VALUE RE-ORIENTATION AS BEDROCK FOR GOOD CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

The university education which was highly revered for quality education and character in the past is now becoming a den for corrupt activities like examination malpractice, sexual assault, substance abuse, cybercrime, and criminal activities like cultism, ritual killings, kidnapping, violence, etc. The increase in the rate of crime among undergraduates can be traced to a gross decline in moral values and poor character development. It is believed that individual is the creator of his own fortune and misfortune therefore, the character displayed by students are product of a complex interplay of individuals' beliefs, experiences, and decisions over a lifetime. This paper looked into the factors responsible for moral and value decadence, the concept of character and character development with William Glasser's control theory as the theoretical framework. Value reorientation as the bedrock for formation of good character development was discussed. The writer suggested that character education should be inculcated into the University Curriculum while Guidance Counsellors who are well skilled in character moulding should impart such knowledge to the students. Counsellors can also use counselling strategies like role – playing, mentoring, and assertive training among others to help students develop good character. Students should be well sensitized and reorientated through workshops, seminars and awareness campaign programmes.
Key Words: Character, Values, Character Development, Reality therapy, Value Re-orientation, Omoluabi.

Introduction

In the traditional African setting, there are written and unwritten moral values, norms, and core beliefs about what is good or right and what is bad or evil. These written and unwritten laws which is referred to as values are held in high esteem across culture and it determines the attitude and lifestyles of the people. Values when properly impacted on an individual, it determines what he/she considers to be rights, good, worthy, beautiful, and ethical. The virtues of good values are

transmitted from one generation to the other and over time, these developed into the character or attitude that a particular family or the society at large is noted for and any deviation is greeted with stiff penalties and shame. In Nigeria and particularly among the Yoruba ethnic group, much importance is laid on these moral values, character, and beliefs thus the concept of "*omoluwabi*" (a person who exhibits excellence in character). An ideal person is expected to be an embodiment of noble character in all ramifications. It is believed that when an individual maintains morality either in the context of the vertical or horizontal web of context of *omoluabi* entails uprightness in cultural, political, social, economic, educational, religious, and family values interrelationships, the individual does not only flourish, but the society also experiences genuine progress and advancement (Adetayo, 2022) Therefore, the place of positive attitude or good character as bedrock for morality in any organization cannot be overemphasized as it plays a crucial role in the way an individual interacts with his environment, it determines the individual's perception, communication, motivation, way of life, leadership style and also propels reactions and decisions per time . In the course of achieving active enhancement, better development and effective transfer of these moral values and good character from one generation to another have led to the formation of higher education. University, a higher learning environment has been highly referred to as a key environment where individuals acquire the needed skills, knowledge, and good character development that are needed for sustainable futures and for the betterment of the society at large (Ofor-Douglas, 2021). It is an environment that generates a peaceful and favourable learning platform for individual students to acquire values or a new sense of values that an individual can apply to improve himself and his lifestyle. It is seen as an ideal place of where an individuals are impacted with moral values and norms that help them to develop good character and leadership qualities that will assist in sustainable socio-economic development of any society.

Unfortunately, the much cherished cultural values, norms that propels the good character is at vanishing point in today's institution of higher learning, such that moral decadence has now triumphed over temperance and there is misplaced or a total sight loss of character (Crossan, Gandz and Seijts, 2012). The degradation or fall in the standards of moral and ethical traditions is known as moral decadence (Adetayo, 2022). The recent prevalence of moral and value decadence observed daily among university undergraduates has become a great concern not only in Nigeria but across the globe. Diverse corrupt activities like examination malpractice, sexual assault, substance abuse, cybercrime, and criminal activities like cultism, ritual killings, kidnapping,

violence, etc. have replaced the good character that university education is initially set up to achieve (Akhter and Peerzada 2023) (Lukman, 2021) and has presented both the institutions and society as unfavourable and traumatic for learning and habitation(Oluwagbohunmi, 2017). Suraju, (2019) revealed that university environment had become a breeding ground for ignoramus, hoodlums, cheaters, rapists, prostitutes, etc. as against its purpose of instilling the required manpower, acquisition of skills, and refinement of morals for the future leaders of the country. These have significantly increased the ratio of unskilled and mediocrity among Nigerian graduates thus posing serious threats and dangers to self-actualization, nation-building and even achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This paper therefore presents value-reorientation as a bedrock for character development among university undergraduates.

