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**Promoting civic virtues in Nigerian youths through civic education: a panacea for contemporary social pathologies**

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**Abstract**

*It is evident that lack of appropriate civic values among Nigerians has deeply eroded the fabric of Nigerian society, and the only remedy is to inculcate fundamental patriotic values in the younger ones, who are the future leaders, through the learning of Civic Education. It is pertinent to note that a successful process of solving the present challenges of our society through inculcation of civic virtues in our youths requires effective civic education in our schools. This study examined the social challenges of Nigeria, the civic virtues needed to be imbibed by Nigerian youths towards the ameliorating of the social challenges in Nigeria and the role of Civic Education in the promotion of civic virtues in Nigerian youths. The study enunciated that Civic Education was re-introduced into the Nigerian curriculum in order to empower learners with knowledge, skills and values necessary to thrive actively and responsibly in democratic citizenship, and to groom them for leadership roles for nation building. The study concluded that civic education is a very viable tool for the promotion of civic virtues in Nigerian youths which will no doubt contribute to peace building and development of our country. Among others it was recommended that government should establish value and cultural enrichment programmes for all citizens, aimed at revitalizing cherished values that have been lost. Additionally, formal and non-formal education and training forums should be created for all citizens, with a particular focus on the younger generation, to foster a sense of cultural heritage and civic responsibility.*

**Key words:** Civic education, Civic virtues, Nigerian youths, Social challenges, Nigeria

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**1. Introduction**

The current state of affairs in Nigeria necessitates a deliberate and collective effort to foster a just and morally inclusive civil society. This is urgent due to the escalating lawlessness and undemocratic practices that undermine the development and sustainability of a democratic culture in Nigeria. Alarmingly, many Nigerian youths show little concern for a just civil society, neglecting civic duties, and displaying intolerance and disrespect for the rule of law. However, Akinjide (2006) states that it is important to recognize the significant potential of Nigerian youths in addressing the country's contemporary

challenges. As the largest demographic group, they have already made valuable contributions to national unity through various activities like sports, and have played critical roles in different fields such as information technology, business, agriculture, and industry (Okeke, 2012). While it's true that some youths have been involved in social unrest and crisis, engaging them in positive change efforts is a promising approach to addressing Nigeria's current social challenges. By harnessing their energy and creativity, we can work towards a more just and prosperous society for all.



Mofoluwawo, Jarimi and Oyelade (2012) opine that youths in Nigeria are defined as citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria between the ages of 17 and 30. This demographic represents the most active, volatile, and vulnerable segment of the population, facing challenges in social, economic, and emotional aspects. This definition is proposed considering the Nigerian context, where at 15 years old, individuals are transitioning from secondary education to adulthood, by 34 years old, they are fully integrated into society. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme has an age limit of 30, marking the end of youth status. The youthful age is a pivotal stage, characterized by energy, determination, courage, and strength, making it an ideal time for young people to be actively engaged in various endeavours and adventures. More so, the age group that is being taught Civic Education in schools is the youth group. Civic Education is taught in schools from primary level through senior secondary school to tertiary institutions where it is called Citizenship Education. The government has tried her best to imbibe necessary values to the youths via the teaching of some subjects like Civic Education, hence the reason for the focus on youths and not any other age group for ameliorating social challenges of Nigeria.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria boasts a rich human resource base, particularly among its vibrant and potential-filled youth, who account for 70% of the population of Nigerians, which is estimated to be 151 million. These youths remain very vibrant and full of potentials for maximum contributions to national development. However, despite their potentials, young people are not significantly contributing to national development due to the country's conflict-prone nature, with youths being involved in 90-95% of violent conflicts (Kehinde-Awoyele & Jekayinoluwa, 2012). Youth

incivility has become a pervasive issue, accompanied by a decline in civic virtues across all aspects of life. The consequences are evident in the persistent social vices, crises, radicalization, extremism, breakdown of traditional values, and rising violence, aggression, and anti-social behaviour among young people. To address these challenges, we must create a society founded on unity, tolerance, honesty, respect for human dignity, and patriotism. This requires harnessing the energy of young people, who are often engaged in social vices, to tackle these issues. To achieve this, we must instil in them the values and traits of effective citizenship. As future leaders, youths must possess these qualities to build a strong nation (Falade, 2008). It's crucial to recognize that nation-building is impossible when young people lack these essential traits. Therefore, there is an urgent need to inculcate civic virtues in Nigerian youths through the teaching of Civic Education, hence, the study focused on the promotion of civic virtues among youths through Civic Education as a panacea for contemporary social challenges of Nigeria.

