



CULTIVATING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH VALUES-BASED EDUCATION: A WAKEUP CALL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS



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Abstract

Responsible citizenship is vital for national development, social harmony, and global peace. In a rapidly evolving world where materialism and individualism often overshadow civic responsibility, there is an urgent need to reorient education systems to emphasize moral and ethical values. Values-based education (VbE) offers a holistic approach to developing individuals who are not only academically competent but also ethically sound and socially responsible. This article explored how VbE can be employed to cultivate responsible citizenship, examined its theoretical foundations, and provided practical strategies for implementation in educational institutions. The major challenges to its realization were cultural and contextual diversity, ambiguity in defining core values, teacher preparedness and competence, conflict with academic priorities, among others. However, the practical approaches to resolving these challenges include teacher training, policy support, community involvement, and the strategic use of media and digital tools and as well as school administrators' involvement through continuous monitoring and evaluation system to assess effectiveness of value-based education and the use of feedback mechanisms from students, staff, parents and other stakeholders to strengthen value-related programs.

Keywords: Responsible citizenship, values-based education, character development, civic responsibility, ethical education

Introduction

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly characterized by complex social, political, and economic challenges that demand not only intellectual competence but also ethical and civic responsibility from citizens. Issues such as corruption, social injustice, and political instability have highlighted the limitations of education systems that focus solely on academic achievements while neglecting character formation. These challenges underscore the urgent need for a transformative educational approach that not only imparts knowledge but also instills values and promotes responsible citizenship. Citizenship, in its true sense, extends beyond legal status or voting rights; it encompasses active participation in the life of a community, ethical decision-making, respect for human rights, and a commitment to social justice and the common good (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Unfortunately, many societies are witnessing a decline in civic engagement and a surge in moral decadence, particularly among the youths. This situation is partly attributed to educational practices that do not prioritize values and ethical behaviour as core learning outcomes (Lickona, 1991). As such, there is a growing call for values-based education (VbE) as a framework for developing morally responsible, socially conscious, and civically active citizens.

Values-based education is an educational paradigm that seeks to integrate core human values, such as honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, and justice, into all aspects of schooling, including the curriculum, pedagogy, leadership, and school culture (Hawkes, 2010). Unlike conventional approaches that treat values education as a separate subject, VbE promotes a holistic model where



values are embedded in the everyday experiences of learners. It is grounded in the belief that the development of personal character and civic virtue is as important as academic achievement in preparing learners for life in a democratic society (Narvaez, 2006).

The role of education in shaping responsible citizenship has long been recognized by philosophers and educationists. John Dewey (1938), for instance, emphasized the connection between education and democracy, arguing that schools should function as miniature communities where learners develop the habits of cooperative living and civic responsibility. Similarly, Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) highlighted the importance of moral reasoning in education, proposing that exposure to ethical dilemmas and moral discourse can enhance students' ability to make principled decisions. These foundational theories provide a compelling justification for integrating values-based practices into modern educational systems.

The relevance of VbE cannot be overstated. Many countries in the world today continues to grapple with systemic corruption, youth restiveness, and a general decline in moral standards, which threaten national cohesion and sustainable development. Educational institutions, particularly at the basic and secondary levels, have a critical role to play in reversing these trends by nurturing a generation of ethically conscious and socially responsible citizens (Okafor, 2012). By embedding values into teaching and learning processes, schools can serve as transformative spaces for cultivating a culture of integrity, respect for the rule of law, and active civic participation. Educational managers therefore have major responsibility in ensuring that the goals of education in the transformative process can be achieved. Thus, this study explores how values-based education can serve as a viable strategy for cultivating responsible citizenship, particularly within educational settings. It examined the theoretical foundations, implementation strategies, and practical implications of integrating VbE into school systems. In doing so, it advocates for a paradigm shift in educational practice, one that prioritizes not just intellectual development, but also the moral and civic formation of learners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored on Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. It provides a robust psychological framework for understanding how individuals acquire new behaviours, attitudes, and values through observation and imitation of others. Central to this theory is the concept that learning occurs within a social context and is heavily influenced by the modeling of behaviours seen in others, especially those in positions of authority or those considered as role models (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, individuals are more likely to adopt behaviours and internalize values if they observe such behaviours as being reinforced in others, especially when those behaviours result in positive outcomes or social approval. Regarding values-based education, Social Learning Theory is highly relevant as it underscores the importance of the school environment and the behavioural modeling provided by educators, school administrators, peers, and even parents. Schools serve as miniature societies where students not only receive formal instruction in moral and civic values but also witness and learn from the day-to-day conduct of their teachers and other adults in authority.

