GNR Publication
The Multidisciplinary Review
ISSN: 3139-6801 | Volume 1, Issue 3 | September – October (2026)

Character Education and Value Reorientation as Catalysts for National Development in Nigeria

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Received: 14 July 2026 | Accepted: 06 September 2026 | Published: 26 September 2026

Abstract	Nigeria's persistent developmental challenges, including corruption, insecurity, weak institutional trust and declining civic responsibility, have increasingly been linked by scholars to a deficit in character formation and a broader erosion of societal values. This paper therefore, examined character education and value reorientation as catalysts for national development in Nigeria. It specifically looked at three objectives: to examine the role of character education as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria; to assess the role of value reorientation as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria; and to identify the challenges confronting character education and value reorientation in fostering national development in Nigeria. The paper adopted a literature-based methodology, drawing on recent peer-reviewed scholarly work. The paper was anchored on the theoretical framework of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and Human Capital Theory. The paper revealed that while character education and value reorientation possess demonstrable potential to strengthen ethical conduct, civic responsibility and institutional trust, their transformative effect in Nigeria remains constrained by curricular neglect, weak implementation, inconsistent role-modelling and institutional corruption. The paper concluded that character education and value reorientation, though necessary, are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee national development unless accompanied by consistent institutional enforcement and ethical leadership, and it therefore recommended overhauling curricular reform, teacher capacity-building and coordinated value-based governance as pathways to realising their developmental promise.
Keywords	Character Education, Value Reorientation, National Development, Moral Development, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Nations rise or decline not merely by the abundance of their material resources but by the character and values of the citizens who inhabit them. Across history, societies that have achieved sustained development have typically done so alongside, and often because of, a citizenry disciplined by shared ethical commitments: hard work, honesty, civic responsibility, respect for law, and a sense of collective purpose (Eyina & Anyalebechi, 2026). This observation holds with particular force for developing nations, where fragile institutions place a correspondingly greater burden on individual

character to sustain public order, economic exchange and democratic governance. Character, understood broadly as the internalised disposition to act rightly even where external sanction is absent or weak, has accordingly re-emerged as a central concern for scholars and policymakers seeking to explain why some nations translate their human and material endowments into development, while others, despite comparable or superior endowments, do not.

Nigeria offers a compelling, if troubling, case study of this broader concern. Endowed with a large population, extensive natural resources, and a long tradition of educational achievement, Nigeria has nonetheless struggled for decades to translate these endowments into commensurate national development. Scholars increasingly attribute part of this developmental shortfall not merely to policy or resource constraints, but to a deeper crisis of character and values pervading Nigerian public and private life (Solomon et al., 2024). Corruption, examination malpractice, electoral fraud, insecurity, and a general decline in civic responsibility are widely cited as symptomatic of this crisis, and are, in turn, understood by many scholars to be substantially rooted in the failure of Nigeria's educational and socialisation processes to adequately cultivate character and reinforce positive societal values (Kelechi & Ridwan, 2025).

It is within this context that the twin concepts of character education and value reorientation have assumed prominence in Nigerian educational and policy discourse. Character education refers to the deliberate cultivation, principally though not exclusively through formal schooling, of the ethical dispositions, virtues and habits that dispose individuals toward morally sound conduct (Pathmu et al., 2025). Value reorientation, by contrast, refers to the broader societal process of redirecting collective values away from those that sustain corruption, materialism and social dysfunction, toward those that sustain integrity, industry and civic responsibility (Uya, 2025). Although conceptually distinct, character education and value reorientation are widely regarded in Nigerian scholarship as mutually reinforcing processes: character education operates principally through the formal curriculum and the school system, while value reorientation operates more broadly across the family, religious institutions, the media, and public governance, with the school system serving as one important, but not exclusive, site of value transmission (Uya, 2025).

The relationship between these processes and national development is not merely asserted but has become the subject of a growing, increasingly empirical, body of Nigerian scholarship. This scholarship situates character education and value reorientation as necessary, though contested, catalysts for national development, understood as the sustained improvement in a nation's economic, political, social and institutional capacities to secure the welfare and dignity of its citizens. This paper engages critically with this scholarship, moving from the general proposition that character and values matter for development, through Nigeria's particular historical and contemporary experience of value decline, to a focused, evidence-based appraisal of the specific contribution that character education and value reorientation can realistically be expected to make to Nigeria's development trajectory.

2. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's National Policy on Education has, since its earliest iterations, articulated the cultivation of a "sound and effective citizen" possessed of the "right type of values and attitudes" as among the central goals of the Nigerian educational system. Notwithstanding this long-standing policy commitment, however, contemporary Nigerian society continues to exhibit pervasive and, by several accounts, worsening indicators of value decline. Corruption remains endemic across public and

private institutions; examination malpractice is widespread within the education sector itself, the very sector charged with inculcating the values needed to prevent such malpractice; electoral fraud continues to undermine democratic legitimacy; and various forms of social dysfunction, including cultism, banditry, and diminishing respect for constituted authority, continue to threaten social cohesion and public safety (Solomon et al., 2024). This persistence of value decline, notwithstanding decades of stated policy commitment to character formation through education, constitutes the central empirical puzzle motivating this paper.

