

# **Teachers as Ethical: Role Modeling and its Impact on Student Digital Conduct**

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## **Abstract:**

Teachers' academic role is well established, their role as behavioural role models in higher education remains insufficiently explored. The analysis identifies three fundamental categories of teacher role modelling: Ethical Qualities, Pedagogical Expertise, and Relational Mentoring, which form the basis of a new conceptual model that frames role modelling as a multidimensional professional practice. The methodological quality of the included studies was evaluated with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool version 2018. The synthesis demonstrates the significant impact of teacher behaviours on student development while revealing critical research limitations, including geographical narrowness, overreliance on student-reported data, and discipline-specific constraints. These findings, drawn mainly from Asian and European contexts, underscore the urgent need for cross-cultural research in underrepresented regions (Latin America and Central Africa) to validate their global relevance. The review offers practical guidance for educational stakeholders and lays a foundation for more comprehensive investigations of the influence of teacher behavioural role models in higher education. Digital influence and evolving societal norms increasingly shape student behaviour, the role of teachers as ethical role models has gained renewed importance. This study examines how teachers contribute to student character formation through their moral responsibilities, ethical conduct, and the integration of character education into everyday classroom practices. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study utilizes a narrative review of existing literature to explore five key areas: (1) the moral responsibilities of teachers in shaping student character; (2) the challenges and barriers teachers encounter in upholding ethical standards; (3) the specific ethical behaviours that positively influence students; (4) the role of schools and policymakers in enhancing teacher ethics training; and (5) the strategies teachers use to embed character education in their pedagogy, along with the effectiveness of these methods. The findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive ethics training, supportive institutional policies, and a strengthened emphasis on moral education in teacher preparation programs. Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of ethically grounded teaching practices in cultivating values such as integrity, respect, fairness, and responsibility among students.

**Keywords:** *Teacher Role Modeling, Teacher Behaviours, Moral Responsibility, Character building, Professional Ethics*

## Introduction:

Teachers have a profound and lasting influence on students beyond academic achievement. Their interpersonal behaviour significantly impacts students' motivation, attitudes, and development. Effective teachers build strong relationships, demonstrate passion, mentor through modelling, maintain high expectations, and go above and beyond. This impact encompasses various aspects, including academic performance, behavioural patterns, motivation, career choices, and life perspectives. Teachers' impact on character development hinges on relational quality, institutional backing, cultural alignment, and pedagogical training. Challenges such as systemic pressures, intentional modelling of virtues. School-wide strategies can strengthen educators' role in shaping character.

Despite the established relevance of teacher role modeling, research on its impact in higher education remains limited, with most recent studies focusing on student perceptions rather than directly observing instructor behaviours. Compared with other approaches, comparatively little attention is paid to the systematic observation of instructors' enacted behaviours in authentic teaching contexts. Moreover, teacher-centered perspectives and institutionally embedded analyses remain underrepresented, particularly in cross-cultural and Global South settings. Although emerging work highlights the ethical and relational dimensions of teacher modeling. There remains a lack of integrative frameworks that connect observational learning processes to long-term academic, professional, and character outcomes across disciplines. This systematic review is motivated by an urgent need to consolidate disparate findings into a coherent framework for teacher behavioural role modelling in higher education, a framework essential for advancing evidence-based teacher professional development and pedagogical innovation. As digitalization and neoliberal audit cultures reshape educational landscapes and as calls for equity-focused and transformative pedagogy intensify (McArthur's, a clarified understanding of how teachers' modelling functions is pivotal. By systematically analyzing core modeling behaviours and their impacts, this review aims to provide a foundational model to inform the design of training programs, mentorship structures, and institutional policies that can consciously enhance this powerful dimension of teaching practice.

How do teachers, as behavioral role models, influence students' attitudes and academic achievements in higher education? Specifically, the review will:

- a. Provide an evidence-based overview of teacher behaviors as role models,
- b. Synthesize findings from studies across diverse academic disciplines and cultural contexts,
- c. Focusing specifically on research conducted in higher education,
- d. Identify gaps in existing literature to guide future research, and
- e. Offer practical recommendations for educators and institutions to optimize teacher-student interactions.

## Methodology:

This is an analytical study based on literature survey. The secondary data like research articles, journals, magazines and different database from websites are considered in this study. Content analysis of the literature which extracts the outcomes of the present study with thematic analysis and corroboration of the data. Data were sourced from Scopus and Web of Science for their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature. The method enabled a rigorous qualitative synthesis of empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods) to derive credible conclusions.

