

Influence of National Ethics on Character Building Among Social Studies Undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14750790>

To cite:

Olokooba, I. N., & Lebari, M. (2025). Influence of national ethics on character building among social studies undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. *Kontagora International Journal of Educational Research (KIJER)*, 2(1), 137–150.

Abstract

This study examined influence of national ethics on character building among Social Studies undergraduates in Kwara State. The specific objectives of the study were to investigate core values, cultural norms and ethical principles embedded within national ethics and how they shape the character building of Social Studies undergraduates. A questionnaire was used to obtained relevant information. The instrument was validated by three experts in the Department of Social Sciences Education. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 social studies undergraduates. Three research questions were answered. Descriptive statistics was adopted. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to determine the reliability of the instrument through test-re-test method. The findings of the study revealed that the paramount core values embedded within national ethics that influenced the character building and shaped social studies undergraduates were patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation. Cultural norms embedded that shaped the character building of social studies undergraduates were social hierarchy, social etiquettes and dress codes. Ethical principles impacted the character building in social studies undergraduates were social justice, fairness and respect to others. Therefore, the study recommended that patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation should be given more attention in the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

Key-word: National ethics, Character building, Social Studies undergraduates, Ethical principles

Introduction

Character building is the process of developing and strengthening personal qualities that are valued and contribute to a person's sense of identity and purpose. These qualities may include honesty, integrity, responsibility, empathy, kindness, respect, self-control, resilience, and perseverance, among others. Character building can take place through a variety of experiences and activities, including education, personal relationships, and participation in community service or other volunteer works. It may involve setting and working towards personal goals, reflecting on one's values and beliefs, and making choices that align with those values. Building strong character can be an ongoing process throughout a person's life and can help them become a better person and make positive contributions to their community and the world.

Character building is the intentional process of cultivating and developing positive traits, virtues, and ethical values in individuals. It involves shaping one's moral, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions to foster personal growth, ethical behavior, and responsible citizenship. Character building aims to instill qualities such as integrity, honesty, empathy, resilience, and compassion and equipping individuals with the skills and mindset to navigate life challenges, make ethical decisions, and contribute positively to society. This process often involves self-reflection, guided learning experiences, role modeling, and the reinforcement of desired behaviors and attitudes. Ultimately, character building seeks to nurture individuals of strong moral character, capable of leading fulfilling lives and making meaningful contributions to their communities (Akande, 2023).

National ethics are the moral principles, values, and standards that are collectively endorsed and upheld within a nation or society. These ethical standards typically reflect the cultural, historical, and ideological foundations of the nation and serve as guiding principles for individual behavior, social interactions, and governance. National ethics encompass a wide range of beliefs and norms related to justice, equality, freedom, responsibility, and the common good. National ethics are often articulated and reinforced through official channels such as constitutions, laws, government policies, and cultural symbols. They may also be expressed through rituals, ceremonies, and national narratives that reinforce shared values and identity. National ethics play a crucial role in shaping societal norms, attitudes, and behaviors, influencing various aspects of public and private life, including education, politics,

economics, and social relations (Galston, 2018). The ethics provide a framework for collective moral conduct, which varies significantly across different nations and cultures, reflecting diverse historical experiences, cultural traditions, and societal priorities. Despite this diversity, national ethics serve as a unifying force, promoting social cohesion, civic responsibility, and a sense of belonging among citizens. They contribute to the formation of national identity and solidarity, fostering a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the welfare of the nation and its members.

National ethics represent the moral foundation of a nation, encompassing the values, principles, and norms that guide individual and collective behavior, shape social institutions, and define the character of the society as a whole. The Nigerian education system has a significant role in shaping the character of young learners, particularly in instilling national ethics and promoting active citizenship. Social Studies, as a core subject in the Nigerian curriculum, is designed to promote civic competence, social responsibility, and cultural awareness. This subject aims to develop informed, responsible, and active citizens who can contribute positively to the society. In Kwara State, the education system has been subjected to various reforms and initiatives aimed to enhance the quality of education and promoting national consciousness among learners. The implementation of the Nigerian Civic Education Curriculum is a significant step towards achieving this goal. This curriculum focuses on instilling socio-political culture, loyalty to collective interests, and participation in state matters as essential aspects of effective citizenship (Idowu, 2022). The importance of character building in the Nigerian context cannot be overemphasized. With the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups, the education system plays a crucial role in fostering national unity, cohesion, and social harmony. By instilling national ethics and promoting active citizenship, the education system can nurture responsible and informed citizens who can contribute positively to the society and uphold the values and principles essential for national development and cohesion.

