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Parental Instruction in Proverbs 22:6 and Moral Formation among Christian Youths in Ogun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The development of morals among Christian adolescents has become a matter of great importance to families and churches in Nigeria because of the changing environment in which children grow up, mainly due to the effects of social media, materialism, and decreased parental supervision. This study analyzes Proverbs 22:6 and its significance in regard to parental teaching and moral formation among Christian adolescents in Ogun State. The research design used a qualitative exploratory design coupled with an exegetical approach to the Bible. A total of twenty participants were purposively selected from Ogun State. These included pastors, church elders, Christian parents, Sunday school teachers, children's ministry directors, and youth counselors. The exegetical findings revealed that Proverbs 22:6 teaches that parental instruction is not an instantaneous duty but a deliberate, sustained activity, and that the promise in the verse is a wisdom principle, not an unconditional guarantee. These results were also corroborated by the field data. Participants stated that the activities which fall within parental instructions include teaching, disciplining, correcting, praying for their children and setting good examples. Participants also identified social media, peer pressure, materialism and lack of good relationship between parents and children as some of the challenges to moral formation among Christians. It was further established that the Yoruba omoluabi principles are in agreement with Christian morals and that the role of the church should be complementary, as parents are counseled, taught and mentored by the churches. The study concludes that moral formation requires consistent parental guidance, positive cultural values, and active church support. It recommends that churches strengthen parenting education and youth mentorship, parents model the values they teach and maintain open communication with their children, and Christian educators make appropriate use of omoluabi values in moral instruction.

KEYWORDS: Proverbs 22:6 • Parental Instruction • Moral Formation • Christian Youths • Omoluabi • Ogun State

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1. Introduction

The moral development of children has traditionally been an important part of family life; however, in modern Nigeria and especially among Christians from Ogun State, the fulfilment of this duty faces challenges. Social media, peer groups, materialism, and the decline of extended-family supervision have made raising morally sound children much harder for the current generation than for past generations. In light of this, Proverbs 22:6, perhaps the most quoted verse about parenthood in the Christian tradition, remains relevant to believers' understanding of their parental duties. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This verse is part of the wisdom books in the Old Testament, and it is more focused on practical instruction than doctrine (Waltke, 2004). According to Waltke (2004, 2005) in his comprehensive NICOT commentary, this verse is placed within the wider context of the instructional purpose of Proverbs, which is to shape the youth into discerning individuals through persistent instruction rather than just one time.

The conflict between teaching and results is not abstract. It is central to how Christian parents in Ogun State feel about their responsibility today. Many parents raise their children with proper religious teaching, discipline, and personal example, only to see some of their children end up behaving in ways that starkly contrast with what they were taught at home. Some even see children who have gone astray ultimately come back to the values that they were taught as young people. It is because of this conflict that Proverbs 22:6 offers a useful perspective for studying morality among Christian youths in Ogun State.

The additional layer of meaning is provided by the fact that the cultural background of the Yoruba people in which most of these families are immersed brings yet another element to the discussion. Before the advent of Christianity, Yoruba society developed a child-rearing system meant to raise children to be omoluabi, meaning a person of good character, honesty, respect, diligence, and social responsibility (Olanipekun, 2017). The observations of several researchers confirm that the moral requirements of omoluabi and the moral requirements of Christian teachings coincide to a great extent despite being based on completely different authorities (Olanipekun, 2017; Fayemi, cited in Olanipekun, 2017). Thus, studying how Christian parents in Ogun State use both biblical and Yoruba sources to bring up their children will provide a more comprehensive perspective than a purely theological or sociological one.

The development of morals among Christian youths in Ogun State does not occur in a vacuum. There has been scholarly evidence from Nigeria about how the use of social media has affected the moral fibre and behaviour of youths in terms of peer pressure, cyberbullying, indecent dressing and overall degradation of morality (Bolu-Steve et al., 2022). Other studies indicate that Christian youths are not an exception to this trend, and churches are increasingly forced to deal with the impact of digitalization on the beliefs and behaviour of their youths. Materialism, breakdown of parent-child communication and peer pressure are some other challenges that are adding to this problem and making one wonder whether mere parental teaching will be enough to achieve what Proverbs 22:6 promises.