## **Teacher Role Modeling:**

Teacher education, and examines modelling by teacher educators as a means of changing the views and practices of future teachers. The results of a literature search and a multiple case study on modelling are discussed. Both the literature search and the case study approach led to the conclusion that we have discovered what is almost a blank spot in both the body of knowledge on teacher education and the actual practices of many teacher educators. Most educationalists believe that the new visions of learning that have surfaced over the last decade should lead to important changes in teaching. This means that approaches are needed in teacher education that will help future teachers to translate such new views and theories about learning into actual teaching practices in the schools. However, review studies on the impact of teacher education on teachers' beliefs and behaviour show that the effects of teacher preparation are often meagre. This study focuses on one important factor in teacher education, namely the exemplary role of teacher educators. Based on the idea that "teachers teach as they are taught" (Blume, 1971), the importance of modelling by teacher educators is discussed and different forms of modelling are distinguished. By means of case studies we analysed the current practices of teacher educators in the Netherlands and showed that although an approach to reform based on the idea of modelling may be fruitful, at present one must have serious doubts about the competence of teacher educators to serve as role models in promoting new visions of learning.

## **Teachers as role models in higher education: Applying social learning theory:**

Teachers' influence as behavioral role models in higher education is grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT), which posits that observational learning occurs through four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Educators amplify this process by aligning their actions with these stages and, for example, using vocal emphasis or multimedia tools to direct attention, demonstrating ethical decision-making through case studies to enhance retention, and contextualizing resilience within career challenges to strengthen motivation (Bandura). This stage-specific alignment is critical in higher education, where adult learners' autonomy requires modeling to balance aspirational traits with achievable practices. Following, the agency framework distinguishes technical functions (skill transmission) from ethical functions (critical societal engagement) in teacher modeling. Biesta reveals how neoliberal audit cultures constrain ethical demonstration, especially in research-intensive institutions that prioritize outputs over mentorship. Students learn integrity, empathy, and professionalism by observing teachers who model relatable behaviors and foster trust. Effective modeling includes demonstrating self-regulation and cognitive strategies to enhance

self-efficacy and autonomy. Educators must tailor these approaches using universal design principles to ensure equity and accessibility for diverse learners.

Collaborative learning environments enhance observational learning by allowing students to observe teachers modeling teamwork, conflict resolution, and ethical dialogue. Educators who explain their decision-making during group work help students retain and replicate these behaviors, aligning with Social Learning Theory's retention and reproduction stages. This approach also boosts motivation by connecting modeled behaviors to real-world outcomes. To address critiques, such as the varying needs of neurodiverse students, educators should use multimodal demonstrations to promote inclusivity. Teachers enhance Social Learning Theory (SLT)-driven modeling by linking behaviors to students' cultural contexts and experiences. Sharing personal stories of resilience boosts motivation, while aligning demonstrations of integrity with culturally relevant scenarios improves attention, retention, and professional identity development in mentorship. Crucially, this process is not passive reception but an exercise of student agency. Learners actively attend to and interpret modeled behaviors in light of their pre-existing values, goals, and critical capacities (Bandura & Walters, [Citation1977](#)). Effective role modeling, therefore, involves not only the teacher's demonstration but also pedagogical strategies that scaffold students' agency in recognizing, critiquing, and internalizing professional norms and ethical stances, transforming observation into deliberate professional identity work (Biesta et al., [Citation2015](#)).

## **Teacher behaviors as role models in student development:**

Teacher role modeling serves two functions: modernizing (refining ethics and pedagogy within existing systems) and transformative (empowering critical agency to challenge inequities). Students are more likely to emulate these behaviors when they align with their cultural and intersectional identities, underscoring the necessity of culturally responsive pedagogy (Narinasamy & Logeswaran, [Citation2015](#)). Reciprocal teacher-student interactions enhance this dynamic, as feedback refines instructional practices and strengthens trust. Pedagogies rooted in students' lived experiences, such as open dialogues, bias mitigation, and age-appropriate methods enhance academic achievement and foster resilience. Effectiveness depends on addressing intersectional barriers to behavioral internalization.

Equitable role modeling fosters inclusive classrooms by translating ethical principles into measurable outcomes. Key strategies include: (1) professional development with adaptable ethical frameworks, (2) active modeling using equity-centered pedagogy and accessible tech, and (3) collaborative refinement via peer observations and student feedback (Sofyan et al., [Citation2023](#)). These bridge theory and practice, ensuring inclusivity and ethical growth. Despite proven effectiveness, integrity-focused explicit instruction is underused in Education, while overreliance on implicit methods limits ethical internalization. Longitudinal studies across pedagogies, including hybrid models and teacher-shared growth narratives, could refine moral development frameworks, especially with systemic support for educator well-being.

## **Moral Responsibility:**

A person is morally responsible for their behavior, and holding others and ourselves responsible for actions and the consequences of actions, is a fundamental and familiar part of our moral practices and our interpersonal relationships.

The judgment that a person is morally responsible for their behavior involves—at least to a first approximation—attributing certain powers and capacities to that person, and viewing their behavior as arising, in the right way, from the fact that the person has, and has exercised, these powers and capacities. Whatever the correct account of the powers and capacities at issue (and canvassing different accounts is one task of this entry), their possession qualifies an agent as morally responsible in a general sense: that is, as one who may be morally responsible for particular exercises of agency. Normal adult human beings may possess the powers and capacities in question, and other agents (such as non-human animals and very young children) are generally taken to lack them.

