

# THE QUESTION OF MORAL VALUES AND DISCIPLINE FOR HIGH AND MIDDLE SCHOOL MOROCCAN STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** Even though all the previous ministerial documents have stressed the importance of integrating values in school, there are still myriad obstacles. Numerous studies have alerted that the Moroccan school is experiencing an intense moral crisis. Thus, this paper was an attempt to tackle the centrality of moral values in education and its intrinsic role in promoting discipline among high and middle school students. Specifically, it investigated the reasons behind the deterioration of student's morals in the last few years. This paper seeks to answer two important questions concerning the prominent manifestations of the disintegration of the value system within the school environment and the basic causes of this phenomenon. To test the hypothesis that student's decreasing discipline recently inside schools is attributed to media influence through its daily outlets on teenagers and the lack of a real and effective curriculum that focuses on teaching moral values, an online survey was distributed to 200 middle and high school teachers across Morocco. The survey analysis showed an agreement with the previous hypothesis, and the respondents added more causes that result in the degrading level of moral values among students. Finally, it was concluded that the moral values crisis in the school perimeter has accelerated in the last few years due to different reasons, mainly social, educational, and others concerned with the curriculum. The phenomenon needs to be taken into account by all the intervening parties, especially with the rising spread of social media and its direct effect on students. Otherwise, this will have a huge impact on the educational system.

**Keywords:** *moral values, educational system, students, discipline*

## Introduction

The concept of values in education as a system, in the modern school, is an important pillar of the success of the development of projects in which Morocco was involved in the third millennium because it aims to train learners according to the prevailing culture that helps students be active citizens with great morals. What the learner acquires in the school atmosphere in terms of skills, abilities, competencies, and methods of systematic behavior greatly contributes to building his personality in its various physical, psychological, social, and moral aspects. However, if students lack basic values and good behaviors without any sort of attention to the consequences, there will be no chance of creating a solid society that aspires to compete with developed societies. No one denies the fact that the Moroccan school has recently witnessed a radical shift concerning the student's behaviors and discipline, and almost all teachers complain about this issue. This problem has become a common feature within Moroccan schools and unprecedented juvenile delinquency has dominated all society. Students are no longer well-disciplined either inside or outside the class, a phenomenon which poses a lot of questions to trace back this problem and explore the major manifestations and reasons behind this. The decline in students' morals has worsened the crisis of the educational system which will also be reflected in the structure of society as a whole, given that students are the outcome of the educational system.

Concerning the same issue, some Moroccan scholars in the field have already discussed the crisis of values and the lack of discipline in Moroccan schools. Here, we

mention Hammani (2020) explained that the field of education in Morocco is characterized by fragility, and it lives on the rhythm of crises of values in all fields, which are structural crises that have become an incurable disease with eternal reasons. Moreover, in light of world changes in all domains, it has become obvious that the crisis has extended to the central part which is values. It should be mentioned that the Moroccan school is experiencing a collapse of value system and this is apparent in the aspects of violence and drug dealing within the school perimeter. Directing attention to the issue of values is a priority today for all those interested in thought, culture, and education, more than ever (Bouklah, 2020). The concern to protect cultural idiosyncrasies and an individual's identity has become more important than the concern for material and technical interests. This is due to the danger caused by the massive development of information and the digital revolution enhanced by social communication techniques. It is no longer a secret that most education and training systems in the world suffer from a severe crisis in the value system.

Thus, this paper is an attempt to address the centrality of moral values in education and their intrinsic role in promoting discipline among high and middle school students. Specifically, it investigates the reasons behind the deterioration of students' morals in the last few years. Students' decreasing discipline recently inside schools is attributed to media influence through its daily outlets on teenagers and the lack of a real and effective curriculum that focuses on teaching moral values. This research paper seeks to answer two important questions: what are the prominent manifestations of the disintegration of the value system within the Moroccan school environment and what are the basic causes of this phenomenon?

