

# Education and Challenges of Moral Ethics Among Nigerian Youths

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**Abstract:** The challenge of moral decadence in Nigeria is one of the burning issues when western education, especially religious education is discussed. It is often argued that western education and formal religious education have contributed little in making Nigerian youths morally upright. Hence, what is the value of education, if not to make an individual to attain high ethical standard. It is suffice to say that one of the main purposes of education of education should be to produce people who have refined mind. When the missionaries brought western education in 1842 they succeeded in inculcating moral discipline in the minds of learners, that is why among the three cardinal subjects in the curriculum were: Reading, 'Rithmetic and Religion. Each culture also, through informal training have moral codes which are part of training the young ones to be responsible members of the society. This explanatory study sheds more light on the nexus between ethics and education. The study takes a look at the moral state of the society and the role of education in ensuring that the society regains its moral standard.

**Keywords:** Morality, Ethics, Religion, Education, Culture

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## 1. Introduction

The concepts of education and ethics are as old as the world itself. Right from the book of Genesis, there were several accounts of formal, informal and nonformal education in which people were impacted with skills and prerequisite education that made them to be relevant within the context of their civilization. In Ancient near East, there were records of training of younger generation by older generation with specific curriculum which helped build the society and ensure that the younger generation are well integrated into the society and properly socialized for the good of the enlarged society. There were also laws and order that were either documented or undocumented, but were meant to guide the society on the right path and ensure that there were peace, order, justice and equity in the society. From the biblical account of the life of Moses in Egypt, the

writer made it clear that he was trained in the palace of Pharaoh. This was later corroborated by Stephen while defending his faith in front of the Jewish council in Acts 7.

According to encyclopedia Britannica, the history of civilization started in the Middle East about 3000 BCE. This civilization also came with culture and Education. The priests were noted as the chief intellectual elites in the Egyptian theocracy. This kind of formal training of organized school system could also be seen in ancient Chinese records and the older Summarian, Akkhadian and Assyrian accounts. [1] A report in the website of Tuane University law school submitted that king Hammurabi of Mesopotamia was known for his fair laws and style of ruling. He clearly articulated the laws to guide his people by developing a code of conduct that is now popularly known as Code of Hammurabi. [2] This code contains laws that stipulated punitive actions against crime in all human endeavours. This same could also be said of the ancient Greek in which the society had written laws

and well developed legal structure that would enforce and punish offenders. The Jews were also given the ten commandments to control guide the people of Israel on personal and public conducts (*see footnote<sup>1</sup>*). These ethical codes, as instructed by Moses, were to be transmitted from generation to generation. So, the Jewish education system did not just transmit knowledge from one generation to the other, it also transmit values, ethics and moral conducts from one generation to the other. There is a similar trend in the Greek and Roman education. It seems there is a kind sync between education and ethics in ancient education curriculum which made it possible for learners to appropriate knowledge which did not just impact on the psychomotor and cognitive domains, but affective as well.

In African culture, education is meant to impact all the aspects of life of a learner. The proper education given to a child starts from home. Some of these lessons are transmitted through oral poetry. For instance a popular Yoruba poetry says, *“kini n o f’ole se laye ti mo wa, kini n o f’ole se l’aye ti mo wa, laye ti mo wa kaka ki n jale, kaka ki n ja le ma kuku seru, kini n o f’ole se laye ti mo wa...”* [3] This poetry which was popularized by J. F Odunjo and learnt as part of the Yoruba language curriculum in primary schools in South West Nigeria is one of the means of impacting ethics through education in African culture. Education and ethics, as earlier seen in Greek, Roman and Jewish culture could also be seen in African culture. According to Omojuwa (2016), one of the bane of modern education is training people who have no morals. She submitted that most of these people were clever devils. [4] According to her, education is of value if educated people did not only become useful to themselves but also become responsible member of the society. She cited example of the political class who despite their high level of education are still corrupt. This kind of situation puts a question mark on the worth of their education.

In this work, attempt would be made to examine the synergy between education and ethics in the Old Testament and draw a comparison with education and ethics in Nigeria. This would guide this work as it navigate through in attempting to examine the level of moral decadence in the society and the relevance of the present curriculum in achieving the goals of Nigerian education which is to build a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation and a land full of opportunities for all citizen.

## 2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

There is no consensus agreement by scholars on most acceptable definition of Education. But attempt would be made to examine a few selected definitions in an attempt to under what education is really all about. Naziev (2017) in his paper titled, “What is Education?” clearly stated;

Not so long ago in the Soviet Union and Russia was recognized the following answer to this question: “Education is the socially organized and regulated process of continuous transference of socially significant experience from previous to following generations. The main way to receive an education is to take a course of training in the system of educational institution.” [5]

