

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ON COMPUTER SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' LIFESTYLE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract: The study explored the influence of the Sermon on the Mount on computer science undergraduate students' lifestyle and mental well-being. This became imminent due to the immense pressure faced by these students while striving to achieve academic excellence in today's complex social dynamics, which sometimes lead to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and lack of direction with regards to ethical decision-making and personal fulfillment. Guided by these, the researchers posed three questions towards actualizing the aim of the study. The population of the study comprised of all three hundred and eighty-one (381) computer science students of Alvan Ikoku federal university of education Owerri (in the 2023/2024 academic session) from which a sample of one hundred and fifty-five (155) persons was drawn using Nwana's statistical proposition and cluster random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection themed "Exploring the Influence of the Sermon on the Mount on one's lifestyle and mental well-being ("EIMSMOLWB"), had two sections A and B with Cronbach Reliability Coefficient 0.80 and 0.90. Questions were structured on a four point Likert rating of very high extent (VHE, 4-points), high extent (HE, 3-points), low extent (LE, 2-points) and very low extent (VLE, 1-poin) while mean and frequency counts were used for the analysis. The findings revealed that the moral values of the Sermon, were lowly integrated into educational practices at the institution (2.3). Further revelation showed that to a high extent, the morals influenced the students lifestyle (2.6) and mental well-being (2.8). Guided by these revelations, the researchers concluded that integrating these timeless teachings into the lives of the students will not only enable them experience greater fulfillment and resilience but also provide them with opportunities for deriving inner peace and contentment in their daily lives and overall well-being.

Keywords: Sermon on the Mount, Lifestyle, Mental Well-being, Undergraduate Students, Computer Science, Ethics, Spiritual Principles.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount, offers profound insights into the essence of a blessed and fulfilled life. While deeply rooted in Christian theology, their impact transcends religious boundaries, resonating with individuals seeking guidance on ethical living, emotional well-being, and meaningful relationships (Alaribe & Okafor, 2010). This Sermon, transcends religious boundaries and offer profound wisdom for navigating life's complexities. Central to this sermon are the Beatitudes, a set of blessings pronounced upon those who embody specific virtues and attitudes.

Originating from a religious context, the Sermon resonate deeply with individuals across cultures and beliefs, offering a blueprint for a fulfilled and meaningful existence. Among those deeply impacted by the Sermon are undergraduate computer science students, whose formative years are characterized by the search for identity, purpose, and direction in the dynamic landscape of academia, where academic pressures, social dynamics, and personal growth intersect. Hence, the teachings of the Sermon not just offer spiritual guidance, but also practical insights into ethical living, emotional resilience, and interpersonal relationships. Despite these, there remains a notable gap in addressing the holistic well-being and moral development of students within educational settings (Ogidi & Ejim, 2016).

In today's fast-paced and competitive world, students generally face immense pressure for academic excellence while navigating complex social dynamics and personal challenges. These can lead to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and lack of direction with regards to ethical decision-making and personal fulfillment (Okafor, 2015). While various approaches exist to support their well-being, there is need to explore and emphasize the role of spiritual and ethical teachings in addressing these challenges. The Sermon on the Mount, with its emphasis on virtues such as compassion, humility, and resilience, offer compelling framework for filling this gap by promoting students' holistic development and well-being. However, the extent to which these morals of the Sermon are integrated into educational practices and their influence on students' lifestyles and well-being remain understudied and often overlooked.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive examination of the influence of the morals of the Sermon on students' lifestyles and well-being, as well as strategies for integrating them into educational practices. By doing so, educators and policymakers can create environments that not only promote academic excellence but also nurture students' characters, resilience, and sense of purpose towards fostering a generation of individuals equipped for leading meaningful and fulfilled lives (Seyi et al., 2024).

