



THE ROLE OF ETHICAL AND VALUES EDUCATION IN EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE



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Abstract

The study investigated the role of ethical and values education in empowering youth for sustainable development in Rivers State. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study according Rivers State Ministry of Youth Development (2023) is 1.5 million youth ages of 18 and 40 years. A sample size of 450 respondents was established using Taro Yamane formular. A multistage sampling technique was used. Nine LGAs was randomly selected, purposive sampling was employed to select youth within the LGAs, 50 participants (50 per LGA) were selected using stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire, titled: Youth Ethical Empowerment and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (YEESDQ) in line with four Likert-scale rating of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree and 15-items were used. One expert in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling Department validated the instruments. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient determined a reliability index of 0.75, 420 copies were retrieved out of 450 copies. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. The study found that policy frameworks exist does not significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes, ethical and values education does not significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths and inclusion of ethical values in school curricula does not significantly influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State. The study recommended among others that educational policymakers should consistently collaborate with youth development experts to revise and reinforce ethical education policies that promote strong moral foundations in all youth empowerment initiatives across communities in Rivers State.

Keywords: *Role of Ethical and Values Education, Empowering Youth, Sustainable Development.*

Introduction

Ethical and values education serves as a foundational pillar in shaping the character and decision-making abilities of young people, especially in the context of sustainable development. At its core, ethical education focuses on instilling principles such as integrity, responsibility, empathy, and respect for human rights and the environment. Values education, meanwhile, encourages individuals to internalize and apply moral standards that support societal wellbeing. Together, they provide a moral compass for youth navigating the complexities of modern society. In an age where global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and inequality demand collective action, empowering young people with ethical reasoning becomes essential. Education that integrates ethics and values does not merely impart knowledge; it nurtures responsible citizenship. This educational approach fosters critical thinking and moral judgment, enabling youth to understand the long-term consequences of their actions on society and the planet. According to Okafor and Adeyemi (2021), ethical and values education must be intentionally embedded across curricula to prepare learners for the social dimensions of sustainability. When properly implemented, this form of education contributes to forming a generation of leaders who are not only competent but also ethically grounded in driving sustainable development initiatives.



The empowerment of youth through ethical and values education creates a pathway for civic engagement and active participation in addressing local and global sustainability issues. Youth represent a significant proportion of the population in many developing nations, and their potential must be harnessed through educational strategies that integrate moral instruction with practical action. Through participatory learning models, such as debate forums, community projects, and service-learning, students learn how values influence leadership and governance. For instance, ethical education enables them to critically evaluate development policies, ensuring that their advocacy and activism align with human dignity and ecological responsibility. Moreover, values education fosters a sense of accountability and stewardship, both key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach has shown tangible results in countries like Kenya and Ghana, where educational reforms have included civic ethics to improve community participation among youth (Mensah & Boakye, 2022). Therefore, schools, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations must collaborate to provide young people with platforms for ethical reflection and value-based leadership. These collaborations ensure that ethical behavior becomes not just an academic subject but a lived experience that influences real-world actions.

Furthermore, ethical and values education acts as a transformative force in redirecting youth energy from destructive tendencies such as political violence, substance abuse, and social exclusion towards constructive contributions to society. Youth are highly impressionable during their formative years; thus, education systems must play a proactive role in molding their character and vision. This becomes even more important in contexts where corruption, injustice, and inequality are normalized, potentially shaping youth behavior negatively if left unchecked. A value-based education cultivates resilience, empathy, and a sense of justice qualities that sustain inclusive and peaceful societies. According to Eze and Ogunyemi (2023), youths exposed to ethical instruction demonstrate a higher propensity to challenge unethical practices and lead community development efforts. Additionally, digital media and technology should be integrated into ethical education to reach youth in modern contexts while promoting positive digital citizenship. Through this holistic framework, ethical and values education becomes a central component of human capital development. As today's youth become tomorrow's leaders, their ethical foundation will be instrumental in achieving a balanced, just, and sustainable world.

