



JUDICIAL CORRUPTION AND CHILDREN UPBRINGING: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Judicial corruption in Nigeria affects more than just the legal system; it also impacts how children grow up and learn values. This paper looks at how corruption in the judiciary weakens ethical standards and social norms, which can influence moral education in secondary schools. When children see unfairness going unpunished or dishonest behavior being rewarded, it can affect their understanding of fairness, honesty, and responsibility key parts of building good character. Some of the main issues include children seeing dishonesty as normal, parents and society struggling to teach ethics, and schools finding it harder to teach moral values effectively.

Keywords: Judicial Corruption, Children Upbringing, Secondary Schools

Introduction

The moral development of young people is a fundamental concern for every society because the values and attitudes acquired during childhood and adolescence shape the character of future citizens. Education systems across the world therefore emphasize not only intellectual development but also moral formation, which involves cultivating values such as honesty, integrity, justice, responsibility, and respect for the rule of law. Schools, families, religious institutions, and the broader society collectively play important roles in shaping these values in children and adolescents. In Nigeria, secondary schools are regarded as important institutions for transmitting ethical standards and civic virtues that guide responsible behaviour in society. However, the success of moral education is closely influenced by the broader social environment in which students live and learn. When societal institutions demonstrate ethical conduct and accountability, they reinforce the moral lessons taught in schools. Conversely, when public institutions are perceived as corrupt or unjust, they may weaken the moral foundation that schools seek to build among young people.

In societies where corruption becomes visible within the judiciary, its influence can extend to the socialization processes that shape the moral development of children and adolescents. Akpunonu, and Eze, (2022) and Eze, and Iloka (2022) noted that young people learn moral values not only through formal instruction but also through observation of societal practices and institutional behaviour. When students observe widespread corruption among public officials, including those responsible for upholding justice, they may begin to question the relevance of moral principles such as honesty, fairness, and integrity. The contradiction between the ethical ideals taught in schools and the realities observed in society can create confusion and weaken students'



commitment to moral values. This situation, according to Anushiem, Anushiem, Nwakoby and Ilodigwe (2025) poses serious challenges to moral education in secondary schools, where educators strive to cultivate responsible and law-abiding citizens.

Children upbringing, according to Eze and Iloka (2022), Anushiem (2024) and Chukwuma (2025), plays a critical role in shaping moral consciousness and behavioural patterns during adolescence. Families traditionally serve as the primary agents of moral socialization by teaching children societal norms and expectations. However, schools complement this role by providing structured moral instruction and reinforcing socially acceptable behaviour through curricular and extracurricular activities. In Nigeria, subjects such as civic education, religious studies, and social studies are designed to instill values of integrity, discipline, patriotism, and respect for the rule of law. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such moral education programmes may be undermined when students perceive inconsistencies between the values promoted in school and the realities of public life, particularly when corruption appears to be rewarded rather than punished.

The Nigerian context presents a particularly compelling case for examining the relationship between judicial corruption and moral education. According to Iloka, (2021) and Eze and Chukwuma (2023) and Anushiem (2026), Nigeria has faced persistent challenges related to corruption across several sectors, including politics, public administration, and the legal system. Studies indicate that corruption within the judiciary has sometimes affected public confidence in legal institutions and has contributed to broader governance challenges in the country (Dantani & Shehu, 2018). When judicial processes are perceived as compromised, the moral authority of the law is weakened, and societal respect for justice and fairness may decline. This situation can indirectly influence the moral outlook of young people who observe these developments within their communities.

Ucheagwu-Okoye (2019), Eze (2023) and Anushiem and Anushiem (2025) has stated that the upbringing of children in such an environment raises important concerns about the future of moral education in Nigerian secondary schools. Students are often exposed to competing value systems: the ethical ideals promoted in educational settings and the practical realities observed in society. When these two-value systems conflict, students may struggle to internalize moral principles, thereby creating challenges for teachers, parents, and policymakers who seek to promote ethical behaviour among young people. Consequently, understanding how judicial corruption affects the moral upbringing of children and the teaching of moral values in secondary schools has become an important issue in contemporary educational and social discourse. Against this background, this study examines the relationship between judicial corruption and children upbringing, with particular attention to its implications for moral education in secondary schools in Nigeria.



Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms

Judicial Corruption

Judicial corruption occurs when judicial processes are manipulated through bribery, favoritism, political influence, or other forms of improper conduct that compromise fairness and impartiality in legal proceedings. Scholars generally describe judicial corruption as the misuse of judicial power by individuals entrusted with administering justice in order to secure financial, political, or personal benefits (Adisa, 2023). In this sense, judicial corruption undermines the rule of law because court decisions are no longer based solely on legal principles and evidence but are influenced by external interests or inducements. Furthermore, the presence of corruption in the judicial system creates a moral paradox in society. Institutions that should promote justice and ethical conduct may instead become sources of injustice and social inequality.

