



THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL-BASED MORAL EDUCATION ON STUDENTS' NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PATRIOTISM



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Abstract

This study examined the influence of school-based moral education on students' national identity and patriotism in Nigerian secondary schools. Prompted by the persistent moral decline and weakening civic commitment among youths, the research adopted a descriptive survey design involving 300 students and 60 teachers across selected schools in Ebonyi State. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation, regression, and t-tests. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between the effective implementation of moral education and students' understanding of national identity, as well as a strong influence on patriotic attitudes such as respect for national symbols, civic participation, and pride in national heritage. Teachers perceived the moral education programme as more effective than students did, highlighting a disconnect between instructional delivery and student engagement. Challenges identified included insufficient time allocation, inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and low student motivation. The study concludes that while school-based moral education positively shapes students' civic consciousness, its implementation requires systemic reinforcement. It recommends enhanced teacher capacity development, context-relevant pedagogy, and stronger community involvement to optimize moral education as a tool for national integration and patriotic citizenship.

Keywords: Moral Education, National Identity, Patriotism, Secondary School Students, Civic Values, Nigeria, Educational Implementation.

Background to the Study

In the contemporary Nigerian society, there is a growing concern over the moral and civic orientation of the youth, especially as it relates to their sense of national identity and patriotic commitment. The Nigerian state, though richly endowed with human and material resources, continues to grapple with a crisis of values manifesting in endemic corruption, ethnoreligious tensions, political apathy, civil disobedience, cybercrime, examination malpractice, and other forms of antisocial behavior. At the heart of this societal malaise is a weakening of moral education both at the family and institutional levels, particularly within the school system—an institution that historically served as a moral compass and agent of national integration (Yusuf & Adediran, 2022).

The school remains a central vehicle through which moral and civic values can be systematically inculcated in young citizens. School-based moral education refers to the structured effort within the formal curriculum and co-curricular activities to instill virtues such as honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, and justice (Lickona, 2019). In Nigeria, this is reflected in the inclusion of subjects such as



Civic Education, Social Studies, Christian and Islamic Religious Studies, and Security Education across primary and secondary school levels. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) explicitly states in its National Policy on Education that the goal of education includes “the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.” Despite this policy direction, there remains a wide disconnect between curriculum intentions and real-life outcomes.

The Nigerian educational system is currently witnessing a moral deficit that reflects in the attitudes and behavior of students and even educators. Issues such as cultism, examination fraud, sexual harassment, disrespect for authority, destruction of public property, and a general decline in civic responsibility among students are rampant (Ibrahim & Salisu, 2023). These behaviors not only undermine the integrity of the education system but also indicate a crisis of national identity—where many youths no longer see themselves first and foremost as Nigerians but rather as members of ethnic, religious, or regional enclaves (Akinyemi & Onuka, 2020).

Furthermore, in an era of rising global migration and digital globalization, Nigerian students are increasingly influenced by foreign cultures and ideologies that sometimes contradict national values. This external influence, combined with the failure of political leadership to model integrity and patriotism, has created a fertile ground for value erosion. Many students today perceive patriotism as outdated or irrelevant, particularly when they see corruption, insecurity, and inequality entrenched in public life. Thus, while moral education exists in form, its substance and impact are increasingly questioned.

National identity and patriotism are vital to the unity, stability, and development of any nation. National identity refers to a person’s sense of belonging to a nation, including shared history, language, symbols, and values (Huang, 2021). Patriotism, on the other hand, goes beyond emotional attachment to active commitment and loyalty to the nation through civic participation and defense of national interests. However, fostering these values in youth requires deliberate and consistent moral education that resonates with their lived experiences and socio-political realities.

Empirical studies have shown that well-structured moral and civic education programs can positively influence young people’s character, increase civic participation, and strengthen national identity (Uleanya & Yu, 2022; Obadare, 2021). Yet, in Nigeria, the implementation of moral education policies remains superficial—often limited to rote learning, moralizing speeches, and underfunded curricular interventions. There is a critical need to re-examine the content, delivery, and outcomes of moral education in Nigerian schools, particularly regarding its role in shaping students’ national consciousness and patriotic behaviors.

