

STUDENTS' EXPOSURE TO COMMON GOOD ETHICS AND THE PERCEIVED LINKAGE BETWEEN ETHICS PRACTICE AND DEMOCRACY OUTCOMES

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effect of exposure to business ethics as a proxy for common good ethics on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics practices and democracy dividends, or democracy's outcomes indicated for corporate social responsibility. Using a stratified sampling approach, 435 university students were randomly selected from the population of approximately 2206 to participate in the study. The instrument titled "Perceived Role of Ethics and Democracy's Outcome Scale" (PREDOS) was used for data collection in the study. A survey questionnaire was also used to measure exposure to common good ethics among the respondents. Descriptive analysis – tables and Analysis and of Covariance (ANCOVA), were used to analyze the data collected in the study. The findings show that exposure to common good ethics has a significant positive effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics practice and democracy outcomes. When controlled for personal characteristics, increased academic status and religion showed a low-interaction effect, while gender did not significantly affect the students' perception of the linkage between ethics practice and democracy's outcomes. It was concluded that a thorough exposure of students to common good ethics is vital to ensure that future democratic citizens, political leaders, politicians, and other public office-holders understand the importance of ethical conduct and its impact on democracy's outcomes.

Keywords: Common good ethics, perceptions, ethics, practice, democracy outcome, gender, exposure, academic status, university students, religion.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country of a moral paradox which is among the most religious countries in the world (Akipu & Lenshi, 2014; Harvard University, 2016); yet one of the most corrupt, according to the Sahara Reporters in 2014. This suggests that against expectations,

religiosity has not improved or reduced propensity to citizens' engagement in unethical practices (UPs). Corruption and unethical practices are a perennial challenge and politicians seek elective offices with the mantra or mandate to fight it with little or no significant positive results. Nigerian youths remain the victims of corrupt and UPs for the past four decades. They have been vulnerable to social vices and crimes occasioned by high level of unemployment and absence access to social safety nets. What is unclear per time, however, is the predisposition of these youths to maintain the status quo, that is, to sustain the trend of corruption or to attempt to reverse the trend should they be elected for leadership position. Nonetheless, it can be presumed that the youths have either been maintaining or preserving the corrupt status quo or have been too disempowered¹ to change it since corruption and UPs have persisted all these years. Thus, this paper concerns itself with assessing the perception of youths that their training on ethics will benefit our emerging democracy for the common good of the citizenry through the transmission and replication of ethical practices.

However, it is intractable to predict the future leadership of current crop of youths. Such a study will require experiments performed over time, huge resources to collect collate and analyze longitudinal data. Thus, investigations will first ascertain the baseline conditions for level of ethics – what choice of variables or their proxies are appropriate – and then over time the conditions and thresholds for descent into engagement in UPs. Moreover, the current generation of youths unlike their predecessors is borne in the digital era – where they have more access to information on the polity and economy and on depending on their inclinations, treatise on ethics for common good.

Youths utilize social media as an alternative to the regular print and electronic media as one major means to air and share their opinions. Social media freedom is indicative of democracy² and information exchange thereof is believed to shape their beliefs, consciousness and conscience for common good and for deepening of democracy in the context of just and equitable resource allocation. But, how have students as a response to trending corruption been exposed to structured lessons on Ethics for the benefit and deepening of democracy for common good with the view to curbing the scourge of UP? With information garnered from the media and structured lessons, it is presumed that students possess beliefs or opinions about contributing to creating a just and egalitarian

¹Youths, in the time past – especially during the military era that tried to challenge the corrupt system were either violently subdued or were bought over.

² Some repressive and undemocratic countries repress social media e.g. Uganda, Equatorial Guinea. The National Assembly of Nigeria has attempted once to pass a bill to ban it or limit its operations.

society. This paper therefore seeks at the basic level to assess the effect of exposure (which includes formal and structured training, and religious and secular exhortations) of students on common good ethics on their belief that it will improve democratic dividends despite the perennial challenge of corrupt and UPs in Nigeria.

