

Research Article

Moral Presence as the Fourth Dimension: An Exploratory Inquiry into the Extension of the Community of Inquiry Framework in Chinese Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract

Global Teacher Education Is Currently Undergoing a Profound “moral Turn,” Redefining Educators as Autonomous Moral Agents Rather Than Mere Transmitters of Knowledge. In Response to This International Trend, China Has Implemented Systematic Reforms Through the “New Normal” Strategy and the “Curriculum for Value Education” Policy, Both of Which Mandate That All Disciplines, Including Linguistics, Integrate Values Education Into Teaching and Learning. Despite These Policy Initiatives, Pre-service Language Teachers Frequently Encounter Challenges in Bridging Abstract Linguistic Analysis with Ethical Reasoning, and Many Remain Uncertain About How to Cultivate Professional Values in Practice. Grounded in a Provincial-level Teaching Reform Project, This Paper Proposes Moral Presence as a Fourth Dimension Extending the Classical Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework, Which Comprises Social Presence, Cognitive Presence, and Teaching Presence. Methodologically, This Study Is a Theoretical and Conceptual Inquiry That Employs Theoretical Synthesis and Deductive Extension Rather Than Empirical Validation. We Construct a Four-dimensional Educational Framework Encompassing Student Community, Pedagogical Methods, Teacher Development, and Evaluation Mechanisms. Through Problem-oriented Learning, Peer Review, and Reflective Practice, This Framework Transforms the Linguistics Classroom Into a Collaborative Space Where Pre-service Teachers Inquire Into the Ethical Dimensions of Language and Negotiate Professional Values. The Central Thesis Posits That Moral Sensitivity Is Not “taught” in a Direct Manner, Rather, It “grows” Through Sustained Engagement Within a CoI. By Distinguishing Moral Presence from Existing Constructs Such as Ethical-values Presence and Emotional Presence, the Paper Clarifies Its Conceptual Boundaries and Theoretical Added Value. The Study Offers a Theoretical Model for Integrating Values Education Into Language Teacher Preparation and Suggests Implications for Curriculum Design, Classroom Interaction, and Assessment in Higher Education. As a Theoretical Proposal, It Provides a Foundation for Future Empirical Testing Rather Than Claiming Empirical Validation.

Keywords

Community of Inquiry, Moral Presence, Teacher Education, Values Education, Pre-service Teacher Education

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Global “Moral Turn” in Teacher Education

Since the 1990s, teacher education has undergone a significant paradigm shift, transitioning from a primary focus on “subject knowledge and pedagogical skills” to a systematic emphasis on the “moral dimensions of teaching.” The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), through its “Education 2030” project, explicitly identifies values and attitudes as core components of the “OECD Learning Compass 2030” [23], asserting that teachers must be empowered with the confidence and competence to navigate values issues within subject instruction. Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* (2016), underscores the necessity of fostering “global citizenship, tolerance, and civic participation,” cultivating respect for “cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity” [36], and establishing “certain knowledge, skills, and values” as pillars of sustainable development. Nations such as Finland, Singapore, and Australia have subsequently embedded moral competence into their professional teaching standards. These international precedents converge on a fundamental proposition: teaching is inherently value-laden, and the teacher’s presence constitutes a moral encounter [35]. Consequently, a teacher’s moral life is not merely an “additional virtue brought into the classroom” but serves as the foundational prerequisite for pedagogical efficacy [30].

1.2. China's Response: “New Normal” and “Curriculum for Value Education”

In alignment with global trends, China initiated systematic educational reforms. The 2018 “Opinions of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Construction of the Teaching Profession in the New Era” officially launched the policy process of the “New Normal University Initiative” [43]. This strategic pivot advocates for a transition in normal universities from a traditional “knowledge-transmission” model to one that “equally emphasizes virtue and competence.” Concurrently, the Ministry of Education’s 2020 Guidelines for the Construction of Curriculum for Value Education in Higher Education Institutions mandated that all courses assume responsibility for values education, thereby institutionalizing the “curriculum for value education” framework [42].

