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Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on Character Education in Poland

Postrzeganie edukacji charakteru przez rodziców i nauczycieli w Polsce

Abstract: Character education, rooted in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, is increasingly recognized as a vital component of holistic student development. This study investigates the attitudes, priorities, and mutual perceptions of parents (n = 162) and teachers (n = 138) in the Polish educational context. Utilizing a quantitative cross-sectional design as part of the European TEPACE project, this paper examines the outlook on specific virtues and the perceived tension between character formation and academic achievements. The findings reveal a clear consensus, with over 95% of both respondent groups endorsing the importance of character education in schools. Notably, when

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asked to prioritize between values, a majority of parents (58%) and teachers (62%) favoured cultivating good character over academic attainment. However, the study confirms the existence of a significant ‘misperception gap’: teachers predominantly believe that parents prioritize grades, whereas parents perceive teachers as primarily focused on exam results. This communication barrier suggests that the main obstacle to effective character education in Poland is not a lack of shared values, but a systemic failure in parent-teacher dialogue. Regarding implementation, teachers demonstrate a strong preference for a whole-school approach—embedding character development within the school ethos and across the curriculum—rather than as a standalone subject. The study also highlights a deficit in professional readiness, with over half of the surveyed teachers reporting no specific training in character education since their initial teacher education. These results underscore the urgent need for systemic teacher training and the creation of dedicated spaces for value-based communication. Such actions are essential for translating the theoretical assumptions of the National Curriculum’s preamble into actual, well-organised character formation within the Polish schooling system.

Keywords: character education; virtue ethics; teachers; parents; polish education.

Abstrakt: Edukacja charakteru, zakorzeniona w neoarystotelesowskiej etyce cnót, zyskuje na znaczeniu jako nieodzowny element holistycznego rozwoju ucznia. Wychodząc z tak nakreślonego paradygmatu, w artykule poddano analizie postawy, priorytety oraz wzajemne oczekiwania rodziców ($n = 162$) i nauczycieli ($n = 138$) funkcjonujących w polskim systemie oświaty. Większość grupy badawczej stanowiły zamężne kobiety w wieku 45–54 lat. Prace zrealizowano w modelu ilościowych badań przekrojowych w ramach europejskiego projektu TEPACE, koncentrując się na relacji między kształtowaniem charakteru a dążeniem do wysokich osiągnięć w nauce. Wyniki wskazują na wyraźny konsensus – ponad 95% respondentów z obu grup uważa, że kształcenie charakteru w szkołach jest bardzo ważne. Co istotne, w sytuacji wyboru między priorytetami większość rodziców (58%) i nauczycieli (62%) uznała kształtowanie dobrego charakteru za ważniejsze niż osiągnięcia w nauce. Mimo tej zbieżności badanie potwierdza występowanie istotnej „luki percepcyjnej” (ang. *misperception gap*): nauczyciele są przekonani, że rodzice przywiązują większą wagę do ocen szkolnych niż do kształtowania charakteru, jednocześnie rodzice postrzegają kadrę pedagogiczną jako zorientowaną głównie na wyniki egzaminacyjne. Ta bariera komunikacyjna pozwala sądzić, że główną przeszkodą w efektywnej edukacji charakteru w Polsce nie jest brak wspólnych wartości, lecz systemowy brak dialogu między kluczowymi interesariuszami. W odniesieniu do praktycznej implementacji nauczyciele popierają podejście całościowe (ang. *whole-school approach*) – oparte na etosie szkoły

i integracji wartości z nauczaniem wszystkich przedmiotów – zamiast wprowadzenia edukacji charakteru jako osobnego przedmiotu. Wyniki ujawniają jednocześnie deficyt przygotowania zawodowego w tym obszarze – ponad połowa ankietowanych nauczycieli deklaruje, że od czasu ukończenia studiów kierunkowych nie przeszła żadnego specjalistycznego przeszkolenia w zakresie edukacji charakteru. Przedstawione dane uzasadniają pilną potrzebę systemowego wsparcia kompetencji nauczycieli oraz zintegrowanych działań komunikacyjnych wokół wspólnych wartości. Działania te są niezbędne, aby założenia teoretyczne zawarte w preambule podstawy programowej zyskały wymiar praktyczny i przełożyły się na rzeczywiste i zorganizowane kształtowanie charakteru w środowisku edukacyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja charakteru; etyka cnót; nauczyciele; rodzice; edukacja w Polsce.

1. Introduction

The subject of character education, while rooted in classical moral philosophy, has experienced a significant resurgence in European educational discourse in recent years (Arthur, 2014, pp. 43–44; Kristjánsson, 2023, p. 7). This renewed focus is partly a response to growing concerns regarding the moral development of young people in increasingly complex and individualized societies (Polskie Towarzystwo Polityki Społecznej [PTPS], 2026, pp. 78–84). Although Poland lacks the long-standing institutional tradition of character education found in the UK or the United States, there is a growing interest among Polish educators and parents in fostering character traits that extend beyond mere academic performance.

1.1. Theoretical Foundations

There are numerous approaches to character development, varying in their definitions of character and specific pedagogical methods. The cognitive-developmental tradition is among the most influential, rooted in Lawrence Kohlberg's synthesis of Jean Piaget's work on moral reasoning and Émile Durkheim's concept of cultural socialization. Piaget argued that moral development follows a trajectory from heteronomous morality – grounded in

obedience to authority and fear of punishment – to autonomous morality, built on a foundation of mutual respect, equality, and the moral significance of intentions. In Durkheim's view, social norms were the primary tools for regulating behaviour; thus, collective responsibility, social solidarity, and attachment to social groups were central to moral education. Drawing from both perspectives, Kohlberg emphasized the importance of rich socio-moral experiences. He developed the well-known stages of moral development and proposed an educational approach based on moral exemplars, dilemma discussions, and 'just community' schools (Snarey & Samuelson, 2014).

The Integrative Ethical Education model, introduced by Darcia Narvaez, seeks to combine the focus on reasoning and brain-based cognitive development with the neo-Aristotelian emphasis on character virtues and 'moral expertise'. This approach provides step-by-step guidance for teachers on implementing this integrative method—for instance, by establishing caring relationships with students, fostering student self-authorship, and creating a supportive classroom climate (Narvaez & Bock, 2014, pp. 148–153).

