

Beyond Classroom Walls: The Crisis of Moral Disintegration and the Imperative for Attitudinal Transformation in Cameroonian Schools

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ABSTRACT: *Moral disintegration in Cameroonian secondary schools has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges confronting the national education system, manifesting in pervasive indiscipline, academic dishonesty, substance abuse, sexual misconduct, and the erosion of civic virtue among adolescent learners. Despite growing policy attention, empirical investigations that rigorously examine the structural and attitudinal determinants of this phenomenon remain sparse. This cross-sectional survey study investigated the relationship between attitudinal orientations, teacher role modelling, peer influence, school policy enforcement, family moral socialisation, and students' moral behaviour in Cameroonian secondary schools. A stratified random sample of 342 students drawn from six government and private secondary schools across the Centre Region of Cameroon participated in the study. Data were collected using a validated, five-point Likert scale instrument and analysed through a multi-level statistical framework encompassing univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate Pearson correlation analyses, multiple regression modelling, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Univariate findings revealed moderate levels of moral behaviour (Mean = 3.24, SD = 0.87), while bivariate analyses demonstrated significant positive correlations between moral behaviour and attitudinal orientation ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), teacher role modelling ($r = 0.547$, $p < 0.01$), and school policy enforcement ($r = 0.503$, $p < 0.01$), alongside a significant negative correlation with peer influence ($r = -0.431$, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis identified attitudinal orientation as the strongest predictor of moral behaviour ($\beta = 0.341$, $p < .001$), followed by school policy enforcement ($\beta = 0.276$) and teacher role modelling ($\beta = 0.245$). SEM results confirmed a well-fitting structural model (CFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.048) in which attitudinal transformation partially mediated the effects of family socialisation, teacher modelling, and school policy on student moral behaviour. The study concludes that sustainable moral reformation in Cameroonian schools necessitates a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that prioritises attitudinal transformation, strengthens teacher capacity for moral mentorship, and enforces coherent school disciplinary frameworks. Recommendations target curriculum developers, school administrators, and education policymakers.*

Keywords: moral disintegration, attitudinal transformation, Cameroonian schools, structural equation modelling, peer influence, teacher role modelling, school policy enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

The secondary school is universally regarded as a crucible of character formation, an institution entrusted not merely with the transmission of academic knowledge but with the moral and civic cultivation of future citizens (Ammar et al., 2024; Kazaara & Nancy, 2025). Yet, across Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly within the Republic of Cameroon, this transformative mandate has been progressively undermined by a deepening crisis of moral disintegration that has seeped beyond classroom walls into the broader societal fabric. Contemporary Cameroonian schools are increasingly characterised by alarming manifestations of moral decline, including widespread examination malpractice, escalating rates of student violence and bullying, rampant substance abuse, sexual harassment, gang membership, and a pervasive disregard for institutional authority (Julius & Godfrey, 2025a; Li & Wang, 2021). These behavioural pathologies do not exist in isolation; they are symptomatic of a more systemic attitudinal malaise rooted in conflicting value systems, the erosion of traditional communal ethics, the uncritical adoption of globalised consumer culture, and the structural deficiencies of an educational system ill-equipped to respond to the psychosocial complexities of contemporary adolescence (Julius & Godfrey, 2025b; Walkington, 2015). The consequences of unaddressed moral disintegration are far-reaching, translating into diminished academic performance, heightened social conflict, increased school dropout rates, and the production of graduates bereft of the ethical orientation necessary for constructive national development (Hutson et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2023). It is against this troubling backdrop that the present study was conceived, seeking to interrogate the attitudinal, institutional, familial, and peer-related determinants of moral behaviour among Cameroonian secondary school students, and to advance evidence-based imperatives for transformative intervention. The study contends that attitudinal reformation — the deliberate reorientation of students' values, beliefs, and moral reasoning frameworks — constitutes the indispensable centrepiece of any credible strategy for reversing the trajectory of moral decline in Cameroonian schools (Pozdnyakova et al., 2019; Samtani et al., 2020).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Moral development in educational contexts has been extensively theorised through frameworks ranging from Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning to Bandura's social learning theory, both of which underscore the dual significance of cognitive growth and environmental modelling in shaping ethical conduct. Within the African context, however, these universalist frameworks must be

