
**THE PLACE OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN
NIGERIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL
SOCIAL STUDIES PEDAGOGY:
ISSUES OF CONCERN**

Adetoun Gladys **EMIOLA**

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,
University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State*

Abstract

In this 21st century, the human race is facing severe difficulties at the societal, economic, and personal levels. The society at large is struggling with greed and dissatisfaction manifested in financial instability, climate change, and personal privacy invasions, coupled with intolerance manifested in religious fundamentalism and extremism, racial crises, financial supremacy and political absolutism. There is also national moral breakdown characterized by examination malpractice, increased use of drugs, excessive and habitual drinking, sex abuse and indulgence, and terrorism among others. Facing the challenges of the 21st century in Nigeria requires a deliberate effort to cultivate in students' personal growth, and the ability to fulfill social and community responsibilities as global citizens. The introduction of Social Studies into the junior secondary curricula of schools in Nigeria has been a major development in the education of the country making it a core-subject. All through history, the goal of education has been to cultivate confident and compassionate students who become successful learners, contribute to their communities and serve society as ethical

citizens. This explains the inclusion of character education in Nigeria not only in secondary schools but mostly in the teaching of Social Studies. The focus of this paper is to examine the importance of character education in secondary school Social Studies, as well as the roles of stakeholders, especially parents and classroom teachers in its dissemination. The paper recommends among others; the inclusion of and emphasis on certain values in the Nigeria Social Studies curriculum to help improve students' character.

Keywords: Character Education, Social Studies, Pedagogy, Social problems

Introduction

Social Studies as a school subject is a major discipline in the annals of Social Sciences. It's a field of study which deals with human behavior, relationships, resources, and institutions. Though the discipline Social Studies is American in origin; it has been well accepted and adopted in the Nigerian classroom with the sole purpose of making education more relevant to the needs of the Society. The teaching of Social Studies focuses majorly on social issues, values, moral education and other related concepts that can prepare children to become better citizens as well as promote unity in the country. Social Studies is also expected to inculcate various skills and critical thinking abilities as well as introduce values in the society that will bring about qualitative positive contributions to the development of the nation.

In the 21st century, humanity is facing severe difficulties at the societal, economic, and personal levels. Societally, the world is struggling with greed manifested in financial instability, climate change and personal privacy invasions, and with intolerance manifested in religious fundamentalism and extremism, racial crises, and political instability & absolutism. The fundamental question being asked by most educators and curriculum designers

today is “what should students learn for the 21st century and beyond?”.

Character education is the intentional effort aimed at developing in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures within and outside a national geographical area. It is teaching which is designed to develop in students the required ethics and values needed to ensure their proper integration in the society. The aims of character education are to promote the intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical development of young people in order to help them become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens of their country. Good character though highly desirable, is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning, and practice – it is developed through character education. An individual with a good character is the individual who can make a decision and is ready to take responsibility for the results of that decision (Agung, 2011).

Why then is character education important? We can answer this question with reference to Josephson Institute on character counts! (2012) which focuses on four aspects of character, described here. Moral character, which refers to the qualities that help us be our best self, including trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Followed by Performance character; the qualities that help us do our best work, including self-discipline, diligence, organization, and confidence. The next thing is Intellectual character, which has to do with those skills and traits needed to be a motivated and committed learner, critical thinker, and creative problem solver, to include; curiosity, intellectual autonomy, humility, and open-mindedness. Finally, is Civic character, which is made up of the skills and traits needed to be an ethical, engaged citizen who demonstrates leadership, teamwork, civility, and creates positive change in their community. (Josephson Institute Character counts, 2012)

Character is the way people react to situations be it negatively or positively whether it be by actions, words, or thoughts. Character truly defines who you are as a person. Character is not

something that happens to a person ‘suddenly’, but rather, something which one builds up over time, something that comes from within. A person’s character determines his/her personality and endears others to him/her. According to Josephson Institute Character Counts! (Character education and SEL Curricular resources, lessons and activities, 2012), the Six Pillars of Character are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship; and all these pillars are keys to opening the door to who exactly we are, and how we behave in the society.

