

# Civic education: a panacea for moral decadence among secondary school students in Ede community, Osun State, Nigeria

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines civic education's potential as a panacea for moral decay among secondary school students in Ede community of Osun State, Nigeria. It looks at how civic education can give students the moral principles and direction they need to navigate daily life and make moral decisions. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology and gathers its data from secondary sources like books, academic journals, theses, and newspapers, among others. The results emphasis how common moral decadence affect students in secondary schools and how important it is to implement successful interventions of civic education. The paper also reveals that students who receive civic education are equipped with the knowledge and abilities needed to make ethical decisions because it instills values, virtues, and ethical concepts. The study concludes that effective civic education that would counteract moral decay needs the involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as schools, parents, teachers, and the community at large, to work together in an integrated manner.

#### **RESUMO**

Este estudo examina o potencial da educação cívica como panaceia para a decadência moral entre estudantes do ensino secundário na comunidade de Ede, no estado de Osun, na Nigéria. Analisa como a educação cívica pode dar aos alunos os princípios morais e a orientação de que necessitam para navegar na vida quotidiana e tomar decisões morais. O estudo adota metodologia de pesquisa qualitativa e reúne seus dados em fontes secundárias como livros, revistas acadêmicas, teses e jornais, entre outros. Os resultados enfatizam como a decadência moral comum afeta os alunos das escolas secundárias e como é importante implementar intervenções bem-sucedidas de educação cívica. O artigo também revela que os alunos que recebem educação cívica estão equipados com o conhecimento e as habilidades necessárias para tomar decisões éticas porque ela incute valores, virtudes e conceitos éticos. O estudo conclui que uma educação cívica eficaz que possa contrariar a decadência moral necessita do envolvimento das partes interessadas relevantes, tais como escolas, pais, professores e a comunidade em geral, para trabalharem em conjunto de forma integrada.

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## Introduction

Senior secondary school students in Ede community of Osun State are prone to moral decadence. The term "moral decadence" describes the deterioration of moral principles and norms in a community or among a particular population. It encompasses actions like deceit, corruption, disrespect for other people, and disdain for social mores. It denotes a break from moral principles and is frequently accompanied by a rise in immorality, corruption, unethical behaviour, and a lack of integrity on a personal level (Porteous, 2018). A person may exhibit moral decadence in a number of ways, including dishonesty, aggression, disdain for social norms, selfishness, corruption, and a lack of empathy. It frequently results in social issues like drug misuse, criminality, broken families, and the deterioration of social cohesiveness. It suggests a deterioration or loss of conventional moral values, leading to actions or viewpoints viewed as immoral, unethical, or detrimental to society (Willemse & Boon, 2019). Numerous secondary school students in Ede community have been seen to partake in social vices such as drug abuse, pre-marital sex, street fighting, stealing, and other wrongdoings. In the meantime, tackling moral decadence necessitates initiatives that support moral consciousness, moral conduct, and character development. By teaching responsible citizenship, moral reasoning, and the instillation of values, civic education can help combat these unlawful acts.

However, in order to address significant social concerns facing Nigerian youth, civil education was introduced to the secondary school curriculum. In Nigeria, civic education was made compulsory in order to combat moral decay among secondary school students. Its importance and efficacy in fostering moral rectitude, ethical principles, and responsible citizenship have been emphasised by earlier research (Jekayinfa, Mofoluwawo, & Oladiran, 2011; Okwenu & Anyacho, 2005).

Moreover, civic education imparts societal ideals. Value is an object's or thing's actual worth. Students are taught values like honesty, truthfulness, justice, responsibility, patriotism, etc. It is also just a simple personal measure of worth, such as how essential an individual deems particular objects, beliefs, principles, or ideals that people attach to things based on their sense of value. They should also understand the significance of value systems, including decision-making, and how they enable people to act in ways that are consistent with our values, such as choosing wisely and acting appropriately in public. According to Okwenu and Anyacho (2005), civic education is the kind of education people in the state receive to help them develop the values, ideas, habits, and attitudes that society holds dear and that will allow them to live as productive and helpful members of society. It has been observed that many secondary school students in Ede metropolitan area do not live according to the conclusions made by these authors.

