



Anchoring School Discipline in Patristic Virtue: A Convergent Mixed-Methods Inquiry into Ethical Leadership, School Climate, and Discipline Management in Nairobi County Secondary Schools, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Student discipline remains one of the most consequential challenges in secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, shaping school climate, learner well-being, and educational outcomes. Although contemporary discourse increasingly emphasises values-based education, character formation, restorative practice, and ethical leadership, the intellectual and moral resources of Patristic educational thought—rooted in the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Basil the Great, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom—have been largely absent from empirical inquiry in African secondary education. This study examined the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, and the mediating roles of ethical leadership and school climate. Anchored in Virtue Ethics, Servant Leadership, and Transformative Leadership theories, the study is framed within the aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035, and Kenya's National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2023–2027. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design involving 980 participants (principals, deputy principals, teachers, chaplains, students, and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers) drawn from 96 secondary schools across the 12 sub-counties of Nairobi County. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and document analysis schedules, and were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Quantitative findings revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management ($r = .684$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .612$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .468$), with Patristic principles explaining 46.8 per cent of the variance in discipline outcomes. Qualitative findings converged with the statistical results, surfacing four integrated themes: moral exemplarity, compassionate leadership, restorative discipline, and positive school climate. The discussion positions Patristic education as a holistic, integrative, and historically grounded framework whose distinctive contribution lies in unifying moral reasoning, spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and character development within a single educational vision. The study concludes that anchoring school discipline in Patristic virtue offers an ethically robust, contextually relevant, and empirically defensible pathway for strengthening school climate, supporting inclusive education, and nurturing responsible citizenship in contemporary Kenyan secondary schools and across the African continent.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student discipline remains one of the most consequential challenges facing secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa. Across the continent, incidents of indiscipline—ranging from disrespect for school regulations, disruptive behaviour, truancy, and examination malpractice to bullying, substance use, and interpersonal violence—undermine teaching, erode learner well-being, and weaken the capacity of schools to fulfil their educational mission (Thapa et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Sele Media Africa, 2025). In South Africa, the Minister of Basic Education reported to Parliament in 2025 that hundreds of bullying cases had been recorded in the first weeks of the school year, with a 35.4 per cent rise in reported cases of abuse and sexual harassment of pupils by teachers (Sowetan, 2025; Tandfonline, 2025). Across the five most populous Anglophone African countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania—school violence is consistently identified as both a learning and a protection crisis (UNESCO, 2023; CGDEV, 2025).

In Kenya, contemporary debates about education are anchored in the National Education Sector

Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2023–2027, which identifies equitable access, quality and relevance, governance and accountability, and pertinent values as cross-cutting priorities (Ministry of Education, 2024). At the regional level, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035 calls explicitly for ethical leadership, learner-centred education, and responsible citizenship as pillars of educational transformation (African Union, 2024). At the global level, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), and particularly Target 4.7, calls on all nations to ensure that education promotes sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights, peace, gender equality, and ethical responsibility (UNESCO, 2021). These three policy instruments converge on a common imperative: contemporary schooling must do far more than transmit knowledge and skills; it must cultivate the moral, ethical, and civic dispositions required for human and societal flourishing.

The present study is situated at the intersection of these imperatives. It argues that the historical and philosophical resources of Patristic educational thought—a tradition rooted in the writings of the Church Fathers, including Augustine of Hippo, Basil the Great,

Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom—offer an untapped but extraordinarily rich resource for contemporary discipline management in secondary schools (Augustine of Hippo, 1997, 2010; Basil the Great, 2014; Clement of Alexandria, 2005; Gregory of Nyssa, 2018; John Chrysostom, 2015). Whereas modern character-education and values-based-education frameworks tend to treat morality, social-emotional learning, and citizenship as distinct pedagogical objectives, Patristic education integrates moral reasoning, spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and character development within a single, holistic vision of the educated person (Arthur et al., 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2023; Mullei, 2026a; Pike, 2026).

This integrative feature is precisely what contemporary African school reform requires. As recent African comparative research has demonstrated, values-based discipline, restorative practice, and culturally aligned Ubuntu-informed approaches produce stronger outcomes than imported punitive models (International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research, 2025). The Malawian Ministry of Education's launch of the Secondary School Commitment Form in 2025 under the theme "Together Towards a Disciplined Generation" is a tangible example of how African ministries are reasserting the link between discipline, values, and shared responsibility (Efficacy News Africa, 2025). Sele Media Malawi (2026) reported the urgent call for Malamulo Secondary School graduates to "uphold discipline, integrity, and academic excellence" as they transition into national service, reflecting a continent-wide recognition that discipline, character, and citizenship are inseparable.

Building on this scholarship, this study advances a clearly delineated, evidence-based contribution. The article integrates Patristic educational principles with Virtue Ethics, Servant Leadership, and Transformative Leadership theories to develop a dynamic process model of discipline management in which ethical leadership and school climate mediate the relationship between Patristic principles and discipline outcomes. The article responds to Mullei, S. N. (2026a), who called for scholarship that connects the aspirations of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027 to historically grounded educational frameworks. It also extends Maranga, T. O. (2025), who worked on values-based curriculum and ethical professional practice. The study is set in Nairobi County, Kenya, and draws on a sample of 980 participants across 96 secondary schools.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the recent proliferation of values-based education, character education, restorative practice, and servant-leadership frameworks in educational research, student discipline in secondary schools across Africa continues to be dominated by punitive, rule-based, and behaviourally oriented approaches (Dembo, 2024;

Mallari, 2025; Potokri & Lumadi, 2025). Empirical evidence from Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, South Africa, and Zimbabwe indicates that corporal punishment has been formally abolished in most jurisdictions, yet continues to be practised informally in many schools, while the adoption of positive, restorative, and values-based alternatives remains uneven (Ankomah et al., 2025; Dembo, 2024; Moyo-Nyoni & Moyo, 2024).

Compounding the problem, much of the contemporary literature on values-based and character education in African schools has been grounded in Western-derived psychological, organisational, and managerial theories (Arthur et al., 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2023; CASEL, 2023). Comparatively little empirical attention has been given to historically grounded African and global ethical traditions—such as the Patristic, Ubuntu, and Islamic traditions—that conceptualise education as a holistic formative process directed toward virtue, self-discipline, and the common good (Sele & Mukundi, 2024; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Pike, 2026).

Within this broader context, three interrelated gaps motivate the present study. First, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in contemporary African secondary school contexts. Second, the existing scholarship has rarely integrated Patristic educational thought with the leadership and climate variables known to shape discipline outcomes. Third, despite the policy prominence of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027, no study, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, has explicitly connected these global, regional, and national agendas to a Patristic framework for discipline management in Kenyan secondary schools. This study addresses these gaps through a rigorous, theory-driven, mixed-methods inquiry.

Recent news coverage by Sele Media Africa (selemedia.org, 2025), SeleMedia.ng (2025), and Sele Media Malawi (selemalawi.com, 2025–2026) confirms the urgency of these questions. The Federal Ministry of Education of Nigeria's launch of anti-bullying hotlines and a dedicated WhatsApp reporting channel in November 2025 (Sele Media Africa, 2025) signals the seriousness with which African governments are confronting the discipline crisis, while at the same time highlighting the need for pedagogically and ethically grounded responses that go beyond punitive regulation.

3. Research Objectives, Questions, and Hypotheses

The general objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objectives were:

- To examine the extent to which Patristic educational principles are operationalised in secondary schools in Nairobi County.

- To determine the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County.
- To establish the predictive influence of Patristic educational principles on discipline management outcomes.
- To explore how school leaders, teachers, chaplains, students, and Quality Assurance and Standards Officers understand and experience the relationship between Patristic principles, ethical leadership, school climate, and discipline management.
- To integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings in order to develop an empirically grounded, contextually relevant, and theoretically defensible framework for values-based discipline management in African secondary schools.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent are Patristic educational principles operationalised in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya?
- What is the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in these schools?
- Do Patristic educational principles significantly predict discipline management outcomes?
- How do school stakeholders experience and narrate the relationship between Patristic principles, ethical leadership, school climate, and discipline management?
- How can quantitative and qualitative findings be integrated to inform a coherent framework for values-based discipline management in African secondary schools?