Despite these top-level policy designs, a significant implementation gap persists at the classroom level. This challenge is particularly acute for linguistics instructors, who must navigate the delicate integration of values education within sub-

ject-specific knowledge transmission without resorting to mechanical or superficial approaches. This inherent tension serves as the primary impetus for the present study.

1.3. The Triple Dilemma in Modern Chinese Courses

As a foundational course for Chinese language majors, Modern Chinese has long been confronted with three pedagogical dilemmas. First, the interest dilemma: linguistics tends toward abstract logical analysis, rendering the classroom dry and tedious. Second, the subjectivity dilemma: a “knowledge-centered” pedagogy places students in a passive, receptive position. Third, the value dilemma: the content of linguistics appears to have a low degree of relevance to values education, leaving teachers at a loss as to how to proceed.

1.4. Limitations of Existing Theoretical Tools

While the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework [9] effectively elucidates the mechanisms of collaborative learning, it remains insufficient in explaining how moral development is cultivated within such communities. Furthermore, within the Chinese context, research on “curriculum for value education” has largely been confined to policy interpretation and experiential summaries, frequently lacking theoretical depth and robust international scholarly dialogue.

1.5. Purpose of This Paper

Drawing upon a provincial-level teaching reform project (2024-2027), this paper aims to construct a four-dimensional framework for linguistics courses within Chinese language teacher education programs. Specifically, we introduce Moral Presence as a fourth dimension that complements the three classical dimensions of the CoI framework: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. The central thesis posits that moral sensitivity is not directly “taught”; rather, it “grows” through sustained collaborative inquiry and value negotiation within a carefully structured community.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Lineage of Research on Teacher Morality

Education is fundamentally a moral enterprise, a premise with intellectual roots extending to the classical expositions of Dewey (1909) [8]. Within the theoretical architecture of moral education, Kohlberg (1981/1984) systematically articulated

the stage theory of moral cognitive development and the concept of justice [17, 18], thereby establishing the cornerstone for subsequent research on moral reasoning. Complementing this cognitive perspective, Noddings (2013) advanced care ethics, positing that caring relationships constitute the central pillar of moral education. Together, these paradigms form a “dual-peak dynamic” of “justice” and “care” that continues to shape the field [22].

At the level of professional ethics, Tom (1984) systematically demonstrated that teaching is inherently a moral craft [35]. Hansen (2001), through an examination of teachers’ daily practices, revealed the “moral core” of the profession, asserting that a teacher’s personal presence is the most critical factor in pedagogical practice [12]. Campbell (2003) further noted that the core qualities of an ethical teacher—fairness, honesty, and empathy—are not merely personal virtues but organic components of professional competence [6].

Regarding the role of community, Vangrieken et al. (2017), in their systematic review, demonstrated that teacher communities are central to professional development [37]. Empirical research by Sanger and Osguthorpe (2011) further revealed a close correlation between pre-service teachers’ personal beliefs and their moral teaching practices [27]. These findings collectively suggest that teachers’ moral growth is contingent not only upon individual consciousness but also upon sustained dialogue and reflection within a community.

This conclusion aligns with recent frontiers in teacher morality research. Tirri (2023) explicitly asserts that teachers must be redefined as “independent moral agents” capable of navigating moral dilemmas through general principles of justice [34]. Furthermore, Lissman et al. (2024) introduce the concept of “moral traps,” revealing that teachers frequently encounter dilemmas where multiple moral demands—such as care, justice, and honesty—are difficult to reconcile simultaneously [21]. In this context, the collective moral reflection facilitated by teacher communities serves as a crucial mechanism for addressing such complex ethical challenges.

2.2. The CoI Framework and Its Limitations

The CoI framework, proposed by Garrison et al. (2000), comprises three dimensions: cognitive presence (the extent to which learners construct meaning through sustained reflection and dialogue), social presence (the ability of learners to establish interpersonal trust and emotional connections within a community), and teaching presence (the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes) [9]. This framework has been substantiated by extensive empirical research [2, 4, 29, 32].