Educators who demonstrate honesty, empathy, fairness, discipline, and civic responsibility are not just teaching these values theoretically; they are embodying them in practice, thereby, making the learning process more authentic and impactful. This aligns with Bandura's assertion that "modeling is not simply a matter of mimicking; it involves internalization of the modeled behaviour when it is seen as rewarding or consistent with the learner's value system" (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, values-based education aims to create a positive school culture, one that fosters mutual respect, inclusivity, and responsibility. Within such environments, students are more likely to adopt prosocial behaviours and develop a strong sense of moral responsibility. The repeated exposure to values through structured curricula, value-laden discussions, and observed behaviour reinforces learning and encourages behavioural change.

Social Learning Theory also emphasizes the role of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to influence events and outcomes. By watching others engage in responsible civic actions, such

as volunteering, voting, or resolving conflicts peacefully, students come to believe in their own capacity to contribute meaningfully to society. This is crucial for developing responsible citizenship, which requires not just knowledge and values, but also the confidence to act on them in real-life situations. Thus, Social Learning Theory supports the core objective of this study: to explore how values-based education can cultivate responsible citizenship. It highlights the importance of modeling, observation, and the social reinforcement of values as mechanisms for moral and civic development. By fostering value-rich school environments and nurturing educators as moral exemplars, educational institutions can significantly influence students' formation as ethical and responsible citizens.

Conceptual Clarifications

Responsible citizenship refers to the active participation of individuals in their communities and societies with a strong sense of duty, ethics, and accountability. It transcends the mere possession of legal nationality to include behaviors, values, and dispositions that support democratic values, social cohesion, and public interest (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A responsible citizen is knowledgeable about civic rights and responsibilities, engages in public life, and demonstrates a commitment to ethical standards, justice, and communal well-being. According to Hoskins, Villalba, Van and Barber (2012), responsible citizenship embodies three core dimensions: civic knowledge (awareness of institutions and societal issues), civic skills (ability to engage and participate), and civic values (commitment to democratic principles and community service). These attributes are nurtured through education systems that emphasize critical thinking, social responsibility, and value-laden curricula.

Values-based education (VbE) is an approach that integrates universal moral and ethical values into the educational process, aiming to develop well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society. It involves the deliberate teaching and modeling of values such as honesty, respect, compassion, responsibility, and justice within school systems (Hawkes, 2010). These values are not only embedded in classroom instruction but are also reflected in school culture, leadership, and interactions among stakeholders. VbE is rooted in the philosophy that education should develop the whole person, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally (Lickona, 1991). It aligns with the goals of character education, moral education, and citizenship education, emphasizing the holistic development of learners who are capable of ethical reasoning and civic engagement. Narvaez and Lapsley (2008) argue that values education helps students internalize moral norms, make principled decisions, and act in ways that promote the common good.

Values-based Education (VbE) differs from traditional civic education by moving beyond factual knowledge of government and laws to focus on internalized values that guide behavior and foster social harmony (UNESCO, 2015). It fosters a school climate where learners experience a sense of belonging, respect, and shared purpose, conditions necessary for the cultivation of responsible citizenship.

The intersection between VbE and responsible citizenship lies in the shared goal of producing individuals who are not only informed but also morally grounded and socially responsive. Schools that adopt a values-based approach help students understand the implications of their actions, develop empathy for others, and take responsibility for contributing to their communities (Arthur et al., 2017). Through consistent exposure to ethical discussions, service learning, and value-laden curricula, learners acquire the tools to become proactive, responsible citizens who uphold democratic ideals and advocate for justice and equity. Cultivating responsible citizenship through values-based education is about instilling a moral compass in learners, equipping them to engage in civic life with integrity and a commitment to societal well-being. This conceptual synergy forms the foundation for addressing many of the socio-political and moral challenges facing contemporary societies around the globe.

The Role of Values-Based Education in Cultivating Responsible Citizenship

Values-based education plays a fundamental role in nurturing responsible citizenship by instilling in learners the moral compass, ethical awareness, and social consciousness necessary to participate meaningfully in society. It is an educational approach that emphasizes the integration of core

human values, such as respect, honesty, empathy, responsibility, justice, and compassion into all aspects of school life, including teaching, learning, leadership, and community engagement (Lovat & Toomey, 2009). When students are guided by strong moral values, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that contribute to the well-being of others and uphold societal norms, which are hallmarks of responsible citizenship. Values-based education goes beyond rote learning or knowledge transmission; it aims to shape the character and identity of students by embedding ethical reflection, emotional intelligence, and civic responsibility into the educational process (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). It promotes an inclusive school culture where positive values are consistently modeled by educators and reinforced through classroom interactions, school policies, and extracurricular activities. Such an environment fosters a sense of belonging, respect for diversity, and a commitment to the common good—qualities that are essential for responsible citizenship in a democratic society (Arthur, 2005).