### ***Literature review***

#### ***Calues, morals and ethics, what difference?***

There is a good amount of literature discussing the slight and sometimes misleading difference between the three concepts. From the outside, they seem to hold the same meaning but in fact they have different meanings. However, with a bit of contemplation, the reader can deduce the difference between them, and this is what we are going to shed light on in this part. To begin with, values are defined as a principle that promotes well-being or prevents harm. In other words, “values are our guidelines for our success-our paradigm about what is acceptable” (Naagarazan, 2006). Values are also intractably connected to the concepts of norms and morals which indicate worth, preferences, and priorities and distinguish between what is desirable and what is not (Askeland et al., 2020). Likewise, values can be seen as a set of mental judgments that work to guide us toward our desires and directions, which are the result of the individual's acquisition from the daily societal acts and it works to motivate his behaviors. Human life is characterized by different kinds of values that exist in multiple domains and serve different purposes.

First, the discussion can talk about social values. They are a group of habits that have affected a person's life and have become a part of his existence that controls his actions and behaviors in terms of his personal and social interaction with others, his family, relatives, or friends. For example, one can say that a certain person holds a social value if they like people and has a tendency to offer help and love unconditionally. Moreover, there is also the personal value that refers to the kind of people who display their characteristics. Last but not least, there is an educational value that represents the

mental qualities of individuals. They are intrinsic to people's growth and self-independence, like curiosity, meditation, and mental development.

Having done with the term values, we come now to discuss morals and ethics. Moral values are the ethos, which we learn throughout the various levels of life. According to the oxford dictionary (1989), morals are “Of or pertaining to character or disposition, considered as good or bad, virtuous or vicious; of or pertaining to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, volitions, or character of responsible beings; ethical.” Moral values are the critical essence of life, and these values come along with us through the journey of life. Furthermore, moral values are considered the fundamentals that guide our lives in the righteous path and do not allow us to harm others (Prasanna, 2020). It is worth mentioning that sometimes morality is culturally bound, whereby an act may seem morally right in one culture and immoral in another society or environment. In this context, Barrow (2007) elucidates that the most obvious problem with the concept of morality is that people disagree about what behavior is or is not moral. One culture finds stoning adulterers to death morally shocking, another finds it morally incumbent. Overall, the values or moral values present a true perspective of the development of any society or nation. They tell us to what extent a society or nation has developed itself. In other words, a state that has a strong education with integration of moral values in its curriculum will be able to face the future with its technological and alerting changes and vice versa.

Additionally, ethics is another term that is confused with the above-mentioned terms, and some may go further and use them interchangeably. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that is used to study ideal human behavior and ideal ways of being (Rich, 2020). It is also a discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad, morally right and wrong (Singer, 2011). Put in another way, ethics is a system of values that guide an individual's life and take it to the highest human levels, and humans cannot achieve their humanistic essence only within an ethical discipline. In the same vein, researchers have concluded that throughout human history societies cannot straighten up without ethical values. McNamara (2012) demonstrates the difference between morals and ethics by saying that a person who knows the difference between right and wrong and chooses right is moral. He also substantiates that “A person whose morality is reflected in his willingness to do the right thing-even if it is hard or dangerous-is ethical.”

### ***The role of school in fostering student's moral values***

Throughout the ages, values have formed a frame of reference that governs and guides the behavior of individuals and their actions, as they preserve homogeneity and interdependence. One of the main reasons that has pushed attention to values is society's exposure to cultural globalization and the dissolution of values. It is necessary to establish a list of values to be able to define the values that we must strengthen and support and which values we need to modify and change to face the challenges of the future. Although the family carries out the process of socialization initially, the school remains the central institution that is created by the state to educate and teach young people the principles of science, ethics, and values. In addition, school assures that students get a good upbringing that helps them become good citizens, serving themselves, their community, and their nation. On the importance of school, Durkheim (1972) argued that schools were necessary for instilling shared social values into the minds of children. He also believed that schools would play a central role in forming modern societies. He stated:

*“Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that social life demands.”*