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H_1 : There is a statistically significant positive relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County.
- H_2 : Patristic educational principles significantly predict variation in discipline management outcomes.
- H_3 : There are statistically significant differences in perceptions of Patristic principles and discipline management across school type (public, private, faith-based, county, sub-county).
- H_4 : Ethical leadership and school climate mediate the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management.

4. Scope and Delimitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study was

conducted in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings should therefore be interpreted within this context and may not be directly transferable to other educational settings without consideration of contextual differences. Second, the study relied in part on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and interviews. Although these methods provided valuable insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, responses may have been affected by social desirability bias and subjective interpretation. Third, although the convergent parallel mixed-methods design strengthened the breadth and depth of analysis through methodological triangulation, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited interpretation to observed relationships and did not permit conclusions regarding causality. Fourth, the study focused specifically on Patristic educational principles as a conceptual framework and did not examine other educational, philosophical, or cultural perspectives (e.g., Ubuntu, Islamic educational ethics, indigenous knowledge systems) that may also relate to discipline management and educational leadership. Fifth, the operationalisation of Patristic principles through six dimensions, although empirically tractable, necessarily simplified a rich and complex theological tradition; future studies may consider more fine-grained qualitative analysis of how specific Patristic texts inform practice in particular schools. Finally, the study did not include longitudinal data, and therefore cannot speak to changes in learner character, school climate, or discipline outcomes over time. Despite these limitations, the study provides robust empirical and contextual insights into the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management and contributes to ongoing discussions concerning values-based education and educational leadership in African secondary schools.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in three complementary theories: Virtue Ethics Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, and Transformative Leadership Theory. Together, these theories position discipline management not as a mechanism of behavioural control but as an educational process that supports ethical conduct, character formation, restorative engagement, and positive school culture. Figure 1 illustrates the integration of the three theories.

5.1 Virtue Ethics Theory

Virtue Ethics Theory originates in the philosophical tradition of Aristotle and has been further developed within contemporary educational and moral philosophy (Arthur et al., 2021; Kristjánsson, 2024). In contrast to approaches that prioritise rules or consequences, virtue ethics emphasises the formation of character and the cultivation of stable moral dispositions that enable individuals and communities to flourish. Within educational contexts, virtue ethics proposes that schools

are not only sites of knowledge transmission but also environments for nurturing virtues such as justice, prudence, compassion, humility, integrity, and self-discipline (Walker, 2022; Berkowitz & Bier, 2023). Patristic educational thought demonstrates a particularly strong conceptual resonance with virtue ethics: educational writings associated with Augustine, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom present education as a formative process directed toward moral growth, self-discipline, and the cultivation of virtuous character (Augustine of Hippo, 1997, 2010; Basil the Great, 2014; Gregory of Nyssa, 2018; John Chrysostom, 2015; Mullei, 2026a).

5.2 Servant Leadership Theory

Servant Leadership Theory, originally developed by Greenleaf and subsequently expanded within leadership research, proposes that effective leadership is grounded in service, ethical responsibility, and commitment to the growth and well-being of others (Eva et al., 2019; Northouse, 2022; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Within educational settings, servant leadership positions school leaders as facilitators of learning, relationship-building, and institutional development. The assumptions of Servant Leadership Theory align conceptually with Patristic educational principles, which place strong emphasis on service, moral guidance, responsibility, and care for the development of learners.

5.3 Transformative Leadership Theory

Transformative Leadership Theory, developed and elaborated by Carolyn M. Shields (2010, 2020, 2024), extends leadership theory beyond interpersonal effectiveness to questions of equity, justice, democracy,

and institutional transformation. Unlike transactional or transformational leadership, transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and critiques inequitable practices wherever they occur (Shields, 2024). Its eight tenets—deep and equitable change; the deconstruction and reconstruction of inequitable knowledge frameworks; redistribution of power; emphasis on both private and public good; emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; interconnectedness and global awareness; the balance of critique with promise; and the call to moral courage—provide a robust framework for connecting Patristic educational principles to broader questions of educational equity and social responsibility (Shields, 2024; Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2024). In this study, Transformative Leadership Theory broadened the theoretical lens beyond interpersonal service to encompass the structural, cultural, and equity dimensions of discipline management.

5.4 Integration of the Three Theories

The three theories were integrated into a coherent framework. Virtue Ethics Theory provided the normative foundation by emphasising character formation and moral development; Servant Leadership Theory explained how these values may be enacted through everyday leadership practices; and Transformative Leadership Theory situated these interpersonal and ethical processes within broader questions of equity, justice, and institutional transformation. The integrated framework proposes that educational environments characterised by ethical leadership, service, responsibility, virtue cultivation, and transformative commitment to equity are more likely to support constructive disciplinary practices, restorative engagement, and positive school climates.



The three theories converge on a shared ethical mandate to form character, serve learners, and transform school cultures.

Figure 1. Integration of Virtue Ethics, Servant Leadership, and Transformative Leadership Theories in the present study.

6. Conceptual Framework

Building on Mullei's (2026a) reconceptualisation of values-based education and the present theoretical

synthesis, this study conceptualised discipline management as the outcome of a dynamic, mediated, and multi-levelled process. The framework is presented in Figure 2 and elaborated in Figure 3.

Patristic Educational Principles → Ethical Leadership → School Climate → Discipline Management

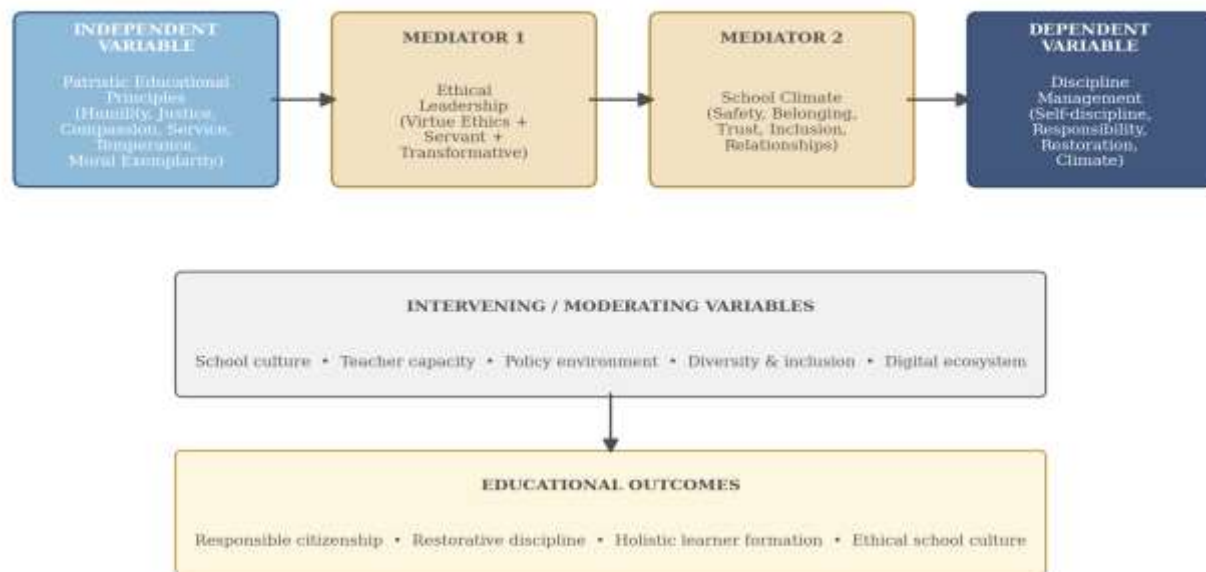
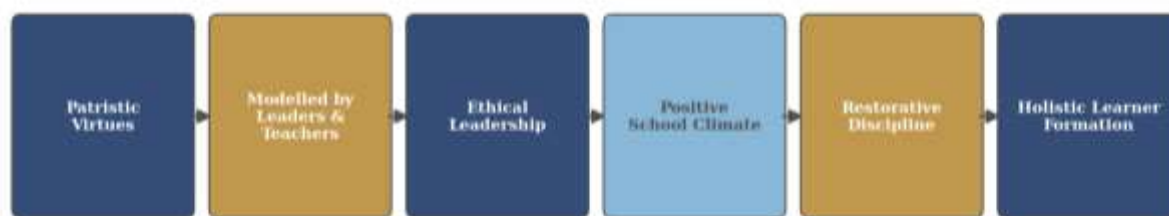


Figure 2. Conceptual framework showing the mediated relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in Nairobi County secondary schools.

