



Research Article

Influence of Civic Education on the Development of Moral Reasoning and Prosocial Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study investigated the influence of civic education on the development of moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the effect of civic education on students' moral reasoning, its influence on prosocial behaviour, and the relationship between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour. A descriptive correlation survey research design was employed, and a total of 384 students were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Civic Education, Moral Reasoning, and Prosocial Behaviour Questionnaire (CEMRPBQ), which was validated by experts and demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' perceptions and inferential statistics, including multiple regression and Pearson correlation, to test the research hypotheses. The findings revealed that civic education significantly

enhances moral reasoning ($\beta = 0.643$, $p < .001$) and prosocial behaviour ($\beta = 0.611$, $p < .001$) among students. Furthermore, a strong positive relationship was observed between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour ($r = .712$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of moral reasoning are associated with increased prosocial tendencies. The study concluded that civic education plays a critical role in promoting ethical cognition and socially responsible behaviours among adolescents. It is recommended that schools adopt structured civic education programs, and teachers employ participatory teaching methods to reinforce moral and prosocial development in students.

Keywords: Civic education, Moral reasoning, Prosocial behaviour, Secondary school students, Zamfara State

INTRODUCTION

The growing concern over moral decline, indiscipline, and antisocial behaviours among secondary school students has attracted significant scholarly attention globally and within developing countries such as Nigeria. Recent studies emphasize that schools are not only centers for cognitive development but also critical institutions for shaping students' moral reasoning and social behaviours. Civic education, as a value-oriented subject, has been identified as a key mechanism for fostering responsible citizenship, ethical awareness, and prosocial tendencies among young learners. For instance, Simushi, Simui, and Muleya (2025) found that civic education significantly promotes moral consciousness, ethical behaviour, and responsible citizenship among students. This suggests that structured civic instruction can address behavioural challenges prevalent among adolescents.

However, Ayane and Mihiretie (2024) assert that civic education curricula are designed to cultivate moral identity, social responsibility, and civic competence among students. Similarly, innovative civic learning approaches, such as problem-oriented learning, have been shown to enhance students' moral judgment and behaviour (Kusmaryono & Suyitno, 2025). These findings reinforce the relevance of civic education in nurturing ethical dispositions among learners in contemporary societies. In the field of developmental psychology, moral reasoning is widely regarded as a predictor of prosocial behaviour. Theoretical perspectives such as Kohlberg's theory of moral development explain how individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning that influence their actions. Contemporary empirical studies support this view. Muñoz and Morales (2024) found that moral reasoning significantly predicts prosocial behaviour among adolescents, indicating that students with higher levels of moral reasoning are more likely to engage in helping behaviours. Similarly, Yu, Li, and Zhang (2025) reported that moral identity and sensitivity positively influence prosocial behaviour, while moral disengagement negatively affects such actions.

Castro, Pérez, and Rodríguez (2025) revealed that students' civic experiences within school environments shape their prosocial decision-making, influenced by empathy, peer relationships, and perceived responsibility. Likewise, Zhang, Wang, and Chen (2023) established that civic involvement significantly enhances prosocial attitudes and behaviours among young people. These findings suggest that exposure

to civic-oriented learning environments can foster socially desirable behaviours among students. Furthermore, character and moral education frameworks emphasize the role of formal education in promoting prosocial values such as empathy, cooperation, and altruism. García, López, and Martínez (2024) highlight that structured moral and civic instruction plays a vital role in nurturing prosocial behaviour among students. Earlier empirical work by Brestovanský (2016) also supports the link between ethics education and higher levels of prosocial moral reasoning. Despite these global advances, there remains a contextual gap in understanding how civic education specifically influences moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara State. Therefore, this study seeks to examine this relationship in order to provide empirical evidence that can inform educational policy and practice.

