

Caregivers' Position in Stirring Virtue Based Education in Early Childhood Centres in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study focused on Caregivers' Position in Stirring Virtue Based Education in Early Childhood Centres in Rivers State. Virtue is that admirable character or disposition which contributes to social harmony. It enables people to feel appropriately and have the right intention. The development of virtuous character such as cooperation, self-esteem, discipline among others is highly valued in every society worldwide. The realization of the existing gap in the inculcation of these virtues in the early childhood centres is the backdrop for this paper. In doing this, the paper discussed virtue as applied in early childhood education. It discussed also, the role of the caregivers in inculcation of virtue based education, the child's behavior and virtue based learning and the significance of virtue based education. Being a descriptive survey research, the statement of problem was identified, purpose of study, theoretical framework and conceptual framework were developed. Methodology and the findings were discussed. It was concluded among others that virtue is a necessary ingredient needed in the society for political and economic stability. It was therefore recommended among others that caregivers should model, motivate and counsel children for the attainment of virtuous life style among children

Keywords: Virtue, Early Childhood, Cooperation, Self-esteem, Discipline

Introduction

The early years of the child is very crucial in the development of basic required developmental skills that will help him to function as an active member of the society. Early philosophers and psychologists dealing with behaviour and behavior modification such as Ivon Pavlor, Jean Piaget, and Erickson among others have cited the early years of the child as the period which learning of various skills can be inculcated. The Federal Government of Nigeria in realization of the imperativeness of inculcation of values, virtues and ideals of the society in the early years of the child, provided for it in the National Policy on Education (2013) when it stated as one of its objectives the "inculcation of social, moral, norms and values in the child and development of a sense of co-operation and team-spirit..."

Learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of exposure to learning experiences. Learning brings about behavior modification. It involves understanding, relating ideas and making connections between old and new knowledge, and the ability to transfer knowledge. Ambrose et al (2010) noted that learning is a process which brings about change and occurs as a result of experience and has the potential for improved performance and future learning. The change may occur at the levels of knowledge, attitude or behavior. Learning makes learners to see concepts and ideas in the world in different perspectives. Learning is a result of how children perceive and respond to their experiences. The learning experiences provide them with the opportunity to develop and practice basic skills such as intellectual, interpersonal and social skills often called soft skills. They develop virtues that are important for personal and professional success, including team work, conflict resolution, and communication among others. There is much more to learning, learning should not only be concerned with cognitive skills rather virtue and values should be incorporated in learning to help build the holistic child.

Virtue Based Learning (VBE) is a necessary instrument for shaping of the child's character for political and economic stability. A virtuous child grows up to make and create a virtuous society. Virtue based learning helps the child to develop social relationship skills that last throughout life time. Virtue can be explained as the admirable character or traits in an individual and the opposite of it is vices (Garrett, 2005). Virtue is a disposition or habit-like tendencies that are engrained. They are not innate, no one is born with virtue, it is learnt from the significant others in the environment and from institutions of socialization such as the family, school, church or mosque and the social media. Aristotle as cited by Curr, (2019) opined that virtue is not inherent in man, rather it is possessed through hard work, learning, tutoring and mentoring.

Aristotle argued that when man is virtuous, he can regulate and manage his emotions and temperament and this will make the society a better place.

It is the duty of the caregivers to mould the character of the child towards the development of virtue so that the child can grow up to become useful citizen by adding value to the society. The caregiver is at the core of the development of virtuous character in children. He diligently nurtures the child to be reasonable and productive in emotions (Austen 2018). Explicitly put, values provide ethical platform for the development of virtue for interpersonal behavior that provide the ability for acting responsibly. Klug, (2014) opined that commitment to the building of a democratic, political and economically stable nation is uncertain when virtue is lacking or is weak because this will disrupt the smooth running of the society.

