

Effect of Cultural Values on Character Formation: Implication for Education

¹Ugwu Jovita Nnenna, ²Mbabazi Asiat, ³Tom Mulegi, ²Eze Chidinma Esther, ¹Aleke Jude Uchekukwu, ⁴Rachel Okwaja Puche and ⁵Eric Mabonga

¹Department of Publication and Extension, Kampala International University, Uganda.

²Faculty of Education Kampala International University, Uganda.

³Department of Public Administration and Management, Kampala International University, Uganda.

⁴Social Work and Social Administration, Kampala International University, Uganda.

⁵Accounting and Finance, Kampala International University, Uganda.

Email address: nnenna.jovita@kiu.ac.ug

ABSTRACT

The influence of cultural norms and home values on an individual's personality and life adjustment can manifest in various ways. An individual's personality is shaped by a complex interplay of biological and experiential factors, with the latter being significantly influenced by cultural elements. One prominent avenue through which cultural values impact personality is in the cultural conditioning of child-rearing practices. When a child is born, it not only relies on the care and support of family members but also lacks the necessary behavioral knowledge required to function within a human society. It depends on innate biological instincts like hunger and the care provided by elders to fulfill these basic needs. To survive and thrive, a human infant must acquire the skills, knowledge, and societal norms specific to the culture into which it is born. Thus, cultural values are deliberately instilled in the members of a society. For a society to function effectively, these shared cultural values must be passed down through generations, primarily through child-rearing practices within homes. Nigeria, characterized by its diverse cultural backgrounds, value systems, and numerous ethnic groups, has distinct child-rearing practices that transmit these values and norms to successive generations. This paper examines the role of culture in shaping an individual's character and emphasizes that education, when coupled with values, is crucial. Education serves as a potent tool for fostering desirable character traits, and it must be refocused to continue producing individuals with strong moral values and responsible character.

Keywords: Character formation, Culture, Morals, Value, Impact

Culture encompasses a collective set of shared values, customs, attributes, and tangible objects upheld by individuals within a specific community, shaping their daily lives and assumptions. This cultural framework includes everything from clothing, housing, technologies, and artistic creations developed by a group over time as a way to structure

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their communal existence. These values and norms are passed down through generations via child-rearing practices within households. Each household essentially acts as a microcosm of society, embodying the prevailing societal values and serving as a nurturing ground for cultural ideals [1]. When we closely examine various ways of life, it becomes evident that cultural values and norms play a significant role in guiding human development through interconnected pathways [2]. For instance, one observation is that in certain societies, children are viewed as economic assets since they can contribute to family farming and later establish strong family bonds to protect land and care for aging parents. Consequently, the survival and well-being of every child hold paramount importance in these communities. Notably, some of these societies might struggle with issues like inadequate nutrition and healthcare, leading to high infant mortality rates. As a result, child-rearing practices prioritize infant survival and emphasize familial cooperation. This involves intensive physical care for infants, on-demand feeding, immediate response to crying, close physical contact, co-sleeping, and active involvement from siblings and other relatives, in addition to the mother's care. These measures are instituted to safeguard fragile infants and instill values of interdependence among family members. In contrast [2], another perspective observes that American middle-class parents may not share the same concerns about infant mortality. Instead, they prioritize preparing their children for success in a technologically advanced and urbanized society. Consequently, their child-rearing practices concentrate on fostering cognitive development and emotional independence. Typically, American middle-class parents engage their infants in activities designed to stimulate cognitive and social growth, prioritize verbal communication over physical touch, have infants sleep in their own cribs in separate rooms, and often allow infants to self-soothe by not immediately responding to their cries to avoid "spoiling" them. Interestingly, these differing approaches to child-rearing yield children with distinct capacities, aspirations, and expectations. Nonetheless, in both cases, the children become well-prepared to embrace the prevailing cultural values of their respective upbringings.

Ultimately, the values and cultural norms within a home encompass behavioral patterns, beliefs, and various aspects of a specific group's way of life, which are transmitted from one generation to the next [3]. There are multiple ways in which the values and cultural norms rooted in a society can shape an individual's personality and their strategies for adapting to life's challenges. [4], suggests that culture and personality are interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon. An individual's personality emerges from the interplay of biological and experiential factors, with a portion of these experiential factors being influenced by culture. [4], maintains that one of the most noticeable ways in which cultural values impact personality is through culturally-influenced approaches to child-rearing. According to [5], a newborn human is inherently vulnerable. Beyond physical dependence on older members of the species, a newborn also lacks the behavioral knowledge required to function in human society. To survive and thrive, a human infant must acquire the skills, knowledge, and accepted social behaviors of the society into which they are born. This learning process is crucial for their adjustment to their cultural environment. [6], posits that culture essentially serves as a blueprint for the way of life embraced by a particular society. For a society to function cohesively, its members must share this cultural blueprint. Consequently, cultural value systems are passed down to successive generations through the child-rearing practices carried out within households. Nigeria, characterized by its diverse cultural heritage and numerous ethnic groups, exhibits distinct child-rearing practices within each ethnic group. These practices serve as conduits for transmitting the values and norms of each ethnic group to future generations. This discussion delves into the role of culture in shaping an individual's character and development.