#### **Research Objectives**

The following are the focus of this research:

1. To discuss the social challenges of Nigeria
2. To justify the need to imbibe civic virtues by Nigerian youths in order to ameliorate social challenges in Nigeria.
3. To elaborate on the place of Civic Education for the promotion of Civic Virtues among Nigerian youth.

#### **2. Literature Review**

##### **Moral and Social Challenges in Contemporary Nigerian Society**

Social challenges of the contemporary Nigeria are so enormous that they hinder the peace, progress and development of Nigeria as a country. Nigeria is grappling with unprecedented security challenges,



which are exacerbated by a lack of consensus on how to address them, as a result, the problems are escalating (Okeke, 2012). The security situation is alarming, indicating that the nation is under siege, and its security forces are struggling to contain the rising insecurity (Ukpong, 2013). Terrorism, particularly Boko Haram, has been a major threat since 2002, targeting various groups, including security forces, politicians, civilians, and institutions. The insurgency has worsened the security situation in Northern Nigeria, posing a significant challenge to the country's security. Notably, many of the perpetrators are youths under 35 years old, highlighting the need for urgent attention to address the root causes of this crisis.

Moreover, the alarming rise of hi-tech crimes, including kidnapping and armed robbery, across various parts of Nigeria, has sparked concern among the government and well-meaning Nigerians. These criminal activities have led to the tragic loss of innocent lives. Additionally, internet fraud, credit card scams, and related offenses are rampant among youths (Ukpong, 2013). The underlying causes of these crimes can be attributed to unemployment, peer pressure, and parental neglect. Notably, most of those involved in these crimes are educated graduates who have chosen to misuse their skills, which were intended to be used for productive purposes, but harm the nation instead.

Besides the above, another challenge of the contemporary Nigeria is the challenge of Nation Building. According to Akorede (1997) cited in Adediran (2015), nation building entails the challenging task of uniting diverse sub-nations within a political unit into a harmonious whole. According to Eragba, Ewhro, and Isitoah (2003), youths should be adequately prepared for leadership position of this nation. In this paper, civic education is employed as a solution to the national challenges.

Nigeria faces additional challenges, including poor leadership, a low sense of civic responsibility, and widespread political apathy. According to Eregba, Ewhro, and Isitoah (2003), political apathy stems from bad leadership, human rights abuses, and the domination of government by a few individuals who seize power through coups or rigged elections and prioritize their own interests. This leads to economic stagnation, poverty, widespread illiteracy, intimidation, assassination, tension, and conflict. As Falade (2008) notes, Nigeria's greatest challenge is the lack of a strong sense of citizenship among its inhabitants, particularly the youth. Unlike countries like England, France, and Germany, Nigerians lack an instinctive sense of social cohesion (Okam, 2001). Furthermore, the educational system in Nigeria fails to emphasize civic values, producing citizens who are often unlawful, uncritical, selfish, and disengaged from public affairs (Balogun, 2003).

Other challenges facing Nigeria include bad leadership, low level of civic responsibility and political apathy. Eregba, Ewhro and Isitoah (2003) argued that political apathy is a consequent of bad leadership, abuse of human rights, domination of government by few despots, which assumed power by coups or rigged elections and rule the state in their own interest. This in turn leads to economic backwardness, poverty, mass illiteracy, intimidation, assassination, tension and conflict. Certainly, the greatest danger from which Nigeria suffers at the present time is the absence of any vivid sense of citizenship on the part of a large proportion of her inhabitants, especially the youth (Falade, 2008). The average Nigerian does not have that instinctive sense of social cohesion, which prevails in certain nation-states of the world such as England, France, and Germany (Okam, 2001). Moreover, not much emphasis is placed on the teaching of civic values in the Nigeria schools. Instead of producing thinking and



objective human beings, the educational system produces many unlawful and uncritical citizens that are also selfish and indifferent to public affairs (Balogun, 2003).

