The Role of Family, Education, and Cultural Context in Shaping Ethical Development among Nigerian Children: Challenges and Opportunities

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Article Info	Abstract
	Ethical development in children is pivotal for shaping societies grounded in integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. In the Nigerian context, this development is shaped by the dynamic interplay of family structures, educational systems, and cultural values. This literature review critically examines existing research on how these factors collectively influence moral growth among Nigerian children. Emphasis is placed on the family as the foundational unit of moral transmission, highlighting the impact of parenting styles, religious practices, and communal values. The review also explores the role of the educational system in promoting ethical reasoning through formal curricula, character education, and community service while acknowledging systemic challenges such as teacher capacity, curriculum gaps, and institutional corruption. Cultural influences, including traditional African ethics, religious teachings, and the pressures of globalization and digital media, are analyzed to understand their complex effects on children's moral orientation. Drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and empirical studies, the review adopts an integrative approach to synthesizing both indigenous and global perspectives. However, it recognizes limitations in the existing literature, including a scarcity of Nigeria-specific empirical studies, uneven methodological rigor, and the underrepresentation of indigenous moral frameworks. By addressing these gaps, this review aims to provide both theoretical insight and practical recommendations. It advocates a multidimensional strategy that reinforces family engagement, integrates culturally relevant moral education, and mobilizes religious and societal institutions. Ultimately, this literature review offers a contextual blueprint for nurturing a morally resilient generation equipped to navigate the ethical complexities of contemporary Nigerian society.

Info Artikel
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Abstrak
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Perkembangan etika pada anak-anak sangat penting untuk membentuk masyarakat yang berlandaskan integritas, empati, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Dalam konteks Nigeria, perkembangan ini dibentuk oleh interaksi dinamis antara struktur keluarga, sistem pendidikan, dan nilai-nilai budaya. Tinjauan literatur ini secara kritis memeriksa penelitian yang ada tentang bagaimana faktor-faktor ini secara kolektif memengaruhi pertumbuhan moral di antara anak-anak Nigeria. Penekanan diberikan pada keluarga sebagai unit dasar transmisi moral, menyoroti dampak gaya pengasuhan anak, praktik keagamaan, dan nilai-nilai komunal. Kajian ini juga mengeksplorasi peran sistem pendidikan dalam mempromosikan penalaran etis melalui kurikulum formal, pendidikan karakter, dan layanan masyarakat sambil mengakui tantangan sistemik seperti kapasitas guru, kesenjangan kurikulum, dan korupsi kelembagaan. Pengaruh budaya, termasuk etika tradisional Afrika, ajaran agama, dan tekanan globalisasi serta media digital, dianalisis untuk memahami dampaknya yang kompleks terhadap orientasi moral anak-anak. Dengan mengacu pada artikel jurnal yang telah diulas oleh rekan sejawat, dokumen kebijakan, dan studi empiris, tinjauan ini mengadopsi pendekatan integratif untuk mensintesiskan perspektif lokal dan global. Namun, kajian ini mengakui adanya keterbatasan dalam literatur yang ada, termasuk kelangkaan studi empiris khusus Nigeria, ketelitian metodologis yang tidak merata, dan kurangnya representasi kerangka kerja moral masyarakat adat. Dengan mengatasi kesenjangan ini, tinjauan ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan teoretis dan rekomendasi praktis. Kajian ini menganjurkan strategi multidimensi yang memperkuat keterlibatan keluarga, mengintegrasikan pendidikan moral yang relevan secara budaya, dan memobilisasi lembaga-lembaga agama dan masyarakat. Pada akhirnya, tinjauan literatur ini menawarkan cetak biru kontekstual untuk membina generasi yang tangguh secara moral yang diperlengkapi untuk menavigasi kompleksitas etika masyarakat Nigeria kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Konteks Budaya, Pendidikan, Pengembangan Etika, Keluarga, Anak-Anak Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Ethical development in children is foundational for societal progress, as it equips individuals with the ability to discern right from wrong and act in ways that benefit the community. Moral reasoning, a critical aspect of ethical development, helps individuals navigate complex social dynamics and make decisions aligned with societal values. Research highlights that moral reasoning not only supports personal growth but also drives societal change by enabling individuals to identify inconsistencies in principles or unequal treatment, thereby fostering fairness and equality (Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). Empathy, another cornerstone of ethical development, allows children to understand and respond to the emotions of others, promoting prosocial behaviors such as helping and sharing. Studies have shown that even infants as young as 12–18 months exhibit prosocial tendencies, such as offering toys to others without external reinforcement (Paz et al., 2023). Such early demonstrations of empathy contribute to social cohesion and cooperation, which are vital for the stability and harmony of any society (Vogt, 2003). Understanding moral development also sheds light on how individuals evolve in their ethical decision-making processes. Kohlberg's stages of moral development emphasize progression from self-centered perspectives to considerations of societal norms and universal ethical principles. This evolution impacts how individuals interact, make decisions, and contribute to collective well-being (Gibbs, 2019).