The “21st century education” is both broad in a relevant way, as well as deep in judiciously chosen areas, where the three dimensions of Skills, Character and Metacognition are taught through the lens of traditional and modern knowledge, with interdisciplinary lenses. The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today’s society since our youths face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations.

This paper is intended to access the place of character education in Nigerian Junior Secondary school Social Studies pedagogy. It also seeks to determine the quality and quantity of Character education content contained in the Social Studies curriculum. Character education in a broad sense is anything that schools might try to provide both within and outside of academics in order to help pupils grow into “good people” within the society. It focuses on the qualities that enable learners to become productive and dependable citizens. In the narrow sense on the other hand, it denotes a particular style of moral training which reflects particular societal values as well as particular assumptions about the nature of children and how they learn. The first step in character education as contained in the Nigeria Junior Secondary School Social Studies curriculum is to train students in basic social and performance skills such as, following instructions, (be they in the home, school or society at large), greeting others, accepting criticism as well as compliments, asking for help and offering help where needed, appreciating other people’s cultures, religions, idiosyncrasies and individual differences, and making use of listening skills effectively. Nigerian students are expected to practice these virtues until they become habits, and sooner or later

part of their character as citizens of this country. It is therefore the objective of this paper to view the issues of concern which may emanate from the teaching or not teaching of character education in Nigeria junior secondary school Social Studies, and to determine whether or not these students are being educated in character.

Character: A Review

The word character is of Greek origin and it refers to an inclined disposition to behave in particular ways. "Character," although sometimes charged with negative connotation, is a concise term that is recognizable by all peoples and cultures. It refers to how good a person is in terms of exhibiting personal qualities as desirable by a society. Character is the sum of continuously developing moral and ethical qualities and the demonstration of those qualities in people's emotional responses, thinking, reasoning, and behavior. Character does not necessarily have to be seen early in a human life as it can be acquired later in life, but soon or later it has to show forth.

Likona, Schaps and Lewis (2008) defined character as "human excellence" comprised of all virtues that enable us to "be our best and to do our best". Hence, character encompasses moral and performance virtues. Character qualities are defined as distinct from Skills, which represent the ability to effectively use what one knows. Higher order skills (such as the "4 C's" of Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration– also known as "21st Century Skills") are essential for acquisition and application of Knowledge as well as for work performance. Character affects a person's words, decisions, attitudes, goals, actions and relationships. Good character is expected to make the 21st century pupil a better leader, neighbour, employee, spouse, parent and citizen. Good character according to Lickona (1991), consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.

Character can refer to so many things such as; personality traits or virtues such as responsibility and respect for others;

emotions such as guilt or sympathy; social skills such as conflict management or effective communication; behaviours such as sharing or helping; or cognitions such as belief in equality or problem-solving strategies. True character can therefore be measured by what one would do if no one were watching, which brings about automatic positive behaviour. A person with good character takes a decision and takes full responsibility for the outcome of that decision no matter the cost to him/her. Hence, good character is not only about knowing the right thing, but knowing the right time to do the right thing.

The Pedagogy of Character Education

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to the necessity of educating for character. However, there is also increasing debate over what character education is and how it should be represented in school curricula. Critics argue that schools or teachers should not impose values on students, and question whether 'knowing' what good behaviour is guarantees its practice. Since school is the major social structure (after family) the child encounters, it provides an excellent opportunity for character-building and character education. School must therefore be seen as not just a place for learning, but also a place where a foundation can be built for becoming upstanding adults. Hence, a key factor in improving learning experiences and outcomes is choosing appropriate teaching strategy (Omiyefa, 2021). Adopting the teacher-centred approach may not be effective for the teaching of character education, because, for character education to be imbibed by students, a lot of action learning strategy must be involved. According to Omiyefa, studies have shown that action learning has a positive impact on students' abilities, such as increasing their motivation and performance, as well as developing social interaction. Some common and well-known methods of teaching Social Studies include; lecture, questioning, dramatization, simulation project, discussion and enquiry. Some of the useful strategies that can be adopted for effective teaching of Social Studies, and hence, character

education includes; graphic organizers, cooperative learning, writing and information presentation and use of visual and oral activities to mention a few.