While there is a lot of literature on Proverbs and parent training (Waltke, 2004, 2005; Boloje, 2024), there is also literature on Yoruba morality (Olanipekun, 2017), and on the problems faced by youths in Nigeria (Bolu-Steve et al., 2022). However, few studies have examined how these literatures can be integrated to understand how Christian parents and church leaders interpret Proverbs 22:6 in nurturing their children. This study attempts to fill the gap.

Objectives

This study aims to examine Proverbs 22:6 and its implications for parental instruction and moral formation among Christian youths in Ogun State, Nigeria, and to compare the theological principles drawn from the text with the lived experiences and practices of parents, church leaders, and community elders in the state.

Research Questions

To achieve this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

i. What does an exegetical examination of Proverbs 22:6 reveal about the nature and scope of parental responsibility in moral and spiritual formation?

ii. What methods do parents and church leaders in Ogun State employ in the moral and spiritual formation of Christian youths?

iii. In what ways do Yoruba cultural values, particularly omoluabi, relate to Christian teaching on moral formation?

iv. What challenges hinder effective parental instruction and moral formation among Christian youths in Ogun State?

v. How effective do participants consider parental instruction to be, and what role should the church play in supporting it?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Proverbs 22:6 in Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Parental Responsibility

The book of Proverbs belongs to the wisdom tradition of the ancient Near East, a body of literature that discussed character formation through observation, instruction, and the accumulated experience of the community (Waltke, 2004). Within this tradition, the family, and particularly the parent, is presented as the primary agent of moral education. Waltke (2004, 2005) situates Proverbs 22:6 within a larger collection of sayings addressed to "my son," a form of address that reflects the setting of home-based education rather than formal schooling.

Boloje's (2024) study of Proverbs 1:8-9, a passage related to 22:6 in its concern with parental instruction, argues that Old Testament wisdom literature presents the family as the primary institution through which moral, social, and spiritual formation takes place, and that parental instruction in this literature is bound up with the child's intellectual, emotional, and moral development. This reading resonates with Deuteronomy 6:6-7, part of the *Shema*, which commands parents to teach the commandments of God diligently to their children in the home, on the road, and at all times of the day (Craigie, 1976). Craigie's NICOT commentary on Deuteronomy observes that the instruction found in this passage is not confined to formal teaching moments but is woven into the day-to-day rhythms of life.

Proverbs 22:6: "and when he is old he will not depart from it." This can be interpreted as an unconditional promise, guaranteeing that properly trained children will never abandon their upbringing and teaching. Scholars such as Waltke (2004) and Fox (2009) caution against this reading, arguing that proverb literature, by its nature, expresses general tendencies rather than absolute guarantees, and that treating every proverb as an ironclad promise misunderstands the genre. This debate over whether the verse offers a guarantee or a principle is directly relevant to how participants in this study understood the limits of parental influence, a matter discussed further in the exegetical section below.

2.2 Yoruba Cultural Values and Omoluabi in Moral Formation

Long before the arrival of Christianity in Southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba community had developed an elaborate system for the moral education of children, centred on the concept of *omoluabi*. Olanipekun (2017) describes omoluabi as the generally accepted principles of good character among the Yoruba, which embody virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, diligence, courage, moderation, and respect for others. According to Olanipekun (2017), an *omoluabi* is not simply someone who avoids wrongdoing but a person whose entire conduct reflects communal responsibility and regard for the wellbeing of others (Olanipekun, 2017). Traditional Yoruba education relied heavily on oral tradition, including proverbs, storytelling, and correction within the extended family, to inculcate these values in children from an early age. Several scholars argue that the erosion of these traditional structures, alongside the pressures of modern urban life, has contributed to a decline in moral standards among contemporary youths, and that reviving omoluabi virtues could serve as a valuable resource for addressing this decline (Olanipekun, 2017). For Christian families in Ogun State, omoluabi and biblical moral teaching are not necessarily in competition.