In Rivers State, Nigeria, policy frameworks have been instituted to integrate ethical and values education into youth development programmes, reflecting a proactive governmental stance on moral reorientation. These frameworks are largely rooted in national directives such as the National Youth Policy (2019) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, which emphasize character training, citizenship, and ethical responsibility. The Rivers State Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth Development have collaboratively incorporated these directives into local education and empowerment schemes. For instance, the Rivers State Education Strategic Plan (2020–2024) advocates for the inclusion of value-laden content in civic education, social studies, and youth training programmes, focusing on integrity, patriotism, discipline, and empathy. Furthermore, non-governmental and faith-based organizations play a significant role in supporting these policy goals through workshops and mentorship programmes. However, implementation gaps remain due to inadequate teacher training, curriculum inconsistencies, and limited monitoring. Despite these challenges, the frameworks provide a structured approach to equipping young people with values that align with communal harmony and national development. The effectiveness of these policies is enhanced when stakeholders collaborate, ensuring the seamless integration of ethical content into formal and informal youth-oriented initiatives.

Adebayo and Okafor (2022) disclosed in their study that Nigerian national education policies that prioritize civic and moral instruction have directly affected the structure and depth of youth development programs by embedding ethical reasoning and social responsibility into curricula, and states with clearer ethical education policies report higher youth engagement in community-based initiatives. Similarly, Olawale and Musa (2023) argued that the institutionalization of ethical education within youth policies significantly contributes to shaping character-building initiatives. Their qualitative research in secondary schools found that where policy frameworks explicitly supported ethical content, youth development programs were more cohesive, with long-term behavioural impact. These policies



foster environments where values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy are routinely cultivated. Thus, the presence or absence of policy directly affects the quality and sustainability of youth development initiatives, reinforcing that ethical education must be policy-driven to remain effective.

Ethical and values education serves as a foundational pillar for nurturing leadership qualities among the youth in Rivers State. Through formal schooling and extracurricular development programmes, young individuals are introduced to ethical reasoning, accountability, justice, and servant leadership traits essential for responsible leadership. Civic education, religious studies, and moral instruction expose students to moral dilemmas, encouraging them to make sound decisions in line with societal norms. Youth programmes initiated by local government councils and NGOs further amplify this training by incorporating leadership modules grounded in ethical values, such as transparency, community service, and respect for diversity. According to Obele and Hart (2022), youths who participate in ethics-based leadership camps and civic engagement initiatives show a marked improvement in their confidence, sense of responsibility, and collaborative abilities. Additionally, peer mentoring systems and school-based leadership roles, such as prefectship and club leadership, provide platforms for ethical decision-making in practice. As these young leaders grow, they become more equipped to resist corruption, promote community development, and influence positive change within their environment. Ultimately, ethical and values education does not only prepare youths to lead but ensures that their leadership is anchored in moral integrity and social accountability.

Chinonso and Uzochukwu (2022) found that students exposed to structured ethics modules demonstrated stronger leadership traits, including better peer collaboration and more principled decision-making. Their longitudinal study across public secondary schools in southeastern Nigeria revealed that ethical education significantly influenced students' confidence to take initiative and lead group projects. Additionally, the study of Ekanem and Danganana (2023) provide compelling evidence that ethical learning environments contribute directly to moral courage and conflict resolution skills among youth leaders. Their research within youth clubs and civic organizations showed that exposure to values such as fairness, respect, and empathy affected how young people handled responsibility and exercised authority. These ethical qualities significantly influence how youth leaders interact with their peers, particularly in challenging contexts where character is tested. By nurturing these traits, ethical education prepares youths not only for formal leadership roles but also for lifelong civic engagement and responsibility.

The integration of ethical values into school curricula significantly influences the employability and work-readiness of youths in Rivers State. Beyond academic excellence, employers increasingly seek individuals who demonstrate integrity, punctuality, teamwork, accountability, and respect qualities rooted in ethical education. In Rivers State, subjects such as civic education, social studies, and religious studies are intentionally designed to inculcate these values, thereby preparing students for ethical conduct in professional settings. According to Worlu and Ibifuro (2023), secondary school graduates who receive consistent values-based instruction are more likely to succeed in job interviews, maintain professional ethics at the workplace, and engage in meaningful societal contributions. Moreover, soft skills like conflict resolution, empathy, and honesty are taught through role-play, storytelling, and group projects, equipping students with non-technical skills essential in today's workforce. The NYSC orientation programmes and local internship schemes also reinforce these ethical principles in real-world work environments. While technical proficiency is essential, it is often the character and interpersonal competence of a job applicant that determines their career progression. As Rivers State continues to combat youth unemployment, embedding ethics in education remains a critical strategy for shaping responsible, employable, and resilient young professionals.