Character development has also been a cornerstone of Eastern philosophical traditions. In contrast to many Western approaches, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism each emphasize holistic self-cultivation and collective harmony. These perspectives are often complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Confucianism primarily advocates for active social engagement, suggesting that through such involvement, individuals can contribute to social progress. Daoism, conversely, encourages the reduction of desires for fame and fortune, facilitating a detachment from social pressures and material goods to achieve true freedom from external constraints. In Buddhism, self-cultivation is a practice of mental discipline aimed at liberation from suffering. While Buddhism promotes compassion and kindness, its ultimate educational goal is Nirvana – the cessation of suffering through the absolute transcendence of the self and its attachments (Cen & Yu, 2014).

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the neo-Aristotelian approach to character education. Grounded in Aristotelian ethics, this perspective defines character as inherently moral and character education as the cultivation of moral virtues. Virtues are understood as stable, 'multi-track' dispositions – they are not merely singular habits, but complex constellations of reasons, emotions, and behaviours that enable an individual to act well across diverse situations (Kristjánsson, 2015; 2022; Szutta, 2017, ch. 3).

For instance, the virtue of honesty entails more than the mere avoidance of lying; it encompasses an appreciation for the importance of truth and the wisdom to express it appropriately.

Within this framework, the pre-eminent 'meta-virtue' is *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. It enables an individual to: 1) recognise the moral context of a situation and identify the virtues at stake; 2) maintain a correct emotional response, harmonizing it with reason and their conception of a flourishing life; 3) sustain a general vision of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) that motivates action; and 4) deliberate on the appropriate course of action in morally ambiguous circumstances (Kristjánsson & Fowers, 2022). The neo-Aristotelian approach is particularly suited for studying perspectives on character because virtues constitute its very core. In this context, virtues are not merely instrumental to other ends – they are an essential and constitutive element of human flourishing. Consequently, by investigating these perspectives, we gain insight into the 'good life' that parents and teachers envision for their children and pupils.

Character education is a broad term that encompasses all school-based efforts to cultivate virtues in students (Nucci et al., 2014). From a neo-Aristotelian perspective, the goal extends beyond teaching 'good behaviour'; it aims to promote human flourishing and enable students to lead meaningful lives. For several decades, this aspect of education has been relatively neglected in policy. Today, however, there is a renewed interest in character, as it is seen as vital for addressing modern challenges and promoting social well-being (Kristjánsson, 2023). It is now widely understood that character should not only be 'taught' through specific lessons, but also 'caught' from the school environment and role models, and 'sought' by students as they develop personal agency and the ability to think for themselves (Arthur et al., 2022; Kristjánsson & Arthur, 2022).

The significance of character education extends beyond moral development, as research indicates a strong, positive impact on various areas of student life. For instance, focusing on character and social-emotional learning can lead to enhanced academic outcomes (Nucci et al., 2014, ch. 14). This is because virtues such as resilience, self-control, curiosity, and responsibility are foundational to successful learning. Character education, therefore, supports holistic student development by integrating academic, social, and emotional growth, with the overarching aim of educating students as whole persons.

1.2. Polish Educational Background

In the Polish context, formal character education is still in an early stage of development.¹ There is no single, dedicated subject for ‘character education’ in the national curriculum. Notably, the official core curricula for all primary school courses begin with a preamble that defines the aim of education as fostering core values, such as solidarity, generosity, altruism, respect for tradition, and the cultivation of social relations (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 2017). However, this remains a very general objective, which is not reflected in specific coursework or discussions aimed at cultivating virtues.

Discussions of virtues and values typically occur in Religion or Ethics classes or through literary interpretation in Polish-language lessons – often from a historical or descriptive perspective. While students may learn what it means to be brave or generous, there is no curriculum dedicated to teaching them how to develop these traits or why they should cultivate virtues as such. It is evident that a broad and vaguely formulated preamble cannot yield the same results as a systematic, whole-school program. As this study demonstrates, there is an undisputed interest among both parents and teachers in Poland to prioritize character development; however, a significant gap remains between this interest and current educational policy and practice.

A recent study on Polish teachers’ readiness to improve their professional competences concluded that the moral dimension of the teaching profession has been neglected in Poland (Buczak & Łukasik, 2024, p. 63). The findings, based on over 2100 respondents, suggest that while teachers recognize the importance of moral competences, they often believe they have already mastered them and perceive these skills as relatively easy to acquire (Buczak & Łukasik, 2024, p. 54).

Furthermore, the authors note that moral education in Poland is predominantly conducted in the spirit of Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental approach, which often lacks sufficient emphasis on affect and emotion elements essential to comprehensive moral education (Buczak & Łukasik, 2024, p. 63). This indicates a pressing need for a more nuanced approach to teacher

¹ A recent, comprehensive nationwide report on Polish youth remains notably silent on the subject of character education, or even character development, with the exception of a solitary reference to its prioritisation within other European nations (PTPS, 2026, p. 393).

training regarding their role in fostering student character. To meet international standards, such an approach should be grounded in national-level empirical research and comparative analyses with other European countries. Addressing the identified lack of empirical data on the practical aspects of teachers' moral competences (Buczak & Łukasik, 2024, p. 62), our study takes a necessary step back to examine the perspectives of both parents and teachers on character education and its implementation.

A key area in character education research is the partnership between home and school. It is widely acknowledged that parents are the primary educators of their children's character (Harrison et al., 2018). For school-based character education to be effective, mindful parental involvement is essential. However, a significant gap remains in the literature: while the importance of this partnership is theoretically accepted, empirical research on how parents and teachers collaborate in practice on this specific issue is remarkably scarce (Harrison et al., 2018).

Research in the UK identified a major barrier to this collaboration: a 'miscommunication or misinterpretation effect' (Harrison et al., 2018, p. 17; 2021, p. 12; 16–17). In that study, both parents and teachers prioritized character development, yet they 'perceived the opposite to be true of their counterparts' (Harrison et. al, 2018, p. 16). These findings suggests that poor communication is a major problem. Our study builds directly upon these insights, investigating whether a similar 'misperception gap' exists in Poland – a context where this specific parent-teacher dynamic in character education has not yet been empirically explored.

2. Research Design and Methodology

This study was conducted as part of the cross-national European project TEPACE,² which involved participants from 11 different countries (Bernhard et al., 2025). The project, coordinated by the European Character and

² TEPACE – Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on Character Education in Europe. A European Research Project promoted by the European Character and Virtues Association (ECVA). Project duration: 2023–2026. More information available on: <https://ecva-character.org/teachers-and-parents-perspectives-on-character-educationin-europe-tepace>.