According to Jekayinfa et al. (2011), civic education is a subject that makes people more capable and self-assured in their interactions with the outside world. They emphasised further

on how it addresses a broad range of problems, subjects, and laws that have consistent influence on people's lives and daily activities. The subject teaches students how to make the most of their surroundings. It also teaches students how to support others in advocating for their rights and beliefs. In Nigeria, civic education is a sort of education that tries to educate individuals about the country's political and democratic systems - men, women, children, and students alike. It helps individuals comprehend the nature of governance and its justifications.

Similarly, civic education is defined as an educational process that strives to improve people's knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for engaged and responsible citizenship, according to Hess and Torney-Purta (2019) and UNESCO (2015). It strives to prepare individuals to participate in civic and democratic practices, understand their rights and responsibilities, and engage in informed decision-making processes that contribute to the betterment of society.

Hahn and Torney-Purta (2015) note that civic education typically covers topics such as democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law, political systems, and community engagement. It aims to foster civic virtues such as tolerance, respect, empathy, and critical thinking. Through various methods like classroom instruction, experiential learning, and community involvement, civic education seeks to empower individuals to become active and engaged citizens.

## History of civic education in Nigeria

Since the history and origin of civic education in Nigeria are not specified, it can be challenging to trace the subject's history. According to Banks (2008), the study of civic education has its origins in prehistoric societies that placed a strong emphasis on moral behaviour and responsible citizenship. As democratic nations realised the importance of instilling democratic principles, civic virtues, and active citizenship in the educational system, the focus on civic education in contemporary times came to the fore. In Nigeria, civics was used to refer to the citizenship course that was part of the national school curriculum. For more than two decades, it was taught as a stand-alone subject until 2007, when the federal government introduced the Basic Curriculum of Education (BEC), a nine-year programme with civic education as a core component.

Nigeria was not a single entity in pre-colonial times; rather, it was a conglomeration of several ethnic groups, each with its own traditions, customs, cultures, norms, values, and ways of life in various regions. Nigeria had a traditional education system in place prior to the country's 1914 amalgamation under the leadership of Sir Frederick Lord Lugard, the then-Governor-General. This system consisted of an informal educational approach wherein various tribes dispersed throughout the nation were taught civic responsibility and effective citizenship skills. While the youth were instructed in popular and political involvement, the children were divided into age groups based on their social obligations.

In traditional Nigerian society, many parents aspired for their children to be useful and productive, as well as to receive some sort of training that would establish a foundation for leadership in their lives; this type of training allows the child to learn skills that would help him or her be accepted by the community, as well as familiarise and assimilate the values that would enable the child to perform well in that community.

According to Ukeje (2008), civic education was first taught in Nigerian secondary schools during the post-independence period. He further states that the topic became well-known in the 1970s and 1980s because young Nigerians needed to be encouraged to be responsible citizens and to uphold societal cohesiveness and ethical standards. However, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) introduced the new civic education curriculum in 2009, designed for use at the senior secondary school level of the country's educational system. In order for this curriculum innovation to reflect the quality and relevance that Nigerian curriculum development demands, effective classroom teaching strategies are required.

# The needs for civic education in Nigeria

Some of the needs for civic education were outlined below:

In Nigeria, civic education is essential in promoting active citizenship. It assists people in comprehending their duties, rights, and obligations as citizens, enabling them to actively engage in democratic processes and make contributions to the advancement of their local communities and the country as a whole (Ekechi, 2017).

Civic education is very imperative to Nigeria's democracy's growth and maintenance. It gives people information and comprehension of democratic procedures, ideals, and principles, empowering them to hold elected officials responsible, participate meaningfully in politics, and make well-informed decisions (Balami & Mohammed, 2019). Civic education therefore encourages democracy.