Both traditions place a high value on honesty, respect, diligence, and concern for others, even though they draw their authority from different sources: covenantal revelation in the case of Scripture and communal custom and ancestral wisdom in the case of omoluabi. This overlap raises an important question for the present study, namely how Christian parents and church leaders in Ogun State understand the relationship between these two moral traditions in practice.

2.3 Contemporary Challenges to Moral Formation among Christian Youths

Attention has been turned to the challenges confronting parents and churches in the moral formation of youths, with social media emerging as one of the most frequently cited factors. Dango (2021) examined the relationship between social media and moral decadence in Nigeria and found that exposure to online content has contributed to cybercrime, cyberbullying, indecent dressing, and a general weakening of moral standards among young people, particularly through pressure to conform to trends and peer expectations circulating online. This finding aligns with the broader understanding that Nigerian youths who spend significant time on social media are more susceptible to peer-pressure and to imitating behaviour that clashes with the values taught in their homes and churches.

Materialism represents a related challenge. When wealth is publicly celebrated without regard to how it was acquired, young people may come to view honesty and hard work as disadvantages rather than virtues, a pressure that complicates the work of parents trying to model and teach integrity. Alongside these external pressures, several studies point to weakening parent-child communication as a contributing factor, noting that many parents, often preoccupied with economic survival, are not sufficiently aware of what their children encounter outside the home until difficulties have already taken root.

2.4 The Role of the Church in Youth Moral Formation

Apart from the family unit, the church has traditionally served as a second, but significant source of moral formation among Christian youth, providing organized religious education, mentoring, and accountability. In this regard, modern Christian education research still emphasises the importance of religious practice at home as a way to complement religious education in the church. According to Lee & Djita (2025), in a study of family devotions, parents who engaged in family devotions regularly, including Bible reading and prayers, were more willing to discuss issues of faith with their children and had stronger parent-child relationships, all of which are considered protective factors in moral formation.

Social Learning Theory offers another perspective on the importance of consistency in moral education. In Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, children learn virtues and behaviours by watching and copying role models around them, such as their parents. This implies that children's moral development depends not only on what they are taught but also on their parents' example. Parents are therefore more likely to influence their children's behaviour positively when their conduct reflects the values they teach. From the perspective of this study, the effectiveness of parental instruction based on Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 6:6–7, and the Yoruba principle of ọmọlúàbí depends largely on the consistency with which these values are taught, demonstrated, and reinforced in everyday life.

3. Exegetical Examination of Proverbs 22:6

3.1 The Meaning of "Train Up" (חֲנֹךְ, ḥănōk)

The Hebrew word which has been translated as "train up" in Proverbs 22:6 is ḥănōk (חֲנֹךְ), the imperative form of the verb חָנַךְ (ḥānaḵ). This word means dedicate, initiate or make a person embark on a certain path. This verb has been used in other Old Testament verses where it has been used in the sense of dedication. For example, the dedication of a house in Deuteronomy 20:5, the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:63 and 2 Chronicles 7:5. It appears that the meaning of this word includes the idea of setting apart something for a particular purpose or initiating something in a particular use. Hence, the meaning of the phrase ḥănōk lanaʿar (חֲנֹךְ לַנַּעַר), which can be understood as "initiate a child," refers to the act of directing a child towards a certain lifestyle. Waltke (2004) explains Proverbs 22:6 in the broader context of Israelite wisdom and household teaching, where parents are responsible for developing their children's character

and behaviour. Thus, it is not just about giving orders, but it is about forming habits, values and ways of behaviour that will act as guidance for the child all his life. Exegetically, the Hebrew term shows parental training as a purposeful and formative process where the child learns and is led along the path of wisdom. While the verb's connection with dedication is evidence to support this idea of initiation, the meaning of the term in Proverbs 22:6 is also to be clarified within the immediate context.

