

Omoluabi Ethics and Educational Leadership: A Model for Reducing Corruption in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Corruption in the Nigerian Education system, from examination malpractice to the abuse of funds, is not only a profound failure of governments, but also a fundamental failure of nature and values. The report states that dominant western management models imported into Nigerian education administration are poorly equipped to deal with this moral crisis, as they often favour technical efficiency over honorable education. Based on the philosophical conception of omoluabi in Yoruba, the ideal person characterised by integrity, character (iwà), hard work (I) and social responsibility, this article proposes a normative model of breeding management. By pursuing a conceptual analysis of omoluabi and in contrast to the symptoms of corruption in Nigeria, the newspaper notes that a leadership framework settled in this indigenous ethic can serve as a more effective remedy. Finally, he explained the importance of a leader in omoluabi in recruiting, training, and evaluating education officials and called for a colonization approach to education management that rated its fibre at the heart of politics.

Keywords: omoluabi, pedagogical leadership, rottenness, tugendethik, colonial theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Moral Crisis in Educational Management in Nigeria.

The educational system of Nigeria is in depth crisis. Although infrastructural shortages and underinvestment are frequently brought to the fore in policy documents and in discourse in the country, there is a much more pernicious disease at the core of the problem: a systemic failure of morals and honesty. The breakdown appears on every spheres of learning, starting at primary schools all the way to universities, covering a substantial spectrum of corrupt activities which are now firmly rooted in the system. The result is an education system that gives certificates but not so much as skills, values and attitude that makes one a useful member of the society.

It is reported that the extensive nature of Nigerian corruption across the education sector has been characterized as a disease that has systematically

impaired its governance, people-trust and development, and education is no exception (Chukwuma, 2024). The ethical scandal goes beyond financial fraud to sexual harassment, so-called sextortion, which is now one of the common types of corruption in gender in Nigerian universities (Transparency International, 2023). A study that investigates the practices of corruption in the Nigerian universities has revealed a set of common behaviours, such as misappropriation of research grants and scholarships, embezzlement of funds, mismanagement of funds, forgery of admission, malpractice during examinations, and forging of certificates (Okojie & Isah, 2024). Such practices are not stray events but institutional flaws that erode the integrity of institutions and quality of higher education delivery (Okojie & Isah, 2024).

Corruption and governance in Nigeria give rise to the formation of an upsetting cycle: corruption influences governance, which consequently removes not only deteriorates the standard, purposes, and roles of

education in the economy but also weakens them (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). This cycle makes graduates who are ill-equipped in making crucial decisions, and are not able to innovate and support critical infrastructure (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). The most frightening fact perhaps is that corruption in the upper ranks of leadership makes dishonesty prevalent in society. The last series of certificate scandals among the members of the government, have demonstrated the moral decay that is becoming increasingly entrenched across Nigeria, and those who are supposed to provide some moral guidance and direction in it has become the very generator of the moral decline of the country (Obi, 2024).

Education corruption has a much further-reaching effect than just to the direct victims themselves as it leaves a channel through which a poorly-informed education leads to a greater social malfunction. The education system in Nigeria has been cited as a major factor in compelling the young to engage in cybercrime due to its corruption (Adebayo, 2023). Rogue officials who steal monies to be spent on schools and universities leave schools in shambles and young people without the necessary tools to make it in the market place (Adebayo, 2023). More recent examples are the embezzlement of ₦10.2 billion that was to be spent on school refurbishment projects in Ogun State and the suspension of the Executive Secretary of the National Senior Secondary Education Commission due to allegations of financial embezzlement (Premium Times, 2024).

Examination malpractice has been labeled the scourge of Nigerian education and rectitude (Bamgbose, 2024). The teachers, principals, examiners, and invigilators often join the conspiracy to conduct massive cases of cheating in national and internal exams. Nigerians are unable to prove their certificates, most of the students are educated rather than learned and results they have received upon passing national exams and institutions of higher learning are usually made, not earned (Bamgbose, 2024). The survey of second household survey by the Chatham House Africa Programme indicated that more than 87 percent of all respondents felt that parents should not bribe in order to pass their exams, yet more parents declare bribing since they believe it allows their children to pass (Chatham House, 2023).

