

# From employability to moral agency: Ubumuntu and the moral telos of Rwandan higher education

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education is increasingly judged through employability, skills and economic contribution, yet professional competence does not by itself determine how that competence should be exercised. This article examines how Rwandan higher-education policy and institutional architecture represent the moral, civic and professional formation of graduates. A critical interpretive analysis of eight authoritative public documents is combined with a structured scholarly evidence map and philosophical synthesis on character, practical wisdom, moral agency and African relational ethics. The documentary reconstruction reveals a dual telos: human-capital and labour-market commitments coexist with explicit expectations concerning human values, citizenship, integrity, dignity, service and social justice. The central weakness is therefore not normative absence but incomplete formative integration: public documents specify valued ends more clearly than the educational and institutional processes through which those ends become practical judgment and responsible agency under pressure. The article develops the Rwanda Higher Education Moral Formation Architecture (R-HEMFA), in which a rights-sensitive reconstruction of Ubumuntu functions as a cross-cutting relational orientation rather than a cultural substitute for pluralism or individual dignity. The argument reframes employability as necessary but normatively insufficient for graduate formation.

**Keywords:** moral formation; higher education; Ubumuntu; practical wisdom; moral agency

## HOW TO CITE

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## 1. Introduction

Universities are asked to produce knowledgeable, employable and innovative graduates, and those expectations are especially visible where higher education is closely tied to national development. Yet the capacity to perform a professional task and the capacity to exercise that competence responsibly are not the same educational achievement. A graduate may know how to manage accounts, design infrastructure, deploy artificial intelligence or administer public institutions while lacking the practical judgment or courage needed when professional incentives conflict with the good of others. The resulting problem is not an argument against employability. It is a question of educational completeness: what, beyond capability, should higher education form?

This question has re-emerged sharply in moral-education scholarship. Brooks and Lamb (2026) argue that universities inevitably influence students' character through institutional norms, exemplars and practices, while Lapsley (2025) locates the moral purpose of higher education in the development of ethical frameworks and moral wisdom. A 2026 *Journal of Moral Education* special-issue conversation similarly treats moral formation in higher education as an emerging field rather than a settled programme (Dallavalle et al. 2026; Kristjánsson 2026a). Recent work has therefore moved the debate beyond whether universities are morally formative toward harder questions about what formation means, how it can avoid paternalism and ideological conformity, which practices cultivate practical wisdom, and how formal curriculum interacts with peer networks, assessment and institutional culture (Bročić and Miles 2024; Herdt 2026; Lamb and Brooks 2026; Shuffelton 2026).

Rwanda offers an analytically revealing case because its higher-education architecture contains both developmental and explicitly normative aspirations. The national Higher Education Policy frames higher education as central to sustainable development, economic growth, employment and citizenship, while requiring respect for human values and integration of citizenship and individual responsibility into taught programmes (Ministry of Education [MINEDUC] 2008). Current Higher Education Council (HEC) implementation discourse gives strong emphasis to labour-market relevance, job-ready graduates, quality assurance, research and innovation (HEC 2026a). At the institutional level, the University of Rwanda (UR) combines enterprise and national development with service, leadership, integrity and social justice, and its compulsory first-year Citizenship and Transformative

Education module explicitly addresses citizenship, integrity, human rights and peace (UR n.d.-a, n.d.-b). These materials do not present a simple opposition between economic and moral purposes. They present a problem of integration.

This Rwanda-specific reconstruction also extends Waghid's (2020) Ubuntu philosophy of African higher education. Waghid establishes human interdependence, humaneness, social responsibility and deliberative engagement as philosophically salient for African higher education. The present study shifts the level of analysis from a general Ubuntu philosophy to a documentary-grounded account of Rwanda, asks what Ubumuntu contributes to the moral telos of higher education, and tests that relational resource against rights, pluralism, practical wisdom and the possibility of principled dissent.

The article therefore asks four questions: (1) How is the desired moral, civic and professional formation of graduates represented in Rwanda's higher-education policy and institutional architecture? (2) To what extent do these sources articulate a coherent conception of moral formation rather than a collection of values, competencies and behavioural expectations? (3) How can Ubumuntu and African relational ethics be placed in critical dialogue with character, practical wisdom and moral agency? (4) What conceptual architecture can connect declared values to morally responsible civic and professional action? The central thesis is that Rwanda's normative problem is not a choice between employability and morality but an under-theorized transition from competence and declared values to responsible agency under non-ideal institutional conditions. The article makes three contributions. Documentarily, it reconstructs the public normative architecture of Rwandan higher education without treating policy aspiration as educational reality. Conceptually, it distinguishes compliance, practical judgment and agency under pressure. Philosophically, it proposes a rights-sensitive reconstruction of Ubumuntu as a relational orientation that can deepen, but not replace, pluralist accounts of dignity, freedom of inquiry and moral responsibility.