Ethical development theories offer frameworks to understand how individuals develop moral reasoning and behavior. One prominent theory is Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, which suggests that moral reasoning evolves in three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional, with each level containing two stages. Kohlberg's model progresses from basic obedience to abstract ethical principles, focusing on cognitive development and social interactions as central to moral growth. At the pre-conventional level, individuals make moral decisions based on avoiding punishment (Stage 1) or pursuing self-interest and rewards (Stage 2). At the conventional level, individuals are guided by the desire for social approval (Stage 3) and respect for authority and societal rules (Stage 4). At the post-conventional level, moral reasoning extends to recognizing societal rules as flexible (Stage 5) and adhering to self-chosen ethical principles (Stage 6).

When applying Kohlberg's theory to Nigerian children, it is essential to consider the cultural context. Nigerian society is deeply influenced by communal values, respect for elders, and religious teachings, which shape moral development. In the pre-conventional stage, Nigerian children often base their moral decisions on avoiding immediate consequences, such as parental punishment or rewards, particularly regarding respect for elders. At the conventional level, Nigerian children align with Kohlberg's Stage 3 (Interpersonal Accord and Conformity), prioritizing family and community expectations. In Stage 4 (Authority and Social Order Maintenance), Nigerian children's moral reasoning is strongly shaped by cultural traditions and religious doctrines (Kanu & Ndubisi, 2017).

In the post-conventional stage, while Kohlberg emphasizes individual ethical principles, Nigerian children's moral reasoning tends to focus on communal welfare and religious values. Advanced moral decision-making may involve balancing personal beliefs with the well-being of the community, with religious teachings often encouraging selflessness and accountability to a higher power (Gungordu et al., 2023). However, Kohlberg's theory has been criticized for its Western-centric perspective, which prioritizes individual autonomy and abstract reasoning. Nigerian cultural values emphasize communalism and relational ethics, which may not align fully with Kohlberg's stages. Gilligan further critiques Kohlberg's approach for overlooking the importance of care and relationships in moral development (de Santis, 2020), a perspective that better reflects Nigerian values. In Nigerian society, moral reasoning often involves prioritizing community harmony over individual rights, offering a distinct pathway to ethical development (Ogbujah, 2014).

Although Kohlberg's stages provide a helpful framework for understanding moral development, they need to be adapted to reflect the cultural nuances of Nigerian society. Values such as communalism, respect for elders, and religious teachings shape children's moral reasoning, often emphasizing collective well-being over individual principles. Future research should investigate how these cultural factors interact with universal theories of ethical development, potentially leading to more context-specific models of moral growth. Additionally, recent studies have explored the relationships between moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior in children, showing how these aspects of social development influence one another.

Moral reasoning is the process by which individuals make decisions about what is right and wrong, and it has been linked to prosocial behaviors, such as helping and sharing. A study by Carlo et al. (2023) found that adolescents with higher levels of moral reasoning were more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, suggesting that advanced moral reasoning skills may promote actions that benefit others. However, the relationship is complex; other research indicates that moral reasoning alone may not directly predict prosocial behavior without the influence of additional factors like empathy (Woolrych et al., 2024)

Empathy is the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, and it has been consistently associated with prosocial behavior in children. A research by Ishtiyaq et al. (2024) concluded that higher levels of empathy and sympathy are linked to increased prosocial behaviors, such as helping and sharing. This relationship underscores the role of emotional understanding in motivating children to act in ways that benefit others. Additionally, research by Abbate et al. (2022) suggests that children's empathy-related responses are crucial predictors of their prosocial actions, highlighting the importance of fostering empathy to encourage positive social behaviors.

The interaction between moral reasoning and empathy is pivotal in understanding prosocial behavior. A study by Malti (in Killen & Dahl, 2021) found that children who exhibit both high moral reasoning and empathy are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors compared to those who are high in only one of these areas. This suggests that the combination of cognitive and emotional understanding enhances children's propensity to act pro-socially. Furthermore, research by Decety and Cowell (2014) indicates that while empathy can motivate prosocial behavior, moral reasoning provides the necessary framework for understanding the implications of one's actions, highlighting the need for a balance between emotional and cognitive components in moral development.

Nurturing ethical development in children is essential for creating a just and progressive society. By fostering moral reasoning and empathy from an early age, society lays the groundwork for future generations to contribute positively to social and cultural advancement. Moral growth in children is deeply influenced by the interconnected roles of family, education, and cultural values. These foundational elements shape children's ethical perspectives and behaviors, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society. The family is often the first environment where moral lessons are learned. Parents and caregivers act as role models, demonstrating values such as honesty, respect, and empathy through their actions and interactions. Studies indicate that authoritative parenting styles, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and clear expectations, are strongly associated with positive moral development in children (Jiao et al., 2025). Additionally, family practices such as open communication and consistent reinforcement of moral values create a supportive environment for ethical growth (Go, 2024).

Education also plays a pivotal role in fostering moral growth by offering structured opportunities for children to engage in ethical concepts and dilemmas. Schools provide a platform where students encounter diverse perspectives and learn the importance of fairness, collaboration, and respect for others. Integrating moral education into the curriculum has been shown to enhance students' moral reasoning and empathy (Govrin, 2014). Teachers, as influential authority figures, further reinforce ethical

behaviors by modeling fairness and respect in their interactions with students. Cultural values serve as the broader framework within which moral growth occurs. They define societal norms and expectations, guiding children's understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. For instance, collectivist cultures often emphasize interdependence, community harmony, and respect for elders, shaping children's sense of responsibility and empathy (Onaolapo & Makhasane, 2024). Conversely, individualistic cultures may focus on personal autonomy and self-expression, influencing moral decision-making in distinct ways.

