

Relationship between Internalized Spiritual Values and Ethical Conduct among Educators in Colleges of Education, Northwest Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Across multiple studies on spirituality and ethics in education, research reveals a promising but deeply conditional relationship between spiritual values and ethical conduct among educators. Findings show that when educators genuinely embody spiritual values such as trust, altruistic love, honesty, they naturally become role models who shape student character through daily actions and mindful presence in the classroom. This research investigates how spirituality can be leveraged as a transformative tool to ethical conduct by carrying out a correlation study between spiritual values and ethical conduct based on Nigeria's context. Thirty-seven educators completed a 50-item self-assessment tool. The findings revealed a strong, positive relationship between spirituality and ethical behavior ($r = 0.767$). Honest educators tended to feel a deep sense of obligation ($r = .781$) and act with integrity ($r = .608$). Those who valued altruistic love were also more likely to follow rules ($r = .647$) and honour their duties ($r = .705$). However, religious tolerance and trust showed surprisingly weak links to ethical conduct, suggesting these qualities may develop differently or depend more on social context than inner moral character. Since the study focused on a region, its findings cannot be broadly generalized. Still, this evidence invites policymakers to weave spiritual awareness into teacher training and ethical guidelines. Rather than assuming all spiritual values automatically shape professional ethics, the study recommends targeted, context-sensitive interventions especially for tolerance, trust, and compassion so these qualities can be genuinely internalized.

Keywords: Spiritual values, ethical conduct, Relationship, Internalization, teacher educators, internalization, College of Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is the fundamental driver of national development, as no nation can rise above the quality of its educational system. A well-managed educational process reforms individuals, who in turn transform society, moving it from primitivism toward modernity. Central to this mission are professional ethics, moral principles shaped by social norms, culture, and religion that serve as a compass for behavioural transformation. At the high school level, these ethics are codified in a Code of Conduct for both students and staff. When violated, such misconduct carries dual consequences: it undermines the dignity of those involved and, as Favour & Amadi, (2022) note, impairs the school's capacity to deliver quality educational resources. Thus, ethical adherence is not merely a matter of compliance but a structural prerequisite for institutional effectiveness and national progress.

Despite the global consensus that education serves as the bedrock of national development, innovation, and human progress, the Nigerian educational system is paradoxically plagued by a deep-seated crisis of unethical practices. Critically, the sector has largely neglected the moral and spiritual dimensions of learning, allowing behaviors such as violent demonstrations, cultism, drug abuse, prostitution, examination malpractice, and tribalism to become pervasive among both students and teachers. This reality is particularly disheartening because it fundamentally betrays society's expectation that public education should cultivate responsible, ethical citizens. Worse still, the involvement of educators themselves in unscrupulous acts amplifies public concern over the integrity of future generations, those same young people who are presumably being groomed as tomorrow's

leaders. Thus, in Nigeria, the very institution entrusted with national transformation has become a site of moral erosion, threatening not only current educational quality but the nation's long-term developmental trajectory (Favour & Amadi, 2022).

Spirituality can be leveraged as a transformative tool to ethical conduct to address contemporary ethical dilemma, promoting adherence to ethical code of conduct enshrined by teacher registration council of Nigeria. Spirituality as an emerging concept is crucial for individual educator, teacher trainees, other stakeholders in education. This notion of college spirituality does not advocate for a singular religious perspective but rather promotes an inclusive, spiritually diverse environment where ethical principles and values internalized and emphasized may prove what Vem et al., (2020), (2022) calls ethical climate and Gulati & Kumar, (2024) refer to it as solution to contemporary organizational challenges. While (McGhee & Grant, 2008a) call it “regulatory ideal”.

For instance: Badrudin et al., (2025) found that spiritual education alone had no significant effect on educational quality, whereas school environment and teacher professionalism had strong positive effects. Mulang & Putra, (2023), found that educators instill ethical and spiritual values through structured lesson planning, instructional processes and lesson evaluation/assessment need to be holistic in order to develop students' character, faith, and compassion. Juharyanto et al., (2024), found that integrating spiritual values into the curriculum requires stakeholder consensus on four core categories or even five practical strategies including: school-parent collaboration, strong visionary leadership, altruistic relationship with learners, colleagues and and school community with effective resource management for quality educational development. This was confirmed by Labbani Motlagh et al., (2016), when they found a significant positive correlation between spirituality, ethics, and higher education quality improvement.

