

## Character Education: The State of Nigeria in Character Building

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**Abstract:** Education as a transformative tool for the growth and development of a nation cannot be overemphasized. Education is much more than the acquisition of literacy competencies, it encompasses character modifications and character building which are necessary for producing a holistic individual that is able to make positive impact in the society where he lives. The main thrust of this paper is to examine the state of Nigeria in character building, focusing on the objectives and purposes of character education in Nigeria. The paper argued that character education instills a sense of responsibility in the younger generation which is key to ethical development, social cohesion and personal well being of the citizens. Hence concerted effort should be made by all and sundry towards promoting character education among the citizens. Finally, the paper ends with recommendations like; updating educational policies to integrate character education into the national school curriculum, encouraging ethical leadership at all levels, encouraging families and communities in character education efforts which can reinforce moral values outside the classroom environment.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Character Building, Nigeria.

### I. Introduction

Character or moral education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals into responsible and ethical members of society. It is an integral aspect of holistic development, aiming to instil ethical values and virtues in students. The concept revolves around teaching principles such as integrity, respect, responsibility, and empathy, which guide individuals in making ethical decisions and fostering positive relationships (Lickona, 2016). It is not limited to explicit instruction but also involves integrating these values into everyday learning experiences and modeling them through educators' behaviors (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2015).

This educational approach aims to build not only intellectual capabilities but also moral integrity and emotional intelligence. In this essay, we will explore the purpose and objectives of character education and critically examine the state of character building in Nigeria, highlighting challenges and offering recommendations for improvement. One key objective of character education is to develop students' moral reasoning abilities, enabling them to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and make decisions aligned with their values (Rest, 2016). Additionally, it seeks to promote social responsibility by encouraging civic engagement and community involvement, helping students understand their role in contributing positively to society. Effective character education also focuses on enhancing emotional intelligence, which includes understanding and managing one's emotions and developing empathy towards others (Goleman, 2016). Integrating these components into the educational framework not only fosters individual growth but also contributes to creating a more ethical and cohesive society.

## II. Review of literature

### 2.1 Concept Clarification

The concept of Character or Moral education is concern with educating people on suitable conducts, XXXehavior and habits. Ikwumelu, Mbang and Oyibe (2015) pointed out that moral education has cognitive inclination that must not be sideline because of its role in giving the learner the skill of making sound moral judgement that is built on cognitive reasoning. The cognitive aspect of Moral education is very important and should be carefully cultivated in children and young adults. Contributing, Lakshmi and Paul (2018) explained that education on values should not be left to the school alone. However, value education can be achieved through three structures – the family, school and the community. Brownie, (2023) submitted that character education is an educational method focused on teaching and instilling shared attitudes, values, behaviors, and social and emotional skills in students. This method aims to prepare students to become responsible, compassionate citizens who will positively contribute to society. Character or Moral education is therefore concerned with educating an individual or groups with the principles that conform to the standards of XXXehavior and character based on those principles and the inherent complex of attributes which determine a person's moral and ethical actions and reactions.

## III. Research Methods

### 3.1 Purpose of Character or Moral Education

The primary purpose of character education is to develop well-rounded individuals who exhibit ethical behavior and social responsibility. Character education seeks to cultivate virtues such as honesty, respect, empathy, and fairness. By instilling these values, character education aims to guide students in making ethical decisions, fostering positive relationships, and contributing to societal well-being (Lickona, 2016). By fostering these values, character education seeks to create a foundation for ethical decision-making and positive social interactions. Also, it intends to enhance students' moral reasoning abilities, helping them evaluate situations and make decisions that align with ethical principles. Additionally, character education promotes social responsibility by encouraging students to engage actively in their communities and contribute to societal well-being. Furthermore, character education aims to develop emotional intelligence, which includes understanding and managing one's emotions and empathizing with others (Goleman, 2016). This holistic approach not only supports individual growth but also contributes to creating a more ethical and cohesive society by instilling values that guide behavior and relationships.

