

# Moral Decadence in Primary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed moral decadence among primary school pupils in Delta State. It defined and examined moral decadence among primary school pupils in Delta State. The descriptive survey research design was adopted using 250 teachers from selected Primary schools in the selected local government in the 3 senatorial districts in Delta State. The objectives of the study are to identify type of school offences committed by primary school pupils in Delta state, find out what is responsible for pupils engaging in these offences and ascertain how these negative attitudes can be ameliorated. Three research questions were raised and answered. A questionnaire was developed and validated for the study. Data collected were analysed with the use of frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that Primary school pupils in Delta State engaged in a lot of negative activities and that a lot of factors were responsible for this; such as family poverty/wealth. It was recommended among other things that, government should empower parents through gainful employment.

**Keywords:** Moral decadence, Primary School, Pupils, Delta State.

## INTRODUCTION

Moral decadence means a gross reduction in the moral values in a particular society (Researchkey.net 2023).

Ezewu (1983) perceived moral values or norms as the rules or standard of behavior defined by the shared expectations of a group of people. They are the behaviours regarded by society as acceptable pattern of behavior expected of every individual in the group. The rules and regulations of the group prescribe the standard of behavior expected of members.

Ezewu (1983) stated that moral decadence which is deviant behavior is a behavior which is a deviation from the socially accepted behavior or norm. It is the non-conformity to the standards of behavior of a group.

Moral decadence therefore connotes a significant departure from established norms acceptable within the family units, school, community, peer groups, clubs, social organizations, employment organization and the larger society.

Akpotu (2013) stated that Adult members of a society, who are deviant are said to be criminals in society. But when adolescents and children manifest moral decadence/deviant behaviors they are classified a delinquent behavior, inappropriate behavior, unhealthy behavior or abnormal behavior.

Primary education according to the National Policy on Education (2013), is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 plus. Since the rest of the education system is built upon it, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Goals of primary education are:

1. Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
2. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
3. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
4. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
5. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
6. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity;
7. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Government promised to provide basic infrastructure and training for the realization of these goals at the primary school level.

Obed-Chukwuka and Atakpo (2022), reiterated the fact that the primary school programme is supposed to be planned considering all such factors that will help guide, shape and obviously help in directing the educational life of the child. In this regard, such aspects as his health, and all that relates to his totality should be put into consideration when planning how to manage primary education because apart from the home which of course is the most important according to Okon (2004), of all the influences which operate on a child particularly at its formative years, the school is the second because the school is an organization in itself and pulls from various homes, several children, hence offering an opportunity for interaction and co-operation amongst children.

The school also plays the role of culture transmission. The total way of life, the social norms and values, sciences, religion, arts and philosophy of the given society are imparted to the children in the school. As such, whatever is presented in form of learning experiences to the children should be carefully planned, sorted out and imparted in the proper way.

### **Causes of Moral Decadence among Primary School Children**

Individual differences that exist among learners, societal factors, family background, lack of adequate facilities in schools, unseriousness in the teaching of religious instruction, lack of cooperation between the school and the home, teachers not showing good examples to the learners have been listed by Onoyase (2013) as some of the causes of moral decadence among young people and adolescents. He stated further that individual differences that exists among learners explains the differences in social reactions of learners.

The society affects learners because the school is part of the society and whatever is going on in the society must affect the school. The family too is another cause of moral decadence. If for instance the family a child comes from is very poor and find it difficult to provide for the school needs of the child, this situation may encourage some of the children from such homes to steal. Oniyama and Oniyama (2005) maintained that the broken homes also encourage deviant behavior. This is a situation where the father and mother of the child are no longer together and therefore the child takes to any bad behavior exhibited by any of the parents. Atakpo, Obed-Chukwuka and Akpotu (2023) also concluded that household characteristics which means how families in the society are differentiated can also affect the education of a child especially the girl child in many ways such as type of school the girl-child will attend, the payment of extra levies, and it will also affect books and other supplies for the girl child,

Nwarabu, Mwonge and Hongoli (2021) study of social factors for moral decadence in schools, the case of Morogro municipality, Tanzania has also found out that, poor-parental guidance, lack of guidance and counseling services, negative attitudes toward religious education and marriage problems were some of the causes of moral decadence among students.

Similarly, a study on the perceived causes and effects of moral decadence among some selected senior high schools in the Kumasi metropolis, Ghana by Britwum, Adjei, Nyamekye and Britwum (2020), has advised that the prevalence of moral decadence should not be over looked because of the negative effect of moral decadence on the learners and society at large.

A lot of studies on moral decadence in schools have been carried out but none on primary school pupils in Delta State. This is the gap this study intends to fill.

### Statement of Problem

The problem of this research is to examine moral decadence among primary school pupils in Delta State, Nigeria.

The study is guided by three research questions;

1. What type of school offences are committed by primary school pupils in Delta state?
2. What is responsible for pupils engaging in these offences?
3. How can it be ameliorated?

## METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the descriptive survey research design. Participants were randomly selected from the three senatorial districts located in Delta State, Nigeria. 80 respondents from Delta North senatorial district, 80 respondents from Delta South Senatorial district and 90 respondents from Delta Central Senatorial district. The respondents consisted of primary school teachers in the different sampled public primary schools in the different local governments that made up each senatorial district. A total of 250 teachers constituted the sample size. Three trained research assistants were also employed for the study.