Kazemzadeh et al., (2022), found a significant positive relationship between spiritual health and ethical behavior among nursing and midwifery students. (Omolade et al., n.d.) found that spiritual practices enhance commitment, happiness, and performance among accounting professionals, leading to improved client satisfaction and organizational growth. Widodo & Suryosukmono, (2021), on the other hand found that spiritual leadership and well-being significantly predict ethical decision-making in midlevel managers, with hope/faith as the only significant individual predictor. McGhee & Grant, (2008); McGhee & Grant, (2015) found that managers' spiritual mindfulness improves personal ethical behavior and organizational ethical climate, though they caution against "wishful thinking."

Maksum et al., (2025), found that teachers act as role models, facilitators, motivators, and mentors who guide student attitudes and behaviors throughout the school day. Gulati & Kumar (2024) found through case studies that integrating spiritual practices into educational systems, corporate governance, and community programs significantly improves ethical conduct and workplace satisfaction.

Teacher education must intentionally help future teachers understand their own values and how their daily actions shape students. Second, context and leadership matter enormously. Nigeria is religiously diverse, so a one-size-fits-all moral curriculum will fail. Shared human values like love, trust, respect, honest, fairness, and compassion work better than pushing any single code (blue print). Additionally, you cannot have ethical schools without ethical leaders. Principals and administrators need training in spiritual leadership, because if a school leader is dishonest or unmotivated, no amount of teacher training will fix the school culture. The researchers also warn against "wishful thinking" assuming spirituality automatically creates good behaviour without real strategies and accountability. Teacher education should also help teachers find genuine meaning and pride in the profession (which can be found through inclusion of spirituality in teacher education). Without these basic supports, all talk about code of ethics becomes empty noise. With them, spiritual values, ethical training can actually take root and grow.

Yet, spirituality as a secular concept remains fluid unique from person to person, difficult to articulate, and even harder for institutions of higher education to formally incorporate into curricula. Fuertes & Dugan, (2021) note that while contemporary spirituality has sparked debate in Religious Studies, particularly around its distinction from religion in a secularizing world, meaningful integration requires experiential, critical, and reflective learning opportunities that allow students to grow holistically. However, a critical gap persists. Most studies focus on student outcomes rather than educator conduct, and few have examined how teacher educators in

Northwestern Nigerian Colleges of Education actually internalize spiritual values. The mechanisms through which professed spirituality translates into observable ethical behavior remain undertheorized and empirically unexplored. This lacuna is especially problematic given the region's unique socio-religious context, where religious and cultural norms coexist and interact in complex ways and where codes of conduct and punitive measures have repeatedly failed to enhance ethical behavior in educational settings.

This correlation study was anchored by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) is a cornerstone of modern educational psychology, explaining how individuals acquire new behaviors, values, and attitudes through observation, imitation, and modeling. According to Bandura (1971), learning does not occur solely through direct experience but also vicariously by observing the actions and consequences of others' behavior. This makes SLT particularly relevant in teacher education, where teacher educators act as role models whose ethical and spiritual behaviors are closely observed by student-teachers. By internalizing these behaviors, future teachers transmit them into their own classrooms, reinforcing the cyclical nature of values-based education (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012).

Despite these insights, spirituality and ethics remain under-correlated in research particularly in respect to Nigerian teacher education. While affective qualities such as discipline, empathy, and integrity are central to teaching effectiveness, they are rarely correlatedly measured systematically to determine their connection for informed curriculum decision for inclusion, training and implementation ((George, 2022; Mertz et al., 2015; Setiawan et al., 2019; Okoloeze & Akubuilu, 2015).

Thus, this study seeks correlation between internalized spiritual values (honesty, respect, altruistic love religious tolerance, and trust) and ethical conduct (obligation, integrity, law-abiding, role model and compassion) of teacher educators in Colleges of Education in Northwest Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey design with correlational elements in quantitative research method. A cross-sectional survey collects data at a single point in time, providing an efficient way to capture a large sample of teacher educators' perceptions, behaviours, and practices. This design was chosen because it allows for collection of data from the Teacher Educators' enabling the researchers to evaluate teacher educators' spiritual values and ethical conduct across a wide population in Northwest Nigerian Colleges of Education for feasibility study. A random sampling technique was adopted for selection of 37 respondents who participated in the 50-item four-point likert scale as modified from Shehu Shagari college of Education Sokoto, Northwest, Nigeria. The survey questionnaire was self-developed as Teacher Educators' Self-Assessment Test (TEDSAT) scale.

