

School Culture, Moral Formation, and Learner Discipline in Seventh-day Adventist Basic Schools in Ghana

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Abstract: *Mission schools are expected to shape learner character through more than classroom instruction alone. They are designed to influence conduct, habits, discipline, and spiritual life through the wider school culture. This study examined how school culture influences moral formation and learner discipline in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with supportive contextual interviews. Data were drawn from 250 learners in five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Fanteakwa North and South Districts of the Eastern Region of Ghana, together with contextual evidence from school personnel. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and interview guide and analysed using frequencies, percentages, and descriptive interpretation. The findings showed that the selected schools retained some value visibility, since many learners had heard the doctrines of the church in school. However, doctrinal exposure was uneven, many learners had limited knowledge of core beliefs, and a large majority perceived falling doctrinal standards. Learners also linked failure to practise school doctrines with weak moral life and academic difficulties, and many supported stronger teaching and enforcement of selected doctrines. The study concludes that moral formation in mission schools is best understood as a school culture issue rather than as a narrow religion lesson issue. When school culture is coherent, values are reinforced through routines, relationships, adult example, discipline, and doctrinal instruction. When school culture is weak, mission identity becomes fragile and learner discipline weakens. The study contributes to literature on faith based schooling by showing that school culture, doctrine teaching, and moral discipline are closely interconnected in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools. It also offers practical recommendations for school leaders, teachers, church educational authorities, and local managers.*

Keywords: school culture, moral formation, learner discipline, Seventh-day Adventist basic schools' schools, value education, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Schools shape more than academic knowledge. They also shape habits, conduct, discipline, relationships, and moral judgement. This broader formative role becomes especially important in mission schools because such schools are expected to support whole person development. They seek not only to prepare learners intellectually, but also to cultivate moral character, spiritual seriousness, and disciplined conduct.

The concept of school culture is central to this task. School culture refers to the pattern of values, expectations, norms, routines, habits, and relationships that develop within the life of a school. It includes both formal and informal elements. Formal elements include rules, assemblies, worship, routines, and codes of conduct. Informal elements include adult example, peer expectations, tone of interaction, and the everyday moral atmosphere experienced by learners. In this sense, school culture is one of the main ways by which institutions communicate what kind of life is expected within them.

Recent scholarship shows that values and character are formed across the wider school environment rather than through isolated classroom lessons alone. Döring et al. (2024) found that teachers promote values through multiple channels across the school context, including classroom interaction, wider school ethos, and daily practice. Their study suggests that values become meaningful to learners when they are embedded across school life. This is important for mission schools because such schools depend heavily on the consistency of their culture.

Research on character and values education reinforces this point. Fernández Espinosa and López González (2024) found that virtues and values education in schools requires intentional educational practice rather than symbolic aspiration. Kropfreiter et al. (2024) similarly found that teachers regard character education as important, but its implementation depends on supportive institutional conditions. These findings suggest that moral formation is not a natural by product of school existence. It depends on deliberate cultural work.

In mission schools, discipline is closely related to this cultural work. Discipline is not only a system of punishment. It is also a moral and educational process through which learners are guided into patterns of self control, responsibility, respect, and obedience to shared norms. Christian education literature has long linked discipline with discipleship, and more recent scholarship continues to suggest that school climate, relationships, and values significantly affect behaviour and adjustment (Chan, 2023; Welsh et al., 2024). This means that learner discipline in mission schools should be examined not only as a behaviour problem, but also as an outcome of school culture.

These concerns are especially relevant in the context of Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana. Many mission schools were established with a strong moral and spiritual purpose. Yet changing educational pressures, staffing realities, inconsistent doctrine teaching, and weak institutional reinforcement may reduce their ability to shape learner character in the way they were intended to do. The present study addresses this concern by examining school culture, moral formation, and learner discipline in five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Fanteakwa North and South Districts of Ghana.