Further, no study to the best my knowledge has mapped youths' beliefs in common good ethics and predicted their propensity toward aggregate national morality for leadership especially for developing nations. Some of the national political leaders either serving or nominated are tried for the "sins" of their past³ - the sins they committed during their student years. It is presumed nonetheless, that these former students somehow, undertook courses and lessons that bothered on common good ethics and leadership. It is also plausible that as emerging leaders, they underwent or are undergoing various trainings on equity and efficiency of time and resource allocation; on peace building and conflict resolution; on nation building and citizen orientation for common good of the citizenry. In any case, many of the current leaders are assumed to graduate for the university "in character and in learning". This suggests that their education would have been robust to the extent that as leaders, they seek to deliver on good governance, equitable resource allocation and distribution as dividends of democracy borne of the ethics of common good. But 'good' is not very 'common' in Nigeria.

Curricula have been modified or revised to respond to morality issues of the day. Different subjects now accommodate contents like HIV/AIDS and sexuality and reproductive health; on safety against terrorism, and on climate change (NERDC, 2003). But Ethics as discipline nay, CGE is an all-in-one subject that will encompass the aforementioned issues. If any, CGE is subsumed in various subjects which includes; moral instructions, religious instructions, civic education and social studies. If other, it is taught by teachers whose moral burden and disposition may exhort students on the benefits of selflessness and service; but a teacher with significant welfare deficit is likely to be indisposed, even to be ethical indeed – what one doesn't possess s/he doesn't give (*nemo quod dat non habet*). Hence the intractability of assessing the propensity of students for future leadership given their current moral stance

Moreover, literature is scanty on empirical studies that investigated beliefs of students that their training on or exposure to common good ethics course will culminate equitable

³ Harvey Weinstein and Brett Kavanaugh are among two developed world leaders who have been alleged to be sexual predators during their student years. Recently, in Nigeria, the former Minister of Finance resigned her position for alleged certificate forgery

democratic outcomes. This paper therefore seeks to contribute to literature to this effect. It is the first of its kind to apply randomized techniques to assess students' propensity to leadership and egalitarianism based on their perception on the effect of common good ethics. This paper proxy's student's belief in business ethics for common good as CGE because of the inclusiveness and freedom to participate in business and the business' engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the proxy for democratic outcomes because it is tool that promotes welfare and ease of poverty burden of the people.

Results show that while irrespective of academic status, training on CGE significantly influences youths' belief that CGE will increase democratic outcomes in Nigeria. Gender is also a significant determinant of this perception. More of females believed. The rest of paper is outlaid as follows: Section 2 is on the review of related literature, Section 3 is on the Methodology, Section 4 is on Results and Section 5 is on Conclusion

Literature Review

Exploring the Notion of Common Good

The common good ethics has a prominent position in the moral, social and political philosophy of the Greeks (Argandona, 2011; Jaede, 2018). Aristotle (1984a), the foremost in the notion of common good and whose idea of common good is relative to the good of the community notes, "the end of the city is living well ...it is to be assumed, therefore, that the object of the political community is good action, not only life in common" (1984a, III, 9, 1280b-1281a). Aquinas (1997) followed the Aristotelian theory of common good advanced that common good derives its meaning in governance. "To govern is to lead what is governed to its appropriate end" (1997, book II, c. 3). While perhaps the language of common good may have some implications in Aristotelian understanding of communities or rather cities, and what it takes to be fully human, Aquinas' (1970) analysis of the law brings to bear or rather makes more explicit this relationship between the human beings, human laws, the common good and immutable ethical standard (Wintermeyer, 2008). While the common good is sometimes nuanced to mean public service since both share same ethical activity (Kinsella, 2008), and has been contrasted with self-serving individuals in the corridors of power and pursuit of narrow self-interest (Jaede, 2018), common good has been associated with a virtuous character (Aristotle, 1988) or conditions that allow communities or social groups and individual members the opportunities to pursue their own fulfilment (Gaudium et Spes. 1966). This strengthens Aristotle's argument that the political community exists for the sake of the common good, in which it finds full justification and significance, the source of its inherent legitimacy (Deneulin, 2004). Truly, as the *Constitution on the Church in the World Today* reiterated, the

common good encompasses the totality of the conditions of the social life, which provides individuals – men, women, families, groups and associations more adequately and easily may attain their own perfection. Whichever way you tend to look at the idea of common good, three salient elements may be obvious. First, there must be a good, which is foremost constituted or inherent in every individual members of a human society. The basis of common good is founded in part on teleological dimension of human life and purpose, the fact that individuals have inherent capacity to flourish - to fulfill their human purpose. The second is that such good must be available to all, must be common. Aristotle, (1988; MacIntyre, 1981) argued that there is a greater value in the common good than in the individual good. Clearly, “even if the end is the same for a single man and for the state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete; ... though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for the a nation or the city state” (Aristotle, 2009). The third element is the good must be associated with a community. This brings back Aristotelian idea that the formation of a community requires a common good, since “the end of the city is living well...it is to be assumed, therefore, that the object of the political community is good actions, not only life in common” (1984a, III, 9, 1280B-1281a) Indeed, as Hollenbach (2002) described it, the idea of common good is imminent within the relationship that bring this community or society into being. According to Dupre (2009), it is a good proper to and attainable only by, the community, yet individually shared by its members.

