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Discipline and Virtue: A Platform for National Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the erosion of discipline and virtue as foundational impediments to sustainable national development in Nigeria. The problem arose from the persistent contradiction between the country's extensive moral, religious, educational and institutional structures and the continuing prevalence of corruption, weak accountability, poor civic conduct, declining work ethics and fragile public trust. The study assessed the influence of discipline and virtue on responsible citizenship, ethical leadership and institutional performance, and evaluated the contributions of families, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies to moral formation. The study was anchored on Aristotle's Virtue Ethics Theory, which emphasises habituation, practical wisdom and the cultivation of excellent character for the common good. A qualitative approach was adopted, drawing data from scholarly books, journal articles, government publications, policy documents and credible reports, which were subjected to content analysis. The findings revealed that families, schools and religious institutions retained substantial moral influence, but their impact was inconsistent because of poor role-modelling, materialism and contradictory practices. Workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies also possessed strong transformative potential, although corruption, selective sanctions and political interference constrained institutional credibility. The study concluded that Nigeria's developmental crisis was partly moral and institutional, arising from the failure to translate ethical ideals into sustained public conduct. It recommended coordinated value-based education, exemplary leadership, impartial sanctions, whistleblower protection and transparent accountability systems across all social institutions.

Keywords:

Discipline, virtue, citizenship, ethical leadership, national development.

Introduction

National development in Nigeria cannot be sustained solely through abundant natural resources, ambitious economic policies, political reforms or the expansion of physical infrastructure. It also depends significantly on

the character of citizens and the willingness of both leaders and followers to pursue collective goals with responsibility, restraint and consistency. Discipline serves as the internal guide through which Nigerians regulate their conduct, respect legitimate authority, fulfil civic

obligations and avoid behaviours that threaten national progress. Virtue strengthens this process by promoting honesty, justice, courage, diligence, compassion and commitment to public service. Together, discipline and virtue transform citizenship from the passive enjoyment of rights into active participation in nation-building.

According to Gargarella (2022), democratic institutions become more effective when citizens possess civic virtue and when political structures deliberately encourage responsible participation. In the Nigerian context, this implies that constitutional provisions, public policies and development programmes may achieve limited results when citizens and public officials lack moral responsibility and respect for established rules. Ratti and Graves (2021) similarly argued that ethical conduct should extend beyond mere obedience to regulations and involve the cultivation of moral awareness, sound judgement and responsible habits. Therefore, laws, sanctions and anti-corruption agencies alone cannot guarantee Nigeria's development unless leaders and citizens demonstrate integrity, self-control and genuine commitment to the common good. Therefore, this study was justified by the need to examine how discipline and virtue can be translated from moral ideals into practical values that strengthen responsible citizenship, ethical leadership, institutional trust and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's successive development plans, institutional reforms, anti-corruption campaigns and civic-orientation programmes, the country continues to experience corruption, weak accountability, electoral misconduct, poor work ethics, disregard for public property and declining commitment to the common good. These challenges raise serious concerns because national development cannot be achieved through infrastructure, economic policies and administrative reforms alone while the moral values required to sustain such initiatives remain weak. Cheeseman et al. (2021) argued that elections in Africa operate within a *moral economy* in which civic virtue, public expectations and political conduct

influence the legitimacy of the state. Although their study provides useful insights into electoral morality, it gives limited attention to the everyday expression of discipline in Nigerian families, schools, workplaces, communities and public institutions. Ogunyemi et al. (2022) also observed that ethical compliance and accountable governance are essential to effective public-sector performance in Africa. However, their work focuses largely on institutional ethics without sufficiently explaining how personal discipline and civic virtue can jointly influence national development. Similarly, Khanal et al. (2022) described civil-service integrity as central to efficient public-service delivery, yet their evidence was drawn from Nepal and may not adequately explain Nigeria's distinct political, social and institutional realities. This separation between individual character and institutional performance therefore remains a major practical and scholarly concern.

