

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Kantian Categorical Imperative and its Relevance to Tanzanian Moral Education

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Abstract

It has been a culture that the issue of ethics is well marked in the Aristotelian Nicomachean ethics, while in fact it is well treated in Kant's ethics of doing. In "The Metaphysics of Morals" published in 1797, Kant conceive virtue as the moral strength to keep doing your duty, even when it is hard. According to Immanuel Kant, virtue has a tendency to follow the moral order. This paper intends to examine the relevance of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative (CI) to Tanzania moral standards. Unlikely the approaches that emphasize obedience, cultural norms, or emotional development, Kantian education favors rational moral reasoning and the development of autonomous individuals who act out of respect for moral order. This study has used qualitative approach by relying to primarily "conceptual analysis" especially on written sources like books, government documents, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Moreover, integrating philosophical reasoning into moral education could lead to more sustainable foundation for cultivating virtue among individuals, responsible citizenship, and ethical accountability in contemporary Tanzanian society.

Keywords: Moral Education , Duty, Categorical Imperative, Ethical Reasoning.

1. Introduction

The study conducted in Tanzania by Mafie and Kitula (2024:340) shows that, Tanzania's education system continues to face significant challenges in cultivating ethical responsibility and moral consciousness among learners, despite the inclusion of Civics, religious studies and Moral Education in the national curriculum. Although moral education has long been recognized as an essential component of human development, as Mgomba (2019:60) contends, current educational approaches in Tanzania (mostly based on school rules, character assessment and religious teachings) tend to emphasize discipline, conformity, and obedience to authority (i.e elders, teachers, parents) rather than the development of autonomous moral reasoning resulting from fully understanding of the action. As a result, this challenge raises important concerns about the

effectiveness of existing moral education practices, especially in a context where ethical problems such as corruption, abuse of power, dishonesty, and declining social responsibility remain widespread.

In a broad sense, Chen et al. (2023: 2) affirms that moral education is a comprehensive concept that draws from several disciplines, especially moral philosophy, philosophy of education, and psychology. Moral philosophy (ethics) provides the 'normative grounds' for distinguishing rightness from wrongness, hence for justifying permissibility and impermissibility of human actions. In educational context, this simply means that moral philosophy gives room for teachers, policymakers and stakeholders acquaints themselves with various ethical principles which helps them to justify their actions or decisions and how they positively or negatively affects education in general.

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Philosophically, moral philosophy informs educators what ought to be done, how and when it should be done.

Philosophy of education, on the other hand, offers the aims, principles, and pedagogical framework which are reasonable and comprehensible through which moral formation can be implemented in educational context. Simply put, as presented by Nigel et al. this means that philosophy complements education by providing theories, methods, principles and systematic rationalization of educational beliefs and practices so as to dissolve educational challenges (Nigel et al. 2002: 2). Thus philosophy of education as Chazzan (2022: 7) shows is typically ground under two perspectives: *Firstly* to present and compare a diverse philosophies of education that developed over the age, meanwhile the *Second* perspective considered that philosophy of education helps educators to present an integrated normative thoughts which they regard as reasonable, intelligent and worthwhile for the practice education.

Consequently, Contrary from ethics and philosophy of education, psychology as presented by Gabbay in the book of “*Philosophy o Psychology and cognitive science*” investigates the relationship between human mind, behaviour and real world (Thagard, 2007: ix). Thus, psychologists tries to show how human mind influences development of new behaviour and how human adapts those behaviors in different contexts. In educational context, this means that psychologists lay the ground under which educators, policy-makers and educational stakeholders comprehend how consciousness becomes the cornerstone for dynamism of human behaviors in different stages of development and how real world influences such variations. Consequently, psychology contributes development of moral education by explaining human development and helping to make moral education appropriate to learners` stages of growth, thereby moving it away from rigid and dogmatic forms of indoctrination.

To this point, we can say that moral education refers to the process through which individuals acquire ‘values,’ ‘principles,’ and patterns of ‘conduct’ that guide ethical behavior in society. Lawrence Mgonda (2009:44) contends that, “the concept of morals derives from the Latin word ‘*mores*,’ meaning the customs, values, and accepted standards of a community.” In this sense, Schuitema et al. (2008) concludes that moral education is not simply about enforcing social rules; rather, “it is concerned with forming individuals who are capable of ethical judgment and responsible action.” Educational institutions, therefore, have a

central role in shaping the moral character of learners and preparing them to participate responsibly in society.

