

# Searching for a Pathway to Priming Accountants for Ethical Compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards: The Core Value Paradigm

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## Abstract

The accounting profession has over the years prescribed solutions (via code of professional ethics) to often complex ethical problems. This has left the profession in a state of continued crises of confidence as evidenced by the celebrated fraud cases across jurisdictions. The problem is likely to be more pronounced following the introduction of the principles-based International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). To be effective, ethical reform initiatives should directly address the inner life and character of accountants through education of the right type. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to bring into focus the relevance of Covenant University Core Values in priming accountants for ethical compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards. According to the empirical results of the study (based a cross-sectional sample of stakeholders from the Lagos area of Nigeria) the CU core values paradigm is relevant and effective in priming ethical behaviour. The paradigm offers the right approach as the acquisition of understanding of ethical issues turns away from a focus on the external world of rules to the more holistic approach of internalizing a set of values which ensures that accountants maintain consistent ethical behaviour. Thus, the paper recommends the Covenant University Core Value dimension to learning and teaching as a pedagogical starting point in building ethical behaviour in accountants for compliance with IFRS. However, there are a number of limitations of the study which include small sample size. Further studies that would consider the limitations are recommended.

**Keywords:** Core values, Accounting education, Ethical sensitivity, Priming, International Financial Reporting Standards(IFRS)

## 1. Introduction

The use of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs) in preparing financial statements globally, is maturing. This is not surprising given the pains associated with the low quality financial reports which witnessed an unprecedented growth in the recent past. In addressing the lapses observed in financial reporting worldwide, relevant bodies, agencies and accounting firms implement laws and regulations, majorly Codes of Professional Ethics (Zolingen & Honders, 2009; Helin & Sandstrom, 2007). For instance, the *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants*, developed by International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) established ethical requirements for professional accountants to ensure compliance with the five fundamental principles of professional ethics. Nigeria, adopted the IFAC code with minor modifications.

However, the recent financial and accounting scandals around the world have drawn attention to the failure of codes of ethics in the monitoring and enforcement of accounting standards. The failure is evidenced, particularly in Nigeria, where a large number of empirical and anecdotal evidences show unethical business behaviour and corporate scandals involving large companies such as African Petroleum Plc, Cadbury Nigeria Plc and Lever Brothers Plc (Ajibolade, 2008 and Bakre, 2007).

There is the fear among stakeholders as to how effective codes of ethics would be as ethical enforcement mechanisms in an IFRS regime. The fears are justifiable. First, IFRSs implicitly assume the existence of legal, institutional and policy conditions, which of course are underdeveloped or non-existent in many developing and emerging countries (Iyoha & Oyerinde, 2010 and Ball, 2006). Second, IFRS contains several overt and covert options and estimation issues which would require the extensive use of judgment. Third, the recent worldwide financial scandals did not emanate from want of accounting standards or codes of ethics, but lack of diligent compliance and enforcement thereof. The basic question then is: How can educators develop future accountants to be ethical? It has, therefore, become imperative to seek a more fundamental alternative means of encouraging and enforcing ethical behaviour among accountants.

The objective of this paper, therefore, is twofold: One, to explore the Covenant University Core Values concept and present it as a more fundamental alternative to extant codes of ethics in enhancing ethical behaviour of accountants and two, to provide useful suggestions for incorporating core values into educational pedagogies in developing countries.

This study has significant implications for the ongoing international accounting convergence with particular reference to enhancing the quality of financial reporting and audit reports. This study adds to the accounting literature by identifying that the Covenant University Core values could be linked to and

incorporated into accounting curriculum with the hope of enabling universities produce more ethically sustainable, sensitive, reliable and relevant accountants.

The remaining part of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the Covenant University Core Value Concept. Section 3 is a review of extant literature and section 4 provides the research method while section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. The Covenant University (CU) Core Values in Context

Covenant University is a Christian Mission University founded in 2002 to pioneer a revolution in education, not only in Nigeria, but also on the African continent. The Vision of the University, according to Oyedepo (2002), is to be a “leading world class Christian Mission University committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of human endeavour.” This philosophy represents a paradigm which shifts the University’s education policy from a ‘content based’ structure to a ‘knowledge based’ structure in which Core Values are emphasized.