*3.2 "In the Way He Should Go" (*Hebrew: עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ, *ʿal-pî darkô)*

The second main expression from Proverbs 22:6 is "ʿal-pî darkô" (עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ), which may be translated "in the way he should go." The phrase includes עַל (ʿal, meaning "upon" or "according to" in prepositional form); פִּי (pî), meaning "mouth"; but more likely idiomatically "measure," "or according to"; and דַּרְכּוֹ (darkô), meaning either "his way" or "his path." In essence, the translation could simply read "according to his way." This interpretation views the expression as teaching people how to direct their children in accordance with wise guidance and righteous paths. It agrees with what Proverbs teaches about the way of wisdom contrasted with the way of folly (see Proverbs 2:12–15; 4:10–19). From this understanding, parents have a duty to instruct children in accordance with wisdom, training, justice, and fear of God. Another interpretive possibility would see ʿal-pî darkô as referring to the special temperament of the child. Waltke (2004) understands the verse within the broader wisdom tradition of Proverbs, in which the main issue is not the acceptance of personal whims but the bringing up of a child in the wisdom way. Exegetically, the expression should be interpreted in connection with the book's constant theme of instruction and the choice between wisdom and foolishness. Such an interpretation draws attention to the obligation of parents to offer their children moral guidance that will help them act in accordance with the wisdom tradition of Israel.

3.3 "When He Is Old, He Will Not Depart from It": Promise or Principle?

The concluding phrase in Proverbs 22:6, which states "he will not depart from it when he is old," poses an important interpretative problem as to whether the statement in this verse must be understood as a promise or a wise principle. The Hebrew text reads, kî-yazqîn lō-yāsûr mimmennāh (מִמֶּנָּה לֹא־יָסוּר כִּי־יַזְקִין), which can be translated as "he will not depart from it when he grows old." The term kî (כִּי) introduces the temporal "when" in this case, whereas the verb yazqîn (יַזְקִין) comes from the Hebrew root זָקֵן (zāqēn), which means "grow old." The phrase lō-yāsûr (לֹא־יָסוּר) comprises the negative particle lō (לֹא), which means "not," and the verb yāsûr, taken from the root סוּר (sûr), meaning "turn away," "depart," or "deviate." Finally, the last phrase, mimmennāh (מִמֶּנָּה), translates "from it" and refers to the method by which the child was taught. However, it would be inappropriate to view this last assertion as an unconditional promise that each child instructed in the right way by his or her parents would never deviate from morality in his/her whole life. The Book of Proverbs is a book of Hebrew wisdom literature, in which general principles of human behaviour and results of specific actions are usually stated, not unconditional promises that do not allow any exceptions. Similar examples appear in Proverbs 10:3 and 16:9, where assertions about righteousness, human behaviour, and God's providence express general wisdom principles. Thus, the verse of Proverbs 22:6 should be viewed as an expression of the expected effect of early instruction on the person's behaviour. From an exegetical point of view, the phrase "lō-yāsûr mimmennāh" (he will not depart from it) means that early instruction will influence the person's future behaviour. The Hebrew verb yāsûr means to turn aside or depart from something. The imperfect tense indicates the continuation of the action, but it does not guarantee lifelong obedience unconditionally.

3.4 Proverbs 22:6 in Relation to Deuteronomy 6:6–7

The connection between the two passages is clear when Proverbs 22:6 is compared with Deuteronomy 6:6–7, which indicates that, in the Old Testament, parents should train their children to become wise in both moral and spiritual matters. While Proverbs 22:6 stresses the significance of training children in the right way, Deuteronomy 6:6–7 explains how this instruction should be done. The Bible states that the parents must teach their children God's commandments when they sit at home, walk along the road, lie down and rise up. Therefore, moral and religious training cannot be limited to classroom learning, family prayer time, or occasional rebuke but should be included in family activities on a daily

basis. As stated by Simanjuntak (2024), the teaching style used in Deuteronomy 6:7–9 involves repetition, fellowship with God, and value formation within the community. For instance, parents can teach children honesty by practising honesty themselves, show respect to others to teach respect, and obey God by following His commandments.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study design that was used in this research was qualitative exploratory research design with exegetical biblical interpretation. Qualitative design was found suitable for the purpose of this study, considering that it would allow researchers to delve deeply into the participants' understanding of the concept of parents' instruction and morality formation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The exegetical part included the in-depth study of Proverbs 22:6 through its interpretation in the Hebrew text and the context of wisdom literature to determine the meaning of this passage in relation to the collected field data. An exploratory design was selected, as there is not much research on how particular biblical verses like Proverbs 22:6 were applied and interpreted by people in particular cultural settings like Ogun State of Nigeria, despite a good body of knowledge on parental instruction and youth moral formation in the body of Christian education and pastoral literature. The study has used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method.

