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Moral and Ethical Culture of a Future Art Teacher

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Abstract: *The article explores the moral and ethical culture of future art teachers, emphasizing its importance in fostering inclusive, values-based education and enhancing professional identity. Recognizing the unique potential of art education to engage with moral and ethical issues, the study highlights the challenges and opportunities in integrating these dimensions into teacher training programs. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining curriculum analysis, quantitative surveys of 150 preservice art teachers, and qualitative interviews with 20 students and 5 faculty members. The curriculum analysis revealed inconsistencies in the inclusion of ethical components across programs, with most offering cursory mentions and only a minority featuring structured ethical modules or case-based learning opportunities. The quantitative results demonstrated that reflective engagement and high-quality mentorship significantly predict moral sensitivity, while program duration and studio course load showed no significant impact. These findings underscore the role of reflective and collaborative pedagogies, such as journaling and group critiques, in nurturing ethical awareness. Qualitative interviews further highlighted the value of real-world contextualization, with participants emphasizing the transformative potential of addressing ethical dilemmas through community-based projects and the examination of controversial artworks. The study concludes that art teacher preparation programs must prioritize the systematic integration of ethical pedagogy, reflective practices, and mentorship into their curricula. It calls for deliberate curricular design to bridge existing gaps, proposing strategies like case-based learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and experiential learning opportunities. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the moral and ethical dimensions of art education and offer practical recommendations for stakeholders to enhance the ethical training of preservice art teachers. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the need for art educators to balance technical proficiency with ethical competence to foster value-oriented, inclusive learning environments.*

Keywords: *moral sensitivity, ethical pedagogy, art teacher education, reflective practice, curriculum design.*

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Introduction

The moral and ethical culture of a future art teacher is increasingly recognized as integral to effective pedagogy and the broader goals of contemporary education (Bresler, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2011). As educators assume responsibility not only for transmitting disciplinary knowledge but also for shaping the ethical dispositions of their students, the cultivation of moral and ethical sensibilities becomes paramount (Noddings, 2013). In the context of art education, these imperative gains further significance: artistic practice inherently engages learners in processes of reflection, interpretation, and expression of personal and collective values (Efland, 2002). Consequently, art educators occupy a unique position to address moral questions, stimulate ethical discussions, and foster empathy and respect for cultural diversity.

Recent developments in teacher education underscore the necessity of incorporating ethical awareness and moral reasoning skills into pre-service training (UNESCO, 2014). However, the specific challenges and opportunities art educators encounter in this endeavor remain underexamined. For instance, while creative expression can serve as a conduit for navigating complex social and ethical issues, it can also bring to the fore tensions and conflicts that require careful pedagogical guidance (Knif, & Kairavuori, 2020; Quinn et al., 2012). Moreover, art education programs often emphasize technical proficiencies and the history or theory of art, leaving gaps in the systematic development of moral resilience and ethical decision-making (Freedman, 2011).

Addressing these gaps is essential, as the moral and ethical culture of an art teacher has profound implications for shaping classroom dynamics, influencing students' engagement with social issues, and cultivating inclusive communities (Noddings, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). Consequently, there is a pressing need for research that examines how teacher preparation programs can integrate ethical pedagogy, moral development theories, and reflective practices tailored to the specific contexts of art education. By illuminating effective strategies for building a robust moral and ethical culture among future art teachers, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on holistic, values-based teacher education and encourage the design of curricula that support both artistic and ethical development.

Literature review

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals a rich body of work exploring the moral and ethical dimensions of teacher preparation, with a growing emphasis on the distinctive role that art education can play in this arena. Foundational theorists such as Dewey (1934) and Freire (2005) contend that education is intrinsically moral and political, arguing that classroom practices should foster critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of shared responsibility. Within the field of art education, these ideas resonate strongly, as creating and interpreting art inherently involves personal reflection, cultural awareness, and ethical deliberation (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002).