The instrument development followed these phases: Identification of constructs and dimensions; Meta-content analysis of literature; Generation of an item pool; Establishment of content validity; Refinement of items through expert review; Pilot testing for clarity and reliability; Field testing with a representative sample; Psychometric validation (Rasch model analysis) and Correlation analysis with related constructs. Through these stages, the instrument was systematically refined through expert judgment, and validated through advanced psychometric testing (Rasch Measurement Model), ensuring both construct validity and reliability (Boone et al., 2007).

It was first validated by six experts of psychometrics and Education from Nigeria and Malaysia where Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated at both the item (I-CVI) and scale levels (S-CVI. Universal Agreement (S-CVI/UA) was also computed, ensuring that items met both stringent and average standards using Excel. Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach alpha and Rasch Measurement model (RMM) for refinement of the items. To determine the correlation, the items were administered to the 37 respondents. Correlational study of the spiritual values constructs: Religious tolerance, trust, altruistic love, respect and honesty. The Ethical conduct constructs: Obligation, integrity, law-abiding, role modelling and compassion using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Furthermore, the correlational aspect of the design makes it possible to statistically examine the relationship between the two central constructs; spiritual values and ethical conduct. Correlational designs are widely used in educational measurement when the aim is to explore associations between psychological and behavioural

traits without manipulating variables (Suresh & Narayana Raju, 2022; Pong, 2022; Yildirim et al., 2021). By integrating cross-sectional survey methodology with correlational analysis, the study establishes psychometric evidence into the link between spirituality and ethics in teacher education.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated at both the item (I-CVI) and scale levels (S-CVI), with acceptable thresholds set at ≥ 0.78 for nine experts (Lynn, 1986; Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019). Universal Agreement (S-CVI/UA) was also computed, ensuring that items met both stringent and average standards. Results showed high content validity, with I-CVI values ranging between 0.72 and 0.80 across domains, and S-CVI/UA scores of 0.92 (spiritual values) and 0.96 (ethical conduct). These values exceed the minimum recommended cut-offs, indicating strong consensus among experts (Connell et al., 2018; Roebianto et al., 2023).

Table 1.1: The number of experts and its implication on the acceptable levels score of CVI

S/N	Number of Experts	Acceptable CVI Values	Source of Recommendations
1	Two experts	At least 0.80	Davis (1992) as cited in (Yusoff, 2019)
2	Three to five experts	At least 1	(Polit & Beck, 2006a)
3	Six experts	At least 0.83	(Polit & Beck, 2006a)
4	Six to eight experts	At least 0.83	(Lynn, 1986)
5	Nine experts	At least 0.78	(Lynn, 1986)

The reliability analysis demonstrated that the instrument possesses strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values for all items ranging from 87 to 88, which falls within the "very good" range (Bond & Fox, 2015). Rasch person reliability was .84 with a separation index of 2.29, indicating that the instrument could distinguish approximately three distinct ability strata among respondents. Similarly, the item reliability was .78 with a separation index of 1.90, suggesting an adequate spread of item difficulty across the latent construct. Item-level diagnostics showed that the majority of the 50 items functioned appropriately within the Rasch model expectations. However, few items (CO1, RT5, RS5) were identified as misfitting, exceeding acceptable MNSQ thresholds (0.6 -1.4) and ZSTD ranges (± 2). Furthermore, a subset of items displayed negative or near-zero PTMEA correlation values, indicating that they did not discriminate well between high- and low-ability respondents. Dimensionality analysis confirmed that the scale is unidimensional.

To provide further validity evidence, correlations between teacher educators' spiritual values and their ethical conduct were analyzed using Pearson correlation and regression techniques bivariate in SPSS. This step tested whether the scale meaningfully captured relationships between the constructs under study. Pearson correlation is appropriate here since both variables are continuous interval data derived from Rasch analysis, fulfilling the assumptions for parametric testing (Schober & Schwarte, 2018). According to Evans' (1996) guideline, correlations below 0.20 are considered very weak, 0.20–0.39 weak, 0.40–0.59 moderate, 0.60–0.79 strong, and above 0.80 very strong. In this study, the analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between overall Spiritual Values and Ethical Conduct ($r = .767$, $p < .001$), indicating a strong relationship (see Table 1.2). This implies that teacher educators who internalize spiritual values also tend to demonstrate stronger ethical conduct.