Given their essential role in the educational system, teachers are true agents of change within the school. Their main concern in their practice is to attempt to influence or teach students to be nice and kind to others, to behave well, and to understand and follow rules (Thornberg, 2008). They view values education as an everyday informal and ongoing process rather than as formal curriculum aspects of school subjects. It is so important to notice that morality nowadays has become a subject of discussion all over the world due to its centrality in education and the critical role it plays in student’s life. Various countries, including Morocco, are complaining about the slow development in education, despite the myriad attempts to fix all the problems and integrate new methods and plans to boost the quality of education. However, what lacks in those societies is a moral philosophy, or moral-based education, as it were. This crucial aspect is not given attention within the educational curriculum, which by itself hinders any development even if the students achieve great results in school subjects. As succinctly put by Noddings (2002):

*“Society does not need to make its children first in the world in mathematics and science. It needs to care for its children-to reduce violence, respect honest work of every kind, to reward excellence at every level, to ensure a place for every child and emerging adult in the economic and social world, to produce people who can care competently for their own families and contribute effectively to their communities.”*

In another context, Yulia (2018) elucidates that the central problems in education are attributed to moral education whereby the absence of societal knowledge of moral education will further exasperate and weaken society in the sense that it will morally become decadent. This is actually what the Moroccan school and society, in general, are going through. For example, as a teacher, author could see numerous cases of adolescent students whose behaviors inside the school are catastrophic. The use of bad words among teenagers has become a norm, not to mention the ratio of violence, which has been accelerated in the last few years. The state, as a major body where all decisions come from, has to adopt a new educational policy based on integrating some subjects that foster students’ morals. Therefore, the issue of teaching moral values has become a necessity if we want to avoid a moral crisis in the future.

### ***Manifestation of students’ morals decline in Moroccan school***

Human societies in this era are facing great challenges imposed by a set of local, regional and global variables. At the top comes the dominance of the forces of openness and globalization and amazing technical development. As expected, this has resulted in clear effects that have shaken our already broken value system. Moral values have begun to disappear, and they are replaced by new values coming from the West and have infiltrated our societies through media invasion. These values do not conform to our Arab and Islamic societies. Thus, a new crisis has been added to the problematic balance of these societies, known as the crisis of values. In light of all these, within the

school environment, we find several phenomena that clearly show the extent of the low morals of students.

First, there is the phenomenon of cheating in exams that has become uncontrollable. Despite all the efforts made by the ministry to eradicate this problem, year after year, we see that students make no effort because they have the intention from the beginning to cheat. Teachers complain about this phenomenon every year, and some even refuse to invigilate the exams just to avoid getting in conflict with students. Worse than this, some students have come to believe that it is a norm and they come to the exam well-equipped with the latest technological devices. Unfortunately, sometimes you feel that the ministry does not make enough efforts to stop this phenomenon, as if they want them to cheat, because what matters to the ministry after all is the ratio of success, especially at the level of the baccalaureate exam.

The second aspect of moral decay among students is the phenomenon of school violence. Educational institutions have suffered from the phenomenon of violence in the last few years. Almost every year, we see one case of violence within the school perimeter between either teacher-student or student-student. Violence may also have a negative impact be it material or moral either on teachers or students which will represent an obstacle for learning. The continuation of violence at this pace is a presumption that the school institution has been emptied of its historical tasks, whereby it has always been a source of knowledge and thought and gave birth to intellectuals. However, nowadays school has become a source of ignorance and ethical corruption. School violence is linked to the unprecedented decline in students' behaviors and guiding values. Although the higher council for education, training, and scientific research has insisted on the importance of values education, it has simultaneously confessed that the reality reveals several difficulties and imbalances. For example, the report of the council explains that there is a growing gap between the discourse on values, rights duties, and their actual practice. Therefore, it turns out that the theoretical discourse expressed in the directive's official and approved reference documents (national and international) occupies a large position with limited impact on behavior, which is the goal of education on values.