Factors Responsible for Moral and Value Decadence among Undergraduates

Parenting Style

Psychoanalysts believed that the first five years of birth tagged formative age, determines individuals' personality, behaviour and a reflection of individuals' coping skills. The implication therefore is that the foundation of individual's behaviour, personality, mental and emotional fortitude are laid by healthy parent – child relationship. Whatever is inculcated into an individual is largely influenced by the home which is the first agent of socialization and the first point of contact for any child. The traditional Yoruba people with its culture of *omoluwabi* belief that parents, siblings and elders within the family have a strong role in transmitting the cultural values and ensuring morality. Unfortunately, there is total collapse in family tide due to civilization, overprotection of children, the urge for white collar job and marital conflicts which has prevented parents most especially mothers from having quality time for the moral development of their children. Marital conflicts which often result in separation or divorce of spouses has over the years exposed youth to moral decadence. It is believed that the emotional and social involvement of father in upbringing of a child is associated with significant improvement in cognitive, developmental and social behaviour outcome of the child (Garfield & Isacco, 2006) and where this is lacking the child tends to exhibit antisocial behaviour which may later have negative influence on the society. Research study also revealed that children whose parents are depressed are more susceptible to secondary depression deficits which can lead to anxiety, pains, substance abuse, physical dysfunction and other moral decadence (Timko et al., 2009). To put it bluntly, immorality are on the high side because parents who should act as authority figure are no longer having quality

time to attend to their children. Children are left at the mercy of caregivers, school and peers at a very tender age which often have significant influence on their character at later life.

School Administrative Policies

The place of school in the transmission of moral values cannot be undermined, school is a community where different peers are gathered for interpersonal relationships that helps in social, emotional and personal growth. Educational institutions as an agent of socialization are designed to shaping the ethical foundation of students and prioritize value alongside with academic achievements. It is in charge of passing along behavioural norms and standards from one generation to another (Tomé et al., 2012). No wonder the announcement at convocations that degrees are awarded on those that were found worthy both in character and learning. The implication is that administrative policies been implemented in higher institution of learning are capable of contributing to moral decadence or fostering ethical development. Unfortunately, there is paradigm shift from fundamentals of education philosophy of pedagogically –based academic values to market – based values in recent time. Many public universities in the quest for improved internally generated revenue, and some private universities in quest for improve enrolment are lenient in approach to disciplinary issues and academic honesty, thus making students view integrity as negotiable and perceive a serious disconnection between success and moral values. The university regulations to undergraduates are seen as mere pious statement, moral values has been seriously eroded thus leading to increase the rate of social menace like cultism, examination malpractice, hooliganism, indecent dressing, sexual, rape, insurgency, terrorism and gender violence among others (Makinde et al., 2020) (Shittu & Gamde, 2021).

Peer Influence

An adage says show me your friend and I will tell you the type of person you are. The type and class of people that one associate with may make or mar the individual's preference, choice, behaviour and attitude. Peer influence entails alteration of one's behaviour or believes to conform to the expectations of others. Peer pressure or influence can give easy access, encouragement, and a suitable social setting for consumption, while also acting as role models and influencing behaviours and attitudes (Glaser, Shelton and Bree 2010). Peer influence can be visible in their ways of dressing, use and abuse of drugs and illicit substances, violence activities, sexual harassment, cultism and adopting other social vices. Majority of male undergraduates no longer

see anything challenging in school system thus the increase in rate of involvement in fraudulent practices and get rich quick syndrome. A clear deviation from the traditional ways of life where honesty, hard work and integrity was the order of the day.

Societal Influence

For any nation to achieve sustainable development and have a meaningful economic progress, the youth most especially the undergraduates which would form the labour force of the nation must be well guided and properly instilled with the general values, norms and right attitude. Nigeria as a people has a distinct and unique features that distinguished them among the comity of nations. The Yorubas for example are known to have much respects for elders, there is the notion that when a child is born to a parent, it becomes the duty of every elders in the neighbourhood to guide, direct and instill discipline into the child at every stage of his/her life. In today's Nigerian society, values such as uprightness, integrity, deference to elders and fellow citizens, loyalty to family values, hard work, creativity, honesty, accountability, and responsibility are no longer relevant (Chima & Onyema, 2019). Situations where people of doubted characters are celebrated and placed in notable positions, leaders who involved in fraud and embezzlement of money live in opulence without penalty, innocent citizens killed for rituals without impunity are clear signs of moral and value decadence.

