



Role of Religious Education in Ethical and Moral Values among Undergraduate Students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi

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Abstract

This study examined the role of religious education in shaping ethical and moral values among undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, in which one research purpose, one research question, and a corresponding hypothesis guided the study. The population of the study comprised 193 Religious Studies Education undergraduates of Rev Fr Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. A sample of 130 was selected using Taro Yamane's formula, and a purposive sampling by gender was done. Data were collected through the administration of researcher's designed questionnaire titled Religious Education Role on Ethical and Moral Values Questionnaire (REEMQ). The instrument for data collection was validated by specialist. Analysis was done using mean, and standard deviation, for research questions, and an independent sample t-test for hypothesis tested at 0.5 level of significance. Results of the analysis showed that students generally agreed that religious education enhances honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, tolerance, and ethical behavior, with an overall mean score of 3.41. Male students recorded significantly higher mean ratings than females, $t = 10.75$, $p = 0.001$, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study recommends practical integration of ethical and moral teachings, a gender-sensitive approach, and broader implementation of religious education across universities, and encourage student's enrollment in religious studies education. These measures could help produce morally grounded graduates capable of contributing to nation-building.

Keywords: Religious Education, Ethical values, Moral Values, and Undergraduate students

Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology has turned the world into a global village through information and communication technologies, a phenomenon particularly embraced by youths and young adults causing them to be exposed to things taught by neither parents, religious leaders nor in formal learning environment like universities which in most cases leads to their deviation from moral and ethical values. The gradual erosion of ethical and moral values among this group poses a serious challenge to sustainable national development and there is need urgent attention to arrest the situation before it gets out of hand. There is no doubt that education stand better chance to instill moral and ethical values among teeming undergraduate students. Across the globe, the mission of tertiary institutions, especially universities, are set to foster both intellectual growth, and strong character formation and accordingly, produce viable graduates who could at all times in all places demonstrate excellence in learning as well as moral

conduct. This is while degrees in all fields of studies in Nigerian tertiary institutions are awarded based on learning and character.

In Nigeria, tertiary institutions of learning like Universities, Polytechnics, and colleges continue to grapple with issues such as moral decadence, internet fraud, cultism, examination malpractice, indecent dressing, substance abuse, academic pressure, peer influence, and the gradual loss of traditional values (Bakare & Ogbodo, 2025). Considering the negative life style displayed by university undergraduate students, there has been a concern on what could be the mitigating factor. Hyde (2024), opined that religious education serves as a moral compass giving soft landing to undergraduates' students especially in shaping their moral predicaments. It is therefore believed that institutions that offers religious education stand a better chance of mitigating the abnormalities observed in undergraduate students. Agreeing with this assertion, Austin (2024), posited that religious

education has gained renewed importance as a mechanism for instilling core moral and ethical values such as honesty, integrity, forgiveness, tolerance, empathy, compassion, and civic duty. This means that those who are well-cultured in religious education and believe in the teaching stand a better chance of living a fulfilled life than those who partake in the learning, but fails to adhere to the teaching (Udemba, 2025). It is on notice however with dismay as reported by Elsayed et al (2023), that among students of same department (male and female) behaves differently sometimes contrary to what they have been taught on moral and ethical values. The certainty of such contrary behaviour is assumed to be as a result of peer influence, moral and ethical degradation among lectures and the availability of information and communication technology which makes the world a global village with accessibility of information at our finger tips.

Availability of gadgets like android phones, smartphones, internet personal access device (IPAD), laptops among other others have given room for fast spread of information across the world. The simple and fast accessibility of information has made undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University (Formerly Called Benue State University, Makurdi) to discovers things that have not been taught there by behaving contrary to moral and ethical norms as enshrine in religious studies education curriculum. In Benue state, despite increased enrollment in religious studies education, the place of ethical and moral lapses remains prevalent due to factors like peer pressure, peer influence, knowledge of information communication and technology, lack of home religious background, moral and ethical degradation among lecturers and other non-academic staff (Ogbodo & Shanpepe, 2025). Similarly, Patrick (2016), buttress that students exposed to religious education are expected to exhibit stronger moral and ethical decision-making, improved conflict resolution skills, greater compassion and responsibility, better adherence to societal norms compared to students from other fields of study despite being exposed to information around the world. This means that undergraduates students in department of arts and social sciences education (Religious unit) have advantage over others coupled with the teaching obtained in various churches by ministers of the gospel in Benue state.

