

ADDRESSING THE MORAL DEFICIT: HOW HIGHER EDUCATION MUST ADAPT TO TECHNOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY



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Abstract:

The current ethical crisis of the 21st century has created a significant and profound moral responsibility gap between past and present world arenas. In fact, it is a direct consequence of an unprecedented accelerated technological and global change overtaking humanity's capacity and code of behaviour. This study argues that the university must urgently reclaim and reassess its role as society's moral saviour by fundamentally reconsidering its educational obligation, as traditional ethical frameworks have been rendered obsolete consequently. Employing a mixed-methods survey administered to 37 university EFL educators from the teaching board at Blida2 University, Algeria, the present research investigates the perceived necessity for curricular reform and re-evaluation as well as the associated implementation barriers. Largely, the findings confirm the inadequacy of current ethics instruction (92% consensus) and, as a result, call for updated curricula focusing on digital citizenship and holistic ethical synthesis to generate globally accepted codes of ethics. On the other hand, the findings of the study identify that the necessary reform is challenged by possible internal institutional friction, specifically structural rigidity (cited by 81% of teachers) and a critical faculty

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preparedness deficit (73% feeling unprepared for tech ethics). The conclusion asserts that this failure is systemic, rooted in an outdated educational model. In the same line of thought, effective reform necessitates treating applied ethics as a mandatory, professional competence and demands an official commitment to funding effective training, enabling the university to fulfil its function in preparing ethical leaders for an increasingly complex and consequential future per se.

key words: Code of ethics; Modernity; Reform; University; EFL.

Introduction:

More than ever, human societies have witnessed a significant split in the history of human morals and ethics (Tomasello, 2016). For generations, the basics for navigating human conduct and societal interactions and dilemmas too had been served by traditional ethical frameworks and governing moral principles. These classical theories, however, were built upon the assumption of relatively stable human contexts, including a liable pace of change and clear definitions of moral integrity. Today, that stability has been nearly lost. An exceptional occurrence of disturbing challenges is being experienced, and moral scenarios where historical frameworks were not designed to address are being witnessed. Similar situation has led to a moral responsibility gap, where the outcomes of both individual as well as societal actions, are increasingly profound and often irreversible, rapidly allowing to exceed our capacity for ethical authority.

The crucial role of higher education is paramount mainly when the university is perceived as the key institutional space where the ethical balance may be sought and recovered (Giroux, 2002). The core problem this article tackles is that our existing ethical and governance frameworks can't keep up with the accelerating speed and complexity of technological and global change. This failure creates a dangerous gap between the technological challenge and people's ability to judge those actions morally, risking widespread social conflict and policy paralysis on issues critical to humanity's future. A key function of the university is a possible recovery of lost moral grounding, teaching students to see the critical line between right and wrong and raising their awareness of the need for a fair and equitable society (Reuben, 1996). However, current university ethics education is failing to teach the complexity and responsibility needed for students to lead ethically, which is why this article moves past simply

pointing out these problems. Its primary goal is to find the necessary basic changes in human morality required to build flexible, strong, and globally accepted ethical rules. The subsequent sections will detail a study on the challenges university teachers face and propose ways to fix the curriculum.

In this context, the present research aims to answer the following research questions:

- What new forms of ethics education is needed in universities to create ethical rules that work in today's fast-changing, global world?
- What difficulties do university teachers currently face, and how can the curriculum be fixed to teach students better moral responsibility?

I. Theoretical Framework

I.1. The Foundations of Ethics

I.1.1. The Classical Theories That Guided Human Conduct

Think about the moral compasses that guided societies for centuries. When we look back at the moral frameworks that shaped civilizations, they were operating systems for life, and they all shared a crucial, foundational assumption that the world was essentially stable. Obviously, they were all crafted for a world that moved at a different rhythm. This stability wasn't a minor detail; rather, it was the very cornerstone on which human nature and social roles were largely consistent. In such a world, you could cultivate a good character through consistent habits because the virtues required tomorrow would be the same as yesterday (Lickona, 2004). The entire structure of traditional code of ethics relied on fixed virtues, rights and duties, and estimative outcomes in accordance to the slow and generational evolution of ethical behaviours as well as norms. It offered a well-founded manual for lively encounters since it assumed the ground beneath people's feet wouldn't suddenly shift, an assumption that feels almost nostalgic in the current relentless era.