4.2 Sampling Technique and Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used whereby those with firsthand experience in the upbringing in morality and spirituality of Christian youth were targeted (Palinkas et al., 2015). The study included twenty participants. Participants included pastors, church elders who are parents, Christian parents, Sunday school teachers, children's ministry leaders, and youth counsellors selected from Ogun State. Participants were assigned pseudonyms ranging from P01 to P20 to protect their identities. It is a conscious choice to use the voices of people who have been involved in the moral and spiritual upbringing of children directly, and not only those of the youths themselves, because that is what the study is all about.

4.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide developed from the research questions. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to reflect on their understanding of Proverbs 22:6, their methods of instruction, and the challenges they face. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned, and identifying details were removed to preserve confidentiality.

4.4 Data Analysis

The interview data were subjected to analysis based on the six phases of thematic analysis developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The phases include data familiarization, code generation, theme identification, theme review, defining and naming of themes, and writing up the final report. Five themes were generated from this process, which were related to the research questions: knowledge of Proverbs 22:6 and parental responsibility, strategies of parental instruction, the influence of Yoruba culture and omoluabi, barriers to moral formation, and the effectiveness of parental instruction and the church. These themes were compared with the exegetical findings on Proverbs 22:6 to identify points of convergence and divergence between the biblical text and participants' lived experience.

4.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility was strengthened through member checking, in which participants reviewed summaries of their responses to confirm accuracy. Dependability was supported by maintaining detailed records of coding decisions, and confirmability was enhanced through discussion with a colleague familiar with qualitative research in religious studies.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

This study conformed to the accepted ethical standards regarding research with human subjects. Participation was on a voluntary basis and the subjects were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point in time. Any information that could have divulged the identity of the subjects was not included in the study.

5. Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data produced five themes that correspond to the research questions.

Theme One: Understanding of Proverbs 22:6 and Parental Responsibility

Participants generally understood Proverbs 22:6 as a call for parents to take deliberate responsibility for their children's moral and spiritual development, encompassing far more than religious instruction alone. Participants saw guidance, correction, discipline, personal example, and preparation for responsible adulthood as components of what the verse demands. Participant 1 (P01), a pastor, explained:

> In my understanding, what the Bible states in Proverbs 22:6 is that children require training. Children cannot just be left to grow and learn all things by themselves. It is the duty of the parents to train the child on what is acceptable and what is not according to God's will for his life. Training involves both teaching, correction, praying and good examples.

Participant 20 (P20), a church elder and parent, offered a similar reading, with particular emphasis on consistency:

> What it means to me is that the child will need a solid foundation. The parents must instruct the child on what is correct and explain to him why it is correct. This training cannot be something that is done after the child has committed an error. It should be part of everyday life.

This is similar to the exegesis of the Hebrew verb ḥănōk (חֲנֹךְ) taken from the root ḥānaḵ (חָנַךְ). The concept denotes dedication, initiation or introduction into a certain mode of life. For example, Proverbs 22:6 implies a conscious effort to teach the child early on so that it develops character and a pattern of life. Parents did not limit their concept of parental instruction to mere instructions but also took in mind how the children are brought up. This is in line with Boloje's (2024) study, where he states that Proverbs was interested in the formation of family morality, where the child's character is cultivated not only through instruction but also through the examples of parents.

Theme Two: Methods of Parental Instruction and Moral Formation

Participants described a range of methods used in teaching moral and spiritual values, including family devotion, Bible reading, prayer, storytelling, correction, discussion, and, above all, parental modeling.