The independent variable—Patristic educational principles—was operationalised through six interrelated dimensions: humility, justice, compassion, service, temperance, and moral exemplarity. These dimensions were treated not as discrete traits but as a mutually reinforcing constellation of virtues that, when modelled by school leaders and teachers, shape the moral and relational life of the school. The dependent variable—discipline management—was operationalised through six indicators: self-discipline, positive school climate, respect for school regulations, responsible behaviour, reduced disciplinary incidents, and constructive interpersonal relationships (Gregory et al., 2021; Cohen, 2022; Wang et al., 2023).

Two mediating mechanisms were hypothesised. First, ethical leadership—encompassing the virtue-

based, servant, and transformative leadership practices of school leaders and teachers—translates abstract Patristic principles into the everyday relational and decision-making life of the school. Second, school climate—the collective perception of safety, belonging, trust, inclusion, and the quality of relationships—mediates the relationship between leadership practice and discipline outcomes. The framework also recognised the moderating influence of intervening variables, including school culture, teacher capacity, policy environment, learner diversity, and the digital ecosystem. The expected outcomes included responsible citizenship, restorative discipline, holistic learner formation, and an ethical school culture aligned with the aspirations of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027.



Virtues are internalised – modelled by adults – enacted as ethical leadership – shape climate – produce restorative discipline – form the whole learner.

Figure 3. Flow of Patristic virtue from principle to discipline practice: virtues are internalised, modelled by adults, enacted as ethical leadership, shape school climate, produce restorative discipline, and form the whole learner.

7. Literature Review

7.1 Patristic Educational Thought and Moral Formation

Patristic educational thought emerges from the writings of the early Church Fathers and presents education as a formative process directed toward virtue, self-discipline, wisdom, and responsible participation in society (Augustine of Hippo, 1997, 2010; Basil the Great, 2014; Clement of Alexandria, 2005; Gregory of Nyssa, 2018; John Chrysostom, 2015). Augustine, in particular, conceptualised virtue as the right ordering of love—a position that resonates strongly with contemporary psychological research on motivation, character, and moral education (Pike, 2024; Educational Renaissance, 2023). Recent scholarship has highlighted the continuing relevance of Augustinian pedagogy for classical, Christian, and character education (Augustine Schools, 2023; Saint Augustine School, 2023; Augustine Expert Seminar Series, 2023), and contemporary commentators have begun to engage the implications of Patristic thought for educational policy and curriculum design (Mulley, 2026a). The present study contributes to this emerging field by empirically examining the relationship between Patristic principles and discipline management in African secondary schools.

7.2 Discipline Management in Contemporary Education

Discipline management remains an important area of educational inquiry because of its influence on school climate, learner engagement, and educational outcomes (Wang et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2022). Traditional approaches to school discipline have emphasised behavioural compliance through rule enforcement and corrective sanctions. However, contemporary research increasingly questions the long-term effectiveness of punitive approaches and instead promotes restorative, relational, and values-based approaches that emphasise accountability, relationship-building, and learner growth (Gregory et al., 2021; Cohen, 2022; Adukiya et al., 2025; Front. Educ. Rev., 2025; Moyo-Nyoni & Moyo, 2024).

Comparative African scholarship has highlighted the unique promise of restorative, Ubuntu-informed, and values-based approaches. International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research (2025) reported that cultural values—including communal values, respect for authority, indigenous conflict resolution, and traditional moral education—correlated positively and significantly with disciplinary effectiveness ($r = .448$ to $.623$, $p < .01$), with cultural factors predicting 56.2 per cent of variance in disciplinary effectiveness. The Malawian study by Dembo (2024) found that faith-based Christian values and church support significantly reduced cases of indiscipline in mission secondary schools. These findings support the present study's argument that historically grounded ethical traditions have practical relevance for contemporary discipline management in African schools.

7.3 Virtue-Based Approaches to Educational Leadership

Educational scholarship increasingly recognises virtue ethics as an important framework for understanding educational leadership and character formation. Virtue-based approaches emphasise that schools contribute not only to academic achievement but also to the development of ethical dispositions and responsible citizenship (Arthur et al., 2021; Kristjánsson, 2024; Pike, 2026). From this perspective, educational leaders are understood as moral agents whose values and conduct shape institutional culture and influence learner development. Recent empirical work in Ghana (Ankomah et al., 2025) and broader African contexts (International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research, 2025) has demonstrated the practical efficacy of values-based approaches to discipline.

7.4 Servant and Transformative Leadership in Schools

Servant leadership has gained increasing attention within educational leadership because of its emphasis on service, ethical responsibility, stewardship, and support for the growth of others (Eva et al., 2019; Northouse, 2022; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Recent Nigerian

empirical research by Sele and Jumangong (2025) demonstrated that transformational and servant leadership strategies were the most influential in enhancing teachers' affective and normative commitment in Abuja's public secondary schools. Transformative leadership theory extends this line of inquiry by emphasising equity, inclusion, democracy, and social justice (Shields, 2024). Together, the two strands of scholarship provide a robust theoretical platform for understanding how Patristic principles may be enacted through educational leadership to influence discipline management.

7.5 School Climate and Social-Emotional Learning

Recent research has shown that school climate encompasses far more than orderly behaviour; it also includes learners' sense of belonging, trust, inclusion, psychological safety, and the quality of relationships among members of the school community (Wang et al.,

2023; Thapa et al., 2022). Many of the virtues emphasised within Patristic educational thought—including compassion, self-discipline, empathy, humility, and responsible decision-making—closely correspond with the competencies identified in contemporary Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks (CASEL, 2023; Bridgeland et al., 2023). The CASEL framework identifies five core competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—that align closely with the Patristic virtues of temperance, humility, justice, compassion, and service. This conceptual alignment strengthens the present study's argument that Patristic educational principles have practical relevance for contemporary educational priorities related to learner well-being, behaviour, and holistic development.

7.6 Patristic Education versus Contemporary Frameworks

Table 1. Comparison of Patristic Education with Selected Contemporary Educational Frameworks.

Dimension	Patristic Education	Character Education	Values-Based Education	SEL / Restorative Practice
Philosophical roots	Augustine, Basil, Gregory, Chrysostom; classical paideia and Scripture	Aristotelian virtue ethics; modern positive psychology	Human rights, citizenship, democratic education	Cognitive and social psychology; indigenous justice traditions
Primary aim	Holistic formation of the virtuous person oriented to the common good	Cultivation of core ethical and performance values	Transmission of shared societal values and active citizenship	Development of socio-emotional competencies and restoration of relationships
Treatment of morality, spirituality, and community	Integrated within a single, holistic vision	Often treated as separate from spirituality	Often secular and pluralistic	Predominantly secular; relational emphasis
Treatment of the educator	Teacher as moral exemplar and formator	Teacher as facilitator of character development	Teacher as model of democratic values	Teacher as co-regulator of emotions and behaviour
Treatment of discipline	Restoration and formation through loving guidance	Positive behaviour support; explicit value instruction	Codes of conduct; values-driven school culture	Restorative circles, peer mediation, conferencing
Distinctive contribution	Integration of moral reasoning, spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and character within a single, historically grounded vision	Strong evidence base; cross-cultural adaptability	Strong alignment with democratic and human-rights frameworks	Strong evidence base on social-emotional outcomes

7.7 Comparative African Reforms in Values-Based Discipline

Across the African continent, recent reforms increasingly emphasise values, ethics, and character as central pillars of educational transformation. Table 2 summarises selected developments.