Virtues Association (ECVA), aims to map the landscape of character education across the continent between 2023 and 2026.

The research design and methodology were standardized across all participating nations to ensure comparability. While the overarching framework provided by the TEPACE leadership was consistent, some individual countries employed additional qualitative methods alongside the core quantitative instruments.

The project was guided by the following core research questions:

What are the views and beliefs held by teachers and parents of European countries regarding character education in schools?

- Do parents and teachers in Europe think character education should be undertaken in schools; and if yes how?
- What type of virtues do teachers and parents in Europe value the most?
- Do teachers and parents in Europe value character or academic attainment more highly?
- What do they think is the preference of the other group?

The present article focuses specifically on the findings from the Polish part of the project.

To investigate the attitudes of Polish parents and teachers toward character education, this study employed a quantitative methodology. This approach was selected as it enabled a relatively small research team to collect data from an adequate sample, facilitating the identification of trends, the comparison of attitudes between the two groups, and the statistical testing of the ‘misperception gap’ hypothesis. The primary instrument was a self-report questionnaire, tailored for each participant group. The respondents were divided into two distinct cohorts: parents and teachers. The demographic section gathered key data points, including gender, age, and level of education for parents, and years of professional experience for teachers. A cross-sectional design was utilized to capture a snapshot of the participants’ current beliefs and perceptions. Furthermore, the use of standardized instruments across the TEPACE project member countries aimed to facilitate cross-national comparisons and draw conclusions at the European level.

The initial research instruments, originally developed in English by the TEPACE project leadership, were translated and adapted for the Polish cultural and educational context. This careful translation process ensured

that the tools were appropriate for local conditions, and the Polish versions were subsequently reviewed for clarity and accuracy. The questionnaire was a structured tool designed to explore how parents and teachers view character education, specifically weighing the value of moral growth against academic success. The survey began with preliminary ethical considerations and informed consent, followed by a section examining parental motivations in school choice and the virtues most valued by both groups. The core section investigated the respondents' personal values regarding character versus academic attainment, alongside their perceptions of how the other group would respond. Finally, demographic data were gathered, covering age, gender, and marital status.³

Fig. 1. A poster promoting the study online.



Source: Filozofuj! Magazine, URL: <https://filozofuj.eu/jestes-rodzicem-lub-nauczycielem-pomoz-nam-ulepszac-system-edukacji/>

³ Full research instruments are available for inspection on the dedicated polish website of the project. URL: <https://virtueethics.ug.edu.pl/projekty/postrzeganie-edukacji-charakteru-w-europie-przez-nauczycieli-i-rodzicow/>

The questionnaires were administered online using the Qualtrics platform. The study employed a non-probabilistic, purposeful sampling strategy. Links to the surveys were hosted on the official University of Gdańsk website, which was subsequently promoted through the *Filozofuj!* magazine and via partner teachers, parents, and educational institutes across Poland.

Data collection took place from July to September 2024. Although 260 parental and 243 teacher responses were initially received, a significant number were incomplete or lacked informed consent. Consequently, 162 parent and 138 teacher responses were qualified for final analysis. Microsoft Excel and SPSS Statistics were utilized to clean the raw data and perform comparative analyses between the groups.

The research was conducted in strict adherence to ethical standards, and approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Gdańsk. Central to the procedure was the principle of informed consent; participants were provided with an information leaflet outlining the aims of the TEPACE project and identifying the research team from the Institute of Philosophy. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of full anonymity. The data collection procedure ensured that no personally identifiable information was collected or shared, thereby respecting the privacy of all individuals and institutions involved.

3. Key Findings

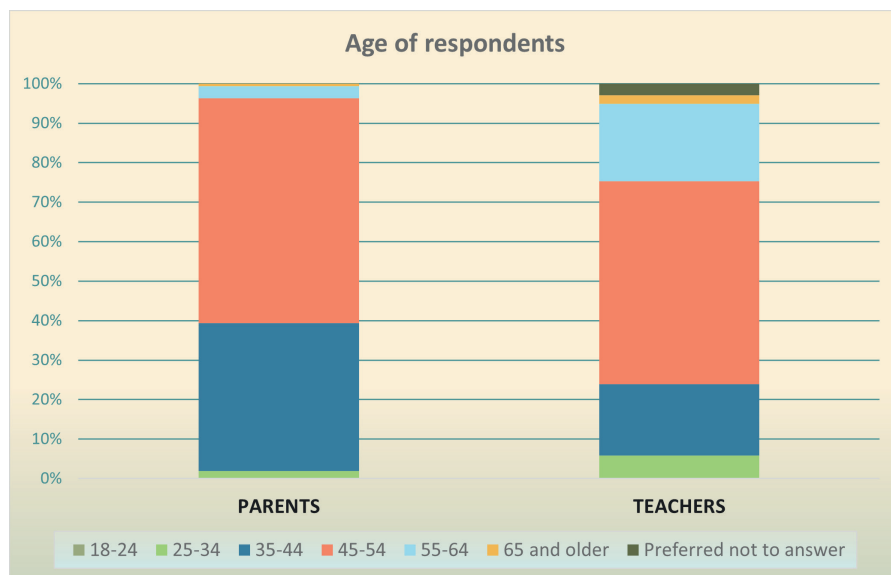
3.1. Respondent Demographics

The demographic analysis of the collected data provided a clear profile of the study participants. The sample was notably female-dominated, with women comprising 82% of parent respondents and 76% of teacher respondents. This high degree of feminization was expected, given the nature of the education sector in Poland and the typical response patterns for voluntary surveys regarding child development.

Regarding the age structure, the parent group was relatively younger than the teacher cohort. The largest segment among parents was the 45–54 age group (56%), followed closely by those aged 35–44 (37%). While the teacher cohort also peaked in the 45–54 age range (51%), the 35–44 age group was

significantly smaller than its parental counterpart, representing only 18% of respondents.

Fig. 2. Age of respondents



Source: Own study.

The educational level among parents was notably high, with 70% holding a Master's degree and 15% a doctoral degree. Regarding the teacher cohort, at the time of the study, more than half (53%) taught in primary schools (ISCED 2), while 43% were employed in secondary schools (ISCED level 3).