Concept of Culture

Culture has been defined as the comprehensive and observable way of life of a people. These include their pattern of behaviour, belief system, values and ideas. It is the umbrella term that focuses on the intrinsic values of a society expressed through beliefs, moral behaviour, customs and tradition. Culture, can also be regarded as a bundle of ideas and ideals that a community of people innately developed, preserves and transfers to succeeding generations [7]. Culture is expressed through the general behaviour of man and it is when there is an observable pattern in the behaviour of a group of people, in relation to their immediate environment, that the pattern of behaviour can be considered as their culture. Culture can be expressed materially and immaterially such as arts and behavioural pattern [6]. [8], further identifies culture with a combined quote thus: "Culture defines a society's identity, its ethos, and its values... It is continuous, enduring, and it relates past to present, present to future in all encompassing...it is the totality of the life of the people- habits, belief, customs, values, attitudes, laws..." The reality of the foregoing is articulated by [7] thus: Culture is transmitted by learning, and learning requires social interaction. Social interaction forms the thrust of socialisation of all kinds. Nigerian cultures must have to be transmitted by teaching and learning vis-a-vis social interaction to the present generation and posterities accordingly by these agents of education and socialisation.

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Review of Related Literature

When assessing the influence of cultural values and norms on individuals' lives, [4] noted that culture furnishes its members with a mental framework from which they interpret and make sense of their experiences. Through this value system, cultural and linguistic structures are provided, tailored to the challenges faced by individuals living within that culture. These values are passed down to the younger generation through child-rearing practices within households. A significant hypothesis regarding value systems, proposed by [9], suggests that the nature and structure of language determine the cognitions possible within any culture, and these are transmitted to children through their upbringing. For instance, in Igbo culture, the word "akwa" can have multiple meanings, such as bed, egg, bridge, clothes, or cry, depending on the pronunciation of the last syllable. Similarly, among the Efiks of Nigeria, the word "obong" can signify mosquito or chieftaincy based on pronunciation, and these meanings are conveyed to successive generations.

Additionally, [4] reported that the Hununoo tribe in the Philippines distinguishes 92 different value variations for what is called "rice" in English. In such communities, it is possible for families to instill these 92 value nuances associated with the word "rice" in their children through their upbringing practices. Therefore, [10] observed that a human child's social and cognitive development is bound by the prevailing life and value system within their culture. Consequently, the environment provided by the home, society, or culture becomes the foundation upon which an individual builds their personality. [6] pointed out that across various cultures and eras, diverse concepts of value systems have emerged. Behaviors such as homicide, suicide, cannibalism, homosexuality, and incest, which may be permissible or even desirable in some societies, are considered taboos in others. For example, some regions of America accept these behaviors, while in some parts of Africa, they are considered taboos.

Moreover, [9] and [3] observed that hallucinations, often seen as symptoms of severe mental disorders, are actively sought after in some cultures rather than feared or avoided. For instance, the Plains Indians of North America frequently sought hallucinatory experiences as forms of divine guidance or initiation signs. Children from such cultures may interpret delusions and hallucinations as "divine calls," whereas children from other cultures, like Nigeria, may perceive such experiences as signs of possession or illness. This differing value system is instilled in successive generations through child-rearing practices.

Speaking of cultural value systems, [11] revealed that the Ogonis of Rivers State adhere to a culturally matrilineal society, which is inherited and instilled in their culture. The Ogonis practice rites of passage or initiation into manhood or womanhood known as "yaa" for males and "koo" for females. This cultural value system is so significant that an Ogoni man may invest more in the initiation ceremony of "yaa" and "koo" for his children than in their education. [11], emphasized that altering an Ogoni man's mindset regarding these initiation rites would require a significant cultural shift or the eradication of Ogoni culture. Culturally, every community holds its land in high regard, but [12] noted that the Tiv people perceive their land not just as a piece of earth they inhabit but as sacred land passed down from their forefathers. This unique Tiv cultural value system is often reflected in their clothing and is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

The Concept of Moral Values

To comprehend moral values, it's important to start by clarifying the concept of morality. The term "morality" has its roots in the Latin word 'mores,' which signifies "manners" or "morals." As described by [13], morality can be defined as "an accepted set of behaviors within a society." Morality involves the establishment of rules that govern the actions of individuals who can choose to follow these rules because they recognize the wisdom in doing so [3]. Being moral or having moral awareness means adopting standards or principles to steer one's actions and behavior in society. Moral education is an educational program that instructs students on how to act in alignment with what is considered good while avoiding what is considered bad. It offers a comprehensive approach to foster character development and moral growth [14]. Moral education should guide young people to progress from a stage of moral uncertainty, often characterized by a lack of established morals, to a stage where an individual is not compelled to be moral but personally embraces the principles that should govern their conduct in society.