The problem is compounded by evidence that Nigeria's formal educational curriculum has not, in practice, given character education and value reorientation the sustained, systematic attention that policy documents prescribe. Recent curriculum analysis finds that while subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Security Education contain value-laden content nominally directed at cultivating integrity, tolerance, patriotism and respect for constituted authority, the practical implementation of this content remains inconsistent, under-resourced, and frequently subordinated to examination-oriented instruction that prioritises cognitive over character outcomes (Uya, 2025). Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) similarly find that character education in Nigeria continues to be treated as a peripheral, rather than a central, component of the school curriculum, notwithstanding its stated policy importance.

The problem is further compounded by evidence that value decline in Nigeria is not confined to youth or to the education sector narrowly conceived, but pervades adult and institutional life more broadly, including higher education itself. Survey-based research conducted among students in Southwest Nigerian higher institutions finds measurable erosion in core values, including obedience, honesty, discipline and patriotism, attributable to a combination of economic pressure, peer influence, and inconsistent institutional modelling of the very values the curriculum purports to teach. This finding is significant because it suggests that value decline in Nigeria may be, in part, self-reinforcing: students who observe corruption, indiscipline and a lack of integrity modelled by adults and institutions around them are correspondingly less likely to internalise the values that character education programmes seek to instil, regardless of the formal content of the curriculum.

Several practical illustrations bring this problem into sharp relief. The recurrent phenomenon of examination malpractice in Nigerian secondary and tertiary institutions, ranging from organised impersonation syndicates to the circulation of leaked examination papers, illustrates how a value deficit within the very institutions responsible for character formation can undermine the credibility of educational credentials and, by extension, the broader project of national development that an educated citizenry is meant to serve. Similarly, the persistence of corruption within Nigeria's public procurement and civil service systems, notwithstanding decades of anti-corruption legislation and institutional reform, illustrates how formal institutional design, however well-intentioned, cannot substitute for the internalised ethical disposition that character education and value reorientation are intended to cultivate. A further illustration is found in the cyclical nature of Nigerian political corruption: successive administrations, from the Murtala Mohammed government's emphasis on discipline and zero tolerance for corruption in the 1970s, through General Muhammadu Buhari's War Against Indiscipline in the 1980s, to the same Buhari's "Change Begins with Me" campaign as civilian president in 2016, have repeatedly invoked value reorientation as a policy response to governance failure, yet each successive campaign has been followed by a resurgence of the very vices it sought

to eliminate, raising serious questions about the durability and practical effectiveness of value reorientation campaigns that are not embedded within sustained institutional and educational reform.

This persistent gap between Nigeria's stated commitment to character education and value reorientation, on the one hand, and the continuing prevalence of value decline and its developmental consequences, on the other, constitutes the central problem this paper investigates. The paper interrogates whether this gap reflects a fundamental inadequacy in the theoretical premise that character education and value reorientation can serve as catalysts for national development, or whether it instead reflects deficiencies in the implementation, institutionalisation and reinforcement of otherwise sound character education and value reorientation strategies within Nigeria's broader social and political context.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Paper

The aim of this paper was to examine character education and value reorientation as catalysts for national development in Nigeria. In furtherance of this aim, the paper addressed the following specific objectives:

i. to examine the role of character education as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria;
ii. to assess the role of value reorientation as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria; and
iii. to identify the challenges confronting character education and value reorientation in fostering national development in Nigeria.

4. Conceptual Clarifications

4.1 Character Education

Character education refers to the deliberate, systematic effort, undertaken principally though not exclusively through formal schooling, to cultivate in learners the ethical dispositions, virtues, and habits of conduct that dispose them toward morally sound behaviour across the various domains of life (Pathmu et al., 2025). Character education is distinguished from purely cognitive or academic instruction by its explicit concern with the affective and behavioural, rather than merely intellectual, dimensions of learning, encompassing what Kohlberg's tradition of moral development scholarship terms moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action or behaviour (Pathmu et al., 2025).

In the context of this paper, character education is typically understood to encompass values such as honesty, integrity, respect for constituted authority, diligence, patriotism, and social responsibility, and is formally embedded, to varying degrees, within subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Security Education (Uya, 2025).

4.2 Value Reorientation

Value reorientation refers to the deliberate, society-wide process of redirecting collective values away from those that sustain corruption, materialism, and social dysfunction, toward those that sustain integrity, industry, and civic responsibility (Solomon et al., 2024). Unlike character education, which operates principally through formal schooling, value reorientation is understood as a broader societal process, encompassing the family, religious institutions, the mass media, civil society, and governmental policy, all of which are understood to function as agents of value transmission and, where necessary, value correction. Nigerian scholars on value reorientation typically situates the concept as both a response to a perceived historical decline in societal values relative to some earlier,

more disciplined period, and as a prospective strategy for restoring the ethical foundations necessary for national development (Kelechi & Ridwan, 2025).