Generally, in moral education, there is a strong insistence on the need for appropriate processes. In the field of character education there is also some research evidence to suggest that methods appropriate for democracy are effective. The teaching and learning of character education focus primarily on morals while that of citizenship education is with the exploration of the search for and abuses of moral thinking and conduct principally as it emerges from, and relates to, social and political frameworks. Halstead (1996) argues that character and values are central to both the theory of education and practical activities in schools, posing the following questions: Should schools instill values in pupils or teach them to explore and develop their own values? Should teachers aim for a neutral (or value-free) approach to their subject matter? This is definitely an issue of concern.

The values we teach children are their best protection from the influences of peer pressure and the temptations of consumer culture. With their own values clearly defined, children can make their own decisions, rather than imitate their friends or the latest fashions or even famous celebrities. According to Likona (1991), the educator is seen as a role model, mentor, and caregiver; the classroom as a moral community, in which civility and compassion are part of the curriculum; positive patterns of discipline involving home and school; confronting the tough issues of drugs, alcohol, and sex; and much more.

Some important character traits to teach students in the secondary school include; obedience, kindness, grit, independence, creativity, conscientiousness, adaptability, Determination, empathy, forgiveness, graciousness, gregariousness, intuitiveness, respectfulness and responsibility (Meador, 2020). Others include; Discipline, Encouragement, Empathy, Enthusiasm, Ethicality, Fairness, Faithfulness, Friendliness, Generosity, Genuineness, Gratitude, Hard Work, Honesty, Honorableness, Integrity, Intentionality, Joy, Love, Perseverance, Politeness, Productivity,

Responsibility, Serving others, Sincerity, Trustworthiness and Willingness.

In Nigeria as it is in most other countries, there is no single particular document on National Curriculum for character education, but it is located most noticeably in a range of other subjects and can be understood very broadly. This is again an issue of concern when one considers the rate of moral decadence in our society today. Schools and subjects that are infusing Character Education into their curricula and cultures, such as Social Studies and Civic Education, are finding improved academic achievement, behavior, school culture, peer interaction, and parental involvement. They are seeing dramatic transformations: pro-social behaviors such as cooperation, respect, and compassion are replacing negative behaviors such as violence, disrespect, apathy, and underachievement. Indeed, character education can also help students in the Nigeria secondary schools with all their academic subjects as well as help them in their relationships with fellow students, teachers and family members.

Character Education: A Trend

Lickona (1987, as cited in Lickona, 1991, p 1) defines character education as “the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about and act upon pure ethical values” Character education is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues (qualities), values (ideals and concepts), and the capacity to make wise choices for a well-rounded life and a thriving society. It is everything a teacher does to influence the kind of human being his/her students become). It can be taken to encompass all of moral education, and also non-moral aspects such as civic or cultural qualities. Hence, it is concerned principally with morals. The lack or deficiency in morals is also a major issue of concern in the Nigerian society.

All character education must involve the school, parents, the community or society and the students themselves. Good character education would also mean the cultivation of virtues through formation of good habits and attitudes. While knowledge and

skills may or may not be used in future jobs, character qualities from character education will invariably be applicable to a wide range of professions. Character education usually works best when schools and families work together to instill societal goals in the child. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) explain that education in its fullest sense is inescapably a moral enterprise that parents and schools must work together, that character education is about developing virtues, and that character education must be pervasive and managed by committed faculty and staff.

The current state of character education in Nigeria is an unfortunate situation where teachers are the single most important factor in character moulding, and when the teachers fail, there is crisis of character in the students. It must however be noted that, for character education to be effective, there must be buy-in and involvement from all stake holders made up of teachers, students, parents, school counsellors, school administrators and the community at large. There must also be adequate integration of character education into everyday classroom practice, discussions and lessons as well as the entire school curriculum. Hence, students need many and varied opportunities both at home and in school to apply values and morals in their everyday lives to bring about good character. Also, the values and morals that make up for character education in the Social Studies curriculum must be in line with the people's values and morals as a nation.

