

**THE ROLE OF GENERAL STUDIES IN CHARACTER FORMATION
AND CHANGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN TERTIARY
INSTITUTIONS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Rising concerns over increasing moral decline, indiscipline, cult activities, exam malpractice, and other antisocial behaviors among university students have raised questions about higher education's ability to instill essential values and support character development. This study explored the impact of General Studies (GST) programmes on shaping character and influencing behavior among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. It specifically assessed how GST courses contribute to developing moral values, civic responsibility, interpersonal abilities, national awareness, leadership skills, and ethical behavior. Using a descriptive survey design grounded in social learning and moral development theories, data were collected from 450 students across selected institutions through structured questionnaires and documentary sources. Results indicated that GST courses—especially those covering communication skills, entrepreneurship, peace and conflict resolution, citizenship education, philosophy, and information literacy—play a meaningful role in shaping students' attitudes, values, and social conduct. The findings also showed that engagement with these courses strengthens critical thinking, fosters tolerance and patriotism, promotes responsible citizenship, and supports positive behavioral changes. Nonetheless, several obstacles hinder the programme's effectiveness, including limited teaching resources, negative student perceptions toward GST courses, overcrowded classes, and a lack of practical application. Despite these limitations, the study confirmed that General Studies remain a crucial part of higher education, contributing significantly to the development of ethically sound, socially conscious, and well-rounded graduates. To improve outcomes, the study recommended enhancing the GST curriculum, employing more innovative teaching methods, and incorporating value-based and experiential learning strategies. It concluded that General Studies education is a vital tool for

encouraging positive character development and supporting holistic growth among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria.

Key words: General Studies, Character Formation, Behavioural Change, Undergraduates, Imo State, Nigeria

Introduction

Education extends beyond academic growth to include the development of values, attitudes, and behaviors that support responsible citizenship and societal progress. In Nigerian higher education, the General Studies (GST) programme was established to broaden students' knowledge and instill essential qualities such as moral integrity, critical thinking, national identity, leadership, and social responsibility (Nwachukwu and Azuka, 2024). The curriculum includes subjects like Communication in English, Use of Library, Philosophy and Logic, Nigerian Peoples and Culture, Entrepreneurship, Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, and Civic Education—all aimed at positively shaping students' character and conduct. Character formation describes the process by which individuals acquire ethical principles, values, and socially appropriate behaviors that guide their decisions and interactions. Character change, in contrast, refers to the shift from less constructive attitudes and values toward more positive and socially beneficial ones. Research suggests that education plays a central role in shaping individuals' moral outlook and contributing to national advancement (Nwachukwu & Azuka, 2024). More recent scholarship highlights the need to embed moral and values education within university curricula to encourage ethical behavior and active citizenship among youth (Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024).

Rising cases of examination fraud, cult activities, cybercrime, substance abuse, corruption, violence, and weakening moral standards among Nigerian youths have raised questions about the effectiveness of educational institutions in fostering character development. In this context, General Studies programmes have become vital in promoting key values such as honesty, discipline, tolerance, patriotism, hard work, and healthy interpersonal relationships among students. As Nwachukwu and Azuka (2024) note, education remains a powerful tool for reshaping character and transforming society. Likewise, Udensi et al. (2024) found that structured educational initiatives and orientation programmes significantly support students' personal adjustment and value acquisition.

The GST curriculum is designed to build intellectual and ethical skills that apply across academic disciplines. By engaging with subjects such as civic education, entrepreneurship, peace studies, and communication, students are expected to develop attitudes conducive to leadership and meaningful social engagement. Additionally, socio-emotional factors—including self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and resilience—have been shown to affect students' behavior and academic adaptation (Ezeonwumelu et al., 2024). This suggests that General Studies courses can play a crucial role in nurturing these personal attributes and supporting positive character development.