The synergy between family, education, and cultural values creates a comprehensive system for moral development. Families lay the foundation for ethical behaviors; schools reinforce these values through structured learning; and cultural norms provide the overarching principles that guide moral conduct. Recognizing and nurturing this interconnected system is crucial for fostering a generation equipped to address the ethical challenges of an increasingly globalized world. In Nigeria, the moral development of children is deeply influenced by the nation's cultural, religious, and socio-economic context. While there are significant opportunities to nurture ethical growth, numerous challenges persist, requiring thoughtful engagement and innovative solutions. One notable challenge is Nigeria's cultural diversity. With over 250 ethnic groups, the nation faces the difficulty of establishing a unified moral framework. Practices deemed acceptable in one culture may conflict with the values of another, leading to confusion for children attempting to navigate these disparities (Udom & Okolie, 2022). Additionally, socio-economic inequalities exacerbate the issue, as poverty often forces families to prioritize survival over moral considerations. In such environments, children may be exposed to unethical practices, such as theft or dishonesty, as coping mechanisms (Alaye & Ogunbanwo, 2024).

The decline in traditional family structures further complicates moral development. Urbanization and economic pressures have led to a shift from extended to nuclear family systems, weakening the

transmission of traditional values. Parental absenteeism due to work commitments or migration limits the opportunities for children to interact with positive moral role models (Bamgboye et al., 2017). Moreover, the pervasive corruption in society undermines moral teachings. When children witness societal leaders engaging in unethical behaviors without consequences, it fosters cynicism and diminishes their sense of moral responsibility (Ogedegbe & Ikhidero, 2024). Educational shortcomings also play a critical role. Many schools in Nigeria prioritize academic success over character development. Inadequate teacher training and the absence of comprehensive moral education curricula hinder efforts to instill ethical reasoning and values in students (Nwogu & Amemtenaan, 2023).

Despite these challenges, Nigeria's cultural and religious richness offers significant opportunities for fostering moral growth. The country's diverse traditions emphasize respect, community responsibility, and hospitality, which can provide a strong ethical foundation for children. Religious organizations, which wield substantial influence in Nigeria, also play a pivotal role in shaping moral perspectives (Saluun & Timin, 2020). Additionally, the resilience of the extended family system remains an asset. Even with the shift toward nuclear families, many communities rely on grandparents, uncles, and aunts to impart communal values and moral lessons (Nwanmuoh et al., 2024). Youth-focused programs present another avenue for moral development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government initiatives, such as mentorship programs and community service projects, foster ethical awareness by encouraging responsibility and empathy (Musa & Idris, 2019). Technology also holds promise, as digital platforms can be used to disseminate moral teachings. Educational apps, social media campaigns, and e-learning programs offer innovative ways to engage children with ethical concepts (Mutu, 2023).

Recent reforms in Nigeria's educational system highlight a growing recognition of the importance of moral development. By integrating moral education into the national curriculum and emphasizing teacher training,

policymakers aim to create an environment where children can develop strong ethical foundations (Adeoye et al., 2024). However, despite the emerging discourse on child moral development and educational reform, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding comprehensive theoretical models or context-specific research addressing how Nigeria's educational challenges, particularly those related to moral development, can be systematically resolved. Existing studies often highlight the problems but fall short of providing integrative frameworks or localized interventions that blend cultural realities with educational innovation. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how moral development theories can be adapted to the Nigerian context to foster lasting societal change.

The purpose of this literature review is both theoretical and practical: it aims to fill this gap by synthesizing existing knowledge on ethical development in children while highlighting the contextual challenges and possibilities within the Nigerian educational system. Theoretically, it seeks to advance discourse by linking global moral development theories with Nigeria's socio-cultural landscape. Practically, it offers insights that can guide educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing culturally responsive and effective moral education strategies that address the unique challenges facing Nigerian children today

METHODS

This literature review employed an integrative approach, synthesizing findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and empirical studies pertinent to children's moral development within the Nigerian context. Selection criteria prioritized valid and relevant sources and specifically addressed the topic, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The review acknowledges certain limitations, including a scarcity of Nigeria-specific empirical studies, variability in methodological rigor among the selected sources, and the underrepresentation of Indigenous moral frameworks in the existing literature. Despite these constraints, the synthesis aims to provide a nuanced

perspective on the factors influencing moral development in Nigerian children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Critical Review of Family, Education and Cultural Influence
Family Influence On Moral Development

The family unit serves as the primary agent of moral socialization in Nigeria. Parenting practices, deeply rooted in cultural norms, emphasize respect for authority and communal values. Traditional disciplinary methods, such as corporal punishment and verbal correction, are commonly employed to instill discipline and obedience. Studies indicate that Nigerian parents often rely on harsh disciplinary measures due to a lack of alternative parenting skills, which poses a threat to children's well-being and development (Ofoha & Ogidan, 2020). Additionally, the extended family system plays a crucial role, with relatives collectively contributing to the child's moral upbringing. Religious institutions further reinforce moral teachings with doctrines that emphasize virtues like honesty, respect, and compassion (Simeon, 2024).