Children Upbringing

According to Akpunonu, (2025) and Iloka, (2023) and Eze (2022), children upbringing refers to the process through which parents, families, and society nurture, guide, and socialize children in order to prepare them for responsible participation in society. It involves the physical, emotional, social, and moral development of children through parenting practices, family interactions, and environmental influences. Parenting scholars describe upbringing as a fundamental socialization process through which parents shape children's behaviour, values, and attitudes toward society (Bornstein, cited in Salkind, 2006).

The process of upbringing is not limited to biological care but includes the transmission of social norms, moral values, cultural practices, and behavioural expectations. During childhood, families play a central role in shaping how children understand right and wrong, respect authority, and interact with others. Through everyday interactions, discipline, and guidance, parents influence the psychological and social development of children, thereby shaping their moral orientation and character formation.

Modern research such as Iloka, & Eze (2022), Chukwuma, (2020) and Iloka (2022), also highlights that children's upbringing is a dynamic and interactive process involving both parents and children. While parents guide and influence children's development, children themselves actively interpret and respond to parental guidance, cultural norms, and environmental experiences. This interaction between parental influence and children's agency contributes significantly to the development of personality, social competence, and moral reasoning (Gao, 2023). Therefore, children upbringing can be understood as a comprehensive developmental process that involves nurturing, discipline, socialization, and value transmission aimed at preparing children to become responsible and morally upright members of society.

Nature and Forms of Judicial Corruption in Nigeria

The judiciary occupies a central position in the administration of justice and the preservation of the rule of law in any democratic society. Ideally, it is expected to operate with independence, impartiality, and integrity in order to ensure fairness in the interpretation and application of laws. However, in many developing countries, including Nigeria, the judicial system has faced persistent



challenges associated with corruption and unethical practices. Judicial corruption refers to the abuse of judicial authority or manipulation of legal procedures by judges, lawyers, and court officials for personal, financial, or political gain. Such practices undermine the credibility of the justice system and weaken citizens' trust in the judiciary as an institution responsible for ensuring fairness and accountability (Salihu & Gholami, 2018).

In Nigeria, judicial corruption is often linked to broader systemic corruption that affects public institutions. Scholars have observed that corruption within the judiciary manifests in both subtle and overt forms, ranging from bribery and favoritism to undue political interference in judicial decisions. These practices distort the legal process and compromise the ability of courts to deliver justice based on merit and evidence. When judicial corruption becomes widespread, it weakens the rule of law and encourages a culture of impunity where individuals with wealth or political influence can manipulate legal outcomes to their advantage (Adisa, 2023).

As noted by Akpunonu, (2019), Okechukwu (2025) and Ilodigwe (2026), one of the most common forms of judicial corruption in Nigeria is bribery. This occurs when litigants, lawyers, or interested parties offer financial inducements or other benefits to judges or court officials in order to influence the outcome of legal proceedings. Bribery may take the form of direct cash payments, gifts, or other material benefits intended to secure favourable rulings or delay judicial processes. Such practices compromise the impartiality of the judiciary and deny justice to those who cannot afford to offer similar inducements. Empirical studies on corruption in judicial institutions have shown that bribery significantly erodes public confidence in the legal system and reduces citizens' willingness to seek redress through formal legal channels (Voigt, 2016).

Another form of judicial corruption in Nigeria is political interference in judicial decisions. In some instances, political actors attempt to influence court rulings, especially in cases involving electoral disputes, corruption allegations, or high-profile political conflicts. Such interference may occur through pressure on judges, manipulation of judicial appointments, or the use of political connections to secure favourable judgments. When the judiciary becomes vulnerable to political influence, its independence is compromised, and the credibility of the legal system is significantly weakened. Research indicates that political interference in judicial processes undermines democratic governance and reduces the effectiveness of courts in upholding constitutional principles (Helmke & Rosenbluth, 2009).

According to Ucheagwu-Okoye (2025) and Akpunonu and Eze (2021), delay of justice and manipulation of court procedures also represent significant forms of judicial corruption. In many Nigerian courts, cases are sometimes deliberately delayed due to unethical practices among judicial officers or court officials. Such delays may occur when court personnel demand unofficial payments to expedite hearings, process legal documents, or schedule court sessions. This practice not only increases the cost of litigation but also frustrates litigants seeking justice. Prolonged delays in the judicial process weaken the effectiveness of the legal system and can discourage citizens from pursuing legitimate legal remedies. Scholars have emphasized that the manipulation of judicial procedures for personal gain undermines the efficiency and integrity of judicial institutions (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).