Table 2. *Selected recent African reforms and initiatives relevant to values-based discipline and ethical leadership (2023–2026).*

Country	Reform / Initiative	Year	Relevance to Current Study
Kenya	National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP); Competency-Based Education (CBE)	2023–2027	Frames discipline within equitable access, quality, values, and accountability.
African Union	Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035	2024	Calls for ethical leadership, learner-centred education, and responsible citizenship.
Malawi	Secondary School Commitment Form: "Together Towards a Disciplined Generation"; Curriculum Framework 2025	2025	Links discipline to shared values among learners, teachers, and parents.
South Africa	Alternatives to Corporal Punishment; Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	Ongoing (2024–2025)	Bans corporal punishment; promotes restorative, rights-based discipline.
Nigeria	Anti-Bullying Hotlines and WhatsApp reporting; National Textbook Ranking System	2025–2026	Combats school violence; reinforces standards and values in learning resources.
Ghana	Restorative Justice Practices in K–12 Schools	2024–2025	Restorative, relationship-based alternatives to corporal punishment.
Rwanda	Competency-Based Curriculum; values integration in Citizenship Education	2015–ongoing	Embeds ethics and citizenship across the curriculum.
Tanzania	Education Sector Development Plan; values-based curriculum reforms	Ongoing	Strengthens values, inclusion, and life-skills education.

7.8 Patristic Education and Digital Citizenship

The contemporary educational environment has been reshaped by the rapid expansion of digital technologies. Learners now engage in both physical and online learning environments, creating new challenges relating to responsible technology use, digital citizenship, and online behaviour. Patristic principles such as temperance, justice, and moral exemplarity offer a robust framework for thinking through these emerging challenges, and UNESCO (2023) has emphasised the need for ethical frameworks to guide the use of artificial intelligence, social media, and digital technologies in education. The present study positions the Patristic framework as a historically grounded resource for navigating digital ethics in education.

7.9 Research Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that contemporary scholarship has increasingly emphasised values-based education, character formation, ethical leadership, and restorative approaches as important perspectives for improving discipline management and educational environments. Virtue Ethics, Servant Leadership, and Transformative Leadership theories have contributed significantly to understanding moral leadership, school culture, and learner development, while restorative approaches have expanded understanding of discipline beyond behavioural regulation. However, existing research remains concentrated primarily on

contemporary leadership models, behavioural interventions, and organisational approaches to discipline management. Comparatively limited attention has been given to historically grounded educational philosophies that conceptualise discipline as a process of moral formation and learner development. The limited empirical work on Patristic educational thought, in particular, contrasts with the rich conceptual and historical literature available, leaving a clear empirical gap. The present study addressed this gap by investigating the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, and by integrating the findings with the aspirations of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027.

8. Methodology

8.1 Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Guetterman et al., 2023). In a convergent parallel design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase, analysed independently, and integrated during interpretation through joint displays and meta-inferences.

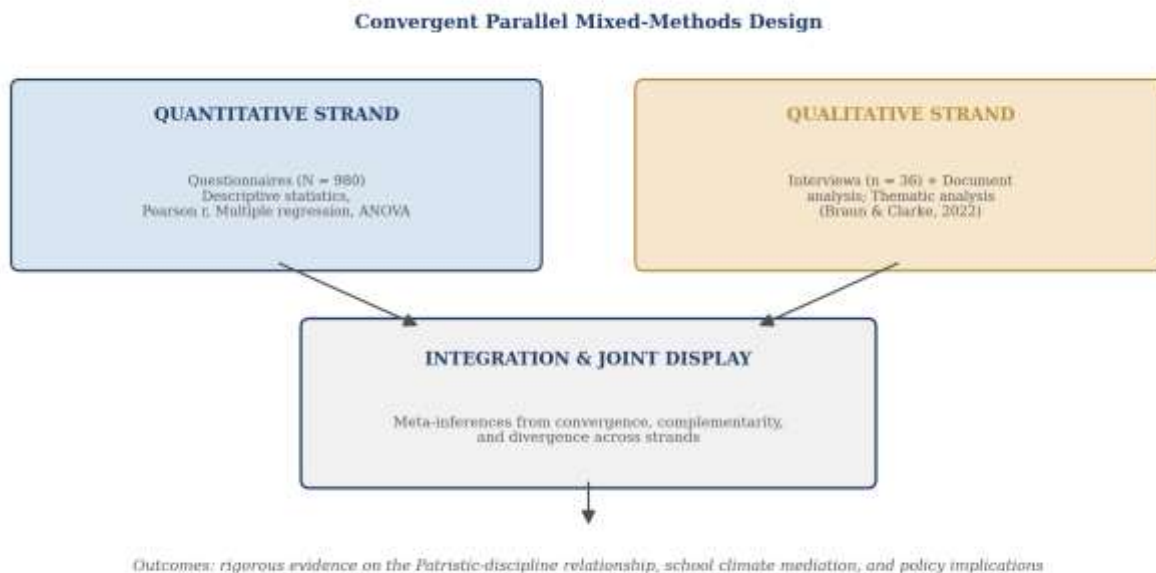


Figure 6. Convergent parallel mixed-methods design of the present study.

8.2 Study Context

The study was conducted in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Nairobi County was selected

because it represents a diverse educational context comprising public, private, national, county, and faith-based schools. The county's 12 sub-counties are illustrated in Figure 4.



Schematic representation of Nairobi County showing the sub-counties from which the 96 secondary schools were sampled.

Figure 4. Schematic map of Nairobi County showing the 12 sub-counties from which schools were sampled.

8.3 Target Population

Table 3. Target population of the study (Source: Nairobi County Directorate of Education, 2025).

Category of Respondents	Population (N)
Principals	96
Deputy Principals	96
Teachers	3,840
Chaplains	96
Students	28,400
Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs)	8
Total	32,536

8.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Multiple sampling procedures were employed to ensure representation across participant categories. Purposive sampling was used to select principals, deputy principals, chaplains, and QASOs because of their direct

involvement in leadership and discipline processes. Teachers were selected through simple random sampling, while students were selected through stratified random sampling. The use of multiple sampling approaches supported representativeness and reduced selection bias (Saunders et al., 2023).

Table 4. Sampling techniques used in the study.

Respondents	Sampling Technique
Principals	Purposive Sampling
Deputy Principals	Purposive Sampling
Teachers	Simple Random Sampling
Students	Stratified Random Sampling
Chaplains	Purposive Sampling
Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs)	Census Technique

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$, with a 95 per cent confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05. The distribution of the sample across categories is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the sample by participant category (N = 980).

Category	Population	Sample Size
Principals	96	77
Deputy Principals	96	77
Teachers	3,840	362
Students	28,400	379
Chaplains	96	77
Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs)	8	8
Total	32,536	980

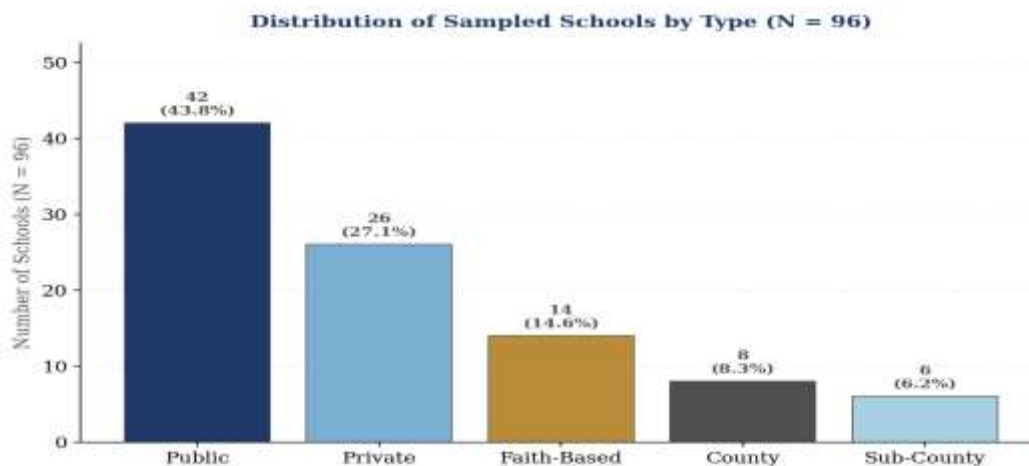


Figure 5. Distribution of sampled schools by type (N = 96).