Educational System's Role in Moral Reasoning

Within the educational sphere, schools have the potential to foster moral reasoning through structured curricula and extracurricular activities. However, challenges such as resource disparities, inadequate teacher training, and instances of academic dishonesty hinder the effective implementation of moral education programs. Current approaches to moral education in Nigerian schools have been deemed inadequate to cope with the contemporary moral crisis (Azuakor, 2017). Integrating moral education into the curriculum and providing teachers with the necessary tools to model ethical behavior are essential steps toward addressing these issues.

Cultural Influences on Ethical Orientation

Culturally, Nigerian society places a strong emphasis on communalism, respect for elders, and religious adherence. These values shape children's moral perspectives, often prioritizing collective well-being over individual autonomy. Traditional practices, such as the use of folktales, serve as

instruments for imparting moral lessons and preserving cultural heritage. However, the advent of globalization and digital media introduces new challenges, potentially diluting traditional values and exposing children to diverse moral paradigms. The erosion of respect for elders in Nigerian culture has been noted as a reflection of changing societal values (Oyinlade, 2024).

Application of Kohlberg's Theory in the Nigerian Context

Applying Kohlberg's stages of moral development within the Nigerian context necessitates cultural adaptation. While Kohlberg's model outlines a progression from obedience-driven morality to the adoption of universal ethical principles, Nigerian children's moral reasoning is deeply intertwined with communal and religious values. For instance, at the post-conventional level, moral decisions are often guided by considerations of communal welfare and adherence to religious doctrines rather than solely by individual ethical principles (Toor & Ofori, 2009). This underscores the importance of contextualizing moral development theories to reflect cultural nuances.

Interplay Between Moral Reasoning, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior

The interaction between moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior is also influenced by cultural factors. Studies indicate that while advanced moral reasoning and empathy are associated with increased prosocial behaviors, the expression of these behaviors is shaped by cultural norms and expectations. In Nigeria, communal values and the emphasis on social harmony may encourage prosocial actions that align with collective interests (Abbate et al., 2022). This literature review highlights the multifaceted factors influencing the moral development of Nigerian children, encompassing family dynamics, educational practices, and cultural values. Recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities within the Nigerian context is crucial for developing effective strategies to nurture ethical development. Recommendations include strengthening family involvement in moral education, integrating culturally relevant moral teachings into school curricula, and leveraging religious

and communal structures to reinforce ethical values. Future research should focus on developing context-specific models of moral development that incorporate indigenous values and address the complexities introduced by globalization and technological advancements.

Cultural Considerations

Cultural contexts significantly influence the development of moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior. Studies have shown that cultural values and norms shape how children interpret moral situations and their willingness to engage in prosocial actions (Killen & Dahl, 2021). For instance, research by Decety and Cowell (2014) demonstrated that children's generosity and moral cognition vary across cultures, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural factors in the study of moral development.

Implications for Practice

Understanding the relationships among moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior has practical implications for educational and parenting strategies. Interventions aimed at enhancing empathy and moral reasoning have been shown to promote prosocial behavior in children (Li et al., 2024). Programs that integrate perspective-taking exercises and moral dilemma discussions can effectively foster these skills, leading to increased prosocial actions among children. Empirical research highlights the intricate connections between moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior in children. Both cognitive and emotional components are essential in fostering prosocial actions, and their development is influenced by cultural contexts. Future research should continue to explore these relationships, considering cultural variations and the effectiveness of targeted interventions to promote moral and prosocial development in diverse child populations.

Ethical Challenges Faced by Children in Contemporary Nigerian Society

In contemporary Nigerian society, children encounter a variety of ethical challenges that impact their moral development. These challenges stem from the interplay of cultural, social, economic, and educational factors, which can sometimes lead

to conflicts between traditional values and modern influences. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies that foster ethical growth in Nigerian children.

Exposure to Poverty and Economic Disparities

One of the major ethical challenges faced by children in Nigeria is exposure to poverty and economic inequalities. According to research by Liman et al. (2020), the high level of poverty in many parts of Nigeria forces children to adopt survival tactics that may conflict with societal ethical norms. In some cases, children are required to work from an early age or engage in street trading to support their families. This situation challenges the values of fairness, justice, and child rights, as the exploitation of child labor can become normalized in such contexts. Furthermore, the stark economic divide between urban and rural areas presents ethical dilemmas. In affluent urban areas, children often face the pressure to maintain status through material possessions. In contrast, those in rural areas may struggle with basic necessities, which creates a disparity in moral reasoning regarding the value of material wealth and societal success (Adewusi et al., 2023). These challenges can impact a child's development of empathy and their understanding of social justice.

Influence of Media and Technology

The rise of digital media and social networks in Nigeria has created new ethical challenges for children. Research by Gbadeyan and Bayrakktar (2023) highlights that exposure to inappropriate content, such as violence or explicit material, through social media platforms, can negatively influence children's behavior and ethical perceptions. These platforms often promote individualism and materialism, which can undermine traditional communal values such as sharing, solidarity, and respect for others. Moreover, cyberbullying has become an increasing concern in Nigerian schools. Children may find themselves either as victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying, facing dilemmas related to bullying, respect, and social justice. This behavior contradicts the Nigerian cultural emphasis on communal harmony and respect, presenting an ethical challenge to children who may struggle with distinguishing right from wrong in the virtual world (Adamu & Dikko, 2017).