Social Media

The emergence of smart phones, computers and the advancement of technology has improved our world greatly, the world has become a global village that one can stay in the comfort of his/her home and connect with the whole world. However it has also made upholding moral principles more difficult. There is now a paradigm shift in the ways of life, perception and the thinking of the old generation tagged *born before computers (BBC)* and the current youth tagged '*digital experts'*. The digital knowledge and the command of social media has encroached and seriously eroded the much cherished traditional values and caused family breakdown, disrespect to constituted authority and gross disobedience to societal norms, such that there is always clash of interest in parent – children relationship. These days, social media encourages obscene materials like multiple sexual partners, cybercrime, pornography, nudity, and sexual promiscuity that threaten the family and society's values (Chima & Onyema, 2019). Nigerian youths most especially the undergraduates are now living in unethical society due to high obsession with smartphones and

other technological devices. Parent no longer have quality time to relate with their children, society are not bordered about the welfare or discipline of the upcoming generation while teachers are more engulfed in social activities than imparting knowledge and cultural values.

Concept of Character and Character Development

Character refers to the collection of traits that inspire and facilitate the performance of one's best at work, act as a moral agent, work well in groups to advance the common good, and effectively seek out and pursue knowledge and truth. This suffix that the way a person generally reacts to desires, fears, opportunities, challenges, failures, and successes depends largely on their disposition and habits. Character is a way of thinking, feeling, and acting that is founded on moral rectitude, moral strength, and integrity. It is already entrenched in the attitudes, values, and practices of the way of life that a person is born into. Character is composed of three elements: traits, values, and virtues which in most clime are used interchangeably. Traits are habitual patterns of thought, behaviour and emotion that are considered to be stable in individuals over a period of time although this may not be fixed. Values refers to beliefs and attitude that are of importance to individual or group of people while virtues are behavioural habits that individuals exhibited fairly consistently (Crossan, Gandz, and Seijts, 2012)

Although Nigeria is a multicultural nation with each ethnic groups having norms and value that shaping their thoughts and lifestyle but there are general moral values that are regarded as symbol of National development and promote their peaceful co – existence and orderliness thus the epithet 'unity in diversity. These values include honesty, hard work, cooperation, respect for elders, kindness, forgiveness, dedication, fairness and justice (Ayanwale, 2015). Cursory look at other clime revealed that values and virtues are necessity in character development. (Crossan et al., 2013) identify six virtues of good character as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. In the same vein Aristotle identified twelve virtues required for an individual to live a good life and achieve happiness and wellbeing to include courage, temperance, generosity, magnificence, magnanimity, right ambition, good temper, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, and justice. These virtues has become a societal expectation for character development, no wonder Crossan, Gandz and Seijts summarized a cross – enterprise leadership virtues as shown below.
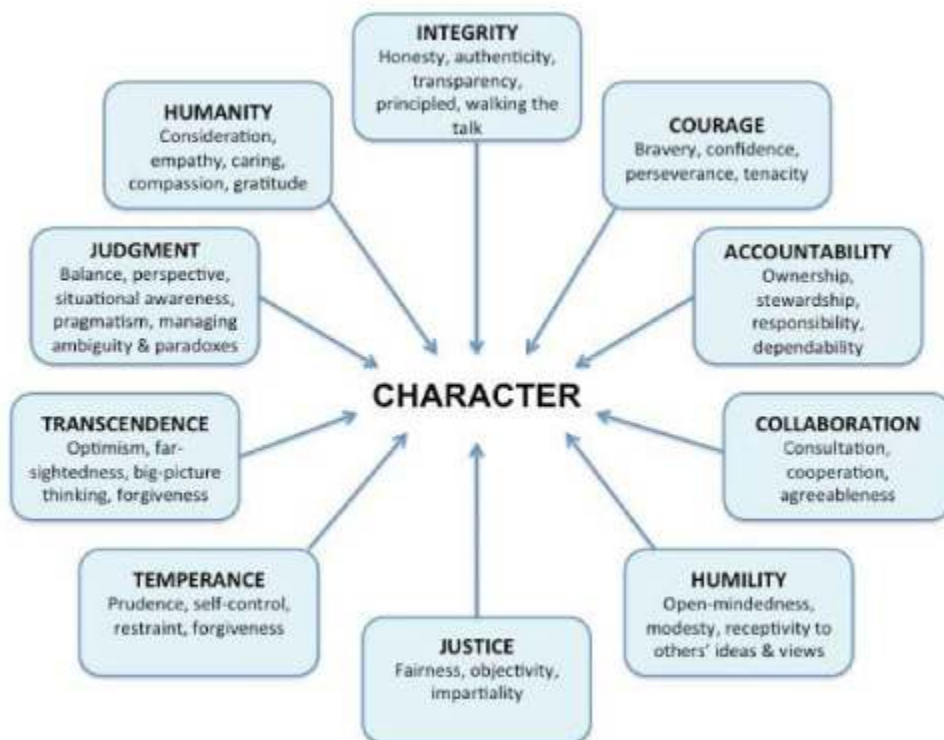
Source: Crossan, Gandz, and Seijts (2012)