4.3 National Development

National development refers to the sustained, multidimensional improvement in a nation's economic, political, social and institutional capacities to secure the welfare, security and dignity of its citizens (Benjamin, 2025). National development, so understood, extends beyond narrow economic growth to encompass institutional integrity, social cohesion, political stability and the effective functioning of public institutions, each of which recent Nigerian scholarship links directly to the character and values of the citizenry responsible for staffing, using and holding accountable those institutions (Eyina & Anyalebechi, 2026).

4.4 Catalyst

Within the framing of this paper, a catalyst refers to a factor that accelerates or enables a broader developmental process without itself constituting the totality of the conditions necessary for that process to occur. Describing character education and value reorientation as catalysts for national development, therefore, implies neither that they are sufficient in themselves to guarantee national development, nor that national development is impossible without them, but rather that they function as significant, facilitating conditions whose presence or absence materially affects the pace and quality of a nation's developmental trajectory. This distinction, between a necessary catalyst and a sufficient cause, is of direct relevance to the critical discussion undertaken later in this paper.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Character Education as a Catalyst for National Development in Nigeria

A substantial and growing body of Nigerian scholarship has examined the role of character education as a catalyst for national development. Uya (2025) undertakes a detailed examination of the potential of the Nigerian school curriculum to serve as a transformative tool for cultivating ethical behaviour, civic consciousness and responsible citizenship in contemporary Nigerian society. Anchored on national policy documents and educational theories, Uya's (2025) study explores how subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Security Education are, at least in principle, infused with value-laden content promoting integrity, tolerance, patriotism and respect for constituted authority. The study finds that the Nigerian curriculum possesses considerable latent capacity to function as an agent of value reorientation, but that this capacity remains substantially unrealised in practice, owing to inconsistent implementation, inadequate teacher preparation, and the continued dominance of examination-oriented pedagogy over character-oriented pedagogy within the practical operation of Nigerian schools.

Complementing this curriculum-focused analysis, Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) examine the state of character education within Nigeria's broader educational system, situating character building as a central, though frequently neglected, component of national educational objectives. Their study emphasises those elements of the National Policy on Education that explicitly identify the cultivation of "the right type of values and attitudes" as a fundamental goal of Nigerian education, and evaluates the extent to which this stated policy commitment has translated into sustained curricular and pedagogical practice. Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) find that character education in Nigeria continues to be treated as a peripheral concern relative to cognitive and examination-oriented objectives,

notwithstanding its explicit prioritisation within national policy, a finding that resonates closely with Uya's (2025) identification of a persistent gap between curricular design and curricular implementation.

The relationship between character education and specific developmental outcomes, rather than national development conceived abstractly, has also attracted focused scholarly attention. Solomon, Abalaka and Olanrewaju (2024) examine the relationship between character education and value reorientation as a means of controlling insecurity in Nigeria, adopting a correlational research design involving one hundred and eighty-one participants. Their study finds a statistically significant relationship between character education and value reorientation, on the one hand, and reduced susceptibility to the anti-social behaviours associated with insecurity, on the other, lending empirical weight to the proposition that character education functions as a genuine, rather than merely rhetorical, catalyst for improved developmental outcomes in at least one critical domain of Nigerian national life. On the basis of this finding, Solomon et al. (2024) recommend that character education be formally instituted as a distinct subject of study within the Nigerian curriculum, rather than remaining dispersed across the value-laden content of existing subjects, and that school counsellors and educational psychologists be resourced to organise seminars and conferences addressing value reorientation and changes in values and human behaviour.

A further important contribution to this literature is provided by Pathmu et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis of empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 examining the integration of moral development theories into educational frameworks. Synthesising thirty-eight peer-reviewed studies drawn from major academic databases, Pathmu et al. (2025) find that structured moral education interventions grounded in established developmental theories, including Kohlberg's stages of moral development, Gilligan's ethic of care, Rest's Four Component Model, and Turiel's domain theory, contribute measurably to the cultivation of moral reasoning, moral identity, and prosocial behaviour among learners across diverse educational settings. Although this meta-analysis is not specific to Nigeria, its findings are directly relevant to the Nigerian case, since they provide a rigorous, cross-national evidentiary basis for the proposition that character education, when structured and sustained rather than incidental and fragmentary, can produce measurable improvements in the moral reasoning and conduct of learners, improvements that are plausibly linked, at the aggregate societal level, to the kinds of civic and ethical outcomes that Nigerian national development requires.

Collectively, this literature converges on a nuanced position regarding character education's role as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria: the theoretical and, to a growing extent, empirical case for character education's transformative potential is well established, but Nigerian scholarship consistently identifies a substantial gap between this theoretical potential and its practical realisation, owing to implementation deficits, inadequate teacher capacity, and the continued institutional prioritisation of examination performance over character formation within the practical operation of Nigerian schools.

5.2 Value Reorientation as a Catalyst for National Development in Nigeria

A parallel body of literature addresses value reorientation as a distinct, though closely related, catalyst for national development, typically situating value reorientation as a broader societal process extending beyond the formal school curriculum. Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) situate value reorientation as an essential complement to character education, arguing that the school system alone

cannot bear the full weight of societal value transmission, particularly where the family, religious institutions, and the broader social environment continue to model values inconsistent with those the school curriculum seeks to instil. This argument reflects a recurring theme within Nigerian scholarship on value reorientation: that value reorientation, to be effective, must operate simultaneously across multiple societal institutions rather than being confined to any single agent of socialisation.