Within the context of moral education, moral values are conveyed as certain qualities that are not only acceptable but also esteemed, contributing to the cultivation of a strong character. [4], defines values as "things regarded as

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worthwhile, desirable, right, and good, and are therefore sought after and applied in daily life to enhance one's existence." Values play a crucial role in shaping a person's identity and preserving cultural continuity. Moral values encompass essential principles that influence an individual's understanding of morality and their moral consciousness in society. These values encompass truthfulness, patience, obedience, honesty, integrity, diligence, responsibility, respect, tolerance, loyalty, public-spiritedness, freedom, and respect for human life and dignity. Additionally, they encompass concepts of justice, fairness, and equality. Moral education aims to instill these values in the members of society to promote character development and cultivate a foundation of good moral upbringing and moral well-being in individuals. As [15] contends, "moral well-being is evident in individuals when a person is capable of grasping the principles of moral conduct and is committed to behaving ethically in their interactions with others." The effective understanding and practice of moral conduct principles are only achievable when individuals strongly adhere to moral values within their given society.

Importance of Value Education

The society has become dynamic due to modernization process. It is posing multiple problems of anxiety, stress, and worries in front of human life. Core human values like honesty, sincerity, morality, humanity, non violence are getting affected due to the evils of poverty, unsocialibility, caste system, gender inequality, ill treatment to children, women and old people, over utilization of natural resources without planning. To address these problems, one must look at morals/value education as integral part of the educational system. In the materialistic era of science and technology, everything except morality has reached its peak. Higher education in the present times is stimulated by economic consideration without any reference to age old human values that separate man from animals [16]. The aim of moral values inculcation has been overlooked and is evident in the dismal picture of society, rampant with corruption, malpractices, flouting of rules, insecurity, mental depression, violence and crime, lack of patriotism among citizens, etc. Education without values is not only ineffectual but also very harmful. The realization is particularly relevant at this time, when social, moral, cultural and spiritual values are disintegrating. Education itself is the best medium for the formation of acceptable character; as such, there is need for urgent measures to restructure the society as it continually suffers from moral decline [16].

Moral Value and Character Development

Character can be seen as the demonstration of specific behaviors, which can be judged as either positive or negative based on the prevailing societal values [17]. This suggests that character is only observable and assessable through the actions of individuals within a given society. Character and value are not interchangeable terms, as character can only be evaluated through behavior, whereas value represents the intrinsic ideals within the societal system that governs people's norms and behavior. Nevertheless, it's important to note that values serve as the foundation upon which individuals' character is constructed within a society [17]. Values encompass the moral principles and beliefs that an individual deems important. They serve as the guiding rules for making decisions and judgments.

Historically, there has been a longstanding debate on moral and character development, dating back to the medieval period and continuing into the contemporary era [18]. This debate primarily revolves around the role of education in shaping moral and character development. Philosophers like John Locke and J.S. Mill championed the idea that moral and character development should be the primary objective of education. Others, such as [19], argued that effective moral and character development through education is the only solution to various social issues threatening our collective well-being. Education serves as the most effective means for fostering desirable character traits. Defining socially acceptable character has been proposed to involve the development of personal discipline, the quality of personal character, adherence to principles and ideals, a strong sense of respect for societal values and goals, and a deep commitment to moral responsibility and behavior [20].

Despite the recognized role of education in cultivating individuals with good morals and strong character, contemporary education has placed more emphasis on cognitive development rather than addressing the affective and behavioral aspects of students' lives. This trend has led education systems worldwide to shift their focus away from viewing teachers as role models and promoters of socially acceptable behavior, instead prioritizing effective teaching methods and skills [18]. Consequently, there is a need for a reconsideration of priorities in education today. Educators of this era must first address the "why" of education before delving into the "how." This approach aims to redirect education towards its core role as a producer of individuals with exemplary character and a strong sense of moral responsibility. It's essential to understand that academic competence and character development are not synonymous and should be given equal priority since they mutually contribute to the development of learners.

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