Character Education is crucial in today's society because it equips pupils with the positive personal traits, dispositions, moral and ethical compass required to navigate our increasingly complex world. While we cannot prepare children for jobs, experiences, problems and technologies yet to be conceived, character education serves to equip pupils with a toolkit to flourish in a job market and society that is continuously changing and evolving. They also develop the capacity of knowing how to select the best course of action in difficult situations.

A dedicated approach to nurturing character yields many benefits. Recent studies by Akabueze,(2021)indicates, that character education can result in increased wellbeing and academic attainment for learners.

Character Education fosters resilience and self-confidence. When pupils face challenges or setbacks, they learn to persevere and bounce back. Confidence in their abilities grows, enabling them to tackle new challenges with determination.

By fostering virtues of responsibility, citizenship and service, pupils are encouraged to contribute to the common good and actively contribute to the betterment of their communities and society.

Specifically, the purpose of character or Moral Education according to Puja (2020) are:

- a. to develop the inherent characteristics of people
- b. to improve the attitude of individuals for a sustainable lifestyle

- c. to teach individuals about the history and cultural heritage of their country, their rights, privileges and national development

- d. to create the awareness of values, their roles and significance in the society

- e. to study about the interaction of living and non-living things in our environment, it teaches us the need to place value on these organisms in order to protect the environment.

Citizens who possess these virtues are better equipped with the necessary skills needed not only to live an impactful and responsible life but also to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the society at large.

### 3.2 Objectives of Character or Moral Education

**a. Development of Ethical Values:** The development of ethical values is a fundamental aspect of character education, essential for fostering responsible and morally grounded individuals. Ethical values such as integrity, honesty, respect, and empathy form the foundation for making sound moral decisions and engaging positively with others (Lickona, 2016). One primary focus is cultivating integrity and honesty, which involves teaching students to act consistently with their values and to uphold truthfulness in their interactions. This aspect of character education helps students build trust and credibility in personal and professional relationships. Respect and empathy are also crucial, as they encourage students to value others' perspectives and feelings, promoting inclusive and harmonious social interactions (Goleman, 2016). Developing empathy involves understanding and responding to others' emotional experiences, which enhances social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, instilling a sense of responsibility is key to ethical development. Students learn to recognize their obligations to themselves, others, and their community, fostering a sense of accountability and proactive engagement in societal issues (Rest, 2016). Through these processes, character education aims to shape individuals who contribute positively to society and navigate ethical challenges effectively.

**b. Promotion of Social Responsibility:** Promotion of social responsibility is a crucial objective of character education, aiming to cultivate students' awareness of their roles and duties within their communities and the broader society. This aspect of moral education encourages individuals to engage actively in civic activities and contribute positively to societal welfare. By integrating social responsibility into the educational framework, schools help students understand the impact of their actions on others and the environment. This includes fostering a sense of duty towards addressing social issues such as inequality, environmental sustainability, and community development.

c. (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2015). Activities such as community service projects, environmental initiatives, and involvement in local governance provide practical experiences that reinforce these values.

Moreover, promoting social responsibility helps students develop a sense of belonging and connection to their communities, which is essential for fostering a cohesive and engaged society (Lickona, 2016). It also encourages students to practice empathy and ethical behavior by understanding and responding to the needs of others (Goleman, 2016). By embedding these principles into the educational process, character education aims to produce responsible citizens who are not only aware of their rights but also committed to their obligations towards societal improvement.

**d. Enhancement of Emotional Intelligence:** Enhancing emotional intelligence (EI) is a pivotal goal of character education, aimed at developing students' abilities to understand, manage, and effectively express their emotions while empathizing with others. Emotional intelligence encompasses skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2016). Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotions and their impact on behavior and decision-making. By fostering self-regulation, students learn to control impulsive reactions and manage stress constructively. This emotional control is crucial for maintaining positive relationships and making thoughtful decisions.