Despite the recognition of character education's significance, empirical research on the influence of national ethics on character building among social studies undergraduates in Kwara State remains scarce. Understanding how national ethics intersect with character development in this context is essential for informing educational policies and practices tailored to the region's unique socio-cultural dynamics (Akande, 2023). By investigating students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding

national ethics, this study sought to shed light on the role of education in fostering ethical citizenship and social responsibility among undergraduates in University of Ilorin, Kwara State and also contributes to the shaping and fostering of national unity and cohesion in Nigeria. Social studies education is a cornerstone in the cultivation of character and values among students. It serves as a foundational platform, rooted in the conviction that well-informed and engaged citizens are pivotal for democratic governance and societal advancement. Drawing on an array of disciplines including history, geography, civics, economics, and sociology, social studies curricula offer students opportunities to delve into historical events, cultural perspectives, and contemporary social issues, laying the groundwork for ethical decision-making, empathy, and civic responsibility (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Research underscores the significance of high-quality social studies instruction in fostering civic knowledge and engagement. Students exposed to robust social studies programs demonstrate a deeper understanding of democratic principles, political institutions, and civic rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, engagement in civics-oriented extracurricular activities correlates with heightened levels of civic participation and community involvement, amplifying students' sense of efficacy and empowerment (Galston, 2018).

Ethical reasoning and moral development are central tenets of social studies education. By exploring historical events, literary works, and case studies, students confront ethical dilemmas and perspectives, nurturing their moral reasoning skills and ethical consciousness. Integrating moral exemplars and role models into instruction serves to inspire students to uphold integrity and compassion in their actions (Ohanyere, 2023). In an era of globalization, social studies education assumes a pivotal role in fostering cultural understanding and global citizenship. By immersing students in diverse cultural perspectives, historical narratives, and global issues, it cultivates empathy, respect for cultural diversity, and awareness of global interdependence. Incorporating global perspectives enriches students' cross-cultural competence, global awareness, and commitment to global citizenship (Cai, 2016). Popular participation emphasizes active engagement in civic life and democratic processes. Through this value, students are encouraged to take part in governance, volunteerism, and community service, thus fostering a culture of active citizenship (Ohanyere, 2023). This aligns with Westheimer and Kahne's

(2004) framework for civic education, which prioritizes democratic participation as a critical outcome of education.

Critical thinking and media literacy skills are honed through social studies education. By scrutinizing historical sources, media representations, and contemporary events, students learn to discern bias and propaganda, fostering critical engagement with information. Incorporating media literacy activities and digital citizenship projects equips students to navigate the digital landscape responsibly as discerning consumers and producers of media. Democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, and human rights are fundamental to social studies education. Through examination of historical struggles for social justice and analysis of contemporary social movements, students grasp the significance of democratic principles and active civic participation. Inclusive representations of history and society, incorporating diverse perspectives and marginalized voices, reinforce democratic ideals and foster a deeper understanding of societal dynamics. Community engagement and service-learning initiatives further bolster character development through social studies education. By bridging classroom learning with real-world experiences, service-learning projects empower students to address community needs and effect positive change.

Participation in meaningful civic endeavors nurtures a sense of agency and empathy, instilling in students a commitment to civic responsibility and community welfare (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Research has shown that social studies integrated character education programs can have a positive impact on both values and academic performance. These programs aim to develop character through social studies, which is achieved through various factors, including internal support from students, teachers, and principals, and external support from parents. Social studies classes are directly related to character education, and the purpose of social science learning is to develop the potential of students to adapt to the environment, be sensitive to problems that arise in the community, and overcome both the burdens themselves. It is important to note that the impact of social studies education on character building extends beyond the individual level to the societal level. By instilling values such as respect, tolerance, and civic responsibility in students, social studies education contributes to the development of a more cohesive and harmonious society. Additionally, the skills and knowledge acquired through social studies education empower individuals to actively engage in civic life, participate in democratic

processes, and contribute to the overall well-being of their communities. This holistic approach to character building through social studies education not only benefits individuals but also has the potential to foster positive social change and national development.