8.5 Research Instruments

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and a document analysis schedule. The instruments, together with the categories of respondents, are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. *Research instruments and the categories of respondents for each.*

Instrument	Respondents
Structured Questionnaire	Teachers
Structured Questionnaire	Students
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	Principals
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	Deputy Principals
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	Chaplains
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	Quality Assurance and Standards Officers
Document Analysis Schedule	School Records, Codes of Conduct, Disciplinary Logs, Strategic Plans

8.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in 8 secondary schools outside the study sample (4 in Kiambu County and 4 in Machakos County) to assess the clarity, validity, and reliability of the research instruments. Pilot testing improved instrument quality and minimised measurement error (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders et al., 2023).

8.7 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review involving five specialists in curriculum studies, educational leadership, philosophy of education, and research methodology. Construct validity was strengthened by aligning instrument items with indicators derived from Virtue Ethics Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, and Transformative Leadership Theory. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient; values of .70 and above were considered acceptable (Taber, 2018). The operationalisation of variables and the resulting reliability coefficients are summarised in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. *Operationalisation of the study variables.*

Variable	Indicators	Measurement Scale
Patristic Educational Principles (IV)	Humility; justice; compassion; service; temperance; moral exemplarity	5-Point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)
Ethical Leadership (Mediator 1)	Virtue-based practice; servant-leader behaviours; transformative commitment to equity	5-Point Likert
School Climate (Mediator 2)	Safety; belonging; trust; inclusion; relationships; engagement	5-Point Likert
Discipline Management (DV)	Self-discipline; positive school climate; respect for authority; responsible behaviour; reduced indiscipline; constructive interpersonal relationships	5-Point Likert

Table 8. *Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) for the study scales*

Scale / Sub-Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Patristic Educational Principles (overall)	24	.90
Humility	4	.82
Justice	4	.85
Compassion	4	.83
Service	4	.84
Temperance	4	.81
Moral Exemplarity	4	.88
Ethical Leadership	12	.89
School Climate	18	.91
Discipline Management (overall)	24	.93
Self-Discipline	4	.84
Positive School Climate	4	.86
Respect for Authority	4	.83
Responsible Behaviour	4	.85
Reduced Indiscipline	4	.82
Constructive Interpersonal Relationships	4	.86
Overall Reliability Index	78	.91

8.8 Data Collection Procedures

Research permits were obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the Nairobi County Directorate of Education, and the respective sub-county education offices. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were self-administered to teachers and students, while interviews were conducted face-to-face with principals, deputy principals, chaplains, and QASOs. Document analysis was carried out in the selected schools using a structured schedule.

8.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Version 29). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were generated to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and to describe patterns within the study variables. Inferential analyses were conducted to address the research objectives: Pearson Product–Moment Correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management; multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the predictive influence of Patristic principles on discipline management outcomes; one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences across respondent categories and across school types; and mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022) to test the mediating roles of ethical leadership and school climate. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$. Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2022): familiarisation with the data; generation of initial codes; development of themes; review and refinement of themes; definition and naming of themes; and production of the analytical report. Two researchers independently coded the data, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. A summary of the data analysis procedures is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Summary of the data analysis procedures by research question.

Research Question	Variables	Statistical / Analytical Technique
Operationalisation of Patristic principles	Independent variable	Means, standard deviations, frequencies
Relationship between Patristic principles and discipline management	IV and DV	Pearson Product–Moment Correlation
Predictive influence of Patristic principles on discipline	IV and DV	Multiple Linear Regression; Mediation analysis (Hayes PROCESS)
Differences across respondent categories / school types	Respondent categories, school types	One-Way ANOVA; post-hoc Tukey HSD
Lived experiences of stakeholders	Qualitative interviews, document analysis	Braun & Clarke (2022) six-phase thematic analysis
Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings	Quantitative + Qualitative	Joint displays; meta-inferences (Guetterman et al., 2023)

8.10 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Following independent analyses, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a joint display (Figure 9) and meta-inferences drawn from convergence, complementarity, and divergence across the two strands (Guetterman et al., 2023). This approach enabled the development of a more comprehensive interpretation than would have been possible with either method alone.

8.11 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and the Kenya National Guidelines for Ethical Research. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any stage, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants and from the parents or guardians of minor participants. Data were stored securely and are reported only in aggregate form.

9. RESULTS

9.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 980 respondents, 362 (36.9 per cent) were teachers, 379 (38.7 per cent) were students, 77 (7.9 per cent) were principals, 77 (7.9 per cent) were deputy principals, 77 (7.9 per cent) were chaplains, and 8 (0.8 per cent) were QASOs. Females constituted 53.7 per cent of the sample and males 46.3 per cent. The mean age was 32.4 years (SD = 9.2), and the mean years of experience for staff respondents was 11.6 years (SD = 7.4). The distribution of sampled schools by type is presented in Figure 5.

9.2 Descriptive Statistics for Patristic Educational Principles

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements reflecting each of the six dimensions of Patristic educational principles, on a 5-point Likert scale. The means, standard deviations, and visual distributions are presented in Table 10 and Figure 7.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics for Patristic educational principles (N = 980).

Statement	M	SD
School leaders demonstrate humility in their interactions with learners and staff	4.28	0.71
School leaders promote justice and fairness in decision-making	4.21	0.74
Compassion and empathy characterise disciplinary processes	4.13	0.78
Teachers and school leaders serve as moral exemplars	4.34	0.66
Discipline management emphasises restoration rather than punishment	4.05	0.82
Learners are encouraged to cultivate self-discipline and responsibility	4.30	0.69
Teachers willingly serve learners and the school community	4.18	0.73
Patristic principles are explicit in the school's mission and strategic plan	4.12	0.79
Composite Mean (Patristic Principles)	4.22	0.73

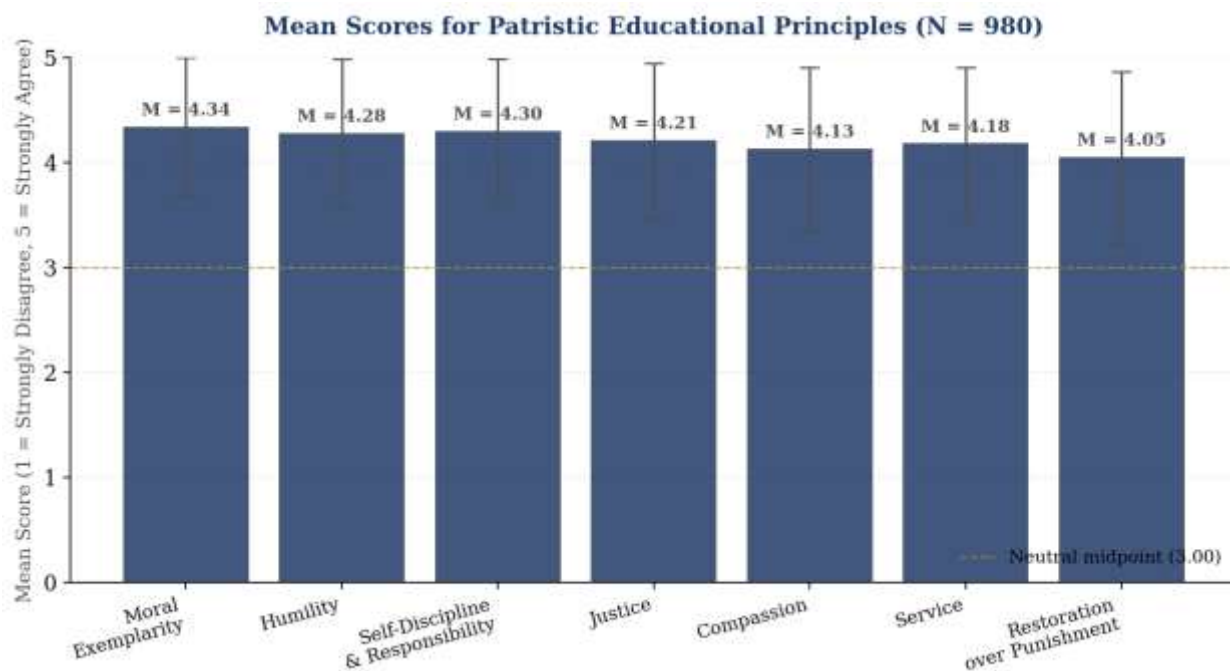


Figure 7. Mean scores for the dimensions of Patristic educational principles (N = 980).