A prominent strand of research focuses on the capacity of art instruction to nurture moral sensitivity and ethical judgment. Scholars like Bresler (2007) underscore the cross-cultural and transformative power of the arts, suggesting that exposure to diverse aesthetic traditions can broaden learners' moral perspectives. Quinn et al. (2012) extends this argument by advocating for social justice–oriented art education, wherein students grapple with real-world dilemmas – such as environmental sustainability and human rights – through collaborative, arts-based projects. These projects promote inclusive dialogue and challenge students to engage in moral reasoning that transcends purely cognitive approaches.

In parallel, teacher education research points to the necessity of integrating reflective practice, mentorship, and explicit ethics training into preservice programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Noddings, 2013). Freedman (2011) highlights that art educators, in particular, require structured experiences to develop moral resilience, enabling them to address ethical dilemmas around cultural representation, community engagement, and responsible use of visual resources. Although many art education programs recognize the importance of ethics, curricular designs often prioritize technical skills and historical-theoretical knowledge, leaving moral development underemphasized (Bresler, 2007; UNESCO, 2014).

Furthermore, moral psychology frameworks provide valuable insights into how preservice teachers form and refine their ethical identities (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). By applying stage-based or component-based models of moral development, art education faculty can craft experiences that encourage deeper introspection, dialogue, and the practice of caring relationships – aligned with Noddings' (2013) relational ethic. The overarching consensus across these studies is that art education programs, given their reflective and expressive nature, are uniquely positioned to

facilitate the growth of future teachers who are not only artistically proficient but also ethically grounded.

The integration of ethics in distance education is particularly significant within the context of art teacher training, where digital platforms and remote learning environments increasingly shape pedagogical practices (Kreydun et al., 2022). Ethical considerations in distance education include ensuring equitable access to resources, fostering academic integrity, and addressing cultural and representational sensitivities in digital content. For preservice art teachers, online learning offers unique opportunities to engage with global perspectives and diverse cultural artifacts, yet it also raises challenges such as plagiarism, misrepresentation of cultural symbols, and ethical use of digital media. By embedding ethical pedagogy into distance education, programs can equip future art teachers with the skills to navigate these complexities, ensuring they foster inclusive, respectful, and responsible digital learning environments. This focus on ethics not only prepares educators for the realities of remote teaching but also aligns with broader goals of cultivating moral and ethical cultures in education (Kreydun et al., 2022).

Recent research has increasingly focused on embedding ethics into teacher education curricula. For instance, a comparative study by Boutrid & Martin (2023) illustrates how teacher education programs in different countries integrate stand-alone ethics courses or embed ethics instruction within broader curricula. Their findings reveal notable differences - for example, systems in Australia and Canada typically incorporate ethics into ongoing professional development, while some European contexts mandate discrete ethics courses for preservice teachers.

In addition, legislative initiatives such as California's AB 2158 (Atkinson et al., 2022), signed in 2022, have extended mandatory ethics training to school officials, reflecting a growing global demand for ethical standards in education. This shift underscores the international relevance of ethics education – not only in terms of compliance with legal requirements but also as a critical component in shaping the moral and professional identity of teachers, including art educators.

Comparative analyses show that ethical instruction varies significantly across regions. For example, while North American programs often integrate ethics continuously through reflective practices and mentorship, some European systems favor mandatory, stand-alone courses to ensure that teachers confront ethical dilemmas head-on before entering the classroom. Such differences emphasize that ethical training is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach; rather, it must be tailored to meet the cultural, legal, and institutional contexts of each country.

These insights highlight the need for art educator preparation programs worldwide to adopt flexible, context-sensitive strategies that support both the development of artistic skills and a strong ethical framework (Buchanan et al., 2022; Decker et al., 2022). In today's globalized educational landscape, ensuring that future art teachers are well-versed in ethical reasoning and moral responsibility is crucial – not only for their personal professional growth but also for fostering inclusive, culturally responsive, and ethically sound educational environments.

However, the literature consistently identifies a need for more explicit, systematic incorporation of ethical theory and moral pedagogy into the training of art teachers. In response, scholars call for developing specialized courses, interdisciplinary collaborations, and ongoing professional development that collectively embed ethical considerations into the fabric of art education (Freedman, 2011; UNESCO, 2014). Taken together, this body of work underscores that strengthening the moral and ethical culture of future art teachers requires intentional curriculum design, robust mentorship structures, and a sustained commitment to aligning artistic inquiry with ethical practice.