Another concern is the assumption that ethical leadership automatically produces disciplined citizens and effective institutions. Al Halbusi et al. (2023) argued that ethical leadership improved employee behaviour most significantly where moral identity and self-control were already strong. Although this finding is valuable, its organisational emphasis does not adequately explain how discipline and virtue can be cultivated among Nigerians before they enter employment or public office. Zahari et al. (2024) observed that ethical leadership can promote sustainable organisational culture within public institutions, but their emphasis on organisational outcomes provides limited understanding of broader national issues such as social trust, patriotism, peaceful coexistence and responsible citizenship.

Nevertheless, commitment to an organisation does not necessarily translate into commitment to Nigeria's national development. The question is: can Nigeria attain sustainable development when citizens obey laws only under supervision? Can public institutions command trust when leaders preach integrity but tolerate favouritism, impunity and misuse of public resources? Some scholars have attributed underdevelopment mainly to poverty,

inadequate funding, weak capacity and political interference (Khanal et al., 2022; Makumbe, 2025). While these explanations are relevant, they may underestimate the extent to which indiscipline, dishonesty and moral compromise weaken policy implementation and intensify institutional failure.

The major gap, therefore, lies in the limited integration of discipline and virtue as complementary foundations for national development in Nigeria. Previous studies have examined electoral morality, public-sector ethics, civil-service integrity, ethical leadership and organisational citizenship as separate issues, but few have connected them across individual, institutional and societal levels within the Nigerian context. This fragmentation creates uncertainty about whether virtue should be understood merely as personal morality, civic responsibility, leadership competence or an institutional value.

In the same way, discipline is often reduced to punishment, obedience and external control, while its broader dimensions, including self-regulation, punctuality, diligence, responsibility, perseverance and respect for lawful procedures, receive inadequate attention. Much of the existing research has also been organisation-specific or conducted outside Nigeria, thereby limiting its direct application to the country's developmental realities. Consequently, scholarship has not sufficiently explained how families, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies can collectively cultivate disciplined and virtuous conduct without encouraging authoritarianism or empty moral rhetoric. This study therefore seeks to fill the gap by examining how discipline and virtue can shape responsible citizenship, ethical leadership, institutional trust and sustainable development in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine "Discipline and Virtue: A Platform for National Development in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine how discipline and virtue influence responsible citizenship, ethical leadership and institutional performance in Nigeria.

2. To identify the roles of families, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies in promoting discipline and virtue for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Discipline

Discipline is a foundational concept in personal development, organisational effectiveness and national progress because it regulates conduct, directs effort and aligns individual choices with accepted goals and standards. It is expressed through self-control, consistency, responsibility and willingness to obey legitimate rules even when external supervision is absent. Michaelides and Durkee (2021) described discipline as a learner's capacity to sustain purposeful behaviour and effort towards achievement, distinguishing it from the broader processes of self-regulation. Billore et al. (2023) viewed discipline through self-regulation, defining it as the management of impulses, thoughts and behaviour in ways that advance chosen goals and support responsible social functioning. Hofmann (2024) argued that discipline involves prioritising valued long-term objectives over competing immediate desires, while also recognising that social environments can either strengthen or weaken such control. Tekin (2024) observed that academic discipline consists of organised, persistent and controlled behaviour that enables learners to resist distractions and maintain commitment to educational responsibilities.

Similarly, Michaelides and Durkee (2021) opined that disciplined behaviour is more directly connected to sustained effort and task completion than general motivational intention. Taken together, these definitions present discipline as purposeful behavioural control, perseverance and conformity to standards required for individual and collective achievement sustainably.

However, existing definitions restrict discipline to educational achievement, workplace compliance or resistance to temptation, giving inadequate attention to its moral, civic and developmental dimensions. Dang (2024)

argued that self-control should not be treated as a fixed trait because disciplined action also depends on strategies, situations and opportunities. This position broadens the concept, yet it does not fully explain how discipline promotes ethical citizenship, institutional responsibility and national development. Billore et al. (2023) observed that self-regulation is essential to a well-functioning society, but their formulation concentrates on goal-directed behaviour and public policy rather than the moral obligations linking citizens to the common good. Erduran Tekin (2024) viewed discipline mainly through academic persistence, leaving limited room for public accountability, lawful conduct and collective welfare. This gap creates the need for a definition combining internal restraint, moral responsibility, social order and development-oriented action.

