

## THE REACTIONS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO INDIGENOUS MORAL VALUES: THE CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF GHANA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study attempted to ascertain and understand the reactions of senior high school students to indigenous moral values. The sample for this study consisted of 296 randomly sampled day students. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A set of questionnaire constituted the research instrument. The independent sample t-test and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) were the main statistical tools used in the analyses of the data. The study established that; there is no significant difference between students of different age groups toward indigenous moral values; the type of school attended had no significant effect on the reactions of adolescent students to indigenous moral values, and parental occupation had no significant effect on the reactions of senior high school students to indigenous moral values.*

### Introduction

Little research has been carried in the area of indigenous moral value. Although some researchers have paid attention to perception of teachers and pupils about moral education (Thompson, 2006; Hoge, 1985; Nduka, 1980). Little is known about how senior high school schools react to indigenous moral values. Furthermore, moral education at senior high school level has traditionally been a blend of some traditional values and democratic values. As a result, the literature on the moral education at the senior high school is rich, but the literature does not capture the intricacies of traditional African values which lie at the heart of the upbringing young people in Ghana.

A major point of difference between moral education in senior high schools and indigenous moral values is the inclusion of certain peculiar values that define the life of every member of the Ghanaian society because prior to the introduction of oriental and western mores into what is now identified as Ghana, indigenous moral values such as respect for and obedience to elders, relatives, peers and other people who wielded power were inculcated in Ghanaian youth. For example, within the traditional society nearly all the various aspects of education for children are directed towards character training. Ghanaian parents prefer their

children to be upright, honest, humble, considerate, persevering, truthful and well-behaved at all times and will spare no effort to inculcate these values in their children. In addition, children were not allowed to butt in the conversations of elders and they were taught to consent without question the obligations allotted to them. Telling stories and legends to children contributed to character formation of children in that both the latter and the former serve as an inexhaustible source of teaching about the results of good behavior and misbehavior of individuals. Generally, children are expected to obey their elders without question and to accept their judgments on all issues as seasoned wisdom (McWilliams & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Pecku, 1998).

In exercising social control, traditional African societies emphasised that children comply with instructions unreservedly, and deviations from cultural norms were sternly frowned upon. Traditional African society also emphasized a strong sense of communal life, manifested in community ownership of land, rejection of ethical egoism, social justice and social control through the family, age groups, and elders (Gyekye, 1996; Nduka, 1980; Sarpong, 1973). Individual actions were to be carried out in congruence with nature, and the needs, concerns, aspirations and interests of

the individual were to play second fiddle to those of the group (Gyekye, 1996).

With the introduction of Western education into Ghana, adolescents who had access to this type of education developed a mindset which tended to disregard traditional beliefs, practices and customs that placed emphasis on values such as communalism, respect, and obedience (Nduka, 1975). As Gyekye (1996) remarks, traditional African moral values amounted to an obstruction to the Western system of thinking aimed at empowering individuals to engage in critical thinking, deep moral judgment and sound moral reasoning to enable the individual to surmount the vicissitudes of life for self-development and self-actualization.

Nevertheless, indigenous moral education appears to be recapturing its pride of place at all levels of education in Ghana's educational institutions. The philosophy of the new education reforms recognizes the need to develop in young people the ideals of sound moral character, good behaviour, morality, and love and respect for one's elders. This is geared towards developing a well-balanced individual who would have sympathy, respect and concern for others as well as the ability to decipher the common thread that binds humanity together and work towards peace and prosperity of humanity (Report on Education Reforms in Ghana, 2007). Nonetheless, although moral education is presently a compulsory subject in some Ghanaian senior high schools, it is not examined externally by the West African Examination Council in those schools (Ministry of Education, 1988). The inertia of the powers that be to put in an implementation process to make moral education externally examinable has been largely so because contemporary educational practices emphasize the development of reflective, critical analytical skills and problem solving skills that often contradict traditional values.

Ghanaian adolescents are currently at the crossroads because they are subjected from birth to an electronically conditioned "Global village culture" which is pivoted around avarice, greed and nepotism. These factors have an important bearing on the way the moral fabric of the adolescents is shaped. While adults' lives are exposed to the same culture that influences young people, adults are not paying attention to the distinctive ways in which young people forge meaning and purpose and develop their morality. Hence, adolescents who

have been raised to relish the Western values ideals of autonomous moral action and relative morality often oppose traditional concepts such as subordination of the self to group interests. To them, indigenous moral values and their reintroduction through character training appear alien. Thus, as Woodhouse (1985) observes, the acceptance of traditional moral education might require that it is exemplified by the development of moral reasoning based on relative morality which is anchored on the practice of basing moral action upon reflection and sound moral reasoning rather than upon the habit of obedience. In addition, because religion and morality are so inevitably linked in the Ghanaian society, secularizing moral education at the second cycle level, (except perhaps in a few senior high schools), has not been easy. Accordingly, Nduka (1982) suggests that moral education in schools be secularized in order to foster the ability of young people to make autonomous moral judgments.

