



**GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY  
ENUGU - NIGERIA**

# **16<sup>TH</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**TOPIC:**

**MARIST EDUCATION STYLES IN  
THE LIGHT OF PATRISTIC EDUCATION:  
A CURRICULUM RESPONSE TO LEARNER  
CHARACTER FORMATION**



*Marist Education Styles in the Light of Patristic Education:  
A Curriculum Response to Learner Character Formation*

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# MARIST EDUCATION STYLES IN THE LIGHT OF PATRISTIC EDUCATION: A CURRICULUM RESPONSE TO LEARNER CHARACTER FORMATION

## INAUGURAL LECTURE

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28TH FEBRUARY, 2025



*Marist Education Styles in the Light of Patristic Education:  
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## DEDICATION

*Marist Brothers of the Schools -  
Catholic Mission*

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## SECTION ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Historical Overview of Marist Education Styles

Marist education is a Christocentric and anthropological reality that informs, forms, and transforms the educand in the way of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2017). The Marist educational tradition, founded by Saint Marcellin Champagnat in the early 19th Century, emphasizes a holistic approach to education (Marist Brothers, 2020). Marist schools have always prioritized the formation of the whole person, combining academic excellence with the cultivation of moral and spiritual values. Central to Marist education is the belief in the dignity of each student and the importance of nurturing a family spirit within the school community (Mendez, 2024).

Drawing from the International Marist Education Commission (2023), the core principles of Marist Education, or what we refer to as Marist education styles include the following: Presence, Simplicity, Family Spirit, Love of Work, and in the Way of Mary. Marist educators are encouraged to be actively present in the lives of their students, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment. The Marist approach values simplicity in teaching and learning, promoting honesty, humility, and authenticity. In family spirit, creating a sense of community and belonging is fundamental, with a focus on mutual respect and solidarity. Hard work and dedication are seen as essential to personal and academic growth. Then, emulating the virtues of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Marist education promotes compassion, care, and faith.

#### Patristic Education

Patristic education refers to the educational philosophies and practices of



the early Church Fathers, who were influential theologians and leaders in the early Christian Church from the 1st to the 8th centuries (Majawa, 2020; Wagare, 2021). These educators laid the groundwork for Christian education by integrating faith with reason, morality, and intellectual development. Historically, Patristic education emerged during the early centuries of Christianity when the Church Fathers sought to establish and spread Christian doctrine in a predominantly pagan world. The notable key Church Fathers include Augustine of Hippo, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom. Their writings and teachings significantly shaped Christian thought and education. The Church Fathers often drew on classical Greek and Roman education systems, merging them with Christian teachings to create a comprehensive educational framework (Jones & Smith, 2019). The core values are theological education, moral formation, communal living, and service.

The core principles of Patristic education as emphasised by Wangare (2021) are the Integration of Faith and Reason, Moral and Spiritual Formation, Community and Tradition, Scriptural Foundation, and Holistic Approach. The Church Fathers emphasized the harmonious relationship between faith and reason, advocating for an education that nurtures both the mind and the soul. For them, education was seen as a means of cultivating virtue and fostering a deep, personal relationship with God. Hence, learning was deeply rooted in the community and the traditions of the Church, with a strong emphasis on passing down wisdom through generations. Moreover, the study of scriptures was central, serving as the primary source of knowledge and moral guidance. Like Marist education, Patristic education is aimed at developing the whole person - intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Regarding shared values in Marist and Patristic education, faith and spiritual formation, holistic education, community and family spirit, and service and responsibility, are some of the common shared values. On faith and



spiritual formation, daily prayers, liturgical celebrations, and Marian devotion are integral to fostering faith in Marist education. Patristic education also emphasised the study of scriptures, the writings of Church Fathers, and participation in the sacraments (Baker & Reeves, 2019). In holistic education, Marist education addresses all facets of development, promoting intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth (Williams et al., 2020). Patristic education incorporates philosophy, theology, and liberal arts, aiming for comprehensive education (Johnson, 2020). Community and family spirit are core shared values. Marist education strives to create a familial atmosphere within educational settings, fostering a sense of belonging (Carter & Evans, 2023). Patristic education also promotes communal responsibility and a sense of belonging among believers (Davis & Lee, 2023). In service and social responsibility, Marist education encourages active service, focusing on helping the marginalized and promoting social justice (Harris, 2019), Patristic education advocates for the common good and social justice, with a strong emphasis on caring for the poor (Miller, 2022).

### Philosophical Foundations and Comparative Analysis

Marist and Patristic education are hinged on some philosophical foundations such as anthropology – understanding of the human person, epistemology – the study of knowledge, axiology – ethics and moral formation, and pedagogy – teaching methods. Marist education highlights the dignity and uniqueness of every individual as a child of God (Brown, 2020), and Patristic education views humanity as created in God's image, with an inherent call to holiness and virtue (Roberts & Green, 2021). Furthermore, in the theory of knowledge, Marist education encourages the integration of faith with academic excellence and critical thinking (Thompson, 2020), and Patristic education balances divine revelation with human intellect, emphasizing the harmony of faith and



reason (Williams, 2021).

Axiology, that is, the study of ethics and moral formation remains the key philosophical foundation of both Marist and Patristic education, and one of the key variables in this inaugural lecture. Marist education instils moral values through the examples of Jesus and Mary, fostering ethical behaviour (Jones, 2019). Patristic education draws on the teachings of the Church Fathers regarding virtue, moral law, and ethics. On their teaching methods, Marist education employs student-centred approaches, promoting active learning and personal growth (Anderson, 2020). Patristic education also utilizes classical education methods, including rhetoric, dialectic, and catechesis (Harris, 2019).

While separated by centuries, both Marist and Patristic educational traditions share a commitment to holistic education and character formation. They both stress the importance of community, moral integrity, and the integration of spiritual and intellectual development. This is the reason we are committed to discussing this today for the transformation of society. The two traditions - Marist and Patristic education share some similarities, differences, and mutual contributions. Regarding similarities, both traditions emphasise incorporating faith into all aspects of education (Johnson, 2020). They focus on nurturing strong moral and spiritual foundations (Miller, 2022), and the importance of community and relationships within the educational environment (Carter & Evans, 2023).

However, both traditions also differ in some ways. For example, Marist education adapts to contemporary educational contexts, blending modern pedagogical methods with traditional values (Williams et al., 2020), while Patristic education is rooted in ancient philosophical and theological traditions, maintaining classical educational approaches (Davis & Lee, 2023). Despite the differences, both traditions have mutual

contributions to the education sector. Marist education can draw on the deep theological and philosophical insights of Patristic education to enrich its curriculum (Baker & Reeves, 2019), and Patristic education can benefit from Marist's emphasis on holistic and student-centred pedagogy, adapting it for modern use (Roberts & Green, 2021).

Summarily, it is worth noting that Marist and Patristic education share a commitment to faith, holistic development, and service. Each tradition offers unique insights and approaches that can enhance others (Johnson, 2020). The principles derived from Marist and Patristic education offer valuable insights for contemporary curriculum design, development, and implementation. In an era often dominated by a utilitarian approach to education, where academic success is frequently measured in purely quantitative terms, these traditions remind us of the broader purposes of education. They emphasize the need to nurture not just knowledgeable, but also morally and spiritually grounded individuals.



## SECTION TWO

### MARIST EDUCATION

#### Catholic Education Heritage

Education is a veritable tool for human survival. It is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. This is because education shapes one's life, and defines one's character, morality, ideology, principles, life skills, and everything that is required to lead a sustained and holistic life. Education in schools is the primary tool for building the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of the individual; and these domains when properly developed, enable the individual to build the nation.

The word education comes from the Latin *educare*, which means to lead out or bring out. This simply means that education brings out the best in the learner for the good of society (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2017). Marist education found its roots in Catholic education. Catholic education is key to bringing out the goodness in the individual. Catholic education is a Christocentric reality that enables the learner to acquire sustainable knowledge, skills, values, and positive attitudes for the formation of the heart and the transformation of society. It is simply an education based on the catholic principles of love for God and neighbour in the footsteps of Christ the great teacher (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020).