Moral education as Chen et al. contends, can be understood through two complementary dimensions: the personal and the societal dimensions. The first-dimension Chen et al. claims that it is concerned with individuals` development by guiding persons toward adulthood, where they are able to develop their own social identity (adopting values and behaviour from individuals` affiliated groups) and moral responsibility (being accountable for our own choices, actions and omissions). The second dimension emphasizes the role of moral education in promoting the rational and orderly development of society by cultivating students` prosocial behavior and ethical conduct (Chen et al., 2023:4).

However, as Sanga, (2022:194) and Twamba et al. (2024:73) noted, contemporary social transformation, technological advancement, and changing cultural dynamics have weakened many of the traditional (family or community-based) mechanisms i.e story telling, proverbs, sayings through which moral values were once transmitted in many African communities including Tanzanian communities. As schools increasingly assume responsibility for moral formation, moral instruction often remains heavily instructional and compliance-oriented, with limited emphasis on critical reflection and rational ethical evaluation. As a result, students may learn socially approved patterns of behavior without developing the capacity to think independently about moral obligations and ethical responsibility.

Against this background, this paper suggests that Kantian thoughts on moral philosophy and philosophy of education provides a reasonable framework for rethinking moral education in Tanzania. Unlike Aristotelian Virtue ethics, Kantian ethical theory (deontology) emphasizes duty (*Pflicht*), rational moral judgment, autonomy, and the CI as the foundation to justify rightness and wrongness of our actions. Unlike approaches that prioritize obedience or social conformity alone, ethical rationalism of Kant as presented by Rae, S. B. (2018: 50) seeks to cultivate individuals who act morally because they recognize their duty through reason. In his mind, Kant thought that since rationality permeates all human beings, that, they should also use it to justify their actions as morally correct or wrong. Consequently, from this perspective, genuine moral education should aim not merely at producing disciplined individuals, but

at developing morally autonomous persons capable of critical ethical reasoning and responsible self-governance. For instance, instead of blindly adhering to misconceptions and unethical actions like robbing, raping or corrupting, individuals should therefore question them and develop their personal assumption (i.e why those actions as morally wrong) which is objectively reasonable and defensible.

Thus, basing on Kantian ethics, this paper examines the current state of moral education in Tanzania and explores how Kantian conception of ‘autonomy’ and ‘moral duty’ can contribute to strengthening ethical formation within Tanzania’s educational institutions. It further argues that integrating philosophical reasoning into moral education can provide a more sustainable foundation for cultivating virtue among individuals, responsible citizenship, and ethical accountability in contemporary Tanzanian society.

2. Background of the Study

Education morals traditionally has played a significant role in figuring social life within African societies, including Tanzania. Before the establishment of formal schooling systems in Africa, Begley & StefKovich (2007) had it that moral values were transmitted through informal social structures such as the family and communal life via storytelling, proverbs, rituals, and elder guidance. For a longtime, these mechanisms helped communities to cultivate virtues such as honesty, respect to elders, responsibility, solidarity, and self-discipline among younger generations. If compared to currently, moral formation was therefore understood as a collective responsibility aimed at preserving social harmony and communal well-being. Despite the historical significance of these traditional approaches, contemporary Tanzanian society has experienced profound social and cultural transformations that have increasingly weakened informal systems of moral formation.