The actual erosion of values for virtue development in the society today is what has caused conflicts, killings, kidnapping, aggression and other forms of vices in the polity. The path towards sustainable political and economic stability requires the integration of knowledge, virtues and education that addresses challenges facing the society (Rivers State). The deterioration of virtuous character is rampant in schools as these are exhibited by prevalent conflict, such as fighting, quarrelling, indiscipline, school dropouts, bullying, violent and crimes among others in schools (Wachukwu and Ibegbunam, 2012). The consequence of decline in virtue is a threat for future development of the state, respect to authority and the existence of the state, respect to authority and the existence of the state.

Virtue is central to the child. It is that which keeps the child going throughout his life time. Virtue is characterized by self-control, truthfulness, kindness, courage, humility, obedience and respect for God and man (Plato in Anero, 2018). It includes wisdom, temperance, justice, dedication and commitment. There is need to strengthen VBL in schools so as to help children discover their unique potentials rather concentrating only on knowledge acquisition alone. It is against the background that the study seeks to examine the position of teachers in stirring up virtue based education among early childhood children in Rivers State.

1.1 Caregivers and Virtue Based Education

Caregivers are at the core of creating virtue-based environment that fosters positive relationship which is aim at producing responsible and functional citizens. Ahmed et al, (2008) as cited by Amollo and Lilian, (2017) observed that teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to respond favorably to developmentally appropriate practices while those with low esteem find it difficult to maintain discipline among learners. The implication here is that, helping children to develop virtue require organized child-centered practices that promotes positive behaviours such as discipline, self-control, kindness, empathy and truth among children. Since caregivers help children to develop virtuous character consciously and unconsciously through their conduct in and out of the class, Reinders and Balcikanli, (2011) laid emphasis on the need to carefully plan VBL activities to focus on interactive, integrative and knowledge based approach. The use of specific teaching strategy and instructional resources becomes imperative for tutoring and mentoring children to become responsible future citizens. Supporting this view are Turker, Vural & Idowu, (2016) who opined that when a sense of safety and knowledge of rights and wrongs is reinforced, the child will learn to be honest, care for others, experience harmonious relationships and avoid conflict. Therefore, exhibiting virtuous character, including virtue learning in all curricular activities and fostering virtuous awareness among preschool children is a crucial effort be the caregivers to build or inculcate virtue in children.

1.2 Children's Behavior and Virtue Based Education

The behavior of the child in relation to social skill development predicts his conduct at adulthood. Children who possess some level of admirable and desirable character are confident, have respect and self-esteem which culminate into appropriate behavior. This supports the view of Reinders and Balcikanli, (2011) who noted that an effective teacher works towards fostering desirable characteristics of children such as honesty, responsibility, etiquette, self-control, self-esteem, discipline and cooperation among others. For the purpose of this paper, the study is based on three virtuous characteristics which are self-esteem, honesty, and cooperation.

Self-esteem is a desirable character which is a product of positive value; children who grow up with positive values are often confident in themselves and have self-esteem, and this produces a positive behavior. In the views of Larisa et al (2016) learners who feel valued have self-esteem and they exhibit a

sense of self-worth and take active role in group. The caregiver therefore should create an atmosphere or an enabling environment which permits development of self-esteem and self-worth since this will enhance psychological balance in children for achievement of positive behavior. This, the caregiver can achieve by modeling positive attitude and use of appropriate language during interaction with children.

Discipline is a very vital virtue in the life of the child. It defines the character of the child. Discipline is a product of acceptable values in all the societies of the world. This regulates human conduct and makes them relate with one another positively. Lopes and Oliveira, (2017) explained that discipline constitutes certain actions that the teacher exhibit in order to end an abnormal behavior of pupils in the classroom. This is an external discipline. Children can also exhibit self-control which is an internal discipline. The essence of discipline in the views of Onderi & Odera, (2012) is to enable learners behave in an orderly manner and to have a smooth interpersonal relations with those around them. Discipline which is an expression of self-control and compliance to rules and regulation including doing the right thing at the right time is a necessary virtue in the child's life as a member of the larger society.