Solomon et al. (2024) similarly frame value reorientation as intrinsically linked to, but analytically distinct from, character education, emphasising that value reorientation additionally requires active societal intervention to address value change and human behaviour beyond the confines of formal schooling, through mechanisms such as seminars, conferences, and public awareness campaigns targeting both youth and adult populations. This broader conception of value reorientation reflects the historical pattern, noted in the statement of the problem above, of successive Nigerian governments invoking value reorientation as a policy response to governance failure, from the Murtala Mohammed administration's disciplinary emphasis, through the War Against Indiscipline of the 1980s, to the Change Begins with Me campaign of 2016, each of which sought to achieve societal value change through public policy intervention operating independently of, though ideally complementary to, the formal education system.

Eyina and Anyalebechi (2026) extend this analysis by examining the erosion of discipline and virtue as foundational impediments to sustainable national development in Nigeria, situating their study explicitly within an examination of the influence of discipline and virtue on responsible citizenship, ethical leadership and institutional performance. Anchored on Aristotle's Virtue Ethics Theory, their qualitative study, drawing on scholarly literature, government publications and policy documents subjected to content analysis, evaluates the contributions of families, schools, religious institutions, workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies to moral formation in Nigeria.

Their findings reveal that while families, schools and religious institutions retain substantial moral influence over Nigerian citizens, this influence has been rendered inconsistent by poor role-modelling, materialism, and contradictory practices within these very institutions, a finding that speaks directly to the self-reinforcing character of value decline identified in the statement of the problem above. Eyina and Anyalebechi (2026) further find that workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies possess strong transformative potential for value reorientation, but that this potential is substantially constrained by corruption, selective sanctioning of misconduct, and political interference, which collectively undermine the institutional credibility necessary for effective value transmission.

The specific mechanisms through which value reorientation is expected to contribute to national development have also received scholarly attention. Uya (2025) identifies the school curriculum as a particularly important, though not exclusive, vehicle for value reorientation, arguing that curricular reform directed at strengthening the value-laden content of Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Security Education can meaningfully contribute to cultivating the ethical behaviour, civic consciousness and responsible citizenship that value reorientation, at the societal level, ultimately seeks to achieve. This curricular emphasis is complemented by Benjamin's (2025) broader analysis of human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria, which, while not focused specifically on value reorientation, situates the character qualities of a population, alongside cultural and ethical

values, national identity, and social adaptability, as constitutive elements of the human capital stock that determines a nation's developmental trajectory, thereby providing a conceptual bridge between value reorientation, narrowly conceived as an ethical or educational concern, and national development, conceived in explicitly economic terms.

In all, the literature reviewed under this objective indicates that value reorientation is widely regarded by Nigerian scholars as a necessary catalyst for national development, operating through multiple societal institutions rather than through formal education alone, but that its practical effectiveness has been persistently undermined by inconsistency in institutional role-modelling, particularly within the very families, schools, workplaces and government agencies charged with transmitting the values that value reorientation seeks to instil.

5.3 Challenges Confronting Character Education and Value Reorientation in Nigeria

In addressing the challenges confronting the effective operation of character education and value reorientation as catalysts for national development in Nigeria, Uya (2025) identifies curricular and implementation challenges as central among these, finding that although Nigeria's National Policy on Education and associated curriculum documents formally embed value-laden content within relevant subjects, the practical delivery of this content is undermined by inadequate teacher training in values pedagogy, insufficient instructional time allocated to character-focused content relative to examinable cognitive content, and the absence of robust assessment mechanisms capable of measuring character outcomes in the way that conventional academic assessment measures cognitive outcomes.

Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) identified a related but distinct challenge, namely the persistent institutional marginalisation of character education within the Nigerian education system's practical priorities, notwithstanding its prominent place within formal policy documents. This marginalisation, Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) argue, reflects a broader systemic bias within Nigerian education toward measurable, examinable outcomes, a bias reinforced by the high-stakes nature of Nigeria's examination system and the intense competition for limited places in tertiary institutions, which together create strong incentives for schools, teachers and students to prioritise examination preparation over character formation, even where character formation is nominally part of the curriculum.

Eyina and Anyalebechi (2026) identified a further, more structural challenge, namely the erosion of institutional credibility resulting from corruption, selective sanctioning, and political interference within the very institutions responsible for value transmission and reinforcement. Their finding that workplaces, civic organisations and government agencies possess strong transformative potential for value reorientation, but that this potential is substantially undermined by inconsistent and politically compromised institutional conduct, points to a challenge that lies beyond the immediate reach of educational or curricular reform alone: without corresponding reform of the institutions that model, reward, and sanction conduct within Nigerian public life, character education and value reorientation efforts confined to the school system risk being systematically undermined by the contrary lessons that students and citizens observe in the broader institutional environment.