Eventually, among other scholars in Tanzania, Christopher & Sanga, (2023:605-6) argued that “moral education is increasingly viewed not merely as a supplementary aspect of education, but as an essential foundation for building an ethically responsible society.” fortunately, persistent ethical challenges within Tanzanian society raise important questions regarding the effectiveness of current approaches to moral education. Regarding to some cases of corruption, abuse of authority, dishonesty, violence, and declining civic responsibility continue to emerge despite the presence of moral-oriented subjects within the curriculum. This situation shows that the problem may not lie solely in the absence of moral

education, but rather in the philosophical foundations upon which such education is constructed. Major limitation of existing approaches as Smith (2014) contends that, it is the tendency to equate moral education with discipline, obedience in conformity to authority. In many educational contexts, students are encouraged to follow rules and instructions without being guided to critically reflect upon the moral principles underlying those rules. Henceforth, moral education often becomes compliance-oriented rather than reasoning-oriented. Meanwhile obedience may produce social order, this does not necessarily cultivate morally autonomous individuals capable of making rational ethical judgments independently. Is within this philosophical context that the Kantian moral philosophy becomes particularly relevant. Within his work entitled “On Education,” Kant contends that genuine morality cannot be grounded merely in external authority, fear of punishment, or social conformity, but rather in rational moral autonomy and duty (Kant, 1990: 90).

According to Kant, morally worthy actions are performed not only because individuals are instructed to act in certain ways, but because they appreciate using reason that such actions are ethically necessary and universally justifiable (Kant, 1930: 38-9). His theory of CI gives a framework for understanding morality as a product of rational ethical self-governance rather than passive obedience. In this case, moral education should aim at developing individuals who are capable of critical reflection, rational moral judgment, and ethical responsibility. By applying Kantian moral philosophy to the Tanzanian context offers an opportunity to rethink existing approaches to moral formation by shifting emphasis from external discipline toward the cultivation of autonomous ethical reasoning. This study therefore examines the relevance of Kant’s moral philosophy in strengthening moral education and ethical formation within contemporary Tanzanian society.

3. Research Gap

Since independence, the government has initiated various educational, legal, and institutional principles aimed at promoting moral values, responsible citizenship, and ethical conduct within society. Part of these efforts, moral-oriented subjects such as Civics in which currently is Historia ya Tanzania na Maadili has been incorporated into the national curriculum at primary and secondary education levels with the intention of shaping disciplined, patriotic, and morally responsible citizens (Tanzania Institute of Education, 2019; Taasisi ya Elimu Tanzania, 2023).

These initiatives reflect education playing its central role not only in intellectual development but also in the moral formation of individuals and the preservation of social order. Apart from these efforts, Tanzania continues to experience persistent ethical and moral challenges across both individual and institutional spheres. Various cases of corruption, nepotism, abuse of public office, dishonesty, violence, academic misconduct, and declining civic responsibility remain prevalent within society (Rashid, 2024: 2). In the same time, rapid technological advancement and changing social dynamics have increasingly influenced the moral orientation of younger generations, contributing to growing concerns regarding ethical decline and weakening social responsibility (Ntawigaya & Mwenisongole, 2021; Sanga, 2022: 194).

The existence of all these challenges continues raising critical questions regarding the effectiveness of existing approaches to moral education within the country. Tanzania is seen rising concerns on indiscipline, cheating, corruption, and slipping civic values. This makes the case for putting more energy into moral education. To be specific, few studies have critically examined how Kantian concepts of duty, autonomy, and rational moral reasoning can contribute to strengthening moral education within the Tanzanian educational context. This study therefore seeks to address the current gap by examining the relevance of Kantian moral philosophy in promoting ethical reasoning, moral autonomy, and responsible citizenship in Tanzania today.

4. Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the current state of moral education in Tanzania.
- ii. To explore Kant's perspective on education and moral formation.
- iii. To show relevance of Kantian principles of moral education to Tanzania's current educational practices.

5. Research Methodology and Data Collection

This study employed post positivist qualitative research method for data collection, analysis and synthesis. This approach is grounded primarily in "conceptual analysis" and "systematic literature review." The choice of this approach was informed by the nature of the study, which seeks to critically examine the relevance of Kantian moral philosophy to contemporary moral education in Tanzania.

Conceptual analysis according to Kölbel, (2021: 35) involves analyzing concepts to understand meaning. Conceptual analysis therefore examines key Kantian ethical concepts and their implications for moral education in Tanzanian context. This approach enabled the study to critically examine the philosophical foundations underlying moral formation, ethical responsibility, and rational autonomy. Therefore, through conceptual examination, the study analyzed how Kantian understanding of morality differs from patriarch approach of many Tanzanians that emphasize obedience, conformity, or externally imposed discipline.