Additionally, a striking phenomenon that has widely spread in Moroccan schools is the problem of obscene speech among students. As soon as you are close to students or passing next to them, you only hear of indecency and bad words, which make you think that this is what they study in the courses and hear it in the classrooms. As a practitioner, I got used to hearing bad words almost every day either on my way to or inside the school. We can ask every teacher about this and you will get numerous accidents and stories, and they all complain about this rising phenomenon. This alarming issue poses many questions concerning whom to blame for this. Is it related to family, school, media, or society? Overall, all the above-mentioned aspects reflect the decline in students' moral values and have affected their behaviors in schools or even outside, which then becomes a societal issue. This also means that our educational system needs a radical and immediate overhaul. Having done with the theoretical part which has dealt with terminology overview to the concepts of values, ethics, and morals, the role of school in promoting moral values for the students, and the manifestations of students decreasing morals in the Moroccan school, the next part will be practical. It will discuss in details the outcome of the disseminated questionnaire to highlight the main reasons behind students' moral values deterioration.

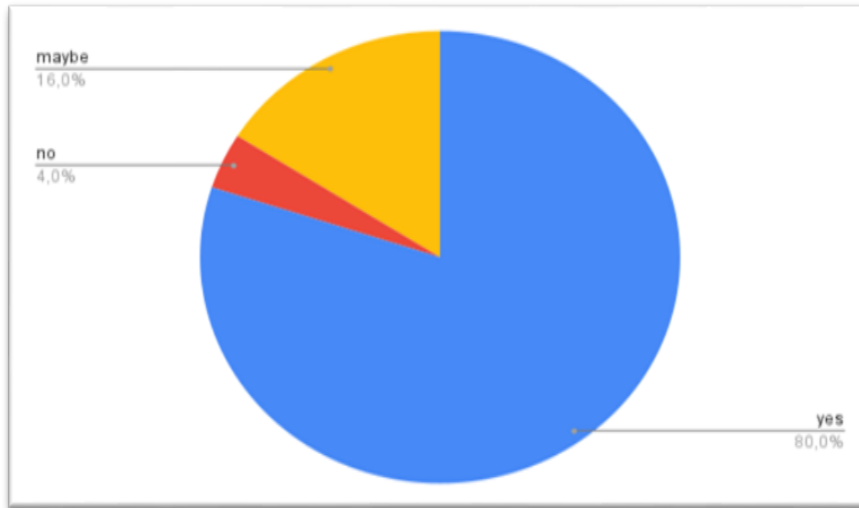
## Materials and Methods

As highlighted before, this paper tries to address the importance of moral values in education and their intrinsic role in promoting discipline among high and middle school students. Importantly, it investigates the reasons behind the deterioration of students' morals in the last few years in the Moroccan school. To know more about these reasons, this paper adopted a quantitative approach for gathering and generating suitable data. For the research design, an online questionnaire has been used as a data collection procedure to elicit quantitative information that would help address the reasons behind students' moral decline. The questionnaire has been designed using Google forms and it has been disseminated to 200 high and middle school teachers across Morocco via social media platforms (Whatsapp, Facebook groups) between the beginning of September and the first week of October. The questionnaire was distributed in the Arabic language given that the participants are not all of them familiar with the English language. However, it should be mentioned that only 100 teachers filled in the questionnaire due to summer holiday and also the reason that people do not seriously react to online documents.

