

The Emerging Pattern of Moral Values and Ethical Behaviour in Nigerian Environment

OGINNI, Babalola Oluwayemi¹ and FASEYIKU, Isaac Oluwadare²

1. Department of Economics and Business Studies, Redeemer's University, Mowe – Ogun State, Nigeria

2. Department of Business Administration, Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria

E-mail address: isomes2011@gmail.com, Phone: +2348028122512

Abstract

For meaningful developments in all facets of Nigeria's national life, moral values and ethical behaviours are seen to be inevitable so as to usher in both economic and political developments; therefore, the paper empirically examined the emerging pattern of moral values and ethical behaviours within the context of Nigerian environment. A total number of 189 respondents were made used in the course of gathering data via questionnaire to reveal moral values and ethical behaviours for 2002 to 2012 while secondary data was used to obtain data for 1960 to 1980 as well as 1981 to 2001. From the comparison of the data obtained ranging from 1960 to 2012, it was discovered that as days pass by there is constant and persistent decline in the levels of moral values as well as virtues and ethical behaviours thus leading to manifestation of unethical behaviours which have real human cost. A number of factors were found to be responsible for this in terms of economic and political factors, suggestions were made out of the woods to include promotion of ethics in government and public integrity as well as accountability, independent prosecuting agency to ferret out corruption in government regardless of the rank or position being occupied and introduction of moral education into the curriculum of primary education so as to catch them young.

Key words: Moral Values, Ethical Behaviour, Unethical Behaviour, Development and Virtues.

1. Introduction

The pride of any community is the attainment of high moral values which is believed would usher in sporadic development and safety in terms of life and property (Lawal and Abe, 2011). Before the advent of the colonial master i.e pre-colonial era in Nigeria, each region through their respective communities governed their subjects by set of rules as provided by the culture which gave them sense of high moral values and acceptable behavioural patterns. Although these set of rules were unwritten but they were well imbibed and passed from one generation to another. However, with the advent of colonial masters, these set of rules were trampled upon in order to establish their system of governance and thus, replace the culture that were contrast to the existing one i.e "divide and rule" (Ajayi, 2004). The new culture inform of policy administration have greatly influenced the ethical orientation of the people in the country because when the colonial master were leaving i.e at independence, the educated few had been exposed to oppression and suppression of oppositions thereby leaving us at cross road of ethical dilemma. Strange and alien culture in the name of civilisation and democracy were left behind, we are not of the opinion that civilisation and democracy are bad but did not take cognisance of our traditional peculiarity as well as values placed on different issues. What the country is witnessing today is the aftermath effect of the policy (Lawal, 1987). Man being a social animal would derive certain principles to adapt to the dictate of the environment on individual and group basis which may be ethical or unethical. Therefore, the paper examines the trend of the emerging pattern of moral values and ethical behaviour in Nigerian environment, and reveal what is responsible for the decadence in the moral values.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is centred on indentifying the emerging pattern of moral values and ethical behaviours in Nigerian environment. In order to achieve this,

1. moral values and ethical behaviours in existence between 1960 and 1980, 1981 to 2001 and 2002 till 2012 would be examined.
2. identify governmental efforts towards preserving moral values and ethical behaviours
3. assess causes of unethical behaviours in Nigerian environment.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Values, ethics and morality as constructs are highly interdependent and interrelated to each to other though in most instances, they are used interchangeably there is a minor but distinct different between them.

2.1 Ethics

This is described as that which constitutes good and bad conducts (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). In the views of (Beauchamp and Bowei, 1993) as that which decides what is good and evil, right and wrong as well as ought and ought not to do. Robert and Angelo (2001) sees ethics to be basically involve in the study of moral issues and choices. It is also concerned with right versus wrong, good versus bad and the many shades of gray in supposedly black and white issue. Lewis (1985) simply put ethics as encompassing rules, standard, principles or codes giving guidelines for morally right behaviour and truthfulness in specific situations.

2.1.2 Morality

Morality is considered to be the method for evaluating human conduct in terms of a system of ideas and practices of a given society, class or social group (Brass and steidlmeier, 1999). Morals are concerned with the judgement of the goodness or badness of human action and character. These moral judgments are derived from standards and values of conduct, which helps in the survival of particular community or a social group and their members. It is governed by certain principles such as integrity, dignity, loyalty, honesty, fairness, kindness, compassion and caring (Ogundele, 2003).