Moreover, this method facilitated the interpretation of Kantian principles within the context of our contemporary Tanzania's educational and moral challenges. Supplementing conceptual analysis, the study also employed a systematic literature review to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing scholarly works relevant to moral education, Kantian ethics, and ethical challenges in Tanzania. According to Gough, (2020: 4) and Petticrew & Roberts, (2006: 9) systematic literature review enables researchers to critically assess available knowledge, identify conceptual gaps, and establish areas requiring further scholarly investigation. For more clarity, Newman & Gough, (2020:5) had it that "systematic review should be guided by a specific objectives."

6. Kant's Philosophy of Moral

Kant developed a comprehensive philosophy of moral basing to reasoning. In his work education for morals, Kant contends that human beings are the only creatures who require education because, unlike animals guided by instinct, human beings must be cultivated through discipline, instruction, and moral formation in order to realize their full humanity. Churton (1990:1) contends that, "man is the only creature that must be educated." This means that, education is not merely a means of acquiring knowledge or practical skills, but an essential process through which individuals are transformed into rational and moral agents capable of contributing positively to society. Kant grouped education in two categories: 'physical education' and 'moral education'. Physical education according to Kant in Churton, (1900: XV) is specifically concerned with the formation of the learner's bodily, intellectual, and emotional capacities through nurture, discipline, instruction, and training from their 'tutors' i.e parents. This aspect of education is concerned with developing the practical abilities and competencies necessary for survival and social functioning.

Through physical education, learners acquire habits, discipline, and intellectual capacities that enable them to understand and interact effectively with the world around them. Notwithstanding, Kant observes that this dimension of education is largely authority-centered (i.e. parents, teachers, guardians) because learners mainly receive guidance, training, orders and discipline from educators without critically question them. As a result, the learner may appear relatively passive, as knowledge and behavioral patterns are inculcated externally through pedagogical instruction and supervision. For instance, in our Tanzania context, learners may internalize assumptions and misconceptions found in their societies passively as they think that what their society holds is correct and unquestionable.

In contrast, moral education occupies a central and superior place in Kant's educational philosophy because it concerns the formation of character (readiness to act in accordance to maxims) and the development of autonomous moral agent (Churton, 1990: 84). While physical education prepares individuals to function within society, moral education prepares them to live ethically and responsibly as rational beings. Kant as presented in Churton (1900: xv–xvi) asserts that “moral education is aimed at enabling individuals to govern themselves through reason rather than through inclinations.

Hence reason becomes established as practical or pragmatic, that is, moral or self-determining.” This means that moral development occurs when individuals learn to exercise rational judgment in determining what ought to be done and what is not ought to be done. Therefore, individual become free agent who is also responsible for his moral choices. According to Kant, the ultimate goal of moral education is ‘moralization,’ which means ability of individuals to rationalize and internalize moral principles so as they may act out of duty

Herman (2022:5) in his book, this entails that an “action possesses genuine moral worth only when it is performed from a sense of duty” rather than from self-interest, emotional inclination, or anticipated reward. In this respect, moral education aims to cultivate persons whose decisions are guided by rational commitment to moral principles rather than by desires, emotions, or social pressure. Kant in his works distinguishes sharply between actions motivated by ‘inclination’ and those motivated by ‘duty.’

As applied in this paper, actions done out of inclination means those actions are driven by emotions, personal preferences, or expected advantages, whereas actions

done from duty are performed deliberately because they are objectively right; i.e they appeal to reason. Hence, when a person lacks personal desire or motives to act, they ought to do what reason identifies as morally right. Therefore, moral education should train individuals to resist harmful inclinations and cultivate the ability to act according to maxims that reason can universally justify. This understanding of duty naturally leads to his concept of the CI, which serves as the foundation of moral reasoning.

7. Moral Education in Tanzania

Moral education remain important concern in Tanzania's educational system due to its perceived role in shaping responsible citizenship, social harmony, and ethical conduct. In respect to growing concerns regarding moral decline and unethical behavior, the Tanzanian government incorporated subjects such as Civics, Religious subjects and Moral Education into the national curriculum with the objective of promoting patriotism, discipline, social responsibility, and moral awareness among learners. Despite these efforts, ethical challenges continue to persist across different sectors of Tanzanian society.