The structured of civic and moral instruction significantly enhances students' ethical thinking and judgment. For instance, Shi, Chen, and Gong (2023) found that civic-moral education improves students' moral cognition and reasoning across educational levels. Buchmann (2024) also reported that civic engagement is closely associated with higher levels of moral reasoning among adolescents. Similarly, Shakeel, Wolf, Johnson, Harris, and Morris (2024) established that schooling contributes significantly to the development of civic values and reasoning skills. In addition, Grütter and Buchmann (2021) as well as Wray-Lake (2023) confirmed that civic-related learning experiences foster progressive development in moral reasoning. Castro, Hung, and Bergin (2025) further demonstrated that civic learning contexts enhance students' reasoning about moral and social issues.

Furthermore, Alfirević, Arslanagić-Kalajdžić, and Lep (2023) found that civic involvement significantly predicts prosocial behaviour by strengthening social responsibility among students. Shodiq, Syamsudin, Dahliana, Kurniawaty, and Faiz (2024) reported that civic-oriented interactions influence students' prosocial actions both online and offline. Peng, Jiang, Ye, and Xiong (2024) also found that empathy and moral identity key outcomes of civic education significantly predict prosocial behaviour. Chen, Kasa, and Yusoff (2025) further established that moral character developed through education strongly influences prosocial behaviour among students. Additionally, Carlo, Padilla-Walker, and Nielson (2023) emphasized that civic values and social responsibility are important predictors of prosocial tendencies among adolescents. Özcan and Aytar (2023) found that individuals with higher moral reasoning demonstrate stronger prosocial behaviours. Peng et al. (2024) also showed that moral identity mediates the relationship between empathy and prosocial behaviour. Alfirević et al. (2023) confirmed that moral responsibility influences prosocial actions through civic engagement pathways. Buchmann (2024) further revealed that prosocial moral reasoning directly predicts helping behaviour and civic participation. Moreover, Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Knafo-Noam (2024) highlighted that moral cognition, empathy, and emotional regulation are key determinants of prosocial behaviour across developmental stages. However, most of these studies are conducted outside the Nigerian context, thereby justifying the need for further investigation within Zamfara State.

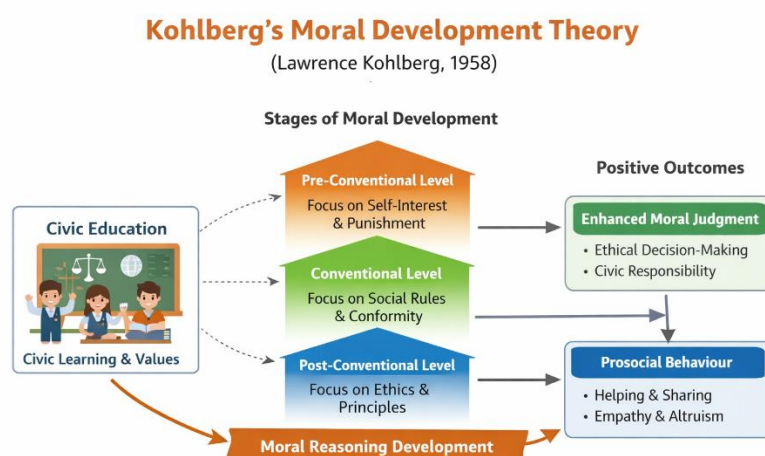
Consequently, there is increasing concern about moral decline and antisocial behaviours among secondary school students in Zamfara State despite the inclusion of civic education in the curriculum to promote moral values and prosocial behaviour. However, it remains unclear whether civic education effectively influences students' moral reasoning and behaviour. Therefore, this study seeks to examine its impact in order to provide evidence-based insights for improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Moral Development Theory propounded by Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) was adopted. The theory explains that individuals progress through sequential stages of moral reasoning, ranging from pre-conventional to conventional and post-conventional levels, and that moral judgment develops through social interaction, education, and cognitive growth. In the context of this research, civic education provides structured opportunities for students to engage with moral dilemmas, societal values, and civic responsibilities, thereby enhancing their level of moral reasoning and influencing their behaviour. Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma (1999) argue that moral reasoning can be improved through deliberate educational interventions such as value-based instruction. Similarly, Nucci and Narvaez (2008) emphasize that classroom experiences, including civic and moral education, play a critical role in advancing students' moral judgment. More recent studies also support Kohlberg's assumptions; Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Knafo-Noam (2024) highlight that moral cognition developed through social learning environments predicts prosocial behaviour among adolescents.