To hold someone responsible involves—again, to a first approximation—responding to that person in ways that are made appropriate by the judgment that they are morally responsible. These responses often constitute instances of moral praise or moral blame (though there may be reason to allow for morally responsible behavior that is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy: Blame is a response that may follow on the judgment that a person is morally responsible for behavior that is wrong or bad, and praise is a response that may follow on the judgment that a person is morally responsible for behavior that is right or good.

## **Character building:**

The basic principles of civilization are being undermined. Family, education and community play important role in building good/bad character of every individual. In nuclear families where both parents work, it is not possible to meet all the expectations and needs of their child solely. In schools and colleges, students are members of small community that exerts a remarkable impact on their character building. Value education can help building good character of students and provide good human beings to the society. In this study, effort has been made to find out reasons behind unacceptable behavior of youth and also to provide solutions. This study has adopted both the primary and secondary data approach. The study has pointed out role of education and mainly role of teachers in character building of their students. The study strongly recommends involvement of teachers, colleges and universities in integration of value education in education system.

## **Professional Ethics:**

Professional ethics in education are fundamental to a robust educational framework. These ethics serve as a foundation for high-quality teaching and are crucial in developing the character and abilities of future generations. Based on the premise that professional ethics is part of the idea of professionalism, attention to

ethical codes has emerged in research . Within the research field, studies show that teachers' perceived ethical responsibility for the children in teaching relates to expressed ethical codes in several ways. French-Lee and Dooley identified that teachers in preschool developed their ethical reasoning in relation to a current ethical code through collegial discussion about ethical dilemmas. Another way of relating to codes is to depart from them when caring for the children requires. Social justice is according the main guiding light for early childhood teachers' professional ethics and takes precedence over formulations in ethical codes. In a Swedish context, the teachers' unions have formulated an ethical code, but it is quite unknown to most teachers.

## Components:

- **Teachers' Ethical Behaviour**

**Definition:** Behaviours exhibited by teachers that reflect ethical standards, including honesty, integrity, fairness, and respect.

**Measurement:** Survey items assessing perceptions of teachers' ethical conduct.

- **Student Perceptions**

**Definition:** How students view and interpret the ethical behaviour of their teachers. **Measurement:** Survey items capturing student attitudes and beliefs regarding their teachers' ethical conduct.

- **Academic Performance**

**Definition:** The level of achievement in academic tasks, measured through grades and self-reported academic success.

**Measurement:** Self-reported GPA, academic engagement, and motivation scales.

- **Personal Development**

**Definition:** The growth of personal attributes such as integrity, responsibility, empathy, and respect for others.

**Measurement:** Surveys measuring character traits through established scales.

## Implications for Educational Practice and Policy:

Important implications for educational practice and policy. Given the significant impact of ethical behaviour on both academic and character outcomes, it may be beneficial for educational institutions to incorporate ethical training into teacher preparation and professional development programs.

- **Incorporate Ethical Training:**

Educational institutions should integrate ethical training into teacher preparation and professional development programs to enhance teachers' awareness of ethical behaviour and its impact.

- **Encourage Reflective Practice:**

Teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their behaviour, practice ethical decision-making, and demonstrate key values like respect, fairness, and empathy in the classroom.

- **Establish Codes of Ethical Conduct:**

Institutions could create and enforce codes of ethical conduct to guide teachers in maintaining high ethical standards.

- **Prioritize Ethics in Teacher Evaluations:**

Policies could be developed to include ethical behaviour as a key criterion in teacher evaluations, highlighting its importance in educational success.

- **Reward Ethical Teaching:**

Recognize and reward teachers who exhibit strong ethical practices, fostering a culture that values ethical role modelling and encourages other educators.

## **Conclusion:**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of teacher ethics in student development, suggesting that ethical role is an influential factor in promoting both academic and character growth. By recognizing and supporting ethical behaviours in teachers, educational institutions can create a learning environment that nurtures motivated, ethically grounded students. This research provides a foundation for further exploration into ethical teaching practices, aiming ultimately to improve student outcomes and foster a more morally responsible generation. Professional ethics are vitally needed in the teaching profession. Teachers are also moral role models; their ethical behaviour can shape their students and society. The findings of this study suggest that a more formalized ethical framework is needed in educational institutions to best support integrity and accountability. Discussions of each other's practices can promote modelling by teacher educators, especially if this is done in a structured way, as in a professional development course. At the moment, however, these ideas are largely possibilities rather than realities. When it comes to using modelling new learning in teaching education, teacher educators are apparently still at the beginning of a long and challenging path. Indian value system has always given lot of importance to the social, economic and emotional aspects of life. It is therefore our moral responsibility to impart these values from generation to generation. Parents should explain the children facts of life. But though it is first responsibility of parents, to impart values in young generation, due to some understandable situations of parents, teachers have to take responsibility. Teachers themselves should understand. Teachers play important role in passing on moral and ethical value by own conduct as value education is not a subject to be taught, it should be inculcated through informal way

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