

Reorientating Values: An Ethical Approach to Combating Corruption in Africa

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Abstract

In Africa, as the consequences of corruption become more tragic, people still have increasing tendencies towards material gains. For these reasons, the issues of corruption and materialism have become a great concern due to their adverse effects. However, the need to explain the role of values and ethics in shaping and moderating individual or collective behavior becomes more imperative. This is because existing anti-corruption efforts in Africa aim at institutional reform and positive measures, with a limited understanding of how value reorientation can be used to prevent corruption in Africa. It becomes important to address how reoriented values can be used in combating corruption in Africa. The relevant question here may be: In the course of teaching socio-civic education, can ethical reorientation be used to reduce the trouble created by corruption as a result of materialism? This question becomes relevant based on individual, societal activities, and human relations. This paper focuses on clarifying corruption and materialism to root out the usefulness and practicability of ethical re-orientation in tackling corruption in Africa. The methodology of approach is conceptual clarification, which is the format into which philosophical explanations are fitted for proper presentation. The paper affirms that ethical reorientation can be used to build a society where individuals lead a kind of life that promotes the welfare of others. The justification tenets are that ethics, as a facilitator of civil activities, concerns itself with what makes actions or policies right or wrong and describes how things ought to be.

Keywords: Value Reorientation, Corruption, Ethics, Materialism, Education.

Introduction

In Africa, corruption ravages many nations because some citizens prioritize wealth and pleasure over conscientious work. This stems from a flawed value system, often driven by materialism and a lack of commitment to the greater good. Ogunmode (2020) stated that *corruption compromises the quality of education and hinders students' learning outcomes... It emanates from the abuse of public office for personal gain*. To buttress this, Transparency International perceives corruption as an abuse of entrusted power for private benefit. One may submit that favoritism, bribery, embezzlement, and some other moral decays can be counted as corruption. This is because they lower individual integrity, weaken democratic institutions, impede growth, and fuel underdevelopment, coupled with insecurity. *Corrupt practices have a negative impact on students, teachers, and the future of a country or nation* (Olubunmi & Adelabu, 2024). Unfortunately, many individuals show little concerns for

those suffering or jobless. Instead, some focus solely on personal needs, disregarding the rights of others. Hence, the importance of value reorientation in education cannot be overemphasized. All humans experience goodness and badness, and ethics analyzed these concepts, questioning whether actions like bribery, fraud, or corruption are justifiable. A society is tolerable only when its members enjoy value-oriented, peaceful, and cooperative social living, free of corruption and materialism. The world recognizes decent societies that uphold social values like faithfulness, humanity, tolerance, commitment, integrity, and consistency. However, in Africa, social relationships often revolve around ethnic classification, fostering corruption, materialism, discrimination, and dissociation instead of being egalitarians.

Corruption is one of the most significant challenges in Africa, with many consequences on sustainable development, economic stability, unethical academic practices, financial misappropriation, and the like. The policy references in the fight against corruption originated from the African Union Convention, which was adopted by the African Heads of State and Government in July 2003 at the African Union Summit in Maputo, Mozambique, and required fifteen ratifications among member Heads of State before coming into force. Transparency International (TI) applauded the entry into force of the convention, adopted two years earlier, which set strong regional standards to practically fight corruption.

Other similar anti-corruption agencies in Africa include:

1. Africa Budget Watch (Newsletter): This provides an opportunity for civil society organizations and other stakeholders in Africa to discuss and share information.
2. African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC).
3. Transparency International.

There has been substantial research and policy development on anti-corruption in Africa, as shown above. However, despite these efforts, the underlying frequency of value reorientation as a tool for combating corruption has been under-examined. This gap stems from a lack of comprehensive shaping or moderating collective behavior.

This paper made a clarification of how value reorientation can promote rational social values in Africa, addressing the degeneration in morals, discipline, and social responsibility. According to Cyril (2014), *moral and value orientation is key to achieving overall development and driving societal change*. In this paper, "value," ethical," and "moral" refer to good and right actions, while "unethical" and "immoral" signify bad and wrong actions.

