



MORAL EDUCATION AS A CORRELATE OF SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study examined moral education as a correlate of sustainable national development in Rivers State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study, and three null hypotheses were tested. A correlational design was adopted. The population consisted of 8,833 senior secondary school teachers and parents in Rivers State, with a sample of 883 representing 10% of the total population, selected using a stratified random sampling technique. A validated 4-point rating scale questionnaire, created by experts, served as the instrument and was used for data collection. The Cronbach Alpha method determined the reliability of the instrument, yielding coefficients of 0.88 and 0.83 for Moral Education Assessment Scale (MEAS) and Sustainable National Development Assessment Scale (SNDAS), respectively. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were used to answer the research questions, while the same statistics were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that family-based moral education highly and significantly relates to sustainable national development in Rivers State, while school-led efforts have a moderate and significant relationship. However, parental involvement was low and showed no significant relationship with sustainable national development. Based on the findings, it was concluded that moral education is a key correlate of sustainable national development in Rivers State. Consequently, it was recommended among others that government and community-based organisations should support initiatives that empower families through parenting education programmes, value reorientation workshops, and family counselling services to enhance their capacity to instill strong moral values that support sustainable national developments.

Keywords: Moral Education, Sustainable National Development

Introduction

Sustainable national development refers to a country's ability to achieve economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection in a balanced and enduring manner. It involves creating systems that ensure long-term prosperity, justice, and stability for both current and future citizens (UNDP, 2023). This includes investing in quality education, ethical governance, and inclusive institutions that promote peace and productivity (Oladipo & Chukwu, 2022). Sustainable national development requires the integration of moral values into policy and practice to foster responsible citizenship (Adebayo & Ibrahim, 2023). It is a holistic approach to nation-building that prioritises people, planet, and progress. However, sustainable national development requires not only economic growth and technological advancement but also the cultivation of sound moral values and responsible citizenship.

Moral education refers to the structured teaching and reinforcement of principles such as honesty, responsibility, respect, empathy, justice, and civic duty. These values form the moral compass that guides behaviour, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. While schools play a formal role in imparting these values through civic and moral education curricula, families are regarded as the foundational agents of value transmission, particularly in early childhood and adolescence (Adebayo & Ibrahim, 2023). According to Afolabi and Ede (2023), moral education can be approached from different dimensions, including family-based moral education, parental involvement in moral education, and school-led moral education.

The family is the first social institution where children learn acceptable norms, beliefs, and behaviours. Family-based moral education refers to the transmission of values, norms, and ethical behaviours from parents or guardians to children within the home setting, serving as the foundation for character development and societal interaction (Ajayi & Adeyemi, 2023; Nwachukwu, 2024). Positively, it nurtures responsible citizenship, discipline, and social harmony, key pillars of sustainable national development (Okafor & Ede, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). However, its absence or distortion, often due to parental neglect or value conflicts, may foster corruption, violence, and civic irresponsibility, thereby undermining national progress (Ibrahim & Salisu, 2023; Ekanem, 2024). Studies highlight that nations with strong family moral systems tend to experience more stable and ethical governance (Chinedu & Bakare, 2023). Thus, families remain both critical enablers and potential threats to sustainable national development depending on the values they uphold (World Bank, 2024). In addition, research suggests that children raised in homes where positive moral values are consistently taught and practised are more likely to demonstrate ethical conduct in school, participate actively in civic life, and contribute constructively to their communities (Oladele & Umeh, 2022). Conversely, children from families where values are either poorly communicated or neglected often struggle with behavioural issues, low social responsibility, and susceptibility to antisocial influences. These outcomes can have far-reaching implications for national stability, social cohesion, and economic sustainability.

Furthermore, parental involvement in moral education refers to the active engagement of parents in nurturing ethical values, character, and civic responsibility in their children through modelling, guidance, and value-based interactions (Akinbote & Ogunyemi, 2022; Yusuf & Sanni, 2023). Positively, such involvement promotes responsible citizenship, social cohesion, and accountability, all vital for sustainable national development (UNESCO, 2022; Okafor & Eze, 2024). It fosters youth empowerment and ethical leadership, which contribute to nation-building (Olanrewaju, 2023). Conversely, weak or negative parental influence can transmit harmful norms, foster corruption, and undermine social justice and national unity (Adetunji & Alabi, 2023). Therefore, the quality and direction of parental involvement are critical to achieving development goals (UN, 2024).