Problem Statement

School culture plays a major role in shaping learner character because values are formed not only through formal teaching but also through routines, norms, habits, example, and discipline within the school

environment. Recent research shows that values are reinforced through the wider school ethos and that school climate is closely related to student engagement, emotional competence, social behaviour, and academic functioning (Döring et al., 2024; Chan, 2023; Delgado-Galindo et al., 2025). In mission school settings, this role becomes even more important because the school is expected to support moral education, disciplined conduct, and whole person development.

However, evidence from the study setting suggests that this culture building role is weakening. The schools under study were perceived to be experiencing falling doctrinal standards, weak doctrinal knowledge among learners, and concerns about indiscipline and immorality. Learners reported that many doctrines were not being taught consistently, and a large majority perceived that doctrinal standards were falling. The study also found that many learners believed failure to teach and practise school doctrines affected their moral and academic lives. These conditions point to a significant school culture problem rather than a narrow doctrinal problem alone.

The research gap addressed in this study is that although scholarship has examined school climate, values education, discipline, and religious schooling, limited empirical work in Ghana has examined how school culture, moral formation, and learner discipline interact in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools. Existing discussions often treat doctrine teaching, leadership, or discipline separately. Less attention has been given to the way school culture ties these together in a faith based school setting. This study addresses that gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how school culture influences moral formation and learner discipline in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine how school culture influences moral formation and learner discipline in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana.
2. To identify school culture practices that can strengthen moral education, discipline, and positive learner behaviour in mission schools.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does school culture influence moral formation and learner discipline in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana?
2. What school culture practices can strengthen moral education, discipline, and positive learner behaviour in mission schools?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it reframes a doctrinal concern as a school culture issue. It shows that moral formation in mission schools depends not only on what learners are told, but also on what they repeatedly experience through routines, adult example, school expectations, and discipline. The study also

contributes evidence from a Ghanaian context that remains under examined in international research on faith based education, school climate, and character formation.

Contribution of the Study

The study makes three contributions. Conceptually, it links school culture, moral formation, and learner discipline within one analytical frame. Empirically, it provides school based evidence from five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana. Practically, it identifies school culture practices that may help strengthen moral education and discipline in mission schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Review

School Culture

School culture refers to the shared patterns of meaning, behaviour, expectations, routines, and relationships that shape life in a school. It includes visible elements such as worship, assemblies, uniforms, rules, sanctions, and ceremonies, but it also includes less visible elements such as tone of interaction, adult example, peer norms, and collective moral expectations. A school may formally declare certain values, yet what learners actually absorb depends on how those values are embodied in the daily environment.

This makes school culture central to value based education. Döring et al. (2024) showed that values are promoted through many aspects of school life, not only through formal lessons. Their work suggests that school culture functions as a living medium through which values are normalised, reinforced, or weakened. For mission schools, this is especially important because their distinctive identity depends on daily cultural consistency.

School culture also affects how learners experience discipline. Where norms are clear, routines are stable, and adult behaviour is consistent, discipline is more likely to be internalised as part of shared school life. Where school culture is weak or contradictory, discipline becomes less educational and more reactive. This distinction is highly relevant in mission schools, where discipline is meant to support moral and spiritual formation.

Moral Formation

Moral formation refers to the process through which learners develop habits, judgements, dispositions, and patterns of conduct that shape ethical living. In school settings, this includes qualities such as honesty, respect, responsibility, reverence, self control, and care for others. Moral formation is not simply about teaching rules. It is about helping learners internalise a way of life.

Recent studies on values and character education suggest that moral formation requires intentional practice. Fernández Espinosa and López González (2024) show that virtues and values education must be integrated meaningfully into educational life if it is to shape behaviour. Kropfleiter et al. (2024) likewise found that teachers value character education but need institutional support if they are to carry it out effectively. These findings suggest that moral formation is strongest where the school culture supports it consistently.

