



VIRTUES AND INTEGRITY: A CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK FROM IFA CORPUS AND PROVERBS 10:9.

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Abstract

This paper explores virtues and integrity as essential foundations for building a just and sustainable society, employing a cross-cultural framework that draws from the Ifa corpus of Yoruba moral philosophy and the biblical text of Proverbs 10:9. Both traditions, though arising from distinct cultural and religious contexts, converge on the primacy of character and uprightness in human conduct. The Ifa corpus emphasizes *Iwa pele* (good character) as the highest virtue, without which knowledge, power, and wealth lose meaning. Similarly, Proverbs 10:9 asserts that one who “walks uprightly walks securely,” linking integrity with stability, trust, and divine approval, while condemning deceitful ways as self-destructive. By placing these two wisdom traditions in dialogue, the study highlights their shared ethical vision: that integrity safeguards individuals, sustains communal harmony, and ensures accountability in both spiritual and social dimensions. This cross-cultural approach not only deepens appreciation of indigenous and biblical moral thought but also proposes an inclusive framework for cultivating virtues that can respond to contemporary challenges of corruption, moral decline, and leadership crises in society.

Keywords: Virtue, Integrity, Ifa corpus, Proverbs 10:9, Cross-cultural ethics, Character formation.

INTRODUCTION

The moral health of any society is deeply rooted in the quality of character displayed by its individuals. Character integrity is defined as the consistent alignment of one’s actions with ethical principles and moral values has long been regarded as the foundation of societal stability and personal fulfillment. In both religious and cultural traditions, the call to live a life of integrity is a recurring theme that transcends geography, history, and ideology. Two such traditions that have significantly shaped moral thought are the Yoruba Ifa corpus and the Judeo-Christian scriptures, particularly the Book of Proverbs.

According to Abimbola, (2006) the Yoruba Ifa corpus, a body of sacred oral literature and spiritual wisdom, places a high premium on the concept of *Ìwà Pẹ̀lẹ́* (good character). Within this framework, character is not only central to individual destiny but also to social harmony and spiritual well-being. Proverbs from the corpus such as “*Ìwà l’ẹ̀wà*” (Character is beauty) underscore the belief that true worth lies in moral behavior rather than external appearance. Similarly, the Book of Proverbs in the Bible, a key text in Hebrew wisdom literature, highlights integrity as a

defining trait of the righteous, according to Longman (2006). Proverbs 10:9 declares: “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.” This verse, among many others, reflects the biblical understanding of integrity as a safeguard for righteous living and communal trust.

In the face of increasing moral decline in contemporary society marked by dishonesty, corruption, and hypocrisy there is an urgent need to revisit these foundational teachings. By examining both the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs, this work seeks to explore the shared moral framework embedded in these traditions, with a particular focus on character integrity. This study, therefore, aims to examine character integrity as presented in the Ifa corpus and Proverbs 10:9, and to show how these two wisdom traditions can jointly offer a framework for restoring virtue and ethical consciousness in contemporary society.

CHARACTER INTEGRITY IN THE IFA CORPUS

Ifa corpus is a vast collection of oral literature central to the Yoruba religious and philosophical worldview. It serves as both a spiritual guide and a moral compass, offering practical wisdom for everyday life. At the heart of this body of knowledge is the concept of *Ìwà* translated as "character" which is regarded as the most important virtue a human being can possess. Within the Ifa tradition, character integrity is not only the basis of moral living but also the foundation upon which one's destiny (*ayanmo*) and social relationships are built. Aina (2022) asserts that within Yoruba cosmology, *Iwa* (character) is the bedrock of ethical life and spiritual destiny, and Ifa corpus consistently opines that integrity of character surpasses all other possessions. Character is considered as the true adornment of an individual, superior to wealth, status, or ritual prowess. Aransi (2025) further explains that, several Odu Ifa like *Iwori Meji* divination teaches that all sacrifices will be in vain without good character. It underscores that ritual efficacy depends on moral uprightness.

