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## Moral Decadence in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: An Evaluator Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The issue of Moral Decadence is becoming worrisome not only among the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions but in the world at large and it's gradually eroding the morals and values which has been of great benefit to people's greatness in the past. As an evaluator, this concern leads to the conceptualization of this study that assessed the causes of moral decadence, identified those to be blamed and provide probable solutions to the menace. Three research questions guided the study and descriptive survey research design was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four hundred undergraduate that participated in the study. The adapted and revalidated Moral Decadence Questionnaire (MODEQ) from Olorundare (2011) study was used and it yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.88. The results reveal that Parental negligence, negative mass media contents, peer group influences, among others are the causes of moral decadence and that Parents are the most to be blamed for the level of moral decadence. To curb this menace, effective parenting, engendering positive peer influence, among others can achieve the best result. Recommendation was made, that Parents should consciously contribute to the building of a morally viable Nigerian society by instilling strong moral values into their children.

## 1. Introduction

The word morality is derived from the Latin word '*Moralitas*' meaning 'manner, character, and proper behavior'. It is the differentiation of intentions, decision and actions between right and wrong. Morality involves what one ought to do, right and wrong, good and bad, values, justice, and virtues. It is taken to be important moral actions which should merit praise and rewards while immoral action is often taken to attract blame and punishment (<http://www.ethicalrealism.wordpress.com>). It can also be seen as relating to the

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notion of how individuals should behave in a given society. It is something ethical, good, right, proper, honorable, just and principled. A child that is morally upright behaves decently and honorably.

Eboh (2001) defines morality as the quality of being moral and to be moral is to conform to accepted good standard. Apparently, there are set of moral principles that guide the activities of the human person in the human society and these standard principles are anchored on the provisions of natural law. As such, the natural law obliges all human beings to do good and avoid evil. It helps to protect and foster values. According to Omoregbe (2003) moral principles are guides of the human conduct indicating certain kinds of actions and behaviour which should be avoided and certain other kinds of actions and behaviours which should be adopted. Without these sets of moral norms and values, the patterned order of the social system of the human society would be truncated. In other words, there is a need for the human being to be abreast with those norms that guarantee harmonious societal life.

Okwueze (2004) explains morality in terms of a specific form of social consciousness of awareness of your relatedness to others without which societal life would be impossible. Because, man is a social being that realizes himself in social relationships, he has a moral obligation therefore, to nurture that which is good that enhances harmonious co-existence and as well avoid that which breaks web of social relationships. Ugwu (2010) describes morality as “the astuteness of one’s conduct and behaviour which enhances good conduct and fair relationship”. Morality is neither found in isolation nor in the air but it is predicated upon the provisions of natural law. On this note, Monye (2010) remarked that morality does not suddenly appear out of nowhere. It is already embedded in the way of life an individual is born into, its attitudes, values and practices. Eboh (2001) added that “morality is founded on eco-justice and the dignity of the human person”. The above statements point to the level of societal organization, the home, and the social environment for these factors have inextricable influence on the moral formation of the human person.

However, the concept of morality has become a complicated issue in the midst of multi-cultural world of today. This without mincing words could be attributed to westernization and modernization. Some people define morality either subjectively or objectively perhaps on the basis of what they consider ethically right or wrong. In spite of the varied approaches to the concept of morality by different scholars, the bottom line is that morality is an indispensable concept in human society. Little wonder Iwenofu (2010) says “It nurtures in a person those virtues and values that make him a good person, thus developing his thinking skills of moral judgment about what is right and wrong. It influences an individual on how he thinks, feels and acts regarding issues of right and wrong”.