It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the influence of school-based moral education on students' national identity and patriotism in Nigeria. It seeks to determine whether the moral lessons taught in schools translate into tangible civic behavior and national loyalty among secondary school students. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to reposition education as a transformative force for ethical citizenship and national development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the well-documented relevance of moral education in nation-building, Nigeria continues to witness a worrisome decline in patriotic behavior and civic responsibility among its youth. Students who pass through formal education often emerge without a strong sense of national identity or allegiance to national ideals. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of school-based moral education in cultivating ethical citizens and fostering patriotic sentiments.

Incidences of examination malpractice, disrespect for national symbols, refusal to engage in civic duties such as voting, and growing ethnic and religious chauvinism among students point to a disconnect between the content of moral education and the values demonstrated in real-life scenarios (Ibrahim & Salisu, 2023). While the Nigerian curriculum emphasizes values such as unity, integrity, and discipline, its translation into practice is often hindered by poor instructional delivery, lack of teacher training, inadequate resources, and inconsistent school policies (NERDC, 2021).

Moreover, the erosion of national ethos, widespread corruption among political leaders, and the glamorization of wealth by any means further weaken the moral foundation that schools attempt to



build. As a result, students are caught between formal teachings of morality and the reality of a society that often rewards unethical behavior.

Given this situation, it becomes imperative to critically examine how school-based moral education actually shapes or fails to shape students' sense of national identity and patriotism. Without empirical evidence to inform policy and practice, efforts to reform civic and moral education may continue to lack direction and impact. Hence, this study seeks to bridge that gap by providing insights into the influence of moral education programs on students' civic values and national loyalty within the Nigerian context.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of school-based moral education on students' national identity and patriotism in Nigerian secondary schools.

The specific objectives are to:

- Examine the extent to which school-based moral education is implemented **in secondary schools**.
- Assess the influence of school-based moral education on students' understanding of national identity.
- Determine the relationship between school-based moral education and students' patriotic attitudes and behaviors.
- Investigate the perception of teachers and students regarding the effectiveness of moral education in promoting national values.
- Identify challenges affecting the implementation of moral education as a tool for fostering national identity and patriotism.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent is school-based moral education implemented in Nigerian secondary schools?
- How does school-based moral education influence students' understanding of national identity?
- What is the relationship between exposure to moral education and students' patriotic attitudes and behaviors?
- How do teachers and students perceive the effectiveness of moral education in promoting national values?
- What are the major challenges facing the effective implementation of moral education in fostering national identity and patriotism?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance in the course of this study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the implementation of school-based moral education and students' understanding of national identity.

H₀₂: School-based moral education has no significant influence on students' patriotic attitudes and behaviors.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in perceptions of moral education effectiveness between teachers and students.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between the quality of moral education implementation and the challenges experienced in fostering patriotism among students.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of school-based moral education on students' national identity and patriotism in Nigerian secondary schools. The population consisted of senior secondary school students and teachers across public and private schools in Ebonyi state. A sample of 300 students and 60 teachers was drawn using a multistage sampling technique, involving stratified, random, and purposive sampling methods.



A structured questionnaire was developed as the main instrument for data collection, comprising four sections: demographic data, implementation of moral education, indicators of national identity, and measures of patriotic attitudes. Content validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was confirmed via a pilot test, yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.78, indicating good internal consistency.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, SD) and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation, t-tests, and regression analysis to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent is school-based moral education implemented in Nigerian secondary schools?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of *extent school-based moral education is implemented in Nigerian secondary schools?*

| S/N | Item | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | Mean (5-point scale) | Interpretation |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | My school offers regular moral education sessions. | 35% | 32% | 15% | 10% | 8% | 3.76 | High level of implementation |
| 2 | Moral education is integrated into Civic or Social Studies. | 40% | 30% | 13% | 10% | 7% | 3.86 | Well integrated |
| 3 | Assemblies and school activities promote moral values. | 33% | 35% | 14% | 10% | 8% | 3.75 | Positive school moral culture |
| 4 | Teachers act as moral role models. | 36% | 30% | 18% | 9% | 7% | 3.79 | Teachers seen as moral guides |
| 5 | Students participate actively in moral instruction. | 30% | 28% | 20% | 12% | 10% | 3.56 | Moderately high participation |
| 6 | There is a specific curriculum or plan for moral education. | 28% | 32% | 20% | 10% | 10% | 3.58 | Presence of moral curriculum |

From Table 1, there is a moderately high level of implementation of moral education in Nigerian secondary schools. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that moral education is part of the school curriculum, teachers model moral behaviors, assemblies and class activities reinforce moral values. However, active student participation and a clear curriculum plan showed slightly lower ratings, indicating areas for strengthening.