The severity of the crisis was revealed by recent scandals. Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission disclosed that 71.2 billion of 100 billion in student loan schemes guaranteed by the Nigeria Education Loan Fund are yet to be accounted and more than 51 education institutions have been involved in unapproved deduction (ICPC, 2025). Professor Attahiru Jega who is the former INEC Chairman has issued a warning that universities in Nigeria are experiencing a crisis of governance which is threatening their capacity of providing quality education, research and innovation (Jega, 2025). Weak leadership

recruitment, inadequate funding, political interference, corruption, weak accountability, and adversarial labour relations are crippling the system (Jega, 2025).

Over decades, these educational ills have been met by a response, which has been more or less technical. Reforms have been made in an effort to inject more money, reformed the curriculum or imported western models of management like Total quality management or transactional leadership in a bid to instill efficiency and accountability (Punch Newspapers, 2025). But these models, created in the environment of individualism and the industrial era, most of the time turn out to be insufficient in the presence of the strongly-established communal and patrimonial processes (Punch Newspapers, 2025). They focus on the consequences of poor performance, lack of money without working on the underlying problem: the lack of moral virtues in people controlling the system (Owolabi, 2017).

This article argues that the Nigerian educational ills can only be cured by doing a paradigm shift, where technical solutions are no longer considered; rather building on virtue ethics (Dada, 2018). It suggests restoring to indigenous philosophical sources to re-build the concept itself of what it is to be an educational leader (Punch Newspapers, 2025). In particular, it discusses the Yoruba notion of Omoluabi which is a philosophical and cultural archetypal person illustrating the ideal character of good demeanor (Faleye, 2020; Dada, 2018). When we apply the Omoluabi ethics to educational leadership theory and practice, then we will create a culturally relevant model that can help us curtail corruption and nurture integrity internally (Isiaka, 2023).

2. Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives:

1. To critically analyze philosophical underpinnings of the concept of Omoluabi and trace the main ethical virtues of the concept as applied to the educational leadership in Nigeria.
2. To develop a normative model of Omoluabi-informed educational leadership and to show the possibility of being a culturally grounded measure in confronting the moral crisis of corruption in the management of Nigerian schools.

Research Questions:

1. What are the philosophical underpinnings and inner ethical virtues embedded in Yoruba notion of Omoluabi, and how such virtues can be perceived as applied to the role and responsibilities of an educational leader?
2. What is the chance of transforming the ethical model of Omoluabi, into a normative model of educational leadership that offers a culturally relevant alternative to Western managerial practices in deterring corruption in Nigerian schools?

Research Questions:

1. What are the philosophical underpinnings, and ethical virtues present in the concept of Omoluabi by the Yoruba people, and how the answers can be next related to the role and duties of an educational leader?
2. How would the Omoluabi ethical model be transformed into a normative model of educational leadership that offers either a culturally relevant alternative to Western managerial strategies of curbing corruption in Nigerian schools?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Philosophical foundations of Omoluabi.

The Yoruba idea of Omoluabi is the embodiment of the ideal individual and the best standards of moral integrity and the social duty of the Yoruba humanism and ethics (Dasylva, 2021). Omoluabi is based on Ifa tradition and it serves as an overall philosophical hermeneutic in indigenous Yoruba culture that delimits values. Analysis by scholars reveals that there are some fundamental pillars of the Omoluabi ethos. Faleye (2020) outlines four main aspects; ayé (the world), òrun (the spiritual realm), isàré (work), and iwà (character). Out of them, iwà (character) stands as the most elementary as it is indicated to be the very nature of a being.

Through comparative studies of philology, significant parallels have been made between the ethics of Omoluabi and Western philosophical studies. Dada (2018) discusses the similarity between virtue ethics proposed by Aristotle and the Yoruba ethical concept of Omoluabi, stating that the two schools believe that character is an activity that is acquired through practice and social support. Gbadegesin (1991) also explains that according to the Yoruba beliefs, a man does not enter the world with personality, he gathers it in the process of socialization, education and deliberate effort.