The idea of common good albeit as attractive as it seems, has also tended to generate growing skepticism among scholars who describe the idea of common good as confusing since there is hardly a common notion or conclusion about the common good. Indeed it has been described as a grand rhetoric not well articulated (Kadri, 2011; as merely an instrument to one’s personal fulfillment or group well-being (Finnis, 1980; Sen, 1982) as utilitarian since common good is determined by what the generality of the people have chosen (Nozick, 1988), a means of subsuming individualities into a totalitarian system as incompatible with democracy and freedom of the people, sometime a way of talking about a good –structural conditions that is necessary for a good human life. Nevertheless, while the purposes of the various notions of common are diverse, most idea of common good share a unified orientation toward it (Beerbohm, E. & Davis, R. W. (2017). Since the idea of common good is “essentially contested” (Mansbridge, 2013) and often used interchangeably with public interest, common utility, public good, common weal, the ongoing discussion will use common good interchangeably with other related concepts.

Exploring the Meaning of Democracy

The word “democracy” is appealed to by philosophers, political scientists, and educators alike yet their notions of it are diverse. Gallie (1956), a British philosopher and social and

political theorist, describes democracy as one of those examples of an “essentially contested” (p. 167) concept – an inherently controversial term that we can never agree to define, because each definition carries a different social, moral, or political agenda (Crick, 2002).

The modernizing and contemporary eras following the Industrial Revolution and the struggle for sovereignty among many nations which led to the establishment of various democratic forms of governments worldwide compounded the problem. These new governments often are not based on what democracy should be or could be, or on a specific interpretation of it, but on people’s varying experiences (Ugwuzor, 2020). The concept of democracy was often put in parallel to the illiberal government of Mugabe of Zimbabwe or Buhari of Nigeria, yet these governments appropriated the concept, democracy to decorate their regimes. Thus, democracy has become all things for all people and has been used as a synonym for equality, freedom, rights or justice.

Despite the widely variant usage of the word democracy, it’s has a historical root – from two Greek words – *demos*, “the people,” and *kratein*, “to rule.” *Demokratia* means rule by the people or by the masses. A deeper insight into this meaning reveals the word democracy arises from the fundamental fact that all humans are born free and equal and have a right to live in a free society. Abraham Lincoln underscores this in his age-old conception of democracy as government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Pericles’ (431 B.C.) timeless qualification of democracy supports Lincoln’s notion:

Our constitution is called democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibilities. What counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability, which a man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty . . . we are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. (Finley, 1954, p. 145)

In the modern and contemporary eras, democracy is couched around two framework first, a representative framework whereby the political power is said to be acquired by means of competitive struggle for the people’s vote (Schumpeter 1975, p. 242). The second is perhaps more than a competitive struggle for people’s vote or election. Although elections are essential to the democratic process, it requires a bill of rights that extends beyond the right to vote, to include equal opportunity for participation and discovering

individuals' preferences, as well as citizens' final control of the political agenda (Held, 1987; Sorensen, 1998). Whichever way we look at democracy three essential points are highlighted. First, sovereign nation that promotes a civil society in which every person enjoys membership via participation must be in place. By and large, this excludes any form of military dictatorships, illiberal government in which the people have no rights to participate in the political process. Second, the people (demos) must have the freedom to make their individual choices collective decisions. This excludes any forms of coercion or manipulation of citizens who by right have full membership of the nation state. The third is the provision of environment that enables citizens to pursue their preferred goals for their good life (See Ugwuozor, 2020).