In this study, discipline is defined as the voluntary and consistent capacity of individuals and institutions to regulate conduct, resist improper impulses, fulfil duties and uphold ethical and lawful standards in pursuit of personal goals and the common good. This definition treats discipline not as coercive obedience, but as conscious responsibility that strengthens trust, productivity, institutional effectiveness and national development

Virtue

Virtue is a central concept in moral philosophy, psychology and leadership because it explains how enduring qualities of character guide people towards morally excellent conduct, sound judgement and human flourishing. It moves ethical inquiry beyond isolated actions by examining the dispositions, motives and values from which behaviour proceeds. Fowers et al. (2021) described virtue as morally valuable behaviour that is stable, properly motivated and responsive to significant situations. Sandis (2021) viewed virtues as enduring dispositions through which people perceive circumstances, experience appropriate emotions and act for morally relevant reasons. Nguyen and Crossan (2022) argued that virtue is embedded in character and supplies the internal capacities required for moral awareness, judgement, intention and ethical

decision-making. Doukas et al. (2022) observed that virtue comprises cultivated qualities of character that orient professionals towards humane, caring and responsible practice. Krettenauer (2023) opined that virtue develops through the interaction of moral identity, motivation and repeated action, enabling individuals to integrate moral commitments into their understanding of who they are. Collectively, these definitions portray virtue as more than occasional goodness; it is a cultivated, dependable and intelligently motivated orientation that harmonises perception, emotion, reasoning and action in the pursuit of worthy human and social ends collectively.

Although these definitions illuminate virtue as a stable and morally motivated disposition, they primarily locate it within individual character, professional practice or personal decision-making. Consequently, they do not adequately explain how virtue operates as a public resource in societies facing corruption, institutional weakness, social distrust and developmental stagnation. Fowers et al. (2021) emphasised stable, value-directed conduct, while Nguyen and Crossan (2022) concentrated on character within organisational decision-making. Doukas et al. (2022) focused on healthcare education, and Krettenauer (2023) examined the acquisition of virtue through moral identity. These perspectives are valuable, yet their specialised settings leave a conceptual gap concerning the relationship among personal morality, civic responsibility, institutional integrity and national development. A broader definition is therefore required to capture both the private and public expressions of virtuous character. In this study, virtue is defined as the cultivated and enduring disposition of individuals, leaders and institutions to perceive, judge, feel and act rightly by consistently upholding integrity, justice, courage, compassion, responsibility and the common good. This definition extends virtue beyond moral excellence by presenting it as a civic and institutional capacity that guides ethical leadership, strengthens accountability, builds social trust and mobilises citizens towards

inclusive and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

National Development

National development is an important concept in development studies because it describes the broad transformation through which a country improves the welfare, capabilities and collective prospects of its people. It extends beyond increases in national income to include institutional effectiveness, social inclusion, human freedom, technological progress and environmental sustainability. Todaro and Smith (2020) described development as a multidimensional process involving changes in social structures, popular attitudes, institutions, economic growth, inequality and poverty. Frankema (2022) viewed development as the expansion of people's freedoms and their capacity to make meaningful choices by removing material and institutional barriers. Pritchett (2022) argued that national development is a countrywide transformation involving a productive economy, responsive government and capable public administration, which collectively improve human well-being. Naseemullah (2023) observed that national development encompasses the provision of public and social goods, productive upgrading and the ability of the state to implement industrial and governance policies. Kallis et al. (2025) opined that genuine development should prioritise human well-being within planetary boundaries rather than treat continuous gross domestic product growth as the sole national objective. These perspectives portray national development as a comprehensive transformation of economic systems, institutions, social conditions and human opportunities for present and future generations, inclusively and sustainably.