This study therefore explored the influence of the morals of the Sermon on the Mount on the lifestyle and well-being of computer science undergraduate students of Alvan Ikoku federal university of education Owerri (AIFUE) through the following questions;

1. To what extent are the moral values of the Sermon integrated into the educational practices of the institution?
2. To what extent has the moral values influenced the students' lifestyle?
3. To what extent has the moral values influenced the students' mental well-being?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars generally agreed that the Sermon on the Mount as found in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7, is a compilation of Jesus' teachings to his disciples and the crowd that gathered at the mountainside (Gradi, 2023; Mukti, 2022; Ian, 2018; Machinek, 2021). It is regarded as one of the most significant passages in the New Testament, encapsulating the core teachings of Jesus on various topics such as ethical, moral, praying, and spiritual practices. The Beatitudes, as articulated by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, has long been recognized for its profound ethical and spiritual significances. While originating from a religious context, the teachings have garnered attention beyond the realm of Christianity, influencing individuals and societies across diverse cultural and philosophical backgrounds (Mukti, 2022).

Within the sphere of education, the Sermon on the Mount hold particular relevance, offering frameworks for fostering students development (moral, and emotional resilience), and overall well-being. The key teachings of the Sermon was the Beatitudes.

➤ **The Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount began with the Beatitudes as illustrated in table 1.1, which are series of blessings pronounced upon those embodying specific virtues such as humility, mercy, and peacemaking. These blessings illustrates Jesus emphasis on inner qualities and attitudes over external accomplishments (Sakiman and Yasin, 2023). The exposure to the teachings of the Beatitudes, promotes ethical awareness and moral reasoning among students. By emphasizing virtues such as compassion, humility, and justice, the teachings encourages students to consider the ethical implications of their actions and decisions while fostering a sense of moral responsibilities and integrities. This goes further to emphasize the importance of incorporating the ethical teachings found in the Beatitudes into the educational curricula, in order to foster moral development and integrity among students.

Table 1: Summary of the Sermon vs. Morals Values

SN	The Teachings of the Sermon on the Mount	The Moral Values
1	Blessed are the poor in spirit	Unselfish, Benevolent, Charitable
2	Blessed are they who mourn	Recognizing one's offenses and been truly sorry for them.
3	Blessed are the meek	Self-control, Humble, Considerate and Courteous
4	Blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	Uprightness, Contentment, & Truthful
5	Blessed are the merciful	Kindness, Forgiveness, Compassionate
6	Blessed are the clean of heart	Don't idolize (material or spiritual), Truthful & Always stand by their words
7	Blessed are the peacemakers	Good deeds, Sharing with the needy, Mourning with the bereaved, rejoicing with those who rejoice
8	Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness	Perseverance in the face of adversity

The Beatitudes in table 1, also emphasized attitudes such as meekness, peacemaking, and perseverance in the face of adversity (Machinek, 2021). Studies by Karakus et al., (2021) and Menakaya and Menakaya (2022) indicated that students who internalize these teachings demonstrated greater levels of emotional regulation, empathy, and contentment, contributing to their overall psychological health and general well-being. Central to the Beatitudes is the notion of communal harmony and reconciliation. McMinn et al., (2009) opined that students who embody these values (forgiveness, empathy, and inclusivity), fostered positive relationships within and beyond the school environment, leading to internalized sense of belonging and social support. These therefore underscores the benefits of nurturing the culture of empathy and cooperation within the educational system.

While the Beatitudes prioritize spiritual values over worldly success, Gates and Jackson (2014) noted that they can positively influence students' attitudes towards academic achievement. By promoting the positive attitudes of humility, diligence, and gratitude, these teachings contributes to a general sense of purpose and motivation in academic pursuits, leading to improved academic performance and engagement.

➤ **Integrating the Morals of the Sermon on the Mount into Classroom Instructions**

Some importance of providing educators with resources and guidance for incorporating the morals of the Sermon on the Mount into classroom activities include (Agwu et al., 2018; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005);

❖ **Enhanced Teacher Confidence:** Many educators may feel uncertain about how to effectively integrate religious teachings into secular educational settings. Providing them with resources and guidance can increase their confidence in addressing these topics sensitively and appropriately.

❖ **Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity:** The Sermon on the Mount contains universal principles of ethics and morality that can resonate with individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Equipping educators with resources that highlights the universal aspects of these teachings promotes inclusivity and respects the diversity of students' beliefs and perspectives.

❖ **Supporting Moral and Character Education:** The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount emphasize virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, and humility, which are foundational to moral and character education. By providing educators with resources that emphasize the development of these virtues, schools can cultivate a positive school culture that promotes ethical behavior and responsible citizenship.