Motivation, another key component, encourages students to set and achieve personal and academic goals through resilience and a positive attitude. Empathy, the ability to understand and share others' feelings, helps students build strong interpersonal relationships and resolve conflicts amicably (Elias, Zins & Weissberg, 2017). The development of social skills through emotional intelligence training enables students to communicate effectively, collaborate, and lead with compassion and respect. Schools that integrate EI into their curriculum prepare students not only for academic success but also for effective participation in diverse social settings, enhancing their overall well-being and societal contributions.

**e. Preparation for Ethical Decision-Making:** Preparation for ethical decision-making is a critical aspect of character education, focusing on equipping students with the skills and frameworks necessary to navigate moral dilemmas effectively. This preparation involves developing students' abilities to evaluate complex situations, consider multiple perspectives, and make choices that align with ethical principles (Rest, 2016). A key component is teaching students about ethical theories and decision-making models. Understanding frameworks such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics helps students analyze situations from different ethical angles and make informed decisions (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2015).

Additionally, character education emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and reflection in ethical decision-making. Students are encouraged to reflect on their values, the potential impact of their decisions, and the consequences for themselves and others (Lickona, 2016). This reflective practice promotes a deeper understanding of ethical principles and how they apply to real-life scenarios. The development of empathy and moral reasoning is also essential, as it enables students to consider the feelings and perspectives of others when making decisions (Goleman, 2016). By integrating these elements into the educational process, character education prepares students to handle ethical challenges with integrity and responsibility, contributing to more ethical and thoughtful decision-making in various aspects of their lives.

### 3.3 Examination of Character Building in Nigeria

In Nigeria, character building faces several significant challenges. The state of character education in the country reflects broader socio-economic and systemic issues that impact its effectiveness

- a. Corruption and Ethical Erosion:** Corruption remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria, affecting various sectors, including education. The prevalence of corrupt practices undermines efforts to instill values of integrity and honesty among students (Ojo, 2022). The normalization of unethical behavior in public and private spheres presents a considerable barrier to effective character education. Corruption and ethical erosion pose significant challenges to societal integrity and governance, undermining trust in institutions and impeding social progress. Corruption, defined as the abuse of power for personal gain, erodes ethical standards and diminishes public confidence in governmental and organizational systems (Kpundeh, 2016). This issue is particularly critical in countries where institutional weaknesses and lack of transparency are prevalent. Ethical erosion, often a consequence of systemic corruption, refers to the gradual decline in moral values and ethical behavior within society. When corruption becomes entrenched, it normalizes unethical practices, making it difficult for individuals and institutions to uphold integrity and accountability (Miller & Waisbord, 2020). For instance, in Nigeria, pervasive corruption has led to widespread ethical erosion, impacting various sectors, including politics and education.

Efforts to combat these issues must focus on strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting transparency, and fostering a culture of accountability. Educational programs that emphasize ethics and integrity can play a vital role in reversing ethical erosion by instilling strong moral values in future generations. By addressing corruption and reinforcing ethical standards, societies can work towards rebuilding trust and fostering a more just and effective governance system.

- b. Educational System Constraints:** The Nigerian educational system constraints significantly impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, hindering the development of students and the implementation of progressive educational strategies.

These constraints often include inadequate resources, outdated curricula, and insufficient teacher training. One major constraint is the lack of financial resources, which affects the quality of infrastructure, learning materials, and technology available to students. Schools with limited budgets struggle to provide modern facilities and educational tools, leading to suboptimal learning environments (Ogunyemi & Adeyemi, 2019). This financial strain also impacts teacher salaries and professional development opportunities, further exacerbating the quality of education.