Similarly, *Ogunda Meji* admonishes that prosperity without integrity leads to ruin, as it is *Iwa* alone that ensures continuity of blessings. Aina (2022) further supports by sighting *Irosun Meji* and explain that those who lack character will inevitably bring misfortune upon themselves and their households, regardless of their social or spiritual achievements. Character is the foundation upon which destiny (*ori*) is actualized. From the view of *Ogunajo* (2021), the relationship between *iwa* and *ori* is especially significant. While destiny is divinely allotted, its fulfillment is contingent upon the cultivation of good character. Aransi (2025) elucidates that *Otura Meji* teaches that even a favourable destiny can be wasted by a person who neglects moral discipline, whereas a difficult destiny may be redeemed through patience, humility, and integrity. Thus, Ifa weaves ethics and ontology together, presenting character not as an optional virtue but as the essential mediator between human beings, society, and the divine order.

Communally, character integrity sustains harmony and trust. *Ofuasia* (2016), opines that, Ifa verses warn that arrogance, dishonesty, and sexual misconduct fracture the social fabric, while patience (*suuru*), honesty (*otito*), and respect (*iyi*) foster cohesion. In this sense, *iwa* is not a private virtue but a public trust. The Ifa worldview, therefore, positions moral integrity as indispensable for sustaining both personal destiny and communal balance. The Ifa corpus elevates character integrity above ritual performance, intellectual brilliance, or material acquisition. It insists that without *iwa*, human life remains unstable, social harmony collapses, and divine blessings are forfeited. Conversely, with *iwa*, individual align themselves with cosmic order, safeguard communal peace, and secure the fulfillment of destiny.

Ìwà Pèlẹ̀: The Foundation of Moral Excellence

The Ifa corpus repeatedly emphasizes the cultivation of *Ìwà Pèlẹ̀* gentle, good, and noble character according to *Abimbola* (2006). This type of character is marked by humility, honesty, patience, respect, and self-control. According to Yoruba cosmology, humans were sent to earth by *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme Being) to fulfill their destiny, but the successful fulfillment of that destiny is only possible through the development and preservation of good character. A popular Ifa maxim states: "*Ìwà l'ẹwà*" (Character is beauty) by *Kanu*, (2012). This proverb teaches that external beauty is meaningless without good character. In other words, true attractiveness lies in a person's

moral disposition, not in their physical appearance. This view contrasts with modern societal values that often prioritize appearance, wealth, or status over moral integrity.

Moral Teachings in the Odu Ifa

The Ifa literary corpus is divided into 256 Odu, each containing stories, proverbs, prayers, and ethical teachings. These Odu offer numerous lessons on the consequences of moral choices. One such teaching from the Odu Irosun Meji warns: "A person who lacks good character, even if he is rich, will lose everything." Abimbola, (2007). Here, Ifa aligns character integrity with long-term well-being. It portrays moral behavior not as a religious obligation alone but as a necessary condition for personal success, social harmony, and spiritual peace. Similarly, in the Odu Ogunda Meji, the verse emphasizes the importance of honesty and consistency: "Let us behave with integrity, that we may not be found wanting when our deeds are weighed." Abimbola, (2007). The moral teachings of Odu Ifa center on good character, truth, respect for destiny, communal responsibility, justice, and harmony with nature. Together, they create a holistic vision of ethics where spiritual well-being and moral behaviour are inseparable. This echoes the sentiment in Proverbs 10:9, illustrating the universality of the moral principle that integrity brings security while dishonesty leads to downfall.

Integrity and Communal Responsibility

In Ifa, character integrity is not an individual concern alone, it has communal consequences. A person with good character brings honor to their family and community, while one with bad character brings shame. This communal outlook creates a system of moral accountability, where everyone is expected to uphold values like truthfulness, reliability, and respect for others. The Babalawo (Ifa priest) plays a key role in guiding individuals toward moral reform, using Ifa divination sessions to counsel people on how to correct their behavior. Integrity is presented not as perfection but as a constant striving toward better character. Modern scholars of African traditional religion affirm the centrality of character in Ifa ethics. Wande Abimbola (2006) notes that "the highest achievement of a person in the Yoruba worldview is to be known for good character." Similarly, Kola Abimbola (2007) highlights that character in Ifa is tied to both spiritual and social dimensions forming the basis of trust, justice, and divine favor. In the contemporary context, the wisdom of the Ifa corpus offers an important corrective to the moral crisis facing many societies. Where integrity is lacking in leadership, governance, or everyday interactions Ifa's teachings call for a return to the disciplined, value-based living embodied in *Ìwà Pẹ̀lẹ́*.

BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The Book of Proverbs is one of the wisdom books in the Old Testament of the Bible. It is a compilation of wise sayings, moral instructions, and life principles intended to guide individuals toward righteous and successful living. As a cornerstone of Hebrew wisdom literature, Proverbs addresses themes such as justice, discipline, integrity, and the fear of God, making it a valuable resource for exploring the concept of character integrity according to Waltke (2004). Traditionally, the book was attributed to King Solomon 10th century BCE, renowned for his wisdom (I Kings 4:32). The date and composition showed that it was likely compiled over centuries (10th - 6th century BCE). The final form was probably edited during the post-exilic period (after the Babylonian exile), when Israel emphasized wisdom literature as part of preserving identity and faith. The literary genre of this book belongs to wisdom literature (along with Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach), and the use of short sayings, poems, and instructions to teach moral and practical lessons. Proverbs are memorable, often built on parallelism (repetition, contrast, or comparison). The theme and purpose of the book is to impact wisdom (*hokmah*) not just intellectual knowledge, but practical skill for godly living, such as, value of discipline, integrity, diligence, humility, and justice. Warning against foolishness, laziness, pride, and immorality, together with, emphasis on family, community, and social harmony. The last but not the least based on cultural context. This book reflects not only Israelite traditions but also the broader Near Eastern wisdom culture, because similar proverbs in Israel were found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian writings. The focus of the book is practical, everyday life, work, speech, relationships, leadership, showing that religion and morality are inseparable.

Literary Structure and Style

The Book of Proverbs is primarily composed of short, pithy maxims many of them in two-line parallelism which are easy to remember and recite. This aphoristic style is typical of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Proverbs are designed to be didactic, offering moral instruction in a concise, memorable form as stated by Talbert (2000). Thematically, the book is organized around key concepts such as:

Wisdom versus foolishness

Righteousness versus wickedness

Diligence versus laziness

Honesty versus deceit

Purpose and Audience

Proverbs 1:1–7 provides the book's stated purpose: “To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity” (Proverbs 1:2–3, ESV). This purpose reveals the book’s goal: to shape moral character and wise decision-making, especially among the youth. The repeated phrase “My son” indicates the book’s pedagogical intent, as if a father were instructing his child in the ways of right living.

Proverbs 10:9 in Hebrew Transliteration Version

holekh b'tom yelexh betach, u'me'akesh derakhav yivvada

Proverbs 10:9 in English Version (RSV - Revised Standard Version)

“He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.”

An Exegesis of Proverbs 10:9

For the purpose of exegetical study, some clauses need to be analyzed here:

The first word to consider is *halak* (walk), it denotes movement in general, although usually of people. It can be applied with various connotations including Joshua 17:7, at the same time in various contexts. Hess (2006) asserts that, it has synonyms with *rus* (run), *bo* (come, enter), *yasa* (go out), *ala* (ascend), and *shub* (return). It occurs in 1562 times in the Bible. The specific application of this verb to various kinds of going may be translate variously as “creeping of a snake (Gen. 3:14), the prowling of foxes (Lam. 5:18), the sailing of ships (Gen. 7:18), the walking of men (Ex. 14:29), and human life (Gen. 15:2, Josh. 23:14).” This verb be applied both to supposed gods (Ps. 115:7) and to the Lord God, although other verbs are generally used in theophanic accounts. More frequently and more importantly *halak* is applied to Yahweh’s coming to his people in judgement or blessing (II Sam. 7:23), especially during the wilderness wanderings (Ex. 33:14). Apostasy is describe as their “going after” other/false gods (Ex. 32:1), pursuing one’s own evil counsel (Jer. 7:24; Ps. 1:1), or heart (Jer. 11:8), or walking in darkness (Isa. 9:2) and meets with God’s judgement (Lev. 26:24). The truly pious follow God’s leading in all that they do (that is, they keep his commandments, I Kgs. 3:14). This idea can be expressed by *halak* alone without *ahare* plus words such as *sedaqot* (Isa. 33:15) (Hinson, 2005).