3.2 Crisis of Corruption in the Management of Nigerian Education.

The problem of endemic corruption in the Nigerian educational institutions is well-documented in the literature. Okoye, Coastman, and Ukachukwu (2025) study how corruption, governance, and higher education relate in Nigeria and discover that corruption does not promote socioeconomic development since ill-equipped graduates do not have the capability to be innovative or sustain crucial infrastructure. Ololube (2020) explores the question of whether the nature of institutional leadership is a core of the quality of higher education management, discovering that the failure of applicable character of leaders justifies the dysfunctional nature of higher education in Nigeria. The effects of corruption in education go beyond the dysfunction inside of institutions and can create a cycle of morally corrupt action that fuels even further development of the society (Bamgbose, 2024).

3.3 Decolonial Turn and Indigenous Ethical Frameworks.

Decolonization of educational theory and practice in the African contexts is being called upon in a growing literature. The Dagbani Indigenous philosophy of Bilchiinsi is the concept put forward by Ahmed, Ahmed, and Abudu (2025) to turn teaching in Ghana into a relationship-oriented pedagogy. In the Nigerian context, in particular, scholars have suggested the use of Omoluabi philosophy in governing institutions. Dada (2018) suggests that the lack of being moral in Nigeria is the reason why the country has developed a neo-patrimonial system of bypassing constitutional guidelines by political elites. According to Faleye (2020), it is postulated that the Omoluabi concept ought to be rejuvenated among Nigerian administrators as the foundation of the administration of the people.

3.4 The Literary Diversity.

Although the scholarly literature has already demonstrated the philosophical richness of the Omoluabi concept, and reports about the crisis of corruption in Nigerian education, no work has hitherto created a systematic and normative model of Omoluabi-based educational leadership, designed with specific reference to the context of the Nigerian school management. The article fills that void.

4. Conceptual Clarifications

Omoluabi: A Yoruba philosophical notion of the perfect individual of good character. Etymologically, it refers to a child who is born as a result of the lord of character meaning that virtue is developed by tending (Faleye, 2020). It represents four pillars, Iwà (character), Owo (respect), Inúre (goodwill), and Oto / Ídadjodododo (truth and justice).

Educational Leadership: Leading the educational organizations towards the accomplishment of the goals, including the principals and administrators of all ranks. This paper is based on its ethical aspect-how leaders construct the institutional ethics and exemplify values to the school community (Ololube, 2020).

Corruption: This involves the misuse of power vested in one with the aim of earning personal gain. It takes various forms in education: financial, academic, administrative, and systemic (Okojie and Isah, 2024). This research appreciates corruption as institutional moral failure that manifest lack of moral character.

Virtue Ethics: A philosophical tradition that values character more than rules of duty or outcomes, i.e. What sort of a person cannot I become? (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2023). In this research, virtue ethics is utilized as the prism that can be used to analyze Omoluabi (Dada, 2018).

Decolonial Theory: Critiques the historicity of colonialism in the production of knowledge and institutions, criticizing the authority of Western epistemology and the anthropocentrism of knowledge,

and urging the reclamation of pre-colonial knowledge (Mignolo, 2011; waThiong'o, 1986).

Normative Model: Gives rules about the way things should be which determine ideals on which practice should be judged (Frankena, 1973).

5. Theoretical Framework

The research is rooted in two, compatible, theoretical approaches: Virtue Ethics Theory and Decolonial Theory.

5.1 Virtue Ethics Theory

Virtue ethics does not focus on duties and consequences but on character and virtue (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2023). Based in the Aristotelian thinking, it is a question posed, what kind of person shall I be? (Aristotle, 350 BCE/2009). According to Aristotle, virtue ethics characterizes the virtue as the traits required to attain eudaimonia (human flourishing) (Kraut, 2022). Virtues are learned by practice, by getting used to their action, and through societal reflection (Annas, 2011). The focus lies upon phronesis (practical wisdom) the skill of evil deed in certain circumstances (Russell, 2014).