Conflicts Between Traditional and Modern Values

The tension between traditional African values and the influence of globalization presents a significant ethical challenge for Nigerian children. On the one hand, children are raised with a strong emphasis on values like respect for elders, communalism, and reverence for authority (Onuorah & Ufodiama, 2024). On the other hand, the increasing presence of Western values, which often emphasize individualism, independence, and self-interest, can create a conflict in children's moral reasoning. In this context, Nigerian children may face confusion about their role within the family and society. For example, while traditional values teach children to respect elders and prioritize family needs, modern influences may encourage them to pursue personal ambitions at the expense of familial and community responsibilities (Odimegwu et al., 2017). This conflict can lead to a lack of moral clarity, especially when children are exposed to conflicting messages from home, school, and media.

Educational and Peer Pressure

In Nigeria, academic success is highly valued, and children often face immense pressure to perform well in school. This pressure can lead to ethical challenges such as cheating, dishonesty, and plagiarism. According to Okunlola (2024), academic dishonesty is a growing issue among Nigerian students, as some may resort to unethical behaviors to achieve high grades and gain social status. The desire to meet the expectations of parents and teachers can lead to a moral dilemma where the ends justify the meaning. Peer pressure in schools also plays a role in shaping ethical behavior. Nigerian children may feel compelled to conform to the behaviors of their peers, even if those behaviors go against their moral compass. Peer pressure related to substance abuse, bullying, and engaging in early sexual activities often results in ethical compromises among adolescents (Obiageli & Nasiru, 2021).

Child Rights and Legal Protection

While Nigeria has made strides in promoting child rights through legislation such as the Child Rights Act (2003), the enforcement of these laws remains inconsistent. Many Nigerian children still face

abuse, neglect, and exploitation, particularly in rural areas. Child marriage, trafficking, and gender-based violence continue to be prevalent issues, violating children's ethical rights and hindering their moral development (Comfort et al., 2013). These ethical challenges highlight the need for better protection of children's rights and stronger law enforcement to ensure that Nigerian children grow up in environments that foster their ethical development. Ensuring that children are protected from harmful practices will allow them to internalize values such as fairness, justice, and respect for human dignity.

In conclusion, the ethical challenges faced by children in contemporary Nigerian society are multifaceted and deeply influenced by cultural, economic, and social dynamics. Issues like poverty, media influence, conflicts between traditional and modern values, peer pressure, and the inconsistent enforcement of child rights present significant obstacles to the moral development of children. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening child protection laws, promoting ethical education, and balancing traditional values with modern influences. Ultimately, fostering an environment that supports children's ethical development is essential for building a just and equitable society.

Family Engagement and Ethical Development

Family is a crucial unit in the ethical and moral development of children, serving as the first institution where ethical values are transmitted and nurtured. In Nigeria, family structures, particularly the extended family system, parenting styles, and cultural values, play an important role in shaping children's ethical values. The involvement of family members in moral development, the guidance provided by parents and extended family members, and the cultural dynamics within Nigerian families have profound implications for the ethical upbringing of children. This review explores the literature on how family involvement shapes ethical values in children, with a focus on Nigerian family systems, parenting styles, and related cultural aspects (Nwanmuoh et al., 2024).

Extended Family System and Ethical Development

One of the distinctive features of Nigerian family structures is the extended family system, which typically includes not only parents and children but also uncles, aunts, grandparents, and sometimes even distant relatives. This collective family structure provides a broader support network for children's socialization and moral development. Research has shown that the extended family plays a significant role in instilling ethical values such as respect, responsibility, and communalism in children (Longo et al., 2024). In the Nigerian context, children are often raised in close proximity to extended family members who serve as additional caregivers and moral guides. Grandparents, uncles, and aunts play key roles in teaching children respect for elders, discipline, and sharing, which are fundamental ethical values in Nigerian culture (Nwanmuoh et al., 2024). The presence of multiple family figures creates a community-oriented approach to moral upbringing, reinforcing the idea that moral responsibility is not only a matter for the nuclear family but for the entire extended family network.

Furthermore, the extended family system fosters a sense of communal responsibility. According to Ogbujah (2014), communal values embedded in the extended family structure emphasize the collective over the individual, teaching children the importance of social harmony, mutual support, and the sharing of resources. These values are critical in shaping children's moral perspectives on fairness, justice, and the well-being of others.

Parenting Styles and Ethical Values

The parenting styles adopted by Nigerian parents are another critical factor in shaping children's ethical development. Parenting styles can vary significantly based on cultural practices, socio-economic status, and regional differences. However, Nigerian parenting styles generally fall into two broad categories: authoritative and authoritarian.

Authoritative Parenting: This parenting style, characterized by warmth, support, and clear expectations, has been linked to positive moral development in children. In the context of Nigerian families, authoritative parents are

likely to engage in open discussions with their children about ethical behavior, fairness, and the consequences of their actions. Research by Saadu (2023) indicates that children raised in authoritative families are more likely to demonstrate empathy, prosocial behavior, and moral reasoning. These parents provide guidance and set boundaries while also encouraging their children to express their thoughts and understand the reasons behind moral choices.