### **Youths with Civic Virtues: Panacea of Social Challenges in Nigeria**

Young people are willing to engage in various activities, regardless of the task's nature, as long as they receive financial compensation, even if it puts their well-being at risk. The situation of youths in the country is dire and frustrating, yet our leaders seem unconcerned since their own children are not affected; the reason why Alimba, Momodu, Abba, and Bello (2010) state that the poor state of youths is closely linked to a critical factor in the country's socio-political landscape: leadership. The leadership factor, according to Alimba et.al (2010) is a crucial contributor to the challenges faced by young people, and addressing this issue is essential to improving their situation. Moreso, Vink and Adejumo (2015) opine that poor parenting and lack of moral guidance, as well as inadequate education and civic training of youths contributed to the prevalence of incivility among Nigerian youths. Scholars are urgently seeking to understand civic virtue as a means to address declining civic engagement and identify the virtues necessary to reverse this trend (Banyan, 2023).

Civic virtue is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the character traits of a good citizen, including personal qualities essential for the effective functioning and preservation of a society's civil and political order, values, and principles (McDermott, 2020). It represents a moral standard for citizens' involvement in society, cultivating habits crucial for societal success (McDermott, 2020). At its core, civic virtue is about dedicating oneself to the common good, prioritizing collective welfare over individual interests (Hale, 1993, cited in Wikipedia, 2023). In essence, civic virtues are the personal

qualities necessary for a society to thrive, upholding its values and principles (Banyan, 2023).

McDermott (2020) identifies 13 virtues that citizens should strive to embody. These include temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. While civic virtue is often understood as citizens' basic obligations, such as paying taxes and participating in society, it also encompasses essential virtues like justice, courage, and honesty. However, the specific virtues that define civic virtue vary depending on the political order and values of a state. In other words, what constitutes civic virtue depends on the type of political system and society a state seeks to establish and maintain (McDermott, 2020).

Youths have long been recognized as the guardians of a nation's future (Ajoma, 2006). In various countries, they are referred to as the "hope of the future" (Indonesia), "future partners" (Libya), and "leaders of tomorrow" (Nigeria). Youths are characterized by their boundless energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity about life and their surroundings. According to Okeke (2012), they have high hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their future and are eager to make a positive impact. When properly guided and directed, their surplus energy can be harnessed for the betterment of society. Engaging and equipping youths, who are the leaders of tomorrow, with the right values and norms will enable them to play a crucial role in addressing the challenges facing the nation and driving peaceful and national development.

The recent upsurge in youth involvement in violent, criminal, and anti-social activities underscores the urgent need to redirect their energy and talents towards positive contributions to society. To achieve this, prioritizing civic education in schools and beyond is crucial. By instilling ethical values and principles, civic education empowers young individuals to become



engaged, informed, and responsible citizens. This education also clarifies individual rights, responsibilities, and the roles of leaders, fostering a more accountable and participatory citizenry (Ukpong, 2013). By channeling youth potential into constructive pursuits, we can build a brighter future for all.

### **The Place of Civic Education in Enhancing Civic Virtues of Nigerian Youths**

The decline of civic virtues and political qualities essential for responsible citizenship has been observed (Falade, 2008), contributing to numerous social problems in the country. In response, the Federal Government previously introduced Civics as a compulsory subject, later integrating it into Social Studies. Although the Social Studies curriculum aimed to promote national unity and address socio-political and economic issues, the society still grapples with significant social ills. Consequently, Civic Education was re-introduced into primary and secondary school curricula in 2009. Recognizing the crucial role of civic education in Nigeria's peaceful development, the federal government mandated its teaching in schools to instill good citizenship values, such as obedience, humility, and respect for authority. By teaching Civic Education in primary and secondary schools, the goal is to foster a deeper democratic culture and encourage active participation of citizens in the government process.