❖ **Fostering Social-Emotional Learning:** The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount also addresses important aspects of social-emotional learning, such as empathy, conflict resolution, and resilience. Educators can use resources and guidance based on these teachings to support students' social and emotional development, helping them build healthy relationships and cope with challenges effectively.

❖ **Nurturing Ethical Leaders:** Educators play critical roles in shaping the next generation of leaders and citizens. By equipping them with resources and guidance based on the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, schools can empower educators to nurture students who demonstrate ethical leadership, integrity, and commitment to servitude.

➤ **Challenges of Integrating these Teaching to Educational Practices**

Despite the above listed benefits of integrating the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount into educational practices, some visible challenges according to Duckworth and Seligman, (2005) include;

- ❖ **Curriculum Design:** Integrating religious teachings into existing curriculum frameworks can be challenging, particularly if there are limited flexibilities or alignments within the educational standards.
- ❖ **Teacher Training:** Many educators may not have deep understanding of religious texts, including the Bible, which contains the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ **Institutional Support:** Incorporating religious teachings into the curriculum may require additional resources, which include curriculum materials, professional development, and instructional support.

The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount remain relevant to contemporary issues such as social justice, peacemaking, and the pursuit of inner peace and spiritual fulfillment. Its emphasis on love, compassion, and humility offers counter-cultural perspectives in a world marked by conflict, materialism, and individualism. Hence by embracing these teachings and their accompanied integration into educational practices, schools can cultivate environments and develop effective strategies for promoting students' holistic development and well-being.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey design due to its quick provision of efficient and accurate information about a population. The population comprised of all three hundred and eighty-one (381) 2023/2024 academic session computer science students of Alvan Ikoku federal university of education Owerri from which a sample of one hundred and fifty-five (155) persons were selected using Nwana’s (1994) statistical proposition and cluster random sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection themed “Exploring the Influence of the Morals in the Sermon on the Mount on One’s Lifestyle and Mental Well-being” (EIMSMOLWB), comprised of two (2) clusters A and B with Cronbach reliability coefficients 0.89 and 0.90. The questions were structured on a four point Likert rating of very high extent (VHE, 4-points), high extent (HE, 3-points), low extent (LE, 2-points) and very low extent (VLE, 1-point) while mean and frequency counts were used for the analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question One: To what extent are the morals of the Sermon integrated into the educational practices of the Institution?

Table 2: Extent of Integration

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	DEC.
1	To what extent have you encountered teachings and discussions related to ethical principles in your Department?	29 116	75 225	23 46	28 28	155 415	2.7	HE
2	To what extent have you participated in character development activities aimed at fostering honesty, respect, and empathy in your Department?	15 60	39 117	83 166	18 18	155 361	2.3	LE
3	To what extent does your Department adequately emphasize the importance of character development alongside academic achievements?	43 172	71 213	27 54	14 14	155 453	2.9	HE
4	To what extent do you perceive learning opportunities such as environmental cleaning, a contributing factor to the cultivation of good morals among students in your Department?	14 56	32 96	41 82	68 68	155 302	1.9	LE
5	To what extent does your Department prepare you for the ethical challenges your future career may possess?	- -	11 33	47 94	97 87	155 214	1.4	VLE
Total						775 1745	2.3	LE

From the analysis of research question one as presented in table 2, character development programme fostering honesty, respect and empathy were lowly integrated into the institution (2,3). Further investigations revealed that to a high extent, teachings and discussions relating to ethical principles (2.7) as well as emphasis on the importance of character development (2.9) were both integrated into the institution's activities. To a very low extent of one point four (1.4), it is assumed that the department of computer science very lowly prepare their undergraduate students on the ethical challenges associated with their future careers.

With a cumulative mean of two point three (2.3), the analysis showed that to a low extent, the morals of the Sermon has been integrated into the educational practices of the institution.

Research Question Two: To what extent has the moral values influenced the students' lifestyle?

