



Character Education and Pro-Social Behaviour of Secondary School Students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area, Edo State

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the connection between character education and pro-social behaviour among secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Two research questions were posed and two hypotheses were developed and test at .05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational research design, with a population that consisted of 6,589 senior secondary two (SS2) pupils from the 21 public secondary schools in the study area. Taro Yamene sampling equation was used to choose a sample size of 377 SS2 students for the study. Out of 21 schools, ten (10) public secondary schools were chosen at random for the study. Therefore, respondents were chosen for instrument administration based on a random sample balloting procedure for each sampled school. The researchers developed an instrument titled “Character Education and Students Pro-social Behaviour (CESPBQ)”, this was used to collect data with an overall reliability coefficient of .78 for character education and .83 for items measuring students’ pro-social behaviour. Of the 377 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 7 copies were not utilized for data collection and analysis as they were wrongly filled by some of the respondents. As a result, just 370 of the questionnaire remained, which were utilized for data analysis. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics to analyse the data, the study conclusion showed that secondary school students’ pro-social behaviour, honesty, and self-discipline have high positive and significant relationship. The researchers came to the conclusion with a recommendation among others that, teachers and parents, through effective relationship and supportive bound, should model desirable character traits in young ones. As such, laudable character traits would encourage students to display honest conducts in schools.

Keywords: Character Education, Pro-Social Behaviour, Honesty, Self-Discipline.

1. Introduction

Character training is essential for successful living of every individual, particularly in the 21st century, where individuals are expected to be found worthy in character and learning for national development. Pala (2011) posited that character education is the disposition and habit which determine the manner one responds to desires, challenge, fear, failure and success. Students learn value, moral ethics and character through the normal realities of their daily lives in schools.

The idea of developing character in students is a perennial and global issue. Ancient Greek philosopher; Socrates, Plato and Aristotle discussed the pursuit of virtue and goodness at length. For instance, Gecan and Mulholland-glaze in Troutman (2014) asserts that Socrates strongly believed that transmitting moral values and traditions of the society in imperative and a part of school duty. In recognition of this, some of the goals of education in Nigeria encapsulated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) are to produce scholars who are morally sound, patriotic and effective citizens, capable of making responsible decisions and wise judgment. The importance of character education in Nigeria was revived in the early 1990s in an effort to address the increased incidence of anti-social and violent behaviour among pupils, which was linked to a lack of character education. Character education tends to instill in people an awareness of their civil responsibilities, an ability to know what to do for the society and not only for selfish gains. According to Azuka and Andrew (2020), character education is a

catch-all word for instruction that helps kids acquire the necessary abilities and internalize values to help them become tomorrow's leaders. The authors added that areas which should be covered in a good character education programme would include being honest, adopting a conduct that complies with the guidelines and regulations of the school, maintaining respect for others, having self-control and accountability, while treating others fairly with full sense of forgiveness when the need arises.

Most often, students spend more time at school than at home. Integrating character education into the school culture would result in the production of a crop of students with desirable values since the students get significant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits from the school that can help them attain their full potential. Williams (2010) commented that character education enhances students' positive self-esteem, multicultural tolerance, display of pro-social behaviour and higher order thinking. Hughes (2018) added that character education can be seen as lessons and activities that develop a student's character, which are embedded in subjects like Social Studies, Civic Education and Religious Knowledge among others. developing social skills, civic responsibility, mutual respect, conflict resolution and bullying prevention and exhibition of pro-social behaviour, such as obedience to rules and regulation of the school are common themes in character education.

One component of character education that pupils must learn in school is self-discipline in order to effectively exhibit pro-social behaviour. Self-discipline is concerned with ability to control behaviours in order to avoid unacceptable behaviour and achieve set goals. It is the ability of an individual to assume some social and oral roles without being asked to, taking responsibility for his or her actions. A self-disciplined person, would create a conducive and stimulating environment for others to actualize and enjoy their moral roles without threatening them, taking responsibility of his or her actions particularly when faced with difficult circumstances. Students who imbibe the character of self-discipline as explained by Bear (2018), are most likely to act, based on what they know is morally right, and do away with immoral behaviours.