Past research on moral education has concentrated only on two broad issues: perception about moral education and attitude towards moral education. Considering the issue of indigenous moral values in Ghana in particular, the literature is almost silent about how senior high school students react to indigenous morality. Consequently, there is an incomplete picture of the way students react to indigenous moral values. Hence, there is the need to explore pertinent question as to whether traditional social control is still applied on Ghanaian children, especially adolescents. In modern-day Ghana, it is possible that moral values and character training by society have never been discarded and that values such as respect for one's elders and regard for others are still considered suitable for promoting appropriate traits of behaviour in the midst of adolescents. It is also likely that unlettered adolescents may possibly be more completely under time-honored social control and so more acquiescent to indigenous moral values. Consequently, by means of independent variables, to wit; age difference, type of school, and parental occupation, the current study intends to establish how Ghanaian senior high school adolescents respond whether positively or negatively, toward indigenous moral values and character training. The following three hypotheses were suggested for the study:

- (1) No significant differences exist in the reactions of senior high school students of

different age groups to indigenous moral values.

- (2) No significant differences exist between adolescents attending boys-only, girls-only, or mixed senior high schools in their reactions to indigenous moral values.
- (3) Parental occupation has no significant effect on the reactions of senior high school students to indigenous moral values.

## Methodology

### Participants

The study population comprised students from seven senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Komenda-Edina-Eguafo District, Mankessim District and Winneba Municipal in the Central Region of Ghana. Three of the schools (one boys-only school, one girls-only school, and one mixed school) are situated in Cape Coast Metropolis, two (mixed) schools are situated in sub-urban community of Elimina and one (mixed) school is located in the sub-urban community of Winneba and one (mixed) school situated in a sub-urban community of Mankessim.

The schools were purposively sampled because they were day schools whose students got back into the community each day after school and as a result were well disposed to providing the relevant data required for the study. From these schools, 296 participants (174 from Cape Coast, 74 from Elimina and Winneba, and 48 from Mankessim) were randomly selected. The sample was obtained from students aged 14 and above in forms three. The respondents were young adolescents who had spent at least two years in senior high school acquiring formal (Western) education, yet who, as day students, lived in the communities in which their schools were located and as a consequence were still exposed to indigenous moral norms of their communities.

### Instrument

The instrument used in this study consisted of two sections. Section one dealt with the background characteristics of the participants (age, sex, place of birth, place of residence, school attended, etc.). Section two consisted of a 12-item, modified Likert-type opinion survey, on which respondents indicated the level of their agreement or disagreement with the

items. The survey items comprised two types of statements, both positive and negative, about aspects of respect for and obedience to elders and other authority figures. These aspects are chosen because they were considered to be the basis of moral values in traditional Ghanaian society. The following constitute the questionnaire:

1. I ought to get up from my seat for an elder if there is no seat for him.
2. I ought to run errands for my parents and elders always.
3. The impressions and judgements of elders ought not be complied with at all times
4. I should stay out when my parents and elders are engrossed in discussions.
5. It is not obligatory for me to run errands for my parents and elders always.
6. I ought to live out the profession my parents select for me.
7. If my father asks me to live out a specific religion, I ought to comply with.
8. A young person ought not to give his seat to an elderly person who has no seat.
9. I cannot comply with my parents if they ask me to live out a certain profession
10. It is not obligatory for me to stop out if my parents and elders engage in discussions.
11. The impressions and judgements of elders ought to be cherished at all times.
12. I cannot comply with my father if he instructs me to live out the religion that he professes.

Responses to positive items on the survey were scored and tabulated on a four point Likert-type scale, which was scored 4, 3, 2 and 1 for all the items with responses; "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree", respectively. Scoring was reversed for negative items. Consequently, the highest and lowest scores obtainable were 48 and 12, respectively. The items were developed to make respondents think carefully about their answers and to discourage inconsistent responses. The inventory was considered as having validity by experts in testing and measurement and moral education in the Faculty of Education at University of Cape Coast since specialists in the content measured by an instrument can judge the appropriateness of items in the instrument. The Cronbach alpha measure of internal consistency was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The selection of

Cronbach's co-efficient alpha was informed by Payne and Payne (2005) view that the "Cronbach's co-efficient is used when measures have multiple-scored items such as attitudinal scale" (p.22). The Cronbach's alpha reliability index of the instrument was .8014 hence it was deemed reliable.

