

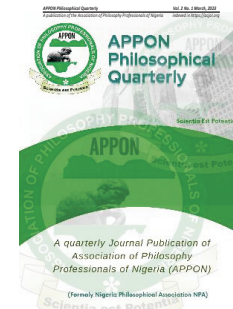
DETERIORATION OF ETHICAL VALUES IN PARENTING: IMPLICATION ON MORAL BEHAVIOUR OF CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA.

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Abstract

In the ages past, African parents were known to inculcate and uphold ethical values grounded in homogeneity in their children's upbringing. Ethical values used to be well inculcated in African children from childhood to adulthood. Children grow to live by the cultural practices and disciplines instilled in them through folklores, fables, oral traditions and moonlight stories. In the recent time, things have fallen apart. The cultural, moral and ethical values in Africa children are fast degenerating. This paper discusses various causes of deterioration of ethical values in parenting. It argues further that such deteriorations are caused by neglect of parental duties, imposition of Western orientations on African cultural values. Furthermore, the paper showcases the negative effects of deterioration of ethical values on moral behaviour of children which has produced more social miscreants than children of good characters in contemporary Nigeria. Finally, the paper recommends on the one hand, the revitalization of ethical values among parents and children by incorporating right ethical values in parenting and on the other hand, it cautions parents to pay more attention to the adequate training, mentoring, nurturing and moral development of their children based traditional on African values instead of committing the upbringing of their children to third party.

Key words: Deterioration, Ethical values, Parenting, Moral Behaviour and Mentoring

Word Count: 213

Introduction

This paper seeks to address the social norms affecting the children's upbringing in the contemporary Nigeria. The paper explores the African cultural value system that ought to be the bedrock of social influence on human character; the act of parenting and inculcating value system and moral behaviour in the children's upbringing. The major aspect of this paper is to find a remedy to the deterioration of

ethical value as a result of poor parenting and negligence of duties which breed social vices in the moral behaviour of children in our society today.

African Ethical Value System in Parenting

The issue of ethical value in parenting is inculcating moral value in the behaviour of children and their social upbringing of responsible human society. Ethical value is the

rational justification for determining the right from wrong, good from bad in human actions and behavioural patterns. It can also mean the philosophical investigation and explanation of moral facts seeking to give reasons for human values and attitudes.¹ Value here connotes the set of institutional ideas cherished either by an individual or group of people subsumed to mean material values, spiritual values, moral values, aesthetic values and religious values.² In life, every individual sets for himself an ideal form of life, an image which he seeks to attain and to which he constantly refers in his process of going through life. Values enhance human social responsibility to his family, friends, society and his immediate environments.

African values according to Sogolo³ are taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which is posited to guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans. Every society has its cultural way of doing things. The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right and wrong, what is a good or bad character. This could be in the forms or patterns of behaviour that are considered by the member of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice and fairness. African societies over the years are seen to be well-organized and functioning human communities different from the Western negative perceptions of Africa as dark continent full of war, hunger, corruption, greed, selfish, diseases and poverty ridden

society African continent is seen and regarded as uncivilized nation backward and incapable of any meaningful development until supposed contact with the European who are regarded as superior and more enlightened. Nevertheless, Africa is known to be rich in ethical value system such as the ethical virtues, principles, rules which intended to guide social and moral behaviour. Therefore, the act of parenting aims at inculcating these African values system in the upbringing of their children.

Be that as it may, every individual sets for himself an ideal form of life, an image which he seeks to attain and to which he constantly refers in his process of going through life.⁴ Africa society is backward in this line of action as it is known in the ages past to uphold strong ethical value system in its progress through life. To this end, Africa people have various moral and societal values meant to regulate their interpersonal relationship and to accentuate the entire community.⁵ Value system is very important in children upbringing in Africa. That is why the Yoruba adage will say “*Omotia o bakoni yio gbelet'ako ta*” (untrained child will plunder / put asunder his golden heritage). This shows the importance of ethical value in the upbringing of an Africa child. The word values here refers to the attitude, beliefs, behaviours and actions that are cherished or acceptable standards of behaviour which every society expects that the members should abide with.⁶ Some of the

¹. J.R. Schuster, Flexible Compensation, Sage Journal, 1, issue 3, 1972.