A key function of values-based education is the development of civic virtues, including justice, tolerance, accountability, and respect for democratic processes. These virtues enable students to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to contribute positively to civic life (Galston, 2001). For instance, through participatory learning experiences such as debates, community service, and student government, learners gain firsthand experience of democratic engagement and ethical decision-making. These experiences encourage students to become proactive, socially responsible citizens who are willing to advocate for justice and contribute to societal development. Furthermore, values-based education is particularly important in pluralistic societies where differences in culture, religion, and ideology can lead to division or conflict. By promoting shared human values, it helps build bridges of understanding and respect among diverse groups, fostering social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. In this way, values-based education serves as a unifying force, preparing learners to navigate complex social environments with empathy and intercultural competence.

In the digital age, where students are increasingly exposed to conflicting value systems through media and technology, the role of values-based education becomes even more critical. It equips learners with critical thinking skills and ethical reasoning to evaluate information, resist harmful influences, and make principled choices (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). It also nurtures a sense of global citizenship, encouraging learners to act not only as responsible members of their local communities but also as stewards of the global commons.

Strategies for Implementing Values-Based Education

Implementing values-based education (VbE) effectively requires a holistic and intentional approach that integrates values into every facet of the school experience. To successfully cultivate responsible citizenship, educational institutions must adopt multidimensional strategies that align curriculum, pedagogy, leadership, and community engagement with core human values. Below are key strategies for implementing values-based education:

1. **Curriculum Integration:** One of the most effective strategies is the deliberate integration of values into the formal curriculum. Values should not be treated as isolated topics but embedded across subjects such as literature, history, civic education, and even science and mathematics. Teachers can highlight themes of justice, fairness, honesty, and compassion through stories, historical events, or ethical dilemmas (Lovat & Toomey, 2009). This cross-curricular approach ensures that values education becomes a lived experience rather than a theoretical exercise.
2. **Modeling by Educators:** Teachers and school leaders play a central role in modeling the values they wish to instill in learners. According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, students often learn by observing and imitating others, particularly authority figures. Educators who demonstrate respect, patience, integrity, and empathy set the tone for a value-rich learning environment. This modeling must be consistent, both within and outside the classroom, for values to take root in students' behavior (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).



3. **Values-Focused Pedagogy:** Teaching methods must support the development of critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning. Interactive pedagogies such as group discussions, storytelling, role-playing, service-learning, and problem-solving exercises provide opportunities for students to explore, question, and apply values in real-life contexts (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Such experiential learning helps students internalize values and relate them to personal and societal responsibilities.
4. **Whole-School Values Culture:** Implementing VbE requires fostering a school-wide culture where values are visibly prioritized and practiced. This includes developing a shared vision of the school's core values, involving all stakeholders-students, staff, and parents-in shaping school policies and expectations. A values-oriented environment should be reflected in classroom norms, disciplinary approaches, and celebration of student achievements (Hawkes, 2010). Displaying value statements on walls, celebrating acts of kindness, and reinforcing positive behavior are ways schools can institutionalize values.
5. **Leadership and Policy Support:** School leaders must champion values-based education by creating policies that promote inclusive, respectful, and participatory practices. They should facilitate professional development for teachers, ensure that recruitment aligns with value-oriented objectives, and lead by example in ethical decision-making and fairness. Leadership commitment is crucial for embedding values into the school's ethos and sustaining long-term change.
6. **Community and Parental Involvement:** Education does not occur in isolation; it is influenced by families and communities. Schools should involve parents and local organizations in promoting shared values through workshops, collaborative events, and community service initiatives (Narvaez, 2006). This partnership reinforces consistency in value messages received at home and school and creates a supportive environment for the moral development of children.
7. **Assessment and Reflection:** Though challenging, evaluating the effectiveness of values-based education is essential. Schools can use reflective journals, behavioral observations, group reflections, and community feedback to assess how well students are internalizing and demonstrating values (Lickona, 1991). Encouraging students to self-reflect on their attitudes and choices helps deepen their moral understanding and sense of civic duty.

Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Values-Based Education

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of values-based education (VbE) in nurturing responsible citizenship, its implementation is fraught with challenges that demand careful consideration. These challenges stem from cultural, institutional, pedagogical, and policy-related complexities that influence how values are perceived, taught, and practiced in educational settings.