### Procedure

The instrument was administered to the students in the respective schools in May 2009. The data were then reviewed, coded and analyzed. The statistical programme, the Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) version 16 was used to analyse the data. The independent sample t-test was used to analyse the first hypothesis. This was meant

to ascertain the mean differences in the reactions of students Aged 14-17 years and 18 Years and Above toward Indigenous moral values. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to resolve the second and third hypotheses. This was considered appropriate since it sought to identify the mean differences reactions of three or more groups (category of schools and parental occupation) to indigenous moral values.

### Results

The first hypothesis was aimed at resolving the issue of whether differences exist in the reactions of senior high school students of different age groups to indigenous moral values.

**Table 1**

**Differences in the Reactions of Students Aged 14-17 years and 18 Years and Above toward Indigenous Moral Values**

Group	N	X	SD	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Aged 14-17	197	52.49	10.21	0.33	97	0.8
Aged 18 years and Above	98	51.96	13.40			

p>0.05 (Not Significant)

Data in Table 1 show the mean scores of the students and the t-test comparison of the means. The mean score for students between 14 and 17 years of age was 52.49; while that for students aged 18 years and older was 51.96. A t-test comparison of the means discovered no significant difference between the reactions of students in these two age groups toward indigenous moral values as illustrated by a sig. value of 0.8 which

was more than .05, the conventional marker of significant results. It appears that age has no significant consequence on students' reactions to indigenous moral values.

The second hypothesis has to do with the issue of whether the type of school attended was not found to have any significant effect on the reactions of adolescent students in the senior high schools to indigenous moral values.

**Table 2**

**Differences in the Reactions of Students in boys only school, girls only school and mixed schools toward Indigenous Moral Values**

Group	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	380.67	2	190.335	.0307	.061
Within Groups	13,401.33	294	45.583		
Total	13,782.00	296			

p>0.05 (Significant)

Table 2 reports the differences in the Reactions of Students in boys only school, girls only school and mixed schools toward Indigenous Moral Values. No significant differences were found in the mean scores of students from boys-only schools ( $\bar{X} = 52.8$ ;  $SD = 9.2$ ), girls-only schools ( $\bar{X} = 52.9$ ;  $SD = 11.8$ ), and mixed schools ( $\bar{X} = 53.9$   $SD = 9.9$ ). Cumulatively, the sig. value of .061 is not significant at the 0.05 level, a finding that indicates that no significant difference existed between the three mean values.

The third hypothesis delved into the issue of whether parental occupation has no significant effect on the reactions of senior high school students to indigenous moral values.

**Table 3**  
**Differences in the reactions toward indigenous moral values of students from three categories of parental occupations**

Source	SS	df	Ms	F	Sig.
Between groups	380.67	2	190.335	4.176	.0034
Within groups	13,401.33	294	45.583		
Total	13,782.00	296			

$p < 0.05$  (Significant)

Table 3 illustrates the differences in the reactions toward indigenous moral values of students from the three categories of parental occupations. Significant difference was found between the reactions of students whose parents belong to the following occupational categories: college professors/doctors, secondary/primary school teachers and nurses, and artisans and other semi-skilled occupations [ $F(2, 294) = 4.176$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ].

Despite reaching statistical significant, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was 0.027. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for students whose parents belong to the first occupational group ( $\bar{X} = 52.4$ ;  $SD = 7.89$ ) and the second category ( $\bar{X} = 52.2$ ;  $SD = 6.91$ ) was significantly different from parents belonging to the third group

( $\bar{X} = 54.6$ ;  $SD = 6.32$ )

### Discussion

Haan (1985) in a study confirmed that moral development occurs most effectively through positive interactions with the environment hence, at any age and in any situation that one is confronted with a challenge that calls for a course of action among competitive values, accepted moral standards of society become an index for determining the rightness or wrongness of an action or making sound moral judgments. This stems from the fact that morality is a social construct. Rest (1986) agrees with Haan on this score but maintains that conscious effort must be made to instill in

young people a sense of sincerity, honesty, sympathy, fairness, humility, love, respect for others, sound moral reasoning and deep moral judgment, this perfectly fits into the study in question. Although, Haan (1985) concurs with the assertion by Kohlberg (1970) that moral values and societal rules primarily exist in peripheral forces and for that reason superficially imposed, he postulates that as children enter adolescence, their moral independence enhances. Regardless of age, nonetheless, the Ghanaian adolescents in the present study were apparently generally supportive of traditional moral values such as respect for and obedience to parents and elders. This finding corroborates with a study conducted by (Gilligan, 1982) which concluded that, by age 16, adolescents start to toe the line of societal standard pattern of behaviour, and that, by age 19, the majority of the youth believe in the upholding of the rules and rights as dictated by society. However, Gilligan observes that most young people also believe that some societal laws or moral values are not sacrosanct hence moral values or laws could be defied if they think that those laws or values are not in conformity with sound moral judgment.