². G. Sogolo, Foundations of African Philosophy: A definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1993), p. 119

³. Ibid, p.119

⁴. G. Sogolo, Foundations of African Philosophy: A definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1993), p. 119

⁵. S. Awoniyi, “African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future”, Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 17 (1), (Clarion University of Pennsylvannia, 2015), p.2

⁶. Ibid, p.4

ethical values expected to inculcate in the upbringing of children are:

- **Respect for Elders:** it is expected of Africa's child to respect parents whether biological or any elders from ones immediate community or beyond it. Since the person is an elder, a child is expected to respect them and their views especially the right values and disciplines. The Yoruba people opine that lack of respect for elder is the basis for the inconsistency in the world today "A i fi agba fun enikan ko je ki aye gun (failure to respect the elders is the fundamental cause of societal abnormality). By implication, children who lack ethical value of respect may find it difficult to live in peace and harmony with others.
- **Respect for Family:** it is imperative for African's child to give respect for his immediate family. It is expected respect beget respect, when you honour others you in return will be honoured. An African child must know that the family bond is more important than anything. *Omoti o so ile nu, o so apo iyako* (A child who forgot home tends to suffer). No matter your place in life, there is a need for a child to respect ones family and protect your lineage and heritage. Yoruba adage portrays that *Omo ale ni ma fi owo osi juwe ile baba re* (A bastard child will point at his father's home with the left hand). Any child who lost his family heritage and respect would not be proud to showcase his family and home.
- **Self-Control and Courtesy:** African's child is expected to exercise self-control and exhibit courtesy in the

society. His character is built up by the amount of self-control he is able to portray. Ability to control your desire for material things help in the development of one's society. Self-control enabling one to control one's desire for unproductive and destructive things like doing server crime popularly known as yahoo and several killing for ritual purposes. The Yoruba adage says *Iwa irele la fi gbayi lawujo*, (we earns respect with act of humility in the society). When one portrays self-control and courtesy in the society, he is well respected and granted due respect in return. Courtesy earns man undue respect in the society and in face of others and places him on the pedestrian of respect among his clans. African people belief that any one that exhibits a conscientious attribute is capable of controlling self in the face of challenges.

- **Virtues of forgiveness:** it is one of the greatest values a parent can give to their children. In any given society, there is no one that is above erring. As human, one constantly offend one another therefore, the need for act of forgiveness to live peacefully and in harmony with others. We tend to offend one another knowingly or otherwise but the act of forgiveness is required to foster harmony and peaceful co-existence among the sundry. Man should not assume the role of God and thereby know that the only way to live in peace with one another is to live and forgive each other. Forgiveness imbibes the greater joy in one's heart when you are able to forgive those who offend you and live in harmony and not in acrimony.

- **Diligence and industry:** *ise ni ogun ise* (Hard work is the cure for poverty). African child must be seen to be diligent and hard work, not given in to slumbering. He must be seen to labour fruitfully and expect good reward of labour. He must be industrious and not a lazy type. Africans are seen to be proud of their heroes past because of their labour tendencies. They believe to eat the fruits of the labour and not scampering for easy food and unworthy legacy youths of nowadays is known to be doing. Their honour is rooted in their labour. Diligence is an attribute that stand one out anywhere one finds himself in the cause of live engagement. There is dignity in labour and that has always been the watchword.
- **Truth and honesty:** *Otito nigbe orilede leke* (truth exalts a nation). An African child must be known to speak truth and be honest always. The first virtues that must be inculcated in every child are truth and honest living. Truth must be upheld at all-time irrespective of what situation we may find ourselves. The Yoruba believe that 'bi iroba lo fun ogun odun, ojokan ni otito yio ba' (truth will always catch up with lies no matter how long it takes). Truth and honesty vindicate man but dishonesty brings shame and separation.
- **Unity and cooperation:** *Ajeji owokan*

ko gbe eru d'ori (a finger cannot pull a string). Africa setting is known to be communal in nature. No man is an island, therefore the need to work in conformity with others. The act of unity foster cooperation in any given society. Therefore, it is imperative for African child to live in unity and cooperation to be to achieve greatness in life.