Authoritarian Parenting: In contrast, authoritarian parenting is more rigid and less responsive to children's emotional needs. This style emphasizes obedience, discipline, and respect for authority without much room for dialogue. In many Nigerian families, this parenting style is prevalent, particularly among older generations. While authoritarian parents emphasize respect and obedience, which are key ethical values, children raised in such environments may struggle with developing independent moral reasoning and empathy (Nwoke, 2013). This style of parenting may foster moral compliance but may not always encourage children to engage with ethical dilemmas or consider others' perspectives critically.

Indulgent and Neglectful Parenting: Other parenting styles, such as indulgent and neglectful parenting, are less commonly associated with positive ethical development. Indulgent parents may overly spoil their children, which can lead to selfish behaviors, while neglectful parents may fail to provide the necessary structure and support for children's ethical socialization (Roman et al., 2015). These parenting styles may hinder children's ability to internalize values of responsibility, fairness, and empathy.

Role of Family in Teaching Cultural and Religious Values

Cultural and religious values play an integral role in shaping children's ethical development in Nigerian families. In many Nigerian households, ethical guidance is rooted in traditional African values and religious teachings, whether Christian, Muslim, or indigenous African religions. According to Enweonwu et al. (2023), religion and culture are inseparable in many Nigerian families, and they significantly influence children's understanding of moral behavior.

Traditional African Values: Nigerian children are often taught values like respect for elders, communalism, and reverence for ancestors from an early age. These values shape their understanding of ethical behavior, focusing on collective well-being, harmony, and respect for authority. Children raised with these values learn to prioritize the welfare of the group over individual desires, which influences their ethical choices and prosocial behavior. The strong emphasis on communalism teaches children the importance of cooperation, sharing, and responsibility toward others, fostering empathy and moral responsibility (Onuorah & Ufodiama, 2024).

Religious Teachings: Religion is a significant influence on moral development in Nigerian families. Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions all provide a framework for ethical behavior, emphasizing values such as honesty, kindness, justice, and respect for others. Research by Otubah (2024) highlights that those religious teachings guide children's moral reasoning by instilling a sense of accountability to a higher power. For example, Christian and Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of charity, honesty, and kindness, while African religious teachings stress the importance of respecting nature, ancestors, and the community. Religious practices, such as regular prayers, fasting, and communal worship, also serve as vehicles for reinforcing moral behavior. Children who participate in these practices learn discipline, gratitude, and ethical conduct as part of their religious observance, which directly influences their ethical development (Otubah, 2024).

Challenges in Family Engagement

Despite the critical role of family involvement in ethical development, several challenges hinder effective family engagement in Nigerian society. Some of these challenges include:

Urbanization and Changing Family Structures: The rapid pace of urbanization in Nigeria has led to changes in traditional family structures. Nuclear families are becoming more common, and extended family support systems are weakening. This shift limits the ability of extended family members, such as

grandparents and uncles, to provide guidance and reinforce ethical values, leaving children more reliant on their immediate parents for moral instruction (Saadu, 2023).

Economic Pressures: Economic hardship and the need for both parents to work in many Nigerian households can reduce the time available for family members to engage in meaningful discussions about ethics and moral values. Parents, particularly in low-income households, may struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, affecting their ability to guide their children's ethical development (Olabiyi, 2021).

Influence of Modern Media: The pervasive influence of global media and digital technologies also poses a challenge to family-based ethical socialization. Nigerian children, particularly those in urban areas, are increasingly exposed to foreign cultures and values through the internet, television, and social media. These external influences may conflict with traditional values, leading to confusion or ethical dissonance in children (Nwoke, 2013)

In conclusion, family involvement plays a critical role in shaping the ethical values of Nigerian children. The extended family system, authoritative parenting styles, and cultural and religious teachings collectively contribute to children's moral development. However, challenges such as urbanization, changing family structures, and economic pressures pose obstacles to effective family engagement in children's ethical upbringing. Despite these challenges, efforts to strengthen family involvement and adapt family systems to contemporary realities can help ensure that children grow up with strong moral foundations rooted in Nigerian cultural and ethical values.

Parents' Role Models and the Impact of Family Communication on Fostering Ethical Behavior

Parents are pivotal in the moral and ethical development of children, serving as the first and most influential role models. The way parents behave, make decisions and interact with others directly shapes the ethical framework that children adopt. Additionally, family communication plays a crucial role in reinforcing these behaviors, providing children with both verbal and non-verbal cues on how to navigate moral dilemmas and social relationships. This discussion explores the role of parents as role models and the impact of family communication on fostering ethical behavior in children.

Parents as Role Models

Parents are often the first ethical guides for their children. The concept of role modeling underscores the idea that children learn moral values not only through direct teachings but also by observing the behavior of their parents. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), children learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of significant adults in their lives. In the context of parenting, this means that children are likely to internalize their parents' actions, attitudes, and responses to ethical situations, shaping their moral compass.

Modeling Positive Ethical Behaviors.