The Core Values are: Spirituality, Possibility Mentality, Integrity, Responsibility, Capacity Building, Diligence and Sacrifice. The Core Values are taught in a *custom built* course known as ‘Total Man Concept’ (TMC). The TMC aims at accessing the total make-up of man from the ‘spiritual, soul and body’ dimensions. It is a unique and holistic concept that is novel in the curriculum of African universities and defines the Mission statement of the university as:

*Create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a human development and ‘Total Man Concept’ driven curriculum, employing innovative, leading edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated life applicable and life transforming education relevant to the context of science, technology and human capacity building (Oyedepo, 2002).*

The core values are universal, not culturally, socially or religion specific. The values can be applied in any context to address the demand to depart from dogmatism to dynamism in the educational system, particularly in Africa, from:

- ‘Form’ to ‘skill’
- ‘Knowledge’ to ‘empowerment’
- ‘Figures’ to ‘future building’
- ‘Legalism’ to ‘realism’
- ‘Points’ to ‘facts’
- ‘Mathematics’ to ‘life-matics’ (Oyedepo, 2002).

The choice of the core values is underpinned by two factors: (i) the religious inclination of Covenant University and (ii) a strong conviction that any ethics education must have foundational elements that are capable of reinforcing, shaping and guiding human conduct in the application of code of conduct in a lifelong learning perspective. Based on the above, the choice of the core values meets the scientific premise of reality. It is believed that the CU ideal is already being realized. For instance, Okebukola (2012), observes that the appearance of CU is “one of the most remarkable events in the 64-year history of the Nigerian university system”. He further noted that CU is ‘one of the most-decorated universities’ in Nigeria, through number and quality of national and global laurels as well as setting academic and physical development reference points for many of the 124-member university system. This is a confirmation of the need to depart from the norm.

## 3. Review of Related Literature

The quality of financial reporting globally has been faulty based on the number and scale of fraud in the recent past. Consequently, many countries have adopted or plan to adopt IFRS largely on the assumption that a single set of high quality accounting standards can enhance the quality of financial information across countries. IFRSs are principles-based accounting standards, which provide conceptual basis for accountants to follow (Wustemann & Wustemann, 2010 and Pacter, 2005). Theoretically, the main advantage of a principles-based system is that it offers the accountant possibilities to adapt the reporting of transactions to their unique economic setting. This flexibility in applying IFRS, according to Wyatt (2005) increases the possibility to provide a fair presentation of transactions.

However, there are dangers inherent in a standard which requires accountants to exercise a large dose of judgment (Nobes, 2009; Douppnik & Perera, 2009; Tsakumis, 2007; Douppnik & Riccio, 2006). This is particularly worrisome when it has been established that accountants’ judgments are not neutral and value free (Patel, 2004).

### 3.1 The Need for Values in Accounting Education

The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) has long recognized the need for a model of education that should emphasize character building much the same way as cognitive and technical competences are emphasized. For instance, IFAC in its revised International Education Standard (IES) 4, noted:

*The programme of professional accounting education should provide potential professional accountants with a framework of professional values, ethics and attitudes for exercising professional judgment and for acting in an ethical manner that is in the public interest (IFAC, 2014).*

The IFAC position suggests that character building is an indispensable part of ensuring ethical compliance with accounting rules and regulations. Therefore, education in values cannot be ignored for a number of reasons- (i) there is a gap between personal ethics and professional ethics (ii) a knowledge of ethical rules alone is not evidence of ethical development/maturity and (iii) ethical reasoning skills need to be developed through specific training in values. Highlighting the need for compliance while ignoring value-based internal motivation, as noted by Salleh and Ahmad (2012), can lead to a culture of “compliance with the letter rather than the spirit of the law.” This observation accords well with the position of Pink (2010) who earlier cautioned against relying on external motivation as a stimulus for good behaviour.

The challenge has been the means to reach the inner life and character of accountants. According to Salleh and Ahmad (2012), the means to reach the internal dimension of human beings must be “formulated” if accounting educators and professional bodies are serious about building ethical individuals. The observation is noteworthy as it is impossible to provide a detailed and standard procedure to enforce ethical behaviour among accountants, especially under a principles based accounting framework. In this regard, the CU Core Value paradigm is considered to offer the right approach as the acquisition of understanding of ethical issues turns away from a focus on the external world of rules (which extant codes of ethics exemplify) to the more holistic approach of internalizing a set of values through priming. Priming in this context is ‘shaping the considerations (emotionally and intellectually) that accountants take into account when making judgments about ethical issues, using the CU core values as benchmark.’ It is preparing accountants to know what to do and doing it under ethical situations.

