, the research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to promote ethical and responsible engagement with digital technologies among students.

In addition, the study aims to identify the challenges faced by English language teachers in integrating AI tools responsibly and effectively in the classroom, while simultaneously cultivating students' moral and ethical consciousness. Ultimately, the purpose is to contribute to the development of strategies that ensure Kenyan students become both linguistically competent and morally prepared to navigate the ethical complexities of a rapidly digitalizing world.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are divided into general and specific objectives:

1.4.1 General Objective

To examine the role of English Language Education in promoting moral values and preparing students in Kenya for ethical challenges in a digital world influenced by AI and modern information technology.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- To investigate the extent to which AI-integrated English language teaching influences students' understanding and practice of moral values in Kenyan schools.
- To assess how English language curricula and classroom practices incorporate moral and ethical education in the context of AI and digital learning.
- To identify challenges faced by teachers in promoting ethical awareness and responsible AI use during English language instruction.
- To explore students' perceptions of AI tools and digital technologies in relation to moral decision-making and ethical behavior in English language learning.
- To provide recommendations for enhancing the integration of moral education and responsible AI use within English language teaching in Kenya.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to have multiple educational, social, and policy-related benefits, particularly in the context of Kenya and Africa at large:

Educational Significance: The study will provide teachers with insights into how English language instruction can be intentionally used to foster moral values while integrating AI and digital tools.

It will help curriculum developers identify gaps in the inclusion of ethical and moral considerations within English language programs.

Policy Significance: Policymakers in the Ministry of Education and relevant educational bodies will gain evidence-based recommendations on the formulation of guidelines for the ethical integration of AI in English classrooms. The study will contribute to the development of frameworks for digital ethics education in schools, ensuring responsible technology use among students.

Social Significance: By promoting moral and ethical awareness, the study will help students become responsible digital citizens capable of navigating the ethical challenges of a rapidly changing digital world.

The research encourages a balance between technological proficiency and moral development, which is critical in shaping socially responsible individuals in Kenyan society.

Academic Significance: The study fills a research gap in the African context, where little empirical evidence exists on the interaction between English language education, AI, and moral development. It provides a foundation for future research on digital ethics, language education, and moral development in schools.

Practical Significance: The study will offer practical recommendations for teachers on integrating moral education into AI-assisted English language instruction. Schools can use the findings to develop policies and programs that guide students in responsible use of AI and digital resources.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

1.7.1 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the role of English Language Education in promoting moral values and preparing students for ethical challenges in a digital world influenced by artificial intelligence (AI) and modern information technology. The study specifically targets secondary schools in Kenya, including both urban and semi-urban settings, to capture variations in access to AI tools, digital infrastructure, and teaching practices. The research investigates:

- How AI-integrated English language teaching impacts students' understanding and practice of moral values.
- How English language curricula and classroom practices incorporate ethical and moral education in the context of digital learning.
- The challenges teachers face in promoting moral and ethical awareness alongside AI-assisted learning.
- Students' perceptions of AI and digital tools in shaping ethical decision-making.

1.7.2 Delimitations of the Study

Geographical Delimitation: The study is limited to selected secondary schools in Kenya and does not cover primary schools, tertiary institutions, or other African countries.

Content Delimitation: The research focuses specifically on English language education and excludes other subjects, although AI use and ethical issues may also occur in other disciplines.

Technological Delimitation: The study examines AI and digital tools commonly used in classrooms, such as automated writing assistants, chatbots, and online learning platforms. Other forms of technology not directly related to language learning, such as advanced robotics or unrelated software, are not considered.

Time Delimitation: Data collection focuses on the current period (2025–2026) to capture contemporary trends in AI use, digital learning, and moral education in Kenyan schools.

Population Delimitation: The study targets secondary school students and English language teachers; other stakeholders, such as parents or policymakers, are not the primary focus, although their perspectives may be indirectly referenced.

By establishing these boundaries, the study ensures that the research remains manageable, relevant, and specifically applicable to the Kenyan context.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

To avoid ambiguity, the following key terms used in this study are defined as follows:

English Language Education (ELE): The formal teaching and learning of English as a language of communication, instruction, and academic engagement in schools, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Ghani, 2024).

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The use of computer systems, algorithms, and digital tools that can perform tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence, such as language processing, automated feedback, and content generation (Alnsour et al., 2025).

Moral Values: Principles and standards of behavior that guide individuals in distinguishing right from wrong, including honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, empathy, and fairness (Nelson et al., 2025).