Unfortunately, these moral values and virtues are now at vanishing point and been replaced with vices among students in institution of higher learning. Character is not made in crisis but exhibited as a result of crisis therefore there is the need to encourage good character development among undergraduates who will become the future leaders.

It must be noted that character development starts with internal characteristics and then translates to external characteristics. Human behaviours are driven by motivations, emotions, fears and flaws. These internal characteristics propels lifestyle, perception and relationship with others. Psychologically, individuals are often stacked between *'wants'* and *'needs'*. Want in this context are surface – level desires that makes one happy while need are what an individual actually require to achieve true happiness. The struggle between what their character *want* and what their character *need* usually results into unending scourge of internal strife and tension among the youths most especially the undergraduates. However, Aristotle believed that character is not formed on internal characteristics alone, it requires relationship and community and when individual shares the internal characteristics with others the virtues of honesty, temperance and friendliness are developed. And when there is disconnection between the person and others individual tends to

yield to pressure. Leaving home out of parental tutelage and monitoring to a new life at school often affect them. The disconnection sometimes push them to explore and crave for immediate gratification of needs, the desire to belong makes them to yield to peer pressure and negative influence of social media. The resultant effect is conflict with parents, disconnection with societal norms and values and high rate of social menace.

Theoretical Framework

William Glasser reality therapy which is based on control theory forms the theoretical background for this work. The proponent of the therapy believed that individuals are born with five genetically encoded needs namely *survival, love and belonging, power or achievement, freedom or independence, and fun* and that we need cooperative person to help us meet the needs (William Glasser, 2000). The therapist proposed that many of the problems of the clients stem from disconnection with important people in their lives and the goal of the therapy is to assist the client towards reconnection and teach them to behave in more effective ways better than their present behaviour. The therapy also assumed that individuals can learn how to take charge of their own lives, make better decisions and build the resilience necessary to deal with life's challenges. This writer believed that the increased rate of moral and value decadence among undergraduates emanated from disconnection from parents, teachers and other significant adults who should guide their thoughts and actions in achieving the basic genetically needs of life. The duty of the guidance counsellor is to assist the students to make specific and workable plans to reconnect them with these significant people they have chosen to emulate or put in their quality world. This is done through exploration of students' wants, needs and perception. This therapy required that the counsellor assists client to explore and evaluate what their character wants and what their character needs and guide them to take valuable decisions.

Value – Reorientation for Character Development

The present and future social, economic, political and moral advancement of any nation lies in the dynamism and growth of proper education and training of the youth. The present environment in which the university's undergraduates operate are becoming more toxic, unfriendly and highly challenging largely due to high rate of corrupt practices, obsession with social media, breakdown of family ties, societal neglect, insecurity, and ritual activities all leading to moral/value decadence and the need for value reorientation. Value reorientation is a process of changing or aligning

behaviour, attitudes and beliefs in a new or different direction within the public discourse (Osisima in (Denen, 2020). It is an attempt to change behaviour to align with best practices. To achieve this, the place of guidance and counselling as a social service to assist the troubled individual to have understanding of themselves, their world and be able to navigate through challenges towards becoming a better person within the society becomes inevitable. Guidance and Counselling is an veritable educational tool used in shaping the orientation of an individual and changing the negative mindset or ideas to a more positive one (Dhal, 2023).