The teacher respondents were highly experienced: over half (51%) reported more than 20 years of professional practice in their current school. Significantly, the most frequent subjects taught by this group were related to values education, such as Ethics or Religion (36%). This suggests that the participating teachers are likely well informed about the moral development of children in Poland. However, only 47% of teacher respondents reported receiving any specialized training in character education since completing their Initial Teacher Education.

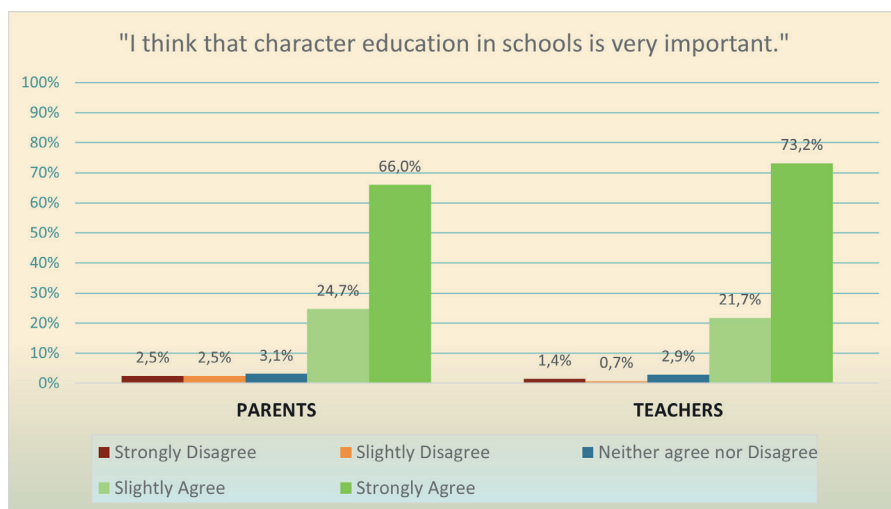
In terms of family structure, an overwhelming majority of parents (87%) reported being married. Regarding family size, nearly half (44%) had two

children, while approximately one-third reported having three or more children (18% with three and 14% with four or more).

3.2. General Attitudes toward Character Education

The first and most fundamental research question concerned the general attitude toward the inclusion of character education in schools. The results reveal a remarkable consensus. Among parents, over 90% expressed a positive attitude, either 'strongly' or 'slightly' agreeing with the statement: 'I think that character education in schools is very important', while only 5% disagreed. Teacher respondents demonstrated even stronger support, with 95% answering affirmatively and only 2% expressing disagreement. These findings indicate that within the Polish social context, there is no conflict regarding the necessity of character education; rather, there is a clear and overwhelming agreement on its importance.

Fig. 3. Importance of character education.



Source: Own study.

In one of the multiple-choice questions, parents were asked to identify the most valued outcomes of their children's time spent in school. The two most frequent responses were 'the ability to develop positive relationships' (87%) and 'the ability to be a good person' (78%). Both of these choices are directly linked to character education, indicating a profound desire among parents for their children's moral growth.

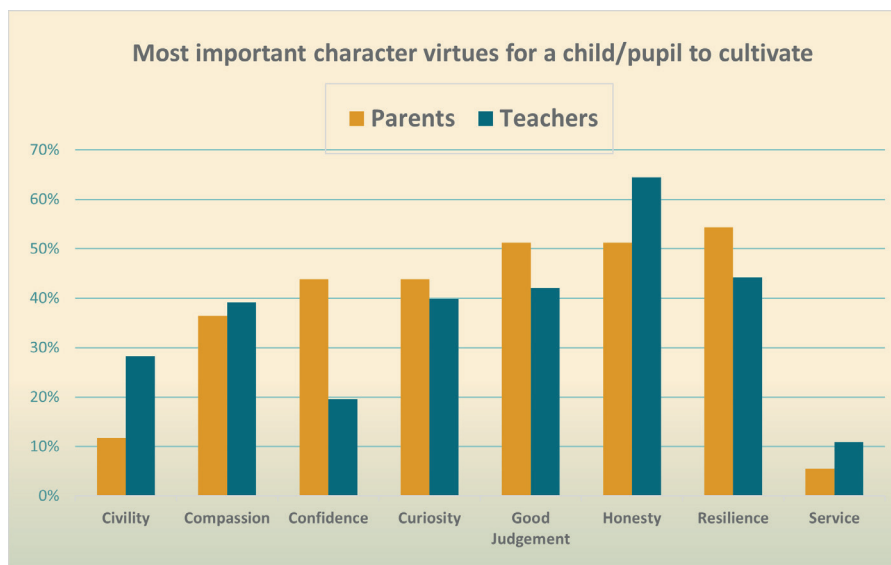
3.3. Most Important Character Virtues

Respondents were asked to select the three virtues they consider most important to cultivate in their children or pupils. The provided list included the following virtues, each accompanied by a brief description:

- **Civility** (is being polite and courteous in behaviour and speech).
- **Compassion** (is being sympathetic, generous and considerate to others, particularly when they suffer misfortune).
- **Confidence** (is being certain in your own abilities, the abilities of others, or that a certain course of action is best).
- **Curiosity** (is an eagerness to know or learn something new).
- **Good Judgement** (is the ability to think reflectively and independently. It is the ability to make decisions after careful consideration).
- **Honesty** (is to be truthful and sincere with others and yourself; to not knowingly deceive someone).
- **Resilience** (is bouncing back from adversity despite obstacles in your path. It is the ability to keep going and persist in a course of action even when things are really tough).
- **Service** (is working hard for a person, organization or country. It is giving your time to help others).

The parental responses did not yield a single, clear favourite. According to parents, the most important virtue to cultivate in children is **resilience** (54%), with **honesty** (51%) and **good judgment** (51%) following closely in second place. A significant proportion of parents also selected **curiosity** (44%), **confidence** (44%), and **compassion** (36%).

Fig. 4. Most important character virtues for a child/pupil to cultivate.