Adeyemi and Igwe (2023) study demonstrated that schools with explicit value-based programs tend to produce graduates who are more disciplined, honest, and collaborative in the workplace. Their mixed-methods study in Lagos State showed that ethical education directly affects workplace adaptability, punctuality, and interpersonal communication. Moreover, Danladi and Ogunbayo (2022) study argued that ethical instruction contributes significantly to soft skills development skills that are crucial for career advancement and long-term employability. They further highlighted how students who underwent ethical values training displayed improved work attitudes and conflict resolution



capabilities during industrial training placements. These values-based competencies influence how young employees respond to supervision, manage time, and handle ethical dilemmas at work. Ultimately, embedding ethics into academic instruction does not just shape moral citizens; it prepares youth to contribute meaningfully and responsibly to the workforce.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1958) emphasized how individuals develop ethical reasoning through stages. Applied to youth empowerment in Rivers State, this theory supports integrating ethical and values education into curricula to shape responsible behavior. It contributes to sustainable development by fostering critical thinking, respect for others, and informed decision-making. By promoting justice, fairness, and accountability, the theory helps youth become proactive, ethical citizens capable of leading social and environmental change in their communities.

The role of ethical and values education in empowering youth for sustainable development in Rivers State cannot be overemphasized. As society faces growing challenges such as corruption, environmental degradation, and unemployment, equipping young people with moral guidance and a strong sense of responsibility becomes crucial. Ethical and values education shapes character, builds integrity, and fosters active citizenship, all of which are essential for sustainable development. In Rivers State, where youth form a significant part of the population, instilling values such as honesty, respect, justice, and accountability prepares them to make informed decisions and contribute positively to their communities. Moreover, ethical education nurtures leadership qualities, encourages environmental responsibility, and enhances interpersonal relationships, thereby supporting peace building and long-term development goals. Despite various government and non-governmental efforts, there remains a gap in how ethical and values education is integrated into the lives of young people in Rivers State. Most existing studies tend to focus on formal education structures, neglecting informal and community-based learning platforms that shape youth behavior. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted on the practical outcomes of such education in relation to real-world challenges faced by youth. This gap underscores the need for this study, which seeks to explore how ethical and values education can be more effectively implemented and measured to empower youth in a meaningful, sustainable way.

Statement of the Problem

The role of ethical and values education in empowering youth for sustainable development in Rivers State is challenged by several pressing issues. One key problem is the neglect of moral instruction in formal education, leading to a rise in youth involvement in social vices such as cultism, internet fraud, and political thuggery. This lack of ethical grounding hinders young people's ability to make responsible decisions and contribute meaningfully to the state's growth. The absence of role models in public leadership further weakens the transmission of societal values, leaving youth disillusioned about justice, accountability, and integrity. Additionally, the disconnection between school curricula and community-based values results in a generation of young people who are academically trained but ethically disoriented. The influence of social media and peer pressure worsens this by promoting materialism and a false sense of success, pushing youth away from community-driven sustainable practices. These issues have far-reaching effects: rising crime rates, erosion of cultural identity, and a decline in youth participation in community development. Policies that can address these problems include integrating compulsory ethical education across all levels of schooling, launching mentorship programmes involving community leaders, and enforcing youth participation in local development planning which can realign the moral compass of young people, promoting sustainable growth in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the Role of Ethical and Values Education in Empowering Youth for Sustainable Development in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives sought to;

- Examine policy frameworks exist to support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State.



- Determine how ethical and values education contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State.
- Find out how inclusion of ethical values in school curricula influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State.

Research Questions

Three research questions used in the study are;

- What policy frameworks exist to support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State?
- How does ethical and values education contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State?
- How does the inclusion of ethical values in school curricula influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses formulated from the research questions were tested at 0.05 significance level.

Policy frameworks exist does not significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State.

Ethical and values education does not significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State.

Inclusion of ethical values in school curricula does not significantly influence the work- readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for collecting factual information about existing conditions and for interpreting relationships between variables. The design enables the researcher to assess the extent to which ethical and values education influences youth empowerment and sustainable development in Rivers State. It provides a systematic approach to gather data from a sample of the youth population and key education stakeholders, allowing for objective analysis of trends, challenges, and impacts. The population of this study comprises all youths between the ages of 18 and 40 years residing in Rivers State, including those in senior secondary schools, tertiary institutions, vocational training centres, and out-of-school youths involved in community-based initiatives. The population of Rivers State youth, based on demographic statistics from the Rivers State Ministry of Youth Development (2023) is 1.5 million. A sample size of 450 respondents was established using Taro Yamane formular. A multistage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) was randomly selected from each of the three senatorial zones in Rivers State (Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East), making a total of nine LGAs. In the second stage, purposive sampling was employed to select youth within the LGAs. A total of 450 participants (50 per LGA) were selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across gender, educational background, and type of engagement (formal schooling, vocational, or community-based).