In mission schools, moral formation often has an explicitly religious dimension. Values are linked not only to social conduct, but also to faith, spiritual identity, and the moral expectations of the sponsoring tradition.

This gives mission schools a distinctive responsibility. They must not only teach morality in general terms, but also connect moral conduct to a larger spiritual framework.

Learner Discipline

Learner discipline refers to patterns of conduct, self regulation, obedience to shared norms, and behaviour consistent with the expectations of the school. In many schools, discipline is treated mainly as a matter of behaviour management. In mission schools, however, discipline often carries a broader moral meaning. It is linked with character, respect, reverence, and self control.

Recent research continues to show that school climate affects discipline related outcomes. Chan (2023) found that perceived school climate was positively associated with academic engagement and emotional competence. Welsh et al. (2024) similarly show that school climate is closely related to discipline conditions and exclusionary experiences. These findings suggest that discipline in schools is shaped not only by rules, but also by the quality of the school environment and relationships.

Mission schools are particularly sensitive to this issue because their educational purpose includes the formation of disciplined and morally serious learners. When school culture weakens, discipline is likely to weaken as well.

Doctrine Teaching, Culture, and Discipline

Doctrine teaching in mission schools is not only about information transfer. It is also part of moral culture building. Through doctrine teaching, schools communicate identity, explain expected ways of life, and anchor moral conduct in a larger worldview. In the present study context, doctrinal teaching includes beliefs such as the Sabbath, the Trinity, creation, and the Ten Commandments.

The significance of doctrine teaching lies in its cultural role. Where doctrine is taught regularly and connected to daily school life, it can support identity, discipline, and moral seriousness. Where doctrine is weakly taught or inconsistently practised, it loses its formative power. This helps explain why doctrinal decline in mission schools may be associated with indiscipline and immorality.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by school culture theory and social learning theory.

School culture theory is useful because it explains how values, norms, and behaviours become embedded in institutional life. It suggests that learners are shaped not only by formal instruction, but also by the wider environment of expectations, relationships, habits, and routines. In mission schools, school culture theory helps explain why values are either sustained or diluted across daily school life.

Social learning theory complements this by focusing on modelling and reinforcement. Learners observe how adults behave, how rules are enforced, and how institutional values are treated in practice. They internalise norms partly through watching credible examples and experiencing repeated reinforcement. In the context of mission schools, this means that teachers, headteachers, and other adults act as powerful carriers of moral and doctrinal influence.

Together, these theories suggest that school culture shapes learner discipline and moral formation through repeated exposure to norms, role models, routines, and value laden environments. If school culture is

coherent and supportive, learners are more likely to internalise discipline and moral values. If it is weak or contradictory, moral formation becomes fragile.

Empirical Review

Recent empirical studies offer strong support for the view that values are transmitted across the school environment. Döring et al. (2024) found that teachers promote values through different methods across all areas of school life. This supports the argument that values in schools are not carried only through formal lessons. They are also communicated through routines, relationships, teacher actions, and school ethos.

Research on character education also reinforces this argument. Fernández Espinosa and López González (2024) found that schools contribute to virtues and values education when they treat it as a deliberate educational project. Kropfleiter et al. (2024) similarly report that teachers regard character education as important, but institutional barriers can weaken implementation. These findings suggest that moral formation depends on school conditions and is unlikely to flourish without intentional support.

Religious education scholarship adds another dimension. Metcalfe and Moulin-Stožek (2021) found that religious education teachers consider character education important, though they also need support in carrying it out effectively. Their findings are relevant to mission schools because they suggest that religious and moral education require more than goodwill. They require clarity, institutional support, and educational consistency.

The literature on school climate and learner outcomes also supports the present study. Chan (2023) found that positive school climate is associated with academic engagement and emotional competence. Welsh et al. (2024) show that school climate and discipline are closely related, especially in relation to exclusionary outcomes and students' sense of the school environment. Delgado-Galindo et al. (2025) likewise found that positive school climate is important for academic performance and the quality of school life. These studies together suggest that school culture and climate influence both learning and behaviour.