Benue state predominantly is a Christian state, and Makurdi, where the institution Rev Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University is located, has a small percentage of adherents of other faiths like Islam and African traditional religion. It is however

difficult to ascertain the role religious education has played, considering the behavior of young people, which most of them are undergraduate students, while others are graduates of various universities. In light of this, Akhyar et al. (2024), buttresses that religious education is a key driver that could serve as a bridge between personal faith, pressure control, ethical and moral adherence, and civic responsibility. This means that religious education is believed to be the most reliable course with the ability to equip undergraduate students on how to navigate moral dilemmas in an increasingly secular and digital world. Similarly, Mukukah and Tian (2025), posited that Christian education is a ground breaking framework for moral uprightness and could, in no small measure, be of assistance to undergraduate students especially those studying religious education in overcoming behaviours that are unacceptable within the society but rather uphold approved moral and ethical uprightness.

More also, there is a concern regarding the actual effectiveness of religious education role in ethical and moral behaviour among undergraduate students at Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. In the light of the above Jaffee (2000), asserts that gender plays a vital role in moral and ethical observation. He was concerned about the average percentage of male and female attitudes towards moral and ethical understating on what is good and bad based on moral principles. He concluded that justice, rights, are associated with male than females. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role that religious education plays in the formation and reinforcement of ethical and moral values among these students. It is now pertinent to understand what religious education has to offer in its capacity as a course of study.

Religious Education therefore is the process of teaching and learning about religious beliefs, practices, histories, texts, ethics, morals, and cultural impact. Hyde (2024), defines religious studies as an involvement of structured learning processes that engage students with religious beliefs, practices, and traditions in formal educational settings. The author further explained that religious education extends beyond confessional instruction to include phenomenological and interpretive approaches that promote understanding of diverse faiths and their relevance to contemporary life. Religious education is against the influence of information and communication technology on young people's sense of community and spirituality, but is concerned with fostering collaboration, social responsibility, and reflective engagement, which are all encompassing in ethical and moral values.

The primary role of religious education is to cultivate moral and ethical frameworks that guide behaviour and decision-making. It functions as a vehicle for moral socialization, transmitting values such as compassion, respect, and responsibility through teachings, rituals, and community practices. Elsayed et al. (2023) summarize the concept of religious education to mean the act that provides a moral compass which helps young people to navigate through ethical and moral dilemmas while offering meaning, purpose, and communal support capable of preserving ethical values for generations to come.

Ethical values, therefore, are principles that distinguish right from wrong behaviour. Elsayed et al. (2023), described it as the embodiment of personal and societal beliefs about right and wrong behaviour. This means that society frowns at unlawful behaviour of any kind, irrespective of the occasion that might have led to such behaviour. As noted by Korley (2024), Such values are deeply internalized through upbringing, education, and religious exposure. Others include empathy, responsibility, fairness, and goodness. These, among others, are virtues that shape the character and daily actions of human beings. Corroborating Tian (2023), state that ethical values are the goodness associated with character traits when determining what is right or wrong. This implies that ethical values center on character and virtues like courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom; these are the dispositions that enable a good life, which religious education refers to as moral values.

Moral values are considered to be the deliberate cultivation of ethical principles such as honesty, respect, responsibility, empathy, and fairness that guide students' character development and ethical decision-making beyond mere academic achievement. Making it practical for better understanding, Hasan (2025) noted that, in a real sense, schools can effectively implement character education programmes through collaborative projects or service-learning activities, where students engage in real-life moral predicaments to build compassion and fairness, thereby promoting holistic growth and responsible citizenship. Similarly, Suciati et al. (2023) emphasized that integrating moral and character education into the curriculum significantly enhances students' social and emotional development as well as academic outcomes. This can be done through an inclusive culture that values ethical interactions in the curriculum, and embedding character education in daily classroom practices could help students internalize values through experiential learning

rather than abstract instruction, preparing undergraduate students to navigate complex societal challenges with integrity and responsiveness.