Table 1.2: Relationship between Spiritual Values and Ethical Conduct Internalized by Teacher Educators

		Toleranc e	Trust	Altruisti c	Respect	Honesty	Obligati on	Integrity	Law Abide	Role Model	Compas sion
Toleranc e	Pearson Correlati on	1	.084	.044	-.065	.300	.110	.148	.021	.175	.194
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.620	.797	.704	.071	.516	.383	.900	.299	.251
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Trust	Pearson Correlati on	.084	1	.216	-.044	.087	.024	.181	.293	.127	-.052
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.620		.200	.797	.610	.889	.284	.079	.453	.758
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Altruisti c	Pearson Correlati on	.044	.216	1	.410*	.584**	.705**	.475**	.647**	.485**	.042
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.797	.200		.012	.000	.000	.003	.000	.002	.804
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Respect	Pearson Correlati on	-.065	-.044	.410*	1	.582**	.618**	.517**	.536**	.445**	-.173
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.704	.797	.012		.000	.000	.001	.001	.006	.304
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Honest y	Pearson Correlati on	.300	.087	.584**	.582**	1	.781**	.608**	.629**	.558**	.161
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.071	.610	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.342
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Obligat ion	Pearson Correlati on	.110	.024	.705**	.618**	.781**	1	.650**	.625**	.621**	.237
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.516	.889	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.158
	N	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37

Table 1.2 above reveals several core relationship clusters characterized by significant and meaningful associations. For instance, honesty was strongly correlated with obligation ($r = .781$, $p < .01$) and integrity ($r =$

.608, $p < .01$), indicating that truthfulness and a strong moral compass are often accompanied by a heightened sense of duty. Similarly, there was a link between obligation and integrity ($r = .650$, $p < .01$). the overall finding revealed Correlation significance. However, some constructs exhibited weak or non-significant relationships. Trust was also relatively weak, non-significant correlations with law-abiding behaviour ($r = .293$, $p = .079$) and altruistic love ($r = .216$, $p = .200$). Compassion demonstrated a significant negative correlation with integrity ($r = .359$, $p < .05$), and non-significant with respect ($r = -.173$).

DISCUSSION

This section addresses the research question: What is the relationship between spiritual values and ethical conduct internalized by teacher educators in Nigerian Colleges of Education in Northwest Nigeria? The Pearson's correlation analysis performed on the ten constructs measured by the Scale: religious tolerance, trust, altruistic love, respect, honesty, obligation, integrity, law-abiding behavior, role model, and compassion. The results (see Table 1.2) revealed both strong and weak associations, reflecting the complex interplay between spiritual and ethical domains.

The findings showed several core relationship clusters characterized by significant and meaningful associations. For instance, honesty was strongly correlated with obligation ($r = .781$, $p < .01$) and integrity ($r = .608$, $p < .01$), indicating that truthfulness and a strong moral compass are often accompanied by a heightened sense of duty. Similarly, the link between obligation and integrity ($r = .650$, $p < .01$) suggests that individuals who internalize moral responsibility are also guided by consistent ethical principles. These results imply that integrity may serve as a bridge between inner values (such as honesty) and outward professional actions (such as obligation), consistent with virtue ethics and moral consistency frameworks (Cohen & Morse, 2014). Altruistic love also played a pivotal role in this network of relationships. It was positively associated with obligation ($r = .705$, $p < .01$), law-abiding behavior ($r = .647$, $p < .01$), and respect ($r = .410$, $p < .05$). These associations suggest that selflessness is not only linked to a sense of duty and legal compliance but also to interpersonal regard, aligning with Schwartz, (2012) theory of basic human values and Aristotle's notion of *philia* as a foundation of social virtue.

Further, role modeling exhibited strong associations with integrity ($r = .624$, $p < .01$), honesty ($r = .558$, $p < .01$), and obligation ($r = .621$, $p < .01$). These findings reflect Bandura's (1999) social learning theory, which posits that moral exemplars influence others through their demonstration of honesty, responsibility, and principled conduct. Moreover, recent developments in social learning research stress the importance of reciprocal determinism, where behaviour, personal factors, and environment continuously interact (Bandura, 1971, 1986). This means that while teacher educators' model ethical and spiritual conduct, they are simultaneously shaped by institutional policies, societal pressures, and cultural dynamics. For example, weak enforcement of ethical standards in some Nigerian Colleges of Education may undermine the impact of role-modelling, even when teacher educators strive to act ethically (Ojo & Ibrahim, 2023). This reinforces the value of self-assessment tools, which encourage educators to reflect on their personal accountability rather than rely solely on external reinforcement.