## 2. Higher education beyond employability: Moral formation as an educational telos

Employability is a legitimate educational good. Students reasonably expect higher education to enlarge their capabilities and livelihood prospects, governments invest in universities partly to strengthen human capital, and professions require reliable competence. Professional competence also has moral significance:

negligence and incapacity can harm others even when intentions are good. The problem arises when employability is allowed to function as a complete account of educational purpose. Korsgaard and Zamojski (2023) argue for higher education beyond a logic of production, while Kristinsson (2026) treats academic community as a normative ideal bound up with the university's moral, intellectual and institutional purposes. Brooks, Lamb and Brant (2022) distinguish the instrumental benefits of character for professional, civic and academic life from the intrinsic importance of forming persons capable of flourishing. Brooks and Lamb (2026) make a related point in contemporary institutional language: character development can support career preparation, but its justification cannot be exhausted by improved performance. If moral formation is valued only because it increases productivity, virtue becomes another employability competency rather than a way of orienting competence toward worthy ends.

Lapsley's (2025) account helps specify what is missing. Higher education, on his view, should enable students to articulate ethical frameworks and engage in stronger evaluation of what is worth wanting and what kind of life is worth living. This moves the educational question from skill acquisition to judgment. It also places a parallel burden on institutions: universities that publish mission statements about integrity, service or justice must themselves subject those aspirations to serious evaluation. Moral formation is therefore simultaneously personal and institutional. Students are formed through what universities teach, reward, model, tolerate and normalize.

This institutional dimension matters because moral learning is not confined to ethics courses. Bročić and Miles (2024) show that undergraduate moral socialization is shaped by a 'bundle' of curricular and peer influences. Madsen et al. (2026) similarly locate generosity not only in individual motivation but in institutional channels and sites that make practices possible. Shuffelton (2026) demonstrates how an apparently technical practice such as grading can have formative or deformative effects. These studies support the concept of an institutional moral ecology: the formal curriculum, hidden curriculum, leadership practices, incentives, peer cultures, assessment systems and opportunities for service jointly shape the moral possibilities of university life. Moral formation is therefore not synonymous with adding a module on values.

## 2.1. Character, practical wisdom, and moral agency

Character education provides one vocabulary for explaining how knowledge might become stable dispositions for responsible action. Contemporary university-focused work identifies practices such as habituation, reflection, exemplars, virtue literacy, moral reminders and relationships of mutual accountability (Lamb et al. 2022). Lamb and Brooks (2026) develop virtue literacy as the capacity to recognize, name, reason about and evaluate character in ways that inform action. This is important because moral vocabulary can sharpen perception. Yet literacy remains insufficient if learners can describe integrity while failing to act with integrity when doing so is costly.

Practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, addresses this knowledge-action problem by focusing on excellence in context-sensitive moral decision-making. Recent work treats practical wisdom as involving moral perception, deliberation, emotion regulation and moral motivation rather than mere possession of ethical rules (Torner et al. 2026). Kristjánsson (2026b) nevertheless cautions that questions about the structure, development and education of *phronesis* remain partly unresolved. For higher education, the implication is methodological humility: practical wisdom should not be invoked as a rhetorical solution to every professional dilemma. It is more defensible to treat it as a coordinating capacity through which graduates perceive morally salient features, weigh competing goods and choose fitting action under contextual uncertainty.

Moral agency adds a further requirement. Agency concerns not only choosing among options but owning and enacting judgment under social and institutional conditions. A student may know a rule, approve of a virtue and correctly reason about a case while remaining unable or unwilling to resist corrupt incentives, challenge abusive authority or accept professional cost. The distinction between compliance and agency is therefore critical. Compliance asks whether conduct accords with a rule; moral agency asks whether a person can discern, justify and enact responsible action when rules are incomplete, norms conflict or institutional pressures discourage integrity. This is where courage, responsibility and the possibility of principled dissent enter moral formation.

The distinction also guards against paternalism. Herdt (2026) illustrates why character formation can become entangled with ideological projects when institutions define virtue in ways that close rather than deepen inquiry. Moral formation in a plural university cannot mean manufacturing conformity to a politically or institutionally convenient ideal of the 'good student'. A

defensible account must preserve contestability, freedom of inquiry and the possibility that moral agency may require criticism of the institution itself. The educational objective is therefore not docility but responsible judgment within relationships of accountability.

## 2.2. Ubumuntu and relational moral personhood

African relational ethics provides a productive but contested interlocutor for this debate. Metz and Gaie (2010) reconstruct a family of sub-Saharan moral ideas around harmonious relationships, identification with others and solidarity. Waghid (2020) develops an Ubuntu philosophy of African higher education around human interdependence, humaneness, social responsibility, deliberative engagement and attentiveness to otherness. These accounts challenge highly individualistic pictures of moral agency by insisting that personhood, responsibility and flourishing are constituted through relations rather than possessed in isolation.

It would, however, be philosophically careless to treat 'Ubuntu' as a single pan-African doctrine. Gade (2012) documents divergent understandings of Ubuntu as moral quality, philosophy, worldview and interconnectedness. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) criticize the political and intellectual romanticization of Ubuntu, while subsequent debate has questioned both their conclusion and uncritical communitarianism. The relevance of this debate is methodological: an African moral vocabulary gains scholarly value only when its meanings, scope and tensions are specified rather than assumed.

For Rwanda, Ubumuntu offers a more context-sensitive entry point than simply importing Southern African formulations of Ubuntu. Ward's (2026) research on human-rights education in Rwanda interprets Ubumuntu through relational values of respect, reciprocity and responsibility and places it alongside *agaciro*, or dignity, while resisting a binary opposition between universal rights and local cultural knowledge. This is especially useful for higher education. Ubumuntu can be read as a relational moral orientation emphasizing humaneness, recognition of others and responsibility within shared life, while rights and individual dignity protect against the danger that community language becomes a warrant for coercive conformity.