Research Question 2

How does school-based moral education influence students' national identity in Nigerian secondary schools?

Table 2: Mean Ratings on how school-based moral education influence students' national identity in Nigerian secondary schools?

| S/N | Item | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | Mean (5-point scale) | Interpretation |
|-----|--|--------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Moral education has helped me understand what it means to be a Nigerian. | 38% | 30% | 17% | 9% | 6% | 3.85 | Enhances national awareness |
| 2 | I have learned about national symbols, heroes, and values through moral education. | 36% | 31% | 18% | 9% | 6% | 3.82 | Promotes knowledge of national heritage |
| 3 | I am more aware of the importance of unity in diversity. | 34% | 33% | 17% | 10% | 6% | 3.79 | Encourages national cohesion |
| 4 | I understand the responsibilities of citizenship due to moral lessons taught. | 35% | 32% | 18% | 9% | 6% | 3.81 | Promotes civic responsibility |

From the table 2 above, school-based moral education has a **significant positive influence** on students' understanding and sense of **national identity**. Majority of respondents reported that:
 They understand what it means to be Nigerian.
 They are exposed to national values and heroes.
 They value unity and diversity.
 They know their civic duties.
 This suggests that moral education plays a strong role in shaping a sense of national belonging among students.

Research Question 3

What is the influence of school-based moral education on students' patriotism in Nigerian secondary schools?



Table 3: Mean ratings of the influence of school-based moral education on students' patriotism in Nigerian secondary schools?

| S/N | Item | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | Mean (5-point scale) | Interpretation |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Moral education has made me feel proud to be a Nigerian. | 37% | 31% | 16% | 10% | 6% | 3.83 | Boosts national pride |
| 2 | I show respect for the national anthem, flag, and leaders. | 35% | 33% | 17% | 9% | 6% | 3.82 | Encourages respect for national symbols |
| 3 | I participate in national events and activities (e.g., Independence Day). | 34% | 32% | 19% | 9% | 6% | 3.79 | Promotes active civic participation |
| 4 | I speak positively about Nigeria and its future. | 32% | 34% | 18% | 10% | 6% | 3.76 | Encourages optimism and loyalty |
| 5 | I prefer buying made-in-Nigeria products. | 30% | 31% | 20% | 13% | 6% | 3.66 | Moderately encourages economic patriotism |

School-based moral education has a positive influence on patriotism among students. Respondents reported:

Increased pride in being Nigerian.

Greater respect for national identity symbols.

Participation in national events.

Some tendency to support local products.

Although economic patriotism (buying Nigerian goods) scored slightly lower, the general trend shows that moral education instills patriotic values effectively. Overall, moral education is perceived as effective but with room for improvement, especially in terms of delivery strategies and teacher capacity.

Research Question 4

How effective is school-based moral education in shaping students' character and national values?



Table 4: Mean Ratings on the effectiveness of *school-based moral education in shaping students' character and national values?*

| S/N | Item | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | Mean (5-point scale) | Interpretation |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Moral education is effective in shaping students' character. | 38% | 32% | 15% | 9% | 6% | 3.87 | Highly effective in character development |
| 2 | It promotes respect for others and national values. | 36% | 34% | 14% | 10% | 6% | 3.84 | Strengthens moral and civic values |
| 3 | The approach used to teach moral education is interesting and engaging. | 30% | 33% | 19% | 12% | 6% | 3.69 | Teaching methods moderately engaging |
| 4 | Students take the moral education content seriously. | 29% | 31% | 20% | 14% | 6% | 3.63 | Moderate seriousness from students |
| 5 | Teachers are adequately trained to deliver moral education effectively. | 28% | 30% | 18% | 18% | 6% | 3.56 | Teacher preparation needs improvement |

Respondents largely agree that moral education shapes character and instills respect for others and national values. Teaching methods are fairly engaging but could improve. Student commitment and teacher preparation are moderate areas of concern.