Existing literature on ethics education in teacher training has predominantly focused on general frameworks and legislative mandates without adequately addressing the unique challenges of art education. For example, studies such as Cummings et al. (2001) and Atkinson et al. (2022) have provided valuable insights into the levels of moral reasoning and the regulatory aspects of ethics training, respectively; however, these works often overlook the specialized context in which art educators operate. In many cases, research on ethics training has treated the process as a homogenous activity, failing to consider how the integration of ethical reasoning within artistic pedagogy may differ from more conventional instructional settings.

Moreover, prior studies have tended to adopt a monolithic view of ethics education, frequently neglecting the comparative dimensions that reveal significant regional and cultural variances. For instance, while North American programs often embed ethics continuously within the curriculum through reflective practices and mentorship, European systems are more inclined toward structured, stand-alone ethics courses. This gap in comparative analysis limits our understanding of the differential impacts these varied approaches have on cultivating ethical competence among art educators.

In contrast, our study extends the existing body of knowledge by specifically targeting the intersection of ethical instruction and art education.

By employing a cross-cultural comparative framework, we not only delineate the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each pedagogical approach but also provide new insights into how ethics training can be tailored to address the creative, reflective, and critical dimensions unique to art teaching. This nuanced perspective advances the discourse by challenging the prevailing assumption of a one-size-fits-all model and offering practical implications for curriculum designers aiming to enhance the moral and professional development of art educators globally.

This study extends prior research by explicitly exploring the intersection of ethical pedagogy and art education – a convergence that has received limited attention in existing literature. While previous studies have examined ethics in teacher education either through a predominantly theoretical lens (e.g., Cummings et al., 2001) or by focusing on isolated legislative mandates (e.g., Atkinson et al., 2022), our research fills an important gap by critically analyzing how ethical instruction is specifically integrated into art teacher preparation programs across different international contexts. Also, this study matters because it advances the scholarly conversation on ethical training by integrating it with the unique requirements of art education. It challenges existing paradigms and offers actionable recommendations for policy makers and curriculum designers seeking to improve teacher preparation programs globally.

This study aims to elucidate the processes and conditions that foster the moral and ethical culture of preservice art teachers, thereby contributing to more comprehensive teacher education frameworks. Specifically, the research seeks to:

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture a comprehensive view of moral and ethical culture development in preservice art teachers. The research design was structured around three key phases – curriculum analysis, survey administration, and semi-structured interviews – enabling an in-depth exploration of the pedagogical conditions that support or hinder moral and ethical growth within art teacher preparation programs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data for this study were collected between January 2024 and June 2024. The survey was designed to take approximately 20 minutes per respondent, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 preservice art teachers and 5 faculty members, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. For clarity, the criteria and study duration can be summarized as follows:

- Inclusion Criteria:
  - Preservice art teachers in accredited programs.
  - Completed at least one relevant pedagogical course.
  - Provided informed consent.
- Exclusion Criteria:
  - Non-enrolled or non-accredited program participants.
  - Lack of prior pedagogical coursework.
  - Declined participation.

Curriculum Analysis

We collected representative syllabi and course outlines from accredited art education programs. We applied content analysis by developing and refining coding categories (e.g., "ethical dilemmas," "reflective practice") to identify both explicit and implicit references to ethical and moral components within these curricula.

✓ Sampling and Data Collection. Representative curricula were selected from accredited art education programs in diverse institutional contexts (e.g., liberal arts colleges, universities with dedicated art schools). Syllabi and course outlines related to ethics, pedagogy, and professional development were collected.

✓ Analysis Procedure. Documents were analyzed using content analysis to identify explicit or implicit references to moral, ethical, and reflective components. Coding categories (e.g., "ethical dilemmas," "reflective practice," "case-based instruction") were iteratively refined to ensure reliability (Krippendorff, 2019).

