



Character and Values Education in the Türkiye Century Maarif Model: A Qualitative Document Analysis

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Abstract: This study critically analyzes how moral and civic values are represented and operationalized within the *Türkiye Century Maarif Model* (TYMM) for primary education through a qualitative document analysis approach. Using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic framework, five official curriculum and policy documents published by the Ministry of National Education between 2023 and 2024 totaling approximately 450 pages were examined. The analysis identified four structural themes: Virtue (Erdem), Value (Değer), Action (Eylem), and Pedagogical Reflection, each illustrating how the TYMM transforms moral education from implicit moral instruction into an explicit, measurable, and pedagogically integrated framework. The findings reveal that the TYMM links personal morality with civic responsibility, embedding values such as honesty, justice, empathy, and cooperation within competency-based learning outcomes. While the model successfully harmonizes local moral heritage with global citizenship principles, it also reveals ideological tensions between universal ethics and national identity. Theoretically, this study contributes to moral and character education literature by offering a curriculum-level perspective on how values are linguistically structured and pedagogically operationalized. Practically, it provides a conceptual reference for educators and policymakers seeking to align moral formation with democratic and global educational goals.

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Introduction

Education today is expected to go beyond the transmission of academic knowledge and foster learners' moral awareness, civic responsibility, and cultural consciousness. In this holistic perspective, values education assumes a central role in shaping not only individuals' ethical behavior but also the collective identity and moral fabric of society. Values such as justice, empathy, respect, and cooperation—when introduced from the earliest years of schooling—enable students to develop moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and a sense of social responsibility. In contemporary educational paradigms, this integration of cognitive and moral development represents a fundamental indicator of quality education (UNESCO, 2023). Globally, curriculum frameworks have shifted toward competency-based models that

embed ethics, collaboration, and social justice as key learning outcomes. The OECD's Learning Compass 2030 (2019) proposes that education must develop students' capacity for moral and civic action in real-life contexts. Likewise, Fullan (2007) asserts that educational reform succeeds only when it incorporates moral purpose into systemic transformation. Veugelers and Bosio (2023) also emphasize that moral education and sustainable citizenship are interdependent goals in the twenty-first century, requiring schools to explicitly teach values such as respect, equity, and solidarity.

Türkiye represents a compelling case in the global discourse on moral and values-based education. Situated at the crossroads of East and West, Türkiye's education system embodies both a strong cultural-religious heritage and modern secular reforms, creating a unique synthesis of local tradition and global pedagogical change. The Türkiye Century Maarif Model (TYMM), launched by the Ministry of National Education in 2024, reflects this dual aspiration by reconstructing the national curriculum around the triadic philosophy of Virtue-Value-Action (Erdem-Değer-Eylem). This framework redefines schooling not merely as academic instruction but as a process of cultivating virtuous individuals who act responsibly and contribute to the common good. Thus, studying the TYMM provides valuable insights into how a national education reform seeks to reconcile moral humanism with twenty-first-century competencies—an endeavor that holds global relevance for nations attempting to balance heritage and innovation.

Philosophically, the TYMM builds upon Türkiye's long-standing maarif tradition, rooted in moral humanism, and integrates it with universal human values. The Virtue-Value-Action framework extends moral education to include contemporary dimensions such as digital ethics, environmental stewardship, and cultural heritage preservation. This approach aligns with international discussions on character education and global citizenship, where moral learning is conceptualized as a lived and experiential process rather than a purely theoretical subject (Lickona, 1992; Narvaez & Bradshaw, 2023). Primary education, as the formative stage of personality and moral consciousness, is central to implementing these ideals. Within the TYMM, curricula for Life Studies, Turkish Language, and Social Studies explicitly embed learning outcomes related to responsibility, empathy, justice, and solidarity—each linked to measurable behavioral indicators that connect ethical understanding with observable actions.