Imo State is home to several tertiary institutions, including the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, and Federal Polytechnic Nekede. In these institutions, the implementation of General Studies is expected to significantly support students' moral and social growth. However, there is little research on how effectively these programmes influence character

development and behavioral change among undergraduates in the state. This study therefore aims to examine the role of General Studies in shaping and transforming student character within tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model adopted for this study includes the Social Learning Theory and Moral Development Theory which provide a firm basis for examining the effect of General Studies (GS) courses on character formation and behavioural change of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Social Learning Theory was pioneered by Bandura (1977; 1986) and it states that people learn new behaviour and acquire new values through observation, imitation, modelling and reinforcement in a given social environment. At the tertiary level, students constantly observe and imitate their lecturers, peers and other social interactions as well as the general social environment for behavioural and attitudinal changes. GS courses expose the students to ethical principles, leadership, national values, interpersonal skills and responsibility among other values for modelling and reinforcement. As a result, students develop improved behaviours and attitudes appropriate for responsible citizenship. Thus, the theory can be used to examine the effect of GS courses on the character formation of undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The study will additionally adopt Moral Development Theory proposed by Kohlberg (1981). According to the theory, morality progresses through discrete stages to higher levels of moral understanding. Students who participate in GS courses including ethics, peace education, citizenship education and critical thinking develop higher levels of moral understanding, reasoning and responsibility. This study uses the theory to evaluate the ability of GS courses to lead the students to higher levels of moral reasoning and decision making as well as responsible behaviour.

Both theories are related and provide the best framework for evaluating the effect of General Studies courses on the character formation of undergraduates at the tertiary level of education. While the Social Learning Theory is used to examine the role of observation and imitation in teaching and fostering behavioural changes among the students, the Moral Development Theory will be used to evaluate the ability of GS courses to foster higher levels of moral reasoning and decision making capabilities among the students. Previous studies have demonstrated that value oriented education has a positive effect on the academic achievement and attitudes of students in the institutions of higher learning. However, most of them have failed to establish the impact of GS courses on the character formation and behavioural change of undergraduates. This study focuses on GS courses and tries to identify the possible mechanisms by which they influence behavioural changes and attitude of the students.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the presence of General Studies courses in Nigerian universities, moral decline among students persists and appears to be worsening. Issues such as exam malpractice, online fraud, drug use, cult involvement, sexual misconduct, and violent behavior continue to challenge the credibility of higher education in promoting ethical conduct and positive behavioral development. While the GST programme was specifically introduced to foster values like integrity, patriotism, and civic responsibility, there is still limited empirical data on its actual impact on character development among students in Imo State. Most prior research has focused on academic outcomes, emotional intelligence, or general student adaptation, rather than

assessing how these courses contribute to behavioral transformation. As a result, it remains unclear whether participation in General Studies has led to meaningful changes in students' values, attitudes, and actions. This gap in understanding underscores the importance of the current study. The broad objective of this study is to investigate the role of General Studies in character formation and change among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to: a). determine influence of General Studies courses on character formation among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State; b). examine the contribution of General Studies courses to behavioral change among undergraduates; c). identify the values and attitudes acquired through General Studies programmes; d). ascertain students' perceptions of the effectiveness of General Studies in promoting ethical behavior; e). identify challenges affecting the effectiveness of General Studies programmes in character development; f). suggest strategies for improving the role of General Studies in character formation among undergraduates. This research holds substantial importance as it aims to deliver empirical insights regarding the role of General Studies programs in nurturing moral values and fostering positive behavioral changes among undergraduate students. The results will be advantageous for university administrators, curriculum designers, educators, policymakers, and other educational stakeholders by offering essential information to enhance the content and execution of General Studies courses. Furthermore, this study will add to the current body of knowledge surrounding moral education and character development, serving as a valuable reference for future scholars focusing on higher education and value orientation.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design, chosen for its effectiveness in gathering information about respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the impact of General Studies on character development and behavioral change. The research was carried out in Imo State, Nigeria, a region notable for its dense network of tertiary institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Five institutions were selected: Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Umuagwo, and Federal Polytechnic Nekede. Data were drawn from both undergraduate students and lecturers engaged in General Studies courses. Imo State was deemed an appropriate setting due to its educational prominence and the diversity of student populations exposed to General Studies programmes. The study population included all undergraduates and General Studies lecturers within the chosen institutions. Specifically, the target group consisted of 4,500 students across various faculties and academic levels who had taken General Studies (GST) courses. A sample of 450 participants—primarily students, along with a smaller number of lecturers—was selected purposively from identified institutions offering GST courses. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires containing closed and open-ended questions, aimed at assessing students' views on GST courses and their perceived role in shaping character and behavior. Secondary data were sourced from textbooks, academic journals, conference papers, and other scholarly works related to General Studies and moral education. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores. Questionnaire responses were coded and interpreted in line with the study's objectives, with