I.1.2. Why Traditional Morality Assumed a Stable World

On the one hand, such assumed stability was practical, not just philosophical. In a world where social roles, economic structures, and technological tools evolved over generations, a person could confidently invest in building a specific persona. Civilized traits like courage, honesty, or patience were reliable assets, guaranteed to be valuable in the social and professional landscapes of their children's lives. Similarly,

Kant's deontology, with its focus on universal duties, makes profound sense when individuals could reasonably predict the outcomes of their actions and behaviours on community (Kant, 2013). Duty to tell the truth or keep a promise was considered a manageable moral load when the consequences were predictable within a stable social fabric.

On the other hand, this "stable world" wasn't merely a peaceful one. In fact, it was a world of shared definitions and predictable cause and effect symbiotic internal links (Kelsey, 2020). There was a general consensus on what constituted a "good life" and a reasonable expectation that moral actions would lead to predictable, stable consequences per se. Such beliefs allowed for what might be called a "generational morality," where wisdom and ethical norms could be passed down, refined slowly, and trusted to remain relevant. However, there are observations leading to the idea that this assumption could "no longer be valid" highlights the core of modern moral dilemma. The human being is left trying to navigate a world of fluid identities, disruptive technologies, and globalized dilemmas with ethical tools that were designed for a fixed, slower-paced world, leaving us to wonder how to build a code of ethics as day one (Archer et al., 2020).

I.2. Ethics Overtaken by Change

1.2.1. When Technology and Globalization Accelerate Beyond Our Judgment

The ethical landscape today is being rapidly reshaped by technology and globalization, both racing beyond humanity's established capacity for sound moral judgment. The rise and integration of sophisticated AI and autonomous systems, for instance, generates technological outcomes that are now far too complex and opaque to trace back to a clear human intention or design. This creates a deeply troubling "responsibility gap" (Matthias, 2004), a gap where irreversible damages often occur, yet the traditional principles and codes of ethics are utterly collapsing. Alongside, the swift current of globalization has completely washed away the geographical and cultural borders that once gave ethical dilemmas context. Societies now find themselves in an "overlapping community of fate" (Osimiri, 2015), like if different dimensions came across one another where a choice made in one nation can inflict profound, often unjust, consequences on remote populations or future generations, thereby forcing disparate ethical systems into direct conflict.

The critical result could detonate on a dangerous policy and judgment deficit. Governments and international bodies are left grappling with regulatory challenges, often paralyzed and unable to govern quickly enough, while world citizens inherit a set of complex, challenging moral problems that the slow, steady wisdom of the past traditional ethical thought was never built to adequately solve.

1.2.2. The Dangerous Gap: Why We Lack Ethical Authority Today

Literally, the core ethical crisis of the modern world is reflected on the rapidly expanding gap between humanity's capacity to innovate and its capacity to govern those innovations morally (Voegtlin & Scherer, 2017). Such a challenge destabilizes traditional ethical frameworks, which were designed for a much slower, deeply rooted, and more predictable settings. The world communities are really staring down a dangerous gap in ethical authority, a fundamental crack in the foundation of how the modern world works (Küng, 2004). It's a unusual situation when considered by an outsider to the current communities; man reached out to almost unbelievable technological powers, tools that can rewrite the very code of life or raise up entire digital worlds. Yet the moral compass for navigating it all feels unstable, and fairly, immoral. The people building this new dimension are operating on a completely different dynamic. Their arena is one of relentless, rapid acceleration and disruption, driven by the most concrete logic of what's feasible and what will dominate a market. So they build, and they launch, unleashing everything from generative AI that can mimic human creativity. This divergence is not just a theoretical problem; rather, it creates a multi-layered crisis that impacts everyone being a global citizen. The average person is no longer a citizen in these discussions but has become a passive subject in a grand, uncontrolled experiment. Currently, algorithms are silently deciding your credit score, tailor your news feed, and even pre-screen your job applications, having nearly zero agency to question the hidden biases or ethical shortcuts baked into their code (Green & Chen, 2019). The result is that all individuals now are navigating a landscape without any reliable blueprint map. The old landmarks of right and wrong, fair and unfair, even what it means to be human, are becoming, may be purposely, blurry. The philosophers and ethicists who might help us find a path are often stuck in their academic silos, their cautious warnings drowned out by the deafening call of progress and profit. This breeds a deep,

collective anxiety, a pervasive feeling that consumers are guided by complex instruments that none truly understand how to control.

This dangerous gap, therefore, is far more than a simple temporary pause; it's a deep, structural flaw that threatens to define centuries ahead, directly challenging human ability to shape a shared human future through conscious choice and collective wisdom, rather than just stumbling into one by accident.