Virtually, the entire senior high schools in the metropolis, municipalities and districts in the Central Region of Ghana, from which the sample was obtained, have day students in the midst of the boarding students and as such, the day students selected for the study stay together with their parents and members of their extended families or other members of the various communities in the study

area. As a consequence, they were perhaps prone to greater echelon of social restriction than as it pertains to students who stay in standoffish and extremely sophisticated cities and towns. In the rural settings, family ties is very strong hence the older generation in the extended family prevail upon the younger ones to lead lives that conform to the standard pattern of behaviour in the society in order to uplift the image of the family. As a consequence, they are expected to refrain from indulging themselves in lifestyles that would make them subjects of public scorn and this might have influenced the students' generally favourable reactions to traditional moral values. This type of social restriction is not likely in urban settings. In the same vein, Hoge (1995) maintains that some aspects of traditional values like sincerity, love and respect for elders and those in authority constitute values which serve as common threads that define humanity and this might have influenced the participants' favourable attitudes toward indigenous moral education.

The finding of no significant difference in reactions to indigenous moral values between adolescents from boys-only, girls-only, and mixed schools implies that the type of schools the adolescents attended was not an issue in determining their moral development. This finding contradicts a study conducted by Leung (1988) which concluded that mixed schools, although improve boys' and girls' academic accomplishment, also encourage debauchery, occultism, and failure to toe the line of standard pattern of behavior in society. However, Lockwood (1997) proffers an explanation to this conundrum of a finding by asserting that there is gap between moral knowledge and moral action, and this occurs at two levels. First a gap may exist between the teaching of virtues on one hand and the reception of these virtues by students on the other. In other words, though teachers may teach the intended virtues, students may not agree with those virtues. Second, another gap may also exist when students agree with the importance of those virtues, but may not be able to practice these virtues in their daily life. Lockwood further argues that factors such as insecurity, impracticality and inexperience are the causes of this discrepancy.

Moreover, the significant difference in the reactions of adolescents whose parents are engineers or medical professionals and those whose parents fit in the artisan and unskilled occupational

category is not startling. This stems from the fact that students whose parents occupy top professional positions tend to be influenced by the views of their Western-sophisticated parents. However, it is instructive to take note that there are few exceptions to the assertion above. This results from the fact that some Ghanaian educated elite still uphold traditional value system and will spare no effort in practicing and preserving it. However, the trappings of western education tend to have an unfavourable influence on their strict adherence to traditional practices and values. Nduka (1975) maintains that stringent adherence to indigenous values such as respect for one's elders and communalism has been compromised with the introduction of the Western ideal of the pursuance of self-interest. Even though Christianity which emanates from the western world, values modesty which is in accord with Ghanaian traditional value system, the quest for material wealth which is a western ethos in several directions, is practically a mismatch with those ideals. Therefore, it is not surprising that a lot of educated Ghanaians are at the crossroads, as Leung (1988) rightly connects, "between the two worlds of the Western system of values and the indigenous one" (p.17). It appears that the children of such erudite people have also been influenced by this maze.

However, children whose parents constitute the working class which is made up of artisans and semi-skilled workforce share world views and reactions to indigenous moral values akin to those of their parents, who have acquired little or no Western education at all. These parents usually have more respect for indigenous moral values such as reverence for and submission to the dictates of elders and other authority figures, and it appears that they impress upon their children to accept these values too.

### Conclusion

The participants, regardless of age and type of school attended responded favourably to indigenous moral values and were positively predisposed toward indigenous morality. Whilst a majority of the students whose parents held lower-status occupations were supportive of indigenous moral values, students whose parents held well-paid and high status jobs reacted more negatively to these values. The work-related status of parents was found to be influenced by their educational background which, in turn, influenced the moral

upbringing and values orientation of their children. A study conducted by Thorton and White (2004) revealed a relationship between the occupational backgrounds of parents and the educational ambitions of their children. However, the finding of the study in question had revealed a relationship between parental occupational background and adolescent reaction to indigenous moral values. This finding is indeed very revealing.

Meanwhile, it would be informative to carry out further a study to ascertain the relationship between indigenous moral values and the behavior of Ghanaian schoolchildren who adhere to these moral values. Nevertheless, judging from the results of this study, it gives the impression that it is logical to propose that students in senior high

schools in Ghana ought to be inspired to hold favourable attitudes toward indigenous moral values. There is the need to close the gap between indigenous moral values and actions hence, students should be encouraged to put these values into practice, by this means a solid and lasting basis for the moral reorientation and development for the younger generation and generations yet unborn would be laid. In addition, teachers, at the same time as they ought to respect the rational emotional state of their students at all times, is incumbent upon them to be archetypes of morality or moral exemplars in the maintenance of indigenous moral qualities and rules of conduct. By doing so, students' favourable temperament toward time-honoured moral norms possibly will be continued.

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