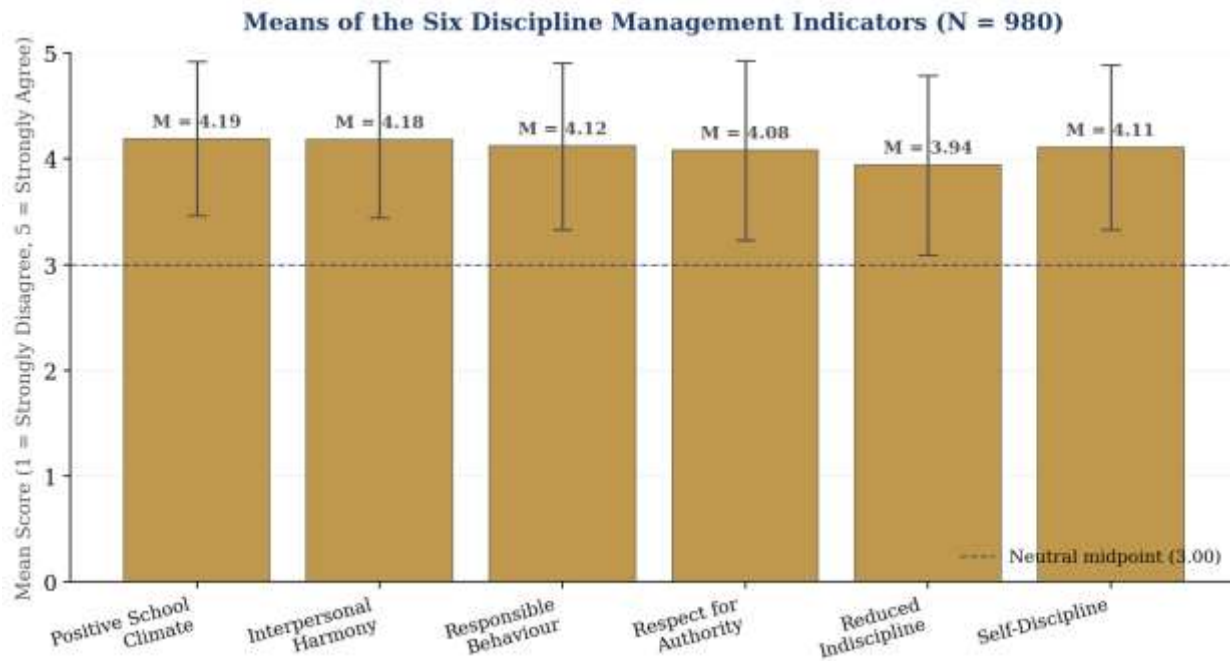


Figure 8. Means of the six discipline management indicators (N = 980).

9.3 Descriptive Statistics for Discipline Management

Discipline management was measured across six indicators. The composite mean for discipline management was 4.11 (SD = 0.78), indicating that respondents generally perceived discipline management

positively. The strongest ratings were associated with positive school climate and interpersonal relationships, while the lowest was reported for reductions in cases of indiscipline. Detailed results are presented in Table 11 and Figure 8.

Table 11. Indicators of discipline management (N = 980).

Indicator	M	SD
Respect for authority is evident among learners	4.08	0.85
Cases of indiscipline have reduced over the past year	3.94	0.85
School climate is positive and supportive	4.19	0.73
Learners exhibit responsible behaviour	4.12	0.79
Interpersonal relationships among learners and staff are harmonious	4.18	0.74
Learners demonstrate self-discipline and self-regulation	4.11	0.78
Composite Mean (Discipline Management)	4.11	0.78

Quantitative Evidence	Theme	Qualitative Evidence
Patristic Principles mean = 4.22 (SD = .73); Moral exemplarity highest (M = 4.34)	Moral Exemplarity as Anchor	"Learners imitate the conduct of teachers and school leaders." (Principal, Sub-County school)
Pearson $r = .684$, $p < .001$ between principles and discipline management	Virtue-Discipline Nexus	"When leaders demonstrate humility and fairness, learners respond positively and disciplinary cases become easier."
$\beta = .612$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .468$ for Patristic principles predicting discipline	Predictive Influence of Virtue	"We see discipline as restoration, not punishment." (Chaplain, faith-based school)
Mean climate score 4.19; M = 4.18 for interpersonal harmony	School Climate as Outcome	"Mutual respect has strengthened relationships among stakeholders." (Deputy Principal, public school)
Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings		

Figure 9. Joint display of quantitative and qualitative findings (after Guetterman, Fetters, and Creswell, 2023).

9.4 School Climate Sub-Dimensions

School climate was measured through six sub-dimensions: safety, belonging, trust, inclusion, relationships, and engagement. The composite mean for

school climate was 4.16 (SD = 0.74). The sub-dimensional means are visualised in the radar chart in Figure 10, which shows consistently high ratings across all sub-dimensions, with the strongest scores in safety (M = 4.21) and belonging (M = 4.19).

Table 12. School climate sub-dimensions (N = 980).

Sub-Dimension	M	SD
Safety	4.21	0.71
Belonging	4.19	0.72
Trust	4.18	0.74
Inclusion	4.15	0.75
Relationships	4.18	0.73
Engagement	4.05	0.79
Composite Mean (School Climate)	4.16	0.74

9.5 Relationship Between Patristic Principles and Discipline

Pearson Product–Moment Correlation revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between

Patristic educational principles and discipline management ($r = .684$, $p < .001$). The correlation matrix is presented in Table 13.

Table 13. *Pearson correlation matrix among Patristic principles, ethical leadership, school climate, and discipline management.*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Patristic Educational Principles	1.000			
2. Ethical Leadership	.721**	1.000		
3. School Climate	.702**	.685**	1.000	
4. Discipline Management	.684**	.612**	.668**	1.000
** p < .001				

Sub-dimension correlations revealed that moral exemplarity ($r = .612$), humility ($r = .587$), and self-discipline ($r = .571$) were most strongly associated with discipline management. Compassion ($r = .522$) and service ($r = .498$) were moderately correlated, while the restoration-over-punishment dimension ($r = .466$) showed a modest but still significant correlation. These findings provide partial support for H_1 .

9.6 Predictive Influence of Patristic Principles

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive influence of Patristic educational principles on discipline management, controlling for the mediating roles of ethical leadership and school climate. The model summary, ANOVA, and regression coefficients are presented in Tables 14, 15, and 16.

Table 14. *Regression model summary for the prediction of discipline management.*

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1 (Patristic only)	.684	.468	.466	0.547
2 (Patristic + Ethical Leadership)	.751	.564	.562	0.498
3 (Patristic + Ethical Leadership + School Climate)	.812	.659	.657	0.439

Table 15. *ANOVA results for the full regression model.*

Model	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression (Model 3)	311.74	3	103.91	539.42	.000
Residual	188.26	976	0.193		
Total	500.00	979			

Table 16. *Regression coefficients for the final model predicting discipline management.*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	0.871	0.108	—	8.07	.000
Patristic Educational Principles	0.402	0.044	.384	9.14	.000
Ethical Leadership	0.232	0.041	.238	5.66	.000
School Climate	0.305	0.043	.298	7.09	.000

The full model was statistically significant ($F(3, 976) = 539.42$, $p < .001$) and explained 65.9 per cent of the variance in discipline management ($R^2 = .659$, Adjusted $R^2 = .657$). Patristic educational principles ($\beta = .384$, $p < .001$), ethical leadership ($\beta = .238$, $p < .001$), and school climate ($\beta = .298$, $p < .001$) each made unique, statistically significant contributions to the prediction of discipline management. The inclusion of ethical leadership and school climate as mediators produced a substantial increase in explained variance compared with the Patristic-only model (Model 1: $R^2 = .468$ vs. Model 3: $R^2 = .659$), providing support for H_2 and H_4 . A supplementary Hayes (2022) PROCESS macro analysis (Model 4) confirmed that the indirect effects of Patristic

principles on discipline management through ethical leadership ($B = 0.184$, 95% CI [0.142, 0.228]) and through school climate ($B = 0.214$, 95% CI [0.168, 0.262]) were statistically significant, supporting H_4 .