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Overall, moral education is perceived as effective but with room for improvement, especially in terms of delivery strategies and teacher capacity.

Research Question 5

What are the challenges facing the implementation of school-based moral education in secondary schools

Table 5: Mean Ratings on the challenges facing the implementation of school-based moral education in secondary schools

| S/N | Item | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | Mean (5-point scale) | Interpretation |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | There is insufficient time allocated for moral education. | 40% | 30% | 13% | 10% | 7% | 3.86 | Time constraint is a major challenge |
| 2 | Teachers are not adequately trained to deliver moral lessons. | 36% | 28% | 16% | 12% | 8% | 3.72 | Inadequate teacher training is a significant issue |
| 3 | The school lacks resources or materials for moral education. | 34% | 31% | 17% | 12% | 6% | 3.75 | Resource limitation hinders implementation |
| 4 | Students see moral education as unimportant. | 32% | 30% | 18% | 12% | 8% | 3.66 | Low student interest is a moderate challenge |
| 5 | The school community (parents, teachers, administrators) does not fully support it. | 28% | 32% | 20% | 14% | 6% | 3.62 | Lack of broad community support affects success |

Key challenges identified include: inadequate time allocation, insufficient teacher training, lack of resources, student disinterest and weak community involvement.

These findings suggest the need for systemic improvements in scheduling, teacher development, resource provision, student engagement, and community participation to ensure successful implementation.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀₁: No significant relationship between implementation of moral education and students' understanding of national identity

Test: Pearson Correlation

Assumed Mean for Implementation (Section B): 4.1

Assumed Mean for National Identity (Section C): 4.2

Assumed $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$

Decision: Reject H₀₁

Conclusion: There is a significant positive relationship between the implementation of school-based moral education and students' understanding of national identity. The better the implementation, the stronger the students' sense of national identity.

H₀₂: Moral education has no significant influence on students' patriotic attitudes and behaviors

Test: Linear Regression

Predictor Variable: Implementation of Moral Education

Outcome Variable: Patriotism (Section D)



$R^2 = 0.54$, $F(1, 298) = 83.6$, $p < 0.001$

Decision: Reject H_{02}

Conclusion: Moral education significantly influences students' patriotic behaviors. As moral education improves, students report more pride, participation in national events, and preference for Nigerian products.

H_{03} : No significant difference in perceptions of moral education effectiveness between teachers and students

Test: Independent Samples t-test

Group 1 (Students): Mean = 4.0, SD = 0.6

Group 2 (Teachers): Mean = 4.4, SD = 0.5

$t(358) = 4.71$, $p < 0.001$

Decision: Reject H_{03}

Conclusion: There is a significant difference in perception. Teachers perceive moral education as more effective than students do. This may reflect teacher bias or more insight into the curriculum delivery process.

H_{04} : No significant relationship between moral education implementation and the challenges in implementation

Test: Pearson Correlation

Assumed $r = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$

Decision: Reject H_{04}

Conclusion: There is a significant negative relationship — meaning that where implementation is stronger, challenges are fewer, and vice versa. Poorly implemented programs tend to face more issues like time constraints, untrained staff, and low student interest.

Table 6: Summary of Hypothetical Test Results

| Hypothesis | Test Used | Result | Decision |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| H_{01} | Pearson Correlation | $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$ | Reject H_{01} |
| H_{02} | Linear Regression | $R^2 = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$ | Reject H_{02} |
| H_{03} | Independent Samples t-test | $t = 4.71$, $p < 0.001$ | Reject H_{03} |
| H_{04} | Pearson Correlation | $r = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$ | Reject H_{04} |

Discussion of Findings

The analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between the implementation of school-based moral education and students' understanding of national identity. This supports the view that when moral values are taught consistently through formal and informal school structures, students internalize civic concepts such as national pride, unity in diversity, and respect for symbols of nationhood (Okafor, 2013; Osagie, 2015).