Although these definitions recognise the economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of development, they place different emphasis on growth, freedom, state capacity, public goods or ecological sustainability. Todaro and Smith (2020) foregrounded structural and socioeconomic transformation, whereas Frankema (2022) emphasised freedom and personal choice. Pritchett (2022) concentrated on productive capacity, effective administration

and national well-being, while Naseemullah (2023) focused on institutions, productive upgrading and developmental governance. Kallis et al. (2025), however, challenged growth-centred approaches by making well-being within ecological limits the principal objective. These positions are valuable, yet they do not fully explain how citizens' discipline, moral character and public virtue support or obstruct a nation's developmental aspirations. This omission creates a conceptual gap because policies, resources and institutions may produce limited outcomes where corruption, irresponsibility and disregard for collective welfare persist. In this study, national development is defined as the sustained and inclusive transformation of a nation's economy, institutions, social relations, environment and human capabilities through responsible leadership and civic participation, resulting in improved living standards, justice, security, productivity and opportunities for present and future generations. This definition connects material advancement with ethical responsibility, institutional integrity and the collective conduct required to convert national resources and policies into enduring public well-being.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is anchored on Aristotle's Virtue Ethics Theory, developed in the fourth century BCE and presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* around 350 BCE. Aristotle founded the theory on the proposition that ethical life is concerned primarily with the formation of good character rather than mere obedience to rules or calculation of consequences. Its first assumption is that human conduct is directed towards eudaimonia, understood as flourishing through rational and morally excellent activity. Its second assumption is that virtues such as justice, courage, temperance, honesty and practical wisdom are not complete but are acquired through habituation, education and right action. Hampson (2020) argued that Aristotelian habituation makes practice indispensable to the formation of moral character, while Kristjánsson (2022) observed that practical wisdom develops through instruction and experience. A third assumption

is the doctrine of the mean, which holds that moral excellence lies in a reasoned balance between deficiency and excess rather than in rigid uniformity. Holst (2024) explained that Aristotle connected rationality, ethical virtue and practical wisdom, thereby making sound judgement essential to responsible action. The theory further assumes that individual flourishing is inseparable from communal and political life because citizens' character shapes the quality of institutions and the common good. Reijers (2023) argued that civic virtue operates between personal dispositions and structures of governance, showing that moral character has institutional consequences.

This theory is relevant to the study because discipline reflects habituated self-control, responsibility and consistency, while virtue supplies the moral qualities directing disciplined behaviour towards justice and public welfare. Applied to Nigeria, the theory explains that national development requires more than policies and resources; it requires citizens and leaders whose ethical practices strengthen accountability, trust, productivity and institutional effectiveness. Thus, Virtue Ethics provides an appropriate framework for examining discipline and virtue as interconnected foundations of sustainable national development.

Method and Materials

This study adopted a qualitative research approach because it enabled an in-depth examination of discipline, virtue and national development as social and ethical concepts that cannot be adequately measured through numerical data alone. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy documents and credible international reports. The collected information was analysed using content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns and relationships, making the approach suitable for explaining how discipline and virtue contribute to sustainable national development.

Thematic Analysis

Assess the state of discipline and virtue on responsible citizens, ethical leadership and institutional performance in Nigeria

Discipline and virtue provide the moral energy through which citizenship, leadership and public institutions become instruments of national progress. In Nigeria, however, these values coexist with electoral apathy, corruption, weak accountability and uneven public-service delivery. Assessing their present condition therefore requires attention to citizens' conduct, leaders' ethical choices and the capacity of institutions to convert rules into fair outcomes. The discussion below examines these three dimensions using empirical evidence and concrete Nigerian examples to reveal both persistent deficits and emerging possibilities.