Civic education is essential in encouraging citizens to act ethically. In order to create a morally upright society and fight corruption and moral decay, it instills principles like honesty, integrity, respect for diversity, and social responsibility (Omorogiuwa, 2018). It should be noted here that civic education strengthens ethical behaviour.

Nigeria as a nation with a wide range of racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, benefits from civic education in promoting national unity and identity. Civic education fosters social cohesiveness, mutual respect, and a feeling of shared citizenship by encouraging tolerance, understanding, and respect for diversity (Okolocha, Oladejo, & Tomola, 2014).

Youth in Nigeria are given the information, abilities, and attitudes needed to take on successful leadership and decision-making roles through civic education. It equips children to participate in public life, grow into responsible adults, and make constructive contributions to the advancement of both their local communities and the country.

On the other hand, the goals of civic education in senior secondary schools are as follows, according to Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2009):

i. fosters an awareness of the interrelationships between individuals, the government, and society;

ii. emphasise the government's structure, functions, and responsibilities to the people and vice versa;

iii. improve the teaching and learning of emerging issues; and

iv. cultivate in students their duties and obligations to society.

Therefore, Yusuf and Balogun (2019) point out that civic education in Nigeria is better defined as teaching about the differences between people and within society, as well as the history and democratic political system, the rights and responsibilities of persons at all levels. In summary, all the aforementioned points are vital for combating moral decadence among secondary school students in Ede community, and Nigeria at large.

# Challenges in teaching civic education in Nigeria's secondary schools

The teaching of civic education is facing a lot of challenges; some of them were discussed below:

One of the challenges faced in teaching and learning of civic education in Nigeria is the inadequate training and qualifications of teachers. In the words of Ojedele (2019), many teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach civic education topics and engage students in active citizenship learning.

The civic education curriculum and instructional materials used in Nigerian secondary schools seems to be outdated and not aligned with current societal challenges and realities. This hinders students' understanding of contemporary civic issues and effective citizenship engagement (Nwosu, 2012).

Inadequate time allotted to civic education within the school timetable is another challenge. Wahab (2015) argues that limited time allocation limits the depth of coverage of civic education topics and limits opportunities for active learning experiences like debates, simulations, and community engagement.

The lack of necessary instructional resources, including textbooks, teaching aids, and technology, poses a challenge to teaching civic education effectively. The limited availability of resources hampers teachers' ability to engage students actively and expose them to diverse civic learning experiences (Oladesu, 2012).

Some students may lack interest in or perceive civic education as unrelated to their immediate concerns. This lack of student engagement can hinder the effective teaching and learning of civic education and limit its impact on promoting active citizenship.

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# Moral decadence versus civic education

Civic education is a vital tool in promoting good morals, social values, a sense of responsibility, and civic engagement among students. It provides a platform for students to learn about their rights, responsibilities, and obligations as citizens and how they can contribute positively to their community's growth and development. In addition, civic education equips students with the necessary skills to be active participants in the democratic process, promote good governance, and hold their leaders accountable. Incorporating civic education into the curriculum of secondary schools in Ede community will help create awareness about the importance of good morals and societal values. It will also promote the development of critical thinking, analytical, and problem-solving skills in the students. With the right knowledge, skills, and values, students can make informed decisions, resist negative peer pressure, and become ambassadors of positive change. Civic education can also play a critical role in reducing the level of moral decadence among students by exposing them to the dangers of drug abuse, premarital sex, and other vices. It teaches them about the consequences of these actions and how indulging in them affects their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

Moral decadence involves a decline in morality within a society. It is often characterised by a lack of ethics, courtesy, respect, and responsibility. A study by Adinya and Gwarzo (2018) suggests that moral decadence is a growing concern in Nigeria, with negative consequences for society. The authors argue that the decline in values such as honesty, accountability, and respect for authority is contributing to problems such as corruption, violence, and social unrest. Moral decadence is usually the result of the erosion of social values and traditional beliefs. This can be seen in behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuity, violence, dishonesty, and corruption.