This article therefore does not claim that Ubumuntu is explicitly embedded across the higher-education policy corpus. Indeed, the documentary reconstruction below shows that it is largely absent as an explicit organizing concept. Its role is interpretive and reconstructive: it

offers a Rwandan relational resource for connecting otherwise dispersed commitments to dignity, citizenship, service, integrity and social responsibility. Nor is Ubumuntu treated as a replacement for practical wisdom. The concepts answer different questions. A rights-sensitive reconstruction of Ubumuntu helps specify the relational stakes of action: whose dignity is recognized, who bears consequences, which relationships are sustained or degraded, and what responsibilities arise from shared life. Practical wisdom concerns context-sensitive judgment about how competing goods should be weighed; moral agency concerns the enactment of judgment under social and institutional pressure. The proposed relation is therefore dialogical rather than assimilative.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research design

The study used critical interpretive documentary analysis combined with integrative philosophical synthesis. Documents were treated as institutional artefacts that articulate norms and delimit legitimate educational purposes, while recognizing that policy intention cannot be equated with enacted practice (Bowen 2009). The analysis was interpretive rather than frequency-driven. It asked how educational purposes were framed, what conception of the graduate was implied, how normative commitments were connected to formative mechanisms, and where tensions, absences or unresolved transitions occurred. Reflexive thematic analysis informed the movement between deductive concepts and inductive patterns without treating inter-rater reliability as a proxy for interpretive quality (Braun and Clarke 2021). The method is best understood as a critical normative reconstruction grounded in public documents, not as a causal evaluation of student development.

### 3.2. Documentary corpus and eligibility

Documents were eligible when they were issued by an authoritative Rwandan higher-education or national education body, were publicly verifiable, remained current or institutionally salient at the time of analysis, and addressed at least one of the following: educational purpose, graduate attributes, citizenship, integrity, discipline, personal development, quality, service, institutional values or moral/professional responsibility. Duplicate or superseded versions were excluded where a current source was available. Promotional materials without substantive normative content were excluded. Current HEC webpages were used to triangulate older regulatory documents that remain publicly hosted,

because the continued availability of a document does not itself prove unchanged implementation.

**Table 1. Documentary corpus and analytical relevance**

| ID | Document                                          | Issuer               | Year/status            | Type                              | Analytical relevance                                                                      |
|----|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| D1 | Higher Education Policy                           | MINEDUC              | 2008                   | National policy                   | Employment, citizenship, human values, dignity, community service, integrity              |
| D2 | Rwanda Qualifications Framework                   | MINEDUC/HEC          | 2021                   | National framework                | Qualification outcomes, competence, autonomy, responsibility, action                      |
| D3 | Personal Development Planning                     | HEC                  | 2007; currently hosted | Policy/procedure                  | Reflection, employability competencies, personal development records                      |
| D4 | Student Regulations and Disciplinary Procedures   | HEC                  | 2007; currently hosted | Regulation                        | Responsible conduct, correction, duty of care, discipline                                 |
| D5 | Quality Guidelines                                | HEC                  | Current webpage        | Quality framework                 | Teaching, student support, research, consultancy, community service, fitness for purpose  |
| D6 | HESSP 2025–2030 implementation/outreach statement | HEC                  | 2026                   | Official implementation statement | Programme relevance, labour-market alignment, research, innovation, quality               |
| D7 | Vision, Mission and Values                        | University of Rwanda | Current webpage        | Institutional mission             | Enterprise, service, leadership, integrity, humanitarian perspective, social justice      |
| D8 | CTE1111 Citizenship and Transformative Education  | University of Rwanda | Current module page    | Curriculum                        | Citizenship, integrity, human rights, peace, reflection, attitudinal/behavioural outcomes |

*Note.* HESSP = Higher Education Sector Strategic Plan. Sources: MINEDUC (2008, 2021); HEC (2007a, 2007b, 2026a, 2026b, n.d.); University of Rwanda (n.d.-a, n.d.-b). D6 is the official 2026 HEC implementation/outreach statement; the study does not infer the contents of policy documents that were listed but not directly accessible for analysis.

### 3.3. Scholarly evidence identification and search audit

The literature component was designed to verify the research gap and support philosophical synthesis, not to convert the documentary study into a systematic review. Search reporting was therefore PRISMA-S-informed rather than presented as an exhaustive PRISMA-compliant review (Page et al. 2021; Rethlefsen et al. 2021). On 14 September 2026, four predefined semantic searches were run in SciSpace's scholarly index and prospectively capped at the first 10 ranked records per query. The queries covered moral formation, character and practical wisdom in higher education; Ubuntu/Ubumuntu and African relational ethics; Rwanda-specific citizenship and integrity; and institutional moral ecology. Targeted publisher hand-searching of the Journal of Moral Education and citation chaining added recent field-defining and foundational sources. Because semantic ranking can change over time, the procedure is described as auditable rather than perfectly rank-reproducible; the exact captured records and screening decisions are preserved in Online Resource 1.