Table 3: Moral Values vs. Lifestyle

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	DEC.
1	To what extent does kindness and compassion guide your daily activity decisions?	24 96	81 243	33 66	27 27	155 432	2.8	HE
2	To what extent do you abhor injustice in your social activities and friendship?	19 76	67 201	49 98	20 20	155 395	2.5	HE
3	To what extent have you gently faced opposition and social maltreatment on self and others?	- -	11 33	44 88	102 102	155 223	1.4	VLE
4	To what extent does your adherence to the moral values affect your relationship with lecturers, classmates and other members of the academic community?	37 148	62 186	17 34	39 39	155 407	2.6	HE
5	To what extent do you perceive self restrain, a positive contributor to your overall well-being and happiness?	89 356	51 153	12 24	3 3	155 536	3.5	VHE
Total						775 1993	2.6	HE

Research question two as analyzed in table 3 showed that to a very low extent, students gently react to social maltreatment and oppositions gently (1.4). It further revealed that to a high extent, kindness and compassion guide their daily routine (2.8), they abhor injustice (2.5) as well as having good relationships with members of the academic community due to their adherence to the moral value of the Sermon (2.6). Also, the analysis showed that to a very high extent, having the virtue of self restrain has contributed positively to their overall well-being and happiness (3.5).

With a cumulative mean of two point six (2.6), the analysis of research question two showed that to a high extent, the moral values of the Sermon on the Mount has influenced the students lifestyle.

Research Question Three: To what extent has the moral values influenced the students' mental well-being?

Table 4: Moral Values vs. Mental Well-being

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	DEC.
1	To what extent do you believe adhering to the moral values of the Sermon positively Impact on your mental well-being?	52 208	70 210	24 48	7 7	155 473	3.1	HE
2	To what extent do you feel a sense of inner peace and contentment when you act in accordance with the moral values?	37 148	84 252	34 68	- -	155 468	3.0	HE
3	To what extent do you perceive adhering to the moral values contributes to your overall happiness and satisfaction?	15 60	17 51	91 182	32 32	155 325	2.1	LE

4	To what extent have you experienced feelings of guilt or remorse when acting against your moral values?	97 388	42 126	11 22	5 5	155 541	3.5	VHE
5	To what extent do you feel a connection between moral integrity and mental resilience while navigating life's challenges?	21 84	39 117	54 108	41 41	155 350	2.3	LE
Total						775 2157	2.8	HE

Research question three targeted the influence of the moral values of the Sermon on students mental well-being and the findings are as follows; the students felt a low connection between moral integrity and mental resilience while navigating life challenges (2.3) as well as lowly perceiving adherent to the moral values a major contributor to their overall happiness and satisfaction (2.1). Further revelations showed that to a high extent, the students believed that adhering to the morals positively impact their mental well-being (3.1) as well as feeling inner peace when acting in accordance with the teachings (3.0). The analysis also showed that to a very high extent, they feel guilt and remorse when acting against the moral values and conscience in the institution (3.5).

With a cumulative mean of two point eight (2.8), the researchers concludes that to a high extent the moral values of the Sermon on the Mount has influenced the computer science students mental well-being at Alvan Ikoku federal university of education,(AIFUE), Owerri.

V. CONCLUSION

The Sermon on the Mount provides a moral and ethical framework that can imbue students' lives with a sense of purpose and meaning beyond academic and career pursuits. This deeper sense of purpose, contributes to greater resilience and well-being, especially during challenging times. Hence, the researchers conclude that students who are familiar with and adhere to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, are more likely to experience higher levels of mental well-being and interpersonal relationship. Therefore by integrating these timeless teachings into their lives, the computer science students of Alvan Ikoku federal university of education Owerri will not only experience greater fulfillment and resilience but also derive inner peace and contentment in their daily lives and overall well-being.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- ✓ The institution should routinely provide opportunities for students to engage in service-oriented projects towards promoting their social and environmental responsibilities;
- ✓ Training and professional development opportunities should be availed to the institution's instructors in order to deepen their understanding of the moral values embedded in the Sermon and best strategies for effectively integrate them into the teaching-learning activities;
- ✓ Computer science students should be encouraged to continually reflect on their actions and the corresponding impact it exerts on self and others;
- ✓ Also, the students should be taught to appreciate diversity and treat others with kindness irrespective of their varying backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives;
- ✓ Furthermore, students should be adequately equipped with the necessary skills required to make ethical decisions while navigating through the moral dilemmas of life; &
- ✓ Practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and gratitude which promote emotional regulation and stress reduction should be encouraged in the institution.

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