

**DECOLONIZATION OF MORAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CREATIVITY  
IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the decolonization of moral education as a strategy for promoting sustainable creativity among learners in Nigerian secondary schools. Colonial educational systems historically imposed Western moral and ethical frameworks, often marginalizing indigenous African value systems. As a result, moral education in many African schools remains disconnected from local cultural realities, limiting its potential to nurture ethically responsible and innovative citizens. Using a conceptual and theoretical approach, the paper explores how integrating indigenous moral philosophies, particularly Ubuntu, can enhance ethical reasoning, cultural identity, and creative problem-solving. The paper argues that culturally grounded moral education fosters sustainable creativity by promoting ethical awareness, critical thinking, and contextually relevant innovation. The paper recommends curriculum reforms that integrate indigenous values, teacher capacity-building in culturally responsive pedagogy, and community involvement in moral education. This paper contributes to the understanding of how culturally grounded moral education can foster innovation, ethical leadership, and sustainable development in post-colonial African educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Decolonization of Education, Moral Education, Sustainable Creativity, Indigenous Knowledge Systems

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## Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental instrument for national development and social transformation. It shapes values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for individual and societal progress. According to UNESCO (2015), education plays a central role in promoting sustainable development by equipping learners with competencies that enable them to address contemporary social, cultural, and environmental challenges. Moral education, as a core component of formal schooling, is particularly significant because it focuses on character formation, ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, and the transmission of societal values.

Moral education in many African countries, including Nigeria, was largely shaped by colonial educational systems. During the colonial period, curricula were structured around Western philosophical traditions, religious doctrines, and cultural assumptions that often marginalized indigenous African knowledge systems and value frameworks. Scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argued that colonial education functioned as a tool for cultural domination by disconnecting learners from their indigenous heritage. Similarly, Frantz Fanon (1961) maintained that colonial structures influenced not only political systems but also the psychological and moral orientations of colonized societies.

The concept of decolonization in education therefore seeks to challenge and transform inherited colonial epistemologies by restoring indigenous voices, values, and knowledge systems in teaching and learning processes. Freire (2021) emphasized that education should serve as a practice of freedom, enabling learners to critically examine their realities rather than passively absorb imposed ideologies. In the context of moral education, decolonization involves integrating African ethical philosophies such as communalism, respect for elders, integrity, solidarity, and responsibility into the curriculum in ways that are relevant to learners' lived experiences.

Sustainable creativity, on the other hand, refers to the capacity to generate innovative ideas and solutions that are culturally grounded, socially responsible, and environmentally conscious. The global emphasis on sustainable development, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations (2015), highlights the need for education systems that nurture critical thinking, creativity, and ethical responsibility. When moral education is culturally relevant and context-sensitive, it has the potential to foster creative problem-solving skills that address local challenges while preserving cultural identity.

In Nigeria, moral education remains a key subject at various levels of schooling; however, concerns persist regarding its relevance to contemporary societal needs and indigenous realities. The continued dominance of externally derived moral frameworks may limit learners' ability to draw inspiration from African philosophies and traditions that support collective well-being and innovation. Consequently, there is a growing call for the decolonization of moral education as a pathway toward sustainable creativity and holistic development.

This paper adopts a conceptual approach to examining the decolonization of moral education and its implications for promoting sustainable creativity among learners. Drawing on existing literature and relevant theoretical perspectives, it explores how the integration of indigenous moral philosophies into the curriculum can enhance learners' creative capacities while supporting ethical and culturally grounded social transformation.

### **Concept of Moral Education in Contemporary African Schooling**

Moral education refers to the intentional cultivation of values, ethics, and behaviours deemed desirable within a society. In African schooling, moral education historically served both social and cultural purposes—preparing learners to live harmoniously within communal systems and respond ethically to societal challenges. Traditional African education was holistic, integrating moral, intellectual, social, and spiritual development rather than isolating character training from other learning domains (Rediscovering Our Roots, MDPI 2025).

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In contemporary African schooling systems, moral education is embedded in subjects like Civic Education and Religious Studies, but its implementation often remains influenced by Western educational models, which may insufficiently reflect local value systems. This has led to critiques that moral education can appear abstract, disconnected from indigenous life-worlds, and insensitive to community demands for ethical leadership, social justice, and cultural continuity (Frontiers, 2025). Therefore, scholars increasingly call for curricula that bridge classroom moral instruction with lived moral economies rooted in communal responsibility, respect, and shared humanity.

