



DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE PROVISION OF ETHICAL AND VALUES EDUCATION: RE-ENGINEERING FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Digital divide remains a significant challenge in ensuring equal access to ethical and values in education. It significantly impacts in the teaching and learning of science, especially in developing regions like Nigeria. This divide hampers access to quality education, affecting both students and educators, addressing this issue is crucial for sustainable national development. As technology continues to revolutionize education, disparities in digital access create inequalities in the moral development of individuals, which in turn affects national growth and stability. This paper examines the implications of the digital divide on the provision of ethics and values education. It advocates for re-engineering of national strategies to bridge this gap and foster inclusive, sustainable development. By leveraging technology equitably and responsibly, nations can empower citizens with the moral compass necessary to navigate modern challenges and contribute meaningfully to national growth

Keywords: Digital divide, Ethical Education, Values Education

Introduction

In today's rapidly advancing digital world, access to technology has become a critical factor in educational success. However, the persistent digital divide the gap between those with and without access to digital tools and the internet poses a significant challenge, especially in the realm of ethical and values education. As nations strive toward sustainable development, the need to instill strong moral values and responsible citizenship in every learner becomes more important than ever. Ethical and values education is not just about character building; it is foundational for nurturing inclusive, equitable, and peaceful societies. When access to such education is hindered by digital inequality, it threatens the broader goals of national unity, civic responsibility, and sustainable progress. Bridging this divide is essential to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, can contribute meaningfully to the nations ethical and developmental

In digital age, access to technology is crucial for educational development. However, a significant divide exists between those who have access to digital tools and those who do not. Digital divide refers to the gap between individuals, groups, or regions that have access to



modern information and communication technologies (ICT) and those that do not. ICT, on the other hand, encompasses all digital tools and resources used to handle telecommunications, broadcast media, intelligent building management systems, audiovisual processing, and transmission systems including the internet, computers, mobile devices, and software. An information society is one that makes the best possible use of ICTs. (Enemuo 2023). Supports this view by describing it as a society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development, depend increasingly upon information and its exploitation. In such a society, living standards, patterns of work and leisure, the education system, and marketplace are all influenced by advances in information and knowledge. ICT are diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store and manage information (Enemuo 2019).

For quality education to be achieved in a nation, the principal actors of learning (teachers, learners and the environment) should be cooperatively organized. In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and required facilities must be provided as well (Enemuo, 2023). This digital divide affects the dissemination of ethical and values education, creating disparities in moral upbringing and civic responsibility. Ethical and values education is essential for developing responsible citizens who contribute positively to sustainable national development. The unequal distribution of digital resources limits opportunities for individuals to engage in moral and ethical learning, thereby influencing the overall progress of a nation. The digital divide worsens inequality around access to information and resources. In the Information Age, people without access to the Internet and other technology are at a disadvantage, for they are unable or less able to connect with others, find and apply for jobs, shop, and learn.

Digital divide represents a form of social exclusion and a barrier to economic and social progress. While some see it as a matter of access to technology, others emphasize the importance of digital literacy and skills to fully participate in the digital age. Concerns about the widening gap between those with and without access, and its impact on education, employment, and overall opportunity, are frequently raised. The digital divide has been attributed to many factors among which is the high cost of computer equipment, lack of ICT skill and poor knowledge of available search engines (Omolaro 2016). Lack of access to ICT makes it difficult for people to access information. The benefits of having access to ICT are numerous. ICT has the potential to promote other sectors of the economy such as agriculture, education, health, bank, defence etc. In times of emergency, ICT becomes an indispensable



tool for overcoming the barriers of time and distance. Efforts are currently being made to reduce the digital divide in Nigeria including collaboration between government agencies and technology corporations like Google, Cchub, Andela, Star Bridge Africa, Microsoft and Intel, using libraries as E-learning (theory) facilities and proposing governmental policies such as salary enhancement and social security (Intel Corporation, 2007).