Theoretical Perspective to the Problem:

Theoretical Frameworks

The most suitable theoretical frameworks for this study are Plato's Idealism and social learning theory. Plato Idealism recognizes ideas, feelings, and ideals as more important than material objects, and human development should be guided by moral, ethical, and spiritual values, recognizing the unity in diversity. Ayeni (2017 states that *idealist education is learner-centered and oriented towards religion, as learners discover their philosophy through self-discovery*. One may submit that education aims to orientate individuals towards self-

development and self-realization, which is self-awareness. Idealist education can promote a value system that serves as a foundation for shaping individual and societal behavior, exemplifying ethical values such as honesty, hard work, humanity, and others. Dike (2016) considers *value education to involve education for character, security, and moral values, emphasizing the teaching of respect and responsibility for good character and national security*. One can therefore contend that idealism's epistemology can be used to instill spiritual and moral values. The task of value education is to orientate every individual according to societal needs. Value reorientation can help provide knowledge that aids rationality and good ideas, constituting knowledge that can solve the present problems of corruption and materialism in Africa. Social learning theory maintains that humans learn new knowledge, behavior, and attitudes through observation and modeling others. Modeling involves observing and imitating other behaviors in the community or nation. Through this, our behavior can be shaped or moderated by our environment, observation, and reinforcement in the form of rewards and punishment. According to Bandura (as cited in Sprinshall & Springhall, 1981), individuals play an active role in determining their own actions rather than being passively acted upon by the learning environment, emphasizing the importance of cognition in personality development. Bandura emphasizes that through learning personal standards of reward and punishment, one can judge their own behavior through self-regulation, based on values such as respect for persons, love, temperance, courage, honesty, truth, wisdom, and justice, all of which are termed as moral values. Moral values can be embedded and regulated through self-awareness, self-realization, self-orientation, and self-correction, and hence play a vital role in the reduction of corruption

Values Education

The principal or fundamental goal of value education is to equip every citizen of a nation with the knowledge and skills necessary for progressive societal goals as an offshoot of development. Dike (2016) submits that *value education involves educating for character and moral values*. Value, as seen by Oddie (2019), is *what is valuable and independent of what people think or feel... That is, values are ingredients of people's minds and are ontologically separate from individual attitudes and preferences*. Value judgments are like scientific claims that have to be consistently revisited. This is possible because education is a testing laboratory of human values. Education, in this sense, has both intrinsic and extrinsic values, thus it can be used as an agent of righting wrongs. We can deduce that the concept of value education encompasses:

- i. assessment of worth
- ii. knowledge acceptable by society
- iii. human conducts, such as respect, love, temperance, justice, and truth (moral values)
- iv. existential references, such as nature, experience, and culture

In reference to character or custom, the theory of values means studying what constitutes good and bad human conduct, as well as related actions and values. The study of ethics

constitutes moral right or wrong, duty or obligation, and moral responsibility. Generally, ethics deals with moral values and the process of valuation in human society. Aladejana (2016) contends that *ethics concerns fundamental principles governing good and evil, right and wrong*. This implies that moral agents should act in line with honesty, faithfulness, and integrity. To show that individual fulfills their duties and be committed to doing what is right, not for rewards but for moral principles. The "will" of an individual cannot be determined independently of their actions and the effects of those actions. Moral actions promote human well-being, and the will is the major propeller of action. NTI (2024) states that *ethics is the systematic study of the norms of human behavior... The purpose is to ensure that human behavior conforms to them*. The point of stress here is that ethics assist in elevating one's moral standard by making individuals realize defects in their behavior as well as other people's conduct, thereby making them understand the exact nature so that they will desire good. The study of ethics deals with questions of moral right and wrong, duty, obligation, and moral responsibility.

From the above accounts, "morals" refer to conduct itself, while "ethics" and "ethical" refer to the study of moral conduct or code of conduct. The process of ethics is directly connected to individual social rules, governing personal behavior and setting limitations concerning good and evil.

Value Reorientation as Education for Change

To re-orientate humans is to establish one's position positively in relation to one's culture or beliefs through education. When we re-orientate, we are re-awakening our consciousness on the need to build a virile nation positively. Education, as generally conceived centers on molding and modifying individual behavior to root out positive change in the course of building a society of responsible citizens. It cultivates people, promotes social cohesion, and refines their patterns of behavior. Ayeni (2014) states that *education, as an instrument of change, has a lot to offer*. If this is the case, can we say that our intelligence has caused our troubles of materialism and corruption? But if so, it is not un-intelligence that will reduce it; only more and wiser intelligence can make a happier Africa. This is because, if there is punishment for misbehaving, probably, the mentally retarded shall be exempted. Again, can education be used in reducing corruption and materialism?

Education implies positive applications of knowledge. When a person uses their knowledge for corruption or corrupting others, they are applying their knowledge wrongly. Education is a worthwhile activity; therefore, knowledge means education only when it is used for the benefit of people. In light of the above, ethical reorientation may be a program of education or actions designed to arrest the ethical decay in African nations. If the human elements operating in society are set right, the issue of people becoming slaves to their environment through corruption and materialism may be reduced. Ethical reorientation therefore calls insistently for continuous reassessment and streamlining of prevailing patterns of behavior. Hence, Ifelunni (2017) asserts that *when we re-orientate ourselves ethically, we are re-*

channeling our attitude and behavior. The course of social transformations is closely linked with morality, as social transformations are explained in the development of powerful moral relations.