In addition, school-led moral education refers to the deliberate efforts by educational institutions to instil ethical values, civic responsibility, and socially acceptable behaviour in students through curriculum content, teacher modelling, and school culture (Okoye & Adeyemi, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). It shapes responsible citizens, fosters national cohesion, promotes integrity, and equips learners with the moral compass necessary for sustainable national development (UNESCO, 2022; Ajayi & Usman, 2024). Such education cultivates critical thinking, tolerance, and a commitment to justice, key pillars for democratic stability and inclusive growth (World Bank, 2023). However, when poorly implemented, overly dogmatic, or detached from lived realities, school-led moral education may encourage passive obedience, suppress individual agency, or entrench systemic inequalities (Eke & Nwachukwu, 2023). Therefore, the impact of school-based moral instruction on development depends significantly on its content, delivery, and alignment with national values and development goals (UN, 2024).

Nigeria, like many developing nations, faces a myriad of socio-economic challenges, including corruption, insecurity, religious intolerance, and youth unrest. Many of these issues have been traced to a gradual erosion of societal values, weakened family structures, and a lack of synergy between home and school in the moral formation of young citizens. Although moral and civic education is part of the national curriculum in Nigerian schools, its impact is often limited if the values taught in classrooms are not reinforced within the home. Families that fail to instil foundational virtues create a disconnect that

makes it difficult for schools to sustain moral development effectively. As Ugwu and Hassan (2023) argue, moral education is most effective when it reflects a collaborative effort between the school and the family, ensuring consistency in message and practice.

Sustainable national development, as articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), requires the nurturing of morally conscious citizens who value accountability, equity, and peaceful coexistence. These attributes are rooted in both formal education and informal home-based learning. However, there remains a lack of empirical understanding of the extent to which families contribute to the success of school-based moral education and how this joint influence impacts national development in practical terms. In Nigeria, a noticeable gap remains between the values promoted by the school system and those practised in many homes, often due to socioeconomic pressures, poor parenting, cultural shifts, and media influence (Eze & Onuoha, 2023).

Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore the correlation between moral education and the role of families in shaping values that support sustainable national development. This study aims to investigate how family-based moral education and parental involvement in moral education interact with school-led moral education efforts to influence children's ethical development and civic behaviour. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for teachers, policymakers, and parents, helping to reinforce collaborative strategies that promote a value-driven society. Only through such holistic efforts can a morally resilient generation be raised, capable of contributing to peace, justice, and sustainable progress in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the growing recognition of the role of moral education in fostering national development, Nigeria, particularly Rivers State, continues to face a significant deficit in ethical leadership, civic responsibility, and social cohesion. Families, traditionally regarded as the bedrock of value formation, appear increasingly weakened by socio-economic pressures, cultural erosion, and shifting parenting roles, which limit their capacity to model and transmit moral values effectively. Family-based moral education, which should lay the foundation for integrity, empathy, and responsible citizenship, is often neglected or inconsistently applied. Additionally, parental involvement in the moral upbringing of children has declined, with many parents overly reliant on schools or preoccupied with survival challenges, thereby weakening value reinforcement across home and school environments.

Moreover, while schools in Rivers State play a formal role in delivering moral education, this effort is often hindered by outdated curricula, undertrained teachers, and a lack of alignment between the values taught in school and real-life societal behaviours. The disconnection between home-based and school-led moral instruction raises concerns about the consistency and effectiveness of value transmission to the younger generation. This disjointed approach hampers the development of ethically grounded citizens who are essential to achieving sustainable national development goals. Therefore, it becomes imperative to examine how family-based moral education, parental involvement, and school-led moral education collectively influence value formation and contribute to sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study sought to:

- ascertain the relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.
- determine the relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.
- assess the relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study used a correlational design to examine the relationship between moral education (independent variable) and sustainable national development (dependent variable). The population included public senior secondary school teachers and parents in Rivers State. Specifically 5,833 teachers and 3,000 parents, totaling 8,833. A sample of 883 respondents, representing 10% of the population, was selected. Nwane in Kpee (2015) deemed this percentage appropriate for large populations. A stratified sampling technique was used to select 23 schools and communities from six Local Government Areas across three senatorial districts in Rivers State (Rivers West, Rivers East, and Rivers South East), ensuring equal respondent representation. The research instrument consisted of two questionnaires: the Moral Education Assessment Scale (MEAS) and Sustainable National Development Assessment Scale (SNDAS). Each had two sections: A for demographic data and B for MEAS and SNDAS items. The instrument used a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.88 for MEAS and 0.83 for SNDAS. Data analysis involved the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer research questions and test hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The direction and value of the correlation coefficient informed the answers. Out of 883 questionnaires administered, 865 were completed and suitable for analysis, resulting in approximately 97% retrieval rate.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) showing the Relationship between Family-Based Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	Decision
Family-Based Moral Education	865	863	0.611	High Relationship
Sustainable National Development	865			

Decision Rule: 0.00 – 0.19 = Very Low, 0.20 – 0.39 = Low, 0.40 – 0.59 = Moderate, 0.60 – 0.79 = High, 0.80 – 1.00 Very High

To answer research question 1, Table 1 results produced a correlation coefficient, 'r', of 0.611, which is 61%. This value shows a high positive relationship between family-based moral education and

sustainable national development in Rivers State. In other words, family-based moral education correlates with sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) Showing the Relationship between Parental Involvement in Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	n	Df	r	Decision
Parental Involvement in Moral Education	865			
		863	0.389	Low Relationship
Sustainable National Development	865			

Decision Rule: 0.00 – 0.19 = Very Low, 0.20 – 0.39 = Low, 0.40 – 0.59 = Moderate, 0.60 – 0.79 = High, 0.80 – 1.00 Very High

To answer research question 2, Table 2 results produced a correlation coefficient, 'r', of 0.389, which is approximately 39%. This value shows a low relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. In other words, parental involvement in moral education to a low extent correlates with sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State?

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) showing the Relationship between School-Led Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	n	df	r	Decision
School-Led Moral Education	865			
		863	0.413	Moderate Relationship
Sustainable National Development	865			

Decision Rule: 0.00 – 0.19 = Very Low, 0.20 – 0.39 = Low, 0.40 – 0.59 = Moderate, 0.60 – 0.79 = High, 0.80 – 1.00 Very High

To answer research question 3, Table 3 results produced a correlation coefficient, 'r', of 0.413, which is 41%. This value shows a moderate positive relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. In other words, school-led moral education correlates with sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.



Table 4: Test of Hypothesis on the Significant Relationship between Family-Based Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	n	df	r	p-value	alpha level	Decision
Family-Based Moral Education	865	863	0.611	0.001	0.05	Reject H_{01} (Significant)
Sustainable National Development	865					

For hypothesis 1 tested, Table 4 reveals a significant correlation at $r = .611$, with a p-value of 0.001 ($P < 0.05$). Since the p-value 0.001 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, we therefore reject the null hypothesis; thus, there is a significant relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Table 5: Test of Hypothesis on the Significant Relationship between Parental Involvement in Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	n	df	r	p-value	alpha level	Decision
Parental Involvement in Moral Education	865	863	0.389	0.442	0.05	Accept H_{02} (Not Significant)
Sustainable National Development	865					

For hypothesis 2 tested, Table 5 reveals a significant correlation at $r = .389$, with a p-value of 0.442 ($P < 0.05$). Since the p-value 0.442 is higher than the alpha level of 0.05, we therefore accept the null hypothesis; thus, there is no significant relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Table 6: Test of Hypothesis on the Significant Relationship between School-Led Moral Education and Sustainable National Development in Rivers State

Variables	N	df	r	p-value	alpha level	Decision
School-Led Moral Education	865	863	0.413	0.014	0.05	Reject H_{03} (Significant)
Sustainable National Development	865					

