CONNECTING CHARACTER TO CONDUCT:
HELPING STUDENTS TAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS

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Abstract

The paper discussed the concept of character and conduct and its product, behaviour. It discussed types of traits needed for students in the Upper Basic Education Schools also known as Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1-3) in Nigeria to be conscientious and intelligent individuals in the society. These traits when developed will help guide them take the right decisions in life. It also examined the curriculum and discussed the unsystematic infusion of themes in Social Studies and Civic Education. The paper then suggested that introducing Character Education as a subject and not s indiscriminate themes in the curriculum will help achieve the purpose of character education. The paper also suggested that apart from teachers, the community as a whole is also involved in teaching these character traits.

Key words: Character, Character Education, Upper Basic Education, Curriculum.

Introduction

Character as defined by Character Integrity Trust Relationships (CITRS) is a pattern of behaviour, thoughts and feelings based on universal principles, moral strength, and integrity. It also involves living by these principles every day. It is evidenced by our life's virtues. It is regarded as valuable and when it is developed, it cannot be taken out. According to Heenan (2006), Character is not inherited and does not grow like a weed on its own but it is learnt.

This paper is concerned with the character and behaviour of students in Upper Basic Education /Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1-3) in Nigeria because children start to become independent from this stage and tend to take wrong decisions at this point due to peer influence. Character education will be of help to them a lot at this point in their lives. Even with the subjects, Civic Education and Social Studies, there still remains a high rate of school truancy and of inappropriate behaviour amongst students. This unacceptable behaviour in most cases shows the kinds of environment they live in or their background at home or one might say they are yet to learn the right traits needed for taking right decisions. Students can learn the right things to do which is one objective of acquiring an education and how they can know the right things to do at all time is by building up their character. Building up their character at school and at home enables them take the right decisions. Introducing Character Education as a subject in the curriculum will accomplish this purpose. Its introduction will guide teachers on what traits to teach the students which will help build them to become conscientious citizens in the society.

Most Nigerian youths are not productive because the society did not teach them the right character traits that should help them be resourceful in the society. Nigerian youths like those in other societies, have to possess good character hence the need to learn character education so they can differentiate between right and wrong thereby becoming responsible adults.

The Concept of Character and Conduct

Character is defined as personal qualities which make up a person's behaviour. These qualities may include one's capabilities, imaginations, and feelings. These qualities are what make up a person's personality when put together. The way an individual relate with people is what makes his character or behaviour unique from other individuals. Character consists of learned behaviour traits (Kurtus, 2013). Character includes attitudes such as the desire to be the best, consider the welfare of others, exhibit intellectual abilities like critical thinking and moral reasoning, honesty, support justice, emotions that allows us interact easily with others and the

commitment to give back to society. For Battistich (2012) character is realizing the positive development one possesses intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically. Anyone who possesses good character is regarded as well behaved.

Lickona (1991) defines character as knowledge of doing and desiring the good. Character should be the bedrock of every one's life. Above all, what we decide to do manifests in how we conduct ourselves. Character is all about one's nature and how it is trained to make us well behaved adults. The society can only get better in the future when citizens are well behaved. Being well behaved does not happen automatically. Certain traits have to be learnt which are necessary for moral decision-making and conduct.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) define conduct as "to behave in a kind of way" and also as a person's behaviour in place or in situation. This means behaviour that is professional. Conduct is synonymous to behaviour. Connecting character to conduct simply means good character bringing forth good behaviour or conduct. Character brings about behaviour just as behavior shows character. Character best modifies behaviour. Unless one's character changes, the future behaviour will always be past behaviour (Heenan, 2006).

Benefits of Good Character according to Davenport, 2016

- Good character attracts trust and respect from other people.
- It enables us influence others.
- It changes our view about failure.
- It helps us endure tough times.
- It improves our self worth and confidence.
- It is a basis for good relationships.
- It helps us stay committed to our goals in life.
- It improves our chances of success in work and other endeavors,

Building Character Traits in Students in Upper Basic Education/Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria (JSS 1-3)

In Nigeria today, there are evidences of vandalism, cultism, cheating in school examinations, disrespect for authority, drug abuse and other self-destructive behaviours in schools (Dike, 2007). The Junior Secondary School (JSS 1-3) is not an exception. Building character traits in these students will make them behave well and enable them desist from these unacceptable behaviours.