Omoluabi is a native African form of virtue ethics, which has some of the basic similarities with Aristotelianism (Adebowale and Onayemi, 2016). Dada (2018) shows that the two traditions consider character to be shaped by practice and reinforcement in communities. Virtue ethics will offer the means of the corruption examination as the failure of character, and the establishment of the virtues in Omoluabi, and the establishment of character by habituation and community.

5.2 Decolonial Theory

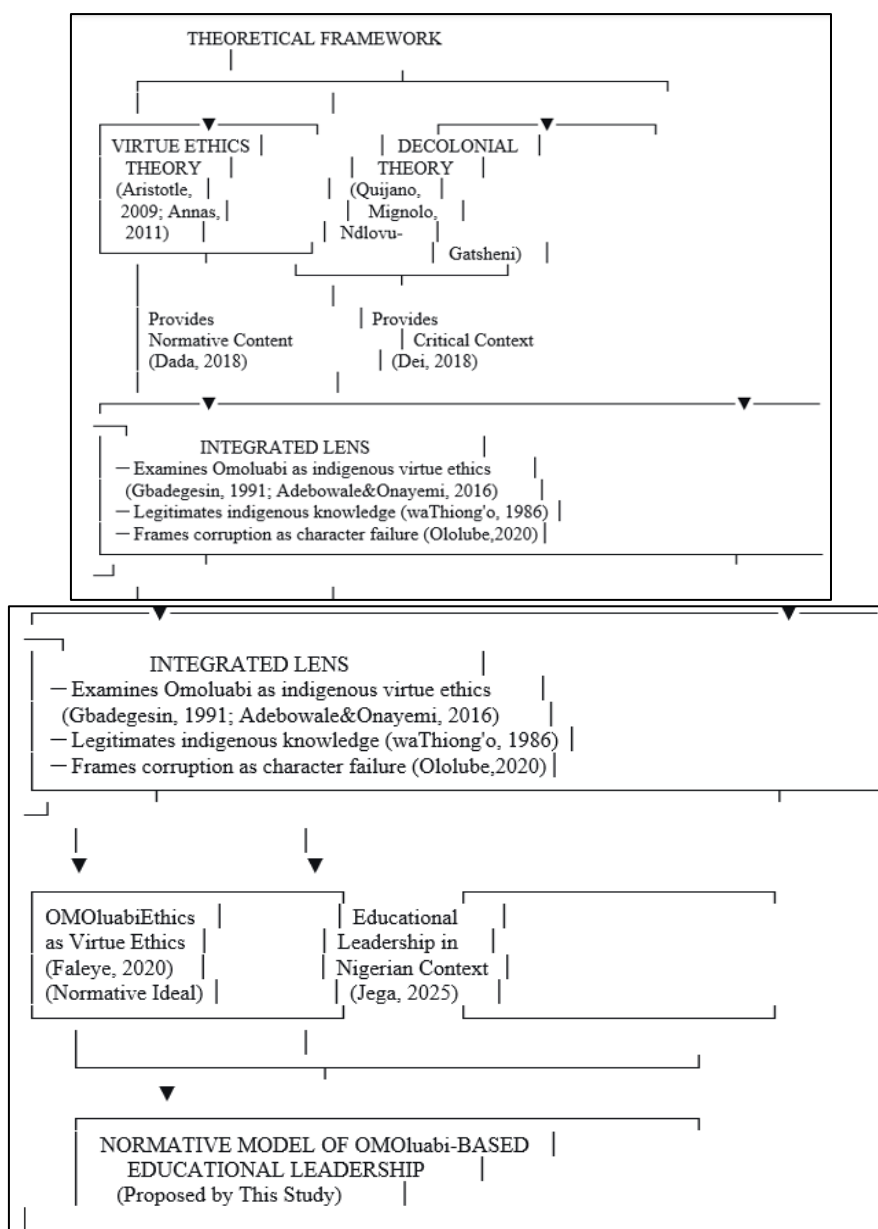
Decolonial theory is an argument against the legacies of colonialism within knowledge production and institutionalize (Mignolo, 2011). The same case is observed in former colonies of European countries that were never free of the influence of coloniality, that is, the existence of power and knowledge structures rooted in the era of European colonization (Quijano, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). What is most important is that the scholars provide an explanation of how colonial institutions construct knowledge production and epistemics (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007). Decoloniality aims to break down the systems of power that give privilege to Western forms of epistemologies, at the expense of Indigenous knowledge systems (waThiong'o, 1986; Smith, 2012).