Apart from the aforementioned elements, I would think that every member of the state should have the ability to participate in the democratic process. I used the term ability⁴ here to mean more than physical ability to vote. It embodies the mental ability to make informed decisions, to make better judgment that is a critical in determining the quality of any democratic process. In other words, a true democracy encourages every citizen to participate namely: to cast votes; to freely make political choices and decisions, and freely pursue their preferences and goals toward the common good. All these elements are equally important, but they amount to nothing without the ability to participation in the democratic process –when this ability to participate is deficient in a society, such society becomes everything but democratic. Simply stated, democracy becomes more responsive and responsible to the extent that its participants (i.e., the citizens) are equally and well informed and freely willing without coercion to engage in democratic politics (Ugwuozor, 2016).

Interestingly scholars agree that some level of educational attainment is a basic lever or one of a complex set of conditions needed for democracy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2004; Culp, 2019; Dewey, 1938; Gramsci & Cornwell, 1997; Lipset, 1959, Omoteso & Aladejena, 2003; Ugwuozor, 2020). While they disagree on the ideals of education needed for democratic growth they acceded that there are common some basic values that must be in place for a proper functioning of democracy. This in way does not suggest that these values are automatic, and will lead to democracy. However, they agree that these values are endogenous and most likely to foster basic what Tocqueville (1835/1994) called “habits of the heart” (p. 287) –the cognitive and affective dispositions necessary for democracy to work. These dispositions or values–responsibilities, integrity, justice, self-discipline, freedom, human rights communal spirit, pursuit for common goal or common

⁴ Ability here implies mental ability to make informed choices and judgment.

good to mention but few are not innate human values –they are not given, they are learned. Thus, the imperative for education on these values, especially, on common good ethics with the hope to prepare Nigeria’s future democratic citizens.

Methodology

This section begins with a brief description of the study area, then description of the sampling techniques and methods of data analysis.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Enugu state Nigeria. It is the capital of the south east Nigeria. People of all walks of life either reside and/or visit Enugu because of her relatively cool climate. Topographically, she is hilly and hence has natural drainage. It is among the least flood-prone locales in Nigeria. Thus, there are many schools and businesses which includes University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). She is bounded by Kogi to the West, Benue to the North, Ebonyi to the East and Anambra to the south.

Sampling and Data

The study is a case study of UNN. UNN is federal university that has more faculties and student distribution across all demographics. Thus, given the limitations of the study, it is a good setting to assess the perception of students from all over the country. A stratified sampling approach was used to select 435 of 2206 student based on proportionate to size of each level of study. Students were first selected according their faculties and then according to their level of study. They were made to respond to the instrument titled “Perceived Role of Ethics and Democracy’s Outcome Scale” (PREDOS) for data collection.

Analytical Technique

Analysis and of Covariance (ANCOVA) is the major analytical tool. Dependent variable was the mean perception scores generated. The key independent variables are students’ gender and their exposure to (trainings on) CGE. The covariates – academic status were controlled for, in order to avoid influence of their levels of study.

Students answered questions on the role on their perception of Ethics in Business as an example of ethics for the common good of the society. For this study, it is assumed that successfully and ethically run business is for the common good of the society in terms of value addition, employment generation, increase in wealth and welfare (direct benefits).

Also, it is assumed that successfully run businesses will engage in corporate social responsibilities as a tool for redistribution of income (indirect benefits). The indirect benefit is also driven by payment of taxes by which the government generates revenue for infrastructure development [Harelimana, 2018]. This measurement approach was chosen because of some apparent apathy of the citizens toward government. Further, in Nigeria, it is believed that government relate to successful businesses more than the ordinary citizens

Results and Discussion

The findings show that exposure to common good ethics has a significant positive effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics practice and democracy outcomes. First the distribution of the students exposed or not to the training suggest that they have positive perception that CGE will influence positive democratic outcomes (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Between-Subject Factors

Variables		Value Label	N	%
Exposure	1.00	Those who were exposed to business ethics courses	361	50.3%
	2.00	Those who were not exposed to business ethics courses	357	49.7%
Positive Perception		Students with positive perceptions	450	62.7%
Negative Perception		Students with negative perceptions	268	37.3%
Gender	1.00	Male	338	47.1%
	2.00	Female	380	52.9%
Academic Status	1.00	Freshmen	310	43.2%
	2.00	Final Year	250	34.8%
	3.00	Postgraduate	158	22.0%
Total		Total	718	100.0%

In table 2, exposure to CGE courses, despite controlling for academic status as a covariate, has significant effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility, $F(1,717) = 141.37$; $P = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .94$.