Within this framework, civic education is frequently viewed as a prophylactic against moral decay. According to Adeyemi and Ojo (2015), moral decadence is a major problem in African nations that influences people's views about their obligations to their families, communities, and places of employment. The foundation of civic education is the idea that every person has a moral and social obligation to improve their community. The goal of civic education is to equip people with the attitudes, abilities, and information needed to be engaged and informed citizens. Civic education has been proven to positively affect young people's engagement in civic activities, including voting, volunteering, and political participation, according to a study by Kahne, Middaugh, and Allen (2014). Similarly, Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, and Alisat (2009) discovered that among Canadian college students, civic education was linked to higher levels of positive views towards social justice, public service, and community involvement.

There is a complicated link between civic education and moral degradation. One could argue that moral decay is a result of inadequate civic education. People are more likely to act in ways that promote moral decline if they are not taught the values and concepts required to be responsible citizens. However, civic education can also be viewed as a countermeasure to moral decay. Civic education has the power to inspire positive change and encourage the restoration of social values by arming people with the knowledge and skills necessary to be informed citizens.

Furthermore, there is a tight relationship between civic education and moral decadence, with one influencing the other. Therefore, it is critical that civic education be given top priority in educational institutions in order to stop moral decay and encourage moral behaviour among citizens.

# **Theoretical framework**

This study adopts a social cognitive theory (SCT), which was developed by Albert Bandura. According to the theory, learning happens through social interactions and observation, which leads to the development of cognitive structures in people that influence their behaviour and attitudes towards particular actions or behaviours (Bandura, 1986). It should be noted that SCT sheds light on how individuals pick up and internalise moral values, principles, and attitudes towards civic duty, it is relevant to this study. Its underlying premise is that people pick up moral reasoning, judgement, and decision-making skills through perceptual and cognitive representations of role models, social cues, and feedback mechanisms. Therefore, the application of SCT in civic education can help identify the key factors that contribute to moral decay, such as social deviance, peer pressure, a lack of accountability, and social inequality.

Some of the key assumptions and applications of SCT in civic education include:

1. Observational learning: This is the process by which individuals acquire new behaviours or attitudes by watching others perform them. In the context of civic education, students can learn from role models who demonstrate good citizenship, leadership, social responsibility, and ethical behaviour. Teachers can also use videos, case studies, and other instructional materials that showcase positive civic values and practices.

2. Self-regulation: This refers to the ability of individuals to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It plays a critical role in civic education because students need to develop the self-discipline, self-efficacy, and self-motivation to engage in civic activities such as voting, volunteering, and participating in community events.

3. Moral disengagement: This is the process by which individuals rationalise or justify immoral behaviour by dehumanising their victims, blaming others, or denying their responsibility. In civic education, students need to be taught about the harmful effects of moral disengagement and how to recognise and resist it in themselves and others.

4. Outcome expectations: This refers to the anticipated consequences of a behaviour or action. In civic education, students need to develop positive outcome expectations, such as the belief that their actions can make a difference, that they have a

responsibility to contribute to the community, and that they will be recognised and rewarded for their efforts (Kaplan & Losel, 2013; Zanakis & Mavrovouniotis, 2009).

In a nutshell, social cognitive theory (SCT) provides a relevant theoretical framework for exploring the role of civic education in addressing moral decadence in Ede metropolis, Osun State. By emphasising the importance of observational learning, self-regulation, moral disengagement, and outcome expectations, SCT can inform the design and implementation of civic education programmes that promote positive civic values, attitudes, and behaviours.