Research on religious value identification offers further support. Vaknin and Schachter (2024) found that school climate and school-home identity fit influence students' identification with religious values. Their study shows that values are more likely to be internalised when the school environment is coherent with the moral and religious identity it claims. This is particularly relevant for mission schools, where weak cultural coherence may undermine both doctrine teaching and learner conduct.

Studies on behaviour and religious schooling also provide useful insight. Siddique (2024) found that long term exposure to religious schooling can influence aspects of children's behaviour and social preferences. Although the context differs from Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana, the broader implication is that faith based educational environments can shape behaviour when their moral and social norms are consistently experienced.

Another relevant strand of literature concerns teacher learner relationships and behaviour. Elizarov et al. (2023) found that teacher child relational conflict is associated with maladaptive social behaviours, depending partly on children's values. This suggests that adult relationships in school matter greatly for behaviour formation. In mission schools, this further reinforces the importance of culture, role modelling, and relational consistency.

The empirical literature therefore supports a broad conclusion. School culture, values education, discipline, and moral formation are deeply intertwined. Yet there remains limited evidence from Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana that examines these issues together. This study addresses that gap.

Research Gap

Three important gaps remain in the literature. First, much recent research on school culture and moral formation comes from settings outside Ghana, leaving Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana under represented. Second, many studies examine values education, school climate, or discipline separately. Fewer studies analyse how these interact in a faith based school context. Third, there is limited school specific research that examines how mission school culture influences both moral formation and learner discipline at the basic school level. This study addresses these gaps by examining school culture, moral formation, and discipline together in five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual logic of this study is that school culture influences moral formation and learner discipline through doctrine teaching, adult example, routines, rules, relationships, and institutional expectations. School culture in this framework includes worship practices, doctrinal teaching, school traditions, examples set by adults, habituation into moral routines, discipline practices, and the overall tone of school life. These cultural conditions shape two key outcomes. The first is moral formation, reflected in learner awareness of values, seriousness about school beliefs, and the perceived moral effect of obeying or failing to obey school doctrines. The second is learner discipline, reflected in conduct, self regulation, and behaviour consistent with school norms. Where school culture is coherent, both outcomes are strengthened. Where school culture is weak, both are weakened.

METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with supportive contextual interviews. The learner survey provided information on doctrinal awareness, doctrinal decline, value teaching, and the moral implications learners associated with school doctrines. The contextual interviews provided supporting evidence on staffing conditions and school practices. This design was appropriate because the study sought to describe the state of school culture and its relationship to moral and disciplinary concerns in a natural school setting. It did not seek to manipulate variables experimentally. Rather, it investigated the phenomenon as it existed in the selected mission schools.

Study Setting / Context

The study was conducted in five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Fanteakwa North and South Districts in the Eastern Region of Ghana. These schools were selected because they represented the mission school context under investigation and because concerns had been raised locally about doctrinal decline, indiscipline, and weak moral formation. The mission school environment in the area was therefore a suitable context for examining school culture and learner discipline.

Population

The target population comprised 250 learners from the five selected Seventh-day Adventist basic schools . The learners were drawn from upper primary and junior high school levels and were between 10 and 16 years old. This population was suitable because learners at these levels were able to respond to questions about what was taught in school, how often doctrines were emphasised, and how school values affected their lives. The study also drew contextual information from staff and headteachers in the selected schools. This allowed the analysis to move beyond learner perceptions alone and to include institutional background on staffing and school culture.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used a sample of 250 learners from the five selected Seventh-day Adventist basic schools . The schools were selected purposively because they were directly relevant to the problem under study. Within the schools, learners were selected across upper primary and junior high school levels using stratified and probability based procedures so that the sample represented the targeted learner groups. The preserved distribution indicates that 50 respondents were from upper primary and 200 from junior high school. Contextual interview evidence was also drawn from selected staff and school leaders in the schools. This evidence was used mainly to clarify staffing composition and related culture conditions.