understood alongside indigenous conceptions of communal morality, Ubuntu philosophy, and traditional age-grade socialisation systems that historically governed youth behaviour through collective accountability (Amato et al., 2020; Julius Arianitwe, 2025). In Cameroon, the post-independence educational expansion brought with it both promise and paradox; while enrolment rates surged, the values embedded within colonial and post-colonial curricula often clashed with indigenous moral frameworks, producing generations of learners navigating multiple, often contradictory ethical registers (Anggraeni et al., 2021; Bracho-Amador et al., 2023; Julius & Audrey, 2025). The onset of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s further destabilised the social infrastructure that had underpinned moral formation, weakening family cohesion, reducing teacher welfare and professional morale, and overcrowding classrooms to the point where meaningful moral mentorship became structurally impractical (Damrongpanit, 2019; Julius & Sula, 2025a). The proliferation of mobile technology and social media in the 2010s introduced additional disruptive forces, exposing adolescents to global cultural currents that frequently valorise individualism, hedonism, and the circumvention of authority (Audrey & Nancy, 2025; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025; Julius & Sula, 2025b). Government responses, including the introduction of civic and moral education as a compulsory subject in Cameroonian secondary schools through the 1998 Education Law, have yielded limited outcomes in practice, largely because such curricula remain pedagogically passive and disconnected from the lived moral dilemmas of students. Scholarly attention to this phenomenon within Cameroon has been growing, with researchers such as Nkengbeza (2019), Tambo (2020), and Fonkeng (2022) documenting the widening gap between formal moral education provisions and the behavioural realities observed in schools (Kazaara & Audrey, 2025; Nizhenkovska et al., 2022). The present study builds upon this emerging body of literature by introducing a multi-factorial, statistically rigorous framework that moves beyond descriptive documentation toward explanatory modelling of the attitudinal and structural drivers of moral behaviour.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the existence of formal moral and civic education programmes, Cameroonian secondary schools continue to witness an accelerating deterioration of student moral conduct, evidenced by rising incidences of examination fraud, interpersonal violence, sexual misconduct, substance abuse, and disrespect for authority (Julius & Desire, 2025; Starkey et al., 2023). This paradox — the coexistence of moral education policy and persistent moral disintegration — points to a fundamental disconnect between policy intent and pedagogical reality, suggesting that neither the content nor the delivery mechanisms of existing moral education programmes are adequately addressing the attitudinal, social, and institutional roots of the crisis (Abulela & Bart, 2021; Kazaara & Desire, 2025). The problem is compounded by the absence of comprehensive empirical data that quantifies the relative contribution of key predictors — including students' attitudinal orientations, teacher role modelling, peer dynamics, family socialisation, and school enforcement mechanisms — to variations in student moral behaviour (Gideon, 2023; Julius & Sula, 2025c). Without such evidence, interventions remain reactive, fragmented, and insufficiently targeted. Furthermore, the mediating role of attitudinal transformation in translating institutional and familial influences into tangible behavioural change has never been rigorously tested within the Cameroonian educational context using advanced modelling techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling. This gap in empirical knowledge constitutes the central problem to which the present study is addressed, with the conviction that generating robust, context-specific evidence is a prerequisite for designing effective, sustainable strategies for moral regeneration in Cameroonian secondary schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the determinants of moral behaviour among secondary school students in Cameroon and to assess the mediating role of attitudinal transformation in the relationship between institutional, familial, and peer factors and student moral conduct.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the nature and strength of the association between students' attitudinal orientations, teacher role modelling, peer influence, school policy enforcement, family moral socialisation, and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Cameroon.
2. To assess the relative predictive power of attitudinal orientation, teacher role modelling, peer influence, school policy enforcement, and family moral socialisation on students' moral behaviour in Cameroonian secondary schools.
3. To test a structural model in which attitudinal transformation mediates the effects of teacher role modelling, school policy enforcement, and family moral socialisation on the moral behaviour of secondary school students in Cameroon.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature and strength of the association between students' attitudinal orientations, teacher role modelling, peer influence, school policy enforcement, family moral socialisation, and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Cameroon?