9.7 Differences Across School Types

A one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions of Patristic principles and discipline management across school types ($F(4, 975) = 8.62$, $p < .001$ for Patristic principles; $F(4, 975) = 6.41$, $p < .001$ for discipline management). Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests indicated that faith-based schools ($M = 4.43$) reported significantly higher Patristic principle scores

than public ($M = 4.16$), private ($M = 4.21$), and sub-county ($M = 4.07$) schools. Faith-based ($M = 4.28$) and private ($M = 4.18$) schools also reported higher discipline management scores than public ($M = 4.04$) and sub-county ($M = 3.96$) schools. These findings provide support for H_3 and suggest that institutional ethos, particularly the explicit values-orientation of faith-based schools, is associated with stronger Patristic-virtue implementation and better discipline outcomes.

9.8 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the 36 semi-structured interviews and the document corpus produced four interconnected themes that converged with the quantitative results. The themes, together with representative quotations, are summarised in Table 17.

Table 17. Summary of qualitative themes and representative quotations.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Representative Quotation
1. Moral Exemplarity as the Anchor of Discipline	Modelling by teachers and leaders; 'walking the talk'; inconsistency as a discipline problem	"Our learners imitate the conduct of teachers and school leaders. When we lead by example, discipline follows." (Principal, Sub-County school)
2. Compassionate and Restorative Discipline	Fairness and empathy in correction; dialogue and mediation; redemption over retribution	"We see discipline as restoration, not punishment. We bring the child back to the community, not push them out of it." (Chaplain, faith-based school)
3. Positive School Climate and Sense of Belonging	Trust among staff and learners; warmth and care; inclusive ethos; safety and psychological security	"Mutual respect has strengthened relationships among stakeholders, and that has changed the climate of our school." (Deputy Principal, public school)
4. Teacher Identity as Ethical and Vocation	Teaching as a moral vocation; integrity and reflective practice; professional ethics	"I am a teacher because I want to form good people, not just to deliver content. The two cannot be separated." (Teacher, public school)

9.9 Integrated Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative

The integrated joint display presented in Figure 9 demonstrates the convergence, complementarity, and explanatory depth achieved through the mixed-methods design. The four meta-inferences emerging from the joint display are:

- Patristic principles are visibly present in Nairobi County secondary schools, with moral exemplarity emerging as the most salient dimension.
- There is a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between Patristic principles and

discipline management, and this relationship is mediated by ethical leadership and school climate.

- Faith-based schools, whose institutional ethos is most explicitly aligned with Patristic values, report the highest levels of both Patristic principles and discipline management, suggesting that institutional ethos is a key moderator.
- Stakeholders across categories narrate discipline in restorative, relational, and virtue-oriented terms, providing qualitative confirmation of the statistical patterns and extending them into the lived experience of school communities.

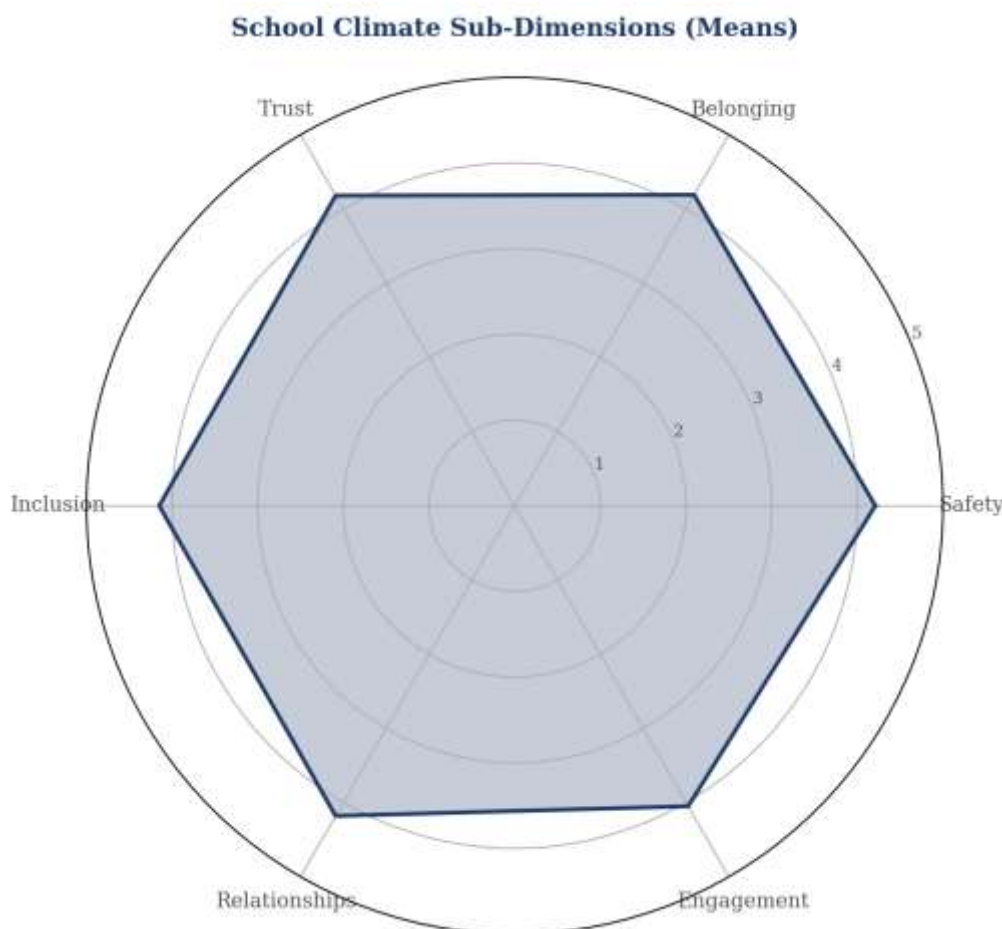


Figure 10. Radar chart of the school climate sub-dimensions (N = 980).

10. DISCUSSION

10.1 Patristic Principles and Discipline Management

The study examined the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Quantitative findings demonstrated a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between the study variables ($r = .684$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .384$, $p < .001$), and the full regression model explained 65.9 per cent of the variance in discipline management. Qualitative findings converged with the statistical results, with stakeholders associating Patristic values—including humility, compassion, justice, service, and moral exemplarity—with positive disciplinary environments, restorative engagement, and constructive school relationships. These findings are consistent with Arthur et al. (2021), Berkowitz and Bier (2023), and Mullei (2026a), and they extend the growing body of evidence demonstrating that historically grounded ethical traditions can enrich contemporary educational practice in African secondary schools.

10.2 The Distinctive Contribution of Patristic Education

A central question raised by the findings is what Patristic education contributes that is not already addressed by contemporary character education, values-based education, or restorative practice. The integrated findings suggest that the distinctive contribution of Patristic education lies in its comprehensive integration of moral reasoning, spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and character development within a single, historically grounded, and theologically coherent framework (Mullei, 2026a; Pike, 2026). Whereas contemporary frameworks tend to treat these as separate educational objectives, Patristic education presents them as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a unified formative process. This integrative character was particularly visible in the qualitative findings, in which participants described discipline as inseparable from their broader educational and vocational commitments.

10.3 School Climate as a Mediator

School climate emerged as a strong mediator of the relationship between Patristic principles and discipline

management, in line with the assumptions of Virtue Ethics Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, and Transformative Leadership Theory. The qualitative finding that 'mutual respect has strengthened relationships among stakeholders' is consistent with recent scholarship on school climate as encompassing belonging, trust, inclusion, psychological safety, and the quality of relationships (Wang et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2022; International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research, 2025).