Character traits make up a person's behaviour and attitudes which is a person's personality. Traits are learnt from parents, friends, and experiences in the form of "rules" of the proper way to behave.

According to Najam (2015) the character traits students can learn in school are listed thus:

- Responsibility: It is the duty of caring for things in one's custody and to account for one's behaviour.
- Trustworthiness: To be honest and keep to one's promises.
- Respect: Treating people in a polite and courteous manner. Showing concern for all things; people, property and authority.
- Caring is showing kindness to others.
- Compassion is reaching out to those in need.
- Justice is to speak out for what is fair, right and true.
- Tolerance is putting up with the opinion of others even when we do not agree with them.
- Co-operation is working and playing with others in a order to finish a task.

Other important personality traits include:

- Integrity: Integrity is acting right even when we are not being watched.
- Loyalty: Loyalty is being faithful and devoted to those we love our loved. Loyalty can also be extended to the organizations we belong to, our communities and our country.
- Humility: It is being confident but also modest about one's own self worth. We do not see ourselves as better than others. We should show gratitude for what we have rather than expecting more.
- Forgiveness: It is the conscious and intentional decision we make so we are not resentful against someone for an offence, even when the offender does not need us to.
- Self-discipline: It is overcoming certain desires through good habits so as to achieve our principles in life.

These character traits if taught to students will make them behave in the following ways:

- Listen to parents and respect authority: Show respect for authority at home, in the community, at school and also extending it to employers later in life. They will also show respect for their mates as well.

- Value the good for its benefit: Realize that good character is an advantage to one's total well being. Demonstrate the use of psychology be good citizens.
- Be aware, even skeptical of persons, places or things that might cause a lapse in character: Know personal capabilities. Acknowledge that every action has a result. Realize that not all people worry about you and identify which persons or situations can be trusted.
- Provide for modeling and practicing of social skills that demonstrate core values (e.g perspective taking, critical thinking, problem solving, ethical decision making.
- Using every skill necessary to understand the tenets of character education as a subject (Najam, 2015).

Developing and maintaining these traits is not easy, but they have advantages that will improve the quality of our life. Therefore, students just have to keep practicing these traits to become part of them. Pearson & Nicholson (2000) cited in Larson (2009) feel that there are three interconnected areas that represent good character: self, others, and the community. Students can now look within themselves and see responsibility, trustworthiness, courage, and self-discipline. Character traits such as honesty, respect, empathy, kindness, and caring will help students' maintain good relations with classmates, teachers, friends, and family.

Helping Students in Upper Basic Education/Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1-3) Take the Right Decisions through Character Education in Nigeria

Character education is a learning process which teaches both youths and adults about core ethical values. Upon learning these core values, we develop attitudes that are the features of safe, healthy and informed communities which make up our society (US Department of Education). It imbibes habits that will make people live and work together as families, friends, neighbours, communities and nations.

It goals are to raise good citizens who understand the effects of having moral values that make for a productive, just, and democratic society. As young people grow in character, they also grow in their willingness to work hard, take right decisions, and lead lives of purpose. A successful character education program involves making learning environments where students can develop their potentials so that their vital goals can be attained (Battistich, 2012).

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) defines Character education as an educational program which supports the total wellbeing of students. It educates students on how to behave.

Character Education Partnership (CEP) program identified 11 broad principles that fully define character education:

- Using moral values as the foundation of good character.
- Defining character to include emotions and behaviour.
- Using a comprehensive and successful approach.
- Creating loving school environments.
- Creating avenues for students to engage themselves in moral activities.
- Creating a relevant curriculum that will enable students succeed.
- Encouraging students develop their inert abilities to learn and be responsible.
- Employing only competent school staff.
- Promote good leadership that will sponsor character education over a long period of time.
- Encourage the entire community to be partners in character education.
- Assess how students are responding to the character education effort.

In advanced countries, character education is taught by special teachers. They introduce it by studying people the society identifies as good role models. They are invited by schools to speak to students so they can examine the character traits personified in them and aspire to emulate their good character (Dike, 2007). This has not been imbibed in our educational system.