Participant 2 (P02), a Christian parent and Sunday school teacher, described a combination of structured and conversational approaches:

> Family devotion is highly important. Biblical stories work well too since children retain stories better. Punishment has to happen, but parents have to be loving while correcting their children. Discussion is also important, if anything happens in school or on social media, I will always discuss it with my children and get their opinions.

Participant 16 (P16), a children's ministry leader, placed particular weight on the power of example over verbal instruction:

> The Bible stories, prayers, correction and the examples of parents play significant roles in teaching the children about morality. Proverbs and Bible stories help children learn and memorize moral values, but prayers and correction help consolidate these lessons. However, being an example plays a crucial role since children pay much attention to the actions of their parents. For example, parents teach their children to be honest but demonstrate dishonesty through their own actions; they create confusion and weaken the lessons they are trying to communicate.

The findings resonate with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which maintains that a considerable number of children's moral behavior is learned through observation and imitation of the important adults in their lives, as well as Lee & Djita's (2025) findings that regular family devotion is correlated with close parent-child bonds and a willingness to discuss religious issues. Participants saw discipline not as the only means, or even the most important, but as part of a mix of instruction, discussion, prayer, and example.

Theme Three: The Role of Yoruba Values and Omoluabi

Participants acknowledged the continuing relevance of Yoruba cultural values, particularly the concept of omoluabi, in their children's moral formation. Most participants viewed these values as compatible with Christian moral teaching, as they do not directly contradict biblical principles.

Participant 15 (P15), a church elder and parent, explained the practical importance of good character in Yoruba society:

> The principle of ọmọlúàbí is very crucial in Yoruba culture since it stresses good character, integrity, respect, and responsibility. One may have all the wealth and success in life, but without good character, such successes may not bring respect to him/her from others. Christianity also stresses the importance of good character, especially with teachings about honesty, humility, love, respect, and righteousness. For this reason, I think there are common values between ọmọlúàbí in Yoruba culture and Christianity.

Participant 20 (P20) elaborated further on the points of overlap between the two traditions:

> The Yoruba language's proverbs have been used to pass on the values of wisdom all along, while ọmọlúàbí is equally important, given its stress that integrity forms an integral part of being a good person. The value teaches people to have respect for other people, be responsible and behave appropriately. I think the two sets of values are quite compatible since Christianity stresses love, honesty, humility and self-restraint, among others.

These responses show that the term ọmọlúàbí remains relevant to raising children morally in Christian households. This aligns with Olanipekun (2017), who defines ọmọlúàbí as a representation of communal virtue, honesty, and respect. The responses also show that Christian parents use both Biblical and Yoruba teachings to raise their children. In other words, there exists an understanding that Christian moral teachings and Yoruba teachings can actually go hand-in-hand when fostering good character.

Theme Four: Challenges to Moral Formation among Christian Youths

Participants identified several challenges affecting parental instruction and moral formation, chief among them social media, peer pressure, materialism, and poor communication between parents and children.

Participant 5 (P05), a pastor, linked the pressure of materialism directly to young people's willingness to compromise their values:

> Materialism is a major problem. Young people see people becoming rich through questionable means and begin to ask why they should remain honest. Sometimes society praises wealth without asking how the wealth was acquired. This makes the work of parents more difficult.

Participant 18 (P18), a youth counsellor, focused instead on the breakdown of parent-child communication as a root cause of vulnerability to outside influence:

> Peer pressure and lack of communication are serious challenges. Some parents do not know what their children are thinking or what they are going through. By the time they realise there is a problem, the child may already have been influenced by friends or things they are seeing online.

These findings are consistent with Dango's (2021) documentation of the link between social media exposure and moral decline among Nigerian youths, and confirm that Christian households in Ogun State are not insulated from the wider social pressures affecting young people across the country.

Theme Five: Effectiveness of Parental Instruction and the Role of the Church

Participants generally agreed that consistent parental instruction provides children with a strong moral and spiritual foundation, but they did not interpret Proverbs 22:6 as an absolute guarantee that every child raised in a Christian home will never make wrong choices.