Parents who demonstrate positive ethical behaviors, such as honesty, integrity, kindness, and respect, are more likely to raise children who exhibit these same traits. For example, when parents practice honesty in their everyday interactions, children are likely to emulate this behavior, understanding that truthfulness is an essential value. Additionally, parents who show empathy toward others, whether through helping neighbors or expressing care for family members, teach children the importance of compassion and prosocial behavior (Jung et al., 2020).

Influence of Parental Consistency

Consistency in behavior is crucial in the role modeling process. Children are highly attuned to inconsistencies in parental behavior. When parents say one thing but act differently, it sends mixed messages to children about what is considered right or wrong (Karmakar, 2017). For instance, if parents tell their children to avoid cheating but themselves engage in dishonest practices, children may struggle to grasp the true importance of honesty. On the other hand, parents who consistently demonstrate ethical behavior provide children with a clear and consistent moral example.

Parental Role in Shaping Moral Reasoning

Parents also play a significant role in guiding children's moral reasoning. By engaging in open discussions about right and

wrong, parents help children understand the rationale behind ethical decisions. According to Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1981), children progress through stages of moral reasoning based on their ability to consider the perspectives of others. Parents who encourage dialogue about moral dilemmas and support their children in considering different viewpoints can foster more advanced moral reasoning in their children. For instance, when children witness their parents discuss complex ethical issues such as fairness in a workplace or the ethics of charitable giving. They are likely to begin considering such issues themselves and develop higher-level moral reasoning skills.

Family Communication and Ethical Development

Effective family communication is a fundamental factor in nurturing ethical behavior in children. Communication within the family influences the way values are transmitted, and it fosters a conducive environment for children to learn and practice ethical behaviors. Both verbal and non-verbal communication methods can significantly impact a child's understanding of morality.

Open and Honest Communication: When parents maintain open and honest lines of communication, they create an environment where children feel comfortable discussing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. This type of communication fosters trust and emotional safety, allowing children to express their ideas about right and wrong without fear of judgment. Children who are encouraged to discuss moral issues with their parents are more likely to develop a clearer sense of ethical principles. For example, when a child makes a mistake, parents who engage in a constructive discussion about the consequences of their actions rather than resorting to harsh punishment help the child understand the ethical implications of their behavior (Prada-Mateus et al., 2024).

Active Listening and Empathy: Active listening is another crucial element of family communication that can foster ethical behavior. When parents listen attentively to their children's concerns and feelings, it not only makes children feel valued but also helps them understand the perspectives of others. This type of communication reinforces empathy, an essential component of ethical behavior. By modeling active listening and demonstrating empathy, parents help children develop these skills, which are vital for moral development. For instance, when parents listen to their child's grievances and validate their emotions, they teach the child to empathize with others and consider how their actions affect those around them.

Non-Verbal Communication: Non-verbal communication, such as body language and facial expressions, is also an important tool in fostering ethical behavior. Parents' actions, even when not explicitly verbalized, communicate ethical expectations. For example, a parent who demonstrates non-verbal signs of respect toward others, such as greeting elders with a bow of the head or offering assistance without being asked, provides a powerful, implicit message about respect and responsibility. Children are highly observant of their parents' non-verbal cues and often learn more from their actions than their words (Keelson et al., 2024).

Moral Conflict Resolution: Family communication is crucial in resolving moral conflicts within the home. Children often face moral dilemmas, such as deciding whether to share with a sibling or how to react when they see a peer being bullied. When parents provide guidance on how to handle these situations through calm discussion, reasoning, and explaining the consequences of different actions, they help children understand the moral principles involved and how to apply them. Moreover, conflict resolution skills developed within the family are transferable to other social contexts, helping children become more ethically aware and responsible in their interactions with others.

Challenges in Family Communication and Role Modeling

While parents play a central role in fostering ethical behavior, several challenges can impede their ability to communicate effectively and serve as positive role models.

Time Constraints and Work Pressure: The demands of modern life, including long working hours and financial pressures, can limit the time parents have to engage in meaningful conversations with their children. When parents are preoccupied with work, they may not have the opportunity to model ethical

behaviors or discuss important moral issues with their children. This lack of engagement can hinder the development of children's ethical reasoning and understanding of right and wrong (Prada-Mateus et al., 2024).

Inconsistent Parental Messages: Inconsistent parenting, where one parent emphasizes a particular ethical value while the other undermines it, can lead to confusion in children. For example, a child may receive messages from one parent about the importance of honesty, only to witness the other parent lying to avoid consequences. This inconsistency can undermine the child's moral development as they struggle to reconcile conflicting moral signals.

Cultural Expectations and Parenting Styles: Cultural expectations and varying parenting styles can also influence the way parents communicate with their children about ethics. In some cultures, particularly in authoritarian or traditional settings, parents may prioritize obedience over moral reasoning, limiting children's opportunities to engage in open discussions about ethical dilemmas. This approach may stifle the development of critical thinking and independent moral reasoning (Obimakinde et al., 2019).

In conclusion, parents play a pivotal role as ethical role models, shaping their children's moral development through their actions, decisions, and communication. The consistency with which parents model ethical behaviors, combined with open, honest, and empathetic communication, helps children internalize ethical values and develop a strong moral foundation. By fostering an environment where children feel encouraged to discuss and reflect on moral issues, parents can guide them toward becoming morally responsible individuals. However, challenges such as time constraints, inconsistent messages, and cultural factors can hinder effective role modeling and communication. Overcoming these challenges can further enhance the positive impact of family involvement on children's ethical development.