### 3.2 Covenant University Core Value Paradigm and Ethical Behaviour

In this study, the CU core values are contextualized as ‘those qualities which enable an individual to know what his or her roles require and to carry out those roles with the appropriate emotional involvement without fear or favour’. Values are of interest because they are important influences of individual’s interpersonal decision making (Ng & Burke, 2010). For instance, the practice of earnings management in financial accounting (Kaplan, 2001 and Ming-Chia, 2012), and budgetary inflations in management accounting (Douglas & Wier, 2000 and Ming-Chia, 2012), are highly relevant to the inner values of leaders.

With core values internalized, accountants should be able to translate codes of ethics into practical reality beyond the current emphasis on problems with specific solutions. The curriculum of Nigerian universities concentrates mainly on the education of the head and the hands (cognitive and psychomotor domains) while ignoring the heart (affective domain), which according to Ochuko (2010:97), is left to develop itself. Covenant University recognizes the heart as the ‘seat’ of the affective domain and so designed her core values in line therewith. Human beings need to be brought into centrality in ethics education and it requires “urgent attention” (Salleh and Ahmad, 2012) and the CU paradigm is a novel attempt at doing it. This could be understood when the core values are compared with accounting fundamental principles as here under.

**Table 1: (Relationship of Core Values and Accounting Fundamental Principles)**

Core Values	Equivalent Fundamental Accounting Principles
Diligence	Professional Competence/Due care/Confidentiality
Integrity	Integrity/ Objectivity
Responsibility	Professional Behaviour
Sacrifice	Nil
Spirituality	Nil
Possibility mentality	Nil
Capacity building	Nil

The table indicates that the core value paradigm is a more holistic approach that includes development of the spirit as well as the mind than the fundamental accounting principles. The potency of the CU paradigm is attracting the attention of scholars who have described the philosophy upon which it is based as “an indigenous knowledge that can provide some inclusiveness and most equitable approach towards ameliorating developmental problems in Africa” (Iyoha, Adejumo & Adeniji, 2008; and Akinwale, 2008). Akinwale further notes that the indigenous knowledge is “a viable option for Africans in their pursuit of productivity and improved living standards” Consequently, the priming of students and practitioners core with core values could serve as foundation to applying codes of ethics, particularly because accountants may be unethical not necessarily due to fraudulent intents but due to other issues such as lack of capacity, fear or ignorance.

For instance, in a study conducted by Jackling, Cooper, Leung and Dellaportas (2007), the key ethical risks identified were: self-interest, failure to maintain objectivity, lack of independence, improper leadership and poor organizational culture, lack of ethical courage to do what is right, lack of ethical sensitivity and failure to exercise proper professional judgment. It may not be logical to conclude that the ethical risks identified above all derive from fraudulent intentions. This point may be clearer when the risks are mapped against the core values as depicted in the table below.

**Table 2:** Ethical Risks and Relevant Core values

Ethical risk	Possible Cause(s)	Relevant Core Value Violated
Self interest	Greed	Spirituality/Sacrifice
Failure to maintain objectivity	Lack of fear of God, ignorance	Spirituality, Capacity building
Lack of independence	Lack of courage, self esteem	Possibility mentality
Improper leadership and poor organizational culture	Lack of relevant information/knowledge	Capacity building/Responsibility
Lack of ethical courage	Fear of superiors	Spirituality/Integrity
Lack of ethical sensitivity	Lack of awareness of ethical implications of actions	Spirituality/Diligence
Failure to exercise professional judgment	Carelessness, lack of attention to details, fear	Responsibility/Capacity building/Spirituality

Given the above areas of ethical risks which could impact on the credibility of financial statements under IFRS regime, the challenge is to seek to improve the ethical knowledge and behaviour of accountants via the core values. Thus, the link between the core values and accounting practice is articulated below.

**Spirituality:** Spirituality, not necessarily religion, refers to instilling the fear of God into the lives of men and women. The fear of God is fundamental to a successful career in any profession (Lancu, Popesus and popescus, 2010). The importance of spirituality, thus lies in ensuring that the behaviour of each individual will encourage and lead both the stakeholders as well as the rest of the corporation towards more responsible behaviour (Masten, 2012) since spiritual alertness can provide the impetus required to eliminate unethical practices.