However, when applied to teacher education, the CoI framework omits a crucial dimension: the development of professional ethical consciousness within the inquiry process. Pritchard (1992, p. 30) observed that “a CoI is simultaneously a moral community” [25], noting that behaviors such as turn-taking and active listening carry inherent ethical connotations.

Similarly, within the “Philosophy for Children” (P4C) tradition [20, 28], Sharp (1987) and Lipman (2003) emphasized that the operation of a CoI enacts the dialogic ethics of democracy and morality [31].

Despite these insights, the CoI framework has not systematized this ethical dimension. Although Holland et al. (2013) proposed an “ethical-values pedagogical model,” [14] Hand (2020) discussed “directive moral teaching,” [11] and Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) proposed an “emotional presence” dimension [7], these contributions remain fragmented. The first primarily treats ethics as a cognitive “filter,” while the latter two focus on teaching methods or emotions; none have achieved a systematic theoretical construction integrating ethics into the CoI structure. Addressing this theoretical gap is precisely the direction this paper attempts to advance.

2.3. “Curriculum for Value Education” and International Dialogue

Chinese research on “curriculum for value education” has historically focused on policy interpretation and practical experience, leaving room for expansion in theoretical construction and international academic dialogue. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed international journals on moral education systematically engaging with Chinese contexts. Harrison et al. (2025) found that Chinese teachers’ understanding of moral values is deeply embedded within a network of social relationships [13]. Xie et al. (2025) demonstrated that the moral dilemma discussion method can effectively cultivate practical wisdom (phronesis) in Chinese classrooms [39]. Additionally, Li and Tan (2017), from a civic education perspective, revealed Chinese teachers’ moral expectations regarding the “good citizen” [19].

Further contributing to this discourse, Ye (2020) discussed the pathways of Chinese teachers’ moral development from a cultural perspective [40], while Ye et al. (2024) empirically examined the cognitive structures of Chinese pre-service teachers regarding “teacher morality” [41]. These empirical studies, employing diverse methodologies, indicate that the topic of Chinese teacher morality has entered the mainstream of international academic discourse, providing robust empirical support for the four-dimensional framework constructed in this paper. Concurrently, the argument advanced by Althof and Berkowitz (2006) regarding the nexus between moral education and citizenship education serves as a vital theoretical bridge [3], linking the discussion in this paper to the cultivation objective of “global citizenship awareness” outlined under the United Nations’ fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4).

3. Theoretical Framework: The Four-Dimensional Educational Model

This section forms the theoretical core of the paper. While

building upon the three foundational dimensions of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, this model introduces Moral Presence as a critical fourth dimension. United by the

overarching logical thread of “collaboration, dialogue, and reflection” [10], these four dimensions collectively aim to cultivate future teachers with moral sensitivity.

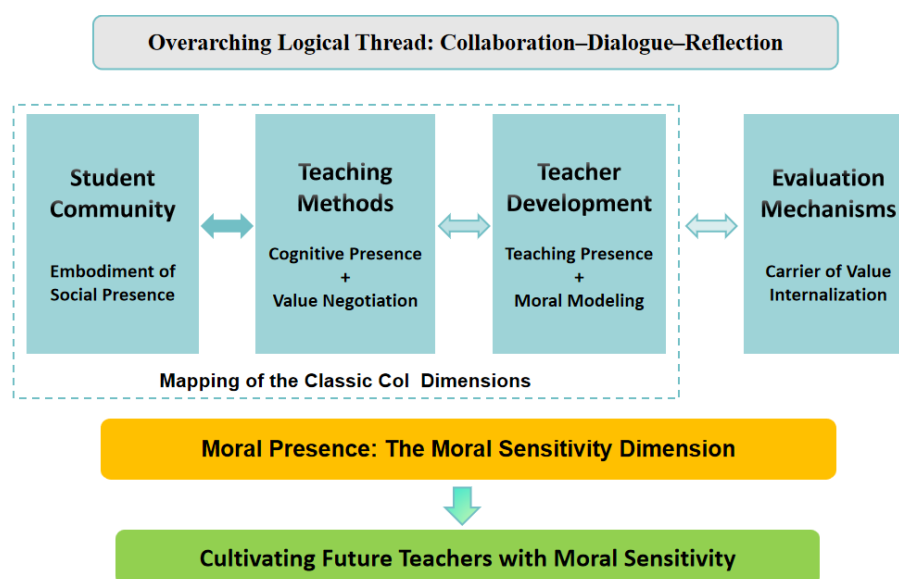


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Four-Dimensional Educational Framework.