Discussion

The findings of this study had several implication on ethical development in Nigerian children highlight the multifaceted role of cultural, social, economic, and family dynamics in shaping children's moral reasoning and behavior. Understanding the interplay between traditional values, modern influences, and family structures can inform educational and parenting strategies aimed at fostering ethical growth in children. The study underscores the need for interventions that address the ethical challenges Nigerian children face, such as the influence of poverty, media, and the tension between traditional and modern values.

For educational institutions, the study suggests the importance of integrating ethical education into school curricula, promoting moral reasoning and empathy as foundational components of socialization. Schools should be encouraged to create programs that involve community service, peer interactions, and moral dilemmas, which would help nurture the development of prosocial behaviors. Additionally, the study highlights the need for targeted interventions in addressing issues like academic dishonesty, cyberbullying, and peer pressure, all of which present significant ethical challenges.

For policymakers and community leaders, the findings stress the importance of strengthening laws and policies that protect children's rights, ensuring access to quality education, and providing frameworks that support ethical decision-making in a rapidly changing world. The need for cultural adaptations of universal ethical theories, like Kohlberg's theory, also calls for a more inclusive and culturally relevant approach to moral education and socialization.

Existing research on the moral development of Nigerian children has predominantly focused on the roles of parents, teachers, and religious institutions. For instance, Maduelosi and Ezuluofor (2022) examined how these entities contribute to children's moral upbringing. Additionally, Ferguson et al. (2001) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of moral reasoning between Nigerian and Northern Irish children, highlighting differences in moral development. However, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning comprehensive analyses that integrate the influences of cultural, social, economic, and familial dynamics on children's ethical development

within the Nigerian context. Specifically, limited attention has been given to how the interplay between traditional values and modern influences, such as media exposure and globalization, impacts the moral reasoning and behavior of Nigerian children.

Furthermore, while Akinwale and Ojakorotu (2024) explored the use of Yoruba folktales as tools for moral development, there is a scarcity of studies investigating how these traditional methods can be effectively combined with contemporary educational strategies to address current ethical challenges faced by Nigerian children, including poverty, media influence, and the tension between traditional and modern values. This underscores the need for research that not only identifies these challenges but also proposes culturally relevant interventions encompassing educational curricula, parenting practices, and policy frameworks to foster ethical growth in Nigerian children.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of family, community, and cultural values in the ethical development of children in Nigeria. The findings highlight that the moral reasoning and behavior of Nigerian children are shaped by both traditional African values and modern influences, with significant input from family structures, parenting styles, and religious teachings. However, children in Nigeria also face numerous ethical challenges, such as economic disparities, media influence, and the tension between traditional and modern values, all of which can hinder their moral development.

While Kohlberg's stages of moral development provide valuable insights into the process of ethical growth, it is evident that these stages need to be adapted to reflect the unique cultural context of Nigeria better. The moral development of Nigerian children is not just an individual process but one that is influenced by communal values, family dynamics, and societal expectations. Addressing the ethical challenges faced by children requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing education, family engagement, and cultural adaptations.

The results of this study recommend several theoretical and practical actions:

Cultural Adaptation of Ethical Theories: It is essential to adapt existing ethical development theories, such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development, to reflect the cultural nuances of Nigerian society. Incorporating communal values, respect for elders, and religious teachings into moral education frameworks will make them more relevant and effective for Nigerian children.

Strengthening Ethical Education in Schools: Educational systems should prioritize moral reasoning, empathy, and prosocial behavior by integrating these topics into the school curriculum. This could include the introduction of moral dilemma discussions, community service programs, and lessons on empathy and social responsibility to help children apply ethical principles in real-life situations.

Promoting Family Involvement in Ethical Socialization: Given the critical role of the family in children's moral development, it is important to strengthen family involvement in the ethical socialization process. Families should be supported with resources and training on positive parenting practices, emphasizing the importance of ethical guidance and modeling behavior that aligns with cultural and religious values.

Addressing Socio-economic Challenges: To mitigate the impact of poverty and economic disparities on children's moral development, there should be policies that promote equitable access to education, healthcare, and social welfare. This would reduce the ethical dilemmas faced by children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who are at risk of being exploited or forced into child labor.

Media Literacy Programs: The rise of digital media and social networks poses challenges to children's ethical development. Schools and communities should implement media literacy programs that teach children how to critically evaluate media content, recognize inappropriate or harmful material, and maintain a balanced perspective on values such as individualism versus communalism.

Strengthening Child Protection Laws: The Nigerian government should continue to strengthen and enforce child protection laws, particularly those addressing child labor, child marriage, and gender-based violence. Ensuring that children are protected from

harmful practices will provide them with a safer environment to develop ethical values such as fairness, justice, and respect for human dignity.

Promoting Peer Support Networks: Peer pressure is a significant ethical challenge, particularly in Nigerian schools. Developing peer support programs that encourage ethical decision-making, foster empathy, and provide positive role models can help counteract negative peer influences and promote ethical behaviors among adolescents.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to create a more supportive environment for Nigerian children, fostering their ethical development and preparing them to become responsible, compassionate, and socially conscious adults.

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