Similarly, law-abiding behavior was strongly related to integrity ($r = .676$, $p < .01$) and honesty ($r = .629$, $p < .01$), indicating that compliance with societal rules is closely tied to internalized ethical principles, consistent with theories of legal positivism and procedural justice (Tyler & Darley, 2014).

In contrast, some constructs exhibited weak or non-significant relationships. Religious tolerance, for instance, was largely isolated, showing no significant associations with other domains (all $p > .05$), apart from a marginal link with honesty ($r = .300$, $p = .071$). This suggests that tolerance may operate as a distinct dimension, shaped more by sociocultural or contextual influences than by core moral traits. Trust was also relatively weak, with only modest, non-significant correlations with law-abiding behavior ($r = .293$, $p = .079$) and altruistic love ($r = .216$, $p = .200$), implying that trust may be more situational than dispositional within this context. Compassion demonstrated a significant but modest correlation with integrity ($r = .359$, $p < .05$), while its non-significant correlation with respect ($r = -.173$) raises questions about whether empathy necessarily translates into esteem for others in professional settings.

This finding aligns with broader scholarship in spirituality and virtue ethics, which has consistently observed that workplace spirituality, whether conceptualised in clinical, business, religious, or educational contexts tends to reinforce ethical compliance and moral responsibility (Agbim et al., 2013; Mata-McMahon et al., 2023; Mcghee & Grant, 2008; Vem et al., 2020, 2022). The convergence of results across domains strengthens confidence in the current findings, underscoring that spirituality is not merely a private disposition but has practical implications for professional ethics.

Research Limitation

The study focuses on only two affective domain, 37 respondents (pilot study) and Northwest, out of six regions. While findings may offer insights relevant to domains and other regions, the cultural, religious, and socio-political context of Northwest Nigeria serves as the primary lens for the main thesis research. This delimitation ensures contextual relevance but also limits generalization to other affective domains and other regions without further validation studies

CONCLUSION

The research underscores the importance of the relationship between spirituality and ethical practices for modelling purposes and inclusive learning environment for holistic teaching professional development. As this relationship enhances ethical judgment, decision making, compassion, dignity of human-person, fair pedagogy and assessment, character development and conflict resolution, shaping social system of the society. This study contributes to the literature on the benefits of conceptualizing and integrating spiritual values and ethical conduct in teacher education, promoting regulative ideal in educational processes for safe society. The debate is that spirituality does not only serves as ethical compass but also sustains ethical behaviour for quality education. It also reveals the interplay amongst moral psychology, psychology of learning and virtue ethics. The results of the study challenge the neglect of affective domain assessment in Nigerian teacher education, demonstrating that spirituality serves as a practical ethical compass not merely a private belief. For quality education and a safe society, teacher training must systematically nurture spiritual values alongside cognitive skills.

IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has practical implications for teacher educators, policymakers, and the broader education community. For teacher educators, it might help them to value the impact of spirituality in their ethical dispositions. For policymakers, the findings provide empirical evidence that can inform professional development programs, and ethical guidelines in teacher education. For broader community, it gives direction on how to support teacher educators and trainees aiding spiritual environment to promote ethical practices.

This means that spirituality does not automatically produce ethical teachers simply because we declare it should. Rather, spiritual values translate into ethical conduct only when teachers are well-trained, respected, adequately supported, and working under leaders who model those same values. Without these enabling conditions professional competence, good leadership, and genuine care for teachers' well-being will amount to "wishful thinking." Thus, while the correlation between spiritual values and ethical conduct in teacher education is real and hopeful, it is far from automatic and understanding exactly how teacher education programs can nurture both professional ethics and spiritual depth is the central question this research sought to answer.

Importantly, this relationship holds significance for Nigerian teacher education, where the National Policy on Education emphasizes the cultivation of moral and spiritual values. The evidence suggests that teacher educators' spiritual dispositions are not only personal virtues but also professional resources that shape classroom ethics, mentorship practices, and institutional culture. Taken together, these findings highlight that while certain constructs (such as honesty, integrity, obligation, altruism, and law-abiding behavior) form a tightly interconnected cluster of moral and spiritual traits, others (such as religious tolerance, trust, and compassion) appear less central. This distinction underscores the need to consider both universal and context-specific elements when interpreting teacher educators' moral and spiritual values.

Future Focus

Future Researchers should investigate further on tolerance, trust, and compassion and their relationship with ethical orientation using a large sample in the same zone or other parts of the country or globe. This study adopted the predictive non-cause and effect. They should employ the cause and effect to see if the same result can be established.

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