Responsible Citizenship and Civic Discipline:

The state of discipline and virtue among Nigerian citizens is mixed: impressive civic courage exists beside widespread rule evasion, electoral disengagement and tolerance of everyday misconduct. Responsible citizenship requires obedience to lawful rules, protection of public property, payment of taxes, informed voting and willingness to hold power accountable. Yet Nigeria's 2023 general election exposed a troubling civic deficit. The Independent National Electoral Commission reported 93,469,008 registered voters, but participation remained markedly below registration, illustrating that formal political inclusion did not automatically translate into active citizenship. Cheeseman et al. (2021) argued that African elections are embedded in a moral economy in which citizens judge legitimacy through expectations of fairness, reciprocity and proper conduct. In Nigeria, however, vote-buying, ethnic mobilisation, misinformation and electoral violence frequently weaken principled participation. The #EndSARS protests offered a contrasting example: young Nigerians organised peaceful demonstrations, raised funds transparently and demanded police accountability, demonstrating solidarity, courage and civic vigilance. Nevertheless, episodes of vandalism and looting during the wider unrest showed how legitimate protest could be displaced by indiscipline. Afrobarometer's 2024 findings also revealed exceptionally low trust in the Nigerian police, at approximately 15 per cent, indicating a damaged relationship between citizens and

public institutions. Adaba and Boio (2024) observed that institutional trust weakens when citizens perceive officials as corrupt, ineffective or unresponsive. Citizens may consequently justify disobedience when government appears unjust, while public officials blame citizens for lawlessness. This cycle diminishes collective responsibility. Nigeria therefore does not lack virtuous citizens; rather, civic discipline is unevenly cultivated and frequently discouraged by impunity. Community associations, investigative journalists, election observers and peaceful advocacy groups demonstrate that disciplined civic participation can protect democracy when citizens reject silence, patronage and political intimidation.

Ethical Leadership and Public Responsibility: Ethical leadership in Nigeria remains fragile because the language of integrity often exceeds its practical demonstration in public office. Ethical leaders are expected to exercise authority fairly, account for public resources, respect constitutional limits and place national welfare above personal or partisan gain. However, corruption allegations, opaque procurement, political patronage and selective application of sanctions continue to weaken this ideal. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index gave Nigeria a score of 26 out of 100 and ranked it 142nd among 182 countries, reflecting persistent perceptions of public-sector corruption. Ogunyemi et al. (2022) observed that accountable governance in Africa depends upon leaders who institutionalise ethical compliance rather than merely proclaim moral values. Nigeria's experience supports this argument. Successive governments have established bodies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, yet anti-corruption enforcement has frequently been criticised as slow, selective or vulnerable to political influence. Ethical inconsistency is also visible when public officials demand sacrifice from citizens while maintaining expensive administrative structures or failing to disclose how public funds are utilised. Such conduct creates what may be described as a credibility

famine: citizens hear calls for discipline but witness few personal examples from those exercising authority. Nevertheless, ethical leadership has occasionally emerged through officials who publish budgets, digitise revenue systems, comply with procurement procedures or invite public scrutiny of projects. Adeshipo (2024) argued that ethical competence in Nigeria's public sector requires integrity, accountability, emotional intelligence and the courage to challenge improper organisational practices. These qualities are important because leaders establish behavioural signals for subordinates and citizens. Where misconduct is rewarded with appointments or political protection, vice becomes profitable. Where transparency and merit are consistently rewarded, virtue gains institutional value. Nigeria's leadership crisis is therefore not an absence of ethical codes, but the weak conversion of such codes into observable conduct, predictable sanctions and exemplary stewardship.

Institutional Performance and the Culture of Accountability: Institutional performance in Nigeria reflects the quality of discipline and virtue embedded within administrative systems. Public institutions perform effectively when officials follow procedures, appointments are merit-based, records are properly maintained and sanctions apply regardless of status. In practice, Nigerian institutions often operate beneath their formal potential because absenteeism, bureaucratic delay, political interference, bribery and weak monitoring obstruct service delivery. Oyekola et al. (2021) observed from the perceptions of young and middle-aged Nigerians that the public service was frequently associated with inefficiency, corruption and inadequate responsiveness, although respondents still recognised its importance to national development. Rasul and Rogger (2016), using data from thousands of Nigerian government projects, argued that bureaucratic management practices significantly influenced the completion of public projects. Their evidence demonstrated that institutional outcomes depend not only upon funding but also upon how civil servants are organised, supervised and allowed to exercise

professional judgement. Nigeria's pension reforms, Treasury Single Account, Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System and digital passport services illustrate efforts to reduce leakages and strengthen administrative discipline.