Cooperation is another type of virtue that children should cultivate. Okcay, (2016) refers to cooperation as the synergy that exists between the teacher and the learners during classroom interaction. In another note, Bicaj, (2019) states that cooperation is the interaction that occurs in the classroom between the teacher and the pupils. In the learning centres, caregivers interact with their pupils and this is supposed to be a friendly one. By so doing, children inculcate the spirit of cooperation and learn to work with one another, while developing interpersonal skills.

1.3 Significance of Virtue Based Education

When school consciously emphasizes virtue Based Education, the school will become a place where virtues such as self-esteem, discipline, cooperation, contentment, trust, etc are recognized and celebrated, hence responsible learners will be turned out. Thompson, (2011), states that such children experience harmonious, social interactions and independent learning which culminates into creating a sustainable social environment. In this context, VBL helps children to develop attitude that enhances intellectual, social, emotional and personal flourishing. In a study on impact of insecurity on school attendance and dropout among Shem children in Nairobi County by Mudege, Machel & Ngetich, (2013), as reported by Amollo and Lillian, (2017) children in acquiring values, demonstrate awareness of themselves as constructive members of the society through communicating openly and honestly with others. This being the case, caregivers have the responsibility of shaping the behavior of children by inculcating appropriate values that will lead to the development of virtuous and life style.

School being an agent of socialization and transformation has the responsibility of helping to produce responsible citizens for the society. It is based on this that UNESCO in 2004 laid emphasis that caregivers should aid the development of virtue in children such that they will be happy with themselves and others. The achievement of potential and economic stability can only be attained when caregivers in the learning centres model these virtues and support children to develop same.

2. Statement of the Problem

Virtue based education promotes political, economic, social and national integration and stability. It awakens curiosity, builds interest and the ability to think and make judgment. The provision of early education ensures that children are guided by positive and appropriate ideologies throughout their life time. When virtue creation is realized, schools are likely to build in children character that produces behavior that is beneficial to the child and the society. However, observation has revealed an increase in conflict, dishonesty, disrespect, lack of cooperation, indiscipline among children and which the caregiver is suspected to be a part of the cause. The decline in these virtues jeopardizes efforts directed at creating a future path for political and economic development of the country. It is based on this that this study explored the role of caregivers in developing VBL among preschool children.

3. Purpose of the Study

The general aim of the study is to determine the role caregivers in the development of virtues in preschool children in Rivers State. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. Counseling by caregivers for virtue based learning
2. Motivation by caregivers for virtue based learning
3. Modeling by caregiver for virtue based learning

4. How children demonstrate cooperation in the classroom
5. How children demonstrate discipline in the classroom.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Kohlberg's (1978) Moral Development Theory. The theory involves children learning how to decipher difference between right and wrong and use the knowledge derived to make appropriate decisions where the need arises and to be able to independently act in the right way. Lev Vygotsky in his social learning theory of cognition argued that children operate by interacting with more knowledgeable others (MKO). This includes caregivers, older peers, adults and learning electronic devices. The implication here is that interpersonal experience with significant others combine to influence moral development in children.

The theory is related to the study in that virtue is a product of moral development. Children should be guided by moral reasoning and self-chosen principles when expressing feelings of anger and frustration without hurting others. When children are properly guided by caregivers on development of virtue such as self-control, cooperation, discipline, respect for others and their feeling, patients etc and children are made to understand that other people perceive situations in their own ways too and equally have rules concerning morality, the result is likely to experience enhanced child-caregivers relationship, improved communication, quality teaching and virtue based education.

5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on the faith that when children are equipped with Virtue Based Learning (VBL), they will become responsible individuals in the society. Without virtue, there is no harmonious society.