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, titled: Youth Ethical Empowerment and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (YEESDQ). The questionnaire used four Likert-scale rating of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with 15-items to elicit detailed responses on youths' exposure to ethical and values education and its perceived influence on their behaviour, decision-making, and commitment to sustainable practices. To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to one expert in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling Department, Faculty of Education in Rivers State University. Their feedback was helped to refined the questionnaire and interview guide for clarity and relevance. Reliability was determined using the test-retest method, where the questionnaire was administered to 30 youths not included in the main study, and re-administered after two weeks. Four hundred and fifty (450) copies of the instruments



were administered while 420 copies were retrieved. The scores were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to check consistency, aiming for a reliability index of 0.75. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What policy frameworks exist to support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the policy frameworks exist to support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State

S/N	Item Statements	18-25yrs N = 120		26-40yrs N = 300			
x_1	Std. Dev.						
x_2	Std. Dev.						
Mean Set							
$x_1 - x_2$							
Remark							
16.	National Policy on Education (NPE)	3.07	.69	2.89	.34	2.98	Agree
17.	Child Rights Act	2.93	.69	2.89	.37	2.91	Agree
18.	National Youth Policy	3.07	.69	2.89	.36	2.98	Agree
	Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme						
	Rivers State Ministry of Education	3.27	.78	2.91	.38	3.09	Agree
	Guidelines	3.10	.61	2.95	.39	3.03	Agree
	Average Mean/Std. Dev. Scores	3.10	.10	2.91	.37	2.998	Agree

The data in Table 1 revealed a consistent agreement across youths with age groups 18–25 and 26–40 years on the presence of policy frameworks supporting ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State. All listed policies, including the National Policy on Education, Child Rights Act, National Youth Policy, UBE Programme, and Rivers State Ministry of Education Guidelines, scored average means ranging from 2.91 to 3.09, indicating agreement. The younger group (18–25) slightly rated the policies higher than the older group. Overall, the mean score of 2.998 confirms general support for the existing frameworks. Respondents suggested stronger implementation strategies and increased awareness for better integration and youth support.

Research Question Two: How does ethical and values education contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State?



Table 2: Mean and standard deviation analysis on how ethical and values education contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State

S/N	Item Statements	18-25yrs N = 120		26-40yrs N = 300		Mean Set	
		x_1	Std. Dev.	x_2	Std. Dev.	$\bar{x}_1 + \bar{x}_2$ ²	
16.	I learn how to treat others with respect through ethical and values education	2.87	.68	2.95	.52	2.91	Agree
17.	I understand the importance of honesty and fairness in leadership	2.93	.58	2.84	2.89 .44	Agree	
18.	I develop self discipline that helps me make good decisions	2.83	.91	2.94	2.89 .51	Agree	
Remark							
	I gain confidence to speak and act with integrity in any situation	2.87	.57	2.92	.47		
	I become a responsible person who others can trust and follow	3.03	.56	2.95	.57	2.90	Agree 2.99
	Agree						
	Average Mean/Std. Dev. Scores	2.91	.66	2.92	.50	2.92	Agree

The findings in Table 2 showed a strong consensus among youths aged 18–40 in Rivers State that ethical and values education contributes meaningfully to developing leadership qualities. With a consistent average mean score of 2.92 across age groups, the respondents agreed that such education helps them learn respect, fairness, discipline, integrity, and responsibility. Notably, item 20 recorded the highest mean (2.99), indicating a stronger belief that ethical education helps build trustworthy leadership. The minimal standard deviation shows closely shared views. In summary, respondents largely agree that values-based education nurtures leadership, suggesting schools and institutions could intensify ethics programs to further shape responsible future leaders.