In our difficult situation today in Nigeria as a nation, the dire need for more catholic education cannot be downplayed. This is because, there is a need to heal citizens from the wounds of division, hatred, wickedness, oppression, corruption, weak education system, political instability, terrorism, banditry, and ritual killing, just to mention a few. Despite

coming from diverse cultural backgrounds, we need an education system that works, an economy that booms and is free from corruption, a political system that is stable and devoid of lies and money bags, a transparent electoral system, a geographical entity that is peaceful and friendly for co-existence, a group of people that is united despite diverse religious and political inclinations. Catholic education therefore plays a role in helping us build our nation and country Nigeria. This is the need for character formation; one of the tools to nation building.

The biblical injunction of 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...and behold, I am with you till the end of the world'(Matt. 28:19-20) is the basis for catholic education. Jesus Christ is the great teacher per excellence. His teachings were full of practical examples that enabled him to garner many followers who were zealous in propagating the gospel up to date. Patristic and Marist education exemplify this injunction.

Catholic education introduces the student to the knowledge of the mystery of salvation (Jacobs, 2018). It makes them more aware of the gift of faith they have received, worshiping God the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23). More so, it conforms their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of the truth (Eph. 4:22-24).

In the spirit of the sacred scriptures, the Vatican II document Declaration on Christian Education - *Gravissimum Educationis* proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, enables us to understand that the influence of the church in the field of education is shown especially by the catholic school. The catholic school pursues the cultural goals and the human formation of youth. Its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity and to help youth grow according to the new



creatures they were made through baptism. The catholic school also leads its students to promote efficaciously the good of the earthly city and prepares them for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God (Grace, 2019).

In the same vein, the Gravissimum Educationis declares that children's education should achieve the following objectives: physical, moral, and intellectual development, a sense of responsibility, participation in society's life, open dialogue, promotion of the common good, sound moral judgment, prudent sex education, and knowledge and love of God.

**Physical, Moral, and Intellectual Development:** This is due to recognition of the integral nature of the human person. Human beings are not compartmentalized into disparate chambers. The human person, in Aristotelian parlance, is a substance, a unity. This means that proper education should focus on the person. It is not just intellectual but must be moral and physical to attain the universal well-being of the person.

**Develop a sense of Responsibility:** Responsibility entails a kin consciousness of what one owes to oneself, to other human beings to society, and to God. Catholic education helps the student to know that none of these should be evaded or shirked and that dereliction in any of them adversely affects the proper integration of the person and the working of the human society.

**Participation in the Life of the Society:** Catholic education imbues the human person with a sense of community. As a result of this, the aptitudes and skills that proper education enables a person to acquire should be employed for the service of other human beings in society.

**Openness to Dialogue:** Dialogue is the mark of freedom and respect for the freedom of other persons. The educated person knows others have the right to their opinions or their points of view, and that free human beings

should be won over by persuasion, not by force.

**Promotion of Common Good:** The truly educated individual is also conscious of the fact that the earth and all its goods are God's gifts to his children. Like a good servant, such an individual should strive to be found worthy of this trust. Care for the common good is thus based on the supernatural origin of all earthly endowments. Accordingly, the effort to preserve and further such goods is a mark of respect for God and consideration for other human beings.

**Development of Sound Moral Judgment:** The free human being constantly performs acts which because they are free and voluntary, have moral worth. Good Catholic education prepares the individual to acquire the principles of morality; to be trained in the necessary virtues and so to acquire the power to make correct moral judgments in every circumstance.

**Prudent Sex Education:** Sex education at an appropriate age is also an important aspect of Catholic education. Human sexuality is an important gift of God to his children. Well-rounded education should be conscious of the importance of this gift; and be clear about its real purpose to avoid the temptation of abusing it.

**Knowledge and Love of God:** Above all, Catholic education should enable students to acquire helpful knowledge of God through the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Bible and the tradition of the Church. It should inculcate in the students a more perfect love of God through the love of one's neighbour. The development of the religious faith which leads to improvement of the individual devotion and love of his creator is one of the hallmarks of Catholic education.





## Marist Educational Philosophy: A Foundation for Transformative Curriculum Design and Implementation

The Marist educational philosophy, rooted in the vision and teachings of Saint Marcellin Champagnat, the founder of the Marist Brothers, offers a holistic approach to education. It emphasises the formation of the whole person – intellectually, spiritually, morally, and socially. This philosophy aligns seamlessly with the principles of designing and implementing curricula that nurture well-rounded individuals equipped to address the challenges of the 21st century. The core pillars of the Marist educational philosophy include presence, simplicity, family spirit, love of work, in the way of Mary, faith-based education, social justice and service, and excellence in education.

Regarding Presence, at the heart of Marist education is the concept of *presence*, which emphasises the importance of building authentic relationships between educators and students. This principle calls for a curriculum that prioritises *learner-centred approaches*, where teachers actively engage with students as mentors and facilitators. Modern pedagogical strategies, such as collaborative learning and mentorship programs, reflect this ethos. Research by Nduka and Ndukwe (2021) highlights how a teacher's presence can significantly enhance students' motivation and self-esteem, fostering a supportive environment conducive to learning.

**Simplicity:** The value of *simplicity* calls for clarity and accessibility in curriculum design. A simple yet profound curriculum ensures that content is relevant and comprehensible while avoiding unnecessary complexity. Ozoemena (2020) argues that simplifying the teaching process through innovative tools and clear communication fosters deeper understanding and retention among learners, aligning with global trends in instructional design.

**Family Spirit:** Marist schools' emphasis on a



*family spirit* inspires the integration of values-based education into the curriculum. Programmes that promote teamwork, community engagement, and inclusivity create an educational atmosphere where all learners feel valued. Eze and Anyaegbunam (2019) advocate for curricula that incorporate cooperative projects and service-learning opportunities, which build a sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

**Love of Work:** A curriculum grounded in the Marist value of *love of work* encourages students to develop a strong work ethic and a sense of purpose. This can be achieved through project-based learning, vocational training, and entrepreneurial education. Okafor and Nnadi (2022) emphasize that integrating practical and experiential learning opportunities into curricula prepares students for real-world challenges and instills a lifelong commitment to excellence.

**In the Way of Mary:** Drawing inspiration from Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Marist education instills compassion, gentleness, and faith-based values. A curriculum that reflects this principle integrates moral and character education, fostering empathy and social responsibility. Odoemelam and Mbaegbu (2023) suggest incorporating reflective practices, such as journaling and ethical debates, to encourage students to internalize these values.

**Faith-Based Education:** Faith-based education, a cornerstone of Marist philosophy, emphasises the integration of spirituality into all aspects of learning. Curricula designed with this principle include opportunities for spiritual growth, ethical reasoning, and community worship. Ibe and Uche (2020) note that such an approach fosters a balanced development of mind and spirit, creating individuals committed to living out their faith in practical ways.

**Social Justice and Service:** The Marist commitment to social justice calls for a curriculum that raises awareness of global issues and equips students to address societal inequities. Service-learning



projects and courses on civic responsibility align with this vision. Umeh and Chukwu (2021) advocate for curricula that encourage critical consciousness, empowering students to become agents of change.

**Excellence in Education:** Excellence is not merely an aspiration in Marist education but a commitment to cultivating critical thinkers, innovators, and lifelong learners. Curricula that emphasize STEM education, digital literacy, and global competencies reflect this commitment. Obi and Nwafor (2019) underscore the importance of integrating research-based teaching strategies to achieve academic excellence and prepare students for leadership roles in their communities.

The founding principles of Marist education provide a comprehensive framework that addresses various aspects of student development. When effectively implemented, these principles can create a rich and supportive educational environment that prepares students for both personal and professional success. Evaluating the founding principles of Marist education involves examining how these principles contribute to the holistic development of students and the effectiveness of the educational approach in achieving its goals.

The principle of presence ensures that educators are actively involved in the lives of their students, fostering strong, supportive relationships. This creates a nurturing environment where students feel valued and understood, which can enhance their learning and personal development. However, maintaining this level of presence can be demanding for educators, especially in larger schools. It requires significant commitment and time, which might be challenging to sustain without adequate support and resources (Chukwuma & Anekwe, 2020). Simplicity encourages humility and authenticity, promoting a culture of integrity and straightforwardness. It helps students and educators focus on what truly matters, avoiding unnecessary

complications. That notwithstanding, in a world that often values complexity and sophistication, promoting simplicity might sometimes be misunderstood or undervalued. Balancing simplicity with the demands of modern education can be challenging (Ogochukwu & Nwabueze, 2021).