Despite the increasing attention to values education in Türkiye, most existing studies have concentrated on teachers' attitudes, classroom practices, or general policy analyses (Aktepe et al., 2020; Bayat & Yazar, 2022; Thornberg & Oğuz, 2013). A systematic review of peer-reviewed national databases (DergiPark and TR Index, 2015-2024) reveals that fewer than 10% of studies on values education directly examine curriculum-level design or document structures. This scarcity highlights a critical gap in understanding how moral and civic values are operationalized at the policy and curriculum level. Addressing this gap is essential to evaluate how the TYMM transforms moral education from an implicit "hidden curriculum" into an explicit and assessable framework.

Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze how moral and civic values are represented and operationalized within the TYMM primary curriculum documents through a qualitative document analysis. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are moral and civic values conceptualized and structured within the TYMM primary education curricula?
2. In what ways does the TYMM's Virtue-Value-Action framework redefine the theoretical and practical foundations of character and values education in Türkiye?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the international literature on curriculum-based moral education, offering an evidence-based understanding of how national reforms can align moral formation with global educational paradigms.

Method

This study employed a qualitative document analysis design to examine how moral and civic values are conceptualized and operationalized within the *Türkiye Century Maarif Model* (TYMM) for primary education. The document analysis approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic interpretation of textual data to reveal underlying meanings, assumptions, and ideological orientations within educational policy documents (Bowen, 2009). This design aligns with an interpretivist paradigm, which views documents not merely as neutral data sources but as social artifacts that embody the moral and philosophical vision of curriculum developers. In this sense, the TYMM curriculum was analyzed as a discursive space where moral ideals, civic responsibilities, and national identity are negotiated and expressed through language.

The corpus of analysis consisted of five official documents published by the *Ministry of National Education (MoNE)* between 2023 and 2024. The documents were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) they directly address primary education curricula, (2) they include explicit or implicit references to moral and civic values, and (3) they are officially published and publicly available through MoNE's website. Supplementary teacher manuals, pilot drafts, or unapproved revisions were excluded to ensure conceptual consistency and institutional validity. Together, these documents comprise approximately 450 pages, providing a comprehensive representation of how values education is integrated across subjects that shape moral and civic learning in the early grades.

Table 1. Corpus of Documents Analyzed

No	Document Title	Year	Source	Page Length
1	Türkiye Yüzyılı Maarif Modeli Ortak Metni (Common Framework)	2024	MoNE (Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu)	112
2	Erdem-Değer-Eylem (Virtue-Value-Action) Framework Guide	2024	MoNE	86
3	Life Studies Curriculum (Grades 1-3)	2023	MoNE	78
4	Turkish Language Curriculum (Grades 1-8)	2024	MoNE	92
5	Social Studies Curriculum (Grades 4-7)	2023	MoNE	82

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework: (1) familiarization, (2) code generation, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) reporting. A hybrid coding strategy combining deductive and inductive reasoning was used. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical framework of *Virtue-Value-Action (EDE)*, while inductive codes emerged from recurring

expressions and moral constructs within the curriculum texts. For example, the statement “students act responsibly toward nature and community” was coded as *responsibility* (Virtue), while “practices fairness in social interactions” was coded as *justice* (Value). These codes were then grouped into broader categories on Moral Dispositions (Virtue), Ethical Principles (Value), and Behavioral Applications (Action) and subsequently synthesized into four overarching themes: Virtue, Value, Action, and Pedagogical Reflection.

Table 2. Illustrative Coding Excerpt from the TYMM Curriculum Documents

Document Segment	Initial Code	Category	Theme
“Students act responsibly toward nature and community.” (<i>Life Studies</i> , 2023)	Responsibility	Moral Disposition	Virtue
“Recognizes and practices fairness in social interactions.” (<i>Social Studies</i> , 2023)	Justice	Ethical Principle	Value
“Engages in collaborative dialogue using polite expressions.” (<i>Turkish Language</i> , 2024)	Respectful Communication	Behavioral Action	Action

Note. Extracted from official Ministry of National Education curriculum documents (MoNE, 2023–2024).

This combination of coding and thematic synthesis allowed the researcher to trace how abstract moral ideals such as virtue, justice, and empathy were operationalized and embedded as observable and assessable outcomes within the TYMM curriculum.