Table 2: The ANCOVA Showing Effect of Common Good Ethics Education on Students' Perceptions of the Linkage between Ethics Education and Democratic Outcomes

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	82.368 ^a	1	82.368	141.373	.000	.165	141.373	1.000
Intercept	7273.824	1	7273.824	12484.478	.000	.946	12484.478	1.000
Exposure	82.368	1	82.368	141.373	.000	.165	141.373	1.000
Academic Status	76.497	2	38.249	64.647	.060	.153	129.293	1.000
Error	417.163	716	.583					
Total	7782.207	718						
Corrected Total	499.531	717						

a. R Squared = .165 (Adjusted R Squared = .164), b. Computed using alpha = .05

Similarly, in Table 3 which states that gender does not have significant effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility, is rejected, $F(1,717)=132.76$; $P=.000$, $\eta_p^2=.94$.

Table 3: The ANCOVA Showing the Effect of Gender Students' Perceptions of the Linkage between Common Good Ethics Education and Democratic Outcomes

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	78.137 ^a	1	78.137	132.765	.000	.156	132.765	1.000
Intercept	7346.12	1	7346.126	12481.988	.000	.946	12481.988	1.000
Acad. Stat	76.497	2	38.249	64.647	.060	.153	129.293	1.000
Gender	78.137	1	78.137	132.765	.000	.156	132.765	1.000
Error	421.393	716	.589					
Total	7782.20	718						
Corrected Total	499.531	717						

a. R Squared=.156 (Adjusted R Squared=.155)

b. Computed using alpha=.05

Brief Discussion

The findings show that exposure to business ethics course as a proxy for CGE has significant effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility. Thus, students who have taken business ethics courses rank high in their perception of how ethics education is linked to firms' corporate social responsibility, the proxy measure for democratic outcomes. This means that with exposure to business ethics courses, individuals can remember to observe the laws of ethics in discharging their corporate responsibilities. The finding supports Murphy and Boatright (1994), who found that students having taken business ethics courses ranked ethical issues differently than those who simply had taken a course in which business ethics was just one component. Also, the present finding is consistent with the assertion made by Luthar and Karri (2005) that exposure to ethics in the curriculum had a significant impact on student perceptions of linkages between ethical practices and business outcomes. The current finding does not support studies that suggest that taking ethics classes has no effect (Tanner & Cudd, 1999).

The findings also indicate that gender have significant effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility. This finding supports Luthar and Karri (2005), who noted gender differences, on the issues of ethics practices and business outcomes" link.

In addition, the findings of the study indicate that academic status does not have significant effect on students' perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility. Thus, freshmen, final-year, and postgraduate students have similar perceptions of the linkage between ethics education and corporate social responsibility. The present findings do not support Luthar and Karri (2005) and Borkowski and Ugras (1992, 1998), who claimed that older students are more ethical than younger ones. The difference in the views between the previous and the current study could result from the addition of corporate social responsibility, which was not a variable of focus in the previous study.

Based on the findings, there is need for the integration of CGE courses into the general curriculum of university in order to eliminate corrupt practices in the business sector of the society. This will help students to be aware of all the critical aspects of corporate social responsibility and consequences of unethical conduct for society. Again, based on the findings, the researchers reached a conclusion that in order to ensure and maintain high ethical conduct in business, students of tertiary institutions, who are the future business

owners, managers, directors, politicians, and other professionals should be exposed to business ethics courses. Hence, there is need for future studies to establish educative business ethics programs that will enable individuals to acquire ethical principles and manifest ethical behaviour in business operations.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has the following limitations:

1. Very few empirical literature exist for measuring ethics. Further the measures of CGE and democratic outcomes are proxy rather than direct measures. Thus, it will be instructive to find out validated measures of common good and democratic outcomes. Nigeria politics is yet devoid of any meaningful ideology.
2. A case study of UNN may not be representative of the views of all the students in Nigeria. A more omnibus study will be preferred to account for regional and other demographic characteristics
3. A more robust research will help assess the determinants of CGE in order to affect targeted training and intervention to change perception of students for common good of the society.

Conclusion

The study concludes despite its limitation that a thorough exposure of students to common good ethics is vital to ensure that future democratic citizens, political leaders, politicians, and other public office-holders understand the importance of ethical conduct and its impact on democracy's outcomes.

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