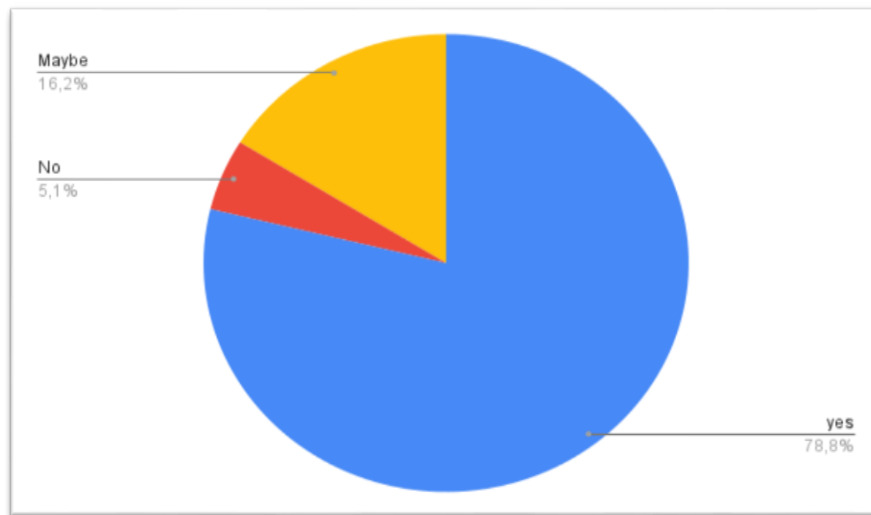
The questionnaire began with demographical information about the participants. It contained 10 different questions ranging from multiple choices, Likert scale to open-ended questions. These latter use statements to aid the respondents indicate how much they agree or disagree with that statement. Each question will be targets eliciting certain information that will help in the analysis of the problem at hand. The next part will be devoted to data analysis and the discussion of the obtained results. Each question will be dealt with separately.

## Results and Discussion

The result indicates the percentage of teachers who have answered the question regarding their views about the lack of discipline in the last few years (*Figure 1*). It can be seen that a great majority of respondents 80% agree that there is a decline in morals among students. Only 4% see that there is not any decline or deterioration in students' discipline. On the other hand, 16% of teachers are not sure if there has been any change in students' behaviors in the classroom or even outside. The researcher can deduce from the graph and the statistics above that there is an undeniable phenomenon of discipline. This idea is substantiated by the constant complaint from teachers about their student's decreasing discipline inside schools. The *Figure 2* shows that 78 teachers out of 100 believe that students in villages tend to be more disciplined than those in cities. On the other hand, only 5 (5%) think that pupils in cities are more likely to display good manners, whereas the rest (16%) answered with maybe. Despite the technological changes, students in small villages display good manners either in school or outside. The latter idea is demonstrated by the fact that families in villages pay heed attention to their children's ethics (conservative families). Students in big cities are more exposed to social media and their families give them unlimited freedom. Undeniably, nowadays teenagers and students, in general, do not care much about school and tend to display less importance to classroom ethics. However, due to the increasing addiction to social media outlets, even students in villages or remote areas have started to show an unprecedented way of behaving.



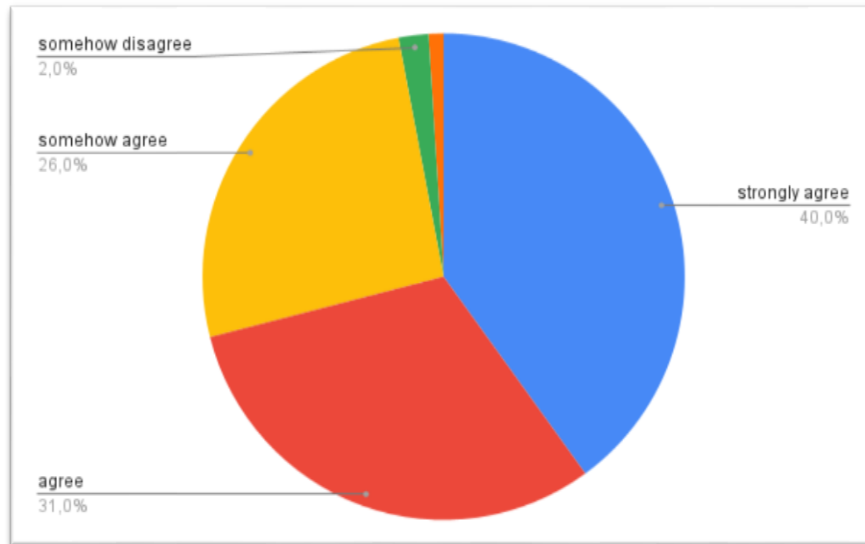
**Figure 1.** Moral values of students have declined in the past few years.