Parenting and Ethical Value in Children's Upbringing

Parenting is an act that requires learning an interpersonal skill and emotions in raising children. According to Santrock,⁷ the act of parenting is a gradual and skilful process. To him, parents learn parenting practices from their own parents as home is the miniature society which nurtures value system.⁸ Some values added acts are wholly accepted while some are discarded. It is therefore follows from the above caption that parenting are passed on from one generation to the next, both desirable and undesirable practices are methods inculcated in cultural values and morality. That is, methods of parenting are rooted in the cultural value and orientation. There are acts that are peculiar to Africa in child upbringing such as backing of babies and storytelling fables.

Culture is known to be the acceptable way of life of group of people- it involves their ways of life, methods of values, symbols, beliefs, dressings and behaviours that are commonly accepted by the people.⁹ It can also be defined

⁷. J.W. Santrock, Life-Span Developmental Psychology, (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 10th ed., 2006)

⁸. Ibid.

⁹. W. Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*, (Great Britain: Iroko Academic Publishers, 2006)

as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation.¹⁰ In this sense, it is accrued to mean the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behaviour. In this context, it means that Africa culture is peculiar only to the African people and those people around the world learning African values and ways of life of Africans like American, Brazil etc. Parenting in Africa is perceived as a form which is important in that it is the social avenue through which parents lead their children to be responsible adult. This is buttressed with a Biblical injunction that “direct your children onto the right path and when they are older, they will not leave it.”¹¹ The Yoruba proverb in traditional thought system vehemently buttresses this biblical passage on the notion of parenting. It affirms that *lati kekere ni a ti peka iroko, ti o ba dagbatan, ebo niyoo ma gba* (the *Iroko* tree is tamed while young, when it grows out of hand, it will receive sacrifices). This position anticipates that there is need for parenting for a child to become a responsible adult in the society. Here, cultural value plays a very dominant role in child's upbringing. African parents adopt various ways or methods through which they train their children in the time past. Some of these methods involve story telling (folklores), the extended family relationships, traditional rites, mother's care, attention from the right quarters and utmost love from both parents.¹² The act of coming together of family in form of family gathering is a very good avenue to inculcate family virtues and values in children. Children must often learn by practice, in so doing they tend to learn their

virtues portrayed by the elderly in their family.

Furthermore, in the ages past, all these aforementioned methods are solely and religiously imbibed by parents in nurturing their young ones to become successful adults. Here, parents use various value added methods in instilling moral virtues into their children to become responsible for their family in particular and society in general. These methods are listed as follows:

Story Telling / Folklores: Parents use this method for correction especially to inculcate moral principle in children and for correction when a child erred. It is used as a corrective measure by sighting previous incident in form of folklore to show whether the action is morally good or bad. Through story telling / folklores, moral credence is passed down to the children and it's expected of the children to imbibe such learning as a way of life. Such that it will serve as a guide to discipline and inculcate moral value in the young ones. Children learn from stories that were heard and they form part of their lives experience while growing into adulthood. It helps them to shun any activities that can bring shame and dishonesty to the family and society.