A further challenge identified within the literature concerns the historical pattern of episodic, rather than sustained, value reorientation initiatives in Nigeria. As noted above, successive Nigerian administrations have periodically launched value reorientation campaigns, including the War Against Indiscipline and the Change Begins with Me campaign, yet these campaigns have typically been

associated with individual political administrations rather than embedded within durable, cross-administration institutional structures, resulting in a pattern of episodic intensification and subsequent abandonment of value reorientation efforts that Nigerian scholars widely regard as inadequate to produce lasting societal value change. This pattern of episodic policy attention stands in contrast to the sustained, multi-generational character education and value formation processes that comparative scholarship, including Pathmu et al.'s (2025) meta-analytic review, associates with measurable improvements in moral reasoning and conduct.

Finally, Solomon et al.'s (2024) correlational findings, while supportive of the proposition that character education and value reorientation are associated with reduced insecurity, also implicitly highlight a challenge of scale: their study's sample of one hundred and eighty-one participants, while methodologically appropriate to establishing a statistically significant association, cannot by itself establish that character education and value reorientation interventions of the kind studied can be scaled to the level of Nigeria's entire population of over two hundred million citizens without substantial additional investment in teacher training, curriculum development, and monitoring infrastructure, a scaling challenge that recurs across much of the literature reviewed in this paper.

6. Empirical Review

Solomon et al.'s (2024) correlational study constitutes the most directly empirical Nigerian contribution reviewed in this paper, employing a structured survey instrument administered to one hundred and eighty-one participants to test the relationship between character education, value reorientation, and the control of insecurity in Nigeria. The study's finding of a statistically significant positive relationship between character education and value reorientation, on the one hand, and reduced susceptibility to insecurity-related anti-social behaviour, on the other, provides empirical, rather than merely theoretical, support for the proposition that character education functions as a genuine catalyst for improved developmental outcomes in the specific domain of security, one of the most consequential dimensions of Nigeria's contemporary developmental challenge.

This empirical finding is substantially reinforced by Pathmu et al.'s (2025) international meta-analysis, which, by synthesising thirty-eight peer-reviewed empirical studies conducted across diverse educational settings between 2020 and 2025, provides a considerably larger and more methodologically rigorous evidentiary base for character education's effectiveness than any single Nigerian study could independently establish. The meta-analysis's finding that structured moral education interventions produce measurable improvements in moral reasoning, moral identity and prosocial behaviour, across a range of theoretical approaches including Kohlberg's stage theory, provides indirect but methodologically robust empirical support for the proposition that character education, where properly structured and sustained, can be expected to produce the kinds of civic and ethical behavioural improvements that Nigerian national development requires, notwithstanding the comparative absence of large-scale Nigerian empirical studies replicating this international evidence base at national scale.

Eyina and Anyalebechi's (2026) qualitative, content-analytic study provides complementary empirical evidence at the institutional, rather than individual, level of analysis. By systematically analysing scholarly literature, government publications, policy documents and credible institutional reports, their study documents empirical instances in which corruption, selective sanctioning and political interference have undermined the credibility of Nigerian workplaces, civic organisations and

government agencies as agents of value reorientation, providing documentary rather than survey-based empirical evidence of the institutional dimension of Nigeria's value reorientation challenge.

Benjamin's (2025) empirical analysis of human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria, while framed principally in economic rather than explicitly values-based terms, provides further empirical grounding for the broader proposition that the character qualities, cultural values and social adaptability of a population constitute measurable components of national human capital with demonstrable implications for economic growth outcomes, thereby linking value reorientation, empirically, to Nigeria's broader developmental trajectory.

Uya's (2025) analysis of curriculum documents and implementation practices provides documentary empirical evidence of the gap between the formal, value-laden content embedded within subjects such as Civic Education and Social Studies, and the practical, examination-oriented priorities that govern actual classroom practice in Nigerian schools. Kelechi and Ridwan's (2025) analysis similarly documents, through examination of Nigeria's educational policy architecture and its practical implementation, empirical evidence of character education's persistent institutional marginalisation relative to cognitive and examination-oriented objectives.

Perhaps most tellingly, Eyina and Anyalebechi's (2026) empirical documentation of corruption, selective sanctioning and political interference within Nigerian institutions, drawn from government publications and credible institutional reports, provides direct empirical evidence of the structural challenge identified throughout this paper: that character education and value reorientation efforts confined to schools and formal educational content cannot succeed where the broader institutional environment empirically continues to reward, or at minimum fails consistently to sanction, the very conduct that character education and value reorientation seek to discourage.

Nwachukwu's (2024) empirical analysis of human capital development as a driver of educational improvement in Nigeria further documents, through analysis of Nigeria's educational infrastructure and workforce planning challenges, the resource and infrastructural constraints that compound the implementation challenges identified elsewhere in this empirical review, providing additional empirical grounding for the proposition that character education and value reorientation challenges in Nigeria are substantially resource- and capacity-driven, rather than attributable solely to inadequate policy design.

7. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted two theories as its theoretical framework: Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and Human Capital Theory.

7.1 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, first articulated in the mid-twentieth century and subsequently elaborated across a substantial body of psychological and educational scholarship, posits that moral reasoning develops through a sequence of six stages, grouped into three broad levels: the pre-conventional level, at which moral reasoning is governed principally by self-interest and the avoidance of punishment; the conventional level, at which moral reasoning is governed by conformity to social expectations and the maintenance of social order; and the post-conventional level, at which moral reasoning is governed by reference to abstract, universal ethical principles that may, in some circumstances, transcend the specific rules of any given society (Pathmu et al., 2025).