2.1.3 Values

According to Argandona (2003), this is central desires or beliefs regarding final states or desirable conducts that transcend specific situations, guide the choice and evaluation of our decisions and therefore, our conduct becoming integral part of our way of being and acting to the point of shaping our character. Value is normative because it tells how to behave which is deeply rooted in individual choices based on what it is perceived would enhance the quality of existence (Posner and Schmidit, 1984). For example, the values considered important for the existence of the group would lead to the particular pattern of behaviour among the group members and thus, become standards of further behaviour.

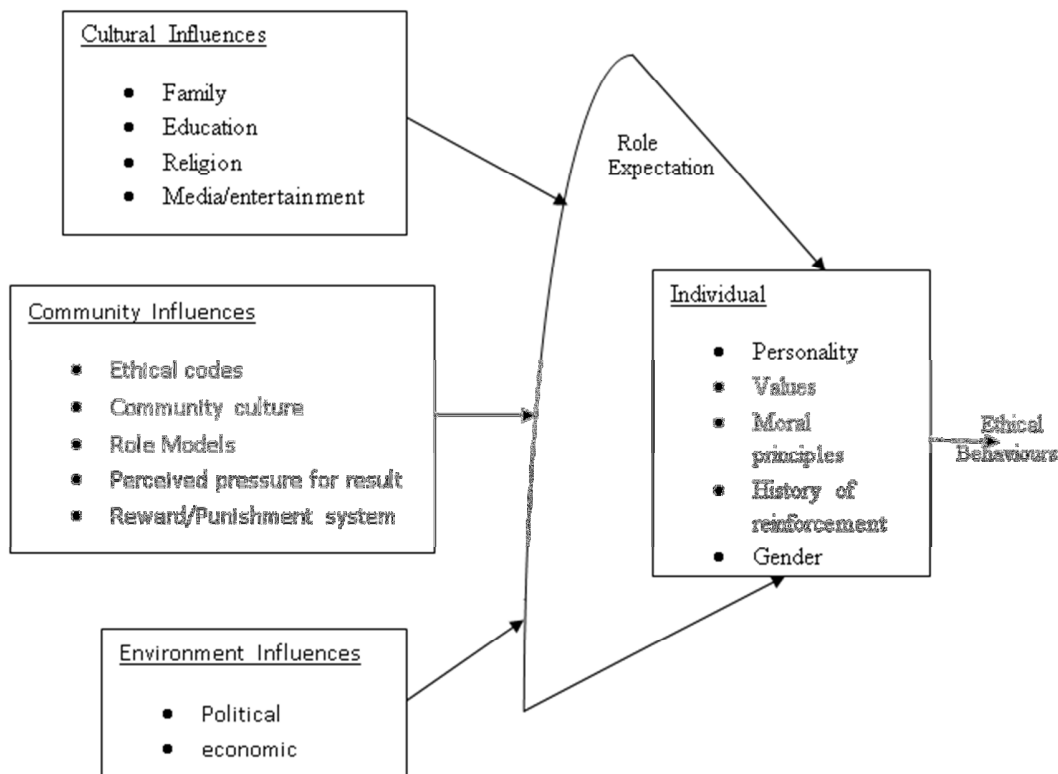
2.1.4 Moral Values

Moral values can therefore be described as the set of values which are in accordance which are in accordance with the social norms and beliefs which helps in upholding the existence of the larger community to exhibit ethical behaviour (Wicks, Berman and Jones, 1999) i.e acting in an acceptable way such would have a sound moral values on its own is further contingent on moral principles which often complement it. Therefore, the outcome of ethical decision guided by moral principles is ethical behaviour (Becker, 1998).

2.2 Efforts and Policies of the Government

In response to pressure for better national life from the general public and intelligentsia within and abroad to preserve the moral values, virtues as well as ethical behaviours, the federal government has effected a number of reforms to curb unethical behaviour most especially corruption by establishing Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Previous government had equally introduced reforms in an attempt to preserve the moral values, virtues and ethical behaviour knowing fully well that there lies the success of any government such as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Patriotism campaign Orderliness in Public gathering as well as constant educational awareness from the National Agency for Orientation. In overall assessment, appreciable advances have been recorded in the reform efforts in the direction to preserve the moral values however the level attained is not yet desirable when compared with what was in the operation in the 60s to the middle of 80s (Ayanwale, 2011).

2.3 Model for Ethical Behaviours



Source: Robert K and Angelo K: Organisational Behaviour, (2001), pp 92.