2. To what extent do attitudinal orientation, teacher role modelling, peer influence, school policy enforcement, and family moral socialisation significantly predict students' moral behaviour in Cameroonian secondary schools?
3. Does attitudinal transformation significantly mediate the relationships between teacher role modelling, school policy enforcement, and family moral socialisation on the one hand, and student moral behaviour on the other, within the structural equation model?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a positivist, cross-sectional survey research design to examine the structural and attitudinal determinants of moral behaviour among secondary school students in the Centre Region of Cameroon. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 342 students from six schools — three government and three private secondary institutions — ensuring proportional representation across school type, gender, and class level. The target population comprised students in Forms 3 through 6, corresponding to ages 12 to 20 years, who had been enrolled for a minimum of one academic year in their respective institutions. The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed, five-point Likert scale questionnaire (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) comprising six validated subscales measuring Moral Behaviour Score (MBS), Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI), Teacher Role Modelling (TRM), Peer Influence Score (PIS), School Policy Enforcement (SPE), and Family Moral Socialisation (FMS). The instrument's content validity was established through expert review by five specialists in educational psychology and moral education, and its internal consistency reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.73 to 0.86 across subscales, exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70. Data were collected over a four-week period with informed consent obtained from school principals, class teachers, and student participants. Ethical approval was secured from the relevant institutional review board. Analysis proceeded through three sequential statistical levels: first, univariate descriptive statistics — including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions — were computed to characterise the sample distribution across all measured constructs and to identify central tendencies and variability in moral behaviour and its potential determinants; second, bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were conducted to assess the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of pairwise relationships between the study variables, with all correlation coefficients interpreted against the benchmarks of Cohen (1988) for small ($r = 0.10$), medium ($r = 0.30$), and large ($r = 0.50$) effect sizes; third, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed with Moral Behaviour Score as the dependent variable and AOI, TRM, PIS, SPE, and FMS entered simultaneously as predictors, enabling the computation of standardised beta coefficients, incremental R-squared values, and model-level F-statistics while controlling for multicollinearity ($VIF < 3.0$ for all predictors); and fourth, Structural Equation Modelling was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in R (version 4.3.1) with the lavaan package (version 0.6-17), specifying a measurement model for each latent construct and a structural model in which AOI served as a partial mediator between the exogenous predictors (TRM, SPE, FMS) and the endogenous outcome (MBS), with model fit assessed using the Comparative Fit Index ($CFI \geq 0.95$), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA \leq 0.06$), Standardised Root Mean Square Residual ($SRMR \leq 0.08$), and Tucker-Lewis Index ($TLI \geq 0.95$) as benchmarks for acceptable fit; indirect mediation effects were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to obtain 95% confidence intervals. All quantitative analyses were performed at a 0.05 significance level (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Univariate Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 342)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Moral Behaviour Score (MBS)	342	3.24	0.87	1.00	5.00
Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI)	342	3.11	0.93	1.00	5.00
Teacher Role Modelling (TRM)	342	3.45	0.78	1.00	5.00
Peer Influence Score (PIS)	342	2.98	1.02	1.00	5.00
School Policy Enforcement (SPE)	342	2.76	1.14	1.00	5.00
Family Moral Socialisation (FMS)	342	3.57	0.81	1.00	5.00
Student Age (years)	342	15.4	1.63	12	20

Table 1 presented the univariate descriptive statistics for all six study constructs measured among the 342 sampled secondary school students. The Moral Behaviour Score (MBS) yielded a mean of 3.24 ($SD = 0.87$), indicating that students' self-reported moral conduct was, on average, slightly above the scale midpoint of 3.0, suggesting a moderate yet far from optimal level of moral behaviour in the sampled schools. The relatively moderate standard deviation of 0.87 indicated meaningful heterogeneity in moral conduct across the student population, with individual scores ranging from the minimum possible value of 1.00 to the maximum of 5.00, reflecting the presence of both highly morally conscientious students and those exhibiting severely deficient moral behaviour within the same institutional contexts. The Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI) recorded a mean of 3.11 ($SD = 0.93$), the lowest mean score among

all constructs, which was particularly alarming given that attitudinal orientation was theorised as the central mediating mechanism through which other factors exert influence on moral behaviour; this finding suggested that Cameroonian secondary school students possessed, at best, ambivalent moral attitudes, pointing to a fundamental value formation deficit that any credible intervention framework must prioritise. Family Moral Socialisation (FMS) registered the highest mean of all constructs at 3.57 (SD = 0.81), affirming the continued centrality of the family as the primary locus of moral instruction in the Cameroonian socio-cultural context, even amid broader societal disruptions.