Another notable manifestation of judicial corruption, according to Ucheagwu-Okoye (2021), Chukwuma (2025) and Anushiem (2025), is favoritism and nepotism within the legal system. This occurs when judges or court officials show undue preference to individuals based on personal relationships, family ties, political affiliations, or social status rather than the merits of the case. Favoritism may influence judicial appointments, promotion within the judicial hierarchy, or the handling of specific legal cases. Such practices distort the principles of equality before the law and create an environment in which justice is perceived as selective rather than universal. Studies on corruption in governance highlight that favoritism in judicial institutions weakens institutional accountability and promotes inequality in the administration of justice (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

Additionally, manipulation of evidence and judicial records has been identified as another form of corruption within judicial systems. This may involve tampering with legal documents, altering court records, or influencing witnesses in order to distort the outcome of legal proceedings. Such practices directly undermine the integrity of the judicial process and can lead to wrongful convictions or the acquittal of guilty individuals. The manipulation of evidence represents one of the most damaging forms of judicial corruption because it directly interferes with the core function of the judiciary, which is the fair and impartial determination of legal disputes.

The nature of judicial corruption in Nigeria is therefore multifaceted and often interconnected with broader institutional weaknesses, including lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms, and inadequate oversight within the judicial system. These conditions create opportunities for unethical behaviour among judicial actors and contribute to the erosion of public confidence in the legal system. When citizens perceive the judiciary as corrupt or compromised, the legitimacy of the entire justice system is called into question, thereby weakening respect for the rule of law.

The Role of the Judiciary in Shaping Societal Values

The judiciary plays a critical role in shaping societal values because it is responsible for interpreting laws, ensuring justice, and upholding the rule of law within a society. Through judicial decisions and interpretations of the law, courts influence what society perceives as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. When judicial institutions function effectively and fairly, they reinforce important social values such as honesty, accountability, fairness, and respect for the rule of law. These values gradually become embedded in the moral consciousness of citizens, including young people who observe and learn from the functioning of societal institutions. According to Voigt (2016), an independent and credible judiciary is essential for maintaining the rule of law and promoting social order, because judicial decisions serve as standards that guide behaviour within society.

The judiciary also acts as a moral compass within democratic societies by ensuring that justice is not only done but seen to be done. Judicial rulings often shape public perceptions of fairness and ethical conduct, thereby influencing how citizens interpret justice and moral responsibility. When



courts consistently enforce laws against corruption, crime, and injustice, they contribute to the development of a society that values integrity and lawful conduct. Tamanaha (2004) notes that the rule of law is a foundational principle that guides social behaviour and promotes respect for legal and moral norms within society.

In addition, the judiciary helps in safeguarding constitutional rights and protecting vulnerable members of society, including children. By interpreting constitutional provisions and ensuring the protection of fundamental rights, courts strengthen societal trust in legal institutions and reinforce ethical standards. Judicial pronouncements on matters relating to justice, fairness, and equality therefore shape societal attitudes toward morality and responsible citizenship. In Nigeria, the judiciary is expected to serve as a guardian of justice and an institution that promotes ethical behaviour through impartial judgments and adherence to legal principles. When the judiciary performs this function effectively, it contributes significantly to the moral development of society and reinforces positive values that influence both adults and children.

Suggested Roles of Parents, Teachers, and Society in Addressing the Problem

Addressing the challenges associated with judicial corruption and its impact on children's upbringing requires the collective involvement of parents, teachers, and society as a whole. Parents play a fundamental role in the moral development of children because the family is the first environment in which children learn values, attitudes, and behaviours. Through daily interactions, discipline, and guidance, parents transmit ethical principles such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and empathy. When parents demonstrate integrity and accountability in their own actions, children are more likely to internalize these values and apply them in their interactions with others. Grusec and Hastings (2015) emphasize that parental modelling and consistent moral guidance are essential factors influencing children's moral development and social behaviour.

Teachers also play a critical role in shaping students' moral character because they serve as important role models within the educational environment. Beyond academic instruction, teachers influence students' attitudes toward fairness, discipline, and respect for rules. By promoting ethical discussions, encouraging empathy, and reinforcing positive behaviours, teachers help students develop moral reasoning skills that guide responsible decision-making. According to Berkowitz and Bier (2005), teachers who actively integrate character education into classroom activities contribute significantly to the development of responsible and ethical citizens.

Society at large also has an important responsibility in addressing the problem of corruption and strengthening moral values among young people. Government institutions, religious organizations, community leaders, and civil society groups must work together to promote ethical behaviour and accountability within public institutions. When society actively condemns corruption and supports transparency in governance, it creates an environment where moral values are reinforced rather than undermined. Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) note that reducing corruption requires not only legal reforms but also societal commitment to ethical standards and institutional accountability.



In the Nigerian context, collaborative efforts among families, schools, and public institutions are essential for addressing the broader societal factors that influence children's moral development. Parents must provide consistent moral guidance at home, teachers must reinforce ethical principles within the school environment, and society must demonstrate a strong commitment to justice and accountability. When these three institutions work together, they create a supportive environment that encourages young people to develop strong moral values and become responsible citizens capable of contributing positively to national development.

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