Where the human person upholds morality at a high esteem between the vertical and the horizontal web of inter relationship, the individual not only soars on a high pedigree, but the society also enjoys genuine growth and development. The contemporary Nigerian society is bedeviled by a myriad of challenges that

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threaten its social, political and economic well-being. One of these is the unprecedented downhill rush on the ladder of morality. This is a reflection of a steady and systematic decline in the social fabrics of the society. The step-motherly aversion to moral conscience which characterizes our social universe has given birth to several illegitimate offspring's such as political and economic corruption, social maladies and individual ethical disorientation.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) defines decadence as 'behavior, attitudes etc. which show a fall in standards, especially moral ones, and an interest in pleasure and enjoyment rather than more serious things. Decadence can be described as corrosive due to lack of ethical and moral traditions. It is a self-indulgence in which the person is willing to give oneself anything in order to be happy. Decadence is the decline or decay in a society, especially in its morals. A decadent often overdresses, flaunting wealth and indulging in all sorts of immoral acts. It is a state of immorality, corruption, self-indulgence, etc. (www.allafrica.com). Moral decadence is the deterioration or decline in standard of moral and ethical traditions.

It has been observed that the Nigerian society in spite of her rich natural and human resources is characterized by different kinds of social vices and ills. These vices are felt at different spheres of the society. They include corruption, bribery, embezzlement, misappropriation of public fund, injustice and so on with their end product as moral degeneration. The youths are the most devastatingly affected by these cankerworms that bedeviled our society. The above observed situation is indicative of the fact that Nigeria as a nation is eroded of morality. These ugly trends inhibit healthy human society. Some social analysts have attributed the problem with Nigeria as problem of leadership. Such assertion may not be disputed, but suffice it to say that the fundamental problem with the Nigerian society is lack of moral consciousness. The youth (the undergraduates) as the engine house and the future of the Nigerian society need to be acquainted with the basic moral values without which the nation would collapse and crash. Suffice to quickly mention at this point that the higher institutions of learning has a lot to do in this regard when it has been established that they are to produce graduate who are worthy in character and learning.

Man gets socialized and demonstrates his gift of rationality which distinguishes him from every other animal. The result of his interaction in the web of interrelationship could either be good or bad. The faculty in man that guarantees the evaluation of man's actions in terms of right or wrong, good or bad is what we refer to as morality. And this brings to fore, the essential dimension of man as a moral being. As a moral being with gift of rationality, he takes the onus for his actions and inactions by way of praise or blame. In the light of the moral perspective, human actions thrive in an already established modality fashioned by the very nature of human existence.

Records have shown that Nigeria, in spite of her astute human and natural resources, is morally bankrupt. There is an increase in willful moral dethronement and immoral enthronement in our society. The youths as part and parcel of the

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Nigerian society are not left out in this morass that bedevils Nigeria. The effects of moral decadence in the Nigerian society could be felt in every facet of the nation. The socio-political system and structure of the Nigerian society is anchored on the egocentric political ideology that is materialistic in orientation. The youths, in their quest to know and explore, become the most hit of the faulty and dysfunctional socio-political structure of the state in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer.

The factors that lie at the root of the practical causes of moral decadence include: individual nature, poor parenting, environmental factor, peer pressure, social status, cultural imperialism, information technology, inadequate religious orientation and coercion. The assertion by Obiefuna (2010) that in a sense, human beings are product of their environment cannot be argued. Peil in Obiefuna understands human beings as product of their environment in terms of the interaction that exists between the individual and the society. Apparently, both the individual and the society engage in symbiotic kind of relationship in which the human person contributes to the societal well-being and the society in turn builds the human persons that form a part of that society. This brings to limelight, the indispensability of an esteemed level of organization of the society by way of her social system and structure. Hence, if the socio-political structure and system of the society is standard, it would reflect in the overall life and activities of the people. In fact, the level of organization of any human society has a lot of influence on the people that make up that society.