Creating a family-like atmosphere fosters a sense of belonging and community. It helps in building trust and cooperation among students and staff, leading to a positive and collaborative school culture. Despite that, ensuring that everyone feels included and valued in this family spirit can be difficult, particularly in diverse communities with varied backgrounds and needs. It requires continuous effort to maintain inclusivity (Emeka & Onyekachi, 2022).

Instilling a love of work encourages diligence, perseverance, and a strong work ethic. It prepares students for future professional and personal challenges by promoting a positive attitude towards effort and achievement. Nevertheless, there is a risk of overemphasizing work to the detriment of other aspects of life, such as leisure and relaxation. It is important to balance the value of hard work with the need for holistic well-being (Chima & Eke, 2023).

Mary's example of compassion, gentleness, and faith provides a powerful role model for students. It encourages them to develop virtues such as kindness, empathy, and a strong moral compass. However, the religious aspect of this principle might not resonate with all students, especially in increasingly secular societies. Ensuring that this principle is inclusive and respectful of diverse beliefs is essential (Nnamdi & Ndukwe, 2022). Integrating faith into education helps in the moral and spiritual development of students. It provides a strong foundation of values and ethics, guiding students to lead meaningful and purposeful lives. But balancing faith-based education with academic rigour and inclusivity can



be challenging. It is important to respect and accommodate the diverse religious backgrounds of students while maintaining the core values of Marist education (Ike & Okorie, 2020).

Emphasising social justice and service cultivates a sense of responsibility and empathy in students. It encourages them to be active and engaged citizens, committed to making a positive difference in the world. However, implementing effective social justice and service programmes require resources, planning, and continuous effort. Ensuring that these initiatives are impactful and sustainable can be challenging (Chukwuka & Mba, 2021).

Striving for academic excellence ensures that students receive a high-quality education, preparing them for future success. It promotes critical thinking, creativity, and a love for learning. On the other hand, the pressure to achieve academic excellence can sometimes lead to stress and burnout among students and staff. It is important to balance the pursuit of excellence with the overall well-being of the school community (Obi & Nwafor, 2019).

### Integration of Objectives and Values of Marist Education

Marist education is founded on a set of key objectives and values that guide its approach to teaching and learning. The key objectives and values of Marist education include holistic development, academic excellence, character formation, faith formation, service and social justice, and community building. These objectives and values are inspired by the life and teachings of Saint Marcellin Champagnat. They aim to develop well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society.

Marist education seeks to integrate seamlessly these objectives and values into the everyday life of the school. This integration is achieved through the development of curricula that reflect Marist values,

encouraging holistic development and critical thinking. In addition, through fostering a school environment that embodies the principles of presence, family spirit, simplicity, hard work, and in the way of Mary, providing opportunities for spiritual growth through prayer, retreats, and religious education. More so, the integration is achieved by encouraging active participation in service projects and social justice initiatives and building strong connections with families and the wider community to support the holistic development of students. Drawing from the above objectives and values, it is worth noting that Marist education aims to nurture well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded and socially responsible.

The Marist educational philosophy is a set of ideals and a transformative approach to curriculum design and implementation. As educators and scholars, Marists are called to integrate these principles into their practices, ensuring that education remains a beacon of hope, justice, and excellence. In doing so, they honour the legacy of Saint Marcellin Champagnat and contribute to forming individuals who will positively shape the future of our world.

The study of Osuji and Oluoch-Suleh (2015) examines the Marist Brother Lecturer and Marist Student perceptions of Marist Education at Marist International University College, Nairobi Kenya through the lens of education rooted in Christian principles passed down by Jesus Christ and the early Church Fathers. Using a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design encompassing a Cross-Sectional Survey, Investigator Triangulation, and data collection from 54 students and 8 Marist Brother Lecturers.

The study draws parallels between Marist principles and the core values of patristic education. It highlights how the Marist educational



philosophy resonates deeply with the early Christian tradition of education (patristic education), emphasising the holistic development of individuals. The research found a positive attitude toward Marist Education among both groups.

The study found that both Marist and patristic education underscore the importance of teachers' active presence in the lives of learners. Educators are seen as mentors and role models, creating a nurturing and respectful environment. This mirrors the Marist principle of *presence*, which calls for educators to accompany students closely in their educational journey. The role of the teacher extends beyond instruction to include personal and moral guidance.

The study observed that patristic education emphasized a lifestyle of simplicity and humility. Early Christian educators promoted a straightforward approach to teaching, focusing on the essentials of moral and intellectual formation. This is consistent with the Marist value of *simplicity*, which advocates for humility and authenticity in interactions, as well as a clear and practical approach to curriculum design and instruction.

The study identified a strong sense of community and familial bonds in patristic education, where learners and educators worked together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and shared purpose. The Marist principle of *family spirit* echoes this, emphasising the creation of a supportive, inclusive, and collaborative learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging for all.

The study found that patristic education valued hard work as a means of personal growth and service to the community. Educators instilled a sense of discipline and purpose in their students. This aligns with the Marist commitment to *love of work*, encouraging students to develop a



strong work ethic, dedication, and a sense of responsibility in their academic and personal lives.

The study emphasised that the role of the Virgin Mary as an exemplar of virtue, faith, and service was a central theme in patristic education. Mary was presented as a model for humility, compassion, and obedience to God's will. The Marist principle of *In the Way of Mary* reflects this influence, inspiring educators and students to emulate her qualities of gentleness, faith, and a commitment to service.

The study further emphasised the centrality of faith in patristic education, where spiritual formation was integrated into all aspects of learning. The ultimate goal was the holistic development of individuals grounded in Christian values. Marist education continues this tradition by embedding faith-based principles in the curriculum, encouraging students to cultivate a personal relationship with God and to express their faith through their actions.

The study highlighted the emphasis on social responsibility in patristic education. Early Christian schools encouraged learners to engage with societal issues and work towards justice and peace. This commitment to *social justice and service* is a cornerstone of Marist education, motivating students to address social inequalities and actively contribute to their communities.

The study found that patristic educators pursued academic and moral excellence, ensuring that learners were well-equipped to serve both the Church and society. Critical thinking and ethical reasoning were integral to their approach. Marist education builds on this tradition, striving for *excellence in education* by fostering intellectual curiosity, creativity, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Osuji and Oluoch-Suleh (2015) concluded that Marist education is deeply



rooted in the principles of patristic education, particularly in its holistic and value-driven approach. The alignment of these educational philosophies highlights the timeless relevance of Marist values in addressing contemporary challenges in education while maintaining a commitment to spiritual and moral formation.

That notwithstanding, in today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the Marist philosophy offers a timeless framework for addressing key challenges such as integration of technology, that is, aligning with Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) principles, Marist-inspired curricula can incorporate emerging technologies while maintaining a human-centred approach. Other challenges include global citizenship education, and sustainability and green education. It is worth noting that Marist values of social justice and service are vital for preparing students to navigate and contribute to a globalized world. Finally, guided by the love of work and simplicity, Marist schools can lead in promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship through curriculum innovations.



## SECTION THREE

### PATRISTIC EDUCATION

#### Core Principles of Patristic Education

Patristic education refers to the pedagogical principles and practices derived from the writings, teachings, and traditions of the Church Fathers during the early centuries of Christianity. Rooted in a synthesis of classical Greco-Roman intellectual heritage and emerging Christian theology, patristic education laid a foundation for spiritual and moral formation, intellectual inquiry, and cultural transformation. This educational paradigm was not merely concerned with the transfer of knowledge but emphasised the holistic development of individuals, fostering virtues aligned with Christian values and preparing learners for a life of service, faith, and community engagement.

Central to patristic education was the integration of scriptural exegesis, theological reflection, and the cultivation of virtues, which were deemed essential for personal growth and societal contribution. Key figures such as St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory Nazianzen championed educational frameworks that emphasised the interplay of divine wisdom and human reason. Their works continue to influence contemporary discussions on education, particularly in areas of moral and spiritual formation, the role of educators, and the integration of faith and reason.

The core principles of patristic education include Christocentric and holistic formation, integration of faith and reason, moral and spiritual development, scriptural foundation, community-oriented learning, holistic approach to knowledge, and mentorship. Education in the patristic tradition is centred on Christ as the ultimate teacher and model for human life. The goal is not merely intellectual mastery but the



transformation of the learner into the image of Christ, embodying His virtues and mission. Patristic education also emphasises the formation of the whole person, addressing intellectual, spiritual, moral, and physical aspects. Here, education is seen to develop virtuous and well-rounded individuals (Brown, 2020).