Note: The four practical pathways—student community, teaching methods, teacher development, and evaluation mechanisms—form an organic interaction centered on the objective of “cultivating future teachers with moral sensitivity,” with “collaboration, dialogue, and reflection” serving as the overarching logical thread. The first three pathways correspond to the three classical dimensions of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence), while Moral Presence serves as the newly integrated fourth dimension, permeating the collaborative operation of all practical pathways.

3.1. Why Introduce “Moral Presence”

While the three dimensions of the CoI framework—social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence—paint a picture of “effective learning,” yet they fail to answer the fundamental question of what kind of person one becomes in the process of learning.

The distinct nature of teacher education necessitates the explicit articulation of this moral dimension. Scholars such as Tom (1984), Sockett (1993), and Hansen (2001) have collectively advanced the proposition that “teaching is moral practice” [12, 30, 35]. Teaching is never value-neutral; rather, the teacher’s moral life is foundational to the efficacy of their pedagogical practice. Consequently, teacher education must cultivate not only “teachers who can teach” but also “teachers with moral awareness” [6].

Sharp (1987) astutely observed that transforming a classroom into a CoI entails implicit assumptions regarding “human nature,” “dialogue,” and “truth,” all of which carry profound moral implications [28]. Although the CoI framework acknowledges the moral attributes inherent in a community of learners, it has not yet systematized this recognition into an operational analytical dimension. This paper seeks to address precisely this theoretical lacuna.

3.2. What Is “Moral Presence”

This paper defines Moral Presence as the process through which learners, within a CoI, progressively identify, comprehend, and internalize the ethical values associated with disciplinary practice and professional roles via collaborative dialogue and reflective practice. Through this process, learners develop moral judgment and a robust professional ethical consciousness.

This concept encompasses three progressive levels:

Moral Awareness: The capacity to identify the value dimensions and ethical issues embedded within subject knowledge. Ronkainen et al. (2023) identified significant individual differences in teachers’ ethical sensitivity, underscoring the necessity for systematic training interventions [26].

Moral Deliberation: The capacity to engage in rational dialogue concerning value disagreements within the community. The classical experiment by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) demonstrated that classroom moral discussions can effectively promote the development of moral reasoning. Furthermore [5], the “Just Community” model proposed by Power et al. (1989) illustrated the pivotal role of collective deliberation in fostering moral growth [24].

Moral Integration: The incorporation of moral judgment

into one's professional identity, making ethical consciousness an organic component of future teaching practice [6].

3.3. Why “Moral Presence” Is Irreducible

Moral presence is not reducible to social presence. While social connections provide the relational foundation for moral practice, interpersonal communicative competence does not guarantee the capacity for fair judgment in situations of value conflict. As Sharp (1987) noted, the ethical dimension of a community does not emerge naturally; rather, it requires conscious cultivation by the educator [28].

Moral presence is not reducible to cognitive presence. Students may fully comprehend the sociolinguistic knowledge of “language variation” at the cognitive level, yet this understanding does not automatically translate into a value stance of “respecting dialect speakers.” Cognitive understanding is a necessary, yet insufficient, condition for moral judgment [18].

Moral presence is not reducible to teaching presence. While teaching presence can create opportunities for moral learning, it cannot substitute for the learner's autonomous generation as a moral subject. Hand (2020) observed that even when teachers employ a “directive” approach to moral education, the objective is to enable students to accept legitimate moral standards, not merely to acknowledge their existence; achieving the former requires the active participation of moral presence [11].

Ultimately, while cognition pertains to “knowing,” social presence to “belonging,” and teaching presence to “guiding,” moral presence pertains to “goodness.” Together, these four dimensions constitute a comprehensive framework for “holistic education.”