Ethical Challenges: Situations or dilemmas that require individuals to make decisions based on moral principles, particularly in contexts involving digital technologies, AI tools, and online communication (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Digital World: The contemporary environment in which communication, learning, and information exchange occur through computers, internet platforms, AI tools, and other technological devices (Zhao, 2025).

AI-Integrated Learning Tools: Educational technologies powered by AI that support teaching and learning processes, such as chatbots, automated writing assistants, online grammar and translation tools, and virtual learning platforms (Sadigzade, 2025).

Responsible AI Use: The ethical, moral, and socially conscious engagement with AI technologies in educational settings, ensuring that students maintain integrity, independence, and accountability while using digital tools (Ghani, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study of English Language Education, AI, and moral values in preparing students for ethical challenges in a digital world. The chapter is organized into theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and a conceptual framework.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Moral Development Theory

Moral Development Theory, proposed by Kohlberg (1958/1998), explains how individuals develop ethical reasoning in stages, from obedience and punishment orientation to principled moral judgment. In educational contexts, this theory helps understand how students internalize moral values when interacting with technology, such as AI tools, in English classrooms (Kohlberg, 1958/1998). Studies have shown that ethical reflection exercises in AI-supported classrooms can enhance students' moral reasoning beyond mere rule-following (Rest, 1986).

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory remains a useful cognitive framework for examining how learners justify ethical decisions, particularly in technology-mediated classrooms. The stage-based model, which traces moral reasoning from obedience-oriented thinking to principled judgment, helps educators interpret how students respond to ethical issues surrounding AI use, such as authorship, academic integrity, and responsibility. Recent educational research suggests that when students engage in structured ethical dialogue and dilemma-based reflection around AI use, they are more likely to demonstrate post-conventional reasoning rather than mere compliance with rules (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2024). In English classrooms, this means that guided reflection on AI-generated texts can encourage learners to think critically about fairness, originality, and the broader social implications of technology, aligning with contemporary calls for ethics-centered digital literacy education.

Despite its strengths, Kohlberg's theory has been increasingly critiqued for its narrow focus on rational cognition while underplaying the roles of emotion, social pressure, and institutional context in moral decision-making. Recent studies on AI ethics in education indicate that students' ethical behavior is strongly influenced by classroom norms, assessment pressures, and teachers' own uncertainty about AI policies, rather than by moral reasoning alone (Holmes et al., 2024; Williamson & Eynon, 2023). In practice, students may articulate principled ethical views about AI use yet still engage in unethical practices due to competitive academic environments or ambiguous guidelines. This gap between moral reasoning and moral action highlights a limitation of Kohlberg's linear, stage-based model, which struggles to account for the situational and fluid nature of ethical decision-making in rapidly evolving digital learning spaces.

A further limitation lies in the theory's cultural assumptions, which continue to raise concerns in diverse and globalized educational contexts. Kohlberg's emphasis on abstract justice and universal principles has been criticized for reflecting Western, individualistic moral values, potentially marginalizing relational or care-based ethical perspectives that are equally relevant to AI use in education (Floridi, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Recent scholarship on AI ethics emphasizes values such as inclusivity, social responsibility, and collective well-being, suggesting that moral reasoning about technology is shaped by cultural, institutional, and disciplinary norms rather than by universal stages alone (Holmes et al., 2024). Consequently, while Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory still offers a valuable foundation for understanding ethical reasoning, its application to AI-enhanced English classrooms must be complemented by contemporary, culturally responsive frameworks that better capture the complexity of moral engagement with emerging technologies.

2.2.2 Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and collaboration (Driscoll, 2000). In language education, students actively construct understanding through dialogue, discussions, and collaborative tasks. This framework supports the idea that moral values can be developed through classroom interactions, particularly in AI-enhanced learning environments where digital tools mediate communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Driscoll, 2000).

2.2.3 Digital Ethics

Digital Ethics refers to the moral principles governing technology use, particularly AI, in learning environments. It emphasizes transparency, accountability, privacy, fairness, and human-centered values (Díaz de la Cruz, Fernández Fernández, & Villegas-Galaviz, 2025). In English language classrooms, digital ethics ensures that AI tools are used responsibly, promoting integrity, autonomy, and ethical decision-making in students (Holmes, Porayska-Pomsta, & Holstein, 2022).