The Church Fathers advocated for the harmonious integration of divine revelation and human intellect. They encouraged the use of philosophy, rhetoric, and other classical disciplines to deepen understanding of the faith and to articulate it effectively. Patristic education believes in the compatibility and mutual reinforcement of faith and reason. It encourages intellectual inquiry alongside spiritual growth (Williams, 2021).

Education was seen as a means to cultivate virtues such as humility, charity, prudence, and temperance. It aimed to shape the character of individuals in alignment with Christian moral teachings. Here, education is aimed at cultivating a strong moral character aligned with Christian values (Miller, 2022).

The Bible served as the primary text and source of wisdom. Patristic educators emphasised the study of Scripture for its spiritual, moral, and intellectual guidance, encouraging learners to apply its teachings in their daily lives. Patristic education encourages regular reading and study of Scripture as a source of wisdom and moral guidance (Johnson, 2022).

Patristic education underscored the communal nature of learning, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility within the Christian community. It viewed education as a collective journey toward truth and holiness. Here also, education is seen as a communal activity that involves the entire Christian community (Davis & Lee, 2023). Knowledge in the patristic framework was not compartmentalised but seen as a unified whole. Theology, philosophy, science, and the arts

were interconnected, with all knowledge pointing toward God as the ultimate source of truth. Teachers in the patristic tradition were viewed as spiritual guides and mentors, tasked with leading learners by example. They were expected to embody the principles they taught, acting as witnesses to the transformative power of Christian education.

### **Influence of Patristic Education on Modern Educational Systems**

Modern education systems that emphasise holistic development, such as character education programmes, draw inspiration from Patristic principles. Patristic education focuses on nurturing not just academic skills but also emotional and social competencies (Roberts & Green, 2021). Many contemporary educational frameworks incorporate ethical and moral education, reflecting the Patristic emphasis on virtue and character formation. Programmes such as social-emotional learning (SEL) are influenced by these ideals (Thompson, 2020). The idea of schools as communities of learning and support echoes the Patristic focus on community and fellowship. Modern educational institutions often strive to create inclusive and supportive environments for all students (Carter & Evans, 2023). Many faith-based schools and universities continue to follow the Patristic model of integrating faith and reason. These institutions emphasize the importance of spiritual development alongside academic excellence (Harris, 2019). Furthermore, the resurgence of classical education movements incorporates many Patristic principles, such as the Trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). These movements seek to provide a well-rounded education grounded in both classical and Christian traditions (Anderson, 2020). In their study, Osuji and Oluoch-Suleh (2015) highlight the contributions of Patristic Wisdom to education. The emphasis was on the role of early Church Fathers in shaping educational principles based on divine wisdom. The study underscores the importance of integrating human affairs with religious



values, as stated in the Apostolic Constitution, *Sapientia Christiana*.

The study therefore found that Patristic education is derived from "Pater" (Father), focusing on the teachings of early Church Fathers. Its philosophy is quality, holistic, and value-based education, aligning with early church fathers' teachings and Christian principles. Its educational approach or patristic wisdom emphasises divine wisdom, transformative experiences, and commitment to Christian teachings for societal betterment.

In the study, the role of the educator is to advocate for an educational environment steeped in Christian principles and transformative values. This is because there is a rise of secularism, materialism, and relativism in society, which undermines the Christian principles foundational to Marist and Patristic Education. Furthermore, there is a decline in values such as hard work, family spirit, morality, and spiritual growth essential for Christian education, which is often overshadowed by modernism. The study, therefore, concludes that Marist education, influenced by Patristic education, is qualitative, holistic, and value-oriented, benefiting both educators and students in their societal transformation efforts. It therefore advocates for the continuous development of the Marist educational approach to ensure it remains focused on informing, forming, and transforming the educand.

## SECTION FOUR

### CURRICULUM RESPONSE TO LEARNER CHARACTER FORMATION

#### Integration of Character Formation in the Curriculum

All the learning experiences of the learner whether planned or planned make up the curriculum. Do Marist schools have their different curriculum? Not really, rather, Marist education integrates character formation into the curriculum. Let us look at certain aspects of the integration of character formation in the curriculum.

Regarding holistic development, Marist education prioritises the development of the whole person, addressing intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth (Brown, 2020). This holistic approach is reflected in the curriculum, which balances academic rigour with character-building activities. Marist education also factors in character education programmes. These programmes are embedded within the curriculum to teach virtues such as honesty, respect, and empathy. For instance, lessons on ethics are integrated into all the subjects done in school to promote moral reasoning and ethical decision-making (Williams, 2022).

On daily practices and rituals, spiritual exercises, which include daily prayers, reflections, and liturgical celebrations are integral to the school programme, fostering a spiritual atmosphere (Carter & Evans, 2021). This practice not only nurtures the faith of students but also cultivates a sense of community and shared purpose. Furthermore, on service activities, students participate in regular community service projects, such as helping the less privileged in their communities. Sometimes, they organise environmental cleanups. These activities are designed to instill a sense of social responsibility and compassion (Thompson,



2023). Regarding role modelling and mentors, teachers in Marist schools are expected to embody the values they teach, serving as role models for their students (Johnson, 2021). Their actions and attitudes provide a living example of the virtues promoted within the curriculum. In many Marist schools, there are structured mentorship programmes that pair students with teachers or older students who provide guidance and support, helping them navigate personal and academic challenges (Anderson, 2022).

The role of patristic ideals in shaping the curriculum cannot be overemphasised. Integration of faith and reason, moral and ethical education, and community and service orientation are some roles to be considered. Patristic education, deeply rooted in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, emphasises the integration of faith and reason. This balance is evident in the Marist curriculum, which includes theological studies alongside secular subjects (Miller, 2022). Courses in philosophy and theology encourage students to engage with fundamental questions about existence, morality, and faith, fostering critical thinking and intellectual depth (Harris, 2021).

Drawing from Patristic teachings, Marist education places a strong emphasis on moral and ethical formation. Lessons on virtue ethics, inspired by the works of the Church Fathers, are incorporated into the curriculum (Davis & Lee, 2023). Ethical theories from figures like St Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas are taught, providing students with a robust framework for moral reasoning and ethical behaviour (Baker & Reeves, 2023).

Furthermore, Patristic ideals highlight the importance of community and service, principles that are central to Marist education (Roberts & Green, 2020). The curriculum includes initiatives that promote communal living and social justice. Service-learning projects for example connect

classroom learning with community service, encouraging students to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world problems (Johnson, 2022).

Examples of Marist curriculum responses can be considered here. Some of the curriculum responses include service-learning projects as mentioned earlier, interdisciplinary courses, and co-curricular activities. Marist schools implement various service-learning projects that address both local and global issues. For example, students may engage in environmental conservation efforts, participate in international aid projects, or support local food banks (Carter & Evans, 2023). These projects are designed not only to provide immediate assistance but also to educate students about the underlying social and environmental issues, fostering a lifelong commitment to service (Brown, 2021).

Marist schools offer interdisciplinary courses that integrate subjects such as science, humanities, and the arts with theological and ethical perspectives (Williams, 2020). For instance, a course on environmental science might include discussions on the ethical implications of climate change and stewardship. These courses are structured to develop critical and creative thinking skills, preparing students to approach complex problems from multiple perspectives (Thompson, 2022).

A wide range of co-curricular activities, including sports, arts, and clubs, support the holistic development of students (Anderson, 2020). These activities are designed to reinforce classroom learning and promote skills such as teamwork, leadership, and perseverance. Activities such as drama clubs, music ensembles, and faith-based groups provide cultural and spiritual enrichment, enhancing the overall educational experience (Harris, 2019). Summarily, Marist education, with its foundation in character formation, integration of Patristic ideals, and innovative curriculum responses, aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals who





are prepared to contribute positively to society. While maintaining a balance between academic excellence and moral development, Marist schools continue to provide a transformative educational experience.