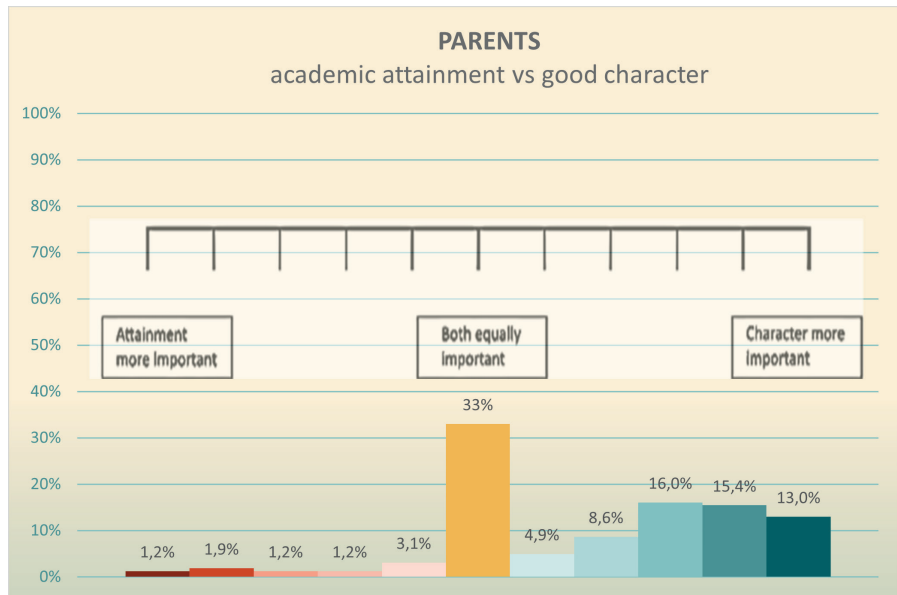
Source: Own study.

In contrast, teachers prioritized **honesty** (64%) above all other virtues, followed by **resilience** (44%), **good judgement** (42%), **curiosity** (40%), and **compassion** (39%). Notably, **civility** was deemed more than twice as important by teachers (28%) as it was by parents (12%). Conversely, the value parents placed on **confidence** (44%) was more than double that of teachers (20%). Both groups agreed that **service** was the least important virtue, with only 8% of parents and 11% of teachers selecting it.

3.4. Priorities: Character Development vs Academic Achievement

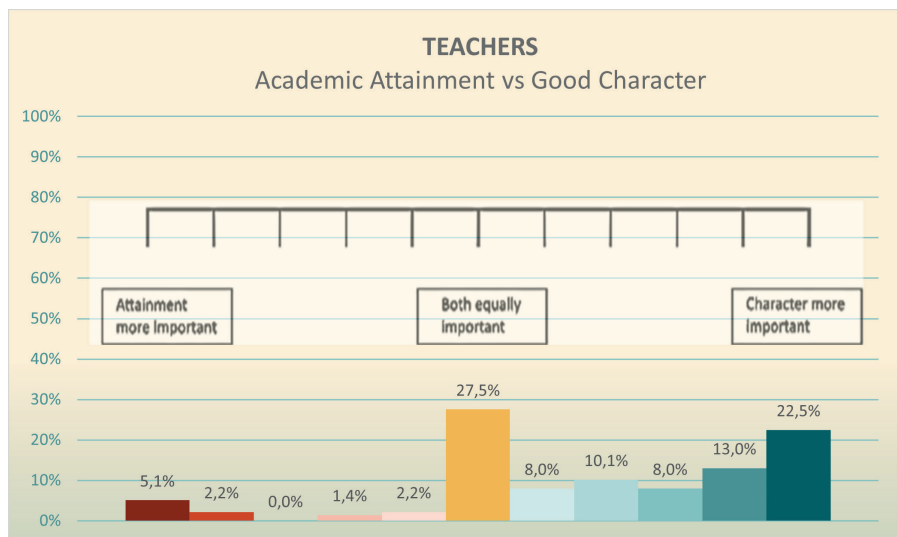
To test the depth of support for character education in schools, the questionnaire required respondents to prioritize between two competing goals: 'academic attainment' (grades, exams) and 'good character.' An 11-point bipolar scale was utilized, allowing participants to position their preference between these two aims. When forced to choose, the majority of both groups favoured the development of good character over academic success.

Fig. 5. Parents: academic attainment vs good character.



Source: Own study.

Fig. 6. Teachers: academic attainment vs good character.



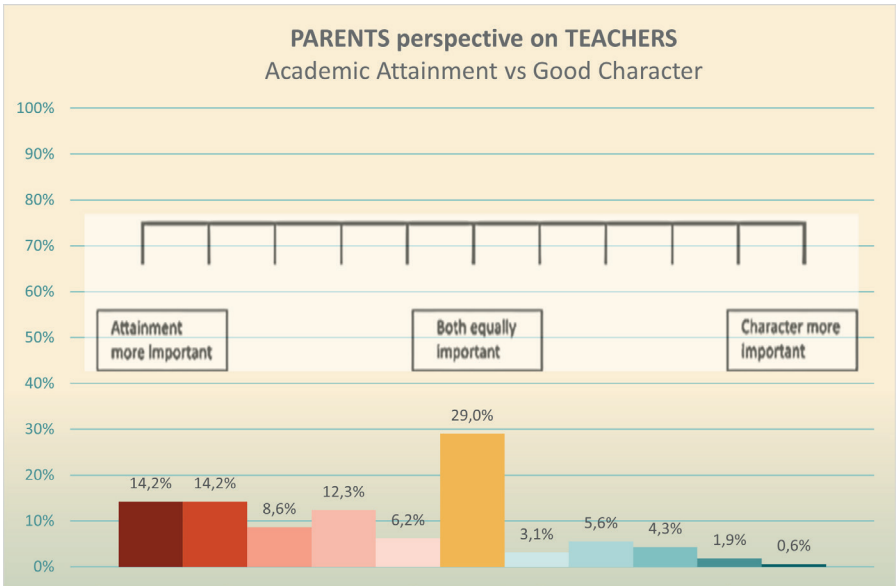
Source: Own study.

Specifically, 58% of parents indicated that character development is more important to them than academic achievement. The teachers’ results were even higher, with 62% prioritizing character over attainment. These findings challenge the common stereotype that Polish schools and parents are focused exclusively on cognitive performance and exam rankings. They demonstrate that, at least at a declarative level, a child’s character development is valued more highly than academic success.