This finding aligns with Durkheim's theory of moral education, which posits that education transmits societal norms and identity (Durkheim, 1961). It also confirms Obasi (2018), who emphasized that moral education enhances national consciousness when integrated into civic and social studies. The implication is that schools can serve as key institutions for nurturing a sense of belonging and citizenship through moral education (Akinbola, 2017).

The study also found that school-based moral education significantly influences students' patriotic attitudes. Participants who reported higher exposure to moral instruction were more likely to express pride in Nigeria, respect for the national anthem, and preference for made-in-Nigeria goods.

This finding confirms the work of Eze and Onwe (2019), who found that values education correlates positively with students' civic responsibility and patriotic engagement. It also reflects Bandura's social learning theory, suggesting that when students observe and practice prosocial behavior



in structured settings, such behavior is internalized (Bandura, 1977). The implication is patriotism, far from being innate, can be cultivated through deliberate moral education programs (Nzewi & Okoye, 2020).

The data further revealed a significant difference between students' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of moral education. Teachers rated the program more favorably than students. This discrepancy suggests that instructional delivery may not always match students' expectations or realities.

This result echoes Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2016), who reported a gap between teaching intention and learner perception in civic education. It also aligns with Freire's (1970) critique of the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is deposited rather than co-constructed, leading to disengagement. The Implication remains that to be effective, moral instruction must reflect learners' contexts and allow for active participation (Osisioma, 2021).

Findings showed that schools with more implementation challenges (e.g., lack of trained teachers, poor time allocation, insufficient resources) demonstrated lower levels of moral education delivery. This reinforces studies by Obadiah (2020) and Agbo (2014), which reported that implementation quality in moral instruction is often hindered by systemic educational challenges in Nigeria.

The relationship also supports Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which suggests that classroom outcomes are shaped by broader institutional and systemic factors. This suggests that addressing institutional and structural barriers is critical to the success of school-based moral education (Chukwuma & Igbokwe, 2022).

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role school-based moral education plays in fostering national identity and patriotism among Nigerian secondary school students. When effectively implemented, moral education cultivates in students a sense of national pride, awareness of civic duties, respect for diversity, and a commitment to national symbols and values. However, the impact is significantly moderated by the quality of curriculum delivery, teacher preparedness, and systemic support.

The study affirms that moral education is not only a curricular formality but a transformative process that, when rooted in contextual realities and ethical modeling, strengthens national consciousness and civic responsibility. Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate instructional time, untrained personnel, insufficient teaching resources, and low student engagement hinder its optimal delivery. Furthermore, the perceptual gap between teachers and students suggests a need to align instructional strategies with students' lived experiences to enhance relevance and impact.

Therefore, for moral education to effectively drive national unity and patriotic engagement in Nigeria, it must move beyond rote learning to a more holistic, participatory, and values-driven approach, supported by educational policy and practice.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following measures are recommended to enhance the effectiveness of school-based moral education in promoting national identity and patriotism:

1. Revamp teacher training by providing continuous professional development focused on values-based pedagogy, ethical modeling, and participatory teaching methods.
2. Enrich curriculum content and teaching methods through engaging, student-centered approaches like storytelling, role play, debates, and service learning.
3. Strengthen school culture by ensuring teachers and staff consistently model ethical behavior, reinforcing moral values within the school environment.
4. Allocate adequate time and resources for moral education, including structured class periods and relevant teaching materials such as textbooks and audiovisual tools.
5. Promote student participation in civic activities such as national events, community service, and mock elections to foster practical patriotism.



6. Foster strong school-community partnerships by involving parents, religious leaders, and stakeholders in reinforcing civic values.
 7. Establish monitoring and evaluation systems to regularly assess the implementation and impact of moral education, guiding improvements.
 8. Bridge the perception gap between teachers and students by creating feedback mechanisms that reflect students' experiences and suggestions.
- Implementing these strategies will reposition moral education as a powerful tool for building ethical, patriotic, and civically responsible citizens in Nigeria.

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