Extended Family and Family Tradition: The extended family has impact in nurturing a child in African setting, that is why the Yoruba would say *ojukan lo n bi omo, igba oju lo n wo* that is, (a parent give birth to a child, but several people train the child). The responsibility of training a child does not lie with the biological parent alone but the whole

¹⁰. W.W. LaMorte, *The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*, (Boston University School of Public Health, 2016)

¹¹. NLT

¹². P. M. Amos, *Parenting and Culture: Evidence from Some African Communities*, (Ghana: University of Education, Winneba, National Centre for Research into Basic Education, 2013)

society at large. This follows that in Africa, the act of parenting is not the sole responsibility of the child's parent. The society inculcates several moral principles that are expected to be imbibed and individuals should follow to live a morally good life. These principles if truly followed will enable every child to live a moral guided life and not live full of shamble. The family tradition is a form of spiritual rite which every member of the family inculcates into their way of life to live a successful and meaningful life style. This must be religiously followed in order to reckon with the member of such noble family. The family rite is in form of dos and don'ts of the family and it is sacrosanct which must always be respected. Any unlawful violation may lead to disastrous consequences. It is set up for every individual member of that particular family to live an ideal form of life, to protect the image and lineage prosperity of such family. It is an ideal picture of life that must be governed with respect and dignity. The Yoruba would say *ilu ti kosi ofin, ese kosi* (city where there is no rule, there is no sin).

Mother's Care: This is expected to be the bane responsibility of parenting in Africa. Mothers are known to be so closed to the children having carried the pregnancy for nine months. It is expected in Africa that such mothers would not want their labours to be in vain. Their cares are to see that their children are responsible citizens among their peers, become dignified personalities and above all live responsibly. It is then that their joy will be full and see values for their labours. Therefore, parents are expected to pay adequate attention to the children upbringing and moral behaviour at early stage. The Yoruba adage says *Omoti a ko ba ko, nigh eileti a ko ta* (The

untrained child will sell the house that we build). Parents are to take part in the growth of their children and contribute to their moral development, learning and teaching. Such responsibilities should not be given to other people and inculcating of moral values must not be neglected. This shows that children require parental attentions especially at the formative stage.

Love: above all, parenting must be guided with love. In Africa, parents rarely show love to their children as they see it as act of weakness while their Western counterpart endowed their young ones and upbringing in love. It is evidence that a child brought up in the serene filled with love usually reciprocate such to others in their developmental growth. This type of love is not the type overshadow with negligence of duty. The Yoruba would say *omoti baba bafe lo nbawi* (Father chastises the child he loved). This type of love must follow with discipline, moral values, respect for elders *et al.* It is not the type coupled with pampering which leads to moral deficiency or indiscipline.

Be that as it may, the focus of this paper is on parenting. Parenting can further be stated as the process of raising and educating a child from birth until adulthood.¹³ It can also be synonymous to carrying out the responsibilities of raising and relating to children in such a manner that the child is well prepared to actualize his full potentials as a human being. This implies that parenting is the process of taking care or supporting a child from birth to adulthood to develop the physical and intellectual capability. In Africa, one can be a parent both to the biological or non-biological children. The Yoruba affirms

¹³ P. M. Amos, *Parenting and Culture: Evidence from Some African Communities*, (Ghana: University of Education, Winneba, National Centre for Research into Basic Education, 2013)

that *eni to bini, ko to eni to woni* (The one that gives birth to a child is not important as the one that trains the child). This shows further that the act of parenting requires interpersonal skill and emotional demands.

The Causes of Deterioration of Ethical Values in Children's Upbringing in Contemporary Nigeria

The African ethical values in children's upbringing are gradually deteriorating in the contemporary Africa especially in Nigeria. This is hinged on Western influence and poor parental training. This is as a result of poor parenting and lack of inculcating ethical values in children. The Yoruba opines that *Omo ti a o ba ko niyio gbe ile ta ko ta* (the untrained / unethical child will put asunder our hard labour). The inability of parents to give proper or adequate training and values to their children upbringing are the major causes of deterioration in the value system in the contemporary time. There is an adage that says "Charity begins at home" *Ile la ti ko eso r'ode*. As children are learning how to take their first step in life, it is important that parents added ethical values into their modes of parenting. Children often learn by imitation, therefore parents must be wary of their acts and behaviours before their young ones. The spoken and unspoken attitudes of parents are imitated by children especially at their formative age. It is good that as parents, one shows love and affections to their children but that must not override the need for discipline and decorum in the lifestyle of such children. Some parents would see their children perpetrating unethical acts and look the other way thinking that they are still young.