Likewise, Carlo et al. (2023) found that higher levels of moral reasoning are associated with increased prosocial tendencies such as helping, sharing, and cooperation. Thus, Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for this study by explaining how civic education can influence the development of moral reasoning and subsequently promote prosocial behaviour among secondary school students.

Diagram of Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory



Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory explains how individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, from self-interest and obedience to social conformity, and finally to principled ethical thinking. In the context of this study, civic education serves as a key influence that exposes students to societal values, ethical dilemmas, and civic responsibilities. This exposure helps students advance through the stages of moral reasoning, which enhances their ability to make ethical decisions and fosters prosocial behaviours such as helping, sharing, empathy, and cooperation. Essentially, the theory suggests that structured moral and civic instruction can transform students' moral cognition into positive social actions, providing a clear framework for understanding how civic education can shape both moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the influence of civic education on the development of moral reasoning among secondary school students in Zamfara State.
2. To examine the influence of civic education on prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State.
3. To assess the relationship between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students exposed to civic education in Zamfara State.

Research Questions

1. What is the influence of civic education on the development of moral reasoning among secondary school students in Zamfara State?
2. How does civic education influence prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State?
3. What relationship exists between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students exposed to civic education in Zamfara State?

Research Hypotheses

1. H_{01} : Civic education has no significant influence on the development of moral reasoning among secondary school students in Zamfara State.
2. H_{02} : Civic education has no significant influence on prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State.
3. H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students exposed to civic education in Zamfara State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, which investigates the influence of civic education on the development of moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State, Nigeria, a descriptive correlation survey research design was adopted. This design was considered appropriate because it allows for systematic collection and analysis of data to examine the relationships between civic education, moral reasoning, and prosocial behaviour, while enabling generalization to the larger student population. The target population comprised all secondary school students

in Zamfara State, and a simple random sampling technique was used to select 384 respondents to ensure representativeness and minimize sampling bias. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Civic Education, Moral Reasoning, and Prosocial Behaviour Questionnaire (CEMRPBQ)”, developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A captured respondents’ demographic information, Section B measured moral reasoning, and Section C assessed prosocial behaviour.

The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review by educational and psychology specialists, who examined the questionnaire for content, construct, and face validity. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding a high reliability index of 0.89, indicating excellent internal consistency. Respondents’ answers were captured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Quantitative data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics, including multiple regression and Pearson correlation analysis, to test the hypotheses and determine the significance and strength of relationships among the variables. Ethical considerations were observed, with informed consent obtained from participants and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity provided. This methodology provides a robust framework for assessing the influence of civic education on moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students.

Results

Table 1. Regression Analysis of Civic Education on Moral Reasoning

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	10.456	1.234	-	8.47	< .001
Civic Education	0.752	0.092	0.643	8.17	< .001

Civic education significantly predicts moral reasoning among secondary school students in Zamfara State ($\beta = 0.643$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H_{01} is rejected, indicating that higher exposure to civic education is associated with higher levels of moral reasoning.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of Civic Education on Prosocial Behaviour

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	8.321	1.118	-	7.44	< .001
Civic Education	0.684	0.085	0.611	8.05	< .001

Civic education significantly influences prosocial behaviour ($\beta = 0.611$, $p < .001$). H_{02} is rejected, showing that students who receive more civic education are more likely to engage in prosocial actions.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation between Moral Reasoning and Prosocial Behaviour