2.3 Empirical Studies

2.3.1 AI's Educational Opportunities and Ethical Risks

Recent research increasingly emphasizes AI's transformative potential in education, particularly in language learning contexts. AI-powered tools such as automated writing assistants, speech recognition software, and adaptive learning platforms can personalize instruction by providing immediate feedback, differentiated tasks, and learner-specific pacing. Zhao (2025) notes that such tools support English language acquisition by enhancing vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and learner engagement, especially for students with varying proficiency levels. From a pedagogical perspective, AI can reduce routine instructional burdens on teachers and allow more classroom time for higher-order language practices such as discussion, interpretation, and creative writing. These affordances position AI as a powerful support for inclusive and learner-centered education, aligning with contemporary goals of equity and personalization in digital learning environments.

At the same time, the growing integration of AI into classrooms raises significant ethical and pedagogical concerns. One of the most frequently cited risks is academic dishonesty, as AI-generated texts can blur the boundaries between student authorship and machine assistance. Alnsour, Al-Shorman, and Abu-Taleb (2025) argue that without clear guidelines, students may use AI to bypass meaningful learning, submitting work they do not fully understand. Beyond plagiarism, there is concern that excessive dependence on AI tools may weaken students' ability to develop independent language skills, problem-solving strategies, and critical thinking. If AI is positioned as a replacement rather than a supplement to cognitive effort, learners may prioritize efficiency over deep engagement, undermining the educational goals AI is intended to support.

Critically, these opportunities and risks suggest that the educational value of AI is not inherent but depends on how it is implemented and regulated within instructional contexts. While AI can scaffold learning and support language development, its ethical risks highlight the need for explicit instruction in digital ethics, academic integrity, and critical AI literacy. Educators must design learning activities that require students to reflect on, evaluate, and revise AI-generated outputs rather than accept them uncritically. As recent scholarship emphasizes, responsible AI use in education requires balancing innovation with ethical awareness, ensuring that AI enhances—not replaces—students' cognitive, linguistic, and moral development (Zhao, 2025; Alnsour et al., 2025). A critical approach therefore positions AI as a pedagogical tool embedded within human judgment, ethical reasoning, and purposeful learning design.

2.3.2 Ethical and Pedagogical

The growing integration of AI into educational settings has intensified discussions around its ethical and pedagogical implications, particularly the role of teachers in mediating students' use of these technologies. Alnsour et al. (2025) argue that ethical AI use does not emerge naturally from access to technology but requires explicit instructional guidance. Teachers are therefore positioned not only as facilitators of learning but also as moral and ethical gatekeepers who must articulate clear expectations regarding academic integrity, responsible content generation, and digital citizenship. Without such guidance, AI tools risk being perceived by students as neutral or authority-free resources, rather than as technologies embedded with values, limitations, and ethical consequences.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the need for explicit instruction challenges assumptions that AI automatically enhances learning. While AI can support efficiency and personalization, Alnsour et al. (2025) highlight that unstructured use may encourage surface-level engagement rather than meaningful learning. When students rely on AI to generate essays, translations, or analyses without critical evaluation, the learning process becomes outcome-focused rather than process-oriented. This raises concerns about the erosion of core educational goals, such as developing independent thinking, problem-solving skills, and linguistic competence. Pedagogically, this suggests that AI must be integrated through carefully designed tasks that require student reflection, revision, and justification, ensuring that AI functions as a scaffold rather than a substitute for learning.

Sadigzade (2025) further extends this critique by warning that AI-enhanced English learning platforms may undermine students' moral reasoning if misused as shortcuts for completing assignments. From a moral development perspective, habitual reliance on AI for quick solutions can discourage students from engaging with ethical questions about authorship, effort, and fairness. If success is achieved through technological efficiency rather than intellectual struggle, students may begin to normalize ethically questionable practices. This concern is particularly significant in language learning, where struggle, feedback, and revision are central to cognitive and moral growth. Sadigzade's findings suggest that unchecked AI use risks reshaping students' values around learning, effort, and responsibility.

Critically, these findings indicate that ethical and pedagogical issues surrounding AI are deeply interconnected rather than separate concerns. Ethical guidance without pedagogical redesign may result in rule compliance without understanding, while innovative pedagogy without ethical framing risks legitimizing misuse. Effective AI integration therefore requires a holistic approach that combines explicit ethical instruction, transparent assessment criteria, and learning designs that foreground human judgment and accountability. Rather than viewing AI as a threat or a solution in itself, educators must position it within a broader educational framework that prioritizes critical thinking, moral reasoning, and purposeful learning. In this sense, the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI underscore the enduring importance of teacher agency in shaping how technology influences both learning outcomes and students' moral development.