**Possibility mentality:** Through possibility mentality, CU, seeks to stimulate the dream of royalty and of dignity into its students so that they can begin to develop a royal attitude, habits and character. Looked at in terms of morality and in the context of accounting practice, possibility mentality calls for obligations and aspirations in all circumstances where accountants make decisions that affect the public interest. That is, possibility mentality is a vector of forthright honesty, obedience, respect for human dignity, mission accomplishment and innovation. These are virtues which accountants require but which they do not currently possess in sufficient dosage.

**Capacity Building:** Accountants are required under the IFRS regime to think critically before making decision that have ethical implications. To make such decisions requires good ethics education that goes beyond the use of codes of ethics. Thus, IFAC as well as the professional accounting bodies recognize the need for capacity building in the quest to making accountants relevant in the dynamic business environment. This is aptly captured in IES 7 (Continuing Professional Development) which IFAC (2012) notes is an important element in maintaining public confidence and trust. IFAC further maintained that the continuing professional development(CPD) is important because professional accountants have a continuing duty to maintain professional competence to satisfy clients, employers, and relevant stakeholders.

**Integrity:** Integrity is a central determinant of trust in organizations. In the CU context, integrity is the established habit of doing right where there is no one to make you do it but yourself. Integrity is the answer to the lack of accountability which is currently the bane of leadership everywhere, every time and in all professions. Integrity is irreplaceable as a foundational principle in accounting practice. A person of integrity is somebody who has reasonable, coherent and relatively stable virtues to which he is freely and genuinely committed and which reflects in his act and speech.

**Diligence:** Diligence is directly relevant to the professional acceptance of the accountant in the perception of the investing public. In the covenant university core value framework, diligence is extolled as a servant-leadership philosophy where commitment is regarded as the greatest qualifier for attainment. The obligation to be competent is not merely prudential. It is moral and culpable incompetence is a violation of professional integrity. For instance, an accountant who is diligent will not accept a professional job for which the required

expertise is lacking.

**Responsibility:** Responsibility in the covenant university core value concept is ‘responding to issues as demanded not as convenient.’ It is knowing what to do and doing it. Accountants must accept the responsibility of upholding the standards of the profession, not as ‘convenient’ but as ‘demanded’ by public interest. There is thus, a joint responsibility for conduct and competence that should be shared by all members of the accounting profession. When fellow accountants close their eyes to the deliberate errors and mistakes of their colleagues, they fall short of the responsibilities to the goals of the profession.

**Sacrifice:** Sometimes, individuals may genuinely want to take the ethical course, but could be ‘constrained’ when personal cost for acting in an ethical manner is inevitable. This is what the core value of sacrifice is meant to address. In the Covenant university context, sacrifice implies the ‘willingness to give all you've got, going the extra mile, paying the extra price to deliver services.’ Sacrifice is a moral standard. It is an individual’s willingness to place the interest of others ahead of his or her own. It presupposes service before self. That is, doing ones’ duties whatever the cost to self. This, perhaps, explains the observation by Mathenge (2012), that considering the ‘interest’ of others is at the heart of ethics. As a moral ideal, sacrifice demands more than obedience. It demands respect for investors’ dignity. But today, how many accountants are aware that sacrifice is needed in accounting practice and are willing to apply it in the course of their duties? As observed by Jackling et al (2007: 938)), self interest is a “most likely factor causing ethical failure.”

### 3.3 Theoretical Framework

Moral development is not just about the intellect (cognitive) but also of the will (virtues). That is why every failure to act ethically is a failure, not only in the moral reasoning process, but also a failure in the practice of the virtues (Catacutan, 2013). Both the cognitive and virtues ethics paradigms have failed to achieve the desired end and evidences exist that both have suffered series of criticisms (Osorio, 2010; Sanderse, 2012 and Catacutan, 2013). Ethics education has been sporadic and indoctrinating (Catacutan, 2013) and lack proper foundation for effectiveness. A foundation is required and therefore, the central theory of this study is Rest’s model of ethical decision making. Rest’s model, as cited in Bebeau (2002) describes the process of decision making as a four-component model in which a decision maker must (i) recognize the moral issue (ii) make a moral judgment (iii) place moral concerns ahead of other concerns and (iv) act according to these moral concerns. As observed by Thorne (1998) and noted by Armstrong, Ketz and Owsen (2003), Rest’s model combines elements of both moral development and the development of virtues, both of which are required for ethical behaviour (Armstrong et al, 2003). The theory captures the essence of the Covenant University core value paradigm.