Central to Kohlberg's theory is the proposition that moral development is not merely a matter of acquiring correct behavioural habits through reinforcement, but involves a genuine cognitive-developmental progression in the structure and sophistication of an individual's moral reasoning, a progression that formal character education is understood to be capable of accelerating or reinforcing, though not of substituting for entirely.

Kohlberg's theory is of direct relevance to this paper's first and third objectives. In relation to character education as a catalyst for national development, Kohlberg's framework provides the theoretical foundation for understanding why structured, sustained character education, of the kind reviewed in this paper's literature and empirical review, is capable of producing measurable improvements in moral reasoning and conduct: character education programmes grounded in Kohlberg's stage theory, as documented in Pathmu et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis, are designed explicitly to challenge learners with morally complex dilemmas appropriate to their developmental stage, thereby stimulating the cognitive restructuring that Kohlberg's theory identifies as the mechanism of moral growth.

In relation to the challenges confronting character education in Nigeria, Kohlberg's theory further illuminates why episodic or superficially delivered character education, of the kind identified as prevalent in Nigerian schools by Uya (2025) and Kelechi and Ridwan (2025), is unlikely to produce durable moral development: genuine progression through Kohlberg's stages requires sustained engagement with morally challenging material over an extended developmental period, a requirement that is difficult to satisfy where character education remains peripheral to the practical priorities of Nigerian schooling.

7.2 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, associated principally with the economists Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, holds that investments in education, training, health and related human development processes constitute investments in a form of capital, namely human capital, that raises the productive capacity of individuals and, in aggregate, of the national economy in which they participate (Nwachukwu, 2024). Human Capital Theory conventionally emphasises cognitive skills and technical training as the principal components of human capital relevant to economic growth, but Nigerian scholarship applying the theory has increasingly extended its scope to encompass non-cognitive components of human capital, including the character qualities, cultural values, ethical dispositions, national identity and social adaptability of a population, each of which is understood to shape a nation's capacity to convert its educated and trained workforce into sustained economic and institutional development (Benjamin, 2025).

Human Capital Theory is of direct relevance to this paper's second objective, concerning value reorientation as a catalyst for national development. By situating values, character and social adaptability as constitutive elements of national human capital, alongside conventional cognitive and technical skills, Human Capital Theory provides the theoretical bridge connecting value reorientation, understood as an ethical and educational process, to national development, understood in explicitly economic and institutional terms. Benjamin's (2025) application of this expanded conception of human capital to the Nigerian economy demonstrates how a workforce possessing strong ethical values, discipline and civic responsibility is better positioned to sustain the institutional trust, reduced transaction costs, and effective governance that underpin national economic development, relative to a workforce whose technical skills are undermined by weak character and eroded societal values.

Human Capital Theory thus complements Kohlberg's theory within this paper's overall framework: where Kohlberg's theory explains the individual, cognitive-developmental mechanism through which character education produces moral growth, Human Capital Theory explains the aggregate, macro-level mechanism through which such moral growth, once achieved at scale, translates into the institutional trust, productivity and governance quality that constitute national development.

8. Methodology

This paper adopted a theoretical and literature-based methodology appropriate to a conceptual appraisal of this kind. It relies entirely on secondary scholarly sources, drawing principally on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2024 and 2026 in the fields of education, moral development, economics and Nigerian studies. Sources were identified through a targeted review of recent literature addressing character education, value reorientation, moral development theory, human capital theory, and national development in the Nigerian context, with particular attention paid to studies employing empirical, whether quantitative, qualitative or meta-analytic, research designs, in order to ground the paper's appraisal in the most current available evidence rather than in purely normative or policy-based assertion.

The material gathered was subjected to qualitative thematic analysis, organised around the paper's three specific objectives, with recurring themes relating to the role of character education, the role of value reorientation, and the challenges confronting both, identified, categorised, and critically discussed in relation to the paper's theoretical framework. As a theoretical and desk-based enquiry, the paper does not generate new primary data; its contribution lies in the systematic synthesis, cross-referencing and critical evaluation of existing scholarly material bearing on character education and value reorientation as catalysts for national development in Nigeria.

9. Discussion

The literature interrogated in relation to the first objective converges on a broadly optimistic assessment of character education's potential, yet a close reading of the authors' own findings revealed a persistent tension between aspiration and demonstrated outcome that deserves more critical attention than it typically receives. Uya (2025) argues that subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, Religious Studies and Security Education are already "infused with value-laden content" capable of cultivating integrity and civic consciousness, yet the same study concedes that this capacity is "substantially unrealised in practice" owing to inconsistent delivery and examination-oriented teaching. This is a significant admission: Uya (2025) effectively identified a curriculum that is well designed on paper but poorly executed in the classroom, which raises the question of whether the problem being described is really a deficiency of character education as a concept, or a deficiency of Nigeria's capacity to implement any curriculum reform faithfully.