### **Concept of Sustainable Creativity in Education**

Sustainable creativity in education refers to the capacity of learners to generate innovative ideas, solutions, and practices that are ethically grounded, culturally relevant, socially responsible, and environmentally conscious. It is a multidimensional concept that integrates creativity with sustainability principles, ensuring that innovation contributes positively to present needs without compromising future generations. In contemporary educational discourse, sustainable creativity moves beyond the traditional understanding of creativity as mere originality or artistic expression. Instead, it emphasizes purposeful innovation directed toward solving real-life problems within specific cultural and social contexts.

In the African educational context, sustainable creativity must be understood within the realities of post-colonial societies facing challenges such as unemployment, poverty, corruption, climate change, and technological dependency. Creativity that is disconnected from ethical responsibility or cultural identity may produce solutions that are externally imposed or unsuited to local contexts. Therefore, sustainable creativity requires learners to draw from indigenous knowledge systems, community values, and lived experiences when developing innovative ideas.

### **Key Dimensions of Sustainable Creativity**

Sustainable creativity in education can be examined through several interrelated dimensions:

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### **1. Ethical Dimension**

Sustainable creativity is morally guided. It ensures that creative outputs respect human dignity, social justice, and environmental preservation. Innovation without ethics may lead to exploitation, inequality, or ecological harm. Therefore, sustainable creativity is rooted in moral reasoning and responsibility.

### **2. Cultural Dimension**

Creativity must reflect learners' cultural identities and indigenous knowledge systems. When students are encouraged to explore their cultural heritage—proverbs, local technologies, agricultural practices, art forms, conflict resolution systems they are more likely to generate contextually meaningful innovations.

### **3. Social Dimension**

Sustainable creativity addresses societal challenges and promotes community well-being. It fosters collaborative problem-solving rather than individualistic competition. Students are encouraged to develop solutions that improve communal life, strengthen social cohesion, and promote inclusive development.

### **4. Environmental Dimension**

Environmental sustainability is central to sustainable creativity. Learners are guided to think critically about climate change, waste management, renewable energy, and ecological conservation. Creative projects in schools may include recycling initiatives, community gardens, water conservation strategies, and green entrepreneurship.

## 5. Economic Dimension

Sustainable creativity supports economic empowerment and self-reliance. It encourages entrepreneurial thinking, vocational innovation, and value creation that aligns with local resources and market realities. In African contexts, this dimension is particularly important in addressing youth unemployment.

### Sustainable Creativity and Educational Practice

In practical terms, sustainable creativity in education is fostered through:

- 1) Problem-based learning approaches
- 2) Community-based projects
- 3) Experiential and service learning
- 4) Collaborative group work
- 5) Indigenous knowledge integration
- 6) Ethical reflection and dialogue

These approaches move away from rote memorization toward participatory and inquiry-based learning. Learners become active creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. They are encouraged to question, design, experiment, and evaluate ideas within real social contexts.

### Meaning and Dimensions of Decolonization in Education

Decolonization in education is both a philosophical critique and a practical reform project aimed at dismantling the lingering epistemic, cultural, and pedagogical dominance of colonial systems within schooling. It questions who controls knowledge production, whose histories are taught, and whose languages and cultural logics shape learning environments. Decolonization is not merely adding local content; it involves restructuring curricula, pedagogy, and institutional norms so that indigenous ways of knowing are central, not peripheral, to educational practice (Frontiers on Decoloniality, 2026).

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**Major Dimensions of Decolonization include:**

1. **Curriculum decolonization:** Revising knowledge frameworks to foreground histories, values, languages, and practices that were marginalized under colonial rule.
2. **Epistemic decolonization:** Recognizing indigenous knowledge systems as valid, coherent forms of knowledge, not secondary or informal sources (MDPI 2024).
3. **Pedagogical decolonization:** Adopting culturally responsive and dialogical teaching approaches that value students' cultural repertoires and lived experiences.
4. **Structural decolonization:** Reforming educational governance and assessment mechanisms to ensure inclusive representation and community participation.

This reconceptualization shifts education from reproducing colonial norms to empowering learners to define their own cultural and moral frameworks.