2.3.3 AI Ethics Education and Reflection

Recent research increasingly positions ethical reflection as a central component of effective AI integration in education, particularly within language curricula. Nelson, Hassan, and Lee (2025) demonstrate that when ethical discussions about AI use are embedded into classroom practice, students develop stronger moral reasoning and a more nuanced understanding of responsible technology use. Rather than treating ethics as an add-on or external rule system, this approach integrates moral inquiry into everyday learning activities such as writing, reading, and discussion. In language classrooms, where meaning-making and interpretation are already central, ethical reflection on AI aligns naturally with curricular goals and supports the development of thoughtful, reflective learners who are aware of the broader implications of their technological choices.

Pedagogically, embedding AI ethics within the curriculum shifts students from passive users of technology to active moral agents. Nelson et al. (2025) found that students who engaged in guided discussions about AI were more aware of issues such as academic integrity, intellectual property, and authorship. This suggests that ethical reflection can deepen students' understanding of why certain practices—such as uncritical use of AI-generated text—are problematic, rather than merely instructing them to avoid such behaviors. However, a critical concern is that the effectiveness of ethical reflection depends heavily on how it is facilitated. Superficial or overly abstract discussions risk becoming symbolic gestures that promote ethical language without meaningful behavioral change, reinforcing the gap between moral reasoning and moral action.

Another limitation lies in the assumption that ethical awareness automatically leads to responsible AI use. While Nelson et al. (2025) report increased awareness among students, awareness alone may not be sufficient in high-pressure academic environments where performance, grades, and efficiency are prioritized. Students may understand ethical principles yet still choose to misuse AI tools due to time constraints or competitive expectations. This highlights the need to align ethical reflection with assessment practices and institutional policies, ensuring that responsible AI use is not only discussed but also meaningfully reinforced. Without such alignment, ethical education risks becoming aspirational rather than transformative.

Critically, the findings of Nelson et al. (2025) suggest that AI ethics education is most effective when it is continuous, contextualized, and closely tied to learning objectives. Embedding ethical reflection within language curricula offers a promising pathway for fostering digital citizenship and moral reasoning, but it must be supported by thoughtful pedagogy, clear expectations, and consistent modeling by educators. AI ethics education should therefore be seen not as a one-time intervention, but as an ongoing dialogue that evolves alongside technological change. In this way, ethical reflection can help ensure that AI enhances educational practice while supporting students' intellectual, moral, and civic development.

2.4 Summary of Literature and Research Gap From the reviewed literature:

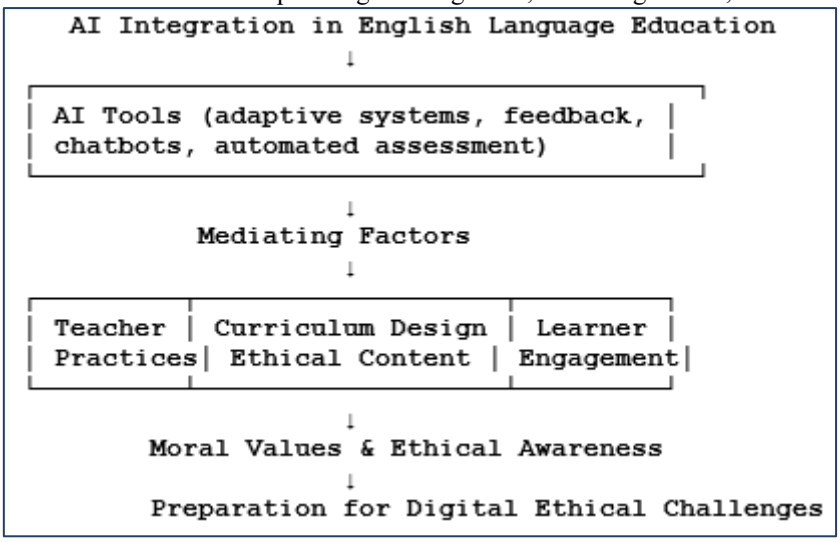
AI tools provide substantial opportunities for enhancing English language learning but also present ethical risks (Alnsour et al., 2025; Zhao, 2025).

Moral and ethical development is often underexplored in English language classrooms, particularly in African and Kenyan contexts (Nelson et al., 2025; Sadigzade, 2025).