### 3.4 The Proposed Model- The Framework

Below is the proposed model (fig 1) that should provide a foundation for ethical behaviour. Before ethical theories and contents of codes of ethics are taught, the students should be primed with the core values.

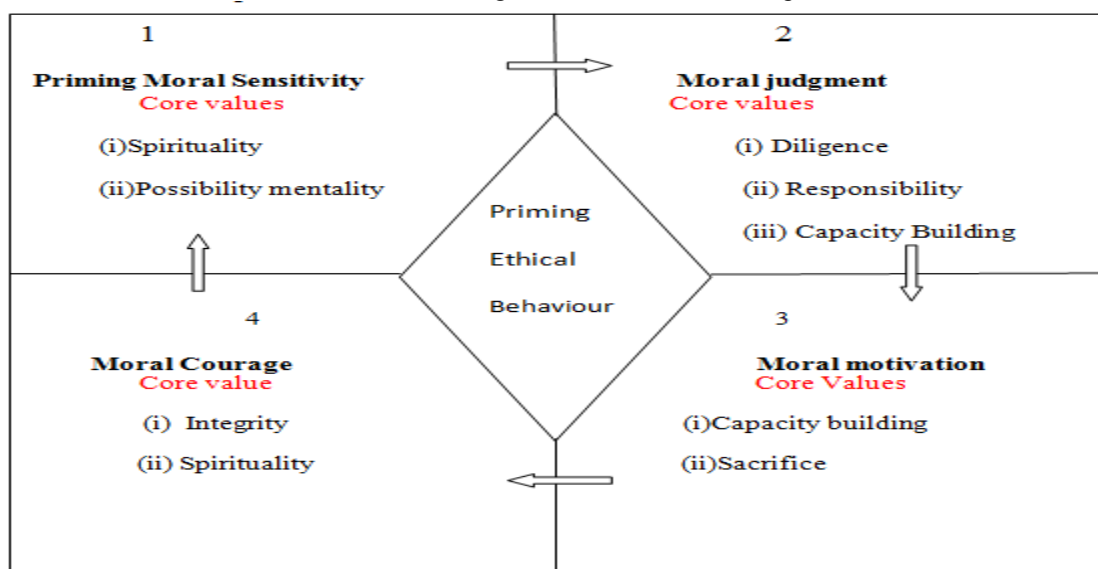


Figure 1. Contents of the proposed model for priming accountants for ethical behaviour

The model’s starting point is in cell 1. Drawing from Rest’s model, moral sensitivity (moral awareness)



begins when an individual recognizes that a given situation will impact on the welfare of others and has the mentality to identify the moral content of an issue. This requires **Spirituality** (the fear of God, God loving, gentleness/peace, enthusiasm/excitement on the job and participating in Godly activities) and **Possibility mentality** (faith and belief in assignments, royal carriage and self confidence, dignity in conduct and character, patriotism, sense of contribution and accomplishments)

In cell 2, we have moral judgment which involves formulating and evaluating which possible solutions to moral issues have moral justification. This process requires ethically sound reasoning which will require the core values of **Diligence** (unalloyed commitment to assignment, being hardworking, striving to excellence and highest standards, being tenacious and conscious of details), **Responsibility** (discipline, willingness to serve, promptness in delivery, complete commitment) and **Capacity Building**( openness to innovation, being teachable, acceptance of mentorship roles, being adaptable).

In cell 3, we have moral motivation which involves committing to choosing the moral value over another solution representing a different value. The *will* to commit to an ethical choice is a virtue worth cultivating. To commit to an ethical choice would require the core values of **Integrity** (honesty, uprightness, trust, being accountable and transparent, obedience to rules and regulation, acting with good conscience, being judicious with funds and resources) and **Sacrifice** (helping others at all times, emphasizing the corporate vision and goal of the firm, being available beyond the call of duty, making unusual contributions).

Finally we have cell 4: Moral courage (moral action): This refers to the individual's actual behaviour/action in a given situation. This step involves strong will and fear of God (to persist), responsibility (to motivate you to do what is ethical), capacity building (to have knowledge of what to do and to follow through with the moral decision).