Another word is *tom* (integrity). Bowker (2018) opines that it has derivative from *tamam* (to complete). *tamam* moves naturally toward that which is ethically sound, upright, whole, perfect, associated with animals which are without blemish (Ps. 19:13). The perfect (*tamim*) decision, as made by lots, is correct one (I Sam. 14:41) It represents the divine standard of God for man’s attainment. *tamam* is used with the commandments of God meaning to fulfill them (Josh. 4:10). To him, the two problems of Old Testament theology concern the verb *tamam*: self-righteousness and perfectionism. It is used to express the meaning of come to a close and cease. The verb elucidate how humanity were encourage to move closer God in the heart of integrity and plainness of mind.

In addition, *betach* means securely, safety, trust, confidence, or security. This is one of two words used in the Old Testament to express trust or reliance upon, the other being *hasa*. In Hebrew *betach*, expresses that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence. It is significant that the LXX never translates this word with “believe in” but with “to hope,” in the positive sense “to rely on God” or “to be persuaded,” for the negative notion for relying on what turns out to be deceptive (Davison, 2001). This would seem to indicate that *betach* does not connote that full-orbed intellectual and volitional response to revelation which is involved in “faith,” rather stressing the feeling of being safe or secure. Likewise, all the derivatives have the same meaning “to feel secure,” “be unconcerned.” It should also be noted that, the word *betach* has an ambivalent connotation when used of human relationships (Thompson, 1974). The folk “living at ease” with their neighbours suffered for their credulity and gullibility, while those taking advantage of their careless posture are censured: the example is in the case of the false security of the Shechemites versus the cruelty of Levi and Simeon (Gen. 34:25). In general, the Old Testament contrasts the validity of that sense of confidence which comes from reliance upon God with the folly of any other kind of security (Walter, 2003). It is made plain that all such trust will end in disgrace and shame (Ps. 31:14), whereas those whose hope in God alone will be delivered from their enemies (Ps. 22:4); their prayers will be answered (I Chr. 5:20); they will walk in straight paths (Prov. 3:5); will be given joy and gladness (Ps. 16:9); will know inner peace and absence of fear (Ps. 4:8). Hence, the repeated admonition to trust in the Lord (Prov. 16:20; Isa. 30:15).

Moreover, *salaph* (perverts) is another word. From the view of Bowker (2018), the basic meaning of the root is “to twist,” the related ideas of distorting or perverting a man’s rights or ways make it synonymous with other such Hebrew verbs as: *hapak* (overturn), *awa* (do wrong, pervert), and *aqash* (do that which is crooked). The verb is employed primarily for contexts dealing with moral or social behaviour. The Torah warns strenuously against taking a bribe, lest it becloud one’s clear thinking and so distort the course of justice (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19). The dangers of bribery, particularly in matters of litigation, were well known in the ancient world. In a nutshell, this verb occurs frequently in pointing out that evil so twists the sinful and foolish man that his way becomes perverted and he rages against the Lord (Prov. 13:6, 19:3). While the evil man may think he prospers, God will overthrow him in his treacherousness (Prov. 22:12) and turn his way to ruin (Prov. 21:12).

Furthermore, *orah* (way, path) is another Hebrew word. This verb appeared fifty-eight times in the Old Testament, forty-five of them are limited to three books: Proverbs nineteen times; Psalms fifteen times; Job eleven times. Most often *orah* is used in a figurative way, describing the way to life or to death. It often parallel with the word *derek*, meaning “way, lifestyle.” (Isidore, 2000). The contrast is between the way of sin/death and the way of obedience/life. These exhaust the options available to man. Man makes his own choice but he cannot choose his own consequences. The path of life (Ps. 16:11) corresponds with the path of integrity (Ps. 27:11), the path of uprightness (Prov. 2:13), the path of justice (Prov. 2:8), the path of righteousness (Prov. 8:20). Conversely, one is to spurn the path of evil (Ps. 119:101) for it is a false path (Ps. 119:104, 128). To follow the path of truth and life is to follow God’s own path (Ps. 25:4, 10), where the word is synonym for God’s Torah (Isa. 2:3). The way which one chooses determines one’s destiny.