The development of social qualities such as humility, faithfulness, and honesty are essential for human relations, expressing itself in fellow-feeling and cooperation. These qualities will stamp out greediness and discrimination, promoting the good of all people in society. This philosophy embraces idealism, as value reorientation advocates universality of good behavior in Africa. Singh (2014) affirms that *idealism believes in the welfare of the whole human community, giving much importance to self and mind, hence personality development.* Some values or social issues that need re-introduction to breed positive behavior include:

- Selflessness: treating others with love, respect, dignity, and humility
- Honesty: appreciating uprightness, straightforwardness, and trustworthiness
- Integrity: upholding strong moral principles and transparency
- Contentment: promoting self-satisfaction and happiness
- Tolerance: embracing others' weaknesses and differences

Values shape our decisions and actions, making value reorientation not only possible but also essential for personal growth and national progress. By re-examining and adjusting our values, we can align them with our goals, behavior, and the greater good in Africa. Our concept of reality, our choices, and our motivational patterns affect the type of person we become. Value can be seen as an idea or ideal about what experiences are important for citizens in society or relationships... What is considered by an individual dictates what they will see, hear, think, and do in the process of socialization or interpersonal relationships in society (Mbanya & Moringa, 2024).

The logical deductions from the above are that our individual or national values may spring from culture, experience, or environment. Value reorientation aims at reducing social vices. Social vices are acts of indiscipline and conditions that violate social norms and values... *They are habits or behaviors of immoral activities, such as corruption* (Elujekwate, 2019).

Based on these value issues, one can claim that an ideal community in Africa would be one where virtually everyone is honest, and social institutions reconcile individual interests with community interests.

Corruption and Materialism

Materialism is one of the vices, as it is the tendency to value material gains. Hence, Shrum et al. (2023) maintain that *materialism is an identity goal pursuit... It has the role of managing identity and maintaining self-awareness... Its pursuit helps to meet the need for material goods and wealth.* The logical deduction here is that materialism is a selfish value that conflicts with altruistic values of environmentalism and pro-social behavior. Materialism promotes corruption and evils that are harmful to the environment, while also reducing people's values of pro-social values... It promotes ecological degradation and racism (Kansser, 2016). Therefore, corruption arises because our ethical values that serve as life wire of laws, orders and discipline are degenerating. There is no doubt that corruption emerges from the

influence of materialism. The experience of both is veridical and verifiable a – priori, it is self validating or authenticating simply because of their rational existence in the society of man. Our mind as the planter of idea reveals to us that corruption and materialism are real and not of mental construct, because everyman have the quality of sensory awareness. Materialism is an action rather than something beyond our control because it involves the actor knowingly and irrationally rejecting the “will” of the people for his selfish interest. Corruption can be tagged as wrong doings through the misuse of powers or opportunity either private or public for personal or private gains by those who hold the power of authority. One can make a rejoinder that corruption is an abuse of power through opportunity and not right. Vittal (2013), opined that *corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefits (monetary or otherwise)*. To this, corruption can be said to occur at two levels i.e., the recipient(s) and the payer(s). In this case, there are natural inclinations of their “will” towards what each and everyone of them tagged as good. Alemika & Chuckwuma, (2016) contend that *corruption, inequality, impunity undermine trust and contributes to grievances,.... conflict in a nation*.

From the above, one observes that if value reorientation had been properly introduced in Africa periodically, our intellects must have been geared toward seen the alternative aspect of goodness so that bribery or stealing can be rejected. This is practically possible because, it is clear that deliberation is a necessary prelude to choice. Hence, education can serve as the main drivers of change and transformation of our society through value reorientation. The activities of corrupting due to the influence of material gains can be explained merely as a reaction to pleasant sensation from all parties. Therefore, the process involves imagination and reasoning in action because, all are processes of general sensory ability. To these, corruption is a form of organized crime in that both parties can make choice and choose not to be corrupted.

In conclusion, it is generally understood that corruption and materialism are virtually related. People’s love for material gain actually breeds corruption. Their effects have affected people of Africa adversely as it promotes crimes, large scale fraud, encouragement of inefficiency, breeds nepotism and undermines the integrity of people. These emanate from the fact that most of our leaders, government officials and the generality of populace have deviated from what is right. To this, injustice, wickedness, gross misconduct, lawlessness and absence of moral or spiritual value become the order of the day. Presently, there is urgent need to go to the foundations of child development and program ethical values for the reorientation in Africa’s schools