The creation of a caring and supportive school climate is another crucial strategy for enhancing character education through national ethics integration. A character education requires a foundation of ethics and the development of a virtuous, good' life as a worthy educational endeavor. This can be achieved through the implementation of initiatives such as Caring School Communities and Positive Youth Development programs, as discussed by Ohanyere, (2023). These approaches emphasize the importance of fostering a sense of belonging, safety, and support within the school environment, which can facilitate the internalization of national ethical values by student. Another strategy that can be employed is integrating character education into the curriculum. The seamless integration of character education into the broader curriculum is a key strategy for enhancing its impact. Character education should not be treated as a standalone subject but rather be infused into academic instruction into some or all subjects. This approach allows for the reinforcement of national ethical values across different disciplines, ensuring that students encounter these principles in a variety of contexts. By embedding character education within the core curriculum, educators can create opportunities for students to apply and reflect on these values in real-world situations. Teacher preparation and professional development are critical factors in ensuring effective integration of national ethics into character education.

Educators need support and training to incorporate national values and ethical principles into their instructional practices, curriculum design, and classroom culture (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2018). Professional development programs that provide educators with opportunities to deepen their understanding of national ethics, explore pedagogical strategies, and collaborate with colleagues enhance their capacity to foster ethical character development among students. Parent and community involvement also plays a significant role in reinforcing character education through the integration of national ethics. Collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and communities provide opportunities for shared dialogue, cultural exchange, and collective action around national values and ethical principles (Brighouse, 2015). Engaging parents and community members in discussions about national ethics, cultural traditions, and civic responsibilities fosters a sense of shared ownership and

commitment to character education, promoting alignment between home, school, and community values.

Strategies for enhancing character education through the integration of national ethics offer a multifaceted approach to fostering ethical character development among students. By aligning curriculum standards, leveraging cross-disciplinary approaches, facilitating experiential learning, promoting civic engagement, fostering ethical decision-making, providing teacher preparation, and fostering parent and community involvement, educators can create rich learning environments that nurture students' ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and civic responsibility. Moving forward, continued research, collaboration, and innovation are essential to advancing the field of character education and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop the ethical values and virtues necessary for responsible citizenship in an increasingly complex world.

Character building is a vital component of education, playing a pivotal role in shaping individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviors, ultimately contributing to the well-being of society. In Nigeria, like many other countries, character education is recognized as essential for fostering responsible citizenship, promoting social cohesion, and addressing various socio-economic challenges. However, despite the growing emphasis on character education in educational policies and discourse, there remains a gap in understanding how national ethics influence character development among undergraduate students, particularly those majoring in social studies, in Kwara State. More so, Social Studies education, with its interdisciplinary approach, is well-suited for addressing issues related to national identity, civic engagement, and ethical responsibility. However, the extent to which Social Studies curriculum incorporate and promote national ethics, and their impact on character development among students, requires further investigation (Akande, 2023). External factors such as peer pressure, social media, and community influences may also play a role in shaping the character of Social Studies undergraduates, and understanding how these influences interact with national ethics in character development is crucial for addressing potential conflicts or inconsistencies.

Addressing these issues and understanding the complexities surrounding the influence of national ethics on character building among Social Studies undergraduates in university of Ilorin, Kwara State is

essential for developing targeted interventions, informing evidence-based strategies to promote ethical citizenship and social cohesion among students improving educational practices, and fostering a more cohesive and values-driven society.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study.

1. What are the core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building of social studies undergraduates?
2. What are the cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building of social studies undergraduates?
3. What are the ethical principles embedded within national ethics impact the character building of social studies undergraduates?

Methodology

The research design for this study was descriptive design of survey type. This approach will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the influence of national ethics on the character building of social studies undergraduates in Kwara State. The quantitative component involved the use of surveys to gather data. The target population of this study consisted of the entire Social Studies undergraduates enrolled in University of Ilorin Kwara State. A sample of 200 Social Studies undergraduates were randomly selected using a researcher-drawn questionnaire. This population was selected as they are the primary beneficiaries of social studies education and are expected to be influenced by the integration of national ethics into their character building. Data were collected through structured questionnaires consisting of only closed-ended questions, employing a 4-scale Likert format to gather quantitative data.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire to obtain certain information from social studies undergraduates on influence of national ethics on social studies undergraduates' character building in Kwara State. The instrument consisted of section A and B. Section A elicited demographic information

of the respondents and level of the respondents. Section B consisted of items relating to core values, cultural norms and ethical principles embedded in National ethics using a Likert scale format of each sub-section contained 5 items. Face validity of the instrument was determined by presenting it to two experts in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin. The corrections and suggestions were incorporated in the construction of the final copy of the instrument. In determining the reliability of the questionnaire, test-retest method was employed. The questionnaire was administered to smaller sample of thirty (30) respondents who were not part of the selected sample for the study. The results obtained were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics and reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building of social studies undergraduates?