The model has a virtuous cycle. That is, failure in any of the processes can result in an unethical decision as an individual who may have strong moral judgment skills may be unable to use them due to moral insensitivity and failure to recognize the moral side of an issue.

### Research Questions

The following research questions have been identified that need to be addressed.

RQ 1- Are Covenant University (CU) Core Values relevant in priming ethical behaviour?

RQ 2- Are the Core Values effective in priming behaviour among CU graduates/students?

RQ 3- Do CU graduates consistently demonstrate behaviours in line with the Core values?

RQ 4- Can accountants be effectively primed to be ethical (especially under IFRS regime) using the Covenant University Core Values?

### 4. Research Methods

The research was largely based on primary data. A research questionnaire was used as a measurement instrument and administered to employers and teachers of CU graduates as well as present students of CU. The information contained in the questionnaire was derived mainly from the staff and student hand book of core values of CU. The questionnaire comprised two main sections (i) respondents' background information and (ii) respondents' perception of their familiarity with the core values as well as the relevance, effectiveness and compliance thereof. The non-probability sampling approach known as judgment or purposive sampling was used. The sample was selected to conform to the criterion that all respondents should be familiar with the CU Core Value paradigm. The administration of the questionnaire was done by research assistants.

At the survey cut-off date, one hundred and thirty five persons had responded to the survey and one hundred and thirty one copies were useable. The survey was conducted in the Lagos area of Nigeria in which most of the respondents reside. The results of the study have been analyzed using the Statistical package for Social Sciences version 17(SPSS). The following table shows the level of familiarity of the respondents with the core values.

**Table 3: Level of familiarity with CU Core Value Paradigm**

Level of familiarity with core value	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Not familiar	5	3.82
Slightly familiar	2	1.53
Somewhat familiar	5	3.82
Moderately familiar	39	29.77
Extremely familiar	80	61.06
Total	<b>131</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In order to be sure that only respondents who are familiar with the core values responded to the question, respondents were asked to rate their level of familiarity with the core value on a five point Likert type scale (1

Not at all familiar to 5 (Extremely familiar). Table 4 indicates that the respondents have reasonable familiarity with the core values and thus competent to complete the questionnaire.

### Results and Discussions

This section discusses the research findings with particular reference to the relevance, effectiveness, extent of compliance with the core values as well as the potential of core values to prime accountants for ethical behaviour. The respondents were asked to rank each of the constructs on a 7-point Likert type scale.

#### Relevance of Core Values in Priming Ethical Behaviour

RQ 1. Are Covenant University (CU) Core Values relevant in priming ethical behaviour? The results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 4: Relevance of Core Values in Priming Ethical Behaviour**

Core Values	Employers Mean: N=33	Rank	Teachers Mean: N= 24	Rank	Students Mean: N= 74	Rank	Overall Mean: N=131	Overall SD
Spirituality	6.76	1	6.71	1	6.09	3	6.37	1.411
Possibility Mentality	6.48	6	6.25	5	6.09	3	6.22	1.291
Capacity Building	6.55	5	6.08	6	6.08	5	6.20	1.303
Integrity	6.64	2	6.46	2	6.27	1	6.40	1.450
Responsibility	6.58	4	6.42	3	6.27	1	6.37	1.267
Diligence	6.61	3	6.33	4	6.04	6	6.24	1.430
Sacrifice	6.06	7	6.00	7	6.04	6	6.24	1.573

The results indicate that the CU core values are relevant in priming ethical behaviour. This is evident from the high mean score for each of the core values. The employers and teachers are unanimous that the core values of Spirituality and Responsibility are the most relevant. They were also unanimous that Sacrifice is the least relevant. As for the students, Integrity and Responsibility are the most relevant with both Diligence and Sacrifice being the least relevant. However, with an f-value of 0.548 and the corresponding p-value of 0.683, no significant difference was found in the mean scores. This result underscores the need for spirituality in ethics education as earlier observed by Masten (2012), that spirituality leads to responsible behaviour. This view is supported by Okebukola (2012), who noted that spiritual, moral, ethical and emotional development are one of the hallmarks of success of CU. He further noted that parents “pleasantly observe remarkable and enduring positive spiritual and attitudinal changes in their children barely a semester of enrolment at CU”. As important as spirituality is in priming behaviour, it is not currently taught in ethics education in other Nigerian tertiary institutions. In terms of responsibility as a core value, Okebukola also noted that the CU community “presents one of the best-case scenarios of staff and student discipline in the Nigeria University system”

RQ 2: Are the Core Values effective in priming behaviour among CU graduates/students?