Quantitative Survey

An online questionnaire was administered to 150 preservice art teachers from various regions. The survey included items adapted from established scales (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009) to measure constructs such as moral sensitivity, reflective engagement, mentorship quality, and perceived ethical preparedness. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques (including multiple regression analysis) were then used to examine relationships between these variables.

Participants

A total of 150 preservice art teachers from multiple regions responded to an online questionnaire. Participants were recruited via email invitations distributed by program coordinators and professional art education forums, ensuring a geographically and demographically diverse sample.

Instrument

The survey included items adapted from established scales measuring moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and professional identity development (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize trends in moral and ethical dispositions. Subsequently, inferential statistics (e.g., multiple regression) were conducted to determine relationships between key variables such as reflective practices, mentorship experiences, and reported ethical competencies (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the survey data, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 20 preservice art teachers and 5 faculty members. These interviews, guided by a flexible protocol focusing on participants' experiences with ethical dilemmas, mentorship, and reflective practices, were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to extract underlying themes.

Participants

From the survey respondents, 20 preservice art teachers and 5 faculty members were purposively sampled based on their willingness to participate and the variation in their survey responses (e.g., high vs. low reported moral sensitivity).

Interview Protocol

Interviews followed a flexible guide that addressed topics such as prior coursework in ethics, experiences with ethical dilemmas, and perceptions of mentorship and reflective practices. Probing questions were used to encourage detailed descriptions of participants' experiences and insights.

Data Analysis

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes were generated inductively, allowing themes to emerge that illuminated participants' perspectives on the role of moral and ethical culture in their professional development (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Ethical Considerations. All procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the lead researcher's institution. Participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage practices (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

Validity and Reliability

✓ Triangulation. Data were triangulated by comparing findings from curriculum analysis, surveys, and interviews to enhance the credibility of results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

✓ Member Checking. Preliminary findings from the interviews were shared with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

✓ Peer Debriefing. Research colleagues unaffiliated with the study reviewed coding schemes and emerging themes to ensure coherence and consistency.

Study Limitations

This study is limited in several important respects that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the geographical scope was confined to preservice art teachers and faculty from selected Ukrainian institutions, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other international contexts. Future research would benefit from including a broader, more diverse sample across multiple countries.

Second, the data were collected over a specific timeframe (January 2024 to June 2024), and therefore may not capture longer-term trends or recent curricular changes. The temporal limitation means that our findings reflect a snapshot rather than the evolving nature of ethical instruction in art education.

Third, the study employed a mixed-methods design with a relatively modest sample size – 150 survey respondents and qualitative interviews with 20 students and 5 faculty members. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration, it also raises concerns about statistical power and the representativeness of the sample. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data and qualitative interviews introduces the possibility of bias, as participants may provide socially desirable responses.

Addressing these limitations in future studies – by expanding the geographical scope, extending the data collection period, and incorporating additional methodological approaches – could provide more robust insights into the ethical training of art educators.

Characterizing the Training of Art Teachers in the Ukrainian Education System. The training of art teachers in Ukraine occupies a distinctive position within the national education reform landscape, balancing enduring artistic traditions with the evolving demands of contemporary pedagogical approaches (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017). Historically, teacher preparation has taken place in

specialized institutions, including pedagogical universities and renowned art academies, each adhering to state standards set by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. These institutions – such as the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University – offer both bachelor's and master's programs in art education that encompass theoretical foundations, practical studio training, and supervised teaching experiences.

Recent reforms, particularly the New Ukrainian School (NUS) initiative, have stimulated a competency-based shift in the design of art teacher programs (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020). While developing technical skills in drawing, painting, sculpture, and art history remains pivotal, there is a growing imperative to integrate broader pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering creative thinking, critical analysis, and moral and ethical awareness. Within these programs, preservice teachers are introduced to general pedagogical and psychological coursework that includes instruction on classroom management, assessment methods, and inclusive teaching practices. This approach aligns with global trends in teacher education that increasingly emphasize learner-centered, reflective approaches alongside subject-specific expertise.