Table 1: Mean Analysis Showing the core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building of social studies undergraduates

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1	Patriotism enhances the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.49	1 st
2	Human dignity influences the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.24	5 th
3	Accountability promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.26	4 th
4	Self-discipline also facilitates the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.42	2 nd
5	Popular participation influences the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.28	3 rd

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 indicates the responses on the core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building of social studies undergraduates. Responses to items that patriotism enhances the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.49 (1st), while Self-discipline also facilitates the character building of social studies undergraduates with a mean score of 3.42 comes 2nd, popular participation influences the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.28 was the 3rd, also accountability promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.26 was 4th and human dignity influences the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.24 was 5th. Therefore, the paramount core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building that shape social studies undergraduates were patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation.

Research Question 2: What are the cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building of social studies undergraduates?

Table 2: Mean Analysis Showing cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building of social studies undergraduates

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1	Social etiquettes ensure the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.18	2 nd
2	Gender roles shape the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.05	5 th
3	Dress codes determine the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.14	3 rd
4	Religion promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.12	4 th
5	Social hierarchy determines the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.19	1 st

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 indicates responses of Social studies undergraduates on cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building. Responses to items that sought information on Social hierarchy determines the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.19 (1st), while Social etiquettes ensure the character building of social studies undergraduates with a mean score of 3.18 comes 2nd, Dress codes determine the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.14 was the 3rd, also Religion promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.12 was 4th while Gender roles shape the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.05 was 5th. Therefore, cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building of social studies undergraduates were social hierarchy, social etiquettes and dress codes.

Research Question 3: What are the ethical principles embedded within national ethics impact the character building of social studies undergraduates?

Table 3: Mean Analysis showing the ethical principles embedded within national ethics impact the character building of social studies undergraduates

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1	Social justice shapes the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.59	1 st
2	Respect enhances the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.37	3 rd
3	Loyalty promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.32	5 th
4	Responsibility determines the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.33	4 th
5	Fairness promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates	3.50	2 nd

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 indicates responses of Social Studies undergraduates on ethical principles embedded within national ethics impact the character building. Responses to items that sought information on social justice shapes the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.59 (1st), while fairness promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates with a mean score of 3.50 comes 2nd, respect enhances the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.37 was the 3rd, also responsibility determines the character building of social studies undergraduates which has a mean score of 3.33 was 4th and loyalty promotes the character building of social studies undergraduates with mean score of 3.05 was 5th. Therefore, ethical principles embedded within national ethics that impacted the character building of social studies undergraduates were social justice, fairness and respect to others.

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that the paramount core values embedded within national ethics that influence the character building that shape social studies undergraduates were patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation. The finding is similar with the research work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) on ethical decision-making and reflective practice are essential skills cultivated through character education, enabling students to navigate ethical dilemmas, exercise moral judgment, and act with integrity. Integrating national ethics into reflective practice encourages students to critically examine their beliefs, values, and actions in light of national values and ethical principles.

The findings revealed that the cultural norms embedded within national ethics shape the character building of social studies undergraduates were social hierarchy, social etiquettes and dress codes. This is related to finding of Biesta and Tedder (2017) who discovered that exploring historical events, literary works, and artistic expressions that reflect national ethos, students gain a nuanced appreciation for the complexities of ethical decision-making and civic engagement within their cultural context.

The finding revealed that the ethical principles embedded within national ethics that impacted the character building of social studies undergraduates were social justice, fairness and respect to others. The finding is in line with the research work of Adekunle and Olatunji (2021) who affirmed that experiential learning and service projects offer powerful avenues for connecting national ethics with

real-world experiences, enabling students to apply ethical principles in practical contexts and engage with national values through meaningful action.

Conclusion

From the finding of the study, it was concluded that the paramount core values embedded within national ethics that influenced the character building and shaped social studies undergraduates were patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation. Cultural norms embedded within national ethics that shape the character building of social studies undergraduates were social hierarchy, social etiquettes and dress codes. Ethical principles embedded within national ethics that impacted the character building of social studies undergraduates were social justice, fairness and respect to others.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

Patriotism, self-discipline and popular participation should be given more attention in the teaching and learning of Social Studies. Social Studies undergraduates should internalize cultural values of social hierarchy, social etiquettes and dress codes that will enhance their social interaction. Ethical principles of social justice, fairness and respect to others embedded within national ethics should be prioritized among the social studies undergraduates.

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