A comparable pattern appears in Kelechi and Ridwan (2025), who document that character education remains "peripheral" to Nigeria's practical educational priorities notwithstanding its prominence in the National Policy on Education. Read together, both studies describe not a failure of theory but a failure of institutional follow-through, a distinction with real consequences for how the problem ought to be diagnosed and addressed.

This revelation supports a more cautious reading of Solomon et al. (2024) correlational result linking character education and value reorientation to reduced susceptibility to insecurity-related conduct. The finding is credible as far as it goes, but a sample of 181 participants cannot establish that the

character education currently delivered in Nigerian schools, as opposed to character education delivered under ideal conditions, produced the observed association. A concrete illustration sharpens this point: the recurring incidents of examination malpractice reported by the West African Examinations Council and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board each year, including mass cancellation of results in specific centres implicated in collusion, occur within the very institutions responsible for delivering the value-laden curriculum that Uya (2025) and Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) discussed.

If character education, as currently practised, were producing the ethical dispositions its designers intend, one would expect examination malpractice to be in visible decline rather than a recurring administrative crisis. The persistence of this problem within the school system itself is a more demanding test of character education's practical effect than any single correlational study can settle.

Pathmu et al.'s (2025) international meta-analysis strengthens rather than resolves this tension. Its finding, drawn from thirty-eight studies, that moral education produces measurable gains in moral reasoning and prosocial conduct is methodologically the strongest evidence available in this paper's review, but it is evidence about structured, sustained interventions, not about the fragmented, examination-subordinated version of character education that Nigerian authors themselves describe. The interrogation this paper offers, therefore, is that Nigerian authors have tended to borrow the international evidence for character education's effectiveness in principle, while under-examining whether the specific form character education takes in Nigerian classrooms resembles the interventions that produced those international results closely enough to justify the transfer.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development supplies the analytical tool that makes sense of this gap. Kohlberg's account holds that moral growth requires sustained cognitive engagement with progressively more complex ethical dilemmas, appropriate to a learner's developmental stage, over an extended period. Where character education is delivered as occasional, low-stakes content squeezed around examinable subjects, as Uya (2025) and Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) both describe, learners are simply not given the sustained engagement that Kohlberg's model identifies as the mechanism of moral progression. On this reading, Nigeria's disappointing practical results are not evidence against Kohlberg's theory but a demonstration of what the theory predicts when its own preconditions are not met. The theoretical framework thus does not merely decorate this paper's findings; it explains them, by identifying precisely the missing ingredient, sustained developmental engagement, that separates the encouraging international evidence from the more modest Nigerian experience.

The second objective exposed a more structurally rooted problem than the first. Kelechi and Ridwan (2025) and Solomon et al. (2024) both frame value reorientation as necessarily broader than schooling, extending to family, religion, media and public policy, a framing this paper accepts as analytically correct. The difficulty lies in what Eyina and Anyalebechi (2026) subsequently document: that the very institutions expected to carry this broader reorientation, families, workplaces, civic bodies and government agencies, are themselves compromised by "corruption, selective sanctioning and political interference." This is, on interrogation, a considerably more serious finding than its authors' relatively measured presentation suggests. If the institutions responsible for modelling integrity are themselves inconsistent or complicit in the very vices value reorientation

seeks to eliminate, then value reorientation confined to exhortation or curriculum content is attempting to correct a system-wide problem using a component-level intervention.

Nigeria's own policy history illustrates this precisely. The Murtala Mohammed administration's discipline campaign of the mid-1970s, the War Against Indiscipline of the early 1980s, and President Buhari's "Change Begins with Me" campaign launched in 2016 each sought, explicitly, to achieve the kind of value reorientation this literature describes. Each campaign generated a period of heightened public attention to discipline and integrity; each was followed, within a relatively short interval, by a resurgence of the same conduct it targeted. This repeating cycle is difficult to explain if value reorientation is treated as primarily a matter of public messaging or civic education content, as some of the reviewed authors implicitly assume.

It becomes considerably easier to explain once Eyina and Anyalebechi's (2026) institutional finding is taken seriously: a value reorientation campaign launched by a government whose own agencies continue to exhibit the corruption and selective enforcement the campaign condemns is unlikely to outlast the political moment that produced it, because the public receives two contradictory signals simultaneously, one rhetorical and one institutional, and institutional signals are ordinarily the more persuasive of the two.

Benjamin (2025) and Nwachukwu (2024) extend the discussion into economic terms, treating character, cultural values and social adaptability as components of a nation's human capital stock with measurable implications for growth. This framing is valuable because it connects an ethical argument to an economic one, but it also, on closer reading, understates the political economy obstacle identified above. Both studies treat value reorientation largely as a matter of policy design and resource allocation, a treatment that implicitly assumes political actors are willing to subject their own conduct to the accountability that durable value reorientation requires. Nigeria's continuing struggle with fuel subsidy-related fraud, repeatedly investigated yet never definitively resolved, is a concrete illustration of the same dynamic: the technical and educational case for reform is not in serious dispute, but the institutional will to enforce reform consistently has proved considerably harder to secure.