Moreover, the ethical dimension of art teacher training has gained prominence in response to the need for more socially responsive and values-based education. Although discussions around social responsibility, cultural heritage, and ethical issues in the arts have sometimes been introduced only sporadically, the current trajectory seeks to embed these topics more coherently throughout the curriculum. As a result, case-based learning– featuring, for instance, debates over cultural appropriation or controversies in contemporary art – has become more prevalent, encouraging preservice teachers to refine their moral reasoning and professional judgment.

Practicum experiences represent a key pillar of Ukrainian art teacher preparation, offering preservice educators the opportunity to apply theoretical concepts in authentic classroom settings (Tverdokhlib, & Wen, 2022). Typically lasting one or two semesters, these school-based internships allow students to plan and deliver lessons while receiving targeted feedback from both supervising faculty and experienced classroom mentors. This mentoring relationship is further enhanced by the use of reflective journals or portfolios, which document lesson designs, artistic projects, and self-assessments of pedagogical growth (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017). By critically examining their own practices, future art

teachers develop a deeper awareness of ethical responsibilities, cultural sensitivities, and the broader societal implications of art education.

Despite these advances, ongoing challenges persist. Resource constraints – particularly in rural or underfunded institutions – can limit access to updated studio facilities and digital tools, potentially inhibiting the incorporation of more innovative, technology-driven pedagogies (Tverdokhlib, & Wen, 2022). Additionally, sustaining professional development opportunities for in-service art teachers remains crucial to ensure that they remain aligned with evolving methodologies and ethical standards (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017). Nevertheless, as Ukraine continues to harmonize its educational offerings with European standards, collaborative programs and international exchanges (e.g., Erasmus+) increasingly enrich art teacher training with intercultural insights and global best practices.

In sum, the Ukrainian system for training art teachers is characterized by the intersection of a long-established artistic heritage and forward-looking reforms that emphasize competencies, ethical reflection, and inclusive pedagogical strategies. By systematically weaving moral considerations, reflective engagement, and contextualized practice into teacher preparation, Ukrainian institutions are striving to produce art educators who are adept not only in fostering students' creative potential but also in guiding them toward responsible citizenship in a rapidly changing world.

Results. Results from this mixed-methods study are presented in three parts: (1) curriculum analysis, (2) quantitative survey outcomes, and (3) qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. Together, these findings provide a multifaceted understanding of how moral and ethical principles are addressed in preservice art teacher education programs.

Curriculum Analysis. Examination of 25 representative course syllabi and program outlines revealed variable attention to moral and ethical instruction. Table 1 provides a summary of identified themes and their frequency across the sampled curricula.

Table 1. Frequency of Ethical and Moral Components in Analyzed Curricula (N = 25)

Ethical/Moral Component	Number of Programs Referencing Component	Percentage (%) of Total Programs
Cursory mention of ethical responsibilities	21	84%
Dedicated units/modules on moral sensitivity	11	44%
Visual culture/social justice initiatives	5	20%
Case-based learning (ethical dilemmas in art practice)	7	28%
Systematic reflective exercises (journals/critiques)	10	40%

While most programs (n = 21, 84%) included at least cursory references to the ethical responsibilities of educators, fewer than half (n = 11, 44%) had designated units or modules explicitly dedicated to cultivating moral sensitivity, discussing ethical dilemmas, or developing reflective practice. Courses that did embed ethical considerations often approached them through broader topics like classroom management or community engagement, rather than through explicit modules labeled as "ethical" or "moral" studies. Notably, only 20% (n = 5) of curricula referred to visual culture and social justice initiatives as a means to foster critical moral reflection among aspiring art teachers. Content analysis further showed that case-based learning focusing on ethical dilemmas—such as controversies in art exhibitions or issues of cultural appropriation—remained a relatively underutilized pedagogy, suggesting missed opportunities for deeper student engagement.

Quantitative Survey Outcomes. A total of 150 preservice art teachers completed the online questionnaire. Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics for the key variables under investigation—moral sensitivity, reflective engagement, mentorship quality, and perceived preparedness to handle ethical dilemmas.