The Need for State of Emergency in African’s Education

Every right-thinking citizen in Africa would agree that drastic, emergency, or quick intervention is needed in the system and implementation of our education due to the constant increases of corruption and materialism that has eaten deeply into the minds of our people. The ethical reform or reorientation in African education should be total, running through all levels of our educational system, as well as universalistic in its orientation. All

adults, including students and the general populace, should be involved. Social media may serve the purpose of propagating holistic change in the new educational orientation system. Okoh (2005) states that *any educational system that avoids the big questions of socio-cultural and philosophical aspects of society will produce graduates who are irrelevant to their society – graduates who have been mis-educated*. The products of our education are influencing the behavior of others, including non-elites, by corrupting them. This is because some elites are grossly irresponsible and corrupt, using their authority for selfish interests. Our education in Africa has not succeeded in transforming our decision-makers, who sometimes deviate from the criteria that should guide their decision-making in exchange for rewards or promises of gifts. To implement changes in Africa's education, we need a new line of action in the area of knowledge worth learning, re-energized or re-channeled into our education from the base, bearing in mind the change that will ease the problems of corruption and materialism. The knowledge, attitudes, and values that would enable the products of our education to develop into "good" members of society advocate social and moral education at all levels.

In the course of a state of emergency in education, programs of universality on moral education (value reorientation) can have the following dimensions:

- Universal Consciousness/Commitment: mobilizing people towards realizing set goals and objectives
- Universal Provisions: establishing networks to spread moral education programs in African society
- Universal Retention: continuing programs and preventing citizens from dropping out
- Universal Programmes: ensuring equality in the quality and quantity of information dissemination concerning generalized moral educational programs in Africa

There is an urgent necessity for the continuation of value reorientation in our educational programs, as it is the pillar of all-round development in every nation.

Value Reorientation as Vital Tool for Tackling Corruption

The secrecy in the process of corrupting makes it difficult to establish how widely and deeply corruption has penetrated our economy and social life. As generally known, each tribe in Africa is composed of ethnic classification, and within each group, there are social structuring and categorization. All these breed one form of discrimination and cheating, which lead to corruption. These social problems constitute failure in unity and reduce the level of development, thereby increasing corruption. Educators can use the knowledge of past and present social problems to re-channel their programs to tackle corruption through ethical re-orientation. In line with Ifelunni (2023), *value reorientation means re-channeling our attitudes and behaviors*. For example, when we arrive late to classes or occasions and talk of "African time," it is a bad orientation that needs change. We should change our attitudes and behaviors to embrace rightful changes. Value reorientation affirms that every

social life requires moral responsibility and willingness to act accordingly. Moral responsibility is about doing the right thing at the right time.

There have been several agendas/reforms by successful governments in Africa towards ensuring a corruption-free economy. These include, amongst others:

- i. Whistleblower protection policies, which encourage individuals to report corrupt activities without fear of retaliation.
- ii. Integration of anti-corruption modules into the school curriculum, as in Nigeria, where civic education is made compulsory as a subject in primary and secondary schools.

Judging from the above, value reorientation can be used in tackling corruption through the provision of educational programs that promote qualities of justice and fairness. Value reorientation can:

- Develop good character, leading to love for fellow beings, self-control, trustworthiness, and selfless service to tackle corruption.
- Create sound attitudes and a spirit of cooperation, accommodation, and teamwork, generating commitment towards creating a good nation devoid of corruption.
- Enshrine the quality of good character into the way of life of people in African society, breeding the release of individual potential to reduce corruption.
- Re-channel the attitudes of African people towards selfless service to tackle corruption.
- Sensitize African people to change their opinions, beliefs, and values against love for material gains to reduce corruption.
- Enhance healthy relationships and minimize possible conflicts of interest by teaching the principles of honesty, impartiality, and uprightness.

The propagation of value characteristics such as honesty, fairness, transparency, and trustworthiness signify the acquisition of just characteristics. It is hopeful that continuous re-orientation of our people from a young age on the implications of such "just" characteristics will yield remarkable improvement in tackling corruption. When conducting such programs of ethical awareness, it must be clarified to make all citizens understand the effects of corruption on society

Conclusion and Recommendation

Education has always been an instrument for individual and societal survival. The impact of morality cannot be overemphasized. It has to do with the right attitudes of the mind. Therefore, the principle for selecting educational content should be whatever constitutes the greatest happiness for the greatest number in this era of corruption and materialism. There is an urgent need for the inculcation of the right type of values that will cultivate right attitudes in Africa through periodic value reorientation. Our educational programs should emphasize value-based education, such as honesty, integrity, and self-reflection, as evident in Nigerian civic education programs in primary and secondary schools. Anti-corruption modules should equally be made part of the curriculum to educate all our students from

primary schools up to university level. The objectives of anti-corruption agencies, such as the African Union Convention, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC), should be specifically stated as part of educational curricula in Africa. Value reorientation can therefore be used to build a society of people who promote the welfare of others, and should be on a continuous basis for the revival of our integrity in Africa.

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