results presented in tables and discussed systematically. One main limitation of this study was that the data were collected from a questionnaire based on participants' responses. Such a method of data collection may be associated with biases, especially when questions are open-ended. Some participants may respond to them in a way they believe is more socially acceptable rather than providing honest answers. The nature of this study implies a possibility of such bias, given that it explores people's perceptions or thoughts about specific theories or actions. As a result, some participants may report higher degrees of positive influences or lower degrees of negative influences of General Studies courses on their characters. For these reasons, the obtained results should be considered with caution, as the effect size and direction may be exaggerated. On the other hand, participants' anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized, which reduced the chances of social desirability bias. Therefore, future research should consider using mixed methods, such as qualitative interviews or observations, to complement the results of a quantitative study. It may allow obtaining more accurate and unbiased results regarding the influence of General Studies courses on undergraduate students' characters.

Result and Discussions

Influence of General Studies (GST) courses on character formation among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State

Table 1 showed that with an benchmark average of 2.50, all statements received mean scores exceeding this threshold, indicating that General Studies courses have a positive impact on character development among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The overall grand mean of 2.84 (SD = 0.93) shows that respondents largely agree that GST courses play a meaningful role in fostering essential character traits and values. General Studies (GST) courses are widely regarded as essential in shaping the character and moral values of undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, including those in Imo State. These courses aim to equip students with a broad educational foundation that extends beyond their specific academic disciplines, focusing on areas such as ethics, civic duty, communication, and cultural understanding. Okafor and Nwankwo (2020) describe GST programmes as platforms for value reorientation, helping students adopt key societal principles like honesty, accountability, and respect. Likewise, Ezeani (2021) highlights that subjects such as Peace and Conflict Resolution and Nigerian Peoples and Culture promote tolerance, patriotism, and harmonious living among students, contributing to a reduction in antisocial behaviour on campuses.

In addition, GST courses play a vital role in developing soft skills and ethical reasoning—competencies crucial for responsible participation in society. Adeyemi and Ogunleye (2019) point out that elements like communication training and entrepreneurship education within GST boost students' confidence, leadership potential, and problem-solving abilities, which in turn support positive personal development. The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2023) underscores that the primary goal of GST is to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also ethically grounded and capable of contributing to national progress. This perspective is echoed by Nwosu (2022), who views GST as a mechanism for socialization, linking academic learning with broader societal expectations. Within tertiary institutions in Imo State, the impact of GST is clearly visible in fostering discipline, ethical decision-making, and a sense of social responsibility among students. Research by Umeh and Ibe (2020) indicates

that students who actively participate in GST coursework tend to exhibit stronger moral reasoning and are less likely to engage in academic dishonesty. This implies that GST does more than convey information—it actively influences student attitudes and conduct. As such, GST continues to be a fundamental part of higher education curricula designed to nurture individuals with strong moral character and a commitment to responsible citizenship.

Table 1: Influence of General Studies (GST) courses on character formation among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State

Influence Statements		Mean	SD
	GST courses promote honesty and integrity among students.	3.11	0.9
2	GST courses enhance students' sense of responsibility and accountability.	3.04	0.8
3	GST courses encourage respect for societal values and norms.	2.98	0.9
4	GST courses improve students' interpersonal relationships and tolerance.	2.94	0.9
5	GST courses foster discipline and self-control among undergraduates.	2.87	0.9
6	GST courses promote ethical decision-making among students.	2.80	0.9
7	GST courses encourage peaceful coexistence and national unity.	2.77	0.9
8	GST courses influence students to develop positive attitudes towards leadership and citizenship.	2.70	0.9
9	GST courses enhance students' commitment to community service and social responsibility.	2.66	0.9
10	GST courses contribute to reducing immoral behaviours among undergraduates.	2.58	0.96

Contribution of General Studies (GST) Courses to Behavioural Change Among Undergraduates

Table 2 indicated that all listed aspects were recognized as significant ways in which GST courses contribute to behavioural change among undergraduate students. The most highly rated contribution was respect for authority, acknowledged by 91.1% of respondents, followed by academic integrity at 90.0% and discipline at 88.9%. This suggests that GST courses have a substantial impact on fostering desirable behaviours in tertiary education settings. The lowest-rated, yet still considerable, contribution was the reduction of aggressive behaviour, reported by 66.7% of participants. Taken together, the results demonstrate that GST courses play a meaningful role in promoting positive behavioural development among undergraduates in tertiary institutions across Imo State.