In Nigeria today, corruption for example has deprived many individuals of the opportunity to contribute positively to society. Osuji (2015) studied the threat to sustainable socioeconomic development in Nigeria. The study found that corruption is a key threat, and it is deeply embedded in various sectors of Nigerian society, including politics, health, education, and civil service, likened to a "cancerous worm" that affects all aspects of life. Surprisingly, the study established that there is cultural acceptance of corruption because the prevalence of corruption has led to the normalization of corrupt practices, with terms like "kola" and "brown envelope" becoming part of the societal lexicon, which hinders sustainable socioeconomic development. The study then emphasises the importance of moral education as a response to corruption, suggesting that instilling moral values from a young age can help combat corrupt practices and improve the quality of life in Nigeria. This is one of the aims of Marist education; helping the learner to be ethically formed in conscience, attitude, and action.

### Character Formation in Education

The relevance of character formation in education cannot be overrated. Character formation contributes significantly to the overall development of students, encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual growth (Berkowitz & Bier, 2018). Regarding moral compass, a strong moral foundation guides students in making ethical decisions and developing a clear sense of right and wrong (Lickona, 2018).

Education that includes character formation equips students to become responsible and engaged citizens (Nucci et al., 2020). Character education emphasises the importance of contributing positively to one's community



and society (Winton, 2019). Developing personal virtues such as integrity, empathy, and perseverance helps students build strong relationships and face life's challenges (Kristjánsson, 2020). Amidst that, character education fosters resilience, enabling students to adapt to various situations and overcome obstacles (Shields, 2020).

Regarding Marist strategies for character formation, integration into curriculum, daily practices, mentorship and role modelling, and community and family spirit, are some strategies. Marist schools incorporate ethical discussions into various subjects, helping students see the relevance of character formation in all areas of life (Buchanan et al., 2018). Programmes combining academic learning with community service promote social responsibility and empathy (Youniss & Levine, 2018). Regular spiritual practices such as prayer and reflection foster a sense of faith and community among students (Sweeney, 2020). More so, emulating the virtues of Mary, such as humility and compassion, provides a model for students to follow (Gleeson & O'Gorman, 2018).

Teachers in Marist schools exemplify the values they teach, serving as role models for their students (Lovat, 2019). Worthy to mention also is that older students mentor younger ones, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment (Healy, 2020). They create a family-like atmosphere where everyone feels valued and supported is central to Marist education (O'Connor et al., 2019). Then, group projects and co-curricular activities that promote teamwork and community engagement are emphasized (Bryk & Schneider, 2019).

Dwelling further on Marist strategies for students' character formation, Oluoch- Suleh and Osuji (2020) explored challenges in the implementation of the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum for character formation in public senior secondary schools in Owerri Municipal, Imo State, Nigeria. It identified several issues related to



administration, teachers, and students, as well as potential solutions. Key findings include some challenges such as Administration-Related Factors (Insufficient instructional resources, Overcrowded classrooms, and Limited administrative support for CRS teachers), Teacher-Related Factors ( Lack of motivation and in-service training, Over-reliance on teacher-centred methods like lectures, and Poor role modelling by some CRS teachers), and Student-Related Factors ( Lack of interest in CRS due to its perceived lack of career prospects, and Poor attitudes and indiscipline, partly attributed to societal devaluation of CRS).

On the solutions to these challenges, students were encouraged to have an interest in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) by making it more relatable and relevant and promote discipline and participation in CRS lessons. Teachers on the other hand, were charged to adopt student-centred and interactive teaching methods, such as role- play, debates, and discovery methods. They were also encouraged to serve as role models through exemplary behaviour and ethical standards, and leverage diverse instructional materials, including visual aids and real-life applications. The school administration was encouraged to create a conducive learning environment by reducing class sizes and supplying instructional resources, support CRS teachers through regular training and incentives, and make CRS compulsory to enhance its value among students.

The study, therefore, concludes that despite its importance in fostering moral and societal values, the CRS curriculum is not effectively implemented due to systemic and contextual challenges. The study emphasised that improved teaching methods, adequate resources, and administrative support are crucial for achieving its objectives of character formation.

Insights from Patristic education on character formation acknowledge

that Patristic education emphasises integrating faith and reason, focusing on moral and ethical teachings derived from the Early Church Fathers (Wilken, 2018). That students learn about virtues such as charity, justice, and temperance. These are influenced by the works of Augustine, Aquinas, and other Church Fathers (Porter, 2018). Furthermore, that the communal and service-oriented lifestyle of early monastic communities provides a model for modern character education (Brown, 2020). It emphasises the importance of serving others, especially the poor and marginalized. This aligns with the teachings of the Church Fathers (Smith, 2020). Patristic education integrates philosophical inquiry with theological study, encouraging students to seek truth and wisdom (Kaye, 2019). Therefore, emphasising moral discernment and ethical reasoning helps students develop a well-rounded character (Clark, 2020).

Character formation is essential in education, contributing to students' holistic development, social responsibility, and personal virtues. Marist education effectively integrates character development into its curriculum and daily practices, drawing inspiration from Patristic education. It is worth noting that in fostering personal virtues, social responsibility, and a strong moral foundation, Marist schools prepare students to navigate life's challenges with integrity and compassion (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015).

Education stakeholders are concerned about students' character formation. The social outcry over the prevalence of indiscipline in high schools for example is the reason for this. The teacher plays a crucial role in assisting students in overcoming these instances of abnormal behaviour and embracing virtue and hard work, which are the cornerstones of character formation. Effective classroom management will enable him or her to accomplish this.

The individual transformation brought about by education encourages



increased output and efficiency at work. It continues to play a significant role in human resource development. Enhancing human resources involves more than just imparting information and skills. It includes having values, positive attitudes, and motives consistent with the goals and methods of a development plan that will benefit future generations. As a result, students need to eschew deviant acts and embrace discipline that will help them live a more successful life for the good of society.

Pope Pius XII messaged the Italian Teachers' Union on January 5, 1954, that: A society that values morality and intellect and resists the pull of consumerism, materialism, and secularism - all of which are being pushed by the increasingly mechanical nature of technical civilization - holds onto high-quality and respectable education. (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2021, p.31). The teacher's role in implementing the curriculum in schools makes them the central figure in this Pope's message.

### **Involvement in Classroom Activities in the Context of Character Formation**

Classroom activities are pivotal in nurturing not only the intellectual but also the moral and social development of students. These activities serve as platforms where students engage in meaningful interactions, develop critical thinking skills, and build character. However, the effectiveness of these activities largely depends on the teacher's classroom management skills, societal and Christian value alignment, and creativity in teaching methodologies. When these are deficient, as noted by Ilechukwu and Ugwuozor (2014), achieving the character formation goals of education becomes challenging. Active involvement in classroom activities allows students to engage directly with the subject matter (Oluoch-Suleh & Osuji, 2020). This active engagement fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability for their learning and actions, which are essential components of character formation. For example, when students are

encouraged to contribute their thoughts during discussions or group projects, they develop confidence and a sense of belonging.

Education is transformative when students are encouraged to think and participate in the specific modes of inquiry characteristic of each discipline. Such engagement allows them to experience the rigors of critical thinking, structured reasoning, and ethical considerations within the context of their studies. This not only enhances their intellectual abilities but also builds moral virtues such as honesty, respect for others' viewpoints, and perseverance.

Well-structured classroom interactions among students provide opportunities for collaboration, mutual respect, and empathy (Osuji, Nwafor, & Enekwe, 2023). These are foundational values in character formation. Through collaborative projects, peer reviews, and problem-solving exercises, students learn to work with diverse individuals, appreciate different perspectives, and develop a team-oriented mindset.

Classroom activities that are relevant and engaging stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. When students see the practical implications of their lessons and how these align with societal and Christian values, they are more likely to internalize these lessons (Oluoch-Suleh & Osuji, 2020). Motivation drives them to emulate positive behaviours demonstrated by teachers and peers, reinforcing their character development.

Regarding the role of teacher-student interaction in character formation, it is worth mentioning that teachers play a crucial role in modelling societal and Christian values through their interactions with students. By demonstrating patience, fairness, respect, and ethical behaviour, teachers indirectly teach these values. For instance, how a teacher handles classroom conflicts can serve as a live lesson in conflict resolution and empathy.



A classroom environment that encourages open dialogue and values every student's contribution fosters a sense of respect and inclusivity. Such an environment is critical for character formation as it teaches students to value diversity and practice tolerance. More so, constructive feedback during classroom activities helps students recognise their strengths and areas for improvement. This process instills humility, self-awareness, and a growth mindset, which are important traits for personal and social development.