An overview of the different facets of the Nigerian society would buttress more the situation on ground concerning the plight of the youth in a morally decadent society. Proverbs 29:2 says: "Show me a righteous ruler and I will show you a happy people. Show me a wicked ruler and I will show you a miserable people." Every rational being in Nigeria could attest to the above provisions of the scripture when the leadership record of the Nigerian state is evaluated. A good number of our political leaders are self-centered. In attempt to achieve their personal interests, they employ every possible means even if it entails murder. Disheartening enough, these political lords engage the youths as election thugs, riot promoters, character and human assassins as well as violence dispensers just to satisfy their personal interests. A good number of Nigerian youths have died while serving the ill-will of their political masters while some remain perpetual hooligans.

Coming generation scares me...Real Hard! While we have been busy talking about Nigeria of today, I wonder if we have spared a thought about how this country will be in the next twenty-five years... when in school, either in university or secondary school, had lofty dreams, both personal and societal. We were always motivated by nationalists and inventors who had impacted positively on the cause of humanity. We were voracious readers of novels and other books. We were always flaunting our knowledge of current affairs, inter-school quiz, literary and debating competition were the in-thing. Nowadays, students can hardly string a sentence together in English without errors. Fast forward 35 years on and you are shocked and disturbed. Have you ever spoken to or engaged a 20

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year-old boy? Ask him what motivates him and he is likely to mention music, hip-hop to be precise. He has hundreds of downloaded songs on his phone. The babes among them take pride in enticing men old enough to be their father on social media with buxomly physique. Ideas about good society, responsible family and good conduct do not motivate him. He just wants to make money because his friend who does yahoo is rich and rides a good car, her friend who has numerous 'aristos' drives an SUV! The things that interest him/her are things that do not add value. S/he has Google but never uses it for advancement of knowledge but to download porn and other inanities. Yet, in twenty years' time, they are the ones that will be contesting to become governors, senators, reps members and even president. They belong to the generation that does not care about morality. They belong to a generation that is motivated only by money and its acquisition. I wonder if we have ever spared a thought for how this country will look like under them. I told a man recently and these are my words: "if a guy who is in Lagos could use false pretense to obtain \$25,000 from someone in United States, what do you think will happen if such a guy becomes a state governor and is in charge of an allocation he does not even have to obtain under false pretense, which his state is statutorily entitled to?. How did we get into this mess? How can we get out of this predicament? I am worried, deeply worried. Are you? (Unknown author). Hence, this study assessed the causes of moral decadence among undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, ascertained those responsible for the level of moral decadence and provide probable solutions to the menace.

This study attempts to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the various perceived causes of moral decadence among the Nigerian undergraduates?
2. Who is to be blamed for the level of moral decadence among Nigerian undergraduates?
3. How can these perceived causes of moral decadence be curbed?

## **2. Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design; this design was chosen because the researcher intends not to manipulate any variable. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the sampled used for the study. The two universities used was selected purposively due to its proximity to the researcher (Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education). In all four (400) hundred undergraduate participated in the study. The only instrument used for data collection in the study was adapted from the study of Olorundare (2011) and titled Moral Decadence Questionnaire (MODEQ) and was validated with some set of undergraduate who were not part of the final sample used for the study.

MODEQ has three sections. Section A sought demographic information of the respondents. Section B consists of six items on causes of moral decadence among the undergraduate. Section C sought information on who is to be blamed for

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moral decadence among undergraduate while Section D sought information on possible ways of curbing moral decadence among the undergraduate. The instrument was given to two experts in the area of educational evaluation and psychometric for perusal to ascertain its validity. It was also trial tested on a sample of fifty undergraduate and the result yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.88 using Cronbach alpha statistic.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows Causes of Moral Decadence among the Undergraduate.