However, recurring complaints about salary fraud, abandoned projects, delayed court cases and difficulties obtaining basic public services indicate that technological reforms cannot replace ethical responsibility. World Bank governance research similarly observed that political stability, rule of law, accountability and government effectiveness are positively connected to economic performance in sub-Saharan Africa. The National Youth Service Corps provides another concrete example. It was designed to cultivate unity, service and civic responsibility, but cases of certificate fraud, preferential postings and evasion of service requirements weaken its moral purpose. Conversely, disciplined health workers, teachers, security personnel and electoral officers who continue serving under difficult conditions demonstrate that institutional virtue remains possible. The central challenge is that exemplary conduct often relies upon individual conscience rather than dependable systems. Sustainable institutional performance therefore requires transparent recruitment, performance-based evaluation, protection for whistle-blowers, digital accountability and consistent punishment of misconduct. Institutions become trustworthy when discipline is routine, virtue is rewarded and public service is treated as stewardship rather than entitlement.

Assessing the impact of families, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies in promoting discipline and virtue for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Discipline and virtue are not cultivated in isolation; they are transmitted through institutions that shape behaviour, reward integrity and discourage misconduct. In Nigeria, families, schools, religious bodies, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies possess considerable moral influence, but their

effectiveness varies widely. Some have produced responsible citizens and exemplary leaders, while others have been weakened by poor role-modelling, corruption and inconsistent sanctions. Assessing their impact therefore requires attention to both achievements and persistent institutional failures within contemporary Nigerian society. Families and the Formation of Moral Character — Noticeable but Inconsistent Influence The family is the earliest workshop of character, where children first encounter authority, responsibility, fairness, honesty and concern for others. Its influence on discipline and virtue in Nigeria can be described as noticeable but inconsistent. Many homes still serve as strong moral foundations, transmitting cultural values and ethical principles, yet this influence is increasingly weakened by economic pressures, shifting family structures and reduced parental supervision. Balogun and Shyngle (2025) observed that strong family systems contribute to national development by fostering social stability, civic responsibility and productive behaviour. Through household chores, respect for elders, religious instruction, storytelling and correction of misconduct, Nigerian parents traditionally teach punctuality, perseverance, courtesy and communal responsibility.

A practical illustration of this influence can be seen in the widely reported case of Aliyu Abdullahi, a teenage boy from Kano State, who returned ₦1.8 million he found on the street to its rightful owner despite his modest background. When interviewed, he explained that his parents had consistently taught him that taking what does not belong to him is wrong, regardless of circumstances (Daily Trust, 2022). This simple but powerful act of honesty reflects the kind of moral training that still exists in many Nigerian homes—where integrity is valued above material gain. Such real-life demonstrations show that families continue to shape individuals who uphold virtue even in a society where dishonesty may appear rewarding.

However, this moral training becomes fragile when children observe contradictory behaviour such as bribery, tax evasion or the glorification of unexplained wealth. Ohazulike (2023) noted

that changes in family structures and parenting patterns have weakened consistent moral guidance in some homes. Economic hardship, migration and long working hours reduce the time parents spend guiding their children. In some cases, discipline is enforced through fear rather than understanding, limiting the development of internal self-control. The persistence of examination malpractice, internet fraud and youth violence suggests that not all families succeed in instilling firm moral boundaries. Even so, many Nigerian families continue to produce individuals who uphold integrity despite societal pressure. The family remains a vital but uneven force—strong in some contexts, fragile in others.

Schools and Values-Oriented Education — Present but Undermined Influence Schools are expected to refine the values introduced at home by teaching knowledge, civic responsibility, cooperation, respect for rules and commitment to excellence. In Nigeria, their influence on discipline and virtue can be described as present but undermined. While moral and civic education exist within the curriculum, the broader school environment often contradicts these teachings. UNESCO (2025) highlighted that integrating social and emotional learning strengthens empathy, responsibility and moral development. Nigerian schools attempt this through Civic Education, Social Studies, prefect systems, assemblies, debates and community-service activities, while the National Youth Service Corps extends this learning into national service.