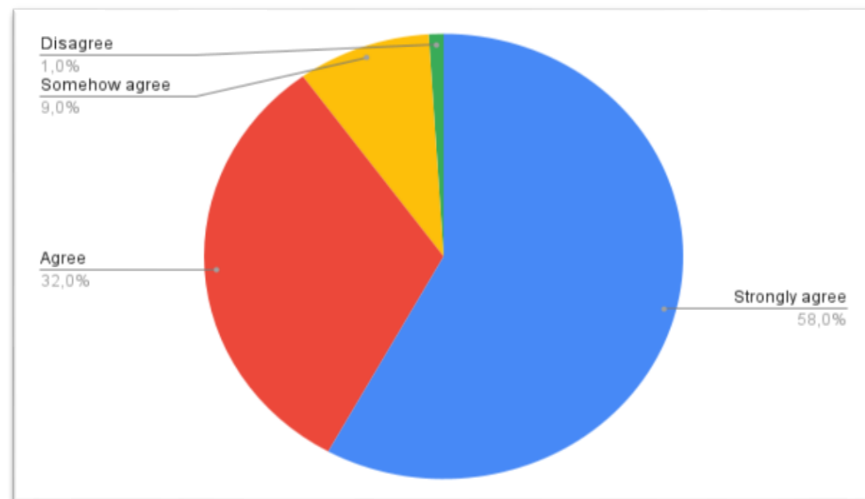
**Figure 2.** Students in villages more disciplined and good manners compared in big cities.

Next, the result in which participants were asked to state how much they agree or disagree with the above statement (*Figure 3*). As observed from the figure, a dominating ratio of respondents between strongly agrees and somehow agrees 97% accord with the above statement. Opposed to this, only a small minority of participants somehow disagree (2%). Students have become deeply addicted to social media, receiving unacceptable comments, pictures, and videos. They have become indulged in a world of picture and rap culture which is full of obscene words that has also become a norm among teenagers. Moreover, students' use of Facebook and TikTok has been accelerated which has given them a ground to imitate westerner songs and other content. In brief, the rising use of social networks is strikingly affecting teenagers' behaviors due to the uncensored content they receive. The next statement that was used in the questionnaire is related to family and its responsibility toward children's moral deterioration (*Figure 4*). It seeks to generate teachers' opinions and to what extent they agree or disagree. As demonstrated in the graph, 58% out of the 100% strongly agree while 32% agree with the above statement. These numbers prove that the lack of parent guidance leads to the decline of their children's morals; whereas only 1% disagrees.

Undeniably, the family's role in children's upbringing is being shrunken more than any time in history. Parents have almost lost control over their children which opens the door for unwanted freedom that would ultimately spoil their manners. Children pick from the street what they see, emulating all sorts of bad things; they are obsessed with their phones and games, which is another cause.