For hypothesis 3 tested, Table 6 reveals an insignificant correlation at $r = .413$, with a p-value of 0.014 ($P < 0.05$). Since the p-value 0.014 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, we therefore reject the null hypothesis; thus, there is a significant relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that there is a high relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. Also, a corresponding hypothesis tested establishes a significant relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. These findings are in agreement with Oladele and Umeh (2022), Okafor and Ede (2022), UNESCO (2023), Ajayi and Adeyemi (2023), and Nwachukwu (2024), whose empirical studies showed that there is a high and significant correlation between family-based moral education and sustainable national development. However, the findings contradict Ibrahim and Salisu (2023), Chinedu and Bakare (2023), Ekanem (2024), and World Bank (2024), whose studies observed that there is no significant relationship between family-based moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. A possible explanation for these findings suggests that families play a crucial role in instilling values like integrity, responsibility, and civic-mindedness from an early age. This foundational moral training fosters ethical behaviour and active citizenship, which are essential for national growth and stability. This implies that when families consistently reinforce positive values, they contribute directly to building a more just, peaceful, and development-oriented society.

The second finding of the study showed that there is a low relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. Also, a corresponding hypothesis tested establishes no significant relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. These findings are in tandem with Adetunji & Alabi (2023) and the United Nations (2024), who observed that no correlation between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development. Conversely, the findings disagree with UNESCO (2022), Akinbote and Ogunyemi (2022), Yusuf and Sanni (2023), Olanrewaju (2023), and Okafor and Eze (2024), whose empirical studies reported a high and significant relationship between parental involvement in moral education and sustainable national development. A possible explanation for these findings indicates limited or ineffective engagement of parents in value formation. Many parents may lack the time, skills, or awareness to intentionally support moral learning at home. As a result, their influence on broader developmental outcomes remains minimal or poorly aligned with national development goals. This implies that without stronger parental engagement, efforts to instil sustainable values in children may remain weak and inconsistent. It highlights the urgent need for policies and programmes that empower parents to actively support moral education at home.

The third finding of the study revealed that there is a moderate relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. Also, a corresponding hypothesis tested establishes a significant relationship between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. These findings align with Okoye and Adeyemi (2022), UNESCO (2022), UNICEF (2023), World Bank (2023) and Ajayi and Usman (2024). These works observed that a significant relationship exists between school-led moral education and sustainable national development in Rivers State. However, the findings contradicted Eke and Nwachukwu (2023) and UN (2024), whose studies showed no correlation between school-led moral education and sustainable national development. A possible explanation to the findings suggests that schools contribute meaningfully to value formation, though their efforts may be constrained by systemic challenges. Trained teachers and structured curricula help promote ethical awareness, yet gaps in practical implementation reduce overall impact. This reflects schools' potential as agents of change, albeit with limited reach without complementary support from families and communities. This implies that schools play a vital role in promoting values that support sustainable national development in Rivers State. However, their influence is only moderately effective, indicating room for improvement in curriculum delivery and teacher capacity. Strengthening school-based moral instruction could significantly enhance developmental outcomes.

Conclusion

The study concludes that moral education is a key correlate of sustainable national development in Rivers State, with family-based moral education showing the strongest positive influence. Parental involvement, however, was found to be low and largely ineffective, highlighting a gap in active value transmission at home. School-led moral education showed a moderate impact, underscoring the need for stronger collaboration between families and schools to effectively promote national development through shared moral values.

Recommendations

Given the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Government and community-based organisations should support initiatives that empower families through parenting education programmes, value reorientation workshops, and family counselling services to enhance their capacity to instil strong moral values that support national development.
2. Schools and policy-makers should establish structured platforms, such as parent-teacher forums, moral education seminars, and home-school communication channels, to actively engage parents in reinforcing moral learning beyond the classroom.
3. The Ministry of Education should revise and strengthen moral education curricula, provide specialised teacher training, and integrate practical, culturally relevant moral instruction across subjects to increase the impact of schools in shaping values that contribute to sustainable national development.

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