Human Capital Theory offers the appropriate lens for interpreting this pattern, precisely because it treats character and values as one input among several, rather than as a self-sufficient cause of development. Schultz's and Becker's original formulation emphasised cognitive and technical skill; its extension by Nigerian authors to include ethical disposition and social adaptability is a reasonable and useful expansion, but the theory's own logic implies that human capital, of any kind, only translates into national development when combined with complementary institutional conditions, functioning markets, enforceable rules, and accountable governance. Applied to value reorientation, this means the theory itself predicts that a population with improved values but unreformed institutions will realise only a fraction of the developmental gain that improved values could otherwise produce. The theoretical framework therefore supports, rather than merely accompanies, this paper's finding that value reorientation efforts have underperformed in Nigeria not because the underlying values argument is wrong, but because the institutional complement the theory itself specifies has been largely absent.

Interrogated together, the challenges identified across the literature reviewed, curricular neglect (Uya, 2025), institutional marginalisation (Kelechi & Ridwan, 2025), inconsistent role-modelling and

selective sanctioning (Eyina & Anyalebechi, 2026), and infrastructural and capacity constraints (Nwachukwu, 2024), are not best understood as a list of independent obstacles. On close reading, each is a specific expression of a single underlying condition: the absence of sustained institutional commitment sufficient to convert stated policy aspiration into durable practice. Uya's finding that curriculum content exists but is poorly delivered, Kelechi and Ridwan's finding that character education is formally endorsed but practically marginalised, and Eyina and Anyalebechi's finding that institutions possess transformative potential but exercise it inconsistently, all describe the same gap between design and delivery, observed at different points in the system.

A concrete illustration drawn from Nigeria's federal character and educational infrastructure debates is instructive here. Government white papers and policy documents have, for decades, articulated ambitious statements about character formation as a national priority, yet teacher training curricula in many Colleges of Education continue to allocate limited instructional time to values pedagogy specifically, a pattern consistent with Uya's implementation gap. Meanwhile, prolonged disruptions to the school calendar, including repeated industrial action within the university system, compound the infrastructural constraints Nwachukwu (2024) identifies, further narrowing the sustained engagement that Kohlberg's theory holds to be necessary for moral development to occur at all.

Each of these dynamics, considered individually, might be dismissed as a discrete administrative failing; considered together, through the combined lens of Kohlberg's developmental requirements and Human Capital Theory's institutional complementarity condition, they describe a single, coherent explanation for why character education and value reorientation have not yet delivered the developmental catalytic effect that Nigerian policy documents have long promised.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper demonstrated that character education and value reorientation possess considerable potential to promote moral development, responsible citizenship and national development in Nigeria, but their practical effectiveness has been constrained less by the weakness of the underlying ideas than by persistent failures of implementation and institutional support. The evidence indicates that character education remains marginalised in practice, while value reorientation efforts are undermined by inconsistent role-modelling, selective enforcement, corruption, inadequate capacity and weak institutional commitment. Viewed through Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, the limited outcomes are understandable because meaningful moral development requires sustained engagement with ethical issues rather than occasional or examination-driven instruction, while Human Capital Theory further shows that improved values can contribute to development only when supported by accountable institutions and effective governance. Thus, the central challenge is the persistent gap between policy aspiration and institutional practice, suggesting that durable character formation and value reorientation in Nigeria require sustained educational engagement, credible role-modelling, consistent enforcement of standards and institutional reforms capable of reinforcing, rather than contradicting, the values being promoted.

12. Recommendations

Arising from the foregoing discussion and conclusion, this paper makes the following recommendations for strengthening the contribution of character education and value reorientation to national development in Nigeria.

1. Character education should be formally instituted as a distinct, examinable subject within the Nigerian basic and secondary education curriculum, rather than remaining dispersed as incidental content within existing subjects, to ensure it receives instructional time and assessment attention proportionate to its stated policy importance.
2. Government and teacher training institutions should prioritise the training of teachers specifically in values pedagogy and moral development theory, addressing the implementation gap identified between curricular design and classroom practice.
3. Educational authorities should develop robust, standardised mechanisms for assessing character and values outcomes among learners, comparable in rigour to existing cognitive assessment mechanisms, to ensure that character education's practical effectiveness can be measured and improved over time, addressing the assessment gap identified in this paper's discussion.
4. Government should move beyond episodic, administration-specific value reorientation campaigns toward a durable, cross-administration institutional framework for value reorientation, insulated from the political transitions that have historically undermined the continuity of Nigerian value reorientation initiatives.
5. Given this paper's finding that institutional corruption, selective sanctioning and political interference substantially undermine value reorientation efforts, government should pursue institutional accountability reforms, including consistent and non-selective enforcement of anti-corruption measures, as a necessary complement to, rather than a separate agenda from, character education and value reorientation policy.
6. Public office holders, civil servants, and institutional leaders should be held to visibly consistent ethical standards, given this paper's finding that inconsistent institutional role-modelling substantially undermines the credibility of character education and value reorientation efforts directed at Nigerian youth and citizens more broadly.
7. Given the comparative scarcity of large-scale Nigerian empirical studies relative to the available international evidence base, government and academic institutions should support continued, methodologically rigorous empirical research on the outcomes of character education and value reorientation interventions within the Nigerian context, to strengthen the evidence base available for future policy design.

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