Educational institutions are entrusted to teach youths of nations. However, the educational system in Nigeria has failed to mould the behaviour of youths in the society for obvious reasons. Even with the numerous educational reforms in Nigeria, schools are yet to improve (Dike, 2007). Even with the inclusion of Civic Education alongside Social Studies, students in the Upper Basic Education/ Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1-3) in Nigeria are yet to exhibit good character traits. This is because Character Education is not well placed in the curriculum.

Upper Basic Education (JSS 1-3)	1. English Studies
	2. One Nigerian Language
	3. Mathematics
	4. Basic Science &Technology
	  • asic Science
	  • asic Technology
	  • nformation Technology
	  • hysical & Health Education
		6.
		  re-vocational Studies
		  • ome Economics
		  • griculture
		7.
		  rench Language
		8.
		  ultural and Creative Arts

5. Religion and National Values • Christian Religious Studies • Islamic Studies • Social Studies • Civic Education • Security Education	9. rabic (Optional)

Source: (NPE, 2013)

The table above is a breakdown of the Upper Basic Education/Junior Secondary School curriculum (JSS 1-3). It shows the combination of Christian Religious Studies/Islamic Studies, Social studies, Civic Education and Security Education as themes under Religion and National Values (RNV) which is the composite subject. Consumer Education, Disaster Risk Education and Peace and Conflict Resolution curricula are infused into the Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education themes. This infusion has overcrowded the social studies curriculum thereby preventing it from achieving its goals in the area of values.

In a study by Lipman (2010) and Sharp (2012:123) cited by Ikwumelu, Bassey and Oyibe (2015), they found out that Social Studies Education advocates character education and they recommended five ethical traits for students' character development which are: to make moral judgments, to hold over satisfying desires, to treat others with dignity, to be non biased when making moral judgments and to be innovative in taking decisions. Yes, social studies education advocates character education but character education tends to teach the right character traits to develop individuals into responsible adults.

It is important to have character education in the curriculum as this will create a school environment where students can reap its benefits academically and in other aspects as well (Larson, 2009). For Otten (2000) cited in Larson (2009) if character education is infused in the curriculum, it will help re-engage students, deal with conflict, keep students busy and reinvest in the community with active participation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Character education is important for all students not only at the Upper Basic Education/Junior Secondary School (JSS 1-3) level but at all levels. But we believe it is more important at this level because it is at this point children become independent.

This show of independence starts with them making decisions not minding the views of their parents like they use to but listening more to their peers. It is at this point that character education will teach them to exhibit good behaviour which will enable them take right decisions even when they are faced with challenges among their peers. When schools' discipline policies are utilized, character education programs, and encouragement from communities will enable schools begin to show significance in the behaviour of the students they teach. The students will show positive traits in their behaviour by treating others with respect and fairness. This will enable them realize they are becoming responsible, caring and trustworthy citizens.

By including more topics in character education as a subject in the curriculum and modeling it throughout the community, students will appreciate the need for having good character. The community ought to communicate and work with the school to gain knowledge and understand character education programs. According to Pearson and Nicholson (2000) students ought to learn good character for them to recognize and desire to do what is good. Although character education falls into the hands of the school, parents are also needed in the program to assist children identify core values, adapt and commit to those values, and then practice them in their everyday lives. Reflecting on one's own behaviour is an essential component of character education, which helps students think of how they can improve their study skills in every subject, especially those subjects they struggle with (Bastien, 2015). Character education aims at creating schools that will produce responsible youths. Some adults should be exposed to character education so they can change; but it is difficult to change adults, especially those with entrenched bad behaviour (Dike, 2007), that is why character building needs to begin with the youths so that they will be useful to society.

Martin Luther King Jr. was of the opinion that "Intelligence and character are products of true education." Therefore helping students take right decisions will develop good character which is fundamental to creating intelligent students.

Schools face so many challenges trying to make students account for their behaviour. Therefore introducing character education in the Upper Basic Education/Junior Secondary School curriculum will help students understand why it is important to be well behaved and not exhibit undesirable behaviour. The entire community should be involved in the entire process of Character Education. It should not be left for teachers alone.

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