The structured search identified 57 records: 40 from the four semantic searches and 17 from publisher hand-searching and citation chasing. Seven duplicate or superseded representations were removed, leaving 50 unique records for title/abstract screening. Twenty-one

were excluded at that stage. Twenty-nine records were then assessed in detail; nine were excluded, two because they did not constitute an eligible peer-reviewed/stable scholarly unit for the evidence map and seven because their direct or distinct contribution to the focused synthesis was insufficient. Twenty contemporary studies were retained. Foundational pre-2020 works and three post-selection target-journal fit sources were added separately through citation chaining and are not included in the 57-record count. Online Resource 1 provides the exact queries, eligibility criteria, record-level decisions, count reconciliation and supplementary flow diagram. No effect estimate, meta-analysis or risk-of-bias aggregation was attempted because the evidence map serves gap verification and conceptual synthesis rather than intervention-effect estimation.

**Supplementary information.** Online Resource 1: PRISMA-S-Informed Search and Screening Audit Trail.

### 3.4. Coding and interpretive procedure

Analysis proceeded in six stages. First, each document was read for origin, purpose, audience and policy function. Second, deductive codes derived from the research questions were applied: educational telos; employability/competence; citizenship; integrity; dignity; service; leadership; responsibility; professional ethics; character; judgment; agency; relationality; public good; and institutional responsibility. Third, inductive

coding captured unanticipated emphases and tensions. Fourth, codes were interpreted relationally: the analysis examined not only whether a term appeared but how it was linked to educational processes, assessment, responsibility and graduate action. Fifth, documentary

findings were placed in dialogue with character, phronesis, moral-agency and African relational-ethics scholarship. Sixth, the conceptual framework was developed only after the themes were stabilized.

**Table 2. Analytical coding framework**

| Domain                             | Analytical question                                          | Indicative evidence                                               |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Educational telos</b>           | What is higher education for?                                | Employment, development, citizenship, public good, flourishing    |
| <b>Graduate conception</b>         | What kind of graduate is desired?                            | Skilled, enterprising, responsible, service-oriented, just        |
| <b>Normative commitments</b>       | Which goods/values are named?                                | Integrity, dignity, rights, social justice, responsibility, peace |
| <b>Formative mechanisms</b>        | How are norms educationally cultivated?                      | Curriculum, reflection, service, dialogue, exemplars, mentoring   |
| <b>Practical judgment</b>          | Is contextual moral reasoning developed?                     | Dilemmas, deliberation, moral perception, competing goods         |
| <b>Moral agency</b>                | Can learners enact judgment under pressure?                  | Courage, responsibility, principled dissent, whistleblowing       |
| <b>Institutional moral ecology</b> | What institutional conditions reinforce/undermine formation? | Leadership, incentives, assessment, peer norms, hidden curriculum |

### 3.5. Trustworthiness, reflexivity and limits of inference

Trustworthiness was pursued through source authentication, an explicit corpus, preservation of negative cases, separation of documentary findings from philosophical reconstruction, and triangulation across national policy, regulatory material, current HEC implementation discourse and UR institutional/curricular sources. Interpretive claims were deliberately calibrated to documentary evidence. The analysis does not infer that stated values are enacted, that students internalize them, or that graduates behave morally. Conversely, silence in a policy document is not treated as proof that a practice is absent. The authorial stance is reconstructive: the task is to identify what the public normative architecture makes visible, what connections it leaves underdeveloped, and what conceptual resources may clarify those gaps.

**Generative AI use.** OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol; accessed September 2026) was used under the author's direction for literature-discovery support, manuscript structuring, drafting and restructuring from the author-specified research problem and analytical framework, language refinement, reference-check support, document formatting, and code-assisted rendering of the conceptual and search-flow diagrams from author-defined constructs and verified record counts. No synthetic empirical data were generated. References, factual claims, documentary interpretations and figure contents were checked against publisher records or official institutional sources during manuscript

preparation. Scholarly interpretation, argument, conclusions, accountability and approval of the submitted version remain the author's responsibility.

## 4. Documentary reconstruction

### 4.1. A dual telos: Economic capability and responsible citizenship

The corpus does not support a claim that Rwandan higher education is framed only as workforce preparation. D1 opens with a strong development logic: higher education is tied to sustainable development, economic growth, a knowledge-based economy, skilled employment and internationally recognized qualifications. D3 operationalizes this orientation by requiring personal development planning to help graduates demonstrate employability competencies as well as academic achievement. Current HEC implementation discourse in D6 intensifies the same emphasis through programme relevance, labour-market alignment, job-ready graduates, innovation and national competitiveness.

Yet D1 also describes higher education as preparing students for citizenship and developing well-rounded, engaged citizens. More strongly, it requires institutions to conduct activity with respect for human values and to integrate citizenship and individual responsibility into taught curricula. It links higher education with human rights, diversity, human dignity and community service. D7 similarly combines 'highly enterprising graduates' with a just and sustainable society, lives of service and leadership, honesty and integrity, humanitarian

perspective and social justice. The documentary pattern is therefore best characterized as a dual telos rather than a single economic one: capability and contribution are prominent, but civic and moral purposes are explicitly present.

#### 4.2. Normative density without a unified theory of formation

Across the corpus, normative language is dense but conceptually dispersed. Citizenship, responsibility, human values, dignity, integrity, service, social justice, humanitarian concern and peace appear in different policy locations. D8 is the clearest curricular concentration of these commitments. Its four units address civic education, integrity systems, human rights and peace education, and its learning outcomes extend from conceptual description and application to critical analysis and anticipated attitudinal and behavioural change. D4 adds conduct regulation and correction, while D3 adds structured reflection on learning and development.