Honesty is a universal human value which has to do with adherence to truth, refusal to lie, to cheat and to deceive. According to Tolafari (2010), students who are honest usually display behaviours that benefit others. during the traditional education era, most parents and the extended family members deliberately put temptation in the way of their children to test their

truthfulness. Caution and severe punishments were meted to those children who cheat and who were not truthful. Such condition deters most of them from showing dishonest behaviour. Thus, it is believed that if children are taught why honesty should be their way of life, they will live by them throughout their lives.

Similarly, in modern society, the school is official education institution with authority. Students are expected to honour and respect school heads and teachers who might caution them against immoral conducts. Observing the rules and regulations of the school is an aspect of pro-social behaviour. Teachers need to teach young ones the benefits of displaying pro-social behaviour such as kindness, gratitude and empathy, and also model such characteristics for students to emulate. Teaching of such pro-social behaviour may contribute to a child's social and academic success. Pro-social fosters positive traits that benefit learners and the larger society. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the researchers sought to understand the relationship between character education and pro-social behaviour of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian educational system is seen to be injected with anti-social vices that are gradually eroding the confidence in our schools. In the secondary schools, there are standards of behaviour which are expected of a student. Students are expected to be submissive to school authorities, obey school rules and regulations, be punctual and regular at school, respect others, be neat always, well dressed to school, study hard and pass examinations. Students are expected to exhibit some level of discipline as compared to those that had not attended such level of education. But in most cases, the opposite seems to be the case, as school adolescents usually engage in social vices such as thuggery, cultism, indecent dressing, rape, drug abuse, examination malpractice, pre-marital sexually and truancy, resulting in high rates of school drop-out.

It is disheartening to observe that in some parts of Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area, students usually roam the streets during school hours, committing deviant offences such as bullying, stealing, drug abuse, cultism, smoking, assault, excessive aggression against other students. Some students go as far as fighting teachers, and parents. The rate of indiscipline and lack of respect for elders, parents, teachers and constituted authorities is alarming. Negative gang activities, such as cultism is noticed on regular basis. These unethical behaviours,

if not controlled may lead to these students growing up into armed robbers, rapists, terrorists, cultists, ritualists and lawless individuals, thereby impeding development and peaceful coexistence in the state. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the relationship between character education and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

1.2 Research Questions

To direct the study, the following research questions were developed:

- What relationship exists between the pro-social behaviour and self-discipline of secondary school students in the Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area?
- What relationship exists between honesty and pro-social behaviour of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area?

1.3 Hypotheses

The research hypotheses listed below were developed and put to the test at .05 significance level:

- There is no significant relationship between self-discipline and pro-social behaviour of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.
- There is no significant relationship between honesty and pro-social behaviour of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Schwartz Theory of Basic Values (1992)

The theory of basic values was proposed by Schwartz, the Past President of the International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology and recipient of the Israel prize in psychology in 1992. As a scholar, Schwartz made important contributions on value research papers in psychology and other fields of human endeavour. According to Schwartz's theory of fundamental human values, values are used to describe individuals, cultural groups, and communities as well as to track changes over time and explain the motives behind attitudes and behaviours. According to Schwartz, every individual possesses a multitude of values that fluctuate in importance, and that individuals and groups have distinct values "priorities" or

"hierarchies". One person may find a certain value to be extremely essential, while it is unimportant to another. According to Schwartz (1992), values influence how acts, policies, and events are chosen or assessed. Individuals make decisions about what is right or wrong, valid or illegitimate, worthwhile or not worth doing depending on the potential impact on their most valued beliefs.

The significance of Schwartz's theory of basic values lies in its clarification that children make decisions about what is right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, worthwhile or not, based on the potential representations of their deeply held belief. If teachers teach their students/pupils the consequences of being dishonest, such would serve as deterrent to further actions. Also, children whose teachers' value truthfulness or fairness in their dealings with people and who always frowns at cheating of any form or weight may likely consider such behaviour as legitimate.