**Table 5. Effectiveness of Core Values in Priming Ethical Behaviour**

Core Values	EmployersMean: N=33	Rank	Teachers: Mean N=24	Rank	StudentsMean: N= 74	Rank	Overall Mean N=131	Overall SD
Spirituality	6.33	1	6.04	2	6.26	1	6.24	1.115
Possibility	6.27	2	5.79	5	5.58	5	5.79	1.155
Mentality	6.21	4	6.08	1	5.58	5	5.83	1.184
Capacity Building	6.09	6	5.96	3	5.80	3	5.90	1.386
Integrity	6.27	2	5.92	4	5.91	2	6.00	1.253
Responsibility	6.12	5	5.75	6	5.66	4	5.79	1.374
Diligence	5.61	7	5.63	7	5.42	7	5.50	1.475
Sacrifice								

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that the core values are effective (producing the intended result). Based on overall mean score, the most effective core value is Spirituality with a mean score of 6.24, followed by Responsibility with 6.00. The least effective core value, however, is Sacrifice with a mean score of 5.50 (slightly effective) and over which all the classes of respondents were unanimous. None-the-less, with an f-value of 0.566 and a corresponding p-value of 0.759, there is no significant differences among respondents with respect to the effectiveness of core values in priming behaviour. The effectiveness of the core values has made CU the preferred choice of parents and candidates among private universities in Nigeria (JAMB, 2012).

RQ 3: Do CU graduates/students consistently demonstrate behaviours in line with the Core values?

**Table 6: Consistency of Behaviour with Core values**

Core Values	Employers Mean N= 33	Rank	Teachers Mean N=24	Rank	Students Mean N=74	Rank	Overall Mean N=131	Overall SD
Spirituality	5.39	2	5.00	1	5.01	1	5.11	1.520
Possibility Mentality	5.45	1	4.83	2	4.68	4	4.90	1.498
Capacity Building	5.39	2	4.79	3	4.70	2	4.89	1.510
Integrity	5.18	6	4.21	6	4.41	6	4.56	1.574
Responsibility	5.06	5	4.58	4	4.86	3	4.82	1.552
Diligence	5.39	2	4.33	5	4.61	5	4.76	1.525
Sacrifice	4.97	7	4.21	6	4.04	7	4.31	1.654

Results in Table 6 indicate that graduates and students of CU consistently demonstrate behaviours which are consistent with the core values. Even though respondents were not unanimous on any particular core value, there is at-least frequent compliance with the core values as indicated by a minimum mean score of 4.04 for students in terms of sacrifice as a core value. With an f-value of 0.815 and a p-value of 0.616, no significance difference is found among respondents in their perception that there is consistency in behaviour among CU graduates with the core values. The high level of compliance with the core values has endeared the graduates to employers. This is evident in the number of CU graduates who are currently employed in over seventeen sectors of the Nigerian economy. According to the Vice-Chancellor in her 2011 USARM report to the National Universities Commission(NUC), “we have continued to receive positive feedback and reference requests from employers on our graduates that have been offered job placements in the financial institutions, manufacturing, oil and gas etc”

RQ 4: Can accountants be effectively primed to be ethical (especially under IFRS regime) using the Covenant University Core Values?

**Table 7a Extent to Which Accountants can be Primed with Core Values to be Ethical**

Core Values	Employers Mean N=33	Rank	Teachers Mean N= 24	Rank	Students Mean N=74	Rank	Overall mean N=131	Overall SD
Spirituality	5.73	5	5.67	3	5.79	1	5.48	1.495
Possibility Mentality	5.76	4	5.46	6	5.20	7	5.39	1.434
Capacity Building	5.73	5	5.63	4	5.42	5	5.53	1.309
Integrity	6.06	1	5.83	1	5.70	2	5.82	1.380
Responsibility	5.94	3	5.63	4	5.65	3	5.72	1.443
Diligence	5.97	2	5.71	2	5.53	4	5.67	1.384
Sacrifice	5.56	7	5.21	7	5.31	6	5.35	1.408

Respondents were asked to express their views by selecting whether : ‘very low’(1) to 7 ‘extremely high’ The mean responses provide some indications of the degree of extent to which core values can prime ethical behaviour in accountants. Results of the analysis shown in Table 7a suggest that respondents were of the view that the core have the potential to prime behaviour. Even though there is no consensus among respondents on any particular core value, however, with an f-value of 0.614 and a p-value of 0.742, there is no significant difference among respondents in their views about the extent to which cores values can prime behaviour.

