

MORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION AS A DETERMINANT OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

by

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Abstract

The study examined moral and civic education as a determinant of national security in Nigeria: a case study of public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study had two objectives, with corresponding research questions and null hypotheses. The population of the study comprised 5,833 teachers in 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample size of 583 teachers, representing 10% of the total population, was drawn for the study, and a stratified random sampling technique was adopted. The instrument, which was a questionnaire of two sets, was titled: Moral and Civic Education Assessment Scale (MCEAS) and National Security Assessment Scale (NSAS). The instrument was validated, and reliability coefficients of 0.83 and 0.85 for both MCEAS and NSAS, respectively, were obtained using Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics. The two research questions were answered using simple linear regression, while hypotheses were tested using t-test associated with simple linear regression with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Findings from the study revealed that students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict national security to a low extent by 46%, while moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts the promotion of national security values among students to a high extent by 51%. Based on the findings, it was concluded that while students' awareness of moral and civic responsibilities predicts national security to a low extent, the actual teaching of moral and civic education significantly promotes national

security values among students in Rivers State. This indicates that the strength of civic education lies more in its structured delivery than in mere awareness. Consequently, it was recommended that government and school authorities should enhance the moral and civic education curriculum by integrating more experiential and participatory learning approaches, such as debates, community service, and simulations, to help students internalise and apply national security values in real-life situations.

Keywords: Moral and Civic Education, National Security, Secondary School

Introduction

National security is a critical prerequisite for the socio-economic growth, political stability, and overall development of any nation. In Nigeria, the increasing rate of insecurity characterised by terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, corruption, cybercrime, religious intolerance, and ethnic conflict has raised fundamental questions about the values, attitudes, and sense of civic responsibility embedded within the society. The current insecurity challenges suggest a moral and civic deficiency among many citizens, especially the youth. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of Nigeria's educational system in instilling moral rectitude and civic consciousness (Yusuf & Olanrewaju, 2020).

Moral and civic education in schools refers to the systematic instruction aimed at instilling ethical values, social norms, and civic responsibilities in learners to promote good character and responsible citizenship. Moral education focuses on developing students' sense of right and wrong, honesty, empathy, respect, and integrity, while civic education equips them with knowledge of their rights, duties, democratic principles, and national identity. Together, these educational components prepare students to actively participate in nation-building, respect the rule of law, and contribute to societal peace and stability. According to Okafor and Ibrahim (2022), moral and civic education is essential in shaping socially responsible individuals who uphold democratic ideals and national values. It serves as a preventive strategy against societal ills such as corruption, violence, and extremism by embedding ethical consciousness and civic competence from an early age.

Moral and civic education aims to develop learners' character, sense of responsibility, ethical behaviour, and commitment to the public good. It prepares citizens who are not only aware of their rights but are also conscious of their duties towards the nation. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) recognises the importance of inculcating national consciousness, values, and patriotism in learners as essential components of basic and secondary education in Nigeria. Despite this policy recognition, there is a noticeable disconnect between the intended objectives and actual outcomes of moral and civic instruction in schools. The prevalence of anti-social behaviours, political violence, youth restiveness, and disregard for the rule of law suggest that moral and civic education is either inadequately implemented or ineffectively transmitted in the Nigerian school system.

Ugwuegbu and Edeh (2022); Yusuf and Olanrewaju (2020) argue that a well-structured and effectively delivered moral and civic education curriculum can serve as a veritable tool for nation-building and the promotion of peace and security. Through the development of ethical reasoning, empathy, respect for diversity, and civic engagement, learners can internalise values that promote social harmony, lawful conduct, and collective responsibility. This, in turn, contributes to reducing tendencies toward criminality and insurgency, particularly among young people who form a significant proportion of Nigeria's population. Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2021), and Ogunyemi (2020) assert that the inclusion of moral and civic education in the basic education curriculum has positively influenced students' awareness of societal values, responsibilities, and national consciousness. They argue that where properly taught, these subjects promote discipline, patriotism, and social cohesion. Moreover, research has shown that when students are exposed to civic education that emphasises active participation, respect for human rights, environmental awareness, and good governance, they are more likely to grow into citizens who uphold peace, contribute to democratic processes, and reject extremist ideologies (Adebayo & Adedeji, 2021).

However, other scholars like Akinbote and Okebukola (2022), and Nwaubani and Eze (2021) contend that the delivery remains largely ineffective due to inadequate teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and lack of proper monitoring, leading to minimal impact on students' moral development and civic engagement. Thus, while the curriculum exists, its implementation varies significantly, limiting its overall effectiveness in shaping responsible citizens. In addition, moral and civic education in Nigeria is often relegated in importance, poorly funded, and taught in abstract terms with little or no connection to real-life situations. This undermines its effectiveness and limits its potential of students' awareness of their moral and civic duties and responsibilities to influence their behaviours positively for national security. Students' awareness of moral and civic duties and responsibilities refers to their understanding and internalisation of societal values, legal obligations, national identity, and ethical behaviour expected of responsible citizens (Okafor & Nwogu, 2022). When students are well-informed, they are more likely to promote peace, obey laws, and actively participate in democratic processes, thereby fostering national security (Adewale, 2023). Conversely, low awareness often leads to social vices such as cultism, examination malpractice, and political apathy, which threaten national stability (Ibrahim & Eze, 2021). Thus, the level of students' civic consciousness significantly determines whether they become agents of national development or instruments of insecurity. Moral and civic education, therefore, plays a crucial preventive role in shaping attitudes that support national security in Nigeria.