From the above model, at the centre is the individual decision maker who has a unique combination of personal characteristics, values and moral principles all which function together to give ethical decisions somewhat influenced by cultural and environmental factors. Without mincing words, ethical and unethical conducts are the product of a complex combination of influences which is often understood by person-situation interactions. Ayala (1998) reported that some socio biologists argued that human beings have biologically inherited capacity to make ethical judgment by evaluating actions either good or evil but on many occasions would strive to be good. However, one wonders why

we lean towards unethical behaviour at the expense of ethical behaviour which could have been used to strengthen the internal cohesion and national development.

The reason is no far-fetched. There had been many reasons adduced forward as the rationale behind unethical behaviour with reference to the Nigerian environment context. A critical analysis of Nigerian environment using the above model would reveal that there are no other things that are responsible other than the economic and political factors. The prevailing economic situation has compelled many individuals to throw into the bin an appreciable percentage of moral values thereby embarking on any means of survival whether logical or not “the ends justify the means”. In the same vein is the political factor. The quest for power irrespective of genuine opposition, yearnings of the people as well as aspiration of the entire citizenry has worsened the standard of behaviour in the country. The political problem has since been inherited from the British policy of “Divide and Rule” and ever since, we have not been able to find a way out and this explains why the country leadership is constantly recycled.

3. Methodology

The research work made used of primary and secondary data. A total number of 189 respondents were used to obtain data to determine the emerging pattern of moral values and ethical behaviours in Nigerian environment through the administration of questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections titled A, B and C. Section A has information on personal information about the respondents, Section B has information on moral values, virtues and ethical behaviours while Section C has information on unethical behaviours. The respondents reside in Lagos State which has been described as mini Nigeria because there is no family in Nigeria that is not duly represented as result of the economic advantage (Adeogun, 2009). The respondents were allowed to indicate the kinds of moral values, virtues and ethical behaviours as well as unethical behaviours that are present in the Nigerian environment without any bias and reference to a particular individual or group of individuals. Content and inferential analyses were used to interpret data collected.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The presentation of findings was done in this order i.e secondary data that covers 1960 to 2001 and primary data that covers 2002 to 2012. The secondary data was further divided into 1960 to 1980 and 1981 to 2001 and the authors tabularised the data obtained for 1981 to 2001.

Table 1: Moral Values and Ethical Behaviours between 1960 and 1980

S/N	Indices	Measurement Scales		
		High	Average	Low
1	Integrity	High	=	=
2	Loyalty	=	Average	=
3	Trustworthy	High	=	=
4	Honesty	High	=	=
5	Faithfulness	=	Average	=
6	Support	High	=	=
7	Friendship	High	=	=
8	Commitment	High	=	=
9	Truthfulness	High	=	=
10	Accountability	=	Average	=

Source: Akingbade (1987): Nigerian Colonialism: Blessing or Cause, Landad Publishing Ltd, Mushin, Lagos pp 79

Evolving from the above table 1 as vividly illustrated in the work of Akingbade (1987) on colonialism of Nigeria whether it was a cause or blessing. What can be deduced from the table 1 is that the levels of moral values and ethical behaviours are very high because out of 10 variables used 3 were found to be on average while none is on low scale. It was explained that Loyalty, Faithfulness and Accountability that were on average was mainly because of attachment to the colonial master which tailored all developmental processes toward them. It can therefore be expressed that Nigeria started on the right track of moral values and ethical behaviours as none of the variables could be classified to have low scale.

Table 2: Moral Values and Ethical Behaviours between 1981 and 2001

S/N	Indices	Measurement Scales		
		High	Average	Low
1	Integrity	=	Average	=
2	Loyalty	=	=	Low
3	Trustworthy	=	Average	=
4	Honesty		=	Low
5	Faithfulness	=	=	Low
6	Support	High	=	=
7	Friendship	High	=	=
8	Commitment	=	=	Low
9	Truthfulness	=	Average	=
10	Accountability	=	=	Low
11	Transparency	=	Average	=

Source: Ayanwale (2005): Business Ethics and Cooperate Governance in Nigeria, Afrant Press Ltd, Somolu, Lagos pp 145

The work of Ayanwale (2005) included another variable to the existing variables which is transparency. The implication of the information tabularised from the data is that moral values in 1981 to 2001 is far cry from that of 1960-1980 because only two variables namely Support and Friendship were high on measurement scale, integrity, trustworthiness, truthfulness and transparency were scored average while others were scored low on the measurement scales. Therefore, it can be deduced that the levels of moral values and ethical behaviours have declined and the high score obtained by Support and Friendship is an indication of caucus operations which seems to favour people in their group(s) and disregard any people outside the group(s). In the same vein, none of the variables in the data for 1960 to 1980 has low score in the measurement scales whereas in the data for 1981 to 2001 five variables were scored low on the measurement scales indicating decadence in the moral values and manifestation of unethical behaviour.