A validated self-designed questionnaire and oral interview were employed as the research instrument for the study. The questionnaire had two sections; section A, B having closed ended questions while section C allowed the respondents to express themselves on ways moral decadence can be ameliorated. A structured interview was carried out by the researchers.

## RESULT

**Research question 1:** What type of school offences are committed by primary school pupils in Delta state?

**Table 1: The different types of school offences committed by Primary school pupils in Delta state.**

	Items/Questions	Yes %	No %
1	Stealing	160(69)	90 (36)
2	Dishonesty	145(58)	105(42)
3	Sex offences	172 (68.8)	78(31.2)
4	Disobedience	140 (56)	110 (44)
5	Truancy	149(59.6)	101(40.4)
6	Assault/insult	173(69.2)	77(30.8)
7	Drug offences	150 (60)	100 (40)
8	Wickedness	180(72)	70(28)
9	Late coming to school	138 (55.2)	112(44.8)
10	Destruction of school property	150 (60.8)	98(39.2)

The teacher’s responses in table 1 indicates that primary school pupils in Delta State (public schools) engaged in a lot of negative activities.

**Research question 2:** What is responsible for pupils engaging in these offences?

**Table 2: Factors responsible for pupils engaging in these offences**

S/N	Items/Questions	SA %	SD %
1	Unseriousness in the teaching of religious instruction	125 (50)	125(50)
2	Teachers not showing good example to the pupils	140 (56)	110 (44)
3	Lack of adequate facilities in the school	127 (50.8)	123 (49.2)
4	Family poverty/wealth/broken homes	130(52)	120(48)
5	Peer pressure	133 (53.2)	117(46.8)
6	Effect of the society	173 (69.2)	77(30.5)
7	Mass media	152 (60.8)	98 (39.2)

Table 2 presents the factors identified as responsible for pupils engaging in offenses. The table includes various items/questions related to these factors, along with the corresponding percentages. The result shows that the factors responsible for pupils’ engaging in offences include unseriousness in the teaching of religious instruction, teachers not showing good example to the pupils, lack of adequate facilities in the school, family poverty/wealth/broken homes, peer pressure, effect of the society and mass media.

**Research question 3:** How can these negative attitudes can be ameliorated?

Respondents in an interview made a lot of suggestions which include the following:

- That the teaching of religious studies, social studies and history be taken more seriously
- Teachers should show good examples to the learners especially those who engage in examination malpractice
- Learners be encouraged to engage in extra-school activities like sporting activities
- Government to provide more facilities and equipment in schools and also make the system to work by monitoring the activities in different schools.
- Empowering parents through gainful employment.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of the study revealed that pupils in primary schools in Delta State engage in a lot of negative behaviors, including stealing, dishonesty, sex offences, disobedience, truancy, assault/insult, drug offences, wickedness, late coming to school and destruction of school property. Negative behaviors among pupils in primary schools can indeed be a concern in some cases.

This finding agrees with Nwarabu, et a. (2021); and Britwum, et al. (2020), who explored various types of negative behaviors exhibited by students and found that these behaviours can include but are not limited to bullying, aggression, disobedience, truancy, cheating, vandalism, and substance abuse. These behaviors can have detrimental effects on the individuals involved, their peers, and the overall school environment. The second finding revealed that the factors responsible for pupils’ engaging in offences include unseriousness in the teaching of religious instruction, teachers not showing good example to the pupils, lack of adequate facilities in the school, family poverty/wealth/broken homes, peer pressure, effect of the society and mass media.

When religious instruction is not taken seriously, it can lead to a lack of moral guidance and values among students. Religion often provides a foundation for ethical behavior, and when it is not adequately taught or emphasized, students may be more prone to engaging in negative behaviors. Also, teachers serve as role models for students, and their behavior and actions can significantly influence student attitudes and actions. When teachers fail to exhibit positive behavior, students may perceive it as acceptable and imitate such behavior, leading to engagement in negative behaviors. Economic factors, including poverty or extreme wealth disparities, can also impact students' well-being and behavior. Economic hardship may lead to stress, lack of basic needs, and limited opportunities, which can increase the likelihood of students engaging in negative behaviors. Similarly, broken homes or family instability can disrupt the nurturing environment necessary for positive development.

It is important to note that these factors are not deterministic, and individual variations exist in how students respond to them. Moreover, additional factors beyond the ones mentioned may also contribute to students engaging in negative behaviors. Further research and context-specific investigations are necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of these factors and their complex interactions. The above finding agrees with Njoku (2016), Sofadekam (2016) and Britwum & Aidoo (2022) who have carried out similar studies with similar results.

The finding further revealed that in order to ameliorate the above negative attitudes, certain steps need to be taken. These steps include that the teaching of religious studies, social studies and history be taken more seriously; that teachers should show good examples to the learners especially those who engage in examination malpractice; that learners be encouraged to engage in extra-school activities like sporting activities; that government should provide more facilities and equipment in schools and also make the system to work by monitoring the activities in different schools; and that parents should be empowered through gainful employment.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that moral decadence is prevalent among primary school children in Delta State Primary school. Children engage in a lot of negative behaviors and there is need to curtail moral decadence among these children.

## RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation based on the findings and review of other studies include:

- Governments empowerment of parents through gainful employment so that parents can adequately provide for needs of their children
- Government to determine and regulate mass media programs.
- Government and traditional institutions and religious bodies to be more firm on issue of family instability and moral decadence in the society.
- Teaching of religious studies, history and social studies be taken more seriously
- Teachers themselves to show good examples to the learners

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