Character formation is a continuous process. Effective classroom management fosters growth in students. It is unfortunate that some teachers lack adequate classroom management techniques or the creativity to design engaging activities (Oluoch-Suleh & Osuji, 2020). This shortfall can be addressed through professional development programmes focusing on innovative teaching methodologies, classroom management strategies, and value-based education.

In the same vein, inconsistent value integration thwarts the growth of students. Teachers may sometimes struggle to integrate societal and Christian values into their lessons effectively. This can be mitigated by developing a value-based curriculum that includes explicit opportunities for character education. On the part of the students, the exhibition of apathy is a challenge. Students may exhibit a lack of interest or motivation in classroom activities. To combat this, teachers should employ differentiated instruction tailored to students' interests and learning styles. The involvement of students in classroom activities is central to their character formation. It bridges the gap between intellectual learning and moral development, ensuring that students grow into competent, critical thinkers and individuals with strong values. Teachers, as role models and facilitators, must prioritize interactive and value-driven classroom activities to achieve these goals. When we address these



challenges in classroom management and creatively engage students, the transformative potential of education can be fully realised (Nwafor, Enekwe, Kanife, & Osuji, 2024).

### Effective Classroom Management: Key to Students' Character Formation

The management of human beings can be problematic if the manager lacks the techniques involved. It can also be rewarding if the manager follows and maintains relevant procedures in the act. Students everywhere would like to act out in one way or the other due to their adolescent stage. These learners are always adventurous and are eager to explore different ways of learning. Sometimes, their creative ways become disruptive in the class and hurt their social life. Therefore, effective classroom management is the key to checkmate the excesses of these young learners and redirect them to positive pursuits.

Teachers play a fundamental role in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning of learners. The teacher needs to allow the learner to develop his or her character properly through effective classroom management. Effective classroom management sets the stage for character formation. Without effective classroom management, classrooms are disorganized and chaotic, and very little academic learning and value formation can happen. Effective classroom interaction and management are the keys to the integral formation of the learner. Effective teaching and learning for students' character formation cannot take place in poorly managed classrooms (Jones & Jones, 2012). Therefore, the teacher, a big stakeholder in the teaching and learning process needs to devise varied classroom management techniques to redirect the behaviour of learners to positive pursuits. This calls for behavioural agreement at the beginning of the term. This is because effective classroom management supports and facilitates effective



teaching and learning for academic excellence and the character formation of students.

Collective behavioural agreement is the key to maximum classroom management (Christy, 2012; Bluestein, 2014). Here, the teacher is expected to reach an agreement with the students on how they want the class to be until the end of the term. Each student is allowed to express his or her feelings. After the agreement, the points are to be displayed in the corner of the classroom and allowed to remain there where everybody can see them and lead by example.

Oluoch-Suleh and Osuji (2020) examined the critical role of effective classroom management in shaping the character of high school students in Africa, highlighting the link between classroom discipline and moral development. The study emphasised that teachers are pivotal in combating indiscipline through structured management techniques, which foster a positive learning environment. The study advocated for clear instructional objectives, active teacher engagement, and the use of reinforcement strategies to enhance student behaviour and academic success. Ultimately, it called for teachers to be proactive in establishing behavioural agreements and promoting a supportive classroom climate. For these scholars, involving students in establishing classroom rules enhances their ownership of the learning process. This collective agreement on acceptable behaviours is essential for maintaining discipline. Furthermore, utilizing varied instructional resources and learner-centred approaches, such as drama and discussions, helps maintain student focus and promotes the transfer of values.

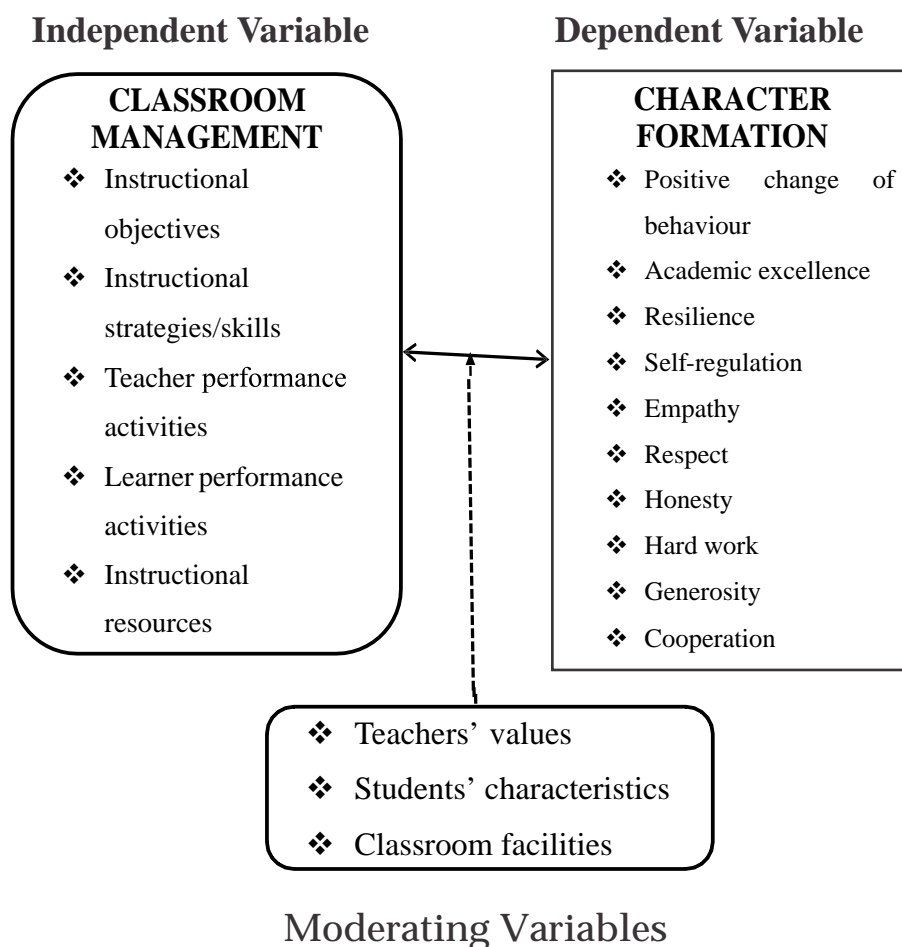
#### Conceptual Framework: Classroom Management and Character Formation

Character formation is all about intrinsic good behaviour. To develop students' self-control, for example, the teacher needs to give up his or her



powers of control and authority and replace them with positive influence and role modelling. Students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century always want to be listened to, especially in any difficult situation they find themselves. This is why at the beginning of the class for a new term for example, the teacher needs to sit and discuss with his or her students the expectations and what they hope to achieve by the end of the term. This would enable the learners to establish their focus and model their behaviours and academic prowess and become conscious of their responsibility in society (Osuji & Nwafor, 2022).

**Figure 1:** *Classroom Management: Key to Students' Character Formation*





Classroom management plays a crucial role in students' character formation. Marist schools try to form learners in such a way that they become more productive in society. The character formation of the learner is inseparable in their pursuit of holistic nation-building. Therefore, the teacher who is at the centre of the formation of this student needs to be properly groomed. He must be a role model to the students to achieve the purpose of Marist education in this child and the transformation of society (Oluoch-Suleh & Osuji, 2020).

The teacher's pedagogical approaches to concepts and issues must have varied innovative undertones to meet the demands of the 21st-century knowledge society. More so, teaching and learning resources are crucial for effective teaching and learning, enhancing overall learning outcomes. Therefore, the study of Osuji and Nzau (2023) emphasised the need for teachers to be innovative and creative in their approach to selecting and preparing teaching resources, which is essential in the 21st-century educational landscape, and for students' holistic formation.

In the same vein, Osuji and Oluoch-Suleh (2023) explored the impact and relevance of innovative practices in teacher education. The study found that innovative practices like dynamic and participatory classrooms, the use of varied learning resources, ICT integration, and gamification are critical for effective teacher preparation. Such practices foster creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving skills, essential for modern education. The study concluded that innovative practices are essential in enhancing teacher education. They improve learning outcomes, build confidence, and prepare teachers for the demands of a knowledge-driven society. Therefore, to achieve learner holistic formation specifically, the character formation of the learner, the study recommended incorporating learner-centred approaches and collaborative learning in the teaching and learning process.