In line with (William Glasser, 2010) in his choice theory that virtually all human problems stem from inadequate or non-existent of connection with valuable or significant people, (Denen, 2020) also opined that confusion, mistrust, envy, and a host of other negative emotions that can lead to emotional instability are brought about when people are not reached out to. It is believed that when parents and significant adults are not present in the life of students, the elements of good character are jettisoned and maladaptive behaviours will set in and to resolve the problems, there is the need to adopt reality therapy which is aimed at reestablishing the connections and reconnections to help students adjust and realign their behaviour. Therefore, Counsellors been a professionally skilled person in behaviour modification can assist students to explore their total behaviours, identify significant people they have chosen to put in their quality world and create a conducive counselling environment that can lead to successful change. To achieve this there is therefore the need for character education to be inculcated into the curriculum.

Character education is the process of teaching people common attitudes, beliefs, norms, values and behaviours they require to be a responsible member of their society. It is a deliberate attempt to inculcate in young people's moral principles, virtue, and moral agency in an educational environments. With the breakdown of family ties and societal neglect, the counsellor becomes the valuable option to deliberately use all the areas of guidance and counselling strategies to reconnect and promote the ideal attitude among the students. This involves the use of the curriculum content that emphasizes elements of cultural values and good character, methods of instruction that is therapeutic in nature, interpersonal relationship strategies like role – playing and mentoring during teaching learning process and all other related school activities like workshops, seminars, symposiums and awareness campaigns to re – orientate the students towards good and right character development.

For value re-orientation to be achieved, counsellors can adopt the following counselling strategies

Role – playing

This is the ability of a person to represent the status and functions of other parties found in real life. Aristotle asserts that observing and imitating the virtuous behaviour of others is a crucial step towards cultivating virtues in one's own character (Aristotle, 1999). The disconnection from parental love at tender age gives an avenue for moral decadence. Counsellors should assist students to identify notable figures within and outside the university that the students can reconnect with, observe their good character and try to represent as role models. Group counselling can be organized where students can act or imitate the role models through play and dramatization.

Mentoring

Guidance Counsellors should use their specialized training in behavioural modification skills to mentor the undergraduates to develop moral values. Counsellor can also assist to connect students with experienced and skilled people who can offer direction, advice, and practical support to them. It is believed that when mentors provided the mentee (clients/students) with information on corporate culture, the clients will gain adequate experience, learn critical knowledge that will assist in character development.

Assertive Training

The goal of assertive training in counselling is to assist the client in realizing their own strength without violating the rights of others. It is certain that clients/students will need assistance from others in meeting the challenges of life. Poor communication of thoughts and feelings may affect their relationship and make them surrender to pressure and maladaptive behaviours. Knowing that change is a matter of choice, Counsellors can introduce students to assertive training which will assist students in handling tensed and awkward situations without giving up their autonomy. It will also increase their ethical decisions making techniques.

Conclusion

Moral and value decadence are becoming deeper and spreading daily even among the innocent ones. This paper revealed that the cankerworm remained unabated due to parental negligence in child rearing, peer pressure, high level of corruption at all levels of Nigeria system and obsession with social media among others are causes of moral and value decadence. Counsellors as

behaviour modification experts can adopt reality therapy principles to achieve value – reorientation towards valuable character development.

Recommendations

- University administrators should establish a functional guidance and counselling centre where vulnerable and troubled students can be attended to.
- Counsellors should liaise with relevant stakeholders and people of integrity who can serve as role models and mentors that students can reconnect with for attitudinal change.
- Character education should be introduced into the curriculum with a clearly stated course content that will reflect the elements of good character and the course should be taught by professional counsellors who are well skilled in behaviour modification skills.
- Counsellors should organize workshops, seminars to sensitize and create awareness on the need for good character development.

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