Table 1. Respondents' Opinion on Causes Of Moral Decadence Among The Undergraduate

S/N	Items	Frequency/Percentages			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	One major cause of moral decadence among the undergraduates is parental negligence	180 (45)	120 (30)	60 (15)	40 (10)
2	The negative impact of mass media content and programmes on the moral life of the undergraduate	190 (47.5)	115 (28.7)	75 (18.75)	10 (2.5)
3	Peer group influences create moral corruption among the undergraduate	166 (41.5)	136 (34)	75 (18.75)	23 (5.75)
4	Disobedience to sound teachings on moral issues creates a fertile ground for immoral acts or problems among the undergraduate	150 (37.5)	110 (27.5)	60 (15)	80 (20)
5	Joblessness among the youths stimulates the exhibition of immoral acts and behaviours	160 (40)	135 (33.75)	78 (19.5)	27 (6.75)
6	Greed and lust after worldly things lead young men and women to immoral acts	180 (45)	120 (30)	60 (15)	40 (10)

The result in the table above indicated that 300 out of 400 (75%) of the total respondents were in agreement with item 1. The table shows that, 100 (25%) disagreed in their opinion on the item. This implies that one major cause of moral decadence among the undergraduate in the tertiary institutions is parental negligence. This finding corroborate that of Ugoji (2011) who cited Kuye (2008) that Nigerian Parents should be blamed for the moral decadence in the country. According to Doggett (2009), the loss of a parent could cause a damaging effect on children most commonly because of the effect on attachment to the parent. Also, Olorundare (2011) further submitted that parents should spend more time with their wards so as to give them sense of security and confidence. There is a dire need to re-orientate the entire populace. Parents as well as their children all need to have a new focus.

The negative impact of mass media contents/programmes often creates harmful effects on the moral life of the undergraduate. This was seen in item 2 of the table where 305(76.2%) of the 400 respondents agreed while the remaining 85(20.8%) of the respondents disagreed with the opinion. The implication of this is that the negative mass media contents have harmful effects on the moral life of the undergraduate in our institutions of learning and this is in consonance with the

submission Onah and Nche (2014), that amidst all the benefits of social media, the phenomenon has inadvertently given rise to moral issues in Nigeria while they have fueled or deepened the level of immorality among youth in the country, new acts of immorality have cropped up as result of negative influences available on these social sites hence the need to check them.

In item 3 the result indicated that 302 (75.5%) of the respondents agreed with the item while 98 (24.5%) of the respondents disagreed with their opinions on the item. This implies that peer group influences create moral corruption among the youths. To some, delinquent peer exerts greater influence on other youth than family environment. Mmaduakonam and Mungai (2006), reported that as children grow more into adolescence, involvement with one peer and attraction of peer identification increases. They try to emancipate from parental control and to spend time together with their peers, hence the need for sound moral teaching both at home and also at every religious gathering.

Disobedience to sound religious teachings on moral issues was another cause of immorality among undergraduates with 260 (65%) of the respondents who agreed, while 140(35%) disagreed that disobedience to sound religious teaching did not contribute to this effect. A close examination of the result showed that disobedience to sound religious teachings on moral issues creates a fertile ground for immoral acts or problems among the undergraduates. Joblessness among the youths is another cause of immoral acts which shows that 295 (73.75%) of the respondents agreed, 105 (26.25%) disagreed in their expression to the opinion on the item. Similarly 300 (75%) of the respondents agreed that greed and lust after worldly things lead young men and women to immoral acts. 100 respondents representing (25%) disagreed with the opinion express on the item.

Table 2 reveals who is to be blamed for the level of moral decadence among Nigerian undergraduates.

Table 2. Respondents' Opinion on Who Should Be Blamed for Moral Decadence Among The Undergraduates

S/N	Groups	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Parental Negligence	153	38.25
2.	Religious Groups	98	24.5
3.	Peer Influence	130	32.5
4.	Loopholes in Government Policies	146	36.5
5.	Internet posed problems	88	22

One hundred and fifty (153) respondents representing 38.25% was of the opinion that Parents are the most to be blamed for the level of morale decadence among undergraduates, followed by the loopholes in Government Policies with one hundred and forty-six (146) respondents representing 36.5%. One hundred and thirty (130) undergraduates representing 32.5% believed that Peer group has greater influence upon Undergraduates behavior and moral values in higher institutions of learning. Ninety-eight (98) respondents representing 24.5% believed that Religious Groups/Organisation should be blamed for the level of

moral decadence among undergraduates and the youth because they failed to instill moral values in their worshippers and the remaining eighty-eight (88) respondents representing 22% believed that the accessibility to internet facilities contributed greatly to the level of moral decadence among undergraduates in higher institutions of learning.