What is less visible is an explicit account of how these components relate developmentally. The documents do not distinguish clearly among knowing a value, endorsing it, habituating a disposition, exercising practical judgment and acting with integrity under pressure. Nor do they articulate a theory explaining how a student moves from a citizenship module or integrity regulation to stable professional moral agency. This is not evidence that such formation never occurs. It is evidence that the public policy architecture leaves the mechanism under-specified.

#### 4.3. From values teaching to formative practice: Promising elements and missing connections

Several existing mechanisms could support deeper formation. D3 institutionalizes reflection through personal development planning; D8 uses discussion forums and reflective assignments; D1 includes community service; D7 frames service and leadership as institutional purposes. These features resonate with contemporary character-education strategies that use reflection, dialogue, practice, exemplars and service as contexts for moral development (Lamb et al. 2022; Madsen et al. 2026). They provide more than abstract value statements.

However, the corpus does not make these practices cohere as a distributed formation strategy. Community engagement is not explicitly connected to moral reflection; personal development planning is strongly oriented toward educational and career development; and CTE1111's stated behavioural aspirations sit alongside a conventional assessment structure of

coursework and final examination. The key gap is thus not the absence of potentially formative practices but their weak integration around an explicit theory of moral learning. This gap matters because virtue literacy, reflective writing or service can remain performative if institutional incentives reward only grades, credentials or compliance.

#### 4.4. Integrity as compliance and integrity as agency

D4 and D8 show substantial concern for integrity. Regulations identify unacceptable conduct and disciplinary processes, while the citizenship module teaches integrity systems and expects students to apply principles. These are necessary features of institutional ethics. Nevertheless, regulatory integrity and moral agency are analytically different. Rules can specify prohibited behaviour, but professional life routinely presents situations in which responsibilities conflict, authority is ambiguous or wrongdoing is normalized. The documentary corpus contains less explicit attention to the capacities needed in such situations: moral perception, deliberation across competing goods, emotional self-regulation, courage, and principled action when compliance with local expectations would itself be unethical.

The distinction matters because professional and civic life routinely present situations in which responsibilities conflict, authority is ambiguous, rules underdetermine action or local expectations normalize questionable conduct. Moral formation worthy of professional life therefore cannot terminate at rule-following. It must include the capacity to recognize when institutional loyalty and moral responsibility diverge, to justify a course of action to affected others, and to accept the costs that responsible action may sometimes entail.

#### 4.5. Ubuntu is normatively resonant but institutionally under-articulated

Ubuntu did not emerge as an explicit organizing term across the core higher-education documents analyzed. This negative finding is significant because it prevents a retrospective claim that current higher-education policy is already structured by Ubuntu. At the same time, the corpus contains commitments that are normatively resonant with a relational ethic: human dignity, service, responsibility, humanitarian perspective, social justice, citizenship and community contribution. Rwanda-specific scholarship outside higher education identifies Ubuntu with relational humaneness, reciprocity and responsibility in ways that can illuminate these commitments without claiming textual identity (Ward 2026).

The interpretive opportunity is therefore reconstructive rather than descriptive. Ubuntu can supply a culturally situated language for asking how competence is owed to others, how professional power affects shared life, and why dignity and responsibility are relational as well as individual. Yet its use requires a rights-aware critical boundary. Communal harmony cannot be

treated as a sufficient moral criterion if it discourages dissent, marginalizes difference or subordinates individual dignity. The most defensible role for Ubuntu is therefore dialogical: it enriches moral purpose while remaining answerable to human rights, freedom of inquiry and plural moral reasoning.

**Table 3. Synthesis of documentary reconstruction**

| Finding                       | Documentary pattern                                                                                               | Interpretive implication                                                           |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dual telos</b>             | Employability, knowledge economy, labour-market relevance coexist with citizenship, dignity, service and justice. | Avoid false choice between economic and moral purposes; focus on integration.      |
| <b>Normative density</b>      | Many values are explicitly named across policy, regulation, mission and curriculum.                               | The problem is not value absence but lack of a unified developmental account.      |
| <b>Formative assets</b>       | Reflection, citizenship curriculum, community service, leadership and integrity mechanisms exist.                 | Build distributed formation across disciplines and institutional life.             |
| <b>Agency gap</b>             | Rules and principles are clearer than judgment and action under ethical pressure.                                 | Move from compliance to practical wisdom, courage and principled action.           |
| <b>Ubuntu gap/opportunity</b> | Ubuntu is not a dominant explicit HE policy term, though relationally resonant commitments are present.           | Use Ubuntu reconstructively and critically, in dialogue with rights and pluralism. |

## 5. Philosophical discussion

### 5.1. Beyond the false choice between employability and moral formation

The Rwanda case complicates a common rhetorical opposition in which employability is treated as the enemy of moral education. The documents instead suggest that professional capability, national development, citizenship and moral responsibility are intended to coexist. This is normatively plausible. Employment is a domain in which graduates exercise consequential agency; therefore professional competence can itself be part of moral responsibility. An incompetent professional is not made morally adequate by good intentions. The problem is incompleteness: skill answers whether a graduate can act, while moral formation addresses how and toward what ends that capacity should be exercised.