Decolonial theory is an approach to education that challenges the Western hegemony in curriculums and managerial patterns (Dei, 2018; Jansen, 2019). Nigerian education, as noted by Olaniyan and Martins (2025), emphasizes western forms of knowledge dominating over the indigenous knowledge. The decolonial theory presents the structure on how to be precise to Western managerial hegemony, authenticate indigenous knowledge, seek epistemic justice, and provide cultural relevance.

5.3 Integration of the Two Theories

Virtue ethics provides prescriptive content as the virtues that teachers run should embody. Colonial theory also provides a critical context to she a justification for the management of indigenous resources. In common, they back the key argument: omoluabi-based management provides a cultural framework to direct corruption in nigerian should (false 2020; ash et al, 20203)

Schematic Representation



6. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study is philosophical with the strategies of conceptual analysis and normative argumentation; which are among the normative methods of the philosophy of education. Conceptual analysis entails the thorough analysis and explanation of some main concepts, Omoluabi, corruption, educational leadership, virtue ethics, and decolonial theory to determine what they mean, their assumptions, and how they relate to one another. Normative argument is also used in the study going beyond description of what to come up with what ought to be. By critically evaluating the available literature, this paper develops a well-constructed argument on the rationale behind the need to integrate Omoluabi ethics in leadership education. It is purely a non-empirical methodology based on textual analysis, philosophical argument and synthesis of current literature.

7. Philosophical Discourse: The Omoluabi Ethos and The Leadership of Education.

7.1 The Ontological Grounding: 5wà On the Ground as the Ground of Being.

Ìwà has a central place in Yoruba ontology. It is etymologically related to wà (to exist) and implies that character is not only an attribute but mode of being (Gbadegesin, 1991). As the saying goes, "Iwalalewo-walCaptivity is beauty or deeper, "Life itself is beauty" (Faleye, 2020). The Yoruba ontology does not regard a person (èniyàn) as being defined by biological presence, but by moral status (Dada, 2018). In the case of educational leadership, this means that leadership cannot be narrowed to technical competencies. They have become the leader, as a result of moral development (Ololube, 2020).

What is known as the Epistemology of Virtue is 7.2: The Epistemology of Virtue: How Character is Known and Cultivated.

Omoluabi is a unique epistemology, whose focus lies in experiential learning, observation, and communal validation (Adebowale and Onayemi, 2016). Apprenticeship and habituation are used to get moral knowledge instead of abstract teaching (Annas, 2011). This is summed up in the notion of *ekó ilé* (home training): one is made a character through correction and example at home and in the community (Gbadegesin, 1991). The character is not an individual judgment but is collectively confirmed (Faleye, 2020). In the case of leadership, character has to be expressed in the form of uniform behavior that is visible to the teachers, students, and community (Ololube, 2020).

7.3 Axiology of Omoluabi: The Four Pillars of Virtue.

underline 5w (Character): The core virtue consistency is the interviewing of inner disposition and external action, wholeness or integrity (Dada, 2018). An Omoluabi leader is consistent in all aspects, developing a trust of integrity (Faleye, 2020).

Respect: òwò (Respect): Strong reverence to the dignity of all human beings (Gbadegesin, 1991). An Omoluabi leader approaches everyone with dignity and establishes a new environment where there are no instances of intimidation or harassment and sexual harassment is directly addressed (Transparency International, 2023).

Inurere (Goodwill): Will to do the good of others, at the cost of self (Dada, 2018). Any Omaluabi leader is driven by interests in people (students and staff) and not interests in enriching him or herself, which opposes the appropriation of funds (Okojie&Isah, 2024).

Ọtọ and Ìdájọ ododo (Truth and Justice): Duty to honesty and justice (Faleye, 2020). Contrary to nepotism, an Omoluabi leader promotes promotions based on merit, accurately grades, and disciplines his subjects, and maintains honesty in reports (Nwankwo& Obi, 2023).