Data Collection Instrument / Sources

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire with 51 items. The questionnaire gathered data on doctrinal awareness, doctrinal knowledge, learner views about the decline of standards, doctrines that should be taught more often, perceived effects of doctrine observance on moral and academic life, and related school conditions. The second source of data was an interview guide used with selected school personnel. These interviews provided contextual information about staffing, religious identity, and the factors believed to contribute to falling doctrinal standards and weak value transmission.

Measures / Variables

The main constructs in this article were school culture, moral formation, and learner discipline. School culture was operationalised through learner exposure to doctrines, visibility of doctrines in school life, views on which doctrines should be taught more often, and support for stronger doctrinal enforcement. Moral formation was operationalised through learners' beliefs that observance or non observance of doctrines affects moral life, character, and seriousness of conduct. Learner discipline was examined through the study's broader concern with falling standards, indiscipline, immorality, and the perceived role of school doctrines in shaping conduct. Because the study was descriptive, these variables were examined primarily through frequencies, percentages, and interpretive analysis rather than through inferential modelling.

Validity and Reliability / Trustworthiness

Face and content validity were established before the main administration. The instrument was reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. School leaders and learners in comparable settings examined the items for clarity, while academic supervision strengthened content alignment. The preserved study materials do not report a scale reliability coefficient. For this reason, the findings are interpreted cautiously as descriptive survey evidence. Trustworthiness in the contextual

interview component was strengthened by convergence between the staff evidence and the learner survey results.

Data Collection Procedure

After institutional access had been obtained, the researcher visited the five selected mission schools and administered the questionnaire to the selected learners. The purpose of the study was explained and learners were guided through the response process. The researcher also conducted contextual interviews with selected staff and school heads. These interviews provided background information on religious staffing composition, school culture practices, and concerns about weak doctrinal and moral standards.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Frequencies and percentages were generated and the results were presented through tables and descriptive interpretation. Because the study was primarily descriptive, the analysis focused on patterns of response rather than on causal modelling. The interview evidence was used contextually to support interpretation of the learner data, especially where staffing patterns and school practices helped explain the survey findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the relevant school authorities before fieldwork began. Learners were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality. Participation was handled respectfully, and the data were used strictly for academic purposes. Sensitivity was especially important because the schools belonged to a religious educational tradition and the study dealt with issues related to school identity and moral life.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

The study drew on responses from 250 learners from five selected Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Fanteakwa North and South Districts. The respondents included upper primary and junior high school learners between 10 and 16 years old. According to the preserved distribution, 50 respondents were from upper primary and 200 were from junior high school.

Table 1*Respondent Profile*

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|--|-----------|------------|
| Total learner respondents | All learners | 250 | 100.0 |
| School level | Upper primary | 50 | 20.0 |
| | Junior high school | 200 | 80.0 |
| Number of schools | Selected Seventh-day Adventist basic schools | 5 | 100.0 |
| Age range | 10 to 16 years | 250 | 100.0 |

The respondent profile indicates that the study captured the views of learners with enough school exposure to comment meaningfully on school values, discipline, and moral life.

4.2 School Culture as Doctrinal Exposure and Value Visibility

A first indicator of school culture was whether learners had heard of the doctrines of the church in the school. The results show that 194 learners, representing 77.6%, had heard the doctrines before. Thirteen learners, representing 5.2%, had not heard them at all, while the remaining 43 learners, representing 17.2%, had heard them only occasionally or once.

Table 2*Learners' Exposure to Doctrinal Teaching in School*

| Response category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Have heard the doctrines before | 194 | 77.6 |
| Have not heard the doctrines before | 13 | 5.2 |
| Heard them only occasionally or once | 43 | 17.2 |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 |

The findings show that mission values were present in the school environment, but not consistently enough to ensure equal exposure for all learners. This suggests a mixed school culture: value visibility existed, but it was not yet deep or regular enough to produce strong common understanding.

4.3 Learners' Knowledge of Core Beliefs

The study also assessed how far learners knew the number of the school's core beliefs. The results show that 78 learners, representing 31.2%, gave the correct answer of 28 fundamental beliefs. Forty-nine learners, or 19.6%, responded with 26. Fifteen learners, or 6.0%, could not decide, while 89 learners, or 35.6%, had no idea.

Table 3*Learners' Knowledge of the Number of Fundamental Beliefs*

| Response category | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 28 fundamental beliefs | 78 | 31.2 |
| 26 fundamental beliefs | 49 | 19.6 |
| Could not decide | 15 | 6.0 |
| Had no idea | 89 | 35.6 |
| Other or missing responses | 19 | 7.6 |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 |

This finding indicates that doctrinal awareness had not translated into strong doctrinal understanding for many learners. In a mission school context, this suggests that school culture was carrying some religious identity markers, but not enough to ensure clear knowledge of core beliefs.

Learners' Perception of Falling Standards and Weakening Moral Culture

The strongest finding in the study concerned the perceived decline in doctrinal standards. Two hundred and ten learners, representing 84%, agreed that doctrinal standards were falling in the mission schools, while 40 respondents, representing 16%, disagreed.

Table 4*Learners' Perception of Falling Doctrinal Standards*

| Response category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Agree that doctrinal standards are falling | 210 | 84.0 |
| Disagree that doctrinal standards are falling | 40 | 16.0 |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 |

This result is highly significant because it shows that learners themselves experienced a weakening of the school's moral and doctrinal culture. In mission schools, falling doctrinal standards are rarely only doctrinal matters. They usually point to a wider weakening of school norms, seriousness, and behavioural expectations.

Learners' Moral Expectations and Preferred Value Emphases

The learners were asked which doctrines needed to be stressed more often in school. The highest response was the Sabbath, followed by the Ten Commandments and the Trinity. Some respondents wanted all three to be stressed together.

Table 5*Doctrines Learners Wanted Taught More Often*

| Doctrine | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Sabbath | 50 |
| Ten Commandments | 25 |
| Trinity | 15 |
| All three together | 10 |

This finding is important because it shows that learners were not rejecting the religious culture of the school. On the contrary, many wanted stronger emphasis on the beliefs they associated with the school's moral and spiritual identity.

Doctrinal Practice, Discipline, and Moral Life

The study also explored whether learners supported stronger enforcement of selected doctrines. The results show that 61.2% of the respondents supported stronger enforcement, while 38.8% did not.

Table 6*Support for Stronger Enforcement of Selected Doctrines*

| Response category | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Support stronger enforcement | 61.2 |
| Do not support stronger enforcement | 38.8 |

The descriptive narrative of the study further indicates that many learners believed failure to obey school doctrines affected their moral and academic life. This suggests that doctrine teaching and discipline were seen as connected. Learners did not treat doctrine simply as information. They linked it to behaviour, seriousness, and school life.

School Culture and Adult Mediation

The contextual interview evidence adds an important dimension to the results. The study found that approximately 80% of the interviewed staff were non-Adventist.

Table 7*Religious Identity of Interviewed Staff Members*

| Staff identity category | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Adventist staff | 1 | 20.0 |
| Non-Adventist staff | 4 | 80.0 |
| Total interviewed staff | 5 | 100.0 |

This matters for school culture because culture is carried by adults. If many of the adults in the school are not fully aligned with the school's doctrines or moral expectations, then the school's value environment may weaken. This does not mean that non-Adventist staff cannot contribute positively. It means that mission school culture requires stronger systems of induction, role modelling, and reinforcement if staffing diversity is high.

Integrated Interpretation of the Results

Four integrated findings emerge from the results. First, the schools retained some visible religious culture, since most learners had heard the doctrines before. Second, this culture was not strong enough to ensure shared understanding, as shown by limited learner knowledge of the core beliefs. Third, learners perceived a major weakening of doctrinal standards, suggesting that school culture itself was under strain. Fourth, many learners still wanted stronger doctrinal teaching and enforcement, indicating that the weakness lay more in institutional transmission than in learner rejection. Taken together, these findings suggest that school culture in the selected mission schools still carried recognisable religious symbols, but not enough consistent moral and disciplinary force to sustain strong learner formation.

DISCUSSION**Interpretation of Findings**

The findings suggest that moral formation and learner discipline in mission schools cannot be separated from school culture. The most powerful result in the study was that 84% of the learners perceived doctrinal standards to be falling. This indicates that the weakening of the school's moral and religious environment was visible to learners and was not simply an adult concern.

The result on doctrinal exposure adds nuance to this conclusion. Most learners had heard the doctrines before, but exposure was uneven. This means that the schools retained some religious identity markers, but not enough to make value transmission systematic. In mission schools, values are expected to be embedded across school life. Where learners hear doctrines only occasionally, school culture is likely to be symbolic rather than deeply formative.

The limited doctrinal knowledge among learners supports this interpretation. Many learners did not know the number of the school's core beliefs. This suggests that the school culture was not reinforcing doctrinal identity strongly enough. Values may have been visible, but they had not been internalised widely. Döring et al. (2024) show that values are promoted through the whole school environment. The present study suggests that this whole environment may have been too weak or inconsistent to produce strong understanding.

The learners' preference for stronger teaching of the Sabbath, the Ten Commandments, and the Trinity is especially important. It shows that many learners still looked to the school for moral and spiritual guidance. This is a critical finding because it means the weakening of school culture cannot be explained simply by student indifference. Rather, learners appear to have been asking for a stronger culture than the one they were experiencing.

The finding that many learners supported stronger enforcement of selected doctrines, and that many believed failure to obey doctrines affected their moral and academic life, also points to the close relationship among values, discipline, and school culture. Learners did not separate moral life from school beliefs. They seemed to understand that when values weaken, conduct and seriousness also weaken.

The staff identity evidence makes this picture clearer. School culture is carried not only by rules and lessons, but also by the adults who inhabit the school. The finding that about 80% of interviewed staff were non-Adventist suggests that cultural transmission may have lacked strong alignment. In mission schools, adults play a vital role in giving moral expectations credibility. If adult identity and school mission are weakly aligned, school culture may become less coherent and learner discipline may weaken as a result.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings align strongly with Astuti et al. (2020), who found that religious character education is strengthened when leaders and teachers model values and integrate them into school life. The present study suggests that this same kind of intentionality may have been too weak in the selected schools.

The findings also support Döring et al. (2024), whose work shows that values are transmitted across many parts of the school environment. In the current study, the uneven doctrinal exposure and limited learner understanding suggest that the wider environment was not reinforcing mission values strongly enough.

The study also resonates with Fernández Espinosa and López González (2024), who found that values education in schools must be treated as an intentional educational project. Kropfreiter et al. (2024) similarly argue that institutional support is necessary for character education to work well. The current findings fit these arguments because the mission schools appeared to have a moral aspiration, but not a strong enough school culture to deliver it consistently.

The discipline aspect of the findings aligns with recent climate research. Chan (2023) found that positive school climate is associated with engagement and emotional competence. Welsh et al. (2024) show that climate matters greatly for discipline related outcomes. Delgado-Galindo et al. (2025) likewise emphasise that positive school climate supports academic performance and school quality. The present study adds a faith based school perspective to this literature by showing that doctrinal and moral culture are part of the climate through which discipline is shaped.

The findings also support Vaknin and Schachter (2024), who show that school climate and identity fit influence student identification with religious values. In the mission school context studied here, weak doctrinal exposure and limited adult alignment appear to have reduced the strength of learners' value identification.

Finally, the result that moral and academic life were perceived as connected to doctrinal practice finds support in Siddique (2024), whose study suggests that religious schooling can shape aspects of behaviour when moral and social norms are consistently experienced. Although contexts differ, the general insight is

relevant: educational environments shaped by faith can influence conduct, but only when their culture is coherent enough to carry that influence.

Theoretical Implications

The study supports both school culture theory and social learning theory. From a school culture perspective, the findings show that values are either strengthened or weakened through the wider environment of school life. Mission school identity cannot be sustained only through formal labels. It must be lived through routines, relationships, and institutional expectations.

From a social learning perspective, the findings show that learners are shaped by what they observe and experience. If adults, school structures, and routines reinforce mission values, learners are more likely to internalise them. If adult behaviour and institutional patterns are inconsistent, learners receive mixed messages and value transmission weakens.

The study also extends current thinking on mission education by showing that discipline should be analysed as part of value transmission rather than as a separate administrative matter. In mission schools, learner discipline is part of moral formation and is therefore deeply tied to school culture.

Practical Implications

The findings carry practical implications for school leaders, church authorities, and policy actors.

First, mission schools need to treat school culture as a central area of leadership work. Values cannot be assumed to survive on their own. They must be reinforced through regular routines, visible expectations, and clear leadership. Second, doctrinal teaching needs to become more systematic. The evidence that learners had uneven exposure and limited doctrinal knowledge suggests that schools should not rely mainly on occasional worship periods. Doctrine and moral expectations need more consistent educational attention.

Third, adults in the school need stronger mission orientation. Where staffing diversity is high, induction and value orientation should be strengthened so that all teachers understand and can support the mission of the school. Fourth, discipline should be treated as part of moral education rather than as punishment alone. Learners need to understand why school expectations matter and how they connect to the values of the institution. Fifth, church educational units, local managers, elders, and school authorities need stronger collaboration in order to sustain school culture. Mission school identity weakens when schools are left to carry the burden of value transmission alone.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how school culture influences moral formation and learner discipline in Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Ghana. Using evidence from five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools in Fanteakwa North and South Districts, the study found that the selected schools retained some visible religious culture, but that this culture had become uneven and weak in important ways. Although many learners had heard the doctrines before, many had limited doctrinal understanding, and a large majority perceived that doctrinal standards were falling.

The study also found that many learners wanted stronger emphasis on key doctrines and supported stronger enforcement of selected school beliefs. This suggests that learners did not reject the values of the schools. Rather, they perceived the schools as falling short of their own moral and spiritual purpose. The contextual

evidence that most interviewed staff were non-Adventist further suggests that adult alignment may have affected the coherence of school culture.

The study therefore concludes that moral formation in mission schools is best understood as a school culture issue. When school culture is coherent, values are reinforced through routines, relationships, doctrine teaching, discipline, and adult example. When school culture weakens, mission identity becomes fragile and learner discipline loses moral force. Mission schools that wish to preserve their educational purpose must therefore strengthen the cultural conditions through which values are lived and transmitted.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. First, it was conducted in only five Seventh-day Adventist basic schools within one district setting, so the findings should be generalised cautiously. Second, the quantitative evidence was descriptive and did not allow more advanced statistical modelling. Third, the contextual interview evidence was limited in scale. Fourth, the study relied mainly on learner perceptions, which are highly valuable but do not capture every dimension of school culture.

Future research should extend this work by examining mission schools in other districts and denominational settings in Ghana. Comparative studies between stronger and weaker mission school cultures would also be useful. Mixed methods research that includes teachers, parents, school leaders, and church authorities could provide a fuller understanding of how culture shapes moral formation and discipline. Longitudinal studies may also help show how changes in school culture affect behaviour and values over time.

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