1.3. The University's Crucial Role

1.3.1. Reclaiming the University as a Moral Anchor

The university's capacity to serve as a moral saviour is significant for opposing the ethical void created by hastened A.I. and modernity revolution (Raji et al.,2021). As the equilibrium resulting from traditional code of ethics fades under modern force, the academic institution, therefore, emerges as the remaining and most crucial saviour for seeking and restoring ethical equilibrium within a universal society. This accountability means the university's mandate must at all costs shift beyond the mere transmission of knowledge. It must actively serve as the safety net for the recovery of lost moral grounding, by equipping its students not just with academic competence and professional skills, but, more importantly, with the sophisticated ability to consider the critical line between right and wrong in complex, novel situations. By profoundly readjusting focus, its educational mission, the university is tasked with preparing world citizens capable of navigating complexity and campaigning the necessity of a fair and equitable society, directly correcting the current failure of ethics education to implant the kind of deep, comprehensive moral responsibility now demanded by a world witnessing a reflective and irreversible costs (Harkavy, 2006).

1.3.2. Why Current Ethics Courses Are Failing Our Students

From a critical point of view, the reason why current ethics are failing or even vanishing is not the fact that educational institutions are teaching the wrong things, but that they are teaching them in a vacuum. They present ethics as a kind of abstract intellectual concept, a series of abstract philosophical thought experiments detached from the messy, highly technology dependent realities that graduates will actually face in daily life encounters (Davis, 2002).

The current fundamental failure, in this case, is that schooling is leading, even subconsciously, students to be brilliant grades collectors, however,

sadly unprepared to navigate their own social experiments (Koretz, 2022). While the classroom is a comfort zone, life encounters resemble to a concrete theatre of competing challenges, career ambitions, and mostly social media shaming, with no users guide on how to sail in that specific, brutal weather.

Considering ethics as a school subject, just like math or biology, is like preparing individuals to live in a void society. Instead, it should be seen as a muscle that needs to be constantly exercised through practice. A student can get an upper grade by drilling ethical theoretical values without having truly immersed in their world experiences. In addition to theoretical decent codes of behaviour, practices like role plays, simulations based on real-world situations are deemed to be needed to bridge that gap between philosophical theory and the psychological reality of ethical compromise under human pressure.

II. Practical Framework

II.1. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, using a quantitative survey complemented by qualitative open-ended questions, to comprehensively investigate the gap between accelerating global change and the capacity of university ethics education to foster moral responsibility. The design was chosen to synthesize broad, measurable opinions on the necessity of curricular change with possibly rich, explanatory data on the practical challenges faced by educators.

II.1.1. Research Design and Approach

Exploratory in nature, the quantitative component used Likert scales and ranking questions to measure the extent of agreement on the insufficiency of traditional frameworks and to prioritize areas for future curriculum reconsideration (RQ1). The qualitative component used open-ended text fields to elicit specific insights into pedagogical barriers and may be proposed interventions from the faculty (RQ2). This triangulation of data provided both the breadth of consensus and the depth of instructional experience necessary for balanced findings.

II.1.2. Participants and Sampling.

The target population comprised EFL teachers from Blida2 University who teach language courses that include components of intercultural

communication, civilization and literature, professional skills, as well as language skills.

- **Sample Size:** The study gathered data from 37 university EFL teachers.
- **Sampling Method:** A convenience and purposive sampling method was used, targeting educators actively engaged in institutions of higher learning, ensuring the respondents possessed direct experience with the curriculum and student ethical development.
- **Context:** All participants were currently employed at universities within the EFL Department *at the Blida2 University* region, providing a specific context for the challenges of teaching global ethics in a non-sophisticated academic environment.

II.1.3. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using an online questionnaire (developed via Google Forms) specifically designed to address the two primary research questions. The instrument consisted of two sections:

- Section 1: The Need for New Frameworks (RQ1): Included a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement on the limits of traditional ethics and a ranking item to prioritize five critical areas for future ethical training (e.g., Digital Citizenship, Trans-Cultural Synthesis).
- Section 2: Challenges and Curriculum Fixes (RQ2): Included a 5-point Likert scale to measure the difficulty of teaching ethical complexity, a checklist to identify specific barriers (e.g., Structural Rigidity, Faculty Preparedness), and two open-ended questions to solicit qualitative recommendations for effective institutional and curricular interventions.