Finally, *masa* (find, found out) and approximately have 450 usages root in the Old Testament, and most of theses are in the Qal stem. The basic meaning of *masa* is “to find” and in the LXX the translation of *masa* is often not *eurisko* but something like *haliskomai* “be caught, held.” The evidence of related languages is helpful (Payne, 2002). Richardson (2001) explains that, Hebrew *masa* is to be related to Aramaic *meta* “to reach, attain.” Apart from this, there seems to be, then, sufficient grounds to establish for *masa* in the Qal stem not only the meaning “to find” but also “to come upon, meet, reach.” As a generalization, we may say that whenever *masa* is used to describe a result following a time of “seeking” the translation is “to find.” Thus, Deut. 4:29, “if you seek (*baqash*) the Lord, you shall find (*masa*) him.” “Seek (*darash*) the Lord, while he may be found (*masa*) (Isa. 55:6), they shall seek (*sahar*) me early, but shall not find (*masa*) me” (Prov. 1:28) (Wiseman, 2001). We may add to this list the copious references to finding favour (hen) in the eyes of another (God or one’s fellow man): Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 32:5. The idea obviously is to gain acceptance or to win approbation. The phrase occurs approximately forty times in the Old Testament.

CHARACTER INTEGRITY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The Book of Proverbs presents character integrity as a fundamental virtue that shapes individual destiny and communal well-being. Integrity, in this context, means walking in truthfulness, uprightness, and moral consistency qualities that foster security, trust, and divine favor. Proverbs 10:9 encapsulates this idea clearly: “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.” (Proverbs 10:9, NIV). This verse contrasts two kinds of people: those who live with honesty and moral soundness, and those who engage in deceit and crooked behavior. The former “walk securely,” implying peace of mind, social trust, and protection from harm. The latter “will be found out,” signifying eventual exposure and disgrace.

Integrity as Moral Wholeness

In Proverbs, integrity is not merely about honesty in speech but reflects the wholeness of character. It involves an alignment of inner values and outward actions, creating consistency that is reliable and admirable. This wholeness forms the basis for sound relationships whether in family, business, or governance. For instance, Proverbs 11:3 states: “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.” (NIV). This emphasizes that integrity functions as a moral compass, guiding righteous living. Conversely, duplicity (deceit) leads to ruin.

Integrity and Divine Favour

The book portrays integrity as pleasing to God and rewarded by Him. Those who maintain integrity enjoy blessings, security, and long life. This divine endorsement reinforces the societal importance of integrity as a stabilizing force. For example, Proverbs 28:6 declares: “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.” (NIV). Here, material wealth is secondary to moral uprightness. The “walk” metaphor in Proverbs refers to one’s lifestyle and choices, highlighting that integrity permeates daily living. Longman III (2006) explains that integrity in Proverbs is closely linked with “faithfulness to God’s law and social responsibilities”. It is a virtue that reflects one’s character before God and society. Whybray (2007) highlights that Proverbs uses integrity as a standard against which all behavior is measured. It stands as a defense against the chaos brought by deceit and injustice. Waltke (2004), another renowned biblical scholar, notes that Proverbs presents integrity as a holistic virtue that protects the individual and community from moral and social collapse.

Integrity in Broader Proverbs Context

Proverbs addresses integrity not in isolation but within a network of virtues such as honesty, humility, diligence, and justice. Proverbs 12:22 asserts: “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (NIV). This shows that trustworthiness, a product of integrity, is a divine delight. Similarly, Proverbs 20:7 says: “The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them” (NIV). The emphasis on the generational impact of integrity suggests its role in building a lasting virtuous society.

Practical Implications

Proverbs teaches that walking in integrity means:

Being truthful in speech and fair in dealings. The practical meaning of this means practicing integrity, and justice in all aspects of life. Waltke (2004) elucidates that, to be truthful in speech is to communicate without deceit, exaggeration, or manipulation, ensuring that words reflect reality and build trust. Fairness in dealings involves treating others with equity, respecting their rights, and avoiding exploitation or dishonesty in relationships, business, or daily interactions. Together, these virtues foster trust, promote harmony, and reflect strong moral and ethical character.

Avoiding deceit, corruption, and injustice. This is essential for living a life of integrity and responsibility. Whybray (2007) asserts that, to avoid deceit means rejecting lies, manipulation, or any form of dishonesty that undermines

trust. Steering clear of corruption involves refusing to engage in bribery, abuse of power, or selfish practices that harm the common good. Avoiding injustice requires treating people with fairness, upholding their freedom, and resisting practices that oppress or exploit others. These principles promote transparency, accountability, and a just society where truth and righteousness can thrive.