A concrete illustration is the case of Emmanuel Ojo, a secondary school student from Ekiti State, who rejected an opportunity to participate in examination malpractice during the West African Senior School Certificate Examination and reported the incident to school authorities. His action, widely reported in Nigerian media, was attributed to the strong emphasis on integrity taught in his school's civic education programme (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023). Students also participate in sanitation campaigns, peer mentoring and debates on corruption and citizenship, which can foster teamwork and public-mindedness. However, these efforts are weakened by widespread

practices such as examination malpractice, sexual harassment, admission racketeering and the sale of grades. When teachers fail to model integrity, moral instruction loses credibility. Structural challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training and weak supervision further limit effectiveness. Research by Ogbochie et al. (2025) suggests that schools sometimes reproduce societal moral weaknesses instead of correcting them. Thus, schools play an important role, but their influence is diluted by contradictions between what is taught and what is practised.

Religious Institutions and Moral Authority — Strong but Partly Contradictory Influence Religious institutions possess exceptional reach in Nigeria and remain among the most influential platforms for promoting moral values. Their impact can be described as strong but partly contradictory. Many Nigerians trust religious leaders more than political figures, giving churches, mosques and faith-based organisations significant moral authority. Mbaegbu (2024) reported that 60 per cent of Nigerians trust religious leaders, far exceeding trust in political institutions. Through sermons, charitable activities, schools and advocacy, religious bodies promote honesty, compassion, justice and service.

A notable example is the humanitarian work of Pastor Enoch Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God, headquartered in Lagos State, which has provided scholarships, healthcare services and disaster relief across Nigeria. Similarly, Islamic organisations such as Jaiz Foundation in Abuja have supported education and poverty alleviation programmes (Premium Times, 2023). These initiatives demonstrate how religious institutions translate moral teachings into practical service. However, their influence is weakened when leaders fail to practise what they preach—displaying excessive wealth, engaging in partisan politics or ignoring misconduct among influential members. In some cases, prosperity-focused teachings may unintentionally encourage materialism over integrity. The contradiction is clear: despite high religious participation, corruption and unethical behaviour remain widespread. Religious institutions therefore

wield powerful influence, but its effectiveness is limited when moral teachings are not consistently reflected in practice.

Workplaces and the Cultivation of Professional Ethics — Functional but Frequently Compromised Influence Workplaces translate personal values into public behaviour, shaping whether honesty, competence and responsibility are rewarded. Their influence in Nigeria can be described as functional but frequently compromised. Many organisations maintain codes of conduct, performance standards and disciplinary systems that encourage professionalism. In well-managed environments, employees learn punctuality, accountability and respect for organisational resources. Professional bodies also enforce ethical standards that protect society.

A practical example is the whistle-blowing case involving Mrs. Nnenna Okonkwo, a bank employee in Anambra State, who reported fraudulent transactions within her organisation, leading to the recovery of misappropriated funds (Central Bank of Nigeria Report, 2022). Studies show that ethical workplace culture improves organisational performance, and examples such as compliance systems in banks and whistle-blowing mechanisms demonstrate positive efforts. However, these gains are undermined by persistent unethical practices such as bribery, absenteeism, payroll fraud and favouritism. In some workplaces, rules are applied selectively, and individuals with connections escape accountability. Economic hardship is sometimes cited as justification, but the deeper issue is inconsistent enforcement of standards. As a result, workplaces contribute to discipline where leadership is ethical, but weaken it where corruption is tolerated.

Civic Organisations and Public Accountability — Energetic but Uneven Influence Civic organisations have made an energetic but uneven contribution to discipline and virtue in Nigeria. They promote active citizenship by educating voters, monitoring government actions and advocating for accountability. Nigerian civic groups have played visible roles in campaigns for electoral integrity, human rights and police reform.