Another critical issue is the outdated curriculum, which may not align with current educational and industry standards. An inflexible curriculum can stifle innovation and fail to prepare students for modern challenges and opportunities (Bolarinwa & Olaniyan, 2021). Additionally, insufficient teacher training and support limit educators' ability to adopt new teaching methods and address diverse classroom needs effectively (Adams, 2020). Addressing these constraints requires targeted policy reforms and investments to modernize educational resources, update curricula, and enhance teacher training programs. Such measures are essential to improving educational outcomes and fostering a more equitable and effective learning environment.

- c. Cultural and Societal Influences:** Nigeria's cultural and societal influences play a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes and character development. These influences encompass traditional values, social norms, and cultural practices that impact students' attitudes towards learning, behavior, and ethical development. Cultural values deeply affect students' perceptions of education and their role within society. For instance, cultures that emphasize collective responsibility and respect for authority often influence students to prioritize community and family obligations over individual achievement (Miller & Waisbord, 2020). These values can both positively and negatively impact educational motivation and performance. Societal norms and practices also significantly shape educational experiences. Social expectations and peer influences can drive students' choices and behaviors, such as academic achievement or involvement in extracurricular activities (Ogunyemi & Adeyemi, 2019). Furthermore, societal issues such as inequality and discrimination can create barriers to educational access and equity, affecting students' opportunities and outcomes (Bolarinwa & Olaniyan, 2021). Addressing these cultural and societal influences involves integrating culturally responsive teaching methods and promoting inclusivity within educational settings. This approach helps to bridge gaps and ensure that diverse cultural backgrounds are respected and valued, ultimately enhancing students' educational experiences and fostering a more inclusive environment.
- d. Family and Community Influence:** Cultural and societal influences play a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes and character development. These influences encompass traditional values, social norms, and cultural practices that impact students' attitudes towards learning, behavior, and ethical development. Cultural values deeply affect students' perceptions of education and their role within society. For instance, cultures that emphasize collective responsibility and respect for authority often influence students to prioritize community and family obligations over individual achievement (Miller & Waisbord, 2020). These values can both positively and negatively impact educational motivation and performance. Societal norms and practices also significantly shape educational experiences. Social expectations and peer influences can drive students' choices and behaviors, such as academic achievement or involvement in extracurricular activities (Ogunyemi & Adeyemi, 2019). Furthermore, societal issues such as inequality and discrimination can create barriers to educational access and equity, affecting students' opportunities and outcomes (Bolarinwa & Olaniyan, 2021). Addressing these cultural and societal influences involves integrating culturally responsive teaching methods and promoting inclusivity within educational settings. This approach helps to bridge gaps and ensure that diverse cultural backgrounds are respected and valued, ultimately enhancing students' educational experiences and fostering a more inclusive environment.

## IV. Conclusion

In today's rapidly evolving and interconnected world, the significance of character or Moral education in shaping societal norms, fostering development and nurturing responsible citizenship cannot be over emphasized. The purpose of moral education as it concerns character development, social cohesion, ethical decision making, personal well-being, citizenship education conflict resolution and global citizenship is note-worthy and should be encouraged and promoted by individual in the society. Therefore, it is very apt to incorporate

character and Moral education emphasizing its purposes in the development of society and the implication to enhancing global atitudinal change for the betterment of humanity.

### Recommendations

1. Updating educational policies to integrate character education into the national curriculum is essential. This includes developing comprehensive moral education programs and training teachers to deliver them effectively. Incorporating character education into teacher training programs can ensure that educators are well-equipped to impart ethical values.
2. Encouraging ethical leadership at all levels of society is crucial. Leaders in various sectors should model values of integrity and accountability, setting a positive example for students and the broader community. Ethical leadership can help create an environment that supports character development.
3. Engaging families and communities in character education efforts can reinforce moral values outside the classroom. Community programs, workshops, and family-centered initiatives can support the development of ethical behavior and create a more supportive environment for students.
4. Tackling socio-economic disparities can improve the environment for character education. Addressing issues such as poverty and access to resources can help reduce barriers to effective character development and provide a more equitable foundation for all students.
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