According to some scholarly understanding on moral education in Tanzania consistently points to important limitations within the current educational framework. Studies examining Civics and Moral Education indicate that moral instruction often emphasizes memorization of moral rules, discipline, and behavioral conformity rather than critical ethical reflection (Ngussa et al. 2016; Ntawigaya & Mwenisongole, 2021; Christopher & Sanga, 2023). As a result, students may acquire knowledge of socially acceptable conduct without necessarily developing the ability to independently evaluate moral situations or justify ethical decisions rationally.

8. Relevance of Kantian Ethics in Tanzania Today

Application of Kantian moral philosophy provides a robust ethical framework for addressing persistent moral and social challenges facing Tanzania today. Contemporary Tanzanian society continues to encounter ethical concerns such as corruption, abuse of public office, dishonesty, moral decline among youth, violence, theft, nepotism, and the weakening of civic responsibility. Meanwhile legal and institutional mechanisms remain important in addressing these issues, Kantian ethics present social transformation which depends fundamentally on moral formation and the cultivation of virtuous citizens guided by reason and duty. In this perspective, social stability

and national development cannot be achieved solely through laws and punishments, but through the internal moral commitment of individuals to act ethically. Kant emphasizes that the responsibility for moral education does not lie exclusively with religious leaders, educational institutions, or government authorities, but with society as a whole (Herrick, 2003).

Since morality concerns the formation of rational and responsible persons, every social institution has a role to play in nurturing ethical consciousness. However, moral development must begin within the family, which Kant regards as the foundational environment for character formation. Through the promotion of critical thinking, rational reflection, and moral accountability, Kantian ethics encourages Tanzanians to act in ways that uphold the common good and respect the shared humanity of all persons. Ultimately, the relevance of Kantian ethics to Tanzania lies in its emphasis on rational moral responsibility, duty, autonomy, and universal moral principles. Cultivating morally responsible individuals capable of acting from duty and respecting human dignity, Kantian ethics provides an enduring philosophical foundation for ethical leadership, responsible citizenship, and crime prevention. Therefore, the integration of Kantian moral principles into families, schools, religious institutions, and public governance can significantly contribute to strengthening Tanzania's moral fabric and promoting a more just, disciplined, and ethically responsible society.

8.1 Kant and Nyerere on Moral Education

Talking about moral education in Tanzania without mentioning Julius Nyerere is impossible. With his work *Education for Self-Reliance* (1967), Nyerere pushed for character formation, cooperation, and active community service. He wanted schools to turn out citizens who actually help build up the nation. Kant and Nyerere have more in common. Both see education as shaping morally responsible people. Kant calls for acting from duty, following universal rules; Nyerere stresses contributing to the community and looking out for others. Both push back against selfishness.

The differences between the two are reflected in their ideas. Kant bases morality on individual autonomy, making decisions as a rational person (Gregor, 1997:41). Nyerere builds his ideas from communal values, like 'Ujamaa,' emphasizing working together and building social solidarity (Nyerere, 1968:4-5). While Kant asks everyone to act from universal law, Nyerere wanted people to act in ways that strengthen the group and society. Blending these

two perspectives could offer Tanzania a powerful way forward, combining personal accountability with strong social bonds.

8.2 Moral Education within Tanzania's Competence-Based Curriculum

Tanzania's Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) is designed to build knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible citizens. There is a big focus on critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and acting ethically - just as what Kant would have liked. But there are still open questions: Is ethical thinking really being taught in the everyday classroom? While values appear in almost every subject, there is a room to do more especially when it comes to teaching moral reasoning, ethical reflection, and civic responsibility in a more systematic and consistent way. Bringing in Kantian principles could help learners move beyond self-interest, and really think through why they act the way they do.

8.3 Pedagogical Implications for Tanzania

Putting Kant's moral philosophy into action calls for teaching that gets students to think about ethics, not just memorize it. Teachers have some solid strategies to draw from: Debating moral dilemmas, so students weigh tough ethical choices, using Socratic questioning to push critical examination of moral principles, organizing debates on real social issues, encouraging reflective journaling to sharpen self-awareness, linking community service with ethical reflection, analyzing case studies of corruption, environmental responsibility, or other social challenges. These activities help students develop their own moral judgment and apply ethical thinking to real life.