Participant 19 (P19), a pastor, articulated this qualified reading of the verse directly:

> I would not interpret it as an absolute guarantee. It gives a principle that proper training provides a strong foundation. But children still make decisions. I have seen children from good homes make wrong choices, and I have also seen some return to the values they were taught later in life.

Participant 1 (P01) emphasised the church's complementary, rather than substitutive, role in supporting parents:

> The church should teach parents, organize counseling, and provide youth mentorship. The church should also create an environment where young people can talk about their problems without feeling that they will immediately be condemned. The church can support the parents, but it cannot replace the family.

This finding aligns precisely with the exegetical reading offered in section 5.3 above, which cautions against treating Proverbs 22:6 as an unconditional promise. Participants' lived experience, informed by years of pastoral and parental practice, mirrors the scholarly consensus that the verse expresses a general tendency of wise upbringing rather than a mechanical guarantee, while still affirming the enduring value of consistent instruction.

Summary of the Five Themes

Theme	Main Finding
Understanding of Proverbs 22:6 and Parental Responsibility	Parents are responsible for deliberately and continuously guiding the moral and spiritual development of their children, not only through discipline but through teaching, prayer, correction, and example.
Methods of Parental Instruction	Family devotion, Bible teaching, storytelling, discussion, correction, and above all, parental modelling are the primary methods used.
Yoruba Values and Omoluabi	Omoluabi and Christian moral teaching are viewed as largely compatible cultural and religious resources for character formation.
Challenges to Moral Formation	Social media, peer pressure, materialism, and weak parent-child communication are the principal obstacles identified.
Effectiveness and Role of the Church	Parental instruction provides a strong foundation but does not guarantee outcomes; the church is expected to support, not replace, parental effort.

6. Discussion

The results from this study show a strong correlation between the exegetical findings on the meaning of Proverbs 22:6 and the experiences of parents and church leaders in Ogun State. Participants see parental instruction as a consistent act of teaching, correcting, encouraging, and leading by example, rather than a one-off action at the child's age. This aligns with the Hebrew verb in Proverbs 22:6, ḥănōk (חֲנֹךְ), which means initiating or dedicating someone to a way of life. It also corresponds with the instruction in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, which calls upon the parents to teach God's commandments as they engage in their daily acts. Similarly, Boloje (2024), in his analysis of Proverbs 1:8–9, highlights the role of the parents in instilling morals and spirituality in the children.

Another important finding is related to the role that participants gave to the behaviour of parents as a crucial aspect of moral teaching. Many participants noted that children study their parents well and can get confused when parents behave in ways that run contrary to the values taught by the parents. This finding aligns with the Social Learning Theory put forward by Bandura (1977), where individuals learn different behaviours through observation and imitation of key figures in their environment. The findings are consistent with Smith's (2023) findings, which link religious practices within the family and congregation to moral values in young adulthood. Therefore, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of parenting relies not only on the teachings of parents but also on the behaviour they show towards the same

values. In Christian families in Ogun State, the teaching of honesty, respect, discipline, and obedience to God must be complemented by similar behaviours by the parents.

The results on the values of Yoruba culture, especially ọmọlúàbí, show the significance of taking into consideration the cultural context of Christian moral education. Respondents mentioned good character, honesty, respect, responsibility, and proper behavior as crucial aspects of Yoruba upbringing. Additionally, they believed that these values are in accordance with Christian moral teachings of love, humility, honesty, and self-control. This view aligns with Azenabor's (2023) philosophical analysis of ọmọlúàbí as a Yoruba moral tradition focused on character development, peaceful coexistence, and social responsibility. Thus, the responses of the respondents indicate that Christian parents do not consider biblical teachings and positive aspects of Yoruba culture as opposing moral guidance. On the contrary, they use both of them in bringing up their children. In other words, the findings show that Christian moral education can positively interact with indigenous cultural values if they are analyzed from the perspective of Christian ethics.