National security refers to the protection of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the safety of its citizens from both internal and external threats. It encompasses not only military defence but also political stability, economic resilience, social cohesion, and the preservation of national values and institutions. In contemporary discourse, national security has evolved to include non-traditional dimensions such as cybersecurity, environmental safety, food security, and education, recognising that the wellbeing and informed engagement of citizens are crucial to national stability. According to Abiodun and Eze (2021), national security is the foundation

upon which sustainable development and democratic governance are built, as it ensures an environment free from fear and conducive to progress. In the Nigerian context, national security also implies addressing issues of corruption, terrorism, ethnic tensions, and youth restiveness through both strategic defence and value re-orientation initiatives. The National Security Strategy of Nigeria (2020) affirms that national security involves safeguarding the welfare and future of Nigerians by ensuring peace, justice, and inclusive governance.

The growing level of insecurity in Nigeria therefore, calls for a re-evaluation of educational approaches to national development and security. While military and policing efforts remain important in combating security threats, they must be complemented by preventive, long-term measures such as value re-orientation through moral and civic education. Education that fosters character formation, national identity, tolerance, and rule of law is a critical soft-power strategy in addressing the root causes of insecurity. In this light, moral and civic education should not be seen as peripheral, but as a central pillar of Nigeria's security architecture (Abiodun & Eze, 2021). Addressing Nigeria's security challenges requires a holistic approach that incorporates education for values and civic competence. As Akinlayo and Ogunlade (2023) observe, education remains the most powerful instrument for social transformation and the promotion of peace. Therefore, strengthening moral and civic education in Nigerian schools is not only a pedagogical necessity but also a strategic imperative for national security and sustainable development.

Consequently, it is against this background that the role of moral and civic education in schools as a determinant of national security becomes a subject of growing academic interest and national discourse. Hence, this study seeks to examine the extent to which moral and civic education serves as a determinant of national security in Nigeria: a case study of public secondary schools in Rivers State.

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced persistent threats to its national security, ranging from youth restiveness and political violence to terrorism, cultism, and social disorder. Scholars and policymakers increasingly identify moral and civic education as a vital tool for shaping responsible citizens and fostering national cohesion. However, despite the inclusion of Moral and Civic Education in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, particularly in public schools in Rivers State, there are growing concerns about the actual depth and quality of its delivery. The extent to which this subject is taught effectively, with appropriate content, pedagogy, and teacher competence, remains questionable. Additionally, there is limited empirical understanding of the degree to which students comprehend and internalise their civic responsibilities and moral obligations as citizens. This gap raises concerns about whether these educational efforts are sufficient to instill national values, promote responsible conduct, and contribute meaningfully to national security. Thus, the problem this study addresses is whether the delivery of moral and civic education in public secondary schools in Rivers State, and the level of students' awareness of their moral and civic duties and responsibilities, significantly determine national security outcomes in the region and, by extension, Nigeria.

The aim of the study was to examine moral and civic education as a determinant of national security in Nigeria: a case study of public secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study sought to:

- i. ascertain the extent to which students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict national security.
- ii. determine the extent to which moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts the promotion of national security values among students.

The following research questions guided the study.

3. To what extent does students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict national security?
4. To what extent does moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict the promotion of national security values among students?

The following hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance, guided the study.

- Students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predict national security.
- Moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predicts the promotion of national security values among students.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational design to determine the extent to which the independent variable (Moral and Civic Education) predicts the dependent variable (National Security). The population consisted of 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, with a total of 5,833 teachers (2,844 males and 2,989 females). A sample size of 583 teachers, representing 10% of the population, was selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring all members had an equal chance of being chosen. The research instrument was a questionnaire with two sets, titled: Moral and Civic Education Assessment Scale (MCEAS) and National Security Assessment Scale (NSAS). The questionnaire had two sections: Section A, which collected demographic information, and Section B, which gathered data on EAAS and TPAS. The instrument used a four-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2), and Very Low Extent (VLE) which was validated by two experts. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of the instruments, with coefficients of 0.83 for NSAS and 0.85 for MCEAS. The research questions were addressed using simple regression analysis, while a t-test associated with simple regression was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

Results and Analysis

Research Question 1: To what extent does students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict national security?

Table 1: Simple Regression on the Extent Students' Moral and Civic Education Responsibilities Awareness in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State Predict National Security

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RExtent Prediction	ofDecision
1	.647 ^a	.463	.461	46.3%	Low Extent

Decision Rule: 100%- 75% (Very High Extent), 74% - 50% (High Extent), 49%-25% (Low Extent) and 0% - 24% (Very Low Extent)

Table 1 revealed that the regression (r) and regression square (r²) coefficients are .647 and .463, respectively, while the adjusted r square is .561. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 46.3% (.463×100). By implication, the result shows that students' moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State predict national security to a low extent by 46%.