Digital divide

Digital divide is a growing global issue that highlights the gap between individuals, communities, and nations that have access to modern digital technologies and those that do not. As technology continues to shape education, communication, governance, and economic activities, unequal access to digital resources has led to disparities in opportunities, knowledge, and overall societal progress (Doe, J. 2023). The divide is influenced by several factors, including economic status, geographical location, infrastructure availability, and digital literacy levels. In developed urban areas, high-speed internet, advanced computing devices, and digital skills are widely available, allowing individuals to fully participate in the digital economy. However, in rural and low-income regions, limited access to these technologies creates barriers to education, employment, and civic engagement.

Digital divide affects multiple sectors, with one of the most significant impacts being on education and ethical values development. Students and communities lacking access to online learning resources are often left behind, resulting in an imbalance in knowledge dissemination, skill acquisition, and moral education. Without equitable access to digital tools, individuals may struggle to participate in national development, weakening overall societal progress. To bridge the digital divide, governments, private sectors, and global organizations must work together to improve internet infrastructure, provide affordable digital devices, and implement digital literacy programs (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Addressing this issue is critical for ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their background, can access the opportunities provided by the digital age, ultimately fostering sustainable national development. Digital divide is the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology (ICT) and those with no or restricted access. This technology can include the telephone, television, PCs and internet connectivity. This divide exists due to several factors, including:

- **Economic disparities:** This refers to the **unequal distribution of income and wealth** among individuals, groups, or regions. It highlights the gap between the rich



and the poor, where some people have much more money, resources, or opportunities than others.

- Geographical limitations (urban vs. rural areas): refers to **restrictions or challenges caused by a location's physical or geographical characteristics**. These limitations can affect access to resources, opportunities, services, or development
- Technological infrastructure availability: this is the process of **restricting or challenging caused by a location's physical or geographical characteristics**. These limitations can affect access to resources, opportunities, services, or development.
- Digital literacy levels: refers to how well a person can use digital technology, tools, and platforms to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information.

Ethical Education and Values Education

Ethical education refers to the teaching and learning of moral values, principles, and decision-making skills that guide individuals to act responsibly and with integrity in both personal and social contexts. It helps students develop a sense of right and wrong, empathy, fairness, and respect for others, contributing to the building of ethical citizens and cohesive societies. UNESCO (2017) defines ethical education as “the process of learning about the values, attitudes, and behaviors that enable individuals to live together in peace and contribute to a just society. It can also be seen as refers to the process of teaching individuals to understand and apply principles of right and wrong, develop moral reasoning, and act with integrity and responsibility in personal and social contexts. Ethical education is the cultivation of ethical awareness, moral reasoning, and character development in learners to help them become responsible and compassionate members of society (Nucci et.al 2008).

Values education is the process of teaching and learning about the ideals that a society considers important. It involves helping learners understand, appreciate, and apply core values such as respect, honesty, responsibility, compassion, and fairness. Values education plays a key role in shaping character, guiding behavior, and promoting social harmony and responsible citizenship. According to Halstead and Taylor (2000) Values education is concerned with the development of the whole person in terms of personal, moral, social, and spiritual values through the formal and informal curriculum.



Implications of the Digital Divide in Ethical and Values Education

1. **Inequity in Moral Development:** Students without access to digital resources miss out on engaging with modern ethical dilemmas (e.g., online privacy, digital footprint). Leads to uneven development of moral reasoning and critical thinking.
2. **Unequal Access to Ethical Discourse:** Limited access to internet-based discussions, debates, and educational content excludes some students from participating in global or diverse ethical conversations.
3. **Widening Socioeconomic Gaps:** Students from low-income families or rural areas may fall behind in both technical skills and values education, deepening social and educational inequality.
4. **Digital Citizenship Gap:** Lack of exposure to digital ethics (e.g., cyberbullying, online respect, intellectual property) means some students are not fully prepared to be responsible digital citizens.
5. **Reduced Opportunities for Inclusive Education:** Diverse perspectives may be underrepresented in online ethics education, especially if only well-connected communities are contributing to digital content.
6. **Teacher Readiness and Quality Gaps:** Teachers in under-resourced schools may not be trained to deliver digital ethics content effectively, impacting the quality of values education.
7. **Moral Disconnection:** Students without digital access may feel alienated or disconnected from modern moral issues and ethical debates shaped by technology and social media.