2.2 Concept of Character Education

Character education is that education that impacts fundamental ethical principles for both adults and children. Based on the ethical deals they have learnt, individuals adopt attitudes that are characteristics of safe, healthy, and knowledgeable communities – the building blocks of the society. It makes young ones develop habits that promote mutual cooperation and togetherness amongst families, friends, neighbors, communities, and nations. According to Battistich (2012 as cited in Chimezie and Sobekon, 2018), the objectives of Character Education are to produce excellent citizens who comprehend the benefits of moral ideals that contribute to a productive, just, and democratic society. A young individual develops the willingness to work hard, make moral decisions, and live lives with meaning as their character grows. Creating learning environment where students may reach their full potential and accomplish their essential goals is a key component of a successful character programme.

Character education deals with inculcating basic human values into the citizenry of any nation especially the youth. It also results in pupils that are highly ethical, compassionate, courteous, accountable, and possessing integrity and self-control in the classroom. It entails imparting positive qualities that help students function in society. Character education, according to Sakellaridi (2016), is a kind of education that fosters and supports people's intellectual, social, emotional, ethical growth. It's a lifelong process of learning that helps adults and children grow into

moral, considerate, critical, and responsible individuals.

2.3 Concept of Pro-social Behaviour

Pro-social behaviour covers a broad range of actions intended to benefit others. This includes, but is not limited to, cooperation, sharing, helping, charitable giving and volunteering. As such, pro-social behaviour usually entails spending resources, time and effort or sometimes even incurring physical harm for the benefit of others. Pro-social children perform voluntary activities for the help of an individual or group of individuals (Kruglanski and Stroebe, 2012). Pro-sociality is a term synonymous with altruism, cooperation, heroism and trustworthiness (Margana, Bhogal, Bartlett and Farrelly, 2019). The major aspects of prosocial behaviours as noted by Shirin (2020) are empathy, agreeableness, peer acceptance and volunteer activities.

2.4 Self-Discipline and Pro-social Behaviour of Students

The capacity to establish and adhere to a plan or reasonable objective is a sign of self-discipline. According to Wall, Finkel, and Denson (2011), exercising self-control involves refraining from actions that could cause harm to others. It entails honouring pledges and carrying through on agreements. It serves as the cornerstone for numerous other character traits. Self-discipline frequently entails perseverance, upholding long-term obligations, and delaying pleasure for later. It also entails learning to be patient and managing strong feelings like jealousy and rage. Adamu (2020) asserts that parental self-discipline helps children control their behaviour and provides them with the strength of character to make moral decisions. However, if children don't learn self-control, they are more likely to engage in harmful behaviour. They frequently get into harmful situations because they lack the ability to assess or regulate their impulses.

Self-discipline among students is crucial for learning, academic success, and maintaining appropriate classroom behaviour. Students who are highly self-disciplined may be able to better focus on long term achievement goals and re-organized their behaviour to facilitate positive social interaction and relationship. In a study conducted by Grusec and Goodness (2014), self-discipline is strongly correlated with students' healthy behaviours in school. The authors went on to say that, students who are not disciplined are more prone to behave in a way that is not compliant with the established guidelines controlling a classroom setting.

In addition, Bear (2018) stated that through encouraging self-discipline, educators help children become people who know and value right from wrong, take ownership of their actions, value cooperative connections, and genuinely care about and are interested in others.

2.5 Honesty and Pro-social Behaviour of Students

Honesty simply means adherence to truth; the refusal to lie, cheat or deceive (Lambardo, 2009). Honesty could also be interpreted as being truthful with oneself and with others, being trustworthy, loyal, fair and sincere. Honesty is the quality of being truthful, sincere and straightforward in one's dealing with others. An honest person is one who always tells the truth, does not deceive, cheat, steal or hide vital facts from people that need them. Okunloye and Koledoye (2013) described honesty as a state of being straight forward and upright in whatever one does. According to these authors, honesty is the quality of being honest, always telling the truth and never cheating or stealing.