The respondents were further re-classified into those with accounting and non-accounting knowledge. The result is presented in Table 7b.

**Table 7b: Extent to Which Accountants can be Primed with Core Values to be Ethical**

Core Values	Accountants Mean =86	Rank	Non- Accountants Mean N=45	Rank	Overall Mean N= 131	Overall SD
Spirituality	5.50	4	5.38	7	5.46	1.495
Possibility Mentality	5.33	6	5.51	5	5.39	1.434
Capacity Building	5.48	5	5.64	4	5.53	1.309
Integrity	5.81	1	5.82	1	5.82	1.380
Responsibility	5.71	2	5.73	2	5.72	1.443
Diligence	5.65	3	5.71	3	5.67	1.384
Sacrifice	5.33	6	5.40	6	5.35	1.408



Respondents were unanimous about the core values of Integrity, Responsibility and Diligence. These are the traditional values in accounting. We need other core values including spirituality and sacrifice to be able to practice integrity, responsibility and diligence. With an t-value of -1.427 and p-value of 0.203, there is, however, no significant difference in the mean scores between respondents, implying confidence in the potential of core values to prime behaviour among accountants in readiness for IFRS.

### **Strategy for Exporting the Core Values to other Developing Countries**

Currently, the core values are taught in two ways at CU- classroom and experiential exposure. The classroom teaching takes further two stages-(i) the principles of the core values are taught in a modular form in a custom built course known as Total Man Concept (TMC) earlier identified. This is to ensure depth and knowledge mastery of the core values. (ii) Each of the core values is treated as cross-cutting and thus integrated into relevant subjects. This is to ensure broad connections between courses and disciplines in a holistic form. The teaching technique in this case involves largely the use of case studies, guest speakers, impersonal and personalized use of questions and student presentation.

The experiential exposure usually takes place outside the class room and involves role playing. Students are appointed to serve in committees and other groups in the university where knowledge of core values are required. Role playing is considered effective in ethic education as it promotes emotional involvement and intellectual engagement. The CU approach as described above can be studied and adapted by developing countries to suit their peculiar situations but without losing sight of the overall objective- securing ethical behaviour.

### **5. Conclusions**

This study was designed to offer insight into the efficacy of the C U Core Values in priming ethical behaviour from the perspective of employers of Covenant University graduates as well as teachers and current students. From the analysis, it is evident that the respondents are supportive of core values as potent means of driving ethical behaviour. From the findings, the core values are relevant and effective in priming behaviour. The graduates of CU are also consistent in their behaviour in line with the core values. Respondents were also of the view that the core values have the potential to prime accountants for ethical behaviour under the IFRS regime if well internalized rather than relying on an imposed set of external regulations and guidelines. This will lead accountants to submit their decisions to reason and change them if such a change seems reasonable. These findings reinforce the view of CU management that the core values have the potential to inculcate ethical values into student/graduates such as to enable them bring about a positive change in the continent of Africa.

The core values when fully brought into accounting curriculum shall provide an effective and valuable process that will engender the desired change in the accounting profession under the IFRS regime. The non-significant differences in the mean scores is an indicate that student respondents did not exhibit any form of social desirability bias. This is a further confirmation that the core values are potent in priming behaviour.

This study has some limitations which may have implications for interpreting the results. First, the results examine the feedback from employers, teachers and students of CU and did not consider other stakeholders such CU graduates who are self employed, parents, friends of CU students/graduates. Another important limitation is the size of the sample which was small and drawn only from the Lagos area of Nigeria, even though CU graduates are all over Nigeria and abroad.

These limitations notwithstanding, it is concluded that there is positive feedback from the respondents in relation to the need to introduce CU core values into the accounting curriculum of tertiary institutions, not only in Nigeria but across the developing countries where a lot of unethical practices are entrenched. Therefore the CU core values are therefore proposed as the foundation of training in ethics.

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