Living consistently according to one's moral beliefs. This means aligning actions, choices, and lifestyle with the values and principles one claims to uphold. Longman III (2006) narrates that, it involves integrity, being the same person in private and public, without hypocrisy or compromise. Such consistency strengthens personal character, builds trust with others, and provides a clear moral example. It also requires courage, especially when external pressures or temptations challenge one's convictions.

Cultivating a reputation that fosters trust and respect. It means living in a way that consistently reflects honesty, responsibility, and integrity. Wiseman (2001) stresses that, a good reputation is built over time through keeping promises, treating others fairly, and demonstrating reliability in words and actions. When people can depend on one's character, trust grows, and respect naturally follows. Such a reputation not only strengthens personal relationships but also serves as a positive influence within the wider community.

These principles, embedded in Proverbs, remain relevant for addressing contemporary ethical challenges.

THE BROADER DECADENCE OF CHARACTER INTEGRITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In recent decades, many societies around the world have witnessed a noticeable decline in character integrity. This erosion manifests in various sectors, including politics, education, religion, and family life, leading to widespread mistrust, social instability, and ethical confusion. The contrast between the high moral standards advocated by traditional wisdom such as those found in the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs and the current moral challenges highlights the urgent need for renewed commitment to integrity.

Political and Governance Challenges

Corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power have become rampant in many countries, undermining public trust in leaders and institutions. Politicians and public officials often engage in dishonest practices for personal gain, betraying the social contract that demands accountability and service. In Nigeria, for example, persistent reports of electoral fraud, misappropriation of public funds, and lack of transparency contribute to cynicism among citizens. Such behaviors run counter to the Ifa teaching that a person's character affects not only their personal destiny but also the well-being of the community. Similarly, Proverbs 29:4 states: "By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down" (NIV). This underscores the consequences of abandoning integrity in leadership.

Ethical Decline in Education

In educational institutions, integrity issues such as cheating, plagiarism, and examination malpractice are increasingly common. Students under pressure to succeed may resort to dishonest means, undermining the value of education and corrupting the future workforce. The Ifa corpus stresses the importance of diligence and honesty as vital to personal and communal progress. Proverbs also warns against deceit: "The integrity of the upright guides them..." (Proverbs 11:3). The lack of integrity in education not only affects individual character but also compromises societal development.

Religious Hypocrisy and Moral Contradictions

Religious institutions, which should serve as beacons of morality, have sometimes been tarnished by scandals, false teachings, and hypocrisy. Leaders who preach integrity but fail to embody it erode their credibility and weaken

communal faith. Both Ifa and Proverbs emphasize that integrity begins with an authentic relationship with the divine. Proverbs 21:3 states: “To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (NIV). This implies that moral character matters more than ritual or appearance.

Family and Social Life

Family structures have also been affected by a decline in character integrity. Issues such as infidelity, domestic violence, and neglect weaken the foundational social unit. The loss of integrity in personal relationships leads to fractured families and communities. The Ifa teachings emphasize respect and honesty within the family as essential to social harmony. Proverbs 22:6 encourages: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (NIV). This highlights the importance of early character formation.

Consequences of Moral Decadence

The broader societal impact of eroded character integrity includes:

Insecurity and lack of trust: When individuals and institutions cannot be trusted, social cohesion weakens. According to Adeodu, Ademola and Clara (2024), this stems from widespread challenges such as terrorism, banditry, political instability, and economic hardship. These problems create fear among citizens and weaken confidence in government institutions, security agencies, and even community leaders. As insecurity grows, trust between the people and those in authority diminishes, leading to social tension, suspicion, and a weakened sense of national unity. Restoring peace and rebuilding trust requires justice, accountability, and genuine commitment to the common good.

Economic decline: Corruption and dishonesty deter investment and economic growth. From the view of Onyekpe (2022), this is marked by rising inflation, unemployment, unstable currency, and over-dependence on oil revenue. Corruption, poor governance, and insecurity further weaken productivity and discourage investment. As a result, many citizens face poverty, high living costs, and limited opportunities for growth. This decline not only affects individual livelihoods but also threatens national development and social stability.

Political instability: Lack of integrity in governance breeds unrest and conflict. Yerokun and Ogidiolu (2025) explains that political instability refers to the frequent disruptions and lack of continuity in governance caused by corruption, weak institutions, electoral malpractice, insecurity, and ethnic or religious tensions. These challenges undermine good leadership, erode public trust, and slow down national development. As a result, policies often change with each administration, and the nation struggles to achieve lasting stability and progress.