This interpretation aligns with Brooks and Lamb's (2026) claim that character education can support career preparation while also exceeding it. It also sharpens Lapsley's (2025) argument about institutional strong evaluation. If Rwandan higher education publicly values integrity, service and justice, programme relevance cannot be defined only by employer demand. Relevance must include the ethical quality of professional and civic action. The philosophical point is stronger than the claim that universities need 'more values': competence is a genuine educational good, but it is normatively underdetermined. It becomes educationally complete only when learners can

deliberate about the ends, relationships and obligations within which competence is exercised.

### 5.2. From declared values to character and practical wisdom

The findings expose a familiar implementation problem in moral education: values are easier to state than to form. A mission statement can name integrity; a module can define it; a regulation can sanction its violation. None of these, separately, guarantees that students will perceive integrity-relevant features of unfamiliar situations or act well when interests conflict. Virtue literacy helps learners name and discriminate moral qualities (Lamb and Brooks 2026), but practical wisdom is needed to coordinate judgment across context. The moral-formation task is therefore developmental and ecological rather than merely propositional.

For curriculum, this implies repeated encounter with morally salient professional situations across years and disciplines, not confinement of ethics to one general module. Case deliberation, reflective practice, service learning, mentoring, exemplars and structured dialogue can make moral reasoning concrete, provided they remain connected to disciplinary expertise. For institutions, it implies examining whether assessment, faculty conduct, reward structures and student governance reinforce the same values the curriculum declares. A university cannot plausibly teach integrity while normalizing opaque decision-making or reward systems that make ethical shortcuts rational.

### 5.3. Ubuntu as relational orientation, not cultural ornament

Ubuntu contributes most when it changes the moral grammar of the problem. Much character literature begins with the individual agent and asks which virtues that agent needs. A relational approach begins additionally with the ties constituted by action: who is recognized, who bears consequences, which relationships are sustained or degraded, and what obligations arise from shared human life. This does not abolish individual agency. It locates agency within webs of dependence, institutional power and mutual vulnerability.

The dialogue with Ubuntu scholarship also supplies a necessary caution. Letseka (2012) offers an influential defence of Ubuntu as ethically and educationally generative, including for democratic citizenship, while Metz and Gaie's (2010) emphasis on harmony and communal relationship is philosophically productive. Yet Gade (2012) and Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) show why Ubuntu cannot be treated as singular or beyond critique. In a university committed to freedom of inquiry, relational harmony must allow disagreement. The rights-sensitive reconstruction proposed here therefore does not equate Ubuntu with consensus. A relationship can be morally degraded by silence in the face of injustice as well as by hostility. On this reconstruction, principled dissent can be relationally responsible when it protects dignity, exposes wrongdoing or restores conditions for accountable common life. This is a normative proposal generated through dialogue between Rwandan relational language and pluralist educational commitments, not a claim that every use of Ubuntu already entails this interpretation.

### 5.4. The problem of compliance without agency

A compliance model is institutionally attractive because it is auditable. Codes can be published, attendance

recorded, plagiarism sanctioned and values tested. Moral agency is harder to standardize because it concerns judgment in situations not fully specified by rules. Yet professional ethics becomes most consequential precisely where rules underdetermine action. Practical wisdom and moral agency therefore need explicit educational space. Students should encounter dilemmas involving conflicts among loyalty, legality, compassion, fairness, institutional reputation and public interest, and they should be required to justify action rather than merely identify a policy clause.

This approach also changes how moral development should be assessed. Universities should resist converting virtue into a simplistic score. Assessment can instead evaluate the quality of ethical reasoning, attentiveness to affected persons, use of evidence, recognition of competing goods, reflexivity and capacity to revise judgment. Behavioural claims should be made cautiously. The aim is to create conditions for formation and to assess educationally accessible manifestations of judgment, not to certify the inner moral worth of students.

## 6. A normative-formative architecture for Rwandan higher education

The documentary reconstruction and philosophical synthesis motivate a context-specific architecture rather than a generalized 'African' model. The Rwanda Higher Education Moral Formation Architecture (R-HEMFA) comprises five linked domains, with two cross-cutting conditions: a relational normative orientation and an institutional moral ecology (Fig. 1). It is a normative-interpretive architecture, not a causal model validated through student outcomes. The arrows indicate reciprocal formative relations rather than a fixed developmental sequence. Its purpose is to make explicit the connections that the public documentary architecture presently leaves dispersed.