Table 3: Moral Values and Ethical Behaviours between 2002 and 2012

S/N	Indices	Measurement Scales		
		High	Average	Low
1	Integrity	=	=	Low
2	Loyalty	=	=	Low
3	Trustworthy	=	=	Low
4	Honesty	=	=	Low
5	Faithfulness	=	=	Low
6	Support	High	=	=
7	Friendship	High	=	=
8	Commitment	=	=	Low
9	Truthfulness	=	=	Low
10	Accountability	=	=	Low
11	Transparency	=	=	Low
12	Fairness	=	=	Low

Source: survey 2012 (section B of the questionnaire)

Table 3 contains expressions of 189 respondents on the moral values and ethical behaviours in Nigeria. Out of the 12 variables, 10 variables were scored low on the measurement scales while only 2 variables were scored high on the measurement scales and none of the variables was scored on the measurement scales. The implication is that there is total collapse of moral values and ethical behaviours in Nigerian environment, Support and Friendship still have high remark on measurement scales giving room for caucus operations which can evolve to cultism. A further analysis inform of comparison of the data from 1960 to 1980, 1981 to 2001 and 2002 to 2012 reveals that as days pass by moral values and ethical behaviours are being eroded away because the data in 1960 to 1980 has mixture of high and average which was found to be adequate, the data obtained for 1981 to 2001 has input from all the variables although not evenly distributed was considered not to be adequate while the data for 2002 to 2012 has more of low score on the measurement scales for virtually all the variables thus breeding unethical behaviours as well as decadence in moral values.

4.1.1 Unethical Behaviours

The under-listed unethical behaviours were obtained from the responses of the 189 respondents used for research work which were as a result of depletion of moral values and ethical behaviour thereby manifesting unethical behaviours to include the following;

1. Violation of public responsibilities in exchange of personal pecuniary gains, power and prestige.
2. Bribery of both Public and Private Officers to induce undue advantage.
3. Falsification of records
4. Embezzlement of public funds
5. Fraudulent sales of public lands, natural resources and other amenities.
6. Favouritism in contract awards
7. Prostitution and child trafficking.

8. Kidnapping and swapping of babies in Hospitals.
9. Deposit of public funds in associates Banks.
10. Corruption
11. Indecent Dressing among women old and young
12. Aiding and abetting examination malpractices and misconducts.
13. Provision of protection for certain interests that are guilty of crimes
14. Nepotism in employment related matters.
15. Political thugery and assassinations.
16. Sexual harassments

Source: survey 2012 (section C of the questionnaire)

4.2 Conclusion

Given the trends and development discussed above, the emerging issues in the Nigerian environment besides the perennial ones can be categorised as unethical behaviours. The devastating effects of depletion of moral values and ethical behaviours led to unethical behaviours which have real human cost – whether it be in the lives and health of people who are robbed of quality health care and medicines or children who are not properly educated as well as long run effect on the political stability and security. To this end, fighting unethical behaviours is not an end in itself; it should be of fundamental value in all government efforts towards reform which may require changes to legal and policy frameworks for effective monitoring and control in order to raise the level of moral values and ethical behaviour in the country.

4.3 Recommendations

Sequel to the above discussions, the authors believed that the following recommendations will assist in the overall improvement in the levels of moral values and ethical behaviours to include;

1. Promotion of ethics in government and public integrity as well as accountability.
2. Independent prosecuting agency to ferret out corruption in government regardless of the rank or position being occupied.
3. Constant declaration of assets and investigation into source of wealth for credibility and integrity sake.
4. Introduction of moral education into the curriculum of primary education so as to catch them young.
5. Genuine zeal and strong will on the part of government and leaders in whatever capacity to curb unethical behaviours.
6. Leadership position should be seen as role model position to afford the younger ones opportunities to learn and emulate.
7. Meritocracy should be instituted in all spheres of the country as against the present practice of godfatherism and nepotism.
8. Whistle – blower must be adequately rewarded for such patriotic act in whatever way that is considered appropriate.

9. Empower the National Agency for Orientation in programme developments with respect to moral values and ethical behaviour.

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