II.2. Data Analysis

Data were processed and analysed as follows:

- Quantitative Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics were calculated, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for all Likert scale, binary, and ranking items. This analysis established the level of consensus among the faculty regarding the ethical gap and reform priorities.
- Qualitative Data Analysis: The open-ended responses were subjected to thematic content analysis. Responses were coded

iteratively to identify recurring themes, dominant terminology and prevalent practical recommendations for curricular intervention. These themes were used to interpret and inform the quantitative findings.

II.3. Ethical Considerations

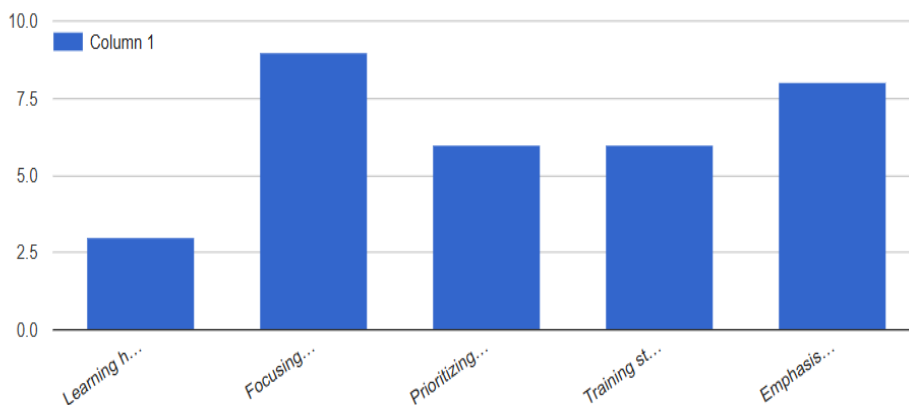
Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data collected were handled strictly in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of the educators' responses.

II.4. Findings

Research Question 1: The Need for Fundamental Curricular Reform

The survey results confirm a widespread consensus among EFL educators regarding the ineffectiveness of current ethics instruction in the face of rapid global and technological change. An overwhelming 92% (34 of 37 respondents) Strongly Agreed or Agreed (mean Likert score of 4.6/5.0) that traditional ethical frameworks are insufficient for addressing modern challenges arising from digital communication ethics and rapid globalization.

When designing an EFL curriculum for the future, which area should receive the highest priority for cultivating globally accepted ethical rules in students?



Source: Study Findings

When selecting areas for curricular reform (Q2), participants strongly favoured interventions that address external complexity over internal virtue:

- Top Priority: Establishing clear ethical rules for online behaviour and this indicates teachers prioritize practical, real-world communication ethics.
- Lowest Priority: Future-proofing ethical vocabulary, suggesting while important, it is seen as secondary to the immediate need for clear digital and communication rules.

In open responses (Q3), the most critical missing skills identified by participants were critical disinformation literacy and ethics, underscoring the necessity to integrate ethics directly with advanced communication skills.

Ethical and critical AI literacy—using AI responsibly without replacing genuine research, communication, and thinking skills.

the skill of using AI tools responsibly, thoughtfully, and openly when engaging in reading, writing, speaking, or research activities.

knowledge about the value of ethics

In today's global landscape, EFL students increasingly use AI tools like chatbots for language practice, but curricula often overlook teaching how to spot algorithmic biases (e.g., cultural stereotypes in translations) or ethical data use. This gap hinders equitable navigation of diverse, tech-driven communication, risking misinformation or exclusion for non-native speakers. Integrating modules on critical evaluation of AI outputs would empower learners to engage responsibly worldwide.

Nowadays, EFL learners need an urgent explicit training in evaluating digital sources and ethically integrating information into their reading and writing skills.

Source: Study Findings

Research Question 2: Challenges and Interventions for Teaching Moral Responsibility

The findings reveal significant institutional and pedagogical roughness challenging the integration of complex moral responsibility into EFL classrooms.

- Difficulty Rating (Q4): A majority of respondents, 78% (29 of 37), rated the difficulty of integrating complex moral responsibility

alongside language skills as challenging or very challenging (mean Likert score of 4.1/5.0).

- Barriers (Q5): The greatest barriers identified were Curriculum focusing strictly on grammar/communication, 81%) and Lack of training to teach complex moral issues, 68%).
- Preparedness (Q6): Consistent with structural issues, a concerning 73% of faculty reported feeling not adequately prepared to teach ethical topics related to emerging technologies
- Recommended Fixes (Q7): The most common intervention proposed was the implementation of dedicated, mandatory 'Ethics in modules and institutional provision for specialized teacher training on digital ethics and global governance frameworks.