This definition is in consonance with the popular belief that education is a process of socialization. It is an organized way, developed by the society to integrate the younger generation into the existing structure of the society. This implies that education is designed by the society to help new members of the society to live within the society. On the website of Punjab College, education was compared to civilization. They submitted that civilized society’s fundamental aspects are associated with education. This means that education is the driving force for modern civilization. Without education, therefore, civilization would not be possible. The dictionary definition on wikidiff.com said education is synonymous with civilization. It further stresses that education is (uncountable) the process or art of imparting knowledge, skill and judgment. The aim of education therefore is to bring changes to the life of an individual in all ramifications and to make this “changed” or “transformed” individual to be change the society. The end of education, therefore the end of education is societal transformation. Any education which has no positive impact in the growth and development of the society may be termed as irrelevant or useless. [6]

The above definitions had been established earlier by scholars such as Aristotle, Langeveld, Yunus and Socrates. Aristotle had earlier submitted that education “is the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the faculties to the fullest extent as a member of the society.” [7] Yunus reiterated that education should be beneficial to the learner and the society while Socrates opined that education should bring out the universal validity which had been hidden or latent in human to fore. Fafunwa (1976) also toed the same line of thought by describing education as “what each generation gives to its younger which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills, and other behaviours which are positive values to the society in which they live. [8]

However, a clearer picture was painted by Horne who submitted that education is the device by which a social group continued to renew its existence and defend its ideals. In view of all these, education could be seen in the light of socialization, integration, acculturation and civilization. Despite this position that most definitions link education to socialization and acculturation, there are others that see education from an individual learner’s perspective. Many dictionary definitions like one from dictionary.com see education as acquisition of knowledge. The same line of thought was taken by Merriam-Webster dictionary. Herbert submitted that education is the development of good moral character. While there are several other definitions that allude the fact that education is acquisition of knowledge,

<sup>1</sup> This is contained in the law given to the Israelites in Exodus chapter 20 as part of their covenant with God as a holy nation.

these definitions still extended this to acquiring a lethal weapon or potent tool that is capable of changing the world, according to Nelson Mandela. This study therefore sees education as a social tool imbibed by an individual for societal change.

Ethics also is a concept that is hard to define. There was a report by Velasquez, et al on the difficulty of getting an acceptable and consensus definition of ethics published on the official website of Markkula Center of Santa Clara University. It was reported that;

Some years ago, sociologist Raymond Baumhart asked business people, "what does ethics mean to you?" Among their replies were the following: "ethics has to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong." "ethics has to do with my religious beliefs." "being ethical is doing what the law requires." "ethics consists of the standards of behaviours our society accepts." "I don't know what the word means." [9]

These multidimensional replies were indications that perceptions of lay people on ethics differ. The same also goes with the perceptions of scholars of ethicists on the acceptable definition of the word ethics. However, Velasquez, et al earlier cited above submitted that "ethics is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues." In 1969, Wittgenstein gave a lecture on ethics in which he concluded that ethics emanates from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable...However, Kang & Glassman (2010) opined that morality and ethics are part of a way of life and cannot be separated from all other aspects of life experiences. [10] Ethics is the branch of philosophy which tries to probe the reasoning behind our moral life (Chowdhury, 2016). [11] Muirhead said ethics is not merely concerned with temporal behaviour but it forms the basis of legal decision. [12] However, Sudan claimed that ethics is a science of character, though not a practical science, nor a pure art. Rich defined ethics as a philosophical discipline which is a systematic approach to understanding, analyzing and distinguishing matters of right and wrong, good and bad, and admirable and deplorable as they relate to the wellbeing of and the relationships among sentient beings. Etymologically, the word "ethic" comes from Old French (etique), Late Latin (ethica), and Greek (ethos) and referred to customs or moral philosophies. The "Morals" comes from Late Latin's moralis, which referred to appropriate behaviour and manners in society (diffen.com). The dictionary definition of ethics is that it is a moral principle that governs a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity. According to the encyclopedia of Philosophy, ethics involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour. Furthermore, Martinez (2019) submitted that ethics attempts to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime.

From all these scholarly and laymen's definitions it could be submitted that ethics is the study of morality as defined by

the society. It is the society that determines the moral standard or the canon of morality for acceptable human behaviour within the society. In a society, what they see as ethically wrong and unacceptable may be tolerated in another society. But, there are some general minimum ethical standards like the sanctity of human life. Therefore, murder is seen as unethical in most societies. This study links ethics with acceptable moral behaviour. Alenxandrov wrote that;

The moral teachings, especially Christianity, have put forward as a general principle the love and service to others. However, in many cases, this is not enough, because you need to understand what people need.. Loving mothers could harm their children, thinking that would make things better for them (the most, we can say, a common situation). Similarly, people with the best intentions can produce health tips without having to understand or, say, feed the hungry, bring it to death...People always judge what is happening about other people, their actions and often make their judgement, their sentences. But any such judgement could be justice, morality, only if it receives sufficient objective justification. [13]

In the beginning of this discourse, it was submitted that the purpose of education is to make a learner to contribute meaningfully to the society. Also, compliance with the national goal of education within a country is the true education. Since, one of the goals of education is to attain high moral standards, therefore, moral education is one of the major goals of education and anyone who is not morally upright or within the ethical standard of the society within which they find themselves may not be deemed educated. This means a morally corrupt person who is trained in a particular skill and has got mastery in it may be termed as uneducated and unethical since his education may not be in consonance with national goal of education.