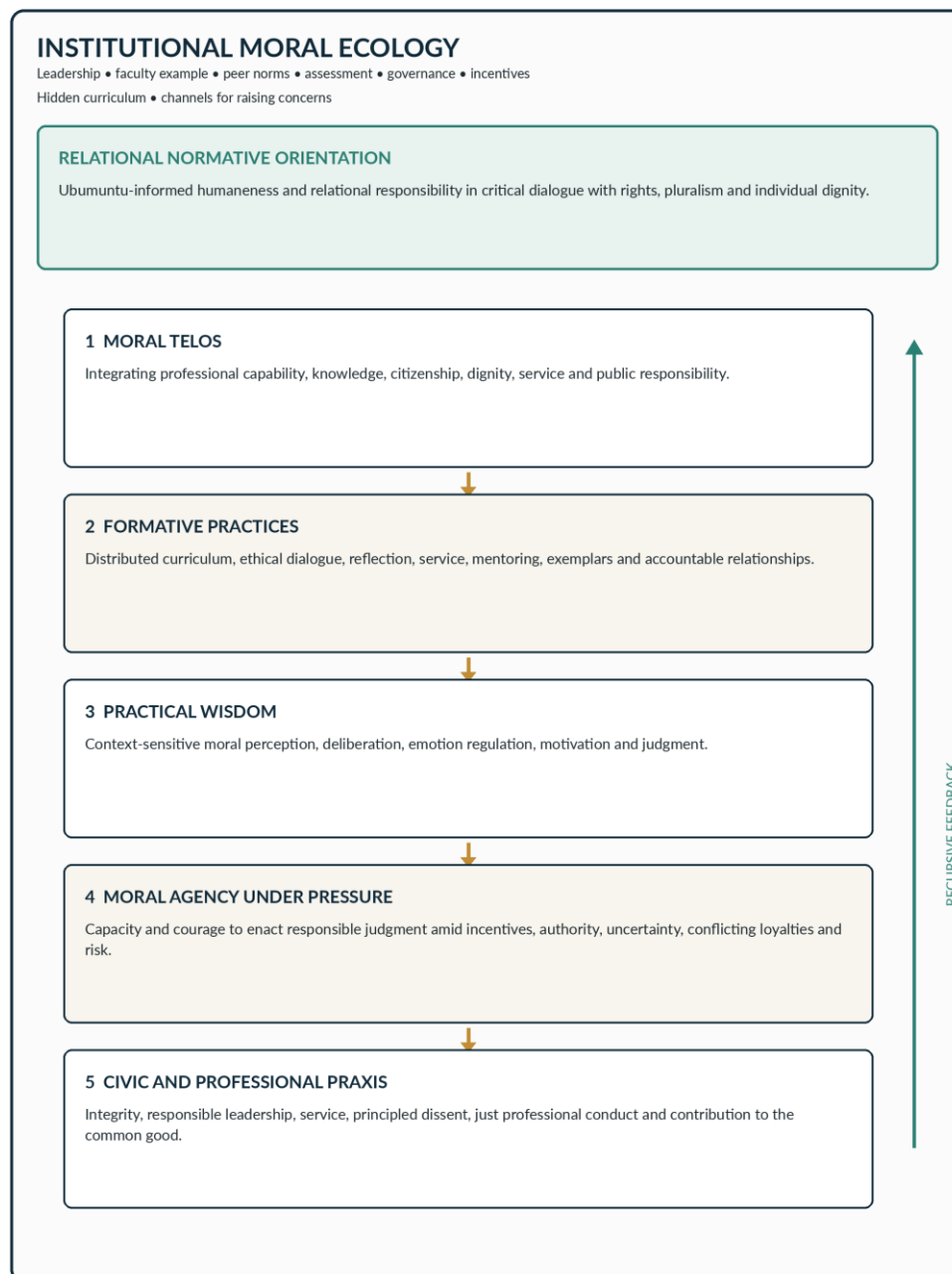


Figure 1. Rwanda Higher Education Moral Formation Architecture (R-HEMFA).

**Note.** The five domains are analytically distinct but recursively related. Ubuntu-informed relational responsibility is treated as a cross-cutting normative orientation in critical dialogue with rights, pluralism and individual dignity; institutional moral ecology spans all domains. AI-assisted visual production: the author-defined conceptual domains were rendered using code generated with OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol) and verified against the manuscript argument; no synthetic empirical data are depicted.

The first domain, moral telos, requires institutions to articulate how professional capability, knowledge, citizenship, dignity, service and public responsibility relate rather than allowing one purpose to dominate by default. Formative practices then translate normative commitments into repeated educational experiences across curriculum and institutional life. Practical wisdom names the context-sensitive capacities through which morally salient features are perceived, competing considerations are deliberated, and motivation and emotion are coordinated in judgment. Moral agency

under pressure asks whether responsible judgment can be enacted amid authority, incentives, uncertainty, risk and conflicting loyalties. Civic and professional praxis concerns the public expression of formation in work, leadership, service and community life. These domains are not stages through which every learner passes in a linear order; practice can reshape judgment, public experience can revise institutional purpose, and failures of agency can expose weaknesses in the formative environment.

Two cross-cutting conditions prevent the architecture from becoming an additive curriculum model. First, a rights-sensitive Ubuntu orientation asks how professional action recognizes or degrades persons-in-relation and what responsibilities arise from shared life, while keeping pluralism and individual dignity as critical limits on appeals to harmony. Second, institutional moral ecology draws attention to leadership, faculty example, peer norms, assessment, governance, incentives, hidden curricula and channels for raising concerns. These conditions can enable or defeat formation across every domain. A university does not form moral agency by inserting a single ethics course into an otherwise ethically incoherent institution.

## 7. Implications for policy, curriculum and institutional practice

### 7.1. Policy and graduate attributes

Rwandan higher-education policy could make the relationship between competence and moral responsibility more explicit in graduate attributes and programme-validation expectations. Rather than listing integrity, citizenship or service as parallel values, standards could ask programmes to show where students encounter ethically complex disciplinary situations, how reflection and community engagement are integrated, and how graduates practice responsible judgment. This would preserve labour-market relevance while deepening its meaning.