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Moral Reasoning	376	3.75	0.93	0.712	0.001
Prosocial Behaviour	376	3.56	0.82	0.712	0.001

There is a strong positive correlation between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour ($r = .712, p < .01$), suggesting that students with higher moral reasoning are more likely to demonstrate prosocial behaviours. H_{03} is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that civic education significantly influences moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour among secondary school students in Zamfara State, and that moral reasoning is closely associated with prosocial behaviour. Regarding the first hypothesis (H_{01}), the results revealed that civic education has a significant positive effect on moral reasoning. This aligns with recent research showing that civic reasoning in educational settings promotes students' capacity for deeper ethical reflection and complex moral deliberation during adolescence, as students integrate contextual experiences, values, and emotional understanding into their decision-making processes (Gotlieb et al., 2024). Such developmental perspectives stress that engaging youth in civic learning is not merely about acquiring factual knowledge but about fostering cognitive and socio-emotional competencies that underpin moral reasoning and identity formation (Buchmann, 2024). In this regard, the result supports the idea that school-based civic education contributes to adolescents' ethical growth by creating contexts where ethical perspectives and values are actively discussed and internalized.

Similarly, the second hypothesis (H_{02}) was rejected because civic education was found to significantly influence prosocial behaviour. This result is supported by recent empirical research indicating that educational environments that emphasize civic engagement and social responsibility encourage students to make decisions that benefit others and their communities (Castro et al., 2025). Studies show that civic and prosocial decision-making often involves thoughtful consideration of helping others and the social impact of one's actions, which are nurtured within supportive school contexts where students practice these behaviours (Castro et al., 2025). These findings also resonate with the literature highlighting that prosocial behaviour in adolescents is influenced by factors such as empathy and moral identity, which can be strengthened through civic education programs that foster perspective-taking and concern for others (Li Peng et al., 2024; Shodiq et al., 2024). Therefore, civic education appears to act as both an instructional and motivational force, shaping students' prosocial inclinations toward cooperation, helping, and community involvement.

The third hypothesis (H_{03}), proposing no relationship between moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour, was also rejected, as a strong positive relationship was observed. This outcome is consistent with evidence from developmental and psychological research showing that moral awareness and sensitivity are foundational for prosocial actions. For example, adult and youth studies have demonstrated that moral sensitivity directly predicts prosocial behaviour and that individuals who are more attuned to moral aspects of social situations tend to respond in ways that benefit others (Frontiers in Psychology, 2024). Moreover, research with high school students underscores that moral identity and empathy significantly enhance prosocial behavioural outcomes, both online and offline, suggesting that underlying moral

dispositions are closely linked to how students behave socially (Shodiq et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the conceptualization that moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour are interdependent processes: as students strengthen their moral reasoning capacities through civic education, they are better equipped to act in prosocial ways.

CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated that civic education significantly influences the moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour of secondary school students in Zamfara State. Students exposed to civic education not only developed higher levels of moral reasoning but also demonstrated more prosocial behaviours, such as cooperation, helping others, and community engagement. Additionally, moral reasoning was found to be strongly positively correlated with prosocial behaviour, indicating that ethical cognition and social conduct are closely linked. These findings highlight the importance of civic education as a tool for promoting both cognitive and behavioural aspects of student development, fostering ethically aware and socially responsible adolescents who can contribute positively to their communities.

Recommendations

1. Schools should integrate structured civic education programs into the curriculum to enhance students' moral reasoning and ethical decision-making skills.
2. Teachers should employ participatory and experiential teaching methods, such as debates, role-plays, and community projects, to promote prosocial behaviour among students.
3. Policy makers and school administrators should provide training and resources for educators to effectively deliver civic education that connects moral reasoning with real-life social actions.
4. Parents and community leaders should collaborate with schools to reinforce civic and moral values at home and in community activities, creating consistent social and ethical learning environments.

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