3.4. The Four Dimensions and Their Interactions

The four dimensions are not simply juxtaposed; rather, they are organically interconnected through the shared logical thread of “collaboration, dialogue, and reflection” [10, 31]. Within this framework, the student community provides the foundation for collaboration, teaching methods offer the field for inquiry, teacher development supplies exemplary leadership, and evaluation mechanisms serve as procedural vehicles. The processes of “collaboration, dialogue, and reflection” permeate the entire educational ecosystem, jointly orienting toward the cultivation of moral sensitivity.

The First Dimension: Student Community. Through digital platforms, heterogeneous grouping, and negotiated tasks, a safe, trusting, and responsibility-sharing learning ecology is established. This environment enables students to repeatedly practice perspective-taking, listening to dissent, and negotiating disagreements in their daily interactions. Research by Hord (1997) and Vescio et al. (2008) demonstrates that professional learning communities can significantly improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes [16, 38]. The

abilities to take others' perspectives, listen to dissenting opinions, and negotiate differences constitute the fertile soil in which moral sensitivity grows.

The Second Dimension: Teaching Methods. Problem-oriented and task-driven pedagogical approaches are adopted, incorporating language issues with ethical tension (e.g., “Should teachers use standard language or dialects?”). Such inquiries reflect ethical dimensions regarding language, identity, and cultural respect, and are supplemented by case analysis and scenario simulation. Xie et al. (2025) validated the effectiveness of the moral dilemma discussion method in Chinese classrooms [39], while the classical experiment by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) similarly confirmed that moral discussions effectively promote the development of moral reasoning [5]. Consequently, students confront not merely pure linguistic analysis, but ethical inquiry imbued with profound value concerns.

The Third Dimension: Teacher Development. Teacher learning communities are constructed through teaching salons and peer lesson observation and evaluation. A systematic review by Vangrieken et al. (2017) demonstrates that teacher communities serve as an effective context for promoting professional development [37], and Vescio et al. (2008) further proved that professional learning communities have a significant positive impact on teaching practices [38]. Within collective reflection, teachers discuss real moral dilemmas such as “how to respond to students' biased remarks” and “how to handle discriminatory expressions in the classroom.” Research by Lissman et al. (2024) indicates that in the face of “moral traps,” collective negotiated responses serve as an effective mitigation mechanism [21]. Furthermore, the attitude of teachers in candidly sharing their confusions and accepting criticism constitutes a moral exemplar for pre-service teachers.

The Fourth Dimension: Evaluation Mechanisms. A comprehensive assessment system encompassing “self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation” is constructed. The “Just Community” model by Power et al. (1989) demonstrates that collective deliberation and shared evaluation are effective means of promoting moral growth [24]. In peer review, students confront genuine ethical issues such as fairness, honesty, and empathy; thus, each evaluation constitutes a practical training exercise in moral practice.

4. Research Methods

This study adopts a theoretical construction approach [33], utilizing the method of “theoretical synthesis and deductive extension.” This study is a theoretical construction and does not involve empirical data collection or validation. The four-step process is designed to ensure transparency in the development of the proposed framework. The methodological process unfolds across four distinct phases:

Step 1: Identifying Theoretical Limitations. A theoretical synthesis was conducted to delineate the explanatory boundaries of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework within the

context of values education. While the framework's three dimensions effectively elucidate the mechanics of learning, they remain insufficient in addressing how learners are cultivated into moral subjects through the educational process.

Step 2: Selecting Theoretical Resources. Core elements pertinent to these identified limitations were extracted from moral education theory, teacher education research, and the "curriculum for value education" literature. Key theoretical foundations include Sharp's (1987) conceptualization of the "community as moral community," Tirri's (2023) notion of the "teacher as moral agent," Campbell's (2003) "ethical teacher," and Holland et al.'s (2013) "ethical-values pedagogical model" [14, 28, 34].