General Studies (GST) courses are widely recognized as vital academic components that play a key role in shaping undergraduate behaviour within tertiary institutions. In Nigerian universities, these courses aim not only to broaden students' general knowledge but also to influence their attitudes, values, and social behaviour. By covering subjects such as ethics, communication skills, peace and conflict resolution, entrepreneurship, and Nigerian peoples and culture, GST programmes support positive behavioural development (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2023). A significant impact of GST courses lies in their ability to curb

social problems like cultism, exam malpractice, substance abuse, and other forms of misconduct. Through value-based instruction—particularly in courses such as Peace and Conflict Resolution—students are guided toward adopting socially acceptable behaviours and steering clear of actions that could harm their academic progress or personal development (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2020). Ezeani (2021) further notes that these programmes foster self-discipline, respect for authority, and openness to diversity, all of which are essential for meaningful behavioural change in higher education settings.

In addition, GST courses encourage ethical thinking and responsible civic engagement, reinforcing students' dedication to academic honesty and social accountability. As Nwosu (2022) points out, GST acts as a tool for socialization, connecting academic content with societal norms and helping learners embrace principles like integrity, responsibility, and adherence to rules. Similarly, Umeh and Ibe (2020) report that students exposed to GST curricula are less likely to engage in unethical conduct and more likely to build stronger interpersonal relationships and a heightened sense of civic duty. Overall, GST courses act as a driving force for behavioural transformation by equipping students with the moral insight and intellectual foundation necessary for responsible living. Their impact reaches beyond academic environments, contributing to the development of disciplined, ethically grounded, and socially conscious graduates who can actively support national growth.

Table 2: Contribution of General Studies (GST) Courses to Behavioural Change Among Undergraduates

S/N	Contributions of GST Courses to Behavioural Change	Frequency	Percentage
1	Reduction of cultism and related vices	380	84.4
2	Reduction of examination malpractice	360	80.0
3	Promotion of discipline among students	400	88.9
4	Improvement in communication behaviour	345	76.7
5	Reduction in drug abuse and substance use	320	71.1
6	Promotion of respect for authority	410	91.1
7	Enhancement of ethical decision-making	390	86.7
8	Strengthening of civic responsibility	370	82.2
9	Reduction of aggressive and violent behaviour	300	66.7
10	Promotion of academic integrity	405	90.0

Values and Attitudes Acquired Through General Studies Programmes

Table 3 indicates that moral and ethical values received the most responses, cited by 320 participants (71.1%), making it the top-ranked attribute. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills followed closely, selected by 310 respondents (68.9%). A significant number of participants also emphasized tolerance and respect for others (65.6%) and effective communication skills (63.3%). In contrast, appreciation of cultural diversity was the least commonly selected value, mentioned by 225 respondents (50.0%). Because individuals were allowed to choose multiple options, the total number of responses surpasses the sample size of 450. General Studies Programmes (GSP) go beyond academic instruction by actively shaping

students' values and outlooks. By incorporating subjects such as communication, philosophy, entrepreneurship, citizenship, and ethics, these programmes help students build constructive values that enrich their intellectual, moral, and social development. They promote key personal qualities like discipline, honesty, integrity, and responsibility—traits vital for individual growth and the advancement of the nation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Students also engage with ethical concepts that encourage respect for human worth, tolerance, and harmonious living in a diverse society. Moreover, GSP fosters critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to solve problems, nurturing independent and analytical mindsets. With a strong focus on civic duty and national pride, the curriculum helps learners recognize their responsibilities as active, engaged citizens dedicated to societal improvement (Nwosu & Chukwuemeka, 2018). Exposure to a range of perspectives and cultural backgrounds promotes cooperation, teamwork, and an appreciation for diversity. The inclusion of entrepreneurship and leadership training further develops self-reliance, innovation, and self-assurance, equipping graduates to make meaningful contributions to economic and social progress (Obasi, 2020). As a result, General Studies Programmes are instrumental in producing well-rounded graduates whose character, attitudes, and values support long-term national development.

The Cultural Context of the Study: A brief Review

The results of this study should be understood within the context of Nigerian Culture because moral values and desirable behaviors are emphasized and well-articulated in community life, religious practices, and societal expectations. In Nigeria, and especially in Imo State, virtues such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and good manners are highly emphasized as attributes that define a good personality. Therefore, the perception of students towards general studies and character formation was influenced by their cultural expectations. It is important to highlight this aspect of the study since it can be argued that in societies with different cultural expectations, the effect of general studies on character building would be different.