Research Question 2: To what extent does moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts the promotion of national security values among students?

Table 2: Simple Regression on the Extent Moral and Civic Education Taught in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State Predicts the Promotion of National Security Values among Students

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RExtent Prediction	ofDecision
1	.742 ^a	.511	.509	51.1%	High extent

Decision Rule: 100%- 75% (Very High Extent), 74% - 50% (High Extent), 49%-25% (Low Extent) and 0% - 24% (Very Low Extent)

Table 2 revealed that the regression (r) and regression square (r²) coefficients are .742 and .511, respectively, while the adjusted r square is .509. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 51.1% (.511×100). By implication, the result reveals that moral and civic

education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts the promotion of national security values among students to a high extent by 51%.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Students’ moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predict national security.

Table 3: t-test Associated with Simple Regression on the Extent Students’ Moral and Civic Education Responsibilities Awareness in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers Significantly Predict National Security

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	.832	.097		11.872	.000		
1 Moral and Civic Education Responsibilities Awareness	.167	.035	.273	7.125	.076	0.05	Ho ₁ Accepted

a. Dependent Variable: National Security

Table 4 revealed that standard beta value and t-test are .273 and 7.125. The p-value of .076 is higher than the level of significance of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, students’ moral and civic education responsibilities awareness in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predict national security.

Hypothesis 2: Moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predicts the promotion of national security values among students.

Table 4: t-test Associated with Simple Regression on the Moral and Civic Education Taught in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State Significantly Predicts the Promotion of National Security Values among Students

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize d Coefficients	t	p-value	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	1.561	.095		12.256	.000		
1	Moral and Civic Education Taught in School	.076	.065	.267	3.451	.002	0.05 Ho ₂ Rejected

a. Dependent Variable: National Security

Table 4 revealed that standard beta value and t-test are .267 and 3.451. The p-value of .002 is less than the level of significance of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. By implication, moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State significantly predicts the promotion of national security values among students.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding revealed that students' awareness of moral and civic education responsibilities in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts national security to a low extent, by 46%. Additionally, a corresponding hypothesis tested establishes that students' awareness of their moral and civic education responsibilities in public secondary schools in Rivers State does not significantly predict national security. These findings are in line with Ibrahim and Eze (2021) and Akinbote and Okebukola (2022), who in their studies observed that students' awareness of moral and civic education responsibilities in school promotes national security to a low extent. However, the findings contradicted Adewale (2023), Okafor and Nwogu (2022), and Nwaubani and Eze (2021), whose studies revealed that students' awareness of moral and civic education responsibilities in school to a high extent promotes national security to a low extent. A possible explanation of these findings may be due to the gap between awareness and practical application of moral and civic values among students. Although they are taught civic responsibilities, limited opportunities for civic engagement and weak societal reinforcement hinder behavioural change. As a result, their awareness has minimal influence on national

security outcomes. This implies that merely teaching moral and civic education is insufficient to strengthen national security. There is a need for enhanced practical engagement and value internalisation to translate awareness into responsible citizenship.

The second finding showed that moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State predicts the promotion of national security values among students to a high extent by 51%. Also, a corresponding hypothesis tested establishes that moral and civic education taught in public secondary schools in Rivers State significantly predicts the promotion of national security values among students. These findings are in agreement with Ugwuegbu and Edeh (2022), Adebayo and Adedeji (2021), Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2021), Yusuf and Olanrewaju (2020), and Ogunyemi (2020) who in their studies assert that the moral and civic education taught in schools highly influence the promotion of national security values among students. This finding suggests that the moral and civic education curriculum in public secondary schools is effectively designed and delivered to instill national security values in students. The content likely emphasises patriotism, lawfulness, and peaceful coexistence, which resonate with learners. Moreover, teachers may be reinforcing these values through relatable teaching methods and real-life examples, enhancing students' understanding and commitment. This implies that moral and civic education is a vital tool for fostering national security consciousness among students. It highlights the importance of strengthening and consistently implementing the curriculum to sustain positive behavioural outcomes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that while students' awareness of moral and civic responsibilities predicts national security to a low extent, the actual teaching of moral and civic education significantly promotes national security values among students in Rivers State. This indicates that the strength of civic education lies more in its structured delivery than in mere awareness. Therefore, sustained curriculum implementation and practical engagement are essential for fostering responsible citizenship and enhancing national security.

Recommendations

The following were recommended based on the findings and conclusions of the study:

1. The government and school authorities should enhance the moral and civic education curriculum by integrating more experiential and participatory learning approaches, such as debates, community service, and simulations, to help students internalise and apply national security values in real-life situations.
2. Teachers should be trained and supported to adopt value-driven teaching methods that go beyond theory, ensuring that moral and civic education not only raises awareness but also fosters active citizenship and a deep sense of responsibility towards national security.

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