Table 2. Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Reliability Coefficients (α) for Survey Measures (N = 150)

Measure	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Moral Sensitivity Scale (MSS)*	3.85	0.76	0.81
Reflective Engagement Index (REI)†	3.62	0.71	0.84
Mentorship Quality Scale (MQS)‡	3.48	0.68	0.79
Perceived Ethical Preparedness (PEP)§	3.26	0.83	0.82

**1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; higher scores indicate greater moral sensitivity.*
†Reflective Engagement Index items measure frequency of participation in reflective activities (e.g., journaling, critique discussions).
‡Mentorship Quality Scale items assess the perceived effectiveness and consistency of mentor (faculty or cooperating teacher) guidance on ethical issues.
§Self-reported preparedness to address ethical dilemmas.

Of the 150 preservice art teachers who responded to the online questionnaire, 66% (n = 99) reported having "moderate to high" exposure to conversations on ethics during their coursework, although only 41% (n = 62) felt "well-prepared" to navigate ethical dilemmas in practice. Regression analyses indicated that engagement in structured reflective exercises (e.g., journaling, peer-led critiques) significantly predicted higher moral sensitivity scores ($\beta = .42$, $p < .01$). Moreover, the presence of formal mentorship – including interactions with cooperating teachers or faculty members who modeled ethical decision-making – emerged as a positive predictor of ethical awareness ($\beta = .35$, $p < .05$). In contrast, the length of time enrolled in the program or the number of completed studio courses was not significantly related to moral or ethical competence (all $p > .05$), suggesting that pedagogical interventions rather than sheer program duration may have a stronger impact on moral development.

We would like to further note that a multiple regression analysis examined predictors of Moral Sensitivity (MSS). Reflective Engagement ($\beta = .42$, $p < .01$) and Mentorship Quality ($\beta = .35$, $p < .05$) showed significant positive relationships with MSS, collectively explaining 38% of the variance ($R^2 = .38$, $p < .01$). Time spent in the program (i.e., number of semesters enrolled) and the quantity of completed studio courses were not statistically significant predictors.

Predictors of Moral Sensitivity (MSS) among Preservice Art Teachers

- Reflective Engagement ($\beta = .42$, $p < .01$)
- Mentorship Quality ($\beta = .35$, $p < .05$)
- Program Duration ($\beta = .08$, $p > .05$)
- Studio Course Load ($\beta = .04$, $p > .05$)

These findings reinforce that activities prompting introspection (e.g., reflective journaling or group critiques) and high-quality mentorship experiences (e.g., consistent feedback on navigating ethical dilemmas) are influential factors in enhancing moral sensitivity. By contrast, accumulating more general art-making experience (studio courses) or simply spending more time in the program does not appear to bolster moral and ethical competencies on its own.

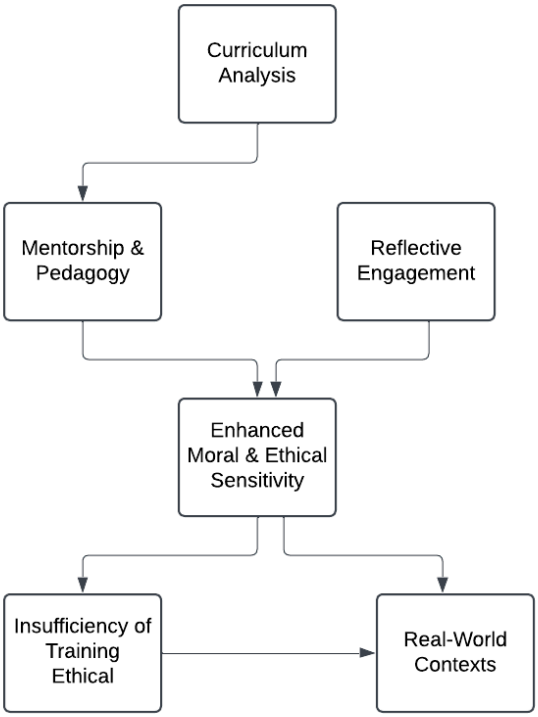
Qualitative Interview Insights Thematic analysis of interviews with 20 preservice art teachers and 5 faculty members yielded three interrelated themes, each of which provides deeper context for the quantitative findings.