Table 3: Identify the values and attitudes acquired through General Studies programmes.

S/N	Values and Attitudes Acquired	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Moral and ethical values	320	71.1
2	Tolerance and respect for others	295	65.6
3	National consciousness and patriotism	270	60.0
4	Leadership and teamwork skills	250	55.6
5	Critical thinking and problem-solving attitude	310	68.9
6	Effective communication skills	285	63.3
7	Discipline and self-reliance	240	53.3
8	Appreciation of cultural diversity	225	50.0
9	Positive attitude towards lifelong learning	260	57.8
10	Civic responsibility and social awareness	275	61.1

Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of General Studies in Promoting Ethical Behavior.

The data presented in table 4 showed that students generally viewed General Studies courses as contributing to character development. All ten statements assessing student perceptions had mean scores exceeding the threshold of 2.50, ranging between 3.06 and 3.22. The highest average ($\bar{x} = 3.22$, $SD = 0.89$) was given to the idea that General Studies courses support character formation in higher education, while the lowest averages ($\bar{x} = 3.06$) were assigned to items related to building leadership skills and fostering discipline and self-control. With an overall mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.87, the results indicates a generally favorable view among respondents regarding the role of these courses in promoting values, attitudes, and behaviors essential for personal development. This suggests students see General Studies programs as important in advancing moral and ethical growth within higher education institutions. General Studies (GS) programmes aim not only to equip students with a wide-ranging knowledge base but also to foster the moral values and ethical principles essential for responsible citizenship. Students' views on how effectively these programmes promote ethical behavior largely depend on how thoroughly they address integrity, discipline, accountability, and social responsibility. Many regard GS courses—especially those covering philosophy, citizenship education, peace studies, and communication skills—as meaningful avenues for building ethical awareness and shaping positive character (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Learners frequently recognize that General Studies introduces them to moral ideals that support honesty, respect, tolerance, and compliance with societal expectations. By engaging with topics such as national values, leadership, and human relationships, students gain a clearer understanding of the negative impacts of unethical actions like exam cheating, corruption, and prejudice. As Adeyemi and Olatunji (2019) note, students commonly see General Studies as a vital tool for enhancing ethical consciousness and reinforcing moral standards that support harmony and national progress. Additionally, the interdisciplinary structure of General Studies is seen as beneficial in helping students grasp ethical challenges in various life contexts. Subjects such as entrepreneurship, civic education, and philosophy promote critical thinking and thoughtful decision-making—key aspects of ethical conduct (Okeke & Eze, 2020). Nevertheless, some students argue that the real impact of these programmes hinges on teaching quality, the practical relevance of course material, and whether instructors themselves demonstrate ethical behavior in their interactions. Approaches that emphasize interaction, real-life examples, and discussions centered on values are often viewed as more influential in shaping student attitudes and actions (Nwosu & Chukwuemeka, 2018). In sum, General Studies is widely regarded by students as an effective means of moral and ethical development. These programmes help shape responsible individuals grounded in honesty, discipline, patriotism, and social responsibility—values crucial for personal advancement and broader national transformation.

Table 4: Students' Perceptions of the Relevance of General Studies Courses in Character Formation

S/N	Perception Statements	Mean	SD
1	General Studies courses promote moral values among students.	3.20	0.8

S/N	Perception Statements	Mean	SD
2	General Studies courses enhance students' sense of responsibility.	3.19	0.8
3	General Studies courses encourage respect for societal norms and values.	3.14	0.8
4	General Studies courses help students develop integrity and honesty.	3.11	0.8
5	General Studies courses contribute to the development of leadership qualities.	3.06	0.9
6	General Studies courses foster tolerance and peaceful coexistence among students.	3.12	0.8
7	General Studies courses help students cultivate discipline and self-control.	3.06	0.8
8	General Studies courses encourage civic responsibility and patriotism.	3.12	0.8
9	General Studies courses have positively influenced my personal behaviour.	3.09	0.8 7
10	General Studies courses are relevant to character formation in higher institutions.	3.22	0.8

Challenges affecting the effectiveness of General Studies programmes in character development.