Integrity to guide decisions, hence people will make decisions that do not benefit the society. It becomes imperative that caregivers analyze and enhance appropriate tasks that are taken by children for the development of appropriate virtues; they should be given appropriate and adequate instructions and engage appropriate activities crucial to the development of virtues. The caregiver is expected to model positive virtues and integrate VBL in all aspect of learning content and foster awareness among children. When this is done, cooperation attitude will be inculcated in them, they will exhibit discipline in their behavior as well, as self-esteem in dealing with people. VBL can be implemented through various methods, strategies and approaches that are virtue-focused and children-centred. When the is attained, there is the likelihood that there will be quality care, improved communication and relationship in the classroom which can transcend into the society.

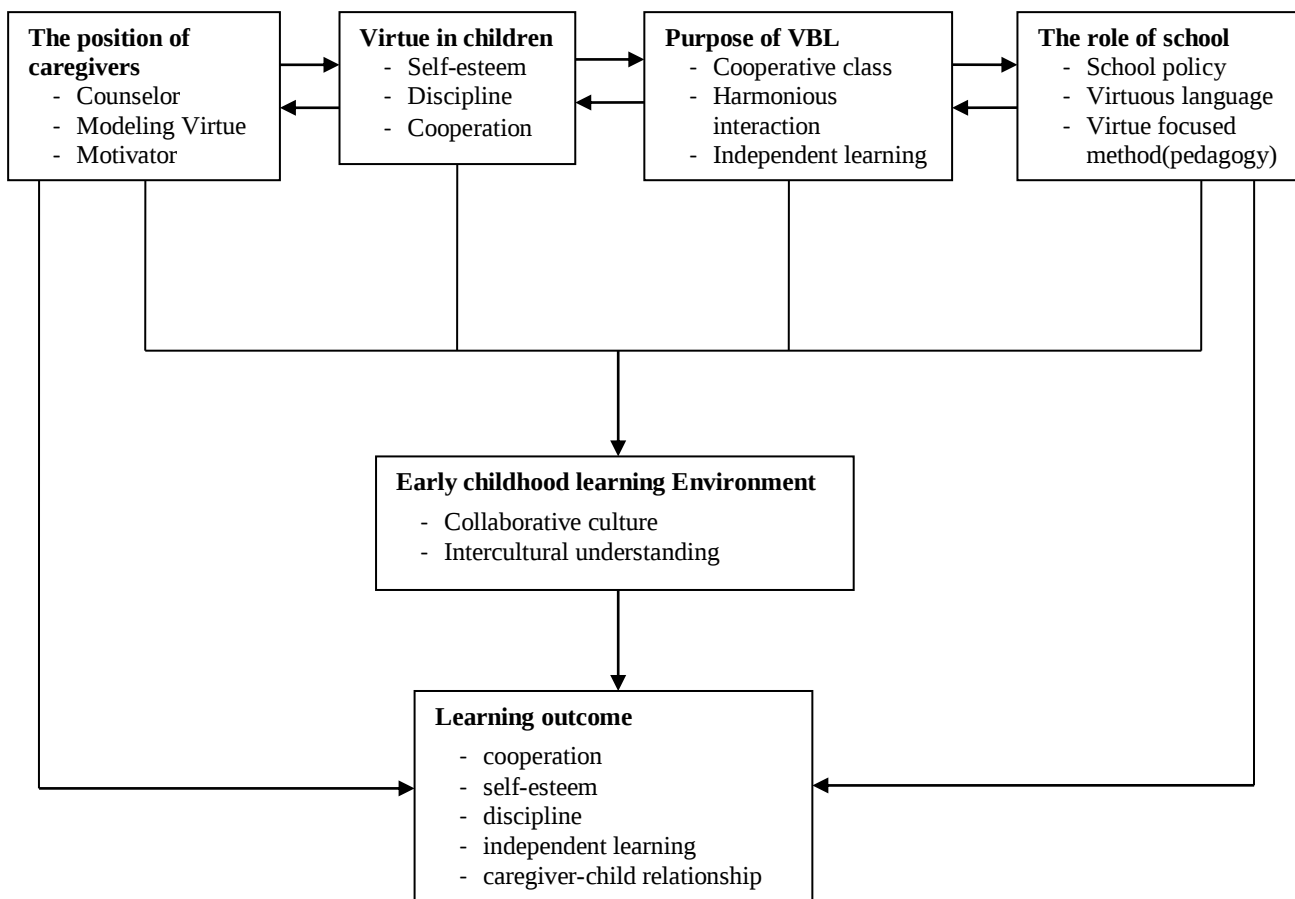


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework. Caregivers support for virtue Based Learning
Adapted from Amollo & Lillian, 2017

6. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used in the study. This is a method of collecting data through interview or questionnaire using a sampled individuals or groups to gather information about opinions or attitude of people. Descriptive survey design was chosen because the study was interested in what is happening in the field and no variable was manipulated in the study. The study used the stratified and simple random techniques to select 38 early childhood centres from public early childhood learning centres. Purposive sampling was adopted in selecting one (1) caregiver from the 38 public early childhood learning centres. A total of 38 caregivers participated in the study. Purposive sampling method is non-probability method of identifying primary participants. Questionnaires entitled Caregivers Position of Virtue Based Learning Questionnaire (CPVBLQ) was used in gathering data for the study, and was scaled using Likert 4-point scale and calculated using percentages and analyzed thematically and presented in tables.

7. Study Findings

Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents

Age	F	%	M	%	Experience (Yrs)	F	%	M	%	Academic Qualification	F	%	M	%
< 30	3	7.9	2	5.2	5 – 10 yrs	3	7.9	2	5.2	Certificate in ECE	18	47.4	19	50.0
31-40	10	26.3	11	28.9	11 – 15 yrs	8	21.1	9	23.7	Diploma in ECE	15	39.5	16	42.1
31-50	18	47.4	17	44.7	16 – 20 yrs	12	31.6	11	28.9	Bachelor in ECE	4	10.5	3	7.9
> 50	7	18.4	8	21.1	> 20 yrs	15	39.5	16	42.1	Masters in ECE	1	2.6	0	0
Total	38	100	38	100	Total	38	100	38	100	Total	38	100	38	100

Results from table 1 showed that out of 38 respondents, {3(7.9%), 2(5.2%)} were below age 30, while {10(26.3%), 11 (28.9%)} fell in the age bracket of 31 – 40. Majority of the respondents {18(47.4%), 17(44.7%)} were between ages 41 – 5 while age 50 and above {7 (18.4%), 8(21.1%)} were the least in the survey. This indicates that most of the respondents were capable of steering growth and development in the preschool centres in Rivers State.

The result on work experience revealed that for female and male respondents, {3(7.9%), 2(5.2%)} had between 5 – 10 years, {8(21.1%), 9(23.7%)} had 11 – 15 years of experience, {12(31.6%), 11(28.9%)} had 16 – 20 years. Majority of the caregivers {15(39.5%), 16(42.1%)} had an experience of 20 years and above indicating that they are capable of implementing VBL among the children in preschool centres in Rivers State.

Findings on academic qualification revealed that female and male respondents, {18(47.4%), 19(50.0%)} were certificates holders, {15(39.5%), 16(42.1%)} were diploma holders, {4(10.5%), 3(7.9%)} had degree, {1(2.6%), 0(0%)} had masters. Based on the analysis, it showed with higher educational qualification are known to possess appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes indicating ability in implementing appropriate practices that influence achievement of learners.