Step 3: Logical Deductive Reasoning. A deductive chain was constructed through the following premises: (1) the teaching profession inherently possesses moral attributes [12, 30, 35]; (2) teacher education must cultivate educators with profound moral awareness [6]; (3) the existing CoI framework fails to adequately capture this critical dimension; and (4) consequently, "Moral Presence" must be introduced as a distinct construct. Throughout this deductive process, the boundaries between "Moral Presence" and the three established presences (cognitive, social, and teaching) were rigorously examined to confirm its irreducibility.

Step 4: Practical Re-embedding and Testing. The resulting four-dimensional framework was re-embedded into the specific teaching reform context of this project for preliminary application. This phase examined the framework's capacity to explain, organize, and integrate experiential materials derived from project practice. Practical experience was thus utilized to illustrate the framework's explanatory power, while simultaneously elevating fragmented experiential insights into formal theoretical propositions.

As a participant and implementer of the teaching reform, the researcher benefits from first-hand experiential material but must also navigate the potential risk of cognitive bias. To mitigate this limitation, the theoretical construction process consistently engaged with published academic literature as a critical dialogue partner. Subsequent empirical testing of the framework will be conducted through rigorous action research.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Contribution: Extending the CoI Framework

The primary theoretical contribution of this paper is the proposition of "Moral Presence" as a fourth dimension of the CoI framework. Distinct from the "ethical-values presence" proposed by Holland et al. (2013), this paper grants "Moral Presence" an independent theoretical status, elevating it from a mere "value filter" to an active "moral generator." Furthermore, while the "emotional presence" dimension articulated by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) addresses affective

states, "Moral Presence" specifically targets the formation of ethical judgment and professional ethical consciousness, focusing on the rational construction and value internalization of the learner as a moral subject. Advancing beyond Hand's (2020) discussion at the level of teaching methods, this paper accomplishes a systematic theoretical construction. Concurrently, by providing a non-Western contextual empirical anchor [19, 40], this study offers robust empirical support for the cross-cultural applicability of the CoI framework within the context of Chinese teacher education.

To further clarify the conceptual boundaries of Moral Presence, it is instructive to compare it with three related constructs that have been proposed in the literature. First, Holland et al. (2013) introduced the notion of "ethical-values presence," which they position as a foundational filter through which cognitive, social, and teaching presences are experienced [14]. In their model, ethical-values presence informs and permeates the other three dimensions but does not itself constitute an independent analytical dimension. Moral Presence, by contrast, is proposed here as a distinct fourth dimension with its own developmental trajectory—from moral awareness through moral deliberation to moral integration—rather than as a filter operating upon the existing dimensions. Second, Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) proposed "emotional presence" as an extension of the CoI framework, defining it as the extent to which learners express and experience emotion within the community [7]. While emotional presence addresses the affective dimension of learning, Moral Presence is concerned with ethical judgment and professional ethical consciousness; the two constructs are conceptually distinct, addressing different domains of learner experience. Third, Hand (2020) discussed "directive moral teaching" as a pedagogical strategy within the community of inquiry, focusing on whether teachers should guide students toward predetermined moral conclusions [11]. This discussion remains at the level of teaching methods, whereas the present paper advances a theoretical dimension that captures the learner's formation as a moral subject. In sum, while these three constructs offer valuable contributions, none fully addresses the specific theoretical space that Moral Presence is intended to occupy: the systematic cultivation of learners' ethical judgment and professional ethical consciousness within a community of inquiry.

5.2. Practical Significance: Providing Pathways for "How Linguistics Can Engage in Values Education"

The core proposition of this paper asserts that ideological and political elements need not be artificially "implanted" outside of linguistic content. Rather, educators need only restructure the organizational form of teaching, shifting from a linear "lecture-listening" model to a communal model characterized by "collaboration, inquiry, and reflection."

This pedagogical model operates across three levels: First, when students collaboratively explore language issues, they

practice listening and respect in cooperation, constituting “moral deliberation” [5]. Second, when students engage in peer review of case analyses, they confront issues of fairness and empathy, fostering “moral awareness” [26]. Third, when teachers reflect on their own teaching, they serve as moral exemplars, facilitating “moral integration” [6]. As Sharp (1987) argued, the CoI inherently contains ethical dimensions; as a sense of community forms, the ethical dimension naturally emerges. The function of the framework proposed in this paper is to systematically create the conditions necessary for this “natural emergence” [10, 31].