Table 5 shows that the most commonly cited obstacle to the effectiveness of General Studies programmes in fostering character development was societal moral decline combined with peer pressure, identified by 340 respondents (75.6%). This was closely followed by overcrowded classrooms (73.3%) and an overemphasis on theoretical instruction at the expense of practical learning (71.1%). Additional significant challenges were outdated or ineffective teaching approaches (70.0%) and a shortage of adequate teaching materials and facilities (67.8%). The least mentioned issue was the absence of strong monitoring and evaluation systems, noted by 245 participants (54.4%). Overall, the results indicate that both social influences and institutional limitations constrain the ability of these programmes to support student character growth. General Studies (GS) programmes are designed to foster intellectual development, moral integrity, and responsible citizenship in students. Yet, various obstacles limit their ability to fully achieve these goals. A key issue is the limited focus on value-based education. In many higher education institutions, both students and some faculty view GS courses as mere formalities rather than essential tools for shaping character. This perception diminishes student engagement and weakens the impact of the ethical lessons embedded in the curriculum (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Another significant barrier is the reliance on ineffective teaching strategies. Since character formation thrives on interaction, discussion, and real-life application of moral concepts, passive lecture formats fall short. These traditional methods restrict student participation and reduce the likelihood that values are genuinely internalized (Okebukola, 2015). The challenge is further intensified by large class sizes, which make meaningful interaction difficult and hinder instructors' ability to observe and support personal development in learners. Insufficient resources and underfunding also undermine the delivery of GS programmes. Shortages of learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to modern teaching technologies impair the quality of instruction (Okojie, 2018). Additionally, a lack of adequately

trained and motivated instructors in certain institutions compromises the standard of teaching and reduces the programme's potential to positively influence students.

The broader social environment presents another challenge. Widespread issues such as corruption, exam cheating, cult activities, and internet fraud contradict the values taught in GS courses. Students are thus caught between societal norms and classroom teachings, which dilutes the effectiveness of moral education (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2020). At the same time, the absence of consistent ethical reinforcement within academic settings further weakens the programme's objectives. Weak implementation and infrequent updates to the curriculum also limit relevance and impact. Some course content fails to reflect current ethical dilemmas or evolving societal issues, making it seem disconnected from students' real-life experiences (Nwosu & Chukwuemeka, 2018). Moreover, limited coordination among schools, families, religious groups, and communities restricts the integrated effort needed for meaningful character development. In sum, while General Studies programmes play a vital role in nurturing ethical behavior and civic responsibility, their effectiveness is hampered by outdated teaching methods, insufficient funding, negative social influences, overcrowded classrooms, and a static curriculum. These factors collectively weaken their capacity to shape student character as intended.

Table 5 : Challenges affecting the effectiveness of General Studies programmes in character development.

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Inadequate teaching methods	315	70.0
2	Lack of qualified and committed lecturers	285	63.3
3	Overcrowded classrooms	330	73.3
4	Insufficient instructional materials and facilities	305	67.8
5	Negative attitudes of students toward General Studies courses	295	65.6
6	Excessive emphasis on theoretical rather than practical learning	320	71.1
7	Poor funding of General Studies programmes	275	61.1
8	Inadequate time allocation for General Studies courses	260	57.8
9	Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms	245	54.4
10	Influence of societal moral decadence and peer pressure	340	75.6

Strategies for Improving the Role of General Studies in Promoting Positive Behavioral Change among Undergraduates

The data presented in the table 6 showed that respondents offered various recommendations to improve the effectiveness of General Studies programmes in encouraging positive behavioral changes among undergraduate students. A significant majority (86.7%) emphasized the inclusion of more ethics and values-based content in the curriculum. This was closely followed by the suggestion to hire qualified instructors who also demonstrate strong personal integrity (380 respondents, 84.4%) and to implement interactive, student-centered teaching methods (372 respondents, 82.7%). Strengthening partnerships between universities, families, and the broader community was seen as important by 81.8% of respondents, while 81.1% supported holding seminars and workshops focused on moral and civic education. Additional proposals

included revising the curriculum, integrating hands-on community service, establishing mentorship initiatives, improving teaching resources, and expanding the use of information and communication technologies in instruction. Overall, the results suggest that enhancing course content, refining teaching practices, and increasing engagement from key stakeholders may strengthen the role of General Studies in promoting desirable student behaviors.