Importance of Ethical and Values Education in Re-Engineering For Sustainable National Development

Ethical and values education is essential for re-engineering society toward sustainable national development. It provides the moral compass and foundational principles necessary for building a just, inclusive, and progressive nation. As societies face increasing challenges—such as corruption, inequality, environmental degradation, and social disintegration—ethical and values education becomes a powerful tool for transformation.

1. **Promotes Good Governance and Accountability:** By instilling honesty, integrity, and a strong sense of responsibility, ethical education helps shape future leaders and citizens who are committed to transparency and fairness in public service.



2. **Builds Social Cohesion and National Unity:** Values education fosters respect for diversity, tolerance, and empathy, which are crucial for peaceful coexistence in multicultural and multi-ethnic societies.
3. **Encourages Responsible Citizenship:** It equips individuals with the moral awareness to participate actively and constructively in civic life, thereby strengthening democratic institutions and community development.
4. **Supports Environmental Sustainability:** Ethical education promotes respect for the environment and responsible stewardship of natural resources an important pillar of sustainable development.
5. **Guides Technological and Economic Advancement:** In an era of rapid technological and economic change, ethics ensures that progress does not come at the cost of human dignity, social justice, or ecological balance.
6. **Empowers Youth as Agents of Change:** Educating young people in ethics and values prepares them to become thoughtful, compassionate, and courageous change-makers who can lead the charge in national renewal and sustainable growth.

Impact of the Digital Divide on Ethical and Values Education

The digital divide significantly affects the quality and reach of ethical and values education in the following ways:

- Limited Access to Online Learning Resources – Students in underprivileged communities lack exposure to digital ethics materials, reducing their ability to engage in self-directed learning.
- Inequality in Moral Development – Those with better digital access benefit from interactive platforms and discussions on ethical dilemmas, while others lag behind.
- Weakened Family and Community Engagement – In communities without digital access, parents and local leaders struggle to keep up with modern ethical challenges faced by their children.
- Loss of Cultural and Traditional Values – Without access to culturally relevant digital content, communities may experience a decline in traditional moral teachings.

Re-Engineering Ethical and Values Education for Digital Inclusion

- To bridge the digital divide and promote sustainable national development, education systems must be re-engineered through the following strategies:



- **Expanding Digital Infrastructure:** Governments should invest in rural broadband expansion. Public-private partnerships can help provide affordable digital devices to marginalized communities.
- **Incorporating Ethical Education in Digital Learning:** Digital literacy programs should include ethical and values-based modules. Schools should integrate digital ethics into curricula, teaching responsible internet use.
- **Developing Inclusive Digital Content:** Educational content should be localized to reflect cultural and societal values. Multilingual platforms should be developed to cater to diverse populations.
- **Enhancing Teacher Training on Digital Ethics:** Educators should receive training on integrating technology into moral education. Schools should adopt blended learning approaches to accommodate students with limited digital access.
- **Strengthening Community and Parental Involvement:** Digital tools should be introduced to parents and community leaders to support moral education at home. Religious and cultural organizations can collaborate to create online platforms promoting ethical values.

Conclusion

Bridging the digital divide is not just a technological concern, but a moral and educational imperative for sustainable national development. Ethical and values education plays a vital role in shaping responsible, informed, and empathetic citizens. When unequal access to digital tools and resources persists, it creates disparities in moral learning and civic participation, especially among marginalized communities. To build a just and inclusive society, it is essential to ensure that every learner regardless of their background has equitable access to quality digital education that fosters ethical thinking and shared national values. Only then can we cultivate a generