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# **EDUCATING FOR ETHICS IN A SOCIETY EXPERIENCING MORAL DETERIORATION: SOCIAL STUDIES IMPLICATIONS**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of Social Studies in the teaching of morals to minimize the prevalence of moral degeneration in contemporary Nigerian society. The causes and consequences of moral degeneration in society were examined. The paper employed the descriptive survey research design and Social Learning Theory to explain that individuals tend to act based on their observations in society. The paper made use of both primary (questionnaire) and secondary (books, journals, and online materials) types of data. The paper was guided by three research questions. The findings revealed that social studies being a value and moral-laden subject can help minimize moral degeneration's prevalence in contemporary Nigerian society. It is recommended that there should be a national re-orientation of national values among Nigerians by Nigeria's federal, state, and local governments.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Morality, morally degenerated society, Implications, Social Studies Civic education.

## **Introduction**

The deterioration of moral values in our society has become a major problem. Today, in Nigeria, immorality is noticed in all areas of our lives. As a result of a lack of morality, citizens especially the youth have employed anti-social behaviors as the only means of getting rich. The high rate of criminality and anti-social behavior increases in Nigeria with the change in social structure and individual motives. Invention of new modes of scams and frauds are emerging which denotes that youth are tending to get more interested in easy ways of acquiring wealth, power, and fame. Kidnapping, armed robbery, and other types of street crimes such as pick-pocketing, stealing, burglary, house and store breaking, cheating, and car snatching have become serious issues in Nigeria today. Many people are kidnapped and sometimes murdered. Many Nigerian youths today are involved in gambling, bribery corruption, and currency offenses.

Specifically, morality means a system of principles and judgments based on religious, cultural, and philosophical beliefs and concepts that determine right or wrong actions. Okwueze (2003) explains morality as a specific form of social consciousness of awareness concerning others without which social life would be impossible. Similarly,

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morality is explained by Adebisi (2018) as relating to the issue of what is right and wrong. In the view of Akande and Jowondo (2008), morality refers to behaviors or actions that most members of a group consider to be right. It is the principles concerning right or wrong or good and bad behaviors. Moral values such as humility, truthfulness, honesty, respect for elders, tolerance, courtesy, spirit of service and sacrifice, affection, sympathy, love and cooperation are necessary among the youth for proper character and personality development. It helps to develop democratic qualities such as dignity of individual, social and individual justice, brotherhood and equality among students for the success of democracy.

Immorality is a problem in human society and needs urgent solutions to improve life. Gaustad as cited in Oderinde (2008), while writing on the need for enhancing character education, wrote that promoting character education is an important aspect of every good curriculum. Mezieobi (2012) conceives Social Studies education as a vehicle for citizenship education, human skill development, ecological studies, and a value-laden field of study. Social Studies education therefore is an integrated body of knowledge developed to equip the learners with significant knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills to be productively functional in society. Social studies is known for character building. The suitability of social studies in promoting attitudes, morals, and values is largely based on their emphasis on the affective domain of education (Joof, 2010). The implication of this view is that Social Studies education as a school subject has the potential to contribute to building a sound moral society. Amid other objectives, Social Studies education inculcates into the students' appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness, justice, togetherness, and respect for other people's lives and opinions, which the achievement of this aim, then the moral standards of the young people are improved.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Moral decadence is a global problem. For instance, over the years in Nigeria, morality has degenerated and resulted in many vices. Immorality is seen in all areas of life where children learn from adults and the circle goes on. Immoral behaviors are found in all works of life and have greatly affected national development and the country's reputation overseas. Today, Nigerian youths are not interested in upholding societal norms and values like hard work, respect for elders, honesty, and decent dressing among others, this is because much attention is not paid on teaching morals in schools and homes. Given the above situation, this paper examined the role of social studies in teaching moral values in a degenerated society like Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of social studies in teaching moral values to minimize the prevalence of moral degeneration in Nigerian society.

### **Research Questions**

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors responsible for moral degeneration in society?
2. What are the effects of moral degeneration in society?
3. How can social studies help to minimize the prevalence of moral degeneration in contemporary Nigerian society?

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Social Learning Theory:** This study adopted the Social Learning Theory propounded by Albert Bandura. The theory explains that new behaviors are acquired by observing and imitating others. Social learning theory

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emphasizes that behaviour of an individual is related to the thought mechanism of the person, the environment, and the action itself. Basically speaking, learning is cognitive and can take place through observation of rewards and punishments or a direct instruction. Social Learning theory is relevant to this study because it explains how individuals easily learn good or bad behaviors through observation of events in their surroundings. As such, the immoral behaviors as portrayed by the people in the society are as a result of what they learn either through the influence of their peers, parents, or other individuals in the society.

## **Literature Review**

### **Causes and Consequences of Moral Degeneration in the Society**

Many factors are responsible for moral decadence in our society today. Adebisi (2018) maintains that youths who parade the streets as a result of a lack of jobs or unstable academic sessions have become a nuisance to society. The jobless youths have become easy targets by radical organizations and have been used as tools by politicians to perpetuate havoc, especially during election periods. Ajufo (2013) argues that unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youth, causing increased militancy, violent crimes, kidnappings, restiveness, and socially delinquent behavior.

Similarly, O'Donovan (2000) emphasizes that poverty is responsible for a lot of social vices such as prostitution, stealing, and kidnapping in society nowadays. Also, poor parental upbringing has been seen as one of the causes of moral decadence among youths. Some parents today have failed to regulate the activities of their children such as visiting nightclubs and engaging in gambling, rocking, etc. (Obiano, 2016). Likewise, mass media has also been blamed for encouraging immoral acts among the youth in society. Undoubtedly, TV, print media, internet blogs and websites, cinemas, and role models play an important role in shaping the personality of the youth (Adebisi, 2018).

In the same vein, peer group influence is also one of the major causes of moral decadence. Faustine (2013) argues that peers are regarded as an important influence in the character development of an individual, especially at young age. The gradual adoption of the European culture by the traditional African society has resulted to the decrease in morality today. This has contributed to rapid change from traditional society (Sodakekan, 2018).

Moral decadence is not without its consequences. The problem arising as a result of immorality cannot be part of the progressive development of the country. Immoral behaviors exhibited by the youths have crippled the progress of the country. Awoniyi (2003) observes that moral decadence has resulted into slow pace of development. In the same vein, Louw (2009), believes that moral decadence impedes the growth and development of any nation. The consequences of moral decay have led to the collapse of family and community life. Moral degeneration has affected the integrity of Nigeria as a whole. Corruption and other immoral acts taking place in the country has affected the image of the Nigerian society internationally (Chinedu, 2020).

### **Social studies as Potent Instruments for Minimizing Moral Degeneration in Contemporary Nigerian Society**

The general objective of social studies in Nigeria is to develop in students' positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship, and cooperation towards a healthy nation, the inculcation of appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness, and justice. This objective does not only aim at the cognitive development of the learners but also develops some values and attitudes that will make them grow into useful and responsible citizens.

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In like manner, the search for means of instilling good traits, norms, and attitudes in the citizens through the formal school system led to the inclusion of social studies in the curriculum. The subject therefore focuses on developing the right values, attitudes, and skills that will help the child to become a responsible citizen, to interact effectively with others, and to perform civic and national duties. Nwangwu (2021) confirms that the main justification for the teaching of social studies is to make individuals act wisely, humanly, and reasonably when dealing with other human beings. Effective implementation of social studies education programs will entrench discipline, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and harmonious existence in learners in their prime age.

The emphasis here is to draw attention to the multi-dimensional nature of the moral education enterprise through social studies. It is on this premise that Johnstone and Munn (2011) advocated five moral components through the teaching of social studies; a consideration for others; an awareness of feeling in one's own and others; the ability to collect data in a situation involving morality; ability to take a decision and will to act on the decision. Lipman (2010) and Sharp (2012) found that social studies advocate character education, and they recommended five primary moral traits for children's character development which are: to make right moral judgments; to postpone gratification of desires; to treat other human beings with dignity, to be flexible in making moral judgment and to be creative and dynamic in moral decisions.

## Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design to collect data from the subject. The population for this study consisted of the total population of secondary school social studies teachers in Oyo metropolis. The sample for this study comprised one hundred and fifty (150) randomly selected teachers (3 teachers per school) from fifty randomly selected schools in the area of study. The primary data was obtained from the administration of questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A dealt with demographic data of the respondents such as gender, religion, educational qualification and years of teaching experience. While Section B contained five (5) items related to the subject matter. The questionnaire was put at a four-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two social studies experts in the Department of Social studies at Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, which gave a reliability coefficient value of 0.73. The secondary data was obtained from books, journals, and internet materials. Data collected were analyzed using tables, frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square methods of statistics.

## Results

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	95	63.33
	Female	55	36.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

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<b>Religion</b>	Islam	70	46.67
	Christianity	50	33.33
	Traditional	30	20.00
Total		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	NCE	45	30.00
	B.Ed/B.Sc (Ed.)	95	63.33
	M.Ed.	10	06.67
Total		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	1-10 years	115	76.67
	11-20 years	29	19.33
	21-30 years	06	04.00
Total		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1 shows that 95 (63.33%) of the teachers were males while 55 (36.67%) were females; 70(46.67%) were Muslims, 50 (33.33%) were Christians while the remaining 30 (20.00%) were traditional worshippers; 45 (30.00%) had NCE certificates; 95 (63.33%) had either B. Ed or B.Sc. (Ed) degrees while the remaining 10 (06.67%) had M. Ed degrees; 115 (76.67%) had between 1-10 years of teaching experience, 29 (19.33%) had between 11-20 years of teaching experience while the remaining 06 (04.00%) had between 21-30 years of teaching experience. The result shows that majority of the teachers who participated in the study were males Muslims having either B.Ed or B.Sc. (Ed.) degrees with between 1-10 years of teaching experience.

### Research Question One:

**What are the factors responsible for moral degeneration in society?**

**Table 2: Analysis of factors responsible for moral degeneration in the society Test Statistics**

		X <sup>2</sup> tab	Positive Response	Negative Response	Decision
Chi-Square	214.373 <sup>a</sup>	24.32	561 (74.8%)	281 (25.2%)	Accepted
df	7				
Asymp. Sig.	.000				

Table 2 shows that the calculated chi-square value of 214.373 is greater than the tabulated value of 24.32. Also, the percentage of positive responses 74.8% is higher than the percentage of negative responses, 25.8%. This

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indicates that careless attitudes of parents to monitor the behavior of their children, overpampering of children by parents and peer group influence are among the factors responsible for moral degeneration in society.

### Research Question Two:

**What are the effects of moral degeneration on society?**

**Table 3: Analysis of the effects of moral degeneration on society.**

#### Test Statistics

		X <sup>2</sup> tab	Positive Response	Negative Response	Decision
Chi-Square	269.627 <sup>a</sup>	24.32	444 (59.2%)	306 (40.8%)	Accepted
df	7				
Asymp. Sig.	.000				

Table 3 reveals that, the calculated chi-square value 269.627 is greater than the tabulated value 24.32. Also, the percentage of positive responses 59.2% is higher than the percentage of negative response 40.8%. This implies that immoral attitudes, acts, behaviours and characters such as bad leadership, youths forming and joining bad gangs and cult groups, destruction of lives and properties, radical persons used as political thugs are some of the effects of moral degeneration on the society.

### Research Question Three:

**How can Social Studies education help to minimize the incidence of moral degeneration in the contemporary Nigerian society?**

**Table 4: Analysis of How Social studies can help to Minimize the Incidence of Moral Degeneration in the Contemporary Nigerian Society**

		X <sup>2</sup> tab	Positive Response	Negative Response	Decision
Chi-Square	133.680 <sup>b</sup>	20.51	469 (62.5%)	281 (37.5%)	Accepted
df	5				
Asymp. Sig.	.000				

Table 4 indicates that, the calculated chi-square value 133.680 is greater than the tabulated value 20.51. Also, the percentage of positive responses 62.5% is higher than the percentage of negative responses 37.5%. This means that social studies being a value laden subject which teaches moral education to students, instills good traits, norms, right attitudes and desirable values to the young ones to become responsible citizens in the future can help to minimize the prevalence of moral degeneration in the contemporary society.



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### **Discussion of Results**

The result of this study revealed that peer group influence and bad leadership are among the causes and effects of moral degeneration in Nigerian society. This result supports the view of Faustine (2013) who submitted that peers are regarded as an important influence in the character development of an individual. The result of this study also revealed that social studies can help to minimize the prevalence of moral degeneration in Nigerian society. This result corroborates the findings of (Joof, 2010) who reported that the suitability of social studies in promoting moral values is largely based on its emphasis on the affective domain of education. The result of this study is also in tandem with the findings of Nwangwu (2021) who believes that the main justification for the teaching of social studies is the contribution it can make to an individual's ability to act wisely, humanly, and reasonably when dealing with other human beings. In the same vein, the result of this study supports the views of Johnstone and Munn (2011) who developed five moral components through the teaching of social studies as well as Lipman (2010) and Sharp (2012) who found that Social Studies education advocates character education.

### **Conclusion**

Immorality is the most deterring factor of crime, anti-social behavior, terrorism, assault, cybercrime, corruption, etc. it is very imperative to find out the major causes of the decline of morality in society. Moral principles held the world together. So, there is a set of needs of moral principles and values to be imparted to children to make them better and responsible citizens. The moral orientation of youths needs to be strengthened to build up a moral and harmonious society. It is therefore concluded that moral training is one of the targets of the Nigerian Social studies programs.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Social Studies education should be repositioned to promote moral instructions in a way to get rid of the prevailing moral decadence among young people in Nigeria. Moral instructions should be planned as part of the curriculum offerings of social studies education in Nigeria. Some changes should be made in the curriculum, keeping in view the social, moral, cultural, and national values. Government at all levels in Nigeria should improve the standard of living of the people, especially the youths who engage in immoral acts because of the high rate of unemployment and poverty. There should be a re-orientation of national values among the youths by the federal government of Nigeria. The various governments in Nigeria should legislate against media operators who publish indecent actions in their publications. This is to ensure that only appropriate types of broadcasting will be televised and eventually reduces the stress of moral decay. Parents, as the primary agents of socialization, should inculcate in their children the accepted norms and values of society. Social values should clearly be distinguished from social conservatism and superstition. The purpose of education should not only be limited to the acquisition of abstract knowledge and blind socialization but also sound moral values. Immoral behaviors exhibited by the youths should be dealt with accordingly to serve as deterrence to others. Religious leaders should be involved in the fight against moral decadence in the society through their preachings. Non-governmental Organizations and other Social Voluntary Associations should be strengthened to coordinate youth activities to minimize immoral behaviors.

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