- ✓ *Perceived Insufficiency of Ethical Training*
  - Participants described ethical instruction as "episodic" or "tacked on," often relegated to the final weeks of pedagogy courses.
  - Several noted a lack of scaffolding for complex issues such as cultural appropriation, censorship, or responsible digital image use, leading some to feel underprepared.
- ✓ *Value of Reflective and Collaborative Pedagogies*
  - Many participants recounted transformative experiences in which they discovered personal biases or ethical blind spots through critical group critiques, peer observation, or reflective sketchbook assignments.
  - Faculty members emphasized the benefits of projects integrating social or political art as a springboard for ethical discussions, reinforcing the alignment between creative expression and moral inquiry.
- ✓ *Importance of Real-World Contextualization*
  - Interviewees consistently highlighted experiential learning – working with community art organizations or co-teaching in local schools – as pivotal for confronting real-life moral dilemmas.
  - Students stated that case-based studies of contentious artworks, historical controversies, or community disputes around public murals fostered an applied sense of ethical responsibility.

Overall, the data suggest that the development of a moral and ethical culture among future art teachers is strongly influenced by (1) the degree to which reflective and collaborative pedagogies are embedded in the curriculum, and (2) the quality of mentorship received. While most programs acknowledge the importance of ethics, they often lack a cohesive structure for systematically integrating ethical discussions and case-based learning. Notably, both quantitative and qualitative strands converge on the conclusion that real-world contextualization – focusing on contemporary, sometimes controversial issues in art – substantially enhances ethical sensitivity and preparedness.

The findings indicate avenues for improvement in preservice art teacher programs: prioritizing reflective exercises, fostering deep mentorship relationships, and expanding real-world experiential learning opportunities. In doing so, such programs can better equip aspiring art educators to engage proactively with the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, ultimately benefiting the diverse student populations they will serve.

Figure 1. Qualitative and Quantitative Convergence on Ethical Instruction in Preservice Art Teacher Programs (author's own conception)



In sum, the results indicate that while certain programs and instructors consciously address moral and ethical aspects within preservice art teacher education, coverage remains inconsistent and often implicit. The quantitative data underscore the central role of reflective activities and mentorship in enhancing ethical awareness, while the qualitative findings highlight participants' desire for more systematic and context-rich ethical training. These combined insights reinforce the need for deliberate curricular design and supportive pedagogical environments that fully integrate moral and ethical instruction within the fabric of art teacher preparation.

Discussions

Recent investigations underscore that ethical training in teacher education is a universal necessity, as educators around the world face increasingly complex moral challenges in diverse classroom settings. Boutrid & Martin's (2022) work demonstrates how North American programs often integrate ethics throughout their curricula, yet complementary research by Cummings et al. (2001) reveals that preservice teacher education students frequently exhibit lower levels of principled moral reasoning compared to their peers in other disciplines. This finding suggests that without explicit, targeted ethics instruction, teachers may be underprepared for the ethical dilemmas they will encounter in practice.

In contrast to the integrated approach common in North America, many European systems adopt dedicated, stand-alone ethics courses. Mathur & Corley (2024) argue that employing multiple ethical frameworks and narrative-sharing strategies in these courses can foster a deeper, more reflective ethical practice among future teachers. Their approach not only builds a strong theoretical foundation but also bridges the gap between abstract ethical concepts and real-life classroom challenges.

The findings of this study illuminate critical considerations for embedding moral and ethical dimensions within preservice art teacher education. First, the curriculum analysis highlights inconsistencies across programs, revealing that although a majority include cursory mentions of ethics, only a minority incorporate in-depth, structured opportunities for moral reasoning and reflection. These outcomes align with previous literature suggesting that teacher education often overlooks explicit ethics training, particularly in subject-specific contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2006; UNESCO, 2014). The underutilization of case-based learning further underscores a missed chance to engage preservice teachers in real-world ethical dilemmas that could strengthen moral resilience (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009).