**Indigenous African Moral Philosophies and Value Systems**

Indigenous African moral philosophies emphasize communalism, relational ethics, and collective well-being. A key concept is Ubuntu, often translated as “I am because we are,” which stresses interconnectedness, dignity, compassion, and mutual responsibility. Ubuntu is increasingly seen as a decolonial moral principle that can reshape schooling by prioritizing values like empathy, respect, and social justice (Integrating Environmental Ethics through Ubuntu, 2024).

Research shows that indigenous moral values were historically embedded in everyday life, where elders, community rituals, proverbs, and oral narratives served as moral educators long before formal schooling was established (Rediscovering Our Roots, MDPI 2025). Contemporary scholars argue that reclaiming such philosophies in curriculum design and instruction supports morally grounded learners who are more connected to their cultural identity and communal obligations. Ubuntu-inspired approaches in education also promote relational practices that can counteract social fragmentation and ethical erosion associated with colonial and global influences (Journal of Arts, Religion, Philosophy and Cultural Studies 2025).

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## **Relationship Between Moral Education and Creative Development**

Moral education and creative development are complementary: moral education offers an ethical foundation that steers creativity toward constructive and sustainable ends. Without ethical grounding, creativity can be untethered and potentially harmful serving individual or external interests at the expense of collective wellbeing.

Recent studies highlight how morally infused education particularly when grounded in indigenous value systems like Ubuntu enhances learners' empathy, perspective-taking, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility, all of which enrich creative processes (Integrating Environmental Ethics through Ubuntu, 2024). Learners who are confident in their cultural identity and moral frameworks exhibit higher levels of socially meaningful creativity because they are motivated to solve real community problems rather than simply innovate for novelty's sake.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To guide this study, the following theories provide conceptual grounding:

#### **a. Critical Pedagogy Theory**

Critical pedagogy emphasizes education as a tool for liberation and social transformation, encouraging learners to challenge power relations and internalized norms inherited from colonial systems. It supports decolonization by promoting reflective, dialogical learning that resists domination and fosters agency.

#### **b. Postcolonial Theory in Education**

Postcolonial theory interrogates the impact of colonial histories on knowledge production and schooling. It critiques Eurocentric dominance in curricula and argues for inclusive epistemologies that value local and indigenous knowledge systems. Decolonial perspectives emerging in 2025

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research stress the necessity of epistemic justice and the centrality of indigenous experiences in curriculum reform (Frontiers, 2025).

### **c. Afrocentric Theory**

Afrocentric theory centers African cultural values, epistemologies, and histories in educational practice. It argues that education should reflect African worldviews rather than replicate Western norms. This is essential to ensure learners see themselves as agents of knowledge, not objects of Western narratives.

### **d. Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative learning emphasizes changes in learners' frames of reference through critical reflection—shifting from assumptions rooted in colonial thinking toward culturally grounded, ethical perspectives. This theory supports efforts to reframe moral education in ways that empower learners to engage creatively with societal challenges.

### **e. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework**

The ESD framework positions education as a driver for sustainable futures, integrating ethics, creativity, and systems thinking. Combining ESD with indigenous moral education supports sustainable creativity that is responsive to local challenges while contributing to broader sustainability goals.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational authorities should revise moral education curricula to integrate indigenous African moral philosophies and cultural values, such as Ubuntu, into teaching content. This will ensure that learners develop ethical awareness that is culturally relevant and conducive to sustainable creativity.

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2. Teachers should receive professional training in culturally responsive pedagogy and decolonized instructional strategies. This will equip educators to effectively facilitate moral education that fosters ethical reasoning and creative problem-solving skills in learners.
3. Schools should involve parents, community elders, and cultural custodians in the design and delivery of moral education programs. This collaboration will help bridge formal schooling with indigenous ethical systems and practical community knowledge.
4. Learning activities should emphasize real-life problem-solving, community projects, and experiential exercises that encourage learners to apply ethical principles creatively. This approach will enhance students' sustainable creativity and critical thinking.
5. Government agencies and education policymakers should develop clear guidelines and monitoring frameworks for implementing decolonized moral education. Continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms will ensure that moral instruction effectively promotes creativity and ethical development.

## Conclusion

Decolonizing moral education is not merely an academic reform but a strategic pathway toward cultural renewal, ethical leadership, and sustainable development. By integrating indigenous African moral philosophies with contemporary sustainability principles, education can nurture learners who are both ethically responsible and creatively innovative. Such an approach prepares students to address local and global challenges while preserving cultural identity and promoting long-term societal well-being.

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