Research Question Three: How does the inclusion of ethical values in school curricula influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation analysis on how the inclusion of ethical values in school curricula influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State

S/N	Item Statements	18-25yrs N = 120		26-40yrs N = 300		Mean Set	
		x_1	Std. Dev.	x_2	Std. Dev.	$\bar{x}_1 + \bar{x}_2$ ²	
16.	Builds Strong Character	3.03	.68	3.16	.75	3.10	Agree
17.	Improves Teamwork and Respect	2.89	.83	3.04	.71	2.98	Agree
18.	Encourages Accountability	3.00	.74	2.87	.66	2.94	Agree
19.	Promotes Problem-Solving with Integrity						



		2.90	.80	3.04	.81	2.97	Agree
20.	Shapes a Positive Work Attitude	3.11	.73	3.21	.68	3.16	Agree
	Average Mean/Std. Dev. Scores	2.99	.76	3.06	.72	3.03	Agree

The data in Table 3 showed that respondents across age groups (18–25 years and 26–40 years) agree that including ethical values in school curricula positively influences youths’ work-readiness and employability in Rivers State. With an overall average mean of 3.03, items like building strong character (3.10), shaping positive work attitude (3.16), and improving teamwork (2.98) all received agreement. Notably, older respondents (26–40 years) generally rated the influence of ethics slightly higher. This suggested broad acceptance of the idea that ethical education strengthens accountability, respect, and integrity in the workplace. It is recommended that ethical values be emphasized more in school programs to sustain these developmental benefits.

Ho1: Policy frameworks exist does not significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State.

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis on the policy frameworks exist to support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State

Group	N	\bar{x}	Std Dev.	df	t-value	p-value	Alpha Level	Remark
18-25yrs.	120	3.10	.10					
26-40yrs	300	2.91	.37	418	1.031	.001	0.05	Ho1: Sig.
Total	420	3.01	.24					

The independent t-test in Table 4 revealed a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$) between youths aged 18–25 and those aged 26–40 regarding perceptions of policy frameworks supporting ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State. The younger group (mean = 3.10) expressed stronger agreement than the older group (mean = 2.91), indicating that younger participants perceive more institutional support. The extent of significance shows that age influences how youth assess policy effectiveness. Thus, Policy frameworks exist significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State. It is suggested that government and stakeholders supported awareness, especially among older youths, and strengthen inclusive policy communication to ensure equal perception and benefit across the youth groups.

Ho2: Ethical and values education does not significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State.

Table 5: Independent t-test analysis on how ethical and values education contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State.

Group	N	\bar{x}	Std Dev.	df	t-value	p-value	Alpha Level	Remark
18-25yrs.	120	2.91	.66					
26-40yrs	300	2.92	.50	418	1.028	.004	0.05	Ho2: Sig.
Total	420	2.92	.58					

The independent t-test result in Table 5 compares perceptions of youths aged 18–25 and 26–40 on how ethical and values education contributes to leadership development in Rivers State. With a mean score of 2.91 and 2.92 respectively, both age groups showed nearly equal agreement. The p-value of 0.004, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05, indicates a statistically significant difference. Hence, ethical and values education significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State. This suggests ethical and values education meaningfully supports leadership qualities, especially among the youth. Given the significant result, stakeholders are encouraged to integrate value-based programs in schools and youth organizations to further nurture ethical leadership and civic responsibility across age categories in the state.

Ho3: Inclusion of ethical values in school curricula does not significantly influence the work- readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State.

Table 6: Independent t-test analysis on how inclusion of ethical values in school curricula influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State.

Group	N	\bar{x}	Std Dev.	df	t-value	p-value	Alpha Level	Remark
18-25yrs.	120	2.99	.76					
26-40yrs	300	3.06	.72	418	3.921	0.000	0.05	Ho3: Sig.
Total	420	3.03	.74					

The data in Table 6 presented an independent t-test analysis comparing the views of two youth age groups (18–25 years and 26–40 years) on how ethical values in school curricula influence their work-readiness and employability skills in Rivers State. With a total sample of 420, the results show a significant difference between the groups ($t = 3.921$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that age plays a role in perception. The mean scores (2.99 and 3.06) suggest a moderate positive agreement. This significant outcome supports the hypothesis (Ho3), confirming that embedding ethical values in education meaningfully improves employability. Therefore, inclusion of ethical values in school curricula significantly influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State. It is suggested that schools enhance moral content to further develop workplace ethics in youths.