8.4 Teachers as Moral Agents

Teachers are not just messengers who deliver the curriculum, they model what moral responsibility looks like. The success of moral education depends as much on teachers' ethical conduct and commitment as it does on the curriculum. Teacher education needs to include courses in ethics and philosophy of education, along with a strong focus on professional responsibility. Ongoing training helps teachers learn how to spark ethical dialogue and encourage reflective thinking. Students learn integrity, fairness, accountability, and respect by watching how their teachers act, sometimes more powerfully than through any lesson.

8.5 Moral Education in the Digital Age

Digital technology has changed the game for educators and students alike. Tanzanian youth spend more and

more time online on social media, using AI tools, and communicating in digital spaces. This brings a raft of new ethical challenges: cyberbullying, online lies and rumors, cheating in digital environments, using AI responsibly, and learning what good digital citizenship looks like. Kant's core idea "treating every person as an end, not a means" offers a practical guide for navigating this new world.

8.6 Kantian Moral Education and National Development

Moral education all about building a nation. Kantian values integration, accountability, responsibility, respect for the law - form the backbone of good governance and sustainable development. In the government of the United Republic of Tanzania, investing in moral education can help advance: Anti-corruption campaigns, public accountability, social unity and cohesion, responsible leadership, sustainable development goals and democratic participation. Turning out citizens who value responsibility, education fuels real national progress.

Limitations and Critiques of Kantian Moral Education

Kant's philosophy of moral delivers a strong foundation to educate the society, it is all about duty, rational thinking, and universal principles. But it is not perfect, and critics haven't held back. Kant rely much on reason, leaving emotions, empathy, and personal relationships on the sidelines. There is also the problem of Kant's rules being, well, a bit too rigid. Life is messy, and moral dilemmas rarely come with clear-cut answers. If we stick to universal rules, we can miss the actual complexity of real situations where duties bump into each other. Some scholars say we need practical judgment and a sense of context, alongside big-picture moral principles. From an African perspective, things look even more different.

African philosophies often highlight community and collective responsibility. In many African traditions, someone "becomes" a person through relationships, not just by being a rational individual. Still, despite these differences, Kant's calls for responsibility, honesty, and accountability hold serious value, especially when tackling things like corruption or weak civic engagement today.

Recommendations

Based on all this, here is what should happen next: Curriculum Development should sharpen the focus on ethical reasoning throughout the school subjects, it will offer structured moral dilemmas and ethics-based learning across the curriculum. Teacher

Education also matter; it should bring philosophy and ethics into teacher training programs and provide ongoing professional development on moral and civic education. Schools should set up ethics clubs, debate forums, and community service groups, encourage regular reflection and self-assessment. Government and Policy Makers should review and revise education policies to put more emphasis on moral education and back initiatives that promote ethical citizenship and integrity. Future Researches are to be conducted on studies to see how Kantian-inspired moral education works in Tanzanian schools and explore further how to merge Kantian ethics with African communitarian philosophies.

9. Conclusion

Tanzania continues to face challenges in effectively embedding moral education within its school system. This paper has argued that Kantian philosophy offers a rational and principled framework for revitalizing virtue education, particularly through its emphasis on ethical reasoning as central to human development. Teachers and communities, therefore, should focus on nurturing students' capacity for independent moral reasoning rather than prioritizing mere obedience. On this basis, curriculum reform that incorporates ethical reasoning and philosophical principles is essential to addressing the moral challenges currently confronting Tanzanian society.

At the same time, the study has revealed a significant gap in the existing literature regarding practical strategies for integrating ethical reasoning and philosophical principles into the Tanzanian curriculum. To bridge this gap, further research is needed to explore both theoretical and practical approaches to moral education. Strengthening such scholarship, and embedding moral education consistently from primary through to university levels, would contribute meaningfully to minimizing the ethical challenges Tanzania faces today.

Abriviations and Translations

CI - *Categorical Imperative*

Taasisi ya Elimu – Institute of Education

Historia ya Tanzania na Maadili – Tanzanian Education Morals

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