Honesty flourishes in friendship, when friends are faithful to each other. Parents and teachers who are seen as custodians of knowledge should exhibit honest behaviour in the school and in all their dealings, such that students can imitate them. It entails having enough empathy to not deceive people in order to further one's own interests. According to Grusec and Goodness (2014), some parents and teachers provide the most constant and visible models of behaviours associated with character development. Berns (2017) revealed that honesty is an essential value that is needed in all aspects of life; adding that being honest at home predisposes students to being honest in their association with others outside the home. The author added that students whose teachers achieve success by illegitimate means are most likely to imitate such behaviour in order to achieve better grade academically. Bureau and Mageau (2014) earlier conceived that honesty is significantly associated with adolescents' display of honesty in schools, and adherence to school rules.

3. Research Methodology

For the study, a correlational research strategy was adopted. This design is used whenever the researcher wants to find out the magnitude and direction of relationship that exist between the dependent and independent variables (Udoh and Joseph, 2025). Consequently, this design was deemed appropriate for the study since it allowed the researcher to assess the connection between pro-social conduct and character

education is secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

The population for the study comprised all the 6,589 senior secondary two (SS2) students in the 21 public secondary schools in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area (Directorate of Planning and Research Statistics, Edo State Secondary Education Board, Benin City, 2024).

A sample size of 377 senior secondary two (SS2) was selected for the study, using Taro Yamane sampling formulae. Ten (10) public secondary schools were chosen at random from a total of fifteen schools for the study using a basic random sampling technique. Thereafter, a balloting method of random sampling was used in selecting the respondents per sampled school. The researchers developed an instrument titled "Character Education and Students' Pro-social Behaviour Questionnaire (CESPBQ) were used for data collection. the CESPBQ had two sections, A and B. Section A contained 10 items on character education while section B contained 8 items measuring students pro-social behaviour. CESPBQ was measured in a four-point rating scale of: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

In order to determine the instrument's reliability, internal consistency reliability technique was used. Here, the instrument was administered to 40 SS2 students in a selected school not included in the sample. The instrument was administered and data were collated. Data was subjected to correlation and Cronbach Alpha statistics was applied for test of internal consistency of the instrument. This yielded the overall reliability co-efficient of .78 for character education and .83 for items measuring students' pro-social behaviour. This index according to Udoh and

Josph (2025) is a high reliability index since the reliability co-efficient is above .50. As a result, the instrument was deemed reliable for use in the study.

The researcher, together with two research assistants, individually administered the instrument to the respondents in their individual schools. Also, permission from the respective principals was sought to allow the respondents respond to the items in the instrument. In addition to items written on the questionnaire, verbal instructions and clarifications where needed were also given to subjects. Copies of the questionnaire administered were filled according to instructions and collected instantly. Out of the 377 copies of questionnaire issued, 7 copies were not used for data collation and analysis because they were not properly filled by the respondents, while some lost in the process. Hence, the questionnaire instruments were reduced to 370 which were used for data analysis. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were used to analyse the generated data. The research questions were answered using the decision rule presented by Nuunally (2011) as follows:

Coefficient (r) – Relationship
 1.00
 $\pm .71$ to $\pm .99$ – Very high positive relationship
 $\pm .50$ to $\pm .70$ – High positive relationship
 $\pm .35$ to $\pm .49$ – Average or moderate positive relationship
 $\pm .33$ to $\pm .34$ – Weak positive relationship
 $\pm .10$ to $\pm .22$ – Very weak positive relationship

For the null hypotheses, the standard for decision was to reject the research hypotheses when the calculated r-value is greater than or equals to the critical value, and retained when the calculated value is less than the critical value.

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What relationship exists between the pro-social behaviour and self-discipline of secondary school pupils in the Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area?