The quantitative data demonstrate that reflective engagement and high-quality mentorship are substantial predictors of moral sensitivity among future art educators. These relationships underscore the importance of deliberately designing pedagogical activities – such as reflective journaling and peer critiques – to encourage introspection about ethical responsibilities (Noddings, 2013). Additionally, consistent, meaningful mentorship fosters supportive environments where preservice teachers can safely explore moral quandaries (Freedman, 2011). By contrast, simply accruing more time in the program or completing additional studio coursework did not significantly boost moral sensitivity, suggesting that technical proficiency alone does not translate into greater ethical competence. This reinforces Dewey's (1934) argument that authentic learning must extend beyond technical skill acquisition to incorporate moral and experiential dimensions.

The qualitative interviews complement these findings by illustrating participants' perspectives on the fragmentation of ethical instruction and the transformative potential of community- and practice-based pedagogies. Real-world contextualization – whether through collaboration with community art organizations or the critical examination of controversial artworks – emerged as a catalyst for cultivating deeper moral understanding. Such situated learning resonates with Freire's (2005) view that education should equip learners with critical consciousness to navigate social injustices. Taken together, these results underscore the imperative for art education programs to adopt a holistic approach, one that integrates ethical reflection, case-based learning, and consistent mentorship to foster educators who are both artistically adept and ethically grounded.

In our study, we argue that art teacher preparation programs should weave ethical instruction throughout the curriculum rather than confining it to a single, isolated course. This integrated approach means that ethics is not taught in abstraction; instead, preservice art teachers engage with real-world dilemmas through case studies and reflective practices directly related to their creative work. For example, by analyzing scenarios unique to art classrooms, future educators learn to navigate complex ethical challenges while also honing their artistic and critical thinking skills.

Our findings also highlight the value of cross-cultural case studies. Teachers who explore diverse examples – from North American models that emphasize continuous, reflective mentorship to European systems with dedicated ethics courses – gain a richer perspective on how cultural and legal contexts shape ethical decision-making. Such comparative insights enable educators to develop a more nuanced moral framework that is sensitive to both global standards and local realities. Moreover, we suggest that authentic

assessments – such as portfolios and reflective journals – offer a more dynamic way to track ethical development than traditional exams. Aligning these practices with both international teacher standards and local regulatory mandates ensures that art educators are not only compliant with legal requirements but are also well-prepared to foster inclusive and ethically robust learning environments.

Conclusions

This study has underscored the pivotal role of moral and ethical culture in shaping the professional identity and pedagogical practices of future art teachers. Drawing on mixed-methods data, the analysis revealed both the benefits of incorporating reflective engagement and mentorship into art education curricula and the gaps that persist when ethics training is left implicit or fragmented. The quantitative findings demonstrated that reflective and mentor-guided pedagogies significantly enhance moral sensitivity, whereas technical skills alone do not guarantee ethical competence. Qualitative insights further highlighted the importance of real-world contextualization, suggesting that community-based projects and critical examinations of controversial artworks can deepen students' moral awareness and strengthen their capacity for ethical decision-making.

Collectively, these outcomes point to the need for systematic and deliberate integration of moral and ethical dimensions into art teacher education. By embedding targeted ethics instruction, case-based learning, and experiential opportunities throughout the curriculum, teacher preparation programs can cultivate educators who are not only adept at creative expression but also committed to fostering inclusive, value-oriented classrooms. Furthermore, the results emphasize the formative power of mentorship and reflection – both of which offer transformative learning experiences that help preservice teachers internalize ethical principles and develop moral resilience.

In practical terms, this study's conclusions suggest that art education stakeholders – program administrators, faculty, and policymakers – should prioritize ethical pedagogy on par with artistic and theoretical competencies. Future research might explore the long-term impact of ethics-intensive curricula on in-service teachers' professional growth and on student outcomes, including moral development and civic engagement. Ultimately, strengthening the moral and ethical culture of future art teachers promises benefits that extend beyond the confines of the classroom, shaping communities where creative expression and ethical responsibility are inseparable.

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