Ajenro (2004) notes that analysts attribute the current insecurity challenges in Nigeria, including ethnic and religious violence, terrorism, kidnapping, rape, political thuggery, and other social vices, to the neglect of civic education by successive governments. He argues that the absence of civic education and patriotic orientation has led to disorientation in schools and society, resulting in severe consequences. The widespread corruption, indiscipline, disrespect for authority and the rule of law, negligence of duty, and embezzlement of

public funds are all indicative of a lack of civic education. Moreover, civic values such as courtesy, respect, charity, tolerance, and dialogue have largely disappeared from Nigerian society.

It is essential to deliberately and carefully instill in young citizens the values and skills necessary for them to develop an interest in public life. Civic training has become a vital tool for nation-building and creating a civil society worldwide. In response to Nigeria's social challenges, curriculum planners have included Civic Education in the school curriculum to address these issues. As a school subject focused on human development, Civic Education aims to rectify the social problems and issues plaguing the nation, much like Social Studies.

Civic Education, as defined by Abisola (2004), is the study of good citizenship, empowering individuals to become more active and responsible citizens. It encompasses the study of government operations and the rights and duties of citizens within a society. Mofoluwawo, Jarimi, and Oyelade (2012) describe Civic Education as a socialization process that trains citizens to navigate their daily interactions with the government and fellow citizens. Ajiboye (2008) defines it as an ongoing study of the fundamental concepts and values that underpin our democratic community and constitutional order. According to Ozumba and Eteng (1999), cited by Adediran (2015), the ultimate goal of Civic Education is to raise individuals who are capable and responsible members of society.

According to Oladele (2009), Civic Education is a type of education that empowers citizens to become active and functional members of society. It instills positive attitudes such as patriotism, peaceful coexistence, hard work, diligence, honesty, mutual respect, love, tolerance, and self-discipline. Civic Education is a vital component of education that enables learners to develop essential skills for





participating in democratic public life, exercising their rights, and fulfilling their responsibilities (Branson, 1998). Similarly, Agu (2009) believes that Civic Education prepares citizens, especially youths, to carry out their roles effectively. The objectives of Civic Education, as outlined by Ozumba and Eteng (1999) and cited by Adediran (2017), include: Enhancing political literacy among Nigerians; Creating awareness of citizens' fundamental rights; Educating students about the Nigerian Constitution and its provisions; Providing knowledge on democracy; Sensitizing citizens to government roles and their obligations; Promoting human development and self-assurance through teaching good values and morals; Reversing the colonial legacy of imposing European values and worldviews on Nigerians

These objectives aim to empower citizens to become responsible, active, and functional members of society. Going by the stated objectives Civic Education aligns with the objectives of Nigerian education, aiming to achieve the nation's philosophical goals. By teaching Civic Education, students (youths) are expected to develop conceptual understanding, process skills, and effective outcomes that foster a deeper democratic culture and encourage the demonstration of civic virtues. The Civic Education curriculum encompasses various virtues, including: Our values (cooperation, unity, harmony, honesty, self-reliance, etc.); Morals; Rights and duties of citizenship; Obligations of citizenship; National consciousness and identity; Promoting national unity; Nigerian Constitution; Representative democracy; Human rights; Social issues

By instilling these values in young Nigerians, the leaders of tomorrow will be shaped and moulded, paving the way for a new generation of re-branded leaders. As Okeke (2012) emphasized, the future of any country relies on its youths, and meaningful development cannot occur

without their active participation. Youths possess raw energy and potential, making them a vital force for shaping Nigeria's future.