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the analysis, several validation strategies were employed. Triangulation was conducted across three curriculum domains (*Life Studies*, *Turkish Language*, and *Social Studies*) to identify converging moral constructs and enhance interpretive consistency. Peer debriefing involved three rounds of expert consultation with curriculum specialists who reviewed the coding structure and thematic coherence. An audit trail was maintained throughout the process, consisting of analytic memos and coding logs to enhance transparency and replicability. Intercoder reliability was established using Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.82$ for a 20% subset of data, followed by collaborative discussions to reach interpretive consensus.

Finally, regarding ethical considerations, all analyzed documents were publicly available materials issued by the Ministry of National Education. No human participants were involved, and thus no formal ethical clearance was required. Nevertheless, the study maintained academic integrity through careful citation, faithful interpretation of data, and reflexive awareness of the researcher’s positionality in interpreting the moral and ideological dimensions of the TYMM.

Results and Discussion

1. Structural Themes of the TYMM Curriculum

The qualitative analysis identified four interrelated themes: Virtue (Erdem), Value (Değer), Action (Eylem), and Pedagogical Reflection that represent the moral and philosophical architecture of the *Türkiye Century Maarif Model* (TYMM). These themes collectively illustrate how moral and civic education is embedded not as an isolated subject but as a cross-curricular framework shaping students' character and ethical reasoning. The

TYMM reframes education as *becoming moral*, linking knowledge, emotion, and behaviour. Each theme reflects a layer of this moral formation, transforming the traditional notion of "values transmission" into an active process of virtue cultivation and civic engagement.

a. Virtue (Erdem): Cultivating Moral Dispositions

The first structural theme, virtue, represents the ethical foundation of the TYMM, emphasizing moral dispositions such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and humility. For instance, within the *Life Studies* curriculum, students are encouraged to "act responsibly toward their community, show empathy to those in need, and demonstrate honesty in their words and actions" (MoNE, 2023, p. 17). This articulation demonstrates that the TYMM does not treat morality as a set of abstract ideals but as a lived experience closely linked to daily actions and relationships. In this sense, virtue is portrayed as *a way of being*, where moral integrity becomes a visible dimension of civic identity. The model thus transforms ethical knowledge into habitual moral consciousness—a process that resonates with Lickona's (1992) triadic concept of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*.

Beyond individual ethics, the virtue framework also serves a collective civic function. Students are taught that personal virtues contribute to social harmony and national cohesion, positioning moral education as a public responsibility. This approach aligns with Türkiye's *Maarif* tradition, which views moral cultivation as a cornerstone of community life. However, this orientation introduces subtle ideological undertones, where moral virtue is intertwined with civic loyalty and obedience to collective norms. As a result, while the TYMM succeeds in embedding virtue as an integral element of character formation, it also reflects a state-centered vision of morality, in which ethical behaviour reinforces social order rather than challenges it.

From a pedagogical perspective, the emphasis on virtue invites teachers to act as moral facilitators rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that nurture empathy, honesty, and responsibility through social projects and reflective dialogue. However, as Fullan (2007) suggests, authentic moral development requires an environment of moral inquiry, not conformity. Thus, while the TYMM's virtue model effectively anchors moral education in daily learning, its success will depend on whether teachers are empowered to foster critical reflection alongside behavioural reinforcement.

b. Value (Değer): Linking Universal Ethics and National Identity

The second theme, value, reflects the TYMM's attempt to integrate universal moral principles such as justice, equality, and respect with the national ideal of unity. In the *Social Studies* curriculum, the statement "learners practice fairness and equality in social life, respecting differences while upholding national cohesion" (MoNE, 2023, p. 44) demonstrates how values are framed through a dual lens of global humanism and patriotic solidarity. This synthesis aligns with the global shift toward competency-based education, where ethics and social participation are key learning outcomes. However, within the TYMM, the universal language of justice and equality is reinterpreted through local cultural values. Arthur (2019) calls *contextual moral universalism* a model where moral principles are adapted to reflect a

nation's cultural and ideological heritage.