## Methods

The method used to collect the data for this study was qualitative research. Qualitative research, according to Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger (2020), entails gathering and analysing non-numerical data via text, audio, or video in order to comprehend ideas, opinions, or experiences. Detailed understanding of an issue or fresh research ideas can be obtained through qualitative research. In the social sciences and humanities, qualitative research is frequently employed. A thorough examination of civic education as a panacea for moral decadence among secondary school students in Ede community of Osun State, Nigeria, was made possible by the documentary method of data collection, which also allows for a deep comprehension of novel concepts. Finding any knowledge gaps in the literature was made easier by the documentary study. As a result, secondary sources like books, academic journals, theses, and newspapers, among others were used in the study.

#### A brief empirical review

Okoye and Owoeye (2018) Okoye and Owoeye (2018) conducted a study on how civic education affects Nigerian secondary school students' moral growth. The study's findings reveal that students' moral reasoning, behaviour, and decision-making were all positively impacted by a well-designed civic education curriculum. The researchers came to the conclusion that moral decay was greatly reduced as a result of civic education instruction.

Adegoke (2016) conducted an empirical study to investigate the impact of civic education on the civic knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of secondary school students in Nigeria. According to the results, pupils who got civic education showed greater civic engagement and knowledge than those who did not. It was determined that civic education significantly improved pupils' comprehension of moral concepts, democratic ideals, and their dedication to social duties.

According to Okereke and Oti (2001), theoretical and phenomenal variables are incorporated into curricula and communicated to youth in civic education so they can grow up to be the kind of citizens the country wants. However, Berlak (1968) contends that civic education should be based on experimental and virtual assumptions about what is and will be rather than on ideas of what is attractive. It seems that more focus is placed on the pressing problems facing a nation-state, regardless of the method used to prepare the civic education curriculum. According to Awosolu (1993), civic education is the kind of education that helps people in multiple societies become more peaceful and purposeful. In a pluralistic culture such as Nigeria, civic education plays a crucial role in fostering an attitude towards civic education. In their 2019 study, Dike and Uduak investigate how civic education helps Nigerian secondary school pupils develop moral principles. Their research shows that moral development and ethical behaviour are positively impacted by good civic education training.

Similar to this, Okorie (2017) conducts a research on the connection between civic education and the battle against corruption in Nigeria. The study discovered that a thorough civic education curriculum that included anti-corruption instruction considerably lowered secondary school pupils' propensity for corruption.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, moral decline among Ede secondary school students is a worrying problem that has to be addressed right away. It appears from the findings of previous work that civic education is a workable way to deal with this issue. Students who receive civic education are equipped with the knowledge and abilities needed to make ethical decisions because it instills values, virtues, and ethical concepts. Additionally, it encourages citizenship, giving students the tools, they need to make a positive impact on their communities. The study concludes that effective civic education that would counteract moral decay needs the involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as schools, parents, teachers, and the community at large, to work together in an integrated manner.

# Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, some recommendations were proffered, it is hoped that implementing these recommendations, secondary schools in Ede community can harness the transformative power of civic education to combat moral decadence and create an environment where students uphold high moral standards and contribute positively to society. The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

Integration of Civic Education in the Curriculum: The educational authorities should ensure that civic education is given proper emphasis in the curriculum. It should be integrated across various subjects, providing consistent and comprehensive moral education to students.

Holistic Approach to Moral Education: Civic education should not be limited to classroom instruction alone. It should encompass co-curricular activities, community service, and experiential learning to foster practical understanding and application of ethical values.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: Teachers should receive adequate training and professional development in civic education. This would enhance their capacity to effectively deliver civic education content and engage students in meaningful discussions and activities. Provision of Adequate Resources: The provision of necessary instructional resources, including textbooks, teaching aids, and technology, is very important in the teaching-learning process of civic education. If these resources are provided, the curriculum will be effectively implemented, which will bring about the desired goals.

Collaboration among Stakeholders: There should be a strong partnership between schools, parents, teachers, and the community. Regular dialogues, workshops, and outreach programmes should be organised to promote collective efforts to address moral decadence and foster a culture of ethics and responsibility.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of civic education programmes should be conducted to assess their effectiveness and make necessary improvements. This would ensure that the desired outcomes of moral character development are achieved.

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