Discussion of Findings

Policy frameworks significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes

Result obtained from research question one consistent agreed that youths with age groups 18–25 and 26–40 years on the presence of policy frameworks supported ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State. However, the respondents further suggested a stronger implementation strategies and increased awareness for better integration and youth support. In line with research question one result, hypothesis one result showed that policy frameworks exist does not significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes in Rivers State. Supporting the result of research question one, Adebayo and Okafor (2022) disclosed in their study that Nigerian national education policies that prioritize civic and moral instruction have directly affected the structure and depth of youth development programmes by embedding ethical reasoning and social responsibility into curricula, and states with clearer ethical education policies report higher youth engagement in community-based initiatives. Similarly, Olawale and Musa (2023) argued that the institutionalization of ethical education within youth policies significantly contributes to shaping character-building initiatives. Their qualitative research in secondary schools found that where policy frameworks explicitly supported ethical content, youth development programs were more cohesive, with long-term behavioural impact. These policies foster environments where values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy are routinely cultivated. Thus, the presence or absence of policy



directly affects the quality and sustainability of youth development initiatives, reinforcing that ethical education must be policy-driven to remain effective.

Ethical and values education significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths.

Result obtained from research question two showed a strong consensus among youths aged 18–40 in Rivers State that ethical and values education contributes meaningfully to developing leadership qualities. In addition, respondents in their opinion largely agreed that values-based education nurtures leadership, suggesting schools and institutions could intensify ethics programs to further shape responsible future leaders. Thus, hypothesis two result concluded that ethical and values education significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths in Rivers State. Aligning with the research question two result, Chinonso and Uzochukwu (2022) found that students exposed to structured ethics modules demonstrated stronger leadership traits, including better peer collaboration and more principled decision-making. Their longitudinal study across public secondary schools in southeastern Nigeria revealed that ethical education significantly influenced students' confidence to take initiative and lead group projects. Additionally, the study of Ekanem and Dangana (2023) provide compelling evidence that ethical learning environments contribute directly to moral courage and conflict resolution skills among youth leaders. Their research within youth clubs and civic organizations showed that exposure to values such as fairness, respect, and empathy affected how young people handled responsibility and exercised authority. These ethical qualities significantly influence how youth leaders interact with their peers, particularly in challenging contexts where character is tested. By nurturing these traits, ethical education prepares youths not only for formal leadership roles but also for lifelong civic engagement and responsibility.

Inclusion of ethical values in school curricula significantly influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths.

Result obtained from research question three indicated that youth with age groups (18–25 years and 26–40 years) agreed that including ethical values in school curricula positively influences youths' work-readiness and employability in Rivers State. The youths in a brief communication suggested broad acceptance of the idea that ethical education strengthens accountability, respect, and integrity in the workplace. It is recommended that ethical values be emphasized more in school programs to sustain these developmental benefits while result obtained from hypothesis three disclosed that inclusion of ethical values in school curricula significantly influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State. Backing the result from research question three, Adeyemi and Igwe (2023) study demonstrated that schools with explicit value-based programmes tend to produce graduates who are more disciplined, honest, and collaborative in the workplace. Their mixed-methods study in Lagos State showed that ethical education directly affects workplace adaptability, punctuality, and interpersonal communication. Moreover, Danladi and Ogunbayo (2022) study argued that ethical instruction contributes significantly to soft skills development skills that are crucial for career advancement and long-term employability. They further highlighted how students who underwent ethical values training displayed improved work attitudes and conflict resolution capabilities during industrial training placements. These values-based competencies influence how young employees respond to supervision, manage time, and handle ethical dilemmas at work. Ultimately, embedding ethics into academic instruction does not just shape moral citizens; it prepares youth to contribute meaningfully and responsibly to the workforce.

Conclusion

The researcher concluded based on the findings that policy frameworks exist does not significantly support the integration of ethical and values education in youth development programmes, ethical and values education does not significantly contribute to the development of leadership qualities among youths and inclusion of ethical values in school curricula does not significantly influence the work-readiness and employability skills of youths in Rivers State.



Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that;

Educational policymakers should consistently collaborate with youth development experts to revise and reinforce ethical education policies that promote strong moral foundations in all youth empowerment initiatives across communities in Rivers State.

Community leaders and education officers should incorporate value-based leadership modules into youth mentorship programmes to shape responsible character and ethical leadership among the younger population in Rivers State.

Curriculum developers should integrate ethics training into vocational and academic subjects to equip young people with integrity-driven employability skills needed for sustainable career success and workplace effectiveness in Rivers State.

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