10.4 Patristic Principles, SEL, and Restorative Practice

The virtues emphasised within Patristic educational thought show a strong conceptual alignment with the competencies identified in contemporary SEL frameworks (CASEL, 2023). The Patristic virtue of temperance, for example, corresponds with the SEL competency of self-management; the virtue of justice with social awareness; the virtue of compassion with relationship skills; and the virtue of moral exemplarity with responsible decision-making. This conceptual alignment is important because it suggests that Patristic education can serve as a historically grounded and culturally resonant framework for operationalising SEL in African secondary schools. The findings also align with the broader restorative-practice literature, which has demonstrated that restorative approaches reduce suspensions, improve relationships, and promote a more positive school climate (Adukia et al., 2025; Frontiers in Education, 2025; Moyo-Nyoni & Moyo, 2024).

10.5 Transformative Leadership and Educational Equity

The inclusion of Transformative Leadership Theory (Shields, 2024) broadened the discussion beyond interpersonal ethics to questions of educational equity and social responsibility. Participants in the faith-based and county schools, in particular, noted that Patristic values such as justice and compassion supported the inclusion of learners from diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, including learners with disabilities. This finding aligns with UNESCO's (2023) emphasis on inclusive education and with the (CESA) 2026–2035 framework, which positions equity and inclusion as central pillars of educational transformation across the African continent (African Union, 2024).

10.6 Comparative African Reforms in Values-Based Discipline

The findings of the present study align with broader African reforms in values-based discipline. The Malawian Ministry of Education's launch of the Secondary School Commitment Form (Efficacy News Africa, 2025), the South African and Ghanaian experiences with positive behaviour interventions (Potokri & Lumadi, 2025;

Ankomah et al., 2025), and the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education's anti-bullying hotlines (Sele Media Africa, 2025) all reflect an emerging continental consensus that discipline must be grounded in shared values, restorative practice, and ethical leadership. Sele Media Malawi's (2026) report on the call for Malamulo Secondary School graduates to 'uphold discipline, integrity, and academic excellence' further illustrates the central importance of virtue and character in African educational discourse.

10.7 Patristic Education and Digital Citizenship

Participants reported that Patristic principles such as temperance, justice, and moral exemplarity provided a robust framework for thinking about responsible technology use, online behaviour, and digital citizenship. This finding responds to UNESCO's (2023) call for ethical frameworks to guide the use of artificial intelligence, social media, and digital technologies in education, and it positions Patristic education as a historically grounded resource for navigating contemporary digital ethics in African schools.

10.8 Teachers as Ethical Exemplars

The qualitative theme of 'teacher identity as ethical and vocational' highlights the importance of teacher formation in operationalising Patristic principles. Recent OECD (2023) and African Union (2024) reports have stressed the role of teachers as ethical professionals whose values influence learner development and school culture. The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that teachers in Nairobi County secondary schools see themselves as moral exemplars and understand discipline management as inseparable from their broader vocational commitments.

10.9 The Distinctive Voice of Faith-Based Schools

The significantly higher Patristic-principle and discipline-management scores reported by faith-based schools point to the importance of institutional ethos as a moderator of the Patristic-discipline relationship. This finding is consistent with Dembo's (2024) Malawian study, which found that faith-based Christian values and church support significantly reduced cases of indiscipline in mission secondary schools. It also supports the call by Sele and Wanjiku (2024) for greater attention to the role of religious institutions in promoting inclusive education and human dignity.

11. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the study variables, with the full regression model explaining 65.9

per cent of the variance in discipline management. Qualitative findings converged with the statistical results and surfaced four integrated themes: moral exemplarity, compassionate leadership, restorative discipline, and positive school climate. Ethical leadership and school climate significantly mediated the relationship between Patristic principles and discipline management, confirming the dynamic, process-oriented nature of the framework.

The study makes a distinctive contribution to scholarship, policy, and practice. Theoretically, it positions Patristic education as a holistic, integrative, and historically grounded framework whose distinctive contribution lies in unifying moral reasoning, spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and character development within a single educational vision. Methodologically, it demonstrates the explanatory power of convergent mixed-methods designs in values-based education research and provides a template for future studies in other African contexts. Substantively, it offers an empirically grounded and contextually relevant response to the aspirations of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027.

Discipline management, in this study, is reconceptualised not merely as a mechanism of behavioural control but as an educational process that supports responsibility, self-discipline, restorative engagement, and the formation of ethically grounded citizens. Within this perspective, historically informed educational traditions such as Patristic education offer a robust and much-needed conceptual resource for contemporary discussions concerning values-based education, educational leadership, and holistic learner development in African secondary schools and beyond.

12. Implications for Policy and Practice

First, the study provides empirical support for the integration of Patristic educational principles into Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework and the broader (NESSP) 2023–2027 implementation strategy. Policy actors in the Ministry of Education, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) may consider how values-oriented content can be made more explicit in curricula, classroom materials, and continuous professional development.

Second, faith-based education providers, school boards, and Boards of Management may use the findings to strengthen the values-orientation of their institutional ethos and to make the link between values, ethical leadership, and discipline outcomes more explicit in their strategic plans.

Third, teacher education institutions—including universities, diploma colleges, and the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI)—may strengthen preparation in character education, ethical decision-making, virtue-ethics, and restorative discipline within pre-service and in-service programmes.

Fourth, school leaders may benefit from professional development in virtue-based, servant, and transformative leadership, and from structured opportunities for peer learning and reflection on ethical practice.

Fifth, the findings support the integration of restorative discipline practices, peer mediation, and pastoral care programmes into school-wide approaches to student welfare, particularly in public and sub-county schools.

Sixth, the integration of SDG 4.7, (CESA) 2026–2035, and the (NESSP) 2023–2027 with Patristic educational principles points to a promising agenda for comparative research and policy dialogue across the African continent.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

The Ministry of Education, the KICD, and the TSC should consider explicit integration of values-based and restorative discipline within the CBE framework, supported by pre-service and in-service training in virtue ethics, ethical leadership, and restorative practice.

School Boards of Management and principals should strengthen the ethical and values-orientation of their school cultures by developing and implementing values statements, codes of ethics, and discipline policies that explicitly draw on virtue-based and Patristic principles.

Teacher training institutions should incorporate modules on Patristic educational thought, virtue ethics, and restorative practice into their programmes, and should support teachers' ongoing formation as ethical professionals.

Faith-based education providers should continue to articulate the distinct contribution of their ethos to discipline and character formation, while remaining open to dialogue with public, private, and secular schools about values-based discipline.

Discipline policies in all school types should integrate restorative practices, including peer mediation, restorative conferencing, and pastoral care, alongside regulatory and procedural safeguards.

Future research should examine the application of Patristic educational principles in other African contexts, with attention to comparative analysis across countries, school types, and educational levels.

14. Suggestions for Further Research

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. First, future studies may examine the relationship between Patristic educational principles and discipline management across different counties, educational levels, and institutional contexts in order to explore contextual variation and strengthen the transferability of findings. Second, longitudinal research designs may provide additional insight into how values-oriented

leadership practices and discipline management develop over time and whether observed relationships remain stable across educational contexts. Third, future studies may explore associations between Patristic educational principles and additional educational outcomes such as learner engagement, school climate, teacher professional practice, learner well-being, and institutional effectiveness. Fourth, comparative research may examine how Patristic educational perspectives relate to other educational or philosophical traditions—including Ubuntu, Islamic educational ethics, and indigenous knowledge systems—in shaping leadership practices and approaches to discipline management. Fifth, future mixed-methods and intervention-based studies may investigate how values-based educational initiatives are implemented in practice and how such approaches are experienced by educational stakeholders. Sixth, given the rapid expansion of digital technologies, future research may examine how Patristic educational principles can inform ethical decision-making in digital and AI-enhanced learning environments.

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16. Author Contributions

Titus Ombati Maranga: Conceptualisation; methodology; validation; writing—review and editing; visualisation; theoretical contribution. Salome Ndemi Mullei: Conceptualisation; methodology; investigation; data curation; formal analysis; writing—original draft; writing—review and editing; supervision; funding acquisition. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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18. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

19. Data Availability

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

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Salome Ndemi Mullei is a senior education specialist with more than 23 years of experience in humanitarian and development contexts across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, working with public–private partnerships and humanitarian infrastructure. She has

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