There is limited research integrating English language education, AI, and moral value formation simultaneously, creating a gap for this study.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship among AI integration, mediating factors, and students' moral development:



Explanation:

- AI tools support English learning.
- Teacher practices, curriculum, and learner engagement mediate ethical outcomes.
- Moral values and ethical awareness develop through guided AI use.
- Outcome: students are prepared to navigate digital ethical challenges.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how English Language Education (ELE) in Kenya, combined with AI integration, influences students' moral values and ethical awareness. Qualitative design allows in-depth exploration of perceptions, experiences, and practices of English teachers, curriculum developers, and the content of teaching materials and curricula (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A multiple data collection approach was adopted:

In this study, data were collected through questionnaires administered to English language teachers, interviews with curriculum developers, and content analysis of English teaching materials and curriculum documents. The questionnaires enabled teachers to

provide first-hand accounts of their experiences using AI tools in the classroom, their perceptions of students' moral development, and the challenges they face in integrating ethical guidance into English language instruction. Through open-ended questions, teachers were able to elaborate on practical examples of both responsible and irresponsible AI use, revealing insights that may not be captured in quantitative metrics. Complementing this, interviews with curriculum developers provided expert perspectives on the design, implementation, and intended outcomes of the English language curriculum in Kenya. These interviews focused on the inclusion of moral and ethical content, the integration of AI tools in learning materials, and the strategies used to guide teachers in fostering students' ethical awareness. In addition, content analysis of English teaching materials and curriculum documents allowed the researcher to systematically examine how moral values and digital ethics are embedded in textbooks, lesson plans, and syllabi, and whether these align with current classroom practices. This multi-source approach, known as triangulation, ensures the credibility, trustworthiness, and depth of the findings by cross-verifying information from different perspectives and data types. By combining teachers' practical insights, curriculum developers' policy-level perspectives, and the objective evaluation of textual content, the study achieves a holistic understanding of how English language education, AI, and moral values interact in Kenyan schools (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation thus mitigates potential biases from any single source and strengthens the validity of conclusions drawn regarding both classroom practice and curriculum design.

3.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Kenya and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). Schools were selected from urban and semi-urban regions, capturing variations in access to AI tools, digital infrastructure, and teaching practices. KICD was included because it oversees the design, review, and implementation of national English curricula.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population consisted of:

- English language teachers in selected secondary schools with at least three years of teaching experience.
- Curriculum developers at KICD involved in English language curriculum design and review.
- Teaching materials including textbooks, lesson plans, and AI-integrated resources used in English classrooms.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants and materials based on relevance to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Teachers: 40 English language teachers from urban and semi-urban schools.

Curriculum developers: 10 experts from KICD.

Teaching materials: Selected English textbooks, syllabi, lesson plans, and AI-assisted teaching platforms currently in use.

Purposive sampling ensures that participants and materials provide rich and relevant data on AI integration, moral values, and curriculum practices.

3.5 Research Instruments

3.5.1 Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to teachers to capture their experiences with AI in teaching English, perceptions of ethical issues, and the role of teaching materials in promoting moral values. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express insights freely, providing rich qualitative data.

3.5.2 Interview Guide

Curriculum developers were interviewed using a structured interview guide. Interviews explored:

- Ethical considerations in English curriculum design.
- Integration of AI tools and digital learning resources.
- Inclusion of moral values in syllabi and lesson objectives.

3.5.3 Content Analysis

Checklist To analyze teaching materials and curricula, a content analysis checklist was developed based on themes derived from the literature review (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The checklist evaluated:

- Presence of ethical/moral content in textbooks and syllabi.
- Representation of digital literacy and responsible AI use.
- Opportunities for ethical reflection and critical thinking in lesson activities.
- Alignment of curriculum objectives with moral value development.
- Content analysis provided objective evidence of how curricula and teaching materials address ethical and moral considerations, complementing teacher and developer perspectives.