At a deeper level, this dual framing reveals a philosophical tension between pluralism and unity. While the curriculum promotes inclusivity and fairness, its repeated association of moral behaviour with national loyalty suggests an underlying preference for harmony over diversity. Halstead and Taylor (2005) caution that moral education framed too strongly within a national narrative risk reducing ethical reasoning to ideological conformity. Nevertheless, in the TYMM's context, this blending of moral values and civic ideals may also represent a pragmatic adaptation to balance the preservation of cultural identity with participation in global citizenship discourse.

Pedagogically, the TYMM's value framework encourages schools to create learning environments that celebrate shared values and cultural particularity. Teachers are positioned as mediators who must translate abstract ethical principles into classroom realities that respect diversity while reinforcing collective ideals. For example, discussions on fairness, environmental respect, or empathy are designed to cultivate civic sensibility rooted in universal ethics and national belonging. The challenge, however, lies in maintaining a balance and ensuring that values education empowers critical moral reasoning without subordinating it to ideological consensus.

c. Action (Eylem): Transforming Moral Understanding into Practice

The third theme, action, operationalizes moral and civic values through observable behaviours and social participation. The *Turkish Language* curriculum provides a clear example: "students engage in cooperative dialogue using polite expressions during classroom discussions and group work" (MoNE, 2024, p. 59). This emphasis transforms moral education from theoretical instruction into competency-based moral practice, linking ethical understanding to tangible actions. By embedding value-oriented competencies into learning outcomes and assessment rubrics, the TYMM ensures that moral education is not abstract but directly connected to students lived experiences.

However, while this focus on measurable behaviour strengthens accountability, it also raises questions about the authenticity of moral action. Narvaez and Bradshaw (2023) argue that moral development must emerge from internalized motivation rather than external compliance. The TYMM's approach risks reducing morality and performance, as well as students behaving "correctly" without necessarily understanding why. Therefore, the pedagogical challenge lies in bridging external behaviour with internal conviction, transforming action from routine compliance into conscious moral engagement.

In practice, the Action dimension of the TYMM provides opportunities for experiential and project-based learning, where students apply values in authentic contexts such as environmental stewardship, community service, or peer collaboration. When effectively implemented, this approach aligns with global character education initiatives like Singapore's *Values in Action* and Japan's *Tokkatsu*, emphasizing learning by doing. Thus, *Eylem* (Action) represents a progressive dimension of the TYMM, promoting moral agency and civic participation as dynamic extensions of classroom learning.

d. Pedagogical Reflection: Teachers as Moral Mediators

The fourth theme, Pedagogical Reflection, positions teachers at the heart of the moral education process. The *Teacher's Guide for Life Studies* underscores that "teachers demonstrate moral consistency in classroom interactions and guide students through value-based dilemmas by modelling ethical decision-making" (MoNE, 2024, p. 21). This expectation transforms teachers from mere transmitters of curriculum to moral exemplars and reflective practitioners. By situating reflection as an integral part of moral pedagogy, the TYMM envisions classrooms as dialogical spaces where students learn virtue through modelling, dialogue, and critical reflection.

At the same time, this framework places significant responsibility on teachers to embody the moral ideals defined by the state. Such expectations echo challenges in other national contexts, such as Korea's *Character Education Framework* (Lee, 2001) and Finland's *Phenomenon-Based Learning* (Tirri, 2011), where teachers balance state-prescribed virtues and learner-centered moral inquiry. Therefore, the TYMM's success will depend on teachers' professional agency and ethical autonomy to interpret the curriculum meaningfully rather than mechanically.

Pedagogical reflection ultimately serves as the bridge between policy and practice, ensuring that moral education remains both coherent and human centered. When teachers engage students in reflective dialogue, asking why fairness matters or what empathy looks like in real life, they move beyond prescriptive morality toward transformative learning. In this sense, the TYMM's reflective component aligns with global efforts to redefine moral education as a dialogical and participatory process, where teachers and students co-construct meaning to pursue ethical understanding.