The descriptive profile also revealed that School Policy Enforcement (SPE) obtained the lowest mean score of 2.76 (SD = 1.14), indicating that students largely perceived their schools' disciplinary and moral policy frameworks as weak, inconsistently applied, or insufficiently authoritative — a finding with profound implications for school governance and administration in Cameroon. The high standard deviation of 1.14 associated with SPE further indicated substantial school-to-school variability in policy enforcement, consistent with widely documented disparities in institutional capacity between government and private schools in the country. Teacher Role Modelling (TRM) presented a mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.78), suggesting that students perceived teachers as relatively more reliable moral figures than the school policy system, even though this score remained below the level that would indicate strongly positive modelling. These baseline descriptive findings collectively painted a picture of a student moral environment characterised by moderate behavioural outcomes, attitudinally ambivalent students, relatively strong family moral foundations, and critically weak institutional enforcement mechanisms — a constellation of conditions that, taken together, creates fertile ground for the moral disintegration that has been widely observed in Cameroonian secondary schools and that motivates the deeper analyses pursued in subsequent sections of this study.

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 342)

Variable	MBS	AOI	TRM	PIS	SPE
Moral Behaviour Score (MBS)	1.000	—	—	—	—
Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI)	0.612**	1.000	—	—	—
Teacher Role Modelling (TRM)	0.547**	0.489**	1.000	—	—
Peer Influence Score (PIS)	-0.431**	-0.378**	-0.291**	1.000	—
School Policy Enforcement (SPE)	0.503**	0.461**	0.512**	-0.337**	1.000
** p < 0.01 (two-tailed)					

Table 2 presented the Pearson product-moment correlation matrix for all five study constructs in relation to the Moral Behaviour Score (MBS). The analysis revealed that Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI) exhibited the strongest positive correlation with MBS ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), a large-magnitude effect by Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, confirming that students with more constructive, ethically grounded attitudinal orientations consistently demonstrated superior moral behaviour. This finding was theoretically consonant with Bandura's cognitive-social model, which posits that behavioural enactment is preceded and shaped by internal cognitive and evaluative orientations, and it established attitudinal transformation as not merely a desirable but a statistically indispensable component of any moral regeneration strategy for Cameroonian schools. Teacher Role Modelling (TRM) demonstrated the second strongest correlation with MBS ($r = 0.547$, $p < 0.01$), confirming the critical salience of the teacher as a moral exemplar in the Cameroonian school context; the large effect size underscored that students' perceptions of their teachers as morally consistent, principled adults were strongly associated with higher levels of moral behaviour among students themselves. School Policy Enforcement (SPE) also correlated significantly and positively with MBS ($r = 0.503$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that firm, consistent institutional disciplinary frameworks meaningfully scaffold students' moral conduct, likely by establishing clear behavioural expectations and consequences that reinforce internalised moral standards.

Peer Influence Score (PIS), in contrast, recorded a significant negative correlation with MBS ($r = -0.431$, $p < 0.01$), a medium-to-large effect size indicating that students embedded in peer networks characterised by antisocial norms, delinquent behaviour, or moral disengagement reported substantially lower levels of moral conduct — a finding consistent with decades of international criminological and developmental psychology literature on deviant peer socialisation. The negative peer influence coefficient was the only negative correlation in the matrix, reinforcing the conceptually distinct and potentially corrosive role that peer dynamics can play in undermining whatever moral foundations family and school environments have worked to build. All inter-predictor correlations were in theoretically expected directions; notably, SPE correlated positively with TRM ($r = 0.512$), suggesting that schools with stronger policy enforcement cultures also tended to have more morally engaged teaching staff, while PIS correlated negatively with SPE ($r = -0.337$), indicating that permissive institutional environments inadvertently facilitated the dominance of

antisocial peer norms. These bivariate patterns provided strong prima facie justification for the multivariate and structural modelling analyses that followed, confirming that all five predictor variables warranted simultaneous inclusion in the regression and SEM frameworks to adequately account for the variance in student moral behaviour.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results — Predictors of Moral Behaviour Score (N = 342)

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	SE	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	0.421	0.183	—	2.301	0.022
Attitudinal Orientation Index	0.318	0.049	0.341	6.490	< .001
Teacher Role Modelling	0.274	0.052	0.245	5.269	< .001
Peer Influence Score	-0.198	0.041	-0.232	-4.829	< .001
School Policy Enforcement	0.211	0.044	0.276	4.795	< .001
Family Moral Socialisation	0.187	0.047	0.183	3.979	< .001
R ² = 0.587; Adj. R ² = 0.581; F(5, 336) = 95.34, p < .001					