The most effective immediate intervention is to introduce a mandatory module on "Digital and AI Ethics in Academic Communication" within EFL courses. This module would teach students how to use AI responsibly, evaluate information critically, and uphold academic integrity when communicating in English. It provides clear guidelines, practical scenarios, and essential skills that strengthen both ethical behaviour and language competence

training and study days about the importance of ethics

The most immediate and impactful institutional intervention I recommend is **mandatory integration of AI ethics workshops into EFL curricula, starting in Institutions should collaborate with edtech experts to embed short, hands-on modules (e.g., 4-6 weeks) teaching students to critically assess AI tools for biases in language output, ethical data sharing, and responsible digital communication. This could include case studies on real-world EFL scenarios, like avoiding cultural insensitivity in AI-generated translations. Pilot programs in universities have shown 40% improvement in ethical awareness (per 2024 EFL Journal studies), making it scalable and urgent for global competence.

It is important to suggest an module a brief introduction to mandatory Ethical Academic Communication within all EFL contexts. In few sessions, students will be trained to evaluate digital sources, recognize bias, and integrate information ethically through proper paraphrasing and citation. Because it is simple to implement and immediately applied in coursework, it quickly strengthens students' ethical responsibility

Source: Study Findings

III. Discussion

The results of this study strongly affirm the central thesis that a moral responsibility gap exists, necessitating urgent and fundamental reform of university curricula. The high level of agreement (92%) that traditional ethical frameworks are insufficient indicates that the crisis is felt at the instructional level, confirming the necessity of reclaiming the university as a moral anchor as proposed in the introduction.

The prioritization made reflect the reality that the primary domain of ethical failure for students is no longer the local, stable context but the fast-changing arena. EFL instruction, by its very nature, is ideally positioned to integrate this new ethical mandate, but the findings clearly expose why this reform is failing to take hold.

The challenges, on the other hand act as the choke points for change. When 81% of teachers cite curriculum inflexibility, it confirms that the university's institutional design, predicated on academic silos (language vs. content), actively prevents the integration of applied ethics. Furthermore, the fact that 73% of teachers feel unprepared to teach technology ethics demonstrates a critical failure in institutional support and investment. The university cannot fulfil its function of fostering ethical balance if it fails to equip its instructors with the necessary knowledge and resources to teach the ethics of the 21st century.

The proposed suggestions, modules and specialized training, directly address this structural deficit. Moving forward, the university must recognize that ethics is no longer an abstract philosophical subject but an applied, professional communication skill. The EFL curriculum offers a viable, necessary site for a globally accepted ethical rules, but this requires an institutional commitment to funding, faculty development, and the mandated removal of rigid disciplinary limits. Failure to enact these changes risks continuing the moral responsibility gap, ultimately undermining the university's ability to prepare students for effective and responsible leadership in the accelerating global landscape.

Conclusion

This research confirms a simple but critical point. The problem with ethics in our society isn't just a complicated philosophical question; in fact, it is a massive failure in how to teach within local universities, which simply did not keep up with the fast pace of global and technological change. The idea that the university should be the moral compass for society, protecting us from the racing modern life, and this idea was strongly validated. Nearly every teacher we surveyed agreed that the traditional way to teach ethics is completely outdated and insufficient for today's students.

However, moving from this agreement to actual change is in fact the biggest hurdle. The study clearly demonstrates that the main challenges are not people fighting the idea of updating ethics. Instead, the problems

are structural and practical tasks. First, there is the "silo effect," where different academic departments are rigid, isolated from each other, and resistant to interdisciplinary holistic collaboration. Working together to solve a shared problem should be a policy. Second, there is a serious training gap among faculty. Teachers know that students need to discuss new, complex issues like online responsibility, and how ethics change across different cultures and communities, as well as eras. At the same time, the teachers themselves feel completely unprepared and untrained to lead those discussions effectively.

To effectively save the situation, the conclusion is clear: the university must make a profound institutional commitment that is far greater than just change a few course titles. It needs to view applied ethics as a mandatory, core professional skill that spans all disciplines, not just a subject for the philosophy department. This requires a heavy investment in specialized training for all educators. If the university fails to pivot away from its old, rigid methods and does not focus on creating flexible, globally relevant ethical frameworks, then, it will only continue to widen the moral responsibility gap. This failure ultimately undermines the university's most essential mission that is preparing responsible, ethical citizens.

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