Table 2: Caregiver Position in Virtue Based Learning

S/N	Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	I consciously model virtuous life to children	65%	28%	5%	2%	100%
2.	I am confident in mentoring virtue to children	73%	23%	3%	1%	100%
3.	I incorporate virtue into all aspects of learning	39%	43%	13%	5%	100%
4.	I create virtue awareness in all lesson content	65%	25%	7%	3%	100%
5.	I use specific virtue based materials during teaching	80%	16%	3%	1%	100%
6.	I provide opportunities for children to explore virtuous characters	66%	28%	4%	2%	100%
7.	I motivate my children when they exhibit virtuous character	50%	46%	3%	1%	100%
8.	I counsel my children to develop virtue in them.	52%	42%	4%	2%	100%

The results from table 2 revealed that out of 38 respondents 65% strongly agreed that virtuous life is consciously modeled to children, while 2% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 73% strongly agreed on the confidence of the caregiver in mentoring virtue to children, while 1% disagreed. 39% also strongly agreed on that virtue is incorporated into all aspect of learning by the caregiver and 5% strongly disagreed. Further still, 65% strongly agreed on the creation of awareness in all lesson contents by the caregiver while 3% strongly disagreed. Again, 80% of the respondents strongly agreed on the use of specific virtue based materials during teaching while 1% strongly disagreed. 66% strongly agreed on the provision of opportunities for children to explore virtuous characters by the caregivers and 2% strongly disagreed as well. 50% strongly agreed that the caregiver motivates the children when they exhibit virtuous character while 1% strongly disagreed. Lastly, 52% strongly agreed that the caregivers counsel the children to develop virtue in them while 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

The result of the findings is in correlation with the findings of Ahmed et al, (2008) as cited by Amollo and Lilian, (2017) who observed that teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to respond favorably to developmentally appropriate practices while those with low esteem find it difficult to maintain discipline among learners. The implication here is that, helping children to develop virtue require organized child-centered practices that promotes positive behaviours such as discipline, self-control, kindness, empathy and truth among children. Since caregivers help children to develop virtuous character consciously and unconsciously through their conduct in and out of the class.

Table 3: How children demonstrate virtue

S/N	Variables	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Total
1.	Children cooperate with each other in the school	25%	70%	3%	2%	100%
2.	Children are receptive to learning about virtue	43%	38%	16%	3%	100%
3.	Child exhibit self-esteem during interaction with others	63%	20%	15%	2%	100%
4.	Children demonstrate discipline during classroom activities	48%	37%	12%	3%	100%
5.	Children explore learning materials harmoniously	40%	45%	13%	2%	100%
6.	Children feel confident to stand on their virtues	60%	24%	15%	1%	100%
7.	Children communicate honestly with one another	33%	45%	18%	4%	100%

The results from table 3 revealed that out of 38 respondents 25% put forward that children cooperate with each other in the school, while 2% never confirmed. 43% confirmed that children are receptive to learning about virtue while 3% never confirmed. 63% indicated that child exhibit self-esteem during interaction with others while 2% said never. Further still, 48% indicated that children demonstrate discipline during classroom activities while 3% are against. Again, 40% reported that children explore learning

materials harmoniously while 1% reported never. 60% confirmed to the fact that children feel confident to stand on their virtue, 1% never. Finally, 33% reported that children communicate honestly with one another while 4% confirmed never.

The finding is in agreement with the findings of Okcay, (2016) who explained that cooperation is the synergy that exists between the teacher and the learners during classroom interaction. In another development, Bicaj, (2019) states that cooperation is the interaction that occurs in the classroom between the teacher and the pupils. He explained that caregivers interact with their pupils and this is supposed to be a friendly one and by so doing, children inculcate the spirit of cooperation and learn to work with one another.

The finding is also in line with the assertion of Lopes and Oliveira, (2017) who explained that discipline constitutes certain actions that the teacher exhibit in order to end an abnormal behavior of pupils in the classroom. In the views of Onderi & Odera, (2012) the essence of discipline is to enable learners behave in an orderly manner and to have a smooth interpersonal relations with those around them. Discipline should be encouraged in learning centres and should be modeled by caregivers.