3.6 Validity of the Instruments

Validity was ensured by:

- Expert review of questionnaires, interview guides, and content analysis checklist by scholars in ELE and digital ethics.
- Aligning instruments with research objectives to ensure all relevant themes are covered.
- Conducting a pilot study with 5 teachers and 2 curriculum developers to refine questions and checklist items (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.7 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability, in qualitative research, is about consistency and dependability of findings:
Triangulation of questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis enhanced reliability.
Coding procedures for data from all sources followed consistent protocols (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Transcriptions of interviews and analysis of teaching materials were checked by a second researcher to reduce bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8 Method of Data Collection

- Permission was obtained from school principals and KICD administrators.
- Teachers completed questionnaires over one week.
- Interviews with curriculum developers were conducted face-to-face or via Zoom.
- Teaching materials (textbooks, syllabi, lesson plans) were collected for systematic content analysis.
- Data from all sources were anonymized and securely stored.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- Questionnaires and interview transcripts were coded for recurring themes on AI integration, ethical challenges, and moral value promotion.
- Content analysis of curricula and teaching materials identified the presence or absence of moral and ethical elements, digital literacy integration, and AI-related guidance.
- Themes were triangulated across data sources, comparing teachers' and developers' perspectives with evidence from teaching materials.
- Findings were presented narratively, supported by illustrative quotes and extracts from curricula.
- This approach ensured rigorous analysis of both perceptions and documented content, enhancing the study's credibility and applicability.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained.
- Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time.
- Data were securely stored and used only for research purposes.
- Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional authorities.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and critically analyzes the data collected from teachers' questionnaires, interviews with curriculum developers, and content analysis of English language curricula and textbooks. The study adopted a qualitative thematic analysis approach to explore how English Language Education (ELE) in Kenya, supported by AI, promotes moral values and prepares students for ethical challenges in a digital world. Themes were derived both inductively from the data and deductively from the literature review.

4.2 Teachers' Questionnaires:

Presentation and Analysis

4.2.1 Theme 1: Use of AI in English Language Teaching Most teachers reported using AI tools, such as grammar checkers, automated writing assistants, and online quizzes, to support teaching.

"I use Grammarly and Google Translate to help students improve their writing, especially with essay assignments. However, some students depend too much on these tools." – Teacher 12

Analysis: Teachers perceive AI as enhancing learning efficiency and language accuracy, consistent with Zhao (2025), but also note risks of overreliance, which can undermine independent thinking and ethical responsibility.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Influence of AI on Students' Moral Values Teachers observed both positive and negative effects of AI use on students' moral development:

- Positive: Encourages responsibility when used as a learning aid.
- Negative: Promotes academic dishonesty, including copying AI-generated essays.

"Some students submit AI-generated essays as their own work. This raises concerns about integrity and honesty." – Teacher 27

Analysis: While AI supports skill development, ethical awareness is limited, confirming the findings of Nelson et al. (2025). Teachers emphasized the need for explicit moral guidance alongside AI use.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Challenges in Integrating Ethical Awareness Teachers identified several challenges:

- Lack of training on AI ethics
- Inadequate curriculum guidance for moral education
- Unequal access to digital resources

"We have no clear instructions on how to teach students to use AI responsibly." – Teacher 34

Analysis: This highlights a gap between AI technology use and ethical education, underscoring the need for teacher training and curriculum alignment (Alnsour et al., 2025).

4.3 Interviews with Curriculum Developers

4.3.1 Theme 1: Curriculum and Ethical Education Curriculum developers confirmed that English syllabi include some moral value content, such as honesty, empathy, and social responsibility, but integration with AI-related ethical guidance is minimal.

"The curriculum encourages moral lessons through literature and essays, but AI integration is not addressed explicitly." – Developer 2

Analysis: The gap between curriculum intent and AI application suggests a need for explicit guidelines for digital ethics, aligning with Holmes et al. (2022).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Recommendations for AI Integration Developers suggested:

- Including digital ethics modules in English curricula
- Providing teacher training on AI ethics
- Encouraging critical reflection tasks in AI-supported learning "Students should be taught to critically assess AI output rather than accept it blindly." – Developer 5

Analysis: These recommendations align with the literature on responsible AI use and moral development (Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2025).

4.4 Content Analysis of Curricula and Textbooks

4.4.1 Theme 1: Presence of Moral Values Analysis of textbooks and syllabi showed:

Frequent inclusion of literature-based ethical lessons

Moral themes such as honesty, empathy, and respect were present in reading comprehension passages and essay topics.

Example: A Form 3 textbook includes a comprehension passage on a student choosing honesty over cheating.

Analysis: Moral education is embedded in traditional content but not explicitly linked to AI or digital learning, revealing a gap between curriculum content and emerging digital realities.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Integration of AI and Digital Skills Minimal guidance on ethical AI use

No structured activities for responsible AI use in writing or comprehension tasks

Example: Lesson plans recommend "using online resources for research" without guidance on ethical citation or AI use.