3.5. The ‘Misperception’ Phenomenon

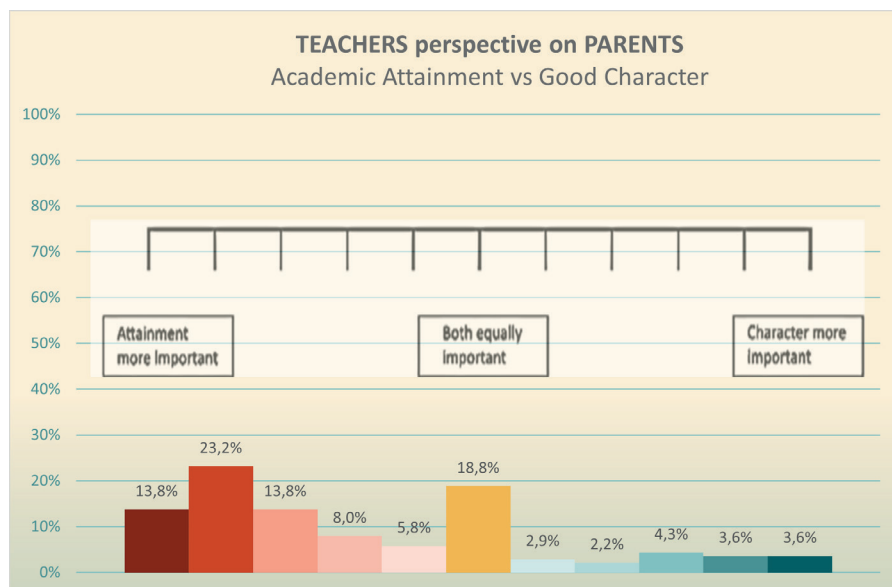
While the previous section demonstrated that parents and teachers actually share the same priorities, the data reveals a significant discrepancy in how they perceive each other. This phenomenon, referred to earlier as the ‘misperception gap,’ suggests a profound lack of mutual trust or communication (Harrison et al., 2018; 2021, p. 12; 16–17).

Fig. 7. Parents perspective on teachers: academic attainment vs good character.



Source: Own study.

Fig. 8. Teachers perspective on parents: academic attainment vs good character.



Source: Own study.

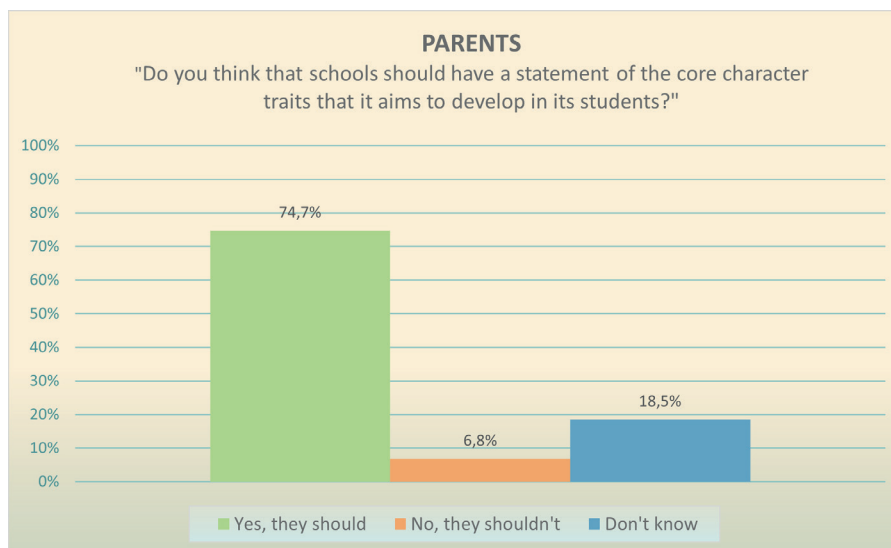
The data analysis reveals that a majority of teacher respondents (65%) believe parents are primarily focused on academic success, while only 17% perceive character as the priority for parents. Teachers largely assume that, for the average parent, grades represent the most significant outcome of schooling. Conversely, parents hold a mirror image of this perception: 56% of parent respondents believe that teachers prioritize academic results, while only 15% believe that teachers value good character more highly.

This creates a paradoxical situation: while both parties personally prioritize character development, they each perceive the 'other' as an obstacle that demands a narrow focus on academic performance. This gap in mutual understanding is a critical finding, as it corroborates international research and suggests that the primary barrier to character education in Poland is not a deficit of will, but rather a significant breakdown in communication and mutual trust.

3.6. Preferred Methods of Implementation

The final part of the quantitative analysis examines the preferred methods of implementation. Respondents were asked how character education should be delivered within the school setting.

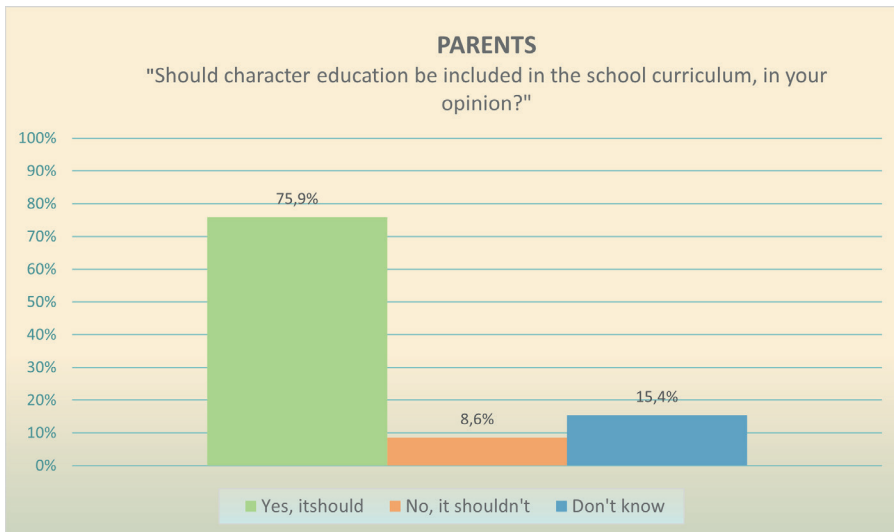
Fig. 9. Parents perspective on schools having a statement on core character traits.



Source: Own study.