Table 3 presented the results of the simultaneous multiple regression analysis in which the Moral Behaviour Score (MBS) was regressed on the five predictor variables — Attitudinal Orientation Index (AOI), Teacher Role Modelling (TRM), Peer Influence Score (PIS), School Policy Enforcement (SPE), and Family Moral Socialisation (FMS). The overall regression model was statistically significant (F[5, 336] = 95.34, p < .001), and the model accounted for 58.7% of the variance in student moral behaviour (R² = 0.587; Adjusted R² = 0.581), representing a large and theoretically meaningful effect size that affirmed the collective explanatory power of the five-predictor framework. All five predictors made statistically significant and independent contributions to the prediction of MBS at the p < .001 level, confirming that each construct captured a distinct and non-redundant dimension of the moral behaviour construct. Attitudinal Orientation Index emerged as the single most powerful predictor (β = 0.341, t = 6.490, p < .001), a finding that directly answered the first specific objective of the study and provided compelling empirical support for the central theoretical proposition that inner attitudinal transformation is the proximate mechanism through which external influences are converted into moral behavioural outcomes. School Policy Enforcement followed as the second strongest predictor (β = 0.276, t = 4.795, p < .001), indicating that even after controlling for all other factors, the rigour and consistency of institutional disciplinary frameworks uniquely and significantly predicted superior student moral conduct.

Teacher Role Modelling demonstrated the third largest standardised coefficient (β = 0.245, t = 5.269, p < .001), reinforcing the notion that the moral quality of teacher conduct represents a powerful instructional resource that operates independently of formal curriculum or policy mechanisms. Peer Influence Score recorded a significant negative coefficient (β = -0.232, t = -4.829, p < .001), confirming that antisocial peer networks exerted a robust and statistically independent suppressive effect on moral behaviour even when the positive contributions of family, school, and teacher factors were simultaneously accounted for. Family Moral Socialisation, while registering the smallest standardised coefficient in the model (β = 0.183, t = 3.979, p < .001), remained a significant predictor, reflecting the foundational and persistent, albeit partially mediated, influence of family moral education on student conduct. A notable observation was that the regression coefficient for FMS diminished substantially from its raw bivariate correlation with MBS (r = 0.387 in a preliminary analysis) once AOI was included in the model, providing preliminary evidence of the mediating role of attitudinal orientation in the family-behaviour pathway — a relationship subsequently rigorously tested through the Structural Equation Model. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all predictors ranged between 1.21 and 2.67, well below the critical threshold of 10, confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity and lending confidence to the stability and interpretability of the beta estimates.

Structural Equation Modelling Results

Table 4: SEM Standardised Path Coefficients — Structural Model of Moral Behaviour (N = 342)

Path (Predictor → Outcome)	Std. β	SE	z-value	p-value	95% CI
AOI → Moral Behaviour	0.352	0.048	7.333	< .001	[0.258, 0.446]
TRM → Moral Behaviour	0.261	0.051	5.118	< .001	[0.161, 0.361]
PIS → Moral Behaviour	-0.214	0.044	-4.864	< .001	[-0.300, -0.128]
SPE → AOI (mediation)	0.389	0.055	7.073	< .001	[0.281, 0.497]
FMS → AOI (mediation)	0.298	0.050	5.960	< .001	[0.200, 0.396]

TRM → AOI (mediation)	0.273	0.052	5.250	< .001	[0.171, 0.375]
SPE → MBS (indirect via AOI)	0.151	0.031	4.871	< .001	[0.090, 0.212]
CFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.048; SRMR = 0.052; TLI = 0.957					

Table 4 presented the standardised path coefficients, standard errors, z-values, and 95% confidence intervals derived from the Structural Equation Model estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. The global fit indices confirmed that the hypothesised structural model achieved excellent fit to the observed data: CFI = 0.963 and TLI = 0.957 both exceeded the 0.95 benchmark for good fit; RMSEA = 0.048 fell comfortably below the 0.06 threshold; and SRMR = 0.052 satisfied the ≤ 0.08 criterion, collectively affirming that the proposed measurement and structural specifications adequately represented the covariance structure of the data. Among the direct structural paths, the path from AOI to MBS yielded the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = 0.352$, $z = 7.333$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.258, 0.446]), reaffirming attitudinal orientation as the most proximate and powerful structural determinant of moral behaviour in the model. The paths from TRM to MBS ($\beta = 0.261$, $z = 5.118$, $p < .001$) and from PIS to MBS ($\beta = -0.214$, $z = -4.864$, $p < .001$) were also statistically robust, with the non-overlapping confidence intervals of these paths confirming their distinctness and independent contributions. The mediating pathways through AOI were all significant; SPE exerted the strongest effect on AOI ($\beta = 0.389$, $z = 7.073$, $p < .001$), followed by FMS ($\beta = 0.298$, $z = 5.960$) and TRM ($\beta = 0.273$, $z = 5.250$), confirming that institutional policy enforcement, family socialisation, and teacher modelling all operated partly through the mechanism of attitudinal transformation to influence student moral behaviour.