7.4 The Virtues Holistically Incorporation.

These virtues make a complete set (Dada, 2018). The choice of some and the lack of the others cannot be selective and used by one to be an Omoluabi. Leadership development aims at producing leaders whose being is virtuous (Annas, 2011).

7.5 Omoluabi and the Western Managerial Models Critique.

Western managerial ideals have inherent shortcomings (Punch Newspapers, 2025): they are technical and not ethical (Ololude, 2020); individualistic and not relational (Gbadegesin, 1991); epistemic

colonialism (waThiong'o, 1986; Mignolo, 2011); and a personal and public

7.6 Onto a Normative Model of Omoluabi Educational Leadership.

A leader of Omolubischool would: demonstrate Inuwa by acting with integrity; demonstrate Owosako by treating everyone with dignity; demonstrate Inuturrere by being a leader exemplified by service to the community; and demonstrate Ototoko and Idajokoododo by doing justice.

8. FINDINGS

The research on Africa ethic philosophy confirms that the ethical framework presented by Omoluabi is an African based virtue ethic which organizes the aspects around four interrelated pillars: *Ìwà* (character), *Ọwọ Data* (respect), *Inurere* (goodwill), and *5toto/ 5dapododo* (truth and justice). As the analysis shows, corruption within the Nigerian educational management, such as embezzlement, exam cheating, falsifying certificates, and admissions fraud, nepotism, and sexual harassment is a structural failure of character rather than purely technical failure.

The models of Western managerial practices that have been imported to Nigeria are ineffective in managing this moral crisis since they are technical and not ethical, individualistic and not relational, culturally specific but introduced as neutral, and that they separate between the public and the private self. Conversely, every virtue of Omoluabi is the explicit opposite of certain corrupt practices: *Ìwà* is the antithesis of embezzlement through integrity; *Ọwọ* is the antithesis of sexual harassment therefore through great respect of dignity; *Inurere* is the antithesis of money diversion through service orientation; *4toto/ idajoododo* is the antithesis of examination malpract

The research also concludes that teaching Omoluabi leaders involves the holistic character development as a result of mentorship, the validation of their characters by the community, habituation, and incorporation of the self in the society and the private self and not only through technical training. This model requires tangible policy changes in hiring, curriculum change, assessment of performance, professional growth, and mentorship system to institutionalize.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the applicability of Omoluabi ethics in the leadership of education provides a culturally-based methodology in dealing with corruption within Nigerian schools. Corruption is a character failure in its purest and sweetest sense, to be correct, and the western managerial paradigms have failed so miserably as they do not focus on achieving ethical conditioning. The four pillars of Omoluabi *Ìwà* (character), *Ọwọ* (respect), *Inurere* (goodwill) and

Ọtọ/Ídajeododo (truth and justice) are a direct counter to certain corrupt acts like embezzlement, nepotism, etc. To nurture such leaders, the holistic process of character development by me means that leaders are molded through mentoring and community verification, and policy changes in recruiting, curriculum, and assessing leaders. The Omoluabi model is this: by retrieving indigenous philosophical capital, educational administrators will no longer be handmaids to bureaucracy, but moralizing agents and officials of justice. Nigeria can only remedy the ills in its education system and develop a better society by producing leaders of character.

10. Recommendations

First and foremost, the recruitment and selection of educational administrators needs to change by reevaluating their techniques to evaluate character by the means of community feedback and ethical reasoning interviews instead of basing on seniority and credentials alone.

Second, the leadership preparation programming must be made decolonized with the usage of the local ethical framework such as Omoluabi presented as a part thereof so that the upcoming leaders are firmly informed about the culturally appropriate virtue ethics.

Third, performance evaluation systems should include 360-degree anonymous feedback from teachers, students, and parents, not only to control the technical solutions of the demonstration of the virtues of omoluabi by administratorsìwà, òwò, inú were, and òtọ/ídájọ ordo.

Fourth, a formal mentoring infrastructure must be put in place that involves issuing leaders with experienced integrity principles that create characters through sustainable observation, headed reflection and collective substantiation.

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