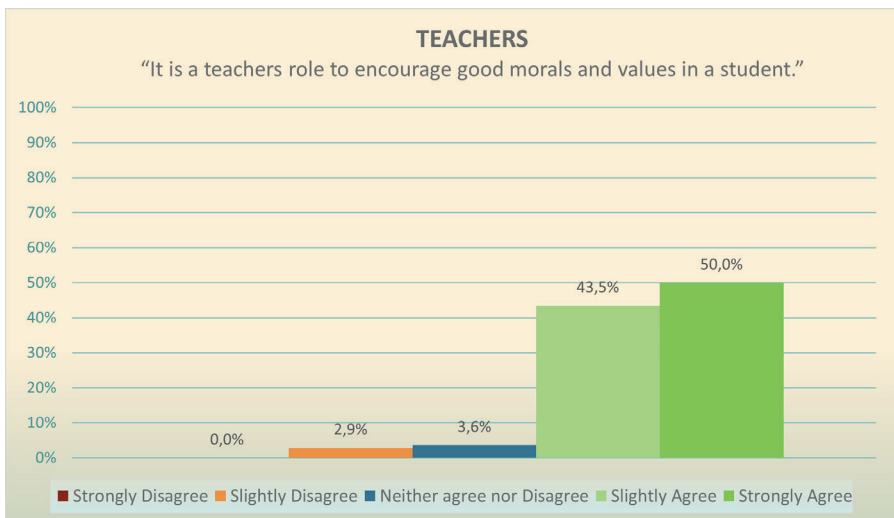
First and foremost, it is worth noting that both groups of respondents strongly believe that placing greater emphasis on character education would – at least to some extent – positively affect children's academic attainment. This view is shared by as many as 91% of the surveyed parents and 97% of the teachers.

Fig. 10. Parents perspective on including CE in school curriculums.



Source: Own study.

Fig. 11. Teachers perspective on their role to encourage good morals and values in students.



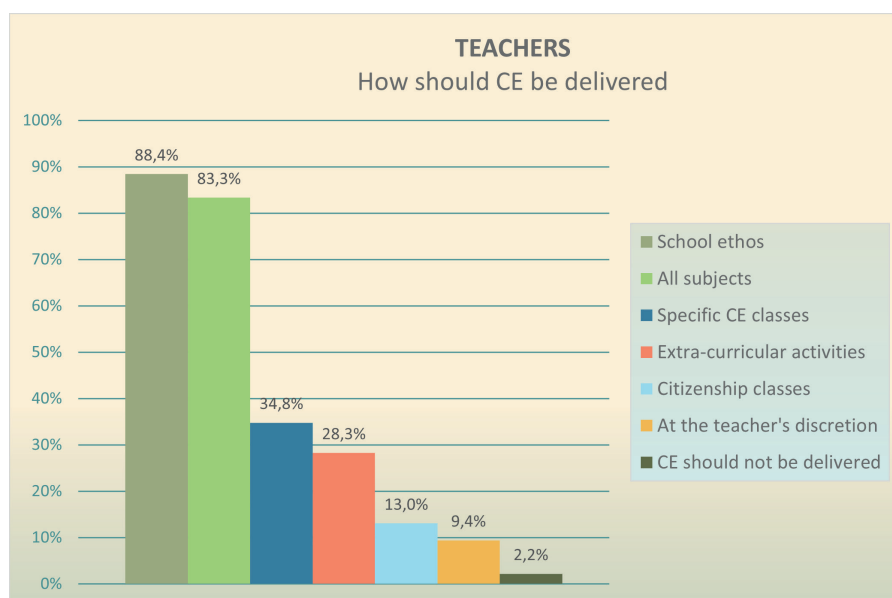
Source: Own study.

A large majority of parent respondents (75%) believe that schools should adopt a formal statement outlining the core character traits they aim to develop in students. Similarly, parents expressed strong support for the inclusion of character education within the school curriculum. These results indicate that, from the parents' perspective, there is a clear demand for a more organized and explicit approach to character development.

The results from the teacher cohort are particularly instructive. There was no hesitation among respondents regarding the teacher's role in fostering student morality; over 93% agreed that cultivating good character is an integral part of their professional responsibility.

When asked about the most effective methods for delivering character education, an overwhelming majority of teachers supported a whole-school approach, prioritizing school ethos (88%) and integration across all school subjects (83%). Since specific character education classes were selected by only 35% of respondents, it suggests that the sampled teachers largely align with the philosophy of the national curriculum's preamble.

Fig. 12. Teachers perspective on CE implementations methods.



Source: Own study.

From the other perspective, more than one-third of teachers advocated for dedicated character education lessons – a format currently absent from the core curriculum. While school ethos and a values-based approach across all subjects are certainly an important, but non-exhaustive part of the neo-Aristotelian framework of this study (Kristjánsson & Arthur, 2022, pp. 13–15), it must be noted that within the Polish educational context, these methods often function as a ‘dead letter’ or a facade regulation, lacking a concrete implementation plan. Ultimately, if character education is theoretically everyone’s responsibility, there is a significant risk that, in practice, no one feels genuinely accountable for its execution.

4. Discussion and Practical Recommendations

The results of this study contribute to the international discourse on character education by offering unique insights into the Polish educational landscape. When situated within the broader theoretical framework and compared with similar international research, the Polish data confirms a paradox of simultaneous consensus and misconception. On the surface, there is a clear alignment between parents and teachers regarding the fundamental aims of education. Both groups overwhelmingly support the inclusion of character education in schools and prioritize the development of virtues over academic attainment. This evidence contradicts the prevailing narrative that modern education is driven solely by a ‘race for grades’ or professional success.

A key finding from the comparative analysis, however, is the existence of a significant misperception in mutual communication. While parents and teachers share the same core values, they fail to recognize these values in one another. This phenomenon mirrors findings from the UK and other countries participating in the TEPACE project (Harrison et al., 2021; Bernhard et al., 2025, p. 16), suggesting that this is a systemic issue in modern European schooling rather than a unique Polish cultural trait.

The data suggests that in Poland, this gap effectively paralyzes collaboration. Teachers, under the impression that parents care exclusively about exam results, may hesitate to dedicate instructional time to character formation. Conversely, parents, perceiving schools as mere ‘exam factories,’ may not expect or demand character-focused policies. This mutual misunder-

standing creates a formidable barrier that stifles the progress of character education and prevents its integration into everyday school practice.

4.1. Improving Parent-Teacher Communication

To address the ‘misperception gap’ confirmed in this study, schools must radically reform the nature of their communication with parents. Currently, parent-teacher meetings are predominantly focused on logistics, grades, and behavioural issues. It would be highly beneficial for schools to create a dedicated space for dialogue focused explicitly on values and character. This could take the form of collaborative workshops or regular communications that highlight the school’s character-related objectives.

The integration of character education into the curriculum – an initiative overwhelmingly supported by parents – would be significantly easier to implement in such a transparent environment. By explicitly stating that the school values kindness, honesty, and resilience alongside academic achievement, teachers can correct parents’ false assumptions. Conversely, listening to clearly articulated parental priorities will help teachers recognize that they have allies, not adversaries, in the process of character formation.

4.2. Value of Specific Character Virtues

Several interesting points emerge regarding which character virtues Polish parents and teachers value most. **Honesty** was identified as the highest priority for teachers, while for parents, it was of equal importance to **good judgment**. This may reflect how teachers perceive their relationship with students; if the educational system expects teachers to act as ‘policemen’ – with a heavy emphasis on monitoring grades and exams – it is unsurprising that they prioritize honesty to ensure a more authentic assessment of student commitment.

For parents, prioritizing **resilience**, **honesty**, and **good judgment** suggests they value cultivating independence, practical reasoning, and moral integrity in their children. Notably, **civility** was selected by parents only half as often as by teachers, suggesting that parents place less emphasis on manners and more on **resilience** and **good judgment**. Furthermore, the fact that

twice as many parents as teachers chose **confidence** – combined with the high score for **resilience** – underlines a parental desire for children to be self-reliant, assertive, and strong-willed.

Comparing these results with findings from Slovakia reveals a stark difference in the value placed on **resilience**. While it is the top priority for Polish parents and the second for Polish teachers, in Slovakia, it was rated as one of the least important virtues (Brestovanský, 2024, pp. 10–11). Conversely, both parents and teachers in Slovakia placed significantly greater emphasis on civility and confidence than their Polish counterparts did. The question of why Polish respondents prioritize resilience over civility to such an extent warrants further research. One possible explanation, requiring deeper study, is an underlying perception of the outside world as inherently hostile or demanding.

Finally, with the exception of Austria, **service** was the least valued virtue across all TEPACE project countries (Bernhard et al., 2025, pp. 10–12). This indicates a widespread cultural trend in Europe that prioritizes individual development and autonomy over communal service.

4.3. Suggestions for CE Integration and Implementation

From a policy perspective, the data suggests clear directions for the methodology of character education implementation. Among practitioners, there is relatively low support for creating a new, standalone subject for character education, compared with the strong preference for a whole-school approach to character education, implemented across all subjects and through the school ethos. Similar findings were reported in other European countries participating in the TEPACE project, particularly regarding the need for character education to be formally included in the school curriculum. However, in contrast to their European counterparts, Polish teachers perceived dedicated character education classes as more effective than extra-curricular activities (Bernhard et al., 2025, p. 12–13). This suggests that on a European scale, Polish educators are more open to a dedicated teaching format, even though teachers – often overburdened by existing curricular demands – generally prefer a whole-school approach.

Therefore, at least initially, educational policy should focus on authentically embedding character education within the school's overall ethos and integrating it across the existing curriculum. The whole-school approach implies that character formation should be cultivated through the entire school culture – from mathematics to sports – rather than being dedicated to an isolated lesson.

Paradoxically, the whole-school approach is precisely what current educational policy aims to achieve. It can be argued, therefore, that this strategy requires either a fundamental re-evaluation or the introduction of more specific guidelines that define precisely how character education should be operationalized through school ethos and across all subjects. Concurrently, a dedicated character education course could be introduced, at least in select schools, as a pilot project to test its effectiveness in the Polish context.

4.4. Teacher Training Programs

While teachers demonstrate a high level of willingness and a sense of responsibility for their students' character development, more than half reported that they have not received any specific training in character education methodology since their initial teacher education. Consequently, there is an urgent need to modernize both initial teacher training at the university level and ongoing professional development programs.

Training curricula should not be limited to theoretical ethics; instead, they must focus on the practical cultivation of virtues in students. Teachers require concrete tools and pedagogical strategies to facilitate discussions on moral dilemmas and to understand their role as moral exemplars better. Without systemic support and professional training, character education in Poland risks remaining an intuitive, rather than a professionalized, practice.

5. Final Conclusions

In conclusion, this study offers a hopeful yet challenging diagnosis of character education in Poland. The findings provide definitive evidence of strong support for the school's role in cultivating character. Both parents and teach-

ers prioritize moral formation over academic attainment, sharing a common vision for the holistic development of the child. However, the potential for a productive partnership is currently blocked by a significant communication gap. This 'misperception gap' – where each side mistakenly assumes the other prioritizes grades alone – creates a formidable barrier to the advancement of character education. Therefore, the key to progress lies not in convincing stakeholders of the value of character, but in creating spaces for genuine dialogue that reveal these shared goals and facilitate collective action toward implementation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate a clear preference regarding implementation methodology. At present, the Polish educational community does not favour the introduction of a new, standalone subject. Instead, teachers express a strong preference for a whole-school approach, in which character education is embedded within the total school ethos and across all academic subjects. It is essential to emphasize that a whole-school approach necessitates much more than mere formalised declarations. Given that this model is already the official blueprint for Polish educational policy, its persistent ineffectiveness suggests a need for a thorough re-evaluation. Future efforts may require more specific operational guidelines or pilot projects involving dedicated character education classes. Ultimately, regardless of the chosen method, the successful implementation of character education will necessitate a fundamental transformation of teacher training systems.

6. Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged, as they affect the generalizability of the findings. First, the study employed a non-probabilistic, purposeful sampling strategy rather than random selection. Furthermore, the relatively small sample sizes in both groups limit the broader applicability of the results and render certain demographic correlations statistically insignificant. Given these constraints and the sample's homogeneity, the analysis was primarily limited to descriptive statistics.

These factors indicate that the results may not fully capture the perspectives of the Polish population as a whole. Additionally, as with all self-report instruments, there is a risk of 'social desirability bias,' in which respondents

may select answers perceived as morally correct rather than those that reflect their actual daily practices. It should also be noted that the research team consisted primarily of philosophers and the study was conducted on a voluntary basis without external funding.

Based on the study's conclusions, future research should focus on deepening understanding of the identified trends. While the quantitative data revealed a 'misperception gap' between parents and teachers, it does not fully explain the root causes of this communication breakdown. Future studies should employ qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to explore the underlying reasons for this lack of mutual trust. Finally, a critical element is currently missing from the discourse: the voice of the students themselves. Future projects should incorporate the perspectives of children and adolescents to determine if their views on character and school priorities align with those of their guardians and educators.

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