Undergraduate students in this study refer to individuals who have completed secondary education and gained university admission to pursue a bachelor's degree, either through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) or Direct Entry. Nneji (2002), conceptualizes undergraduate students as individuals enrolled in post-secondary programmes usually between 4 and 6 years, depending on the discipline. This is so because students at this developmental stage could be receptive, particularly to ethical and moral formation through well-organized teaching and practice of religious education virtues.

Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that tertiary institutions in Nigeria face a dilemma character-wise, though students' enrollment keeps increasing significantly. There are reports of moral and ethical decline among undergraduates, which of late have increased astronomically. Documented behaviour includes academic dishonesty, sexual harassment, cult-related violence, examination malpractice, public indecency in dressing, cyber fraud, and rape, among others, all signaling a broader crushing of societal ethical and moral values. In (Benue State University) now Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, there is public concerns about rising indecency and ethical lapses among undergraduates that have prompted calls for institutional intervention.

Though the university offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education (B.A. Ed. Religious Studies), but questions remain about its practical role in the lives of those studying the course between male and females. There is also, a concern to find out if exposure to religious education translate into observable improvements in ethical and moral decision making in their lives. Studies conducted in Benue state by other scholars focused on relevance of religious studies among secondary school students in Apa local government using opinion expressions and qualitative method for data collection and analysis. There is no empirical research that has been conducted using undergraduate students of Rev. Fr, Moses Orshio Adasu University Makurdi

The researcher therefore believes that it is imperative for an empirical study to be conducted in order to bridge the gap, and ascertain the role of religious education in moral and ethical values, using statistical analysis without which, the university might risk graduating students who excel

academically, but lack ethical competence, thereby perpetuating cycles of moral decadence that impede personal and national progress.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of religious education in ethical and moral values among male and female undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi.

Research Question

To guide this study, one research question was stated.

1. What is the role of religious education in the ethical and moral values among male and female undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi?

Hypothesis

To further guide the study, one null hypothesis was formulated and it was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female undergraduate students on the role of religious education in the ethical and moral values in Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study area was Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio

Adasu University, Makurdi, Benue state. (Formerly Benue State University, Makurdi) The population was 193 undergraduate students in Religious Education Unit from one hundred level to four hundred level, Department of Arts and social sciences Education, Faculty of Education. The sample size was 130 undergraduate students, and was determined by Taro Yamane's formula. A purposive sampling technique by gender was employed for equal representation (Male 65 and Female 65).

Data were collected using a researcher designed questionnaire titled Religious Education Role on Ethical and Moral Values Questionnaire (REEMQ). The instrument developed was subjected to both face and content validation by three specialists; one from the Department of Curriculum and Teaching (Measurement and Evaluation Unit), and two from Arts and Social Sciences Education (Social Studies Education Unit) Faculty of Education Rev Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi was administered and retrieved through direct delivery to minimize mortality. Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale. A total of 130 questionnaires were correctly completed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26.0). Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research question, while the t-test was used for testing the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results:

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Male and Female Undergraduates on the Role of Religious Education in Ethical and Moral Values

ITEM	Male			Female			Overall		
	$\bar{x}$	SD	D	$\bar{x}$	SD	D	$\bar{x}$	SD	DEC
1. Religious education has helped me develop a strong sense of honesty	3.46	0.56	A	3.45	0.59	A	3.45	0.57	A
2. Through religious education I was taught how to show respect to others	3.40	0.52	A	3.31	0.58	A	3.35	0.55	A
3. My ability to maintain integrity is through religious studies education lessons	3.36	0.52	A	3.29	0.52	A	3.33	0.52	A

4.	Religious education has strengthened my sense of responsibility	3.46	0.56	A	3.22	0.54	A	3.34	0.56	A
5.	My positive behavior is influenced by religious education	3.66	0.54	SA	3.25	0.56	A	3.46	0.59	A
6.	Knowledge of religious education enhances my interactions with people of different beliefs	3.60	0.55	SA	3.37	0.67	A	3.48	0.63	A
7.	Religious education guides my moral behaviour	3.49	0.56	A	3.46	0.63	A	3.48	0.63	A
8.	Teaching of religious education shaped my ethical behaviour	3.46	0.59	A	3.32	0.59	A	3.39	0.59	A
Cluster Mean		3.49	0.09	SA	3.33	0.08	A	3.41	0.06	A