## Critiques of Marist Education Considering Patristic Ideals

The critiques and the responses are looked at in different ways: Integration of faith and reason, holistic development, and community and service. Some critics argue that Marist education, while rooted in faith, may struggle to fully integrate reason and academic rigour as advocated by Patristic ideals. The focus on spiritual formation might overshadow the need for a balanced approach to intellectual development (Miller & Brown, 2022). In response to this critique, recent reforms in Marist education emphasise a more integrated curriculum that aligns faith with academic excellence, striving to balance spiritual and intellectual growth (Johnson, 2021; Osuji & Nwafor, 2022).

Regarding holistic development, the emphasis on holistic development in Marist education might sometimes be perceived as lacking in depth regarding the intellectual and philosophical aspects that Patristic education emphasizes (Lee & Wright, 2023). It is worthy to note that Marist schools are increasingly incorporating philosophical and theological studies into their curricula to address this gap and ensure a more comprehensive approach to student development (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015; Smith, 2022).

On community and service, while Marist education fosters a strong sense of community, there are concerns that the practical implementation of service-oriented programmes may not fully reflect the depth of social justice teachings as seen in Patristic education (Garcia, 2022). The response to this claim is that efforts are being made to enhance the impact of service programmes by incorporating more rigorous evaluation methods and aligning them closely with social justice goals (Parker & Nguyen, 2023). Despite the above critiques, there are some contemporary challenges in implementing character formation. One significant challenge is integrating character formation with rigorous academic



standards. There is a concern that the focus on academic achievement may overshadow moral and ethical education (White & Lee, 2024). Studies indicate that while academic pressures are rising, schools that intentionally integrate character education into the curriculum can achieve a balance that fosters both intellectual and moral development (Okpalaenwe & Osuji, 2018; Brown & Mitchell, 2023).

Another challenge is cultural and societal changes. Rapid cultural and societal changes pose difficulties for Marist education in maintaining traditional values while adapting to contemporary issues and diverse student populations (Johnson, 2022). Adapting character formation programmes to be culturally inclusive and responsive to contemporary social issues is crucial. Research suggests that dynamic and context-sensitive approaches can effectively address these challenges (Osuji & Oluoch-Suleh, 2021; Williams, 2023).

In the same vein, limited resources and funding can hinder the implementation of comprehensive character formation programmes, affecting the ability to provide adequate support and enrichment activities (Smith, 2023). However, in recent developments, schools are exploring innovative solutions, such as partnerships with community organizations and leveraging technology, to supplement their character formation efforts (Garcia & Lee, 2023).

There are some of the strategies put in place to overcome the challenges of character formation implementation in Marist schools. These include enhanced curriculum integration, professional development, community and parental engagement, evaluation adaptation, and leveraging technology. Developing curriculum that integrate character education with academic subjects can ensure that moral and ethical learning is embedded in daily lessons (Miller & Brown, 2022). Schools

should focus on creating interdisciplinary programmes that address both academic and character development (Johnson, 2021).

Investing in ongoing professional development for educators can help them better incorporate character formation into their teaching practices and stay aligned with both Marist and Patristic ideals (Parker & Nguyen, 2023). Training programmes should emphasize the integration of faith and reason, as well as effective strategies for teaching character education. In addition, strengthening partnerships with parents and the local community can enhance the effectiveness of character formation programmes. Schools should actively involve families and community leaders in character education initiatives to create a supportive environment (Williams, 2023).

Implementing robust evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of character formation programmes can provide valuable insights for improvement. Regular feedback and data-driven adjustments can help address the challenges and enhance the effectiveness of these programmes (Brown & Mitchell, 2023). Similarly, utilising technology to support character education, such as digital resources and online platforms, can expand access to learning materials and provide interactive and engaging ways to teach values and ethics (Garcia & Lee, 2023).



## SECTION FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Marist educational philosophy is deeply intertwined with Patristic ideals, drawing on the wisdom of the early Church Fathers to create a comprehensive and faith-based approach to education. Through the emphasis on holistic development, the integration of faith and reason, moral and ethical formation, community, service, simplicity, and the example of Mary, Marist education continues to uphold and advance the foundational principles laid down by the Patristics. This connection ensures that Marist schools not only provide academic excellence but also foster the spiritual and moral growth of their students, hence, character formation, and preparing them to lead meaningful and impactful lives.

The Marist educational philosophy is deeply connected to Patristic ideals, drawing inspiration from the early Church Fathers (Patristics) whose teachings and writings helped shape Christian thought and practice. These connections can be observed in several key areas: holistic development, integration of faith and reason, moral and ethical formation, community and fellowship, service and social justice, simplicity and humility, and the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

The Church Fathers emphasised the holistic development of the individual, integrating body, mind, and spirit. They believed that education should address all aspects of a person's life. In the same vein, Marist education promotes the holistic development of students, aiming to nurture their intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social growth. This aligns with the Patristic view that true education goes beyond academic learning to include the formation of character and faith (Eke & Uzochukwu, 2020).

On the integration of faith and reason, the Church Fathers, such as St Augustine of Hippo and St Thomas Aquinas, emphasized the harmony between faith and reason, advocating for an education that integrates both. Marist education seeks to incorporate faith into the learning experience, encouraging students to develop a personal relationship with God while engaging in rigorous intellectual pursuits. This reflects the Patristic belief that faith and reason complement each other in the search for truth (Umeh & Chukwu, 2021).

The early Church Fathers focused on the moral and ethical formation of individuals, stressing the importance of virtue and life aligned with Christian values. In the same spirit, Marist education places a strong emphasis on moral and ethical development, encouraging students to live out virtues such as compassion, integrity, and justice. This commitment to character formation is deeply rooted in Patristic teachings on virtuous living (Ike & Okorie, 2020).

The Church Fathers highlighted the significance of community and fellowship, promoting the idea of the Church as a family of believers united in faith and love. Also, Marist education fosters a family spirit, creating a supportive and inclusive community where everyone feels a sense of belonging. This mirrors the Patristic vision of a Christian community bound by love and mutual support (Nnamdi & Ndukwe, 2022).

Regarding service and social justice, many Church Fathers, such as St Basil the Great and St John Chrysostom, advocated for social justice and the care of the poor and marginalised. They taught that service to others is a fundamental expression of Christian faith. In the same perspective, Marist education emphasises service and social justice, encouraging students to be active in their communities and to work towards a more just and equitable society. This reflects the Patristic call to serve others





and to uphold the dignity of every person (Chukwuka & Mba, 2021).

Concerning simplicity and humility, the Church Fathers often promoted simplicity and humility, valuing a lifestyle that eschews materialism and embraces modesty. Marist education on its own, values simplicity and humility, encouraging students and educators to live authentically and with integrity. This echoes the Patristic emphasis on modest living and the rejection of pride (Eke & Uzochukwu, 2020).

The Church Fathers held Mary, the mother of Jesus, in high esteem, viewing her as a model of faith, obedience, and virtue. Similarly, Marist education is inspired by Mary's example, promoting values such as compassion, gentleness, and a strong faith. The “Way of Mary” is integral to the Marist approach, reflecting the Patristic reverence for Mary as a role model for all Christians (Odoemelam & Mbaegbu, 2023). Marist education, founded by Saint Marcellin Champagnat, emphasises the holistic development of students, focusing on intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth (Smith & Brown, 2021). This comprehensive approach aims to nurture well-rounded individuals who can contribute meaningfully to society (Garcia & Nguyen, 2022). Character formation is a cornerstone of Marist education, striving to develop individuals who are compassionate, responsible, and socially conscious (Johnson, 2023). Methods include integrating daily prayers, liturgical celebrations, and service-learning projects into the curriculum (Mitchell & White, 2023).

Modern Marist education incorporates digital learning platforms and global collaboration, enhancing accessibility and relevance (Parker & Williams, 2023). This integration promotes a broader worldview through student exchange programmes, virtual collaborations, and interdisciplinary approaches (Smith & Brown, 2021). Innovative educational models, developing and implementing innovative

educational models that integrate technology, global perspectives, and interdisciplinary approaches can enhance the effectiveness and relevance of Marist education (Parker & Williams, 2023). More so, embracing adaptive learning technologies, flipped classrooms, and project-based learning can provide students with personalized and engaging educational experiences (Garcia & Lee, 2023).