Variables	n	$\frac{\sum x}{\sum y}$	$\frac{\sum x^2}{\sum x^3}$	$\sum xy$	r-value	Remark
Self-Discipline (x)	370	5477	81919	171455	.871	Very High Positive Relationship
Pro-social Behaviors of Students (y)	370	5417	79971			

Table 1 shows a very high positive relationship between self-discipline and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area. The result yielded a correlation coefficient of .871. This result suggests that if the students cultivate the character of self-discipline from the schools they are more likely to display pro-social behaviours.

Research Question 2: What relationship exists between the honesty and pro-social behaviour of secondary school in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area?

Table 2: Correlation analysis of responses between self-discipline and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students

Variables	n	$\frac{\sum x}{\sum y}$	$\frac{\sum x^2}{\sum x^3}$	$\sum xy$	r-value	Remark
Honesty (x)	370	5483	82083	175229	.743	Very High Positive Relationship
Pro-social Behaviors of Students (y)	370	5417	79971			

Table 2 shows a very high positive relationship between honesty and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area. The result yielded a correlation coefficient of .743. This result implies that the more teachers teach the students honest dealings, the greater students would display pro-social behaviours.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1

Students' pro-social behaviour and self-discipline in secondary school in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area do not significantly correlate

Table 3: Pearson Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between self-discipline and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students

Variables	n	df	r-cal	r-crit	Decision
Honesty (x)	370	368	.743	0.196	Rejected Ho
Pro-social Behaviors of Students (y)					

Source: Field Data (2023) S = Significant: $P < .05$; $df = 368$; critical $r = 0.196$

Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of .871 exceeded the critical value of 0.196 at the degree of freedom of 368 and .05 significant levels. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is retained and the null hypothesis is rejected. These indices that pro-social behaviour and self-discipline are significantly correlated in secondary school pupils in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

Hypothesis

The pro-social behaviours of secondary school students in the Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area do not significantly correlate with honesty.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between honesty and pro-social behaviours of secondary school students

Variables	n	df	r-cal	r-crit	Decision
Honesty (x)	370	368	.743	0.196	Rejected Ho
Pro-social Behaviors of Students (y)					

Source: Field Data (2023) S = Significant: $P < .05$; $df = 368$; critical $r = 0.196$

Table 4 shows that the calculated r – value of .743 exceeded the critical value of 0.196 at the degree of freedom of 368 and at .05 significant levels. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is retained and the null hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that pro-social behaviour and honesty are significantly correlated in secondary school pupils in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area.

5. Discussion of Findings

The researcher made a combined discussion of findings from the research questions and hypotheses of the study.

The first research question and hypothesis results revealed a very strong, positive correlation between pro-social conduct and self-discipline among secondary school pupils in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with the finding of the study conducted by Grusec and

Goodness (2014), that high self-discipline is strongly correlated with students' healthy behaviours in school. The authors added that students who lack self-discipline are most likely to act in a way that is inconsistent with the laid down rules and regulations governing a learning situation. Hence, it is observed from this finding that poor self-discipline encourages behaviours that is not pro-social in nature.

The findings of research question two and hypothesis two demonstrated a strong, positive correlation between secondary school students' pro-social actions and honesty in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with the finding of the study conducted by Berns (2017), who found that honesty is the value that is needed in all aspects of life; and that being honest at home disposes students to being honest in school activities. The author added that students whose teachers usually consider illegitimate means to achieve success are most likely to imitate such behaviour in order to achieve better grade academically. This finding is also in tandem with that of Bureau and Mageau (2014), that honesty is significantly associated with adolescents' display of honesty in schools and adherence to school rules. Hence, it is observed from this finding that students who learn honesty as worthwhile character are most likely to display pro-social behaviour in the school.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore concluded that self-discipline, honesty and respect are essential component of character education that can enhance pro-social behaviours secondary school students. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers and parents through affective relationship and supportive bond should ensure that they model desirable character traits which young ones can emulate; as such character traits would encourage them to display honesty conducts in school.
- Teachers should always explain moral rules and principles as well as consequences of moral violations to students so that they can continue to maintain pro-social behaviours essential for self and national development.

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