Key: A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree, $\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, DEC = Decision

The results in Table 1 show the mean and standard deviation scores and decision levels for each of the eight items, analyzed by gender and overall decision. This was done using the 4-point Likert scale. Most items' means ranged from 3.46 to 3.66, indicating a strong agreement in responses. Male students recorded higher means on most items, with particularly strong agreement on Item 5, positive behaviour influenced by religious education, mean 3.66, and Item 6, interactions with

people of different beliefs, mean 3.60. Female undergraduate students also agreed with the statements on item 8, which showed that teaching religious education shaped ethical behaviour, with a male mean of 3.46 and a female mean of 3.32. The overall means across items exceeded 3.41, reflecting agreement that religious education plays a meaningful role in developing honesty, respect, integrity, responsibility, positive behaviour, tolerance, and ethical guidance.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the role of religious education between male and female undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi.

Hypothesis Test Table 2

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	t-value	df	p-value (Sig.)	Decision
Male	65	3.49	0.09	10.75	128	0.001	Reject
Female	65	3.33	0.08	-	-	-	

The data in table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 10.75 yields a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 bench mark or significance level. Based on the result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This clearly shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean ratings of the role that religious education plays between Male and Female undergraduate students. Male students expressed a significantly higher positive perception of religious education's role in shaping ethical and moral values than their female counterparts. The difference experience may be due to variations in engagement and personal experiences.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that undergraduate students at Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, generally perceive religious education as playing a meaningful role in shaping their ethical and moral values. Most items, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religious education enhances honesty, respect, integrity, responsibility, positive behaviour, tolerance toward diverse beliefs, and ethical guidance in daily life. These results align with earlier assertions by Hyde (2024), and Elsayed et al. (2023), both of whom, in separate studies, agreed that religious education serves as a moral compass, helping young people, especially undergraduates, to navigate ethical

predicaments amid the digital age and societal pressures.

Male students recorded slightly higher mean ratings than female students, particularly in areas such as positive behaviour and interactions with people of different beliefs. The gender difference shows statistically significant, hence the rejection of the null hypothesis, which said there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female undergraduate students on the role of religious education in shaping the ethical and moral values in Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. The variation reflected some differences in how Male and Female students engage with religious learning, internalize moral lessons, or apply them in personal and social contexts. Similar patterns have been noted by Tian and Tang (2025), in their studies, where they noted that religious exposure influences prosocial attitudes differently across genders due to socialization processes and home upbringing.

The agreement on items related to integrity, accountability, and tolerance suggests that the B. A (Ed) Religious Studies successfully transmits core virtues that counter moral decadence prevalent in Nigerian universities, such as examination malpractice, cultism, and cyber fraud, as was examined by Ayeni (2025). This means that Students' teaching of religious studies is a veritable tool for the shaping of ethical behaviour among undergraduates' students of the university.

Moreover, the results confirm that religious education at the undergraduate level contributes meaningfully to ethical, and moral development, bridging personal faith, cultural heritage, and civic responsibility not just in Benue State, but in Nigeria at large. These outcomes support the view that religious education can serve as a vital tool for ethical revitalization in higher education if carefully followed, as noted by Akhyar et. al. (2024). The modest gender disparity highlights the need for more inclusive pedagogical approaches that address the specific needs of both male and female learners.

Conclusion

The role of religious education in shaping ethical and moral values among undergraduate students of Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, Benue State has been adjudged to be feasible because of its role played in shaping moral and ethical values and its emphasis on discipline among undergraduate students. Findings indicate that students perceive religious education as significantly contributing to the development of honesty, integrity, responsibility, compassion, and tolerance. The program appears effective in fostering

good behaviour and ethical decision-making, which are essential for personal growth, and national development in the face of moral challenges facing Nigerian tertiary institutions. Although a statistically significant gender difference emerged, with males expressing stronger agreement on most aspects, both groups demonstrated positive perceptions overall. These results affirm the value of religious education as a counterforce against moral decadence and a bridge among faith, culture, and civic ethics in a diverse society like Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be an increase in students' enrollment in religious studies education due to its excellence in character formation to produce graduates who would continue to promote moral values in society.
2. The government should encourage more universities to establish religious studies education, as doing so would help reduce ethical violations among undergraduate students.

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