5.3. Dialogue with Global Frontier Issues

Moral Sensitivity and Teacher Judgment: Addressing Tirri’s (2023) inquiry regarding the conscious cultivation of teachers’ ability to identify moral dilemmas [34], the framework presented herein provides a structured pathway through a three-level construction of awareness, deliberation, and integration. The empirical findings of Ronkainen et al. (2023), which indicate significant individual differences in teachers’ ethical sensitivity, further underscore the necessity for systematic educational intervention [26]—a precise design objective of this framework.

The Cultural Uniqueness of Chinese Teachers’ Moral Conceptions: A recent study by Harrison et al. (2025), published in the *Journal of Moral Education*, reveals that Chinese teachers’ understanding of gratitude emphasizes the importance of “developing relationships,” “maintaining social harmony,” and “reciprocity” [13]. This finding corroborates the central premise of this paper: moral values are generated and sustained within communal relationships, rather than acquired through abstract indoctrination. The collaborative design of the “student community” and the peer review mechanisms in this framework serve as concrete pathways for embedding moral learning within “relationship development” and “reciprocity.”

SDG 4.7 and Global Citizenship Education: This framework provides a tangible exemplar for implementing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in teacher education. The argument advanced by Althof and Berkowitz (2006) regarding the intrinsic connection between moral education and civic education provides theoretical support for this alignment [3].

Teacher Ethics in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: While Akgun and Greenhow (2022) systematically reviewed the ethical challenges of artificial intelligence (AI) applications in education [1], and Holmes et al. (2019) discussed the profound impact of AI on the teacher’s role, the value of the current framework lies in its community-based value-deliberation function [15]. This function can serve as an immune mechanism against the erosion of teachers’ ethical judgment by “technological logic.” Research by Lissman et al. (2024) similarly demonstrates that in the face of systemic moral dilemmas, collective deliberation and peer coordination are effective

coping mechanisms [21]. This provides cutting-edge empirical support from research published in the *Journal of Moral Education* for the positioning of the “community value deliberation” function within this framework.

5.4. Research Limitations

First, the proposed four-dimensional framework currently relies primarily on theoretical deduction and practical re-embedding, and has not yet undergone large-scale, systematic empirical validation. Second, as the framework was constructed within the specific context of Modern Chinese courses in Chinese normal universities, its transferability to other contexts requires further exploration. Third, this paper has not yet undertaken a detailed analysis of the specific micro-mechanisms through which moral learning occurs within the CoI. Fourth, as an “insider” participant in the teaching reform practice, the researcher’s theoretical construction inevitably carries a certain tendency toward practitioner optimism.

6. Conclusion

Addressing the core perplexity of “how linguistics can achieve values education” in Modern Chinese courses, this paper constructs a theoretical four-dimensional educational framework by introducing “Moral Presence” alongside the three dimensions of the CoI framework. Through the synergy of student community, teaching methods, teacher development, and evaluation mechanisms, the abstract linguistics classroom is reshaped into a site for moral learning. This framework provides a conceptual model for the implementation of a “curriculum for value education” in linguistics courses and contributes Chinese experience to the extension of the CoI framework in the context of values education. Furthermore, by engaging with frontier issues such as moral sensitivity and teacher judgment, the cultural uniqueness of Chinese teachers’ moral conceptions, SDG 4.7 and global citizenship education, and teacher ethics in the age of artificial intelligence, this framework demonstrates the potential for meaningful dialogue between Chinese local educational practice and international academic trends. As a theoretical proposal, the framework requires future empirical testing; subsequent research will employ action research to refine and validate the model presented in this paper.

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CoI	Community of Inquiry
CPC	Communist Party of China
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P4C	Philosophy for Children
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Data Availability Statement

This is a theoretical study and no empirical data were collected or analyzed. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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