1. **Cultural and Contextual Diversity:** One of the primary challenges in implementing VbE is the cultural and contextual diversity present within classrooms and societies. What constitutes a "value" may differ across ethnic, religious, or socio-economic groups. For instance, values like obedience, individual freedom, or communal responsibility may hold different levels of importance across communities (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). As such, imposing a uniform set of values without sensitivity to cultural nuances can lead to conflict or rejection by learners and parents.
2. **Ambiguity in Defining Core Values:** Another major consideration is the ambiguity and subjectivity in defining which values should be taught. Terms like respect, integrity, or tolerance are often interpreted differently depending on societal norms or personal experience. Without a clearly defined and universally accepted framework, educators may struggle to convey consistent messages, leading to confusion among learners and disparities in implementation.



3. **Teacher Preparedness and Competence:** The success of VbE largely depends on the capacity of teachers to model, communicate, and integrate values into their teaching. However, many educators may not have received adequate training in values education, nor do they always feel competent in navigating moral and ethical discussions. This lack of professional development limits their ability to create reflective, inclusive, and value-rich classroom experiences.
4. **Conflict with Academic Priorities:** In many educational systems, there is a strong emphasis on academic achievement and standardized testing. This focus often relegates values education to a peripheral position, viewed as a "soft" subject that does not contribute directly to measurable academic outcomes (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Consequently, schools may under-prioritize or superficially engage in VbE due to pressure to perform in core subjects like mathematics, science, or language.
5. **Inconsistencies Between School and Society:** Schools operate within broader social contexts where media, politics, and societal behavior may contradict the values taught in classrooms. For example, while schools may emphasize honesty and fairness, students may witness widespread corruption, inequality, or dishonesty in the public sphere. These contradictions can confuse students and diminish the credibility of school-based value teachings, especially when societal role models behave in ways inconsistent with espoused values.
6. **Evaluation and Assessment Challenges:** Assessing the impact of VbE poses another significant hurdle. Unlike academic subjects, values and moral development are difficult to measure quantitatively. Educators struggle to assess students' internalization of values without relying on subjective judgments (Lickona, 1991). This raises concerns about accountability, comparability, and effectiveness, making it hard for schools to track progress or justify investments in values education.
7. **Policy and Structural Gaps:** Finally, many education systems lack coherent policies or structural frameworks for implementing VbE. Inadequate policy support, limited funding, and the absence of national guidelines often result in fragmented or inconsistent implementation across schools and regions. Policymakers must therefore prioritize VbE in curriculum reforms, teacher education, and educational standards to ensure systematic adoption and sustainability.

The Roles of Educational Administrators in Promoting Values-based Education

Educational administrators play pivotal roles in ensuring the achievement of educational goals. In awarding degrees to students in every institution of learning, the conferment of the degrees is reminiscent in two areas: character and learning. This shows that cultivating responsible citizenship through values-based education. Ofeimu and Kolawole (2021) found that there is a fall in the value system of education in Nigeria and as such school administrators must as a matter of importance carryout the following roles:

- a. Design and implement school policies that integrate core values. Align institutional goals with national and global frameworks for value education.
- b. Support curriculum integration and development that fosters ethical reasoning and social responsibilities.
- c. Provide continuous professional training to teachers that incorporate moral and ethical issues.
- d. Create a positive school culture that fosters inclusivity and address value re-orientation which addresses bullying, discrimination, and other negative behaviours.
- e. Engagement of community and other stakeholders in reinforcing value education beyond the classrooms.
- f. Carry out continuous monitoring and evaluation system to assess effectiveness of value-based education. Use feedback mechanisms from students, staff, parents and other stakeholders concerned to strengthen value-related programmes.

Conclusion

The cultivation of responsible citizenship is a fundamental objective of modern education systems, particularly in a rapidly changing world that faces complex moral, political, and social challenges. As this article has demonstrated, Values-Based Education (VbE) plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character, promoting ethical behaviour, and preparing them to be active, compassionate, and responsible members of society. Drawing from social learning theory, which emphasizes modeling and observational learning, VbE fosters a learning environment where values are lived and experienced, not merely taught. The integration of core values such as respect, empathy, integrity, justice, and responsibility across school curricula and culture can empower learners to make informed and ethical decisions. However, implementing VbE effectively requires a comprehensive approach that includes teacher training, policy support, community involvement, and the strategic use of media and digital tools. Despite the challenges ranging from cultural diversity and resource limitations to ideological conflicts, this study affirms that with intentionality, collaboration, and commitment, values-based education can be a transformative force. By embedding values into the heart of educational practice, we can nurture a generation of citizens equipped not only with knowledge and skills but also with the moral compass needed to contribute meaningfully to national development and global peace.

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