Another cause of deterioration is the neglect of parental duties to the hand of immature maids. This singular act has continued to degenerate the ethical prowess among our youth. The maids that still need to be nurtured

and trained, who lack parental guide are those we committed the welfare of our noble children in their care. The Yoruba would say *Obo ngbe obo gun ope* (the one that lack adequate wisdom is teaching the other who is yet to acquire wisdom). In actual fact, some of these maids trained the feeble hearts of these innocent young ones to commit erroneous acts like teaching them how to lie which is the bedrock of all evils. We have read series of things online on the way and manners the so-called maids maltreated the children committed in their cares. They teach them how to watch pornography, smoke and do so many unprintable things which later form part of their life as they grow. Some parents too are in the habits of watching porn films with their children directly or indirectly. As parents, we must be mindful of what we store on our phones, discuss in the children's presence so that we do not unconsciously destroy their primitive stage of growth.

Basically, some parents indoctrinate and impose the Western orientations over African cultural values. This is done by imposing and encouraging their children to practise foreign culture at the expense of our noble culture. They imbibe non-greeting acts; they prevent their children from respecting elders. They encourage vulgar languages in the bid that their children would not be intimidated by anyone alike and become bullying. These acts of indiscipline cumulated to deterioration of ethical values because when they grow up they too will train their children the same very act of indiscipline. Yes, they cannot give what they do not have.

The gross misconduct is that parents entrusted a huge amount of money in the care of their children to spend as they deem fit. Some called it modernization and globalization, the need to catch up with the trend of things in the world. This singular act is common among the

rich elite in our society today. They entrust a lot of money in the custody of their children as a caregiver. This act is seen to have done more damage than good in the recent time as such children throw away caution during their spendthrift. It also exposes them to more dangerous friends who in return destroy their moral and ethical values if there remains any at all.

Be that as it may, in the recent time, the children are seen to be out of control and bigger for their parents to caution or control for any wrong doings. The parents neglect their responsibility of training their children with social and moral behaviour to uphold ethical values system. The children turn out to become internet fraudsters (Yahoo-yahoo), kidnappers which are very common among the youths in the contemporary time. Some parents are seen to encourage this un-didactic act that is detrimental to our national value. They will say that the Western's ancestor had robbed the black in the past and it is now time their children pay the consequence. This line of phrase has really encouraged this illicit act among the African youths today. Instead for parents to vehemently discourage this scourge they even encourage their children to learn the illicit act. I learnt that some parts of Yoruba groups in Nigeria see the act as divine blessings. Therefore, they do everything possible to allow their children to follow this line of order. In Sagamu to be précised, it was learnt that there is a group in the recent time called *Yahoo's Mother Association*. Most of the deteriorations are the handworks of mostly mothers. These activities bring nothing but despair, uncertainty, fear and untimely death to the youths.

The Way Out of the Menace of Ethical Deterioration in Children's Upbringing

There are so many ways through which right values can be inculcated in the upbringing of

children. Here, I will highlight some of the ethical values needed to forestall the deterioration in children. They are as follows:

- **Acquisition of right value:** the application of knowledge, wisdom and understanding look perennial but they are important in life and upbringing of children. The Yoruba adage says that *ati kekere lati peka iroko to ba dagba tan, ebo ni yio ma gba*, (that means when a child that is well trained it is will be difficult if not impossible to inculcate good moral character in them. When we inculcate the right principle and value in our children, it makes them become better and responsible person in life. This later cumulates in giving us peace, rest of mind and makes our society a better place.
- **Inculcating right character and integrity:** someone with valour of integrity is a man / woman of their words. One who will not bend the rules no matter who is involved. If you have all the wealth in the world but lack integrity, then you are not worth a thing. Integrity (Omoluabi) if combined with character (Iwa) will result in human dignity (Iwa Omoluabi). Life with or without money should not reduce man integrity rather integrity should pave way for him, recently in the news, a man was reported to return money which was mistakenly transferred to his bank account to the owner. Integrity affords children to inculcate right principle in life and enable them to choose between right and wrong. Integrity refers to the quality of having strong moral principles or beliefs which includes virtues such as honesty, compassion, responsibility, patience

and character. It helps shape our understanding of right and wrong, good and evil. Integrity is one of the cardinal qualities that positively influence a child's character and behaviour. Instilling positive integrity helps an individual anticipate the consequences of unethical behaviour and forms the basis of good relationships.

- **Develop Courage or Valour:** Children are growing up in a world that is becoming increasingly competitive and comparative. It is easy for them to believe that the ones who are found to be successful or happy, stronger and smarter are better than the others. The need to let them know the truth that none is born with success gene or happiness gene. There are many things that lead to success and happiness but one of the most powerful of these is courage. Courage is not something magical but a propelling force that encourages us not to be frightful.
- **Taking Responsibility:** taking responsibility is another way through which a genuine parenting can be done and an upright child can equally be raised. Aristotle considers it a fact that we must praise and blame people with respect to their virtues and vices.¹⁴ To this effect, he believes that virtues are the character dispositions that are praise worthy. Therefore, for any person to be worthy in the society, s/he must adequately subject themselves for social appraisal and thereafter take responsibility for their actions whether good or bad. In this vein, one must be

ready to redeem and change for the good and be subjected to punishment if the need be.

- **Dignity and Honour:** These are worthwhile and frantic effort to live harmoniously in any given society. In Africa, human dignity is a fundamental societal, religious, cultural and legal concept. Dignity can mean living an exemplified life which is known to be dignified. Dignity describes the inherent values and worth of human person. It means living a complete and virtuous life devoid of acrimony and chaos. The 'Omoluabi' (good character) must be imbibed in a child while growing. In a situation that certain money was mistakenly given to beyond the actual money you ought to take, it is expected of the receiver to return the said money back to the owner and not pocketing it. We have seen so many cases of such dignified lifestyles of some people. Dignity will prevent one from betraying the trust imposed in them by the family and society at large.
- **Money or Wealth:** having money or wealth is good but it should be known that it must not destroy the dignity of any man. *Owo a pe kanuko, je kini o lowo, maje kini o lorun* (Money is good for exchange and to have good things of life, let me have you at hand rather than be a burden on me). In Africa, a wealthy person is respected so much if he is not known to be dubious and have bad antecedents in the past.

The bible establishes that money answers all.

¹⁴ S. Bobzein, *Determinism, Freedom and Moral Responsibility: Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.54

When one is rich, he would be able to do a lot of good things in life and help others in need. The Yoruba affirms this by stating that *nitori Olowo kan, la se da igba otosi* (Because of a rich man a two hundred paupers were established). The purpose of rich people is to help the poor. This is also a measure to the ethical fitness of a good person. As parents we need to inculcate in our children the need to possess all the above virtues to live an exemplary life style.

All the above mentioned values are to be incorporated in the life of children while they are growing up. “Eniyan o le gbin alubosa, ko re efo, ohun eniyan ba ti gbin, lo ma ka” (You cannot plant onion and harvest vegetable, whatever you sow, you will reap). In order to have a reliable and peaceful nation, we all have to adequately play our roles in the life of our children. Train our children to shun vices and embrace virtues worthy of omoluabi (dignified person). It is by so doing that the nation can exceedingly grow and be among peaceful nations of the world.

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