Goals of Character Education

According to Likona (1991), character education has three goals: good people, good schools and a good society. The major goals of character education in any school curriculum therefore are to: develop students socially, ethically, and academically by infusing character development into every aspect of the school culture and curriculum. To help students develop good character, which includes knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical traits such as respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, and compassion. All schools of character have one thing in common: a socially wide

commitment to nurture the “whole” child. They develop students socially, ethically, and academically by infusing character development into every part of their curriculum and culture. Hence, all students should develop in both character and learning to become “whole” (first class character and second-class brain). Theodore Roosevelt a former president of the United States once stated: “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” Therefore, a good character is actually the foundation of learning. Character education is not about religion or religious activities in school

The Eleven Principles of Character Education

There is no single script for effective character education, but there are some important basic principles which must be followed. The eleven principles according to Likona (1996) serve as criteria that schools and other social groups can use to plan a character education effort and to evaluate available character education programs, books, and curriculum resources. These principles include the fact that: Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character. Character education holds, as starting philosophical principle, that there are widely shared, pivotally important core ethical values, such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others that form the basis of good character. These ethical values are very much needed not only in the Nigeria Social Studies curriculum, but also in the lives of the 21st century secondary school students. Secondly, “Character” must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior. In an effective character education program, character is broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the moral life. Good character consists of understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values. Thirdly, effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life. Schools committed to character education look at themselves through a moral lens and see how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the values and character of students.

The school must be a caring community and must embody good character. It must progress toward becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring, and just society we seek to create as a nation. Furthermore, to develop character, students need opportunities for moral action. In the ethical as in the intellectual domain, students are constructive learners~ they learn best by doing. Through repeated moral experiences, students can also develop and practice the moral skills and behavioral habits that make up the action side of character. Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed. Character education and academic learning must not be conceived as separate spheres~ rather there must be a strong, mutually supportive relationship; the lack of which will be a major issue of concern in any society. Character education should therefore strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation, because as students develop good character; they develop a stronger inner commitment to doing what their moral judgment tells them is right.

The school staff (teachers, administrators, counselors, coaches, secretaries, front desk workers/receptionists, cafeteria/kitchen workers, bus drivers, school nurse etc.) must become a learning and moral community in which they all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students. If a school's staff members do not experience or display mutual respect, fairness, and cooperation in their adult relationships, they are less likely to be committed to teaching those values to students. Hence, only exemplary, committed and dedicated workers should be employed in schools to work with students. Character education requires moral leadership from both staff (principals, school administrator, lead teacher/HOD, all academic and administrative staff) and students (Head boy/girl, prefects) who will champion the effort and be responsible for long-range planning and programme implementation. A morally bankrupt leadership from both staff and students will most likely not impart any values, morals or good character in students.

Three broad kinds of outcomes merit attention:

The character of the school i.e. the extent to which the school becomes a more caring community; the school staff's growth as character educators; which shows the extent staff teaching faculty, administrators, and support personnel developed understandings of what they can do to foster character development and their personal commitment to doing so. And finally, students' character which reveals the extent to which students manifest understanding of, commitment to, and act upon the core ethical values. Schools can, gather data on various character related behaviors such as increase in attendance, reduction of fights and suspensions, decline in vandalism and destruction of school properties, decrease in incidents of drug abuse etc. Schools can also assess the three domains of character (knowing, feeling, and behaving) through anonymous questionnaires that measure student's moral judgment (for example, "Is cheating on a test wrong?"), moral commitment ("Would you cheat if you were sure you wouldn't get caught?") and self-reported moral behavior ("How many times have you cheated on a test or major assignment in the past year?"). Such questionnaires can be administered at the beginning of a school's character initiative to get a baseline and again at later points to assess progress.

Conclusion

The children and the youth of today popularly called leaders of tomorrow, who will ensure the continuity of the society should have good characters and moral values in addition to cognitive knowledge. A conscious effort must therefore be made to ensure acquisition of positive character attributes by students in addition to field knowledge and cognitive development. Schools must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort because whether we like it or not, parents are the first and most important moral educators of their children hence schools should ensure they are fully engaged in character development of their children. Schools can organize programs for parents and teachers to encourage development of

good character in their children, and there is not a more appropriate avenue to do this than through the teaching of Social Studies.

Way Forward

In order for students in Nigeria secondary schools to acquire good character that will make them world class and exemplary citizens, the intentional teaching of character education must be included in the Social Studies curriculum. Indeed, the learning of Social Sciences especially Social Studies in secondary school is for nation and character building and hence the teaching of character and values must not be down played by the Social Studies teachers.

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