Analysis: While curricula promote digital literacy superficially, explicit instruction on AI ethics is missing, confirming gaps highlighted by teachers and curriculum developers.

4.5 Cross-Source Analysis Theme Teachers' Questionnaires

Curriculum Developers Curriculum/Material Analysis Interpretation AI Use Tools like Grammarly & Google Translate widely used AI mentioned in policy but not integrated in lessons Minimal AI guidance in textbooks Teachers innovate; curriculum lags behind technology Moral Values Observed risks of dishonesty, need for guidance Moral values present but AI integration missing Ethics embedded in stories but not in AI tasks Moral education exists but is not connected to AI Challenges Lack of AI ethics training, unequal resources Curriculum lacks explicit digital ethics Limited AI-related content Training and curriculum updates needed Recommendations Teacher guidance, reflection tasks Include digital ethics modules, teacher training Develop AI-informed lesson plans Unified approach needed across policy, teachers, and materials Analysis: Triangulation confirms a consistent pattern:

- Moral education exists in traditional English teaching.
- AI tools are widely used but ethical guidance is inadequate.
- Curriculum materials have gaps in AI integration and digital ethics.
- Teachers and developers recommend explicit AI ethics inclusion and training.

4.6 Summary of Findings

AI Integration: Teachers actively use AI in English instruction, but curricula do not provide guidance on ethical use.

Moral Value Promotion: Textbooks and syllabi embed traditional moral lessons, but digital ethical awareness is not addressed.

Teacher Challenges: Teachers lack training and resources to integrate ethical AI use into instruction.

Curriculum Gaps: Developers acknowledge moral content exists but digital ethics and AI guidance are missing.

Recommendations: Triangulated data suggest teacher training, AI-integrated curriculum design, and reflective tasks to align moral education with digital learning.

Interpretation: The findings align with prior literature (Nelson et al., 2025; Alnsour et al., 2025; Holmes et al., 2022), indicating a disconnect between AI use, moral education, and curriculum design. Integrating digital ethics with English language teaching is essential to prepare students for ethical challenges in a rapidly digitalizing world, particularly in the Kenyan context.

5. Discussion of Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five synthesizes the findings of this qualitative study and interprets them in light of existing research, policy, and classroom practice. The study investigated the intersection of English Language Education (ELE), artificial intelligence (AI), and moral values in Kenyan secondary schools. Data were collected through teachers' questionnaires, interviews with curriculum developers, and content analysis of teaching materials and curricula. This chapter elaborates on the significance of these findings, drawing conclusions about the state of AI integration, ethical instruction, and moral education, and providing recommendations to strengthen students' ethical preparedness in a rapidly digitalizing educational environment.

5.2 Discussion of Key Findings

5.2.1 AI Integration in English Language Teaching

The study found that AI tools are increasingly used in English classrooms, primarily through writing assistants, grammar checkers,

and online language platforms. Teachers reported that these tools support improved accuracy, feedback, and personalized learning, reflecting global trends in AI-enhanced education (Zhao, 2025). However, the study also revealed that while AI enhances technical language skills, its integration into ethical and moral development is minimal. Teachers observed instances where students relied excessively on AI outputs, sometimes submitting AI-generated work as their own, highlighting a gap between technological proficiency and moral reasoning. Curriculum developers acknowledged AI use in policy but confirmed the absence of explicit guidelines on ethical AI use, while content analysis of textbooks and syllabi revealed limited instruction on responsible AI engagement. These findings indicate a disconnect between digital tool use and moral guidance, reinforcing prior research emphasizing the need for deliberate ethical instruction alongside AI integration (Nelson, Hassan, & Lee, 2025; Holmes et al., 2022).

5.2.2 Promotion of Moral Values

The analysis of teaching materials and curriculum documents demonstrated that moral values such as honesty, empathy, respect, and responsibility are embedded in literature, comprehension exercises, and essay tasks. These elements provide a foundation for moral education, consistent with Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1958/1998). Nevertheless, the study found that these traditional moral lessons are not explicitly connected to AI use or digital literacy, leaving students without guidance on navigating ethical dilemmas in online or AI-assisted learning environments. Teachers' responses corroborated this gap, with many expressing concern about students' misuse of AI tools. Curriculum developers recognized the need to update curricula to incorporate digital ethics, emphasizing that moral and ethical education cannot be separated from technological competence in the 21st-century classroom. This reflects a broader global concern that educational systems often lag behind technological adoption, leaving students exposed to ethical risks without structured guidance (Díaz de la Cruz, Fernández Fernández, & Villegas-Galaviz, 2025).