Table 3. Critical Reading of TYMM Value Themes and Pedagogical Implications

Theme	Illustrative Example	Ideological Reading	Pedagogical Implication
Virtue	"Acts responsibly toward community and homeland."	Links virtue to national service and loyalty.	Encourages civic duty but may constrain individual moral autonomy.
Value	"Practices fairness and equality in social life."	Frames universal justice within national unity.	Promotes harmony yet risks neglecting pluralism.
Action	"Engages in cooperative dialogue using polite expressions."	Behaviour-oriented morality emphasizing decorum.	Supports communication skills but may limit critical moral agency.
Pedagogical Reflection	"Teacher models ethical behaviour and leads reflection."	Institutionalizes moral authority within state norms.	Strengthens accountability but reduces teacher autonomy.

2. Ideological and Pedagogical Tensions

The *Türkiye Century Maarif Model* (TYMM) analysis reveals a complex ideological duality in how moral education is constructed. On one hand, the curriculum embraces empathy, equality, cooperation, and justice as universal moral competencies aligned with global frameworks such as UNESCO's (2023) *Education for Sustainable Development* and the OECD's *Learning Compass 2030* (2019). On the other hand, these virtues are situated within the moral boundaries of nationalism and cultural heritage, often expressed through concepts such as "service to the homeland" and "protection of moral unity." This dual orientation

illustrates what Arthur (2019) calls contextual moral universalism, where global ethical principles are localized to reflect national identity and collective moral order. Through this lens, the TYMM emerges as an effort to reconcile global citizenship with the moral humanism of Türkiye's *Maarif* tradition.

However, this synthesis also introduces inherent pedagogical tensions. While the curriculum aims to foster moral coherence and social harmony, it simultaneously risks narrowing the scope of moral inquiry. As Halstead and Taylor (2022) caution, frameworks that privilege conformity and consensus may transform moral education into a mechanism of ideological reproduction rather than a space for critical reasoning. The TYMM's omission of explicit references to sociocultural diversity, gender equality, or interfaith dialogue reflects a tendency to prioritize unity over plurality. This absence limits opportunities for students to engage in open-ended moral deliberation, an essential condition for developing ethical judgment and democratic values.

From a pedagogical perspective, these ideological tensions pose challenges and opportunities for educators. Teachers are expected to mediate between the state-defined virtues embedded in the TYMM and the plural moral realities of their classrooms. Therefore, moral instruction's effectiveness depends on teachers' ability to interpret the curriculum reflexively, upholding shared civic ideals while encouraging critical and empathetic engagement with difference. If approached thoughtfully, this tension need not be a limitation; instead, it can become a productive pedagogical space where students learn to balance cultural rootedness with openness to global ethical perspectives. In this sense, the TYMM reflects the ideological complexity of national education reform and underscores the evolving dialogue between tradition and modernity in character and values education.

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like in real life, they move beyond prescriptive morality toward transformative learning. In this sense, the TYMM's reflective component aligns with global efforts to redefine moral education as a dialogical and participatory process, where teachers and students co-construct meaning to pursue ethical understanding.

4. Comparative and Theoretical Insights

Cross-national comparisons indicate that the *Türkiye Century Maarif Model* (TYMM) shares structural similarities with various international frameworks of character education, such as Japan's *Tokatsu* (group ethics), Singapore's *Values in Action*, and Korea's *Character Education Promotion Act*. These models emphasize collective responsibility, moral participation, and social harmony as central goals of schooling. However, the TYMM distinguishes itself through its grounding in the *Maarif* tradition, which integrates spiritual and cultural morality as the foundation of civic virtue. This synthesis of moral humanism and national philosophy provides cultural authenticity and coherence, positioning morality as personal integrity and social responsibility. However, this strong emphasis on unity may also limit the cultivation of critical pluralism, as moral discourse prioritizes harmony and consensus over open moral dialogue and diversity of thought.