Despite the potential of youths, recent violent, criminal, and anti-social activities across the country highlight the need to harness their energy and talents for positive outcomes. To achieve this, prioritizing civic education in schools and beyond is crucial. Civic education instils sound moral values and principles, empowering youths to become active, informed, and responsible citizens. By teaching civic education, we can educate individuals about their rights, duties, and responsibilities, as well as those of their leaders, fostering a more engaged and responsible citizenry (Ukpong, 2013). This is vital for channelling the power and natural endowment of youths into beneficial pursuits, leading to a brighter future for all.

As a subject, Civic Education empowers youths to navigate the world with capability and confidence. It encompasses a broad range of issues and topics that impact people's lives and daily experiences. These include values such as consistency, trust, integrity, commitment, honesty, cooperation, harmony, and goal achievement, as well as national consciousness and identity, national unity, social issues, human rights, and the rule of law. Additionally, Civic Education covers democracy, citizenship rights and duties, and social responsibilities. By teaching young people how to maximize their potential and advocate for their rights and opinions, Civic Education fosters tolerance and opposes selfishness, hatred, corruption, terrorism, and other social vices. It also guides young individuals in organizing their responsibilities to the government and their community, covering essential areas like voting, taxes, the justice system, prisons, cultures, and international relations. This comprehensive approach enables young people to become effective



and functional citizens (Azebamwan, 2010).

No society can progress and develop lawless, hostile, intolerant, dishonest, uncooperative, and destructive citizens. A progressing society needs an atmosphere of discipline, security, peace, unity, and tolerance to plan and execute development projects successfully (Mansaray & Adeyemi, 2002). Hence, it is expected that youths contribute to the development of their society by portraying high level of civic responsibility, making their country proud of them. According to Ukpong (2013), a crisis-free Nigeria is possible only when the young ones who will take over leadership from the elders tomorrow understand what leads to crises and how to avoid and resolve them. This knowledge is imparted through civic education. With adequate civic education, youths will develop sound minds, and tomorrow, Nigeria will be great, free from problems like embezzlement, corruption, cheating, violence, terrorism, and others. Through civic education, youths will understand what the government expects and do what is expected, leading to peace and tranquillity in the country. To address Nigeria's social challenges, exposing youths to civic virtues through civic education is the solution. It remains a vital means of teaching the populace about our values, rights, duties, and responsibilities, both for the governed and leaders.

### **3. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The analysis highlights the significance of civic education in addressing the societal challenges facing Nigeria. The lack of civic values has indeed permeated the fabric of Nigerian society, and it is crucial to instill these values in the incoming generation of leaders through effective civic education. This requires a collaborative effort from all members of society, including schools, civic education teachers, and the community, to teach good character and civic virtues, especially among young

people. The development of good citizenship through formal and informal civic education programmes is essential to tackle the social challenges facing the country. This is a critical moment in Nigeria's democratic history, and civic education plays a vital role in reaffirming the fundamental principles of the constitutional compact to the youth. The analysis reveals that the absence of civic values has profoundly impacted Nigerian society, and the only solution is to instill these values in the next generation of leaders through civic education. Effective civic education in schools is crucial to address the current challenges. Developing good citizenship through formal and informal civic education programs is vital to tackle social challenges. The entire society must work together to teach good character and civic virtues, especially among young people. This is a critical moment in Nigeria's democratic history, and civic education plays a vital role in reaffirming the fundamental principles of the constitutional compact to the youth. Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should organize value and cultural enlightenment programs for all citizens to promote cherished values like honesty, transparency, cooperation, accountability, and discipline.
2. Civic education should be taught in schools to impart these values to youths.
3. Youth-oriented programs should be implemented to engage young people in community activities and governance, making them responsible citizens.
4. Training for effective citizenship should extend beyond the formal school curriculum to include informal programs like civic club activities (Falade, 2006).
5. Radio and television programs promoting values like honesty, dignity of labor, respect for elders and authority, self-reliance, accountability, and good citizenship traits should be encouraged.



6. Values like oral aesthetics, spiritual development, pursuit of happiness, appreciation of democratic principles, and desire to be good citizens should be developed among youths.

7. Government should create more civic and leadership training programs for Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) to involve them in civic and leadership training outside the school system.

8. Stable civic programs are needed for people in various community segments.

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