Table 4: School and Virtue Based Learning

S/N	Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	Virtue life style is explicitly valued in the school	41%	47%	10%	2%	100%
2.	Parents actively support virtuous character	46%	55%	11%	14%	100%
3.	Virtue is taught as part of the school lesson content	40%	30%	18%	12%	100%
4.	The school virtue perspective is used to explore challenges in the classroom	55%	28%	14%	3%	100%
5.	Virtuous character is rewarded in the school	50%	35%	11%	4%	100%
6.	Children are given opportunity to exhibit virtuous character	63%	27%	9%	2%	100%
7.	The school speaks about virtue in children in its policy	65%	26%	6%	3%	100%

The results from table 4 revealed that 41% of the respondents strongly agreed that virtuous life style is explicitly valued in the school while 2% strongly disagreed. In addition, 46% strongly agreed that parents actively support virtuous character, 14% disagreed. Further still, 40% strongly agreed that virtue is taught as part of the school lesson content while 12% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 55% strongly agreed that the school virtue perspective is used to explore challenges in the classroom and 3% strongly disagreed. Again, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that virtuous character is rewarded in the school while 1% strongly disagreed. 63% strongly agreed that children are given opportunity to exhibit virtuous character while 2% strongly disagreed as well. Lastly, 65% of the respondents strongly agreed that the school speaks about virtue in children in its policy 3% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Significance of Virtue Based Learning

S/N	Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	Virtue based education addresses societal problems such as political and economic issues	70%	26%	3%	1%	100%
2.	The school facilitate virtue that promotes Rivers State political and economic stability	68%	28%	2%	2%	100%
3.	The school promote virtue that helps children cope with difficulty of modern life	56%	39%	4%	1%	100%
4.	The school is explicit about virtuous character by children	60%	37%	2%	1%	100%
5.	Virtuous character permits openness in communication	75%	21%	3%	3%	100%
6.	The school models virtues they want children to develop	59%	35%	4%	2%	100%
7.	Virtuous life style enhances interpersonal relationship.	74%	22%	5%	1%	100%

The results from table 5 revealed that 70% of the respondents strongly agreed that virtue based education addresses societal problems such as political and economic issues while 1% strongly disagreed. 68% strongly agreed that the school facilitates virtue that promotes Rivers State political and economic stability, 2% strongly disagreed. 56% of the respondents strongly agreed that the school promote virtue that

helps children cope with difficulty of modern life while 1% strongly disagreed. Further still, 60% strongly agreed that the school is explicit about virtuous character by children, 1% strongly disagreed. Again, 75% of the respondents strongly agreed that virtuous character permits openness in communication while 3% strongly disagreed. 59% strongly agreed that the school models virtues they want children to develop while 2% strongly disagreed. Finally, 74% of the respondents strongly agreed that virtuous life style enhances interpersonal relationship while 1% respondents strongly disagreed.

The result of the findings agrees with the assertion of Thompson, (2011) who opined that the school has become a place where virtues such as self-esteem, discipline, cooperation, contentment, trust, etc are recognized and celebrated, hence responsible learners will be turned out from the school and such children experience harmonious, social interactions and independent learning which culminates into creating a sustainable social environment. In this context, VBL helps children to develop attitude that enhances intellectual, social, emotional and personal flourishing. He added that the school being an agent of socialization and transformation has the responsibility of helping to produce responsible citizens for the society.

8. Conclusion

The study established that caregivers are not consistent with the manner in which they handle virtue based learning (VBL) irrespective of its significance in developing a responsible child. Virtue based Education is taken for granted even though the national policy on education provides for it. It is not included in tutoring and mentoring of children, this is why many children complete school without developing some virtuous characteristics. It was also revealed in the study that there was adequacy of virtuous education and most learning centres did not understand the various virtues to foster. Schools should therefore provide opportunities to children through modeling among others to develop virtuous characteristics that will lead to harmony, peace and political stability in the society.

9. Recommendation

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Schools should be regularly supervised by ministry of Education to ensure that the objectives of National policy on education are implemented.
2. Caregivers should motivate, model and counsel children for virtue development.
3. Caregivers should explicitly tutor and mentor children on virtue.
4. Schools should have critical approach to virtue based education.
5. Caregivers should improve their professional practice through training and development for the achievement of virtue based education.

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