The findings related to the problems affecting the effectiveness of moral instruction of parents also capture some of the difficulties that exist in the current Nigerian society. The participants indicated social media, materialism, and negative peer influence as the problems that make it hard for parents to maintain moral values within their children and young people. These findings are in line with those of Bolu-Steve et al. (2022), who carried out a study on the effect of exposure to inappropriate content through social media on the moral development of 420 secondary school students in Ekiti State. Ofoegbu (2023) studied the link between social media and the erosion of societal values among youths in Nigeria. These studies provide good backing for the problems raised by the participants in the current study. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that moral instruction of parents is not an isolated process. There are other influences beyond the family setting that can either complement or contradict the values taught at home.

Another relevant aspect of the findings concerns the interpretation of the concluding clause of Proverbs 22:6, especially lō-yāsûr mimmennāh (מִמֶּנָּה לֹא־יָסוּר), "he will not depart from it." Participants largely saw the passage as highlighting the long-term effect of childhood training rather than offering an absolute promise that all children who receive proper training will continue being obedient in their adult years. This view is also in line with the literary nature of Hebrew wisdom literature since the latter often teaches the expected patterns of human behavior rather than offering a guaranteed outcome for each individual case. The findings thus confirm the need to interpret the verse without excluding the responsibility of the child and his or her ability to make decisions. In pastoral terms, this interpretation matters because parents whose children have departed from what they were taught in childhood should not assume everything was in vain or that the Bible is untrustworthy

Finally, the findings show that parents do not see themselves as the only agents of their children's moral development. The role of the church as a source of additional assistance through counseling, mentorship, biblical teachings and discussions on the part of young people about their challenges was noted by participants. This finding is consistent with the ideas put forward by Smith (2023) regarding the connection between family and congregational religious experiences and moral development. Moreover, the findings align with those reported by Nyaga et al. (2023). The authors' study of the role of church programs in moral education conducted in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa indicated the significance of relevant teaching techniques, involvement of young people, early moral socialization and follow-up in the context of church-based moral development. Even though the aforementioned study was conducted in Kenya, it can serve as an interesting comparison for understanding the contribution of church programs to youth moral development. Therefore, it can be concluded that moral development in Christian families in Ogun State is enhanced through the joint work of parenting, positive Yoruba cultural values and the church.

7. Conclusion

This study examined Proverbs 22:6 and its implications for parental instruction and moral formation among Christian youths in Ogun State, Nigeria. The exegetical analysis shows that the verse

presents parental instruction as an early, deliberate, and sustained responsibility, while its concluding statement expresses a general wisdom principle rather than an unconditional guarantee. The field findings similarly show that moral formation involves teaching, prayer, correction, communication, and personal example. The study also found that Yoruba omoluabi values can support biblical moral teaching, although social media, peer pressure, materialism, and weak parent-child communication remain challenges. It therefore concludes that the moral formation of Christian youths requires consistent parental instruction, the positive contribution of Yoruba cultural values, and the church's support through teaching, counselling, and mentorship. This study is limited by its focus on a single State, its modest purposive sample, and its reliance on the accounts of parents and church leaders rather than the youths themselves; its findings should therefore be read as analytic insights rather than statistical generalisations.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Churches in Ogun State should strengthen parenting education programmes that present Proverbs 22:6 as a principle for consistent, embedded moral instruction rather than a mechanical guarantee, in order to support parents whose children depart temporarily from their upbringing.

ii. Parenting programmes should place deliberate emphasis on helping parents model the values they wish to instil, given the strong weight participants placed on personal example over verbal instruction alone.

iii. Christian educators should explore the intentional integration of Yoruba cultural resources, particularly omoluabi, alongside biblical teaching in moral instruction, given the compatibility participants identified between the two traditions.

iv. Churches should develop structured youth mentorship and counselling programmes that create a non-condemning space for young people to discuss the pressures of social media, peer influence, and materialism.

v. Parents should be encouraged and equipped to maintain open, ongoing communication with their children about digital culture and consumer pressures, rather than relying solely on restriction or discipline.

vi. Further studies should include the direct perspectives of Christian youths themselves, in order to compare parental and church accounts of moral formation with the experiences and self-understanding of young people.

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