The influence of General Studies (GS) programmes in nurturing positive behavioral changes among undergraduates can be greatly enhanced through a range of strategic initiatives. One essential strategy is to consistently refresh and broaden the GS curriculum, incorporating contemporary topics such as ethics, civic duty, peace education, entrepreneurship, environmental awareness, and digital citizenship. A curriculum that is both relevant and adaptable is crucial for guiding students in developing the values and attitudes that are vital for responsible citizenship and personal growth (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2014). Furthermore, the implementation of learner-centered and interactive teaching methods is imperative. Techniques such as group discussions, role-playing, debates, case studies, and problem-solving exercises promote active engagement, enabling students to grasp moral and ethical principles more effectively.

Research by Adeyemi and Adu (2012) indicates that participatory teaching methods lead to better outcomes in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors than traditional lectures. The importance of qualified educators who embody integrity and professionalism cannot be emphasized enough. Teachers serve as role models, and their conduct can have a profound impact on students' character development. When instructors display ethical behavior and commitment, students are more likely to embrace those values (Ogunyemi, 2018). Furthermore, organizing seminars, workshops, and counseling sessions that concentrate on morality, leadership, substance abuse, and social responsibility can strengthen the objectives of General Studies programmes, providing students with opportunities for self-reflection and behavioral enhancement. Integrating community service and hands-on learning experiences into the General Studies curriculum also contributes to fostering civic engagement and social responsibility.

Service-learning allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge in real-life contexts, promoting empathy, cooperation, and a sense of duty (Eyler & Giles, 1999). It is essential for universities, families, religious organizations, and the wider community to work together, as the responsibility for character development is a shared one. These collaborations create supportive environments that bolster the values advocated through General Studies programmes. Finally, ensuring access to adequate instructional resources and utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) can significantly enrich the teaching and learning experiences. Modern educational technologies enhance information access, stimulate student engagement, and improve the effectiveness of General Studies course delivery (UNESCO, 2021). By embracing these strategies, General Studies programmes can play a more prominent role in fostering positive behavioral changes and developing morally responsible graduates.

Table 5: Strategies for Improving the Role of General Studies in Promoting Positive Behavioral Change among Undergraduates

S/N	Suggested Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Incorporating more ethics and value-oriented contents into General Studies courses	390	86.7
2	Employing interactive and participatory teaching methods	372	82.7
3	Organizing seminars and workshops on moral and civic values	365	81.1
4	Integrating practical community service and volunteer activities into General Studies programmes	348	77.3
5	Using qualified and competent lecturers with good moral character	380	84.4
6	Introducing mentorship and counseling programmes for students	340	75.6
7	Regular review and updating of General Studies curriculum to address contemporary societal issues	356	79.1
8	Providing adequate instructional materials and learning facilities	335	74.4
9	Encouraging the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in General Studies instruction	322	71.6
10	Strengthening collaboration between the university, parents, and society in students' character development	368	81.8

Relationship of the Theoretical Framework to the Study Findings

The study results relate to the theoretical framework in several ways. The Social Learning Theory explains how students learn acceptable behaviours and values through observing a lecturer, peers, and the overall learning environment. In fact, the study results demonstrated that General Studies courses improved students' discipline, responsibility, integrity, teamwork, and respect for societal values. This outcome aligns with the concept that students' social behaviours are learned through observing role models. The study results also relate to the Moral Development Theory because exposure to elements such as ethics, civic education, leadership, and critical thinking in General Studies courses enhances moral development. It is noteworthy that the study results validated the theoretical framework. First, Social Learning Theory anticipated that students' moral behaviours could be learned from observing a lecturer, peers, and the overall learning environment. Indeed, the study revealed that General Studies courses improved students' discipline, responsibility, integrity, teamwork, and respect for societal values. Second, the study results demonstrated that General Studies courses fostered character development by influencing students' attitudes and promoting acceptable conduct. This outcome aligned with the Moral Development Theory's prediction that character education would raise moral awareness among students.

Conclusion

This study concluded that general studies (GST) programmes have a great potential of promoting character formation and behavioural change of undergraduates in the tertiary

institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. This conclusion was made based on the results that showed that GST courses foster the inculcation of desirable values such as integrity, discipline, responsibility, ethical reasoning, and civic consciousness in the study area. These conclusions were drawn from the study, and they cannot be used to represent the entire Nigeria tertiary institutions because this study was conducted in only one geopolitical zone. More studies need to be conducted in order to establish this same effect in the other geo-political zones and types of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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