There are several theories on moral education and ethical education. This work would be guided by the transformation of value classification approach method developed in 1972 by Simon, Howe and Kirschenbaum. [14] This is a "multi-dimensional, holistic, and integrative approach that combines both traditional educational goals and recent lessons in moral psychology and other sciences." According to Strahovnik (2018) explained Kirschenbaum later expanded the theory more by highlighting four key areas of the theory, which are:

1. Content: Comprehensive ethical education including both personal and social values.
2. Methodology: An integrative approach to ethical education.
3. Scope: Ethical education extends beyond teaching and learning as part of an individual subject and encompasses the entire school domain, including all subjects, as well as the reminder of school life and activities.
4. Approach: It involves not only children and their teachers or educators and the whole community. [15]

This theory is appropriate because the approach is very comprehensive and covers the learner, their teachers and the

entire society. This shows that ethical education involves the whole community and is not limited to the learner and the teacher only but also the society at large. The standard is often set by the community and implemented within the school environment.

### 3. Moral Decadence among Nigerian Youths: A Growing Concern

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is facing a significant challenge in the form of moral decadence among its youth population. Moral decadence refers to the erosion of ethical principles, values, and standards in society. It manifests in various forms, including corruption, indiscipline, drug abuse, promiscuity, and a disregard for societal norms. This article aims to shed light on the factors contributing to moral decadence among Nigerian youths and propose potential solutions to address this growing concern. The factors contributing to moral decadence include:

1. **Socioeconomic Factors:** Nigeria has experienced rapid social and economic changes in recent decades. The country has faced challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and income inequality, which have resulted in frustration and disillusionment among the youth. In such circumstances, some young individuals resort to unethical means to attain wealth and success, further perpetuating moral decadence.
2. **Weak Educational System:** Nigeria's education system has faced various challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and outdated curricula. These shortcomings have limited the system's ability to instill moral values and character development in students. As a result, some young individuals lack a strong moral foundation, leading to moral decadence.
3. **Influence of Media and Technology:** The advent of digital media and technology has significantly impacted Nigerian youth. While technology has its benefits, the unrestricted access to explicit content, violence, and materialistic messages has contributed to moral decay. Social media platforms, in particular, have facilitated the spread of harmful trends and behaviours, creating an environment conducive to moral decadence.
4. **Political and Leadership Crisis:** Nigeria has faced challenges of corruption and weak leadership, which has eroded public trust and moral values. When young people witness dishonesty and unethical behaviour from those in power, they may perceive it as acceptable conduct, leading to a further decline in moral standards.
5. **Cultural Shift:** Rapid urbanization and exposure to Western influences have brought about cultural shifts in Nigeria. While cultural diversity is enriching, it has also led to the erosion of traditional values and moral norms. Westernization, with its emphasis on individualism and materialism, has contributed to the decline in ethical behaviour among Nigerian youths.

### 4. Potential Solutions to the Challenges of Moral Decadence

1. **Strengthening Moral Education:** Reforms in the educational system should prioritize the inclusion of moral and character education as a core component of the curriculum. Teachers should be trained to incorporate values, ethics, and empathy in their teaching methods to help students develop strong moral foundations.
2. **Empowering Youth:** Creating opportunities for youth empowerment through entrepreneurship, skills development, and job creation can reduce frustration and minimize the inclination toward immoral activities. By providing avenues for growth and self-sufficiency, young people can develop a sense of purpose and responsibility.
3. **Parental Guidance and Mentorship:** Parents and guardians play a vital role in instilling moral values in their children. Encouraging open communication, setting positive examples, and providing guidance can help steer young individuals away from moral decadence. Additionally, mentorship programs can connect young people with positive role models who can guide them in making ethical choices.
4. **Media Regulation:** Implementing stricter regulations on media content, particularly concerning explicit material and violent imagery, can protect young people from exposure to harmful influences. Promoting media literacy programs can also equip youth with the necessary critical thinking skills to navigate digital platforms responsibly.

### 5. Conclusion

The "concept of clever devil" needs to be thoroughly investigated and a far-reaching solution should be proffered. The nation is now a breeding ground for highly intelligent people who have several higher degrees in different fields but are morally corrupt. Most of those convicted of internet frauds have university degrees and most of the politicians with corruption cases are graduates and some of them even have foreign degrees. Then, the question is: what is the moral value of the education that breeds corrupt leaders? However, if the country must progress, the issue of moral decadence among Nigerian youths demands urgent attention. It is a multifaceted problem influenced by socioeconomic factors, the education system, media exposure, political climate, and cultural shifts. By addressing these factors and implementing proactive solutions, such as strengthening moral education, empowering youth, promoting parental guidance, and regulating media content, Nigeria can foster a generation of morally upright society. This paper suggests that concept of home training and religious instruction would save our society from sinking deeper in the pit of destruction.

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