**Figure 3.** *The excessive use of social networks has direct and negative impact on student's behaviors.*

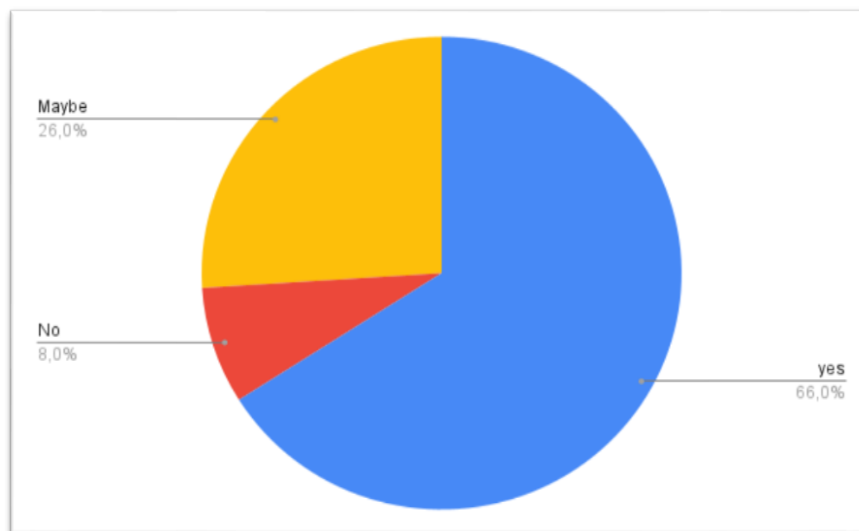


**Figure 4.** *The absence of family role in raising children results in morals deterioration.*

As demonstrated in the *Figure 5*, 66% of teachers perceive that students decreasing discipline is attributed to the lack of a moral-based curriculum. Only 8% of the respondents answered with no, whereas 26% are not sure if the absence of teaching morals in school can be considered a contributive factor to the problem of discipline. It can be deduced then that school programs do not give much importance to subjects that teach students moral values and ethics in general. The ministry stresses the teaching and integration of scientific subjects while ignoring the moral side which is more important.



As a result, our society is living in a crisis of morals among teenagers and it's rising which will have an effect in the long term.



**Figure 5.** Lack of an effective curriculum based on teaching moral values is the reason behind the decline of school discipline.

In this particular question, the purpose is to elicit more reasons that contributed to students' deterioration of certain ethics and classroom discipline in general. Different answers can be summarized as: (1) there are social causes such as family disintegration, domestic violence, and drug addiction; (2) lack of awareness of the importance and role of teachers on the part of some families; (3) absence of school subjects that take into account the moral aspect of the learner; (4) school courses lack the integration of religious and Islamic values in the curriculum and its hours are few in the academic program; (5) families' negligence and evasion of their responsibility to raise their children; (6) extreme tolerance with students and ignoring their lack of discipline within institutions; (7) the collapse of the educational sector and its role in society, as well as the moral collapse in social networking sites directly affects the morals of learners; (8) the second reason is related to the school's relationship with the public and society in general, and the deterioration of moral values in the classroom is nothing but the result of the deterioration of the general morals of Moroccan society; as well as (9) what do you suggest as a solution to limit the disintegration of moral values and ways to strengthen school discipline?

It is worth mentioning that the aim behind this question is to give the participants a chance to propose solutions that are effective and may be of great use to eradicate the problem of discipline among students. As stated before, the answers of the participants were in Arabic and they have been translated into English. Below are some of the suggestions: (1) putting pressure on parents to reconsider the way they treat their children; (2) stand firmly and strongly against any unethical practice from within the institution by activating the procedure of the Disciplinary Council; (3) applying strictness by the administration with any negligent student; (4) monitoring the media and preventing it from everything that would contribute to the deterioration of moral values; (5) rehabilitation of teachers, raising their value, and punishing anyone who is tempted to infringe on their dignity; (6) a curriculum that gives utmost importance to spreading moral, educational, and social values; as well as (7) the creation of listening

and accompaniment cells within institutions supervised by specialists in psychology and sociology.

## Conclusion

The concept of values in education as a system, in the modern school, remains an important pillar of the success of the development of projects in which Morocco was involved in the third millennium because it aims to train learners according to the prevailing culture that helps students be active citizens with great morals. What the learner acquires in the school atmosphere in terms of skills, abilities, competencies, and methods of systematic behavior greatly contributes to building their personality in its various physical, psychological, social, and moral aspects. However, if students lack basic values and good behaviors without any sort of attention to the consequences, there will be no chance in creating a solid society that aspires to compete with developed societies. In light of all that has been said, the ministry or the government must interfere and legislate some strict laws that would get the school its reputation and put an end to such degrading morals of the students by looking for other alternatives. Finally, Families should also find a way to teach their children good manners and limit their freedom by guiding them toward what is good for them and their future.

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## Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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