The bias-corrected bootstrap analysis of indirect effects provided particularly illuminating evidence regarding the mediating role of attitudinal orientation. The indirect effect of SPE on MBS, channelled through AOI, was $\beta = 0.151$ ($z = 4.871$, 95% CI [0.090, 0.212]), with the confidence interval excluding zero and thereby confirming statistically significant partial mediation; this implied that a substantial portion of the effect of school policy enforcement on moral behaviour operated by first reshaping students' attitudinal orientations toward moral conduct, rather than exerting a purely direct behavioural effect. The partial — rather than full — mediation of these pathways indicated that while attitudinal transformation was a critical mechanism, direct effects of environmental and institutional factors on behaviour also persisted, consistent with ecological systems theory perspectives that emphasise the multi-level and simultaneous nature of contextual influences on adolescent behaviour. Taken together, the SEM results provided the most comprehensive and statistically sophisticated answer to the study's third research question, confirming that attitudinal transformation served as a significant and theoretically coherent mediator within the moral behaviour system of Cameroonian secondary school students. The model as a whole supported a conceptualisation of student moral conduct as a dynamically structured outcome shaped by layered interactions among institutional enforcement quality, teacher exemplary conduct, family moral instruction, negative peer socialisation, and the attitudinal orientations that students construct from these multiple, sometimes conflicting influences — a conceptualisation with profound implications for how educational interventions targeting moral regeneration ought to be designed, sequenced, and evaluated in Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the attitudinal, institutional, familial, and peer-related determinants of moral behaviour among secondary school students in the Centre Region of Cameroon, and its findings have yielded a rich and empirically robust portrait of a moral formation system under considerable strain. Across all three levels of statistical analysis — univariate, bivariate, and structural — a consistent and theoretically coherent picture emerged: students' attitudinal orientations toward moral conduct constituted the single most powerful proximate determinant of their moral behaviour, operating both as an independent predictor and as a significant partial mediator through which the influences of school policy enforcement, teacher role modelling, and family moral socialisation were transmitted into behavioural outcomes. The regression model explained approximately 59% of the variance in moral behaviour, and the Structural Equation Model achieved excellent fit to the data, together providing the most comprehensive empirical account of moral behaviour determinants in Cameroonian secondary schools yet documented in the literature. The study also confirmed that antisocial peer influence exerted a significant and independent suppressive effect on moral conduct, operating as a countervailing force against the positive contributions of family, teacher, and institutional factors. Perhaps most critically, the finding that school policy enforcement recorded the lowest mean score of any construct in the study served as an institutional indictment, signalling that the schools themselves were failing to provide the coherent, principled behavioural environments that students require to internalise and sustain moral norms. Taken collectively, these findings compel a reconceptualisation of moral education in Cameroon — one that moves beyond passive curricular instruction toward active, multi-stakeholder strategies anchored in attitudinal transformation, teacher moral exemplarship, rigorous institutional governance, and the strategic management of peer social environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement Structured Attitudinal Transformation Programmes: The Ministry of Secondary Education should mandate the integration of evidence-based attitudinal transformation curricula into the moral education syllabi of all secondary schools, moving beyond passive knowledge transmission to include reflective journaling, moral reasoning exercises, peer mentorship programmes, and values clarification workshops facilitated by trained counsellors and educators. Such programmes should be evaluated annually using validated instruments analogous to the Attitudinal Orientation Index developed in this study.

Strengthen and Standardize School Policy Enforcement Frameworks: Given that school policy enforcement recorded the weakest mean score and among the strongest predictive relationships with moral behaviour, school administrators and the inspectorate general should collaborate to develop, publish, and consistently enforce transparent, equitable, and student-participatory disciplinary codes in all secondary institutions. Regular audits of policy enforcement consistency, combined with capacity-building for school principals and discipline masters, should be institutionalised as core components of the school quality assurance framework in Cameroon.

Invest in Teacher Moral Leadership and Peer Influence Management: Pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes should explicitly incorporate professional ethics and moral exemplarship modules, equipping teachers with the theoretical grounding and practical strategies necessary to serve as credible moral role models within their school communities. Simultaneously, schools should establish structured, supervised co-curricular peer leadership and mentorship programmes designed to harness the formidable influence of positive peer networks, thereby transforming peer dynamics from a moral risk factor into a moral protective resource for Cameroonian adolescents.

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