From a theoretical perspective, the TYMM represents a hybrid model that combines the philosophical ideals of moral humanism with the practical orientation of competency-based pedagogy. It redefines moral education as a measurable construct by articulating performance-based outcomes and behavioral indicators, aligning with global trends that link ethical reasoning to skill development and civic participation. This hybridity demonstrates an evolving paradigm in curriculum design that seeks to balance the universality of moral values with the contextual realities of national identity. Consequently, the TYMM contributes to the broader discourse on global moral education by offering a culturally situated yet internationally resonant model for integrating virtue, value, and action within the structure of modern schooling.

5. Theoretical and Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expanding literature on values and character education by demonstrating how a national curriculum can structurally integrate moral and civic formation into measurable learning outcomes. The TYMM's Virtue–Value–Action philosophy extends classical moral education theories (Lickona, 1992; Nucci et al., 2024) by operationalizing abstract virtues such as justice, empathy, and responsibility within explicit pedagogical frameworks. This theoretical contribution bridges moral philosophy, civic education, and curriculum design, offering a model for linking ethical reasoning with national cultural identity. At a practical level, the findings hold significant implications for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers. Teachers can utilize the TYMM framework to design reflective classroom practices that foster empathy and civic awareness; policymakers can adapt the structure to align moral education with democratic citizenship goals; and curriculum developers may use the model as a blueprint for embedding ethical reasoning across subjects and grade levels.

Despite these strengths, the study has several limitations. As a qualitative document

analysis, it is restricted to textual interpretations and does not capture how values are enacted in real classroom settings. This limitation underscores the need for empirical validation through classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student reflections to understand implementation fidelity. Future research should adopt comparative and mixed-method approaches to examine how similar frameworks function across different national contexts, such as Japan's Tokkatsu, Finland's Phenomenon-Based Learning, and Korea's Character Education Framework. Such cross-cultural analyses would illuminate how national ideologies mediate moral education and how curriculum design can balance universal ethics with local cultural values.

Conclusion

This study critically analyzed how moral and civic values are represented and operationalized within the Türkiye Century Maarif Model (TYMM) through a qualitative document analysis of five official curriculum and policy texts. The findings reveal that the TYMM integrates values education as a multidimensional framework linking virtue, value, action, and pedagogical reflection. This integration demonstrates a systematic attempt to redefine moral learning as an explicit, assessable, and pedagogically embedded component of the primary curriculum. Beyond its structural innovation, the TYMM illustrates how national education reforms can institutionalize moral development within competency-based curricula while negotiating tensions between universal ethics and local virtue traditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the broader literature on values and character education by extending moral education theories (Lickona, 1992; Nucci et al., 2024) through the contextual application of the Virtue–Value–Action philosophy. The TYMM provides an original model that links moral philosophy with educational policy and curriculum design, demonstrating how abstract virtues such as justice, empathy, and responsibility can be translated into measurable learning outcomes. At the practical level, the findings hold direct implications for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers. Teachers can adapt the TYMM framework to design reflective classroom practices that foster empathy, civic awareness, and ethical communication. Policymakers may use the model to align moral education with democratic citizenship goals, while curriculum developers can employ it as a blueprint for embedding ethical reasoning across subject areas and grade levels.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on textual analysis of curriculum documents. The absence of classroom observation and teacher–student perspectives constrain the understanding of how values are enacted in real contexts. To address this limitation, future research should incorporate empirical methods such as classroom ethnography, teacher interviews, and longitudinal observations to evaluate how the Virtue–Value–Action framework translates into lived pedagogical practice. Comparative studies across different national contexts, such as Japan's Tokkatsu, Finland's Phenomenon-Based Learning, and Korea's Character Education Framework, would also provide deeper insight into how nations integrate moral education into their cultural and ideological systems.

In conclusion, TYMM offers both opportunities and challenges for integrating moral formation into the educational process. It stands as a dynamic framework that reflects Türkiye's effort to harmonize its maarif heritage with global moral education paradigms. Its

successful implementation will depend on teachers' interpretive agency, institutional flexibility, and ongoing policy reflection. By situating the TYMM within the international discourse on character and values education, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how national curricula can reconcile ethical ideals with the practical demands of twenty-first-century citizenship.

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