A clear illustration is the role of Yiaga Africa, headquartered in Abuja, which deployed thousands of observers during the 2023 general elections to monitor voting processes and report irregularities (INEC, 2023). The #EndSARS movement also demonstrated youth mobilisation, solidarity and demand for accountability, particularly led by activists in Lagos State. Community associations contribute to development through local projects such as road construction, school support and sanitation initiatives. However, their influence is uneven due to limited funding, urban concentration and occasional political alignment. Some organisations are active only during elections and lack long-term engagement. Despite these challenges, civic organisations remain a vital bridge between citizens and institutions, encouraging voluntary accountability and public participation.

Government Agencies and the Enforcement of Ethical Standards — Powerful but Weakly Trusted Influence Government agencies possess the authority to enforce discipline and uphold virtue, yet their influence in Nigeria can be described as powerful but weakly trusted. Institutions such as the EFCC, ICPC and INEC have mandates to promote accountability and integrity, and reforms like the Treasury Single Account and biometric systems have improved transparency. These measures demonstrate the government's capacity to strengthen ethical governance.

A notable example is the prosecution of former public officials by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Abuja, which has led to the recovery of billions of naira in stolen public funds (EFCC Annual Report, 2023). However, public trust remains low due to perceptions of selective enforcement, political interference and slow judicial processes. Nigeria's low ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index reflects persistent concerns about accountability. When powerful individuals evade consequences while minor offenders are punished, the credibility of institutions is weakened. Government agencies therefore have significant potential, but their impact is limited by inconsistency and lack of impartiality. Their influence would become

more effective if enforcement were fair, transparent and independent of political influence.

Major Findings

1. The study found that families, schools and religious institutions remain influential channels for transmitting discipline and virtue in Nigeria, but their impact is inconsistent. Positive moral instruction is frequently weakened by poor role-modelling, examination malpractice, materialism and contradictory behaviour. Consequently, these institutions promote honesty, responsibility and service, yet often fail to translate moral teaching into sustained ethical conduct nationwide effectively.
2. The study also found that workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies possess strong potential to institutionalise discipline, accountability and public virtue, but their performance is uneven. Civic organisations demonstrate notable success in electoral monitoring and advocacy, whereas workplaces and government agencies are constrained by selective sanctions, corruption and political interference. Sustainable development therefore depends on impartial enforcement and ethical leadership.

Conclusion

The study concluded that discipline and virtue had remained indispensable foundations for responsible citizenship, ethical leadership, institutional effectiveness and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The findings showed that families, schools and religious institutions had continued to transmit important moral values, but their influence had been inconsistent because poor role-modelling, materialism, examination malpractice and contradictory conduct frequently weakened moral instruction. The study also established that workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies had possessed substantial capacity to institutionalise accountability and ethical conduct, although corruption, selective sanctions, political interference and weak

enforcement had limited their effectiveness. Civic organisations had demonstrated relatively stronger influence through electoral monitoring, advocacy and public accountability, while government institutions had suffered from declining public trust. These findings affirmed Aristotle's Virtue Ethics Theory, which had maintained that virtuous character was cultivated through habituation, repeated moral practice and the development of practical wisdom. The theory had explained why ethical values could not become effective through laws or moral preaching alone, but required consistent practice by individuals and institutions. The study therefore concluded that Nigeria's development challenges had been partly rooted in the failure to transform discipline and virtue from abstract ideals into everyday conduct. Sustainable progress had consequently required exemplary leadership, consistent sanctions, moral education, institutional transparency and collective commitment to the common good.

Recommendation

1. Government should strengthen value-based education by partnering with families, schools and religious institutions to implement coordinated character-development programmes that emphasise integrity, civic responsibility, accountability and ethical conduct. Parents, teachers and religious leaders should be trained to serve as consistent role models, while values education should be reinforced through practical activities, community service and measurable behavioural outcomes rather than theoretical instruction alone.
2. Government agencies, workplaces and civic organisations should institutionalise transparent accountability mechanisms through merit-based recruitment, impartial enforcement of ethical standards, protection of whistle-blowers and performance-based rewards for integrity. Anti-corruption institutions should operate independently of political influence, while civic organisations should be supported to

sustain public education, electoral monitoring and citizen participation that strengthen discipline, virtue and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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