Youth disillusionment: Young people may lose faith in moral ideals and resort to destructive behaviour. From Yerokun and Oni (2025) perspective, this leads to widespread unemployment, poverty, poor governance, insecurity, and lack of opportunities for growth. Many young people feel excluded from decision-making and frustrated by unfulfilled promises of leaders. This disillusionment often leads to loss of hope, migration, involvement in crime, or apathy toward national development.

Scholars like Ehusani (2009) and Onigbinde (2017) have documented how value erosion in African societies contributes to underdevelopment and social malaise. They argue for renewed emphasis on moral education rooted in indigenous and religious ethical systems.

The Need for a Virtue-Based Framework

Given these challenges, the wisdom of both the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs becomes highly relevant. Their teachings on character integrity offer timeless guidelines for rebuilding ethical consciousness and nurturing a virtuous society. Virtue ethics emphasizes the formation of good character, qualities like honesty, integrity, compassion, and justice which guide people to act rightly in every situation. In contexts marked by corruption, insecurity, and moral failure, a virtue-based framework provides a stable foundation for ethical living, personal growth, and societal transformation.

CONCLUSION

Character integrity stands as the cornerstone of both individual fulfillment and societal well-being. Through the exploration of the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs, this study has shown that both traditions place profound emphasis on the cultivation of integrity as an essential virtue. In the Ifa worldview, Ìwà Pèlẹ good and gentle character is the foundation upon which destiny, spiritual harmony, and social respect are built. Similarly, the Book of Proverbs consistently highlights integrity as the path to security, divine favor, and lasting blessings. The shared emphasis on integrity in these distinct yet complementary wisdom traditions underscores the universality and timelessness of this virtue. Proverbs 10:9 captures this succinctly, affirming that walking in integrity leads to safety, while deceit results in downfall. This aligns closely with Ifa's teachings that good character sustains an individual and the community.

However, the broader contemporary society faces a critical erosion of character integrity, evidenced in widespread corruption, dishonesty, and moral laxity. This decay threatens social trust, political stability, and economic progress. The moral crises seen today call for a reinvigoration of foundational ethical principles grounded in wisdom traditions such as Ifa and biblical Proverbs. In sum, character integrity is not only a personal moral imperative but a vital framework for building a virtuous society. Revisiting and applying the insights from the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs can inspire individuals and communities to restore trust, justice, and ethical responsibility in all spheres of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights gained from the study of character integrity in the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs, as well as the current challenges facing contemporary society, the following recommendations are proposed to foster a virtues-based society:

1. Incorporate Traditional Wisdom into Moral Education

Governments and educational institutions should integrate the teachings of Ifa and biblical Proverbs into school curricula and moral education programs. This would provide students with a foundation in character development rooted in culturally and spiritually relevant wisdom traditions.

2. Promote Ethical Leadership and Accountability

Leaders in politics, business, and religious institutions must be encouraged and held accountable to high standards of integrity. Establishing transparent systems and rewarding ethical behavior will create a culture where honesty and responsibility are valued and practiced.

3. Strengthen Family and Community Values

Families and community leaders should actively teach and model good character traits such as honesty, respect, and humility. Initiatives such as community workshops, family counseling, and mentorship programs can reinforce these values from an early age.

4. Encourage Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue

Facilitating dialogue between different religious and cultural groups can foster mutual understanding and highlight shared moral principles like integrity. Such interactions can build bridges for collective efforts toward societal virtue.

5. Use Media and Technology Responsibly

Media outlets and social platforms have powerful influences on public morals. They should be encouraged to promote positive role models and stories that emphasize integrity and discourage dishonesty and corruption.

6. Revitalize Spiritual Practices

Individuals and communities should engage more deeply with spiritual traditions, such as Ifa divination and biblical study, that reinforce the importance of integrity. Spiritual leaders can play a crucial role in guiding people toward moral reform.

7. Establish Ethical Codes in Institutions

Institutions across sectors should develop and enforce codes of ethics that emphasize and institutionalize these principles. These recommendations aim to leverage the rich moral insights from the Ifa corpus and the Book of Proverbs as a framework for nurturing character integrity and building a more virtuous and just society.

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