Regarding reflective practice and continuous improvement, encouraging reflective practice among educators and students can lead to continuous improvement and growth in Marist education (Nguyen & White, 2023). Therefore, implementing regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and professional development opportunities can support the ongoing development of effective educational practices (Mitchell & White, 2023).

Marist education aligns with Patristic principles by emphasizing the integration of faith and reason, commitment to moral and ethical education, and fostering a sense of community and service (Lee & Parker, 2022). Both traditions share a dedication to holistic development, community, and promoting social justice (Williams, 2022). Encouraging ongoing dialogue and collaboration between Marist and Patristic educators can enrich both traditions, fostering a deeper understanding of shared values and innovative approaches (Brown & Mitchell, 2023). Furthermore, hosting joint workshops, seminars, and conferences can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices (Smith & Brown, 2021).



## SECTION SIX

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Let us consider some of the recommendations drawn from this lecture:  
*Marist Education Styles in the Light of Patristic Education: A Curriculum  
Response to Learner Character Formation:*

#### Evolving Nature of Marist Education

Marist education has continually adapted to meet contemporary educational needs, balancing tradition with innovation (Smith & Brown, 2021). For example, recent curricular reforms in some parts of Marist world emphasise not only academic excellence but also the development of critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning (Garcia & Nguyen, 2022). Therefore, for further development, incorporating project-based learning and interdisciplinary studies that connect traditional subjects with real-world applications would be appropriate (Johnson, 2023).

Furthermore, emphasizing social justice and inclusivity has become a central tenet in modern Marist education, reflecting broader societal changes and commitments (Johnson, 2023). For example, programmes that address issues of inequality, diversity, and inclusion are being incorporated into the curriculum, fostering a sense of global citizenship among students (Lee & Parker, 2022). Regarding further developments, creating partnerships with local communities to address social issues and develop community-based projects that promote social equity is the answer (Mitchell & White, 2023).

Similarly, there is a growing emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches that integrate various fields of study, promoting a more comprehensive educational experience (Williams, 2022). For example, integrating subjects like ethics, environmental studies, and technology to create a

more holistic and relevant education has been advanced in Marist schools (Mitchell & White, 2023). For future development, there is a need to implement cross-curricular themes and collaborative projects that encourage students to think critically and creatively across disciplines (Nguyen & White, 2023).

### Integration of Technology and Global Perspectives

The integration of digital learning platforms has transformed the educational landscape, providing new opportunities for interactive and personalized learning (Smith, 2023). For example, the use of online resources, virtual classrooms, and educational apps to enhance learning experiences and accessibility (Garcia & Lee, 2023). Therefore, there is a need for developing adaptive learning technologies that tailor educational content to individual student needs, improving engagement and outcomes (Parker & Williams, 2023).

In the same vein, encouraging global collaboration and exchange programmes helps broaden students' perspectives and fosters a sense of global interconnectedness (Brown & Mitchell, 2023). For example, partnering with Marist institutions worldwide for student exchange programmes, collaborative projects, and cultural immersion experiences (Johnson, 2022). Furthermore, utilizing virtual exchange programmes and international project-based learning to connect students with peers around the world (Smith & Brown, 2021).

In addition, utilizing technology to support character education through online modules, virtual mentorship, and digital storytelling (Parker & Williams, 2023). For example, implementing programmes that use technology to teach values, ethics, and social responsibility in engaging and interactive ways (Nguyen & White, 2023).

Therefore, there is a need to create digital platforms for reflective practice,



where students can document their personal growth and moral development (Garcia & Nguyen, 2022).

### Prospects for Continued Alignment with Patristic Ideals

Continued emphasis on integrating faith and reason remains a cornerstone of Marist education, reflecting Patristic ideals (Johnson, 2023). Developing curricula that include both scientific inquiry and theological studies, fostering a balanced and holistic understanding of knowledge is apt (Smith & Brown, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to encourage interdisciplinary research that explores the intersections of faith, science, and ethics (Lee & Parker, 2022).

More so, sustaining a strong commitment to moral and ethical education is crucial for maintaining alignment with Patristic ideals (Garcia & Nguyen, 2022). Programmes that focus on virtues, moral decision-making, and ethical leadership are integral to Marist education (Mitchell & White, 2023). Therefore, there is a need to incorporate case studies and real-life scenarios into the curriculum to enhance students' ethical reasoning and decision-making skills (Williams, 2022).

Furthermore, the emphasis on community and service that aligns Marist education with Patristic principles, promoting social responsibility and communal living needs to be strengthened (Lee & Parker, 2022). A typical example is encouraging students to engage in community service projects, social justice initiatives, and leadership roles within their communities (Williams, 2022). Establishing long-term service-learning partnerships that allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to address community needs is therefore a need in Marist schools (Brown & Mitchell, 2023).

Furthermore, embracing innovative pedagogical approaches that align with Patristic ideals can enhance the effectiveness of Marist education



(Brown & Mitchell, 2023). For example, utilizing methods such as experiential learning, reflective practice, and dialogue-based teaching to deepen students' understanding and engagement enhances learning outcomes (Nguyen & White, 2023). Future development needs to consider implementing flipped classrooms and blended learning models that combine traditional instruction with modern technology (Smith & Brown, 2021).

The future of Marist education lies in its ability to adapt and innovate while staying true to its foundational principles. When we integrate technology, embrace global perspectives, and maintain a commitment to faith and reason, Marist education can continue to thrive and align with Patristic ideals. The evolving nature of Marist education promises a dynamic and holistic approach that prepares students to navigate the complexities of the modern world with integrity, compassion, and wisdom.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the success of my professorial inaugural lecture, "Marist Education Styles in the Light of Patristic Education: A Curriculum Response to Learner Character Formation." First and foremost, I thank Almighty God for His continuous guidance and blessings. His providence has been the cornerstone of my academic and professional journey, making this moment possible.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the leadership of Godfrey Okoye University, particularly the Vice Chancellor, Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Anieke for their unwavering support and encouragement. Your visionary leadership has provided a conducive environment for academic excellence and personal growth.

My sincere appreciation goes to my colleagues in the Faculty of Education. Your intellectual stimulation, collaborative spirit, and support have been invaluable in shaping this lecture. Special thanks to the leadership team of the Faculty of Education for your guidance and encouragement.

I am deeply indebted to the Marist Brothers of the Schools whose educational philosophy and dedication to character formation have profoundly influenced my work. Your commitment to the Marist charism continues to inspire and guide me. In a special way, thanks to the Provincial, Marist Brothers of Nigeria, Rev. Br. Dr Omede, Okolo Mark, fms, Ph. D. who permitted me to work with Godfrey Okoye University Enugu, Nigeria.

I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of the numerous scholars and researchers whose works have informed and enriched this lecture. Their dedication to the field of education has provided a solid foundation

upon which this lecture is built. To my research partners; Dr Everlyn Achieng' Oluoch-Suleh (Asst. Prof.) (United States International University – Africa, Nairobi, Kenya), Dr Alphonsus Nwafor (Godfrey Okoye University Enugu, Nigeria), and Dr Rosepetra Enekwe (Godfrey Okoye University Enugu, Nigeria), thanks for inspiring me. May God continue to bless you.

A special thank you to the organizing committee of this inaugural lecture for their meticulous planning and execution of this event. Your hard work, attention to detail, and commitment to excellence have ensured the smooth running of this lecture.

I am profoundly grateful to my biological family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement. Your love, prayers, and belief in me have been my source of strength throughout this journey.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to all the attendees of this lecture. Your presence and participation are greatly appreciated, and I hope that this lecture has provided valuable insights and sparked meaningful discussions on Marist educational styles and their impact on students' character formation.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.



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## 16TH INAUGURAL LECTURE ORDER OF PROGRAMME

1. Procession to Peter Mbah Law Auditorium from the E-library
2. National Anthem
3. University Anthem
4. Opening Prayers
5. Recognition/Introduction
6. Vice Chancellor's Opening Remark
7. Musical Interlude
8. Citation of Inaugural Lecturer
9. Inaugural Lecture
10. Award of Certificate to the Inaugural Lecturer
11. Vote of Thanks
12. Closing Remark
13. Closing Prayer
14. National Anthem
15. Photograph – with the Council Members, Principal Officers, and Members of the Senate in the Auditorium
16. Recession
17. Group Photographs:
  - Staff of the Faculty of Education
  - Students of the Faculty of Education
  - Religious Family; The Marist Brothers of the Schools
  - General