5.2.3 Challenges in Ethical Integration

Teachers and curriculum developers identified multiple challenges in integrating ethical considerations with AI use. Among the most critical challenges were insufficient teacher training on AI ethics, lack of curriculum guidance on responsible AI use, and unequal access to digital tools. These challenges are particularly salient in Kenya, where resource disparities between urban and semi-urban schools affect both access to AI technology and teachers' ability to implement ethical instruction consistently. The findings suggest that while teachers may be aware of ethical concerns, their ability to foster moral reasoning in AI-enhanced learning is constrained by systemic factors, including curriculum limitations and inadequate professional development. Content analysis reinforced this point, revealing that although ethical values are embedded in literature-based activities, there is no structured instruction on responsible AI use, digital citizenship, or reflective engagement with technology. These findings echo Bowen's (2009) assertion that triangulating multiple qualitative data sources teachers' perceptions, developers' expertise, and document analysis provides a robust and credible picture of the challenges and gaps in practice.

5.2.4 Recommendations from Data Triangulation

Both teachers and curriculum developers recommended explicit inclusion of AI-related ethical content in the English curriculum, structured teacher professional development on digital ethics, and the design of reflective classroom activities that encourage critical engagement with AI outputs. These recommendations were reinforced by content analysis, which demonstrated that curricula currently provide few opportunities for students to evaluate AI-generated content, consider intellectual property rights, or discuss moral dilemmas arising from technology use. Integrating these recommendations would enable schools to not only enhance students' language competencies but also prepare them to navigate ethical challenges in a digital environment, aligning with the principles of Digital Ethics and Social Constructivism highlighted in the literature review (Driscoll, 2000; Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2025).

5.3 Conclusions From the triangulated data, the study concludes that:

AI tools are widely used in English language classrooms in Kenya and provide clear pedagogical benefits, yet their ethical implications are largely unaddressed. Moral and ethical values are embedded in traditional curricula, but their integration with AI-mediated learning is insufficient, leaving students unprepared for digital ethical challenges.

Teachers lack adequate training and curricular guidance to bridge the gap between AI use and moral education, limiting their capacity to foster ethical awareness in students. Curriculum materials and lesson plans provide limited explicit instruction on digital ethics, highlighting the need for reforms that align AI integration with moral development objectives.

Overall, while AI enhances English language learning outcomes, its potential to reinforce or undermine moral education depends on deliberate curriculum design, teacher preparedness, and reflective classroom practice. Without intervention, AI may inadvertently foster academic dishonesty or reduce students' ethical awareness.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the study provides recommendations for curriculum developers, teachers, policymakers, and researchers:

5.4.1 For Curriculum Developers

- Integrate digital ethics modules within English language curricula, linking AI use to moral reasoning.
- Revise textbooks and lesson plans to include case studies, ethical dilemmas, and reflective tasks that promote responsible AI use.
- Collaborate with teacher training institutions to ensure alignment between curricular goals and classroom implementation.

5.4.2 For Teachers

- Facilitate reflective discussions and activities around ethical AI use and digital citizenship.
- Monitor and guide students to use AI responsibly, discouraging over-reliance or plagiarism.

- Engage in professional development programs focused on AI integration, pedagogy, and moral education.

5.4.3 For Policy Makers

- Establish national guidelines for ethical AI use in schools, ensuring moral, digital, and academic integrity standards.
- Promote equitable access to AI tools and digital infrastructure across urban and semi-urban schools.
- Support curriculum and teacher training reforms to strengthen digital ethics instruction.

5.4.4 For Future Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of AI integration on students' moral development.
- Explore interdisciplinary approaches linking language learning, digital literacy, and ethics in other African contexts.
- Investigate teacher-led interventions for fostering ethical awareness in AI-assisted learning.

5.5 Final Remarks

This study demonstrates that while AI integration in English language education offers substantial pedagogical benefits, it also introduces ethical challenges that must be addressed through curriculum design, teacher preparedness, and reflective classroom practices. By triangulating teachers' questionnaires, curriculum developers' interviews, and content analysis of teaching materials, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of current gaps and opportunities in the Kenyan context. Implementing the recommended strategies will ensure that students are not only linguistically competent but also morally and digitally responsible, capable of navigating the ethical challenges of a dynamic, AI-driven world.

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