Table 3 show how these perceived causes of moral decadence be curbed.

Table 3. Suggestions on How to Curb Moral Decadence Among Undergraduates in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

S/N	Groups	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Effective Parenting	256	64
2.	Sound Religious Teaching	220	55
3.	Engendering Positive Peer Influence	243	60.75
4.	Improve Government Policies	180	45
5.	Establish control on Internet Surfing	209	52.25

The result on table 3 revealed that two hundred and fifty-six (256) respondents representing 64% agreed that effective parenting can be used to curb moral decadence. Two hundred and twenty (220) undergraduates representing (55%) believed that sound religious teaching can also be used, however, two hundred and forty-three (243) representing (60.75%) submitted that engendering positive peer influence can be embraced for improvement, one hundred and eighty (180) respondents representing (45%) believed that improved Government Policies and readiness to serve the governs well will improve the level of moral decadence in the country while two hundred and nine (209) representing (52.25%) affirmed that control over internet surfing can achieve the best result for curbing the menace.

The result also revealed clearly that religious groups too have the social responsibility to reinstate faith in the divine because Uwalaka (2008) stated that religious organization is the society character molder and they have serious stake in the character and moral formation of the human persons as they have to enforce virtues that perfect individual. Religious clerics must through personal conduct rebuild confidence in moral uprightness. The school system must not only inculcate discipline in the students and teachers through verbal counseling, morality must be built into the curriculum for maximum impact.

Omoregbe (2003) a seasoned school administrator writes: "Not long ago, I met one of our great high School masters; a veteran in that high service. Where in your time-table do you teach religion? I asked him. We teach it in Arithmetic by accuracy. We teach it in history by humanity. We teach it in Geography by breadth of mind. We teach it in the playground by kindness to animals, by courtesy to servants, by good manners to one another and by truthfulness in all things. We teach it by showing the children that we, their elders are their friends not their enemies." From the above, it is evident that religious instruction does not end with I.R.S. or C.R.S. True Religious Education requires an all-embracing system where universal moral principles guide all actions.



Government too has a major stake in moral education that goes beyond remuneration of teachers or providing facilities for schools. It must, through the conduct of its officials, entrench respect for moral probity in the populace. At the corporate level, we need a new social and economic ideology to meet the challenges facing our Nation. This ideology does not have to be entirely new in its contents. It may be a modification of the Western concept of democracy plus piety, in line with our worldview, vision of society, value-framework and moral ethos. What I am saying is that the most appropriate model-governance with piety and moral conscience must replace the most applauded, but the least properly applied system popularly known as democracy because our quest for social and economic justice has not completed and our failure to achieve it has proved to be the most tragic theme of the contemporary Nigerian history. We are not alone in this. The quest for good governance is a global phenomenon.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it was concluded that the level of moral decadence among undergraduates requires urgent attention and that if all stakeholders will do needful in curbing these menace, there bound to be improve not only in the education sector alone but in all the facet of life and that after graduation they will be able to contribute positively to the development of the economy.

#### **Recommendations**

To actually control or curb the moral decadence in Nigeria, the following have been recommended:

1. Parents should guide against social media obsession among their children, by ensuring that they are not allowed much time to surf the internet or their phones especially at home.
2. Parents should also consciously contribute to the building of a morally viable Nigerian society by instilling strong moral values into their children.
3. Parents should instill in their children the teaching of morality and social values.
4. The traditional media like the television and radio broadcast as well as newspapers should through their routine activities discourage the abuse of social media as well as the internet facilities available to them.

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