### 7.2. Curriculum and pedagogy

CTE1111 provides a national institutional asset, but moral formation should not be outsourced to a first-year citizenship module. Discipline-specific ethical deliberation should recur across programmes. Engineering, business, health, law, technology and public administration present different structures of responsibility. Case-based discussion, reflective portfolios, service learning, supervised practice and encounters with moral exemplars can connect common civic commitments to professional realities. Faculty development is essential because such pedagogy requires instructors to facilitate disagreement without collapsing discussion into moral relativism or ideological conformity.

### 7.3. Institutional culture and leadership

If institutional culture is morally formative, quality assurance should attend not only to written policies but also to the alignment of incentives and practices. Whistleblowing protections, transparent assessment,

fair procedures, responsible leadership, mentoring and student participation are not merely governance matters; they are part of the hidden moral curriculum. Institutions teach what they repeatedly reward and tolerate. A serious moral-formation agenda therefore requires institutional self-scrutiny alongside student formation.

### 7.4. Research agenda

The framework now requires empirical testing. Multi-institutional studies could examine whether students perceive the normative aims identified here, how different disciplines mediate them, and which practices are associated with stronger ethical reasoning or moral agency. Longitudinal qualitative designs would be particularly valuable for tracing how students interpret professional dilemmas from entry through internship and early employment. Research should also examine whether Ubuntu resonates with students' own moral language or whether other Rwandan concepts provide stronger explanatory power. Such work should be open to disconfirming the framework rather than treating cultural concepts as predetermined explanatory variables.

## 8. Limitations and scope conditions

This study analyzes public documentary architecture, not educational practice or student development. It cannot determine whether stated values are enacted, whether CTE1111 changes behaviour, or whether graduates act with integrity. The corpus privileges documents that were publicly accessible and verifiable in September 2026; unpublished institutional practices may therefore be missed. Some regulatory documents currently hosted by HEC originated in 2007–2008. Their continued publication establishes documentary salience, not unchanged implementation, which is why they were interpreted alongside current HEC material and treated cautiously. The scholarly evidence search is transparent and auditable but not exhaustive: it used a capped semantic-discovery layer and targeted publisher hand-searching rather than direct Scopus or Web of Science exports. Semantic ranking may also change over time; the retained record-level log therefore supports auditability rather than exact rank replication. Finally, R-HEMFA is a philosophical and documentary reconstruction specific to Rwanda. Its transfer to other higher-education systems, and its claims about actual formative effects, require empirical testing rather than assumption.

## 9. Conclusion

The central question is not whether higher education should choose between employability and moral formation. Rwanda's public higher-education architecture indicates that the two are intended to coexist. The more demanding question is whether declarations of citizenship, integrity, dignity, service and social justice are connected to the educational and institutional processes through which graduates learn to perceive moral significance, deliberate wisely and act responsibly when doing so is difficult.

The documentary reconstruction suggests that Rwanda possesses substantial normative resources but an incompletely articulated formation architecture. CTE1111, personal development planning, community-service expectations, integrity mechanisms and the University of Rwanda's mission provide formative entry points. What remains underdeveloped at the level of

publicly articulated architecture is the connection from valued ends to distributed practice, from practice to context-sensitive judgment, and from judgment to responsible action under pressure. A rights-sensitive reconstruction of Ubuntu can deepen this architecture by locating competence and agency within relationships of humaneness, reciprocity and responsibility while preserving the critical functions of rights, pluralism and freedom of inquiry.

A university fulfils its public purpose inadequately if it produces graduates who can do difficult things but cannot judge whether, why or how they should do them. The more complete educational aspiration is a graduate who is professionally capable, relationally responsible, practically wise and able to act with integrity in civic and professional life. That is the normative movement from employability to moral agency.

## Declarations

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS</b>            | Sixbert SANGWA: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, visualization, and writing - original draft. Placide Mutabazi: Validation and writing - review & editing. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>FUNDING</b>                         | No funding was received for conducting this study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>CONFLICTS OF INTEREST</b>           | The authors declare no conflict of interest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>ETHICS APPROVAL</b>                 | Not applicable. This study used publicly available policy, regulatory, institutional and scholarly sources and involved no human participants, identifiable private data or intervention.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>INFORMED CONSENT</b>                | Not applicable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>DATA AVAILABILITY</b>               | The documentary sources are publicly accessible through the official Rwanda Ministry of Education, Higher Education Council and University of Rwanda webpages cited in the reference list. Online Resource 1 contains the exact scholarly-search strings, eligibility criteria, record-level screening decisions, version control and count reconciliation used for the evidence map.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>MATERIALS AND CODE AVAILABILITY</b> | No proprietary materials or bespoke analytical code are required to reproduce the documentary analysis. Figure rendering was code-assisted from author-defined constructs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>USE OF GENERATIVE AI</b>            | OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol; accessed September 2026) was used under the corresponding author's direction for literature-discovery support, manuscript structuring, drafting and restructuring from the author-specified research problem and analytical framework, language refinement, reference-check support, document formatting, and code-assisted rendering of the conceptual and search-flow diagrams from author-defined constructs and verified record counts. No synthetic empirical data were generated. References, factual claims, documentary interpretations and figure contents were checked against publisher records or official institutional sources during manuscript preparation. Scholarly interpretation, argument, conclusions, accountability and approval of the submitted version remain the authors' responsibility. |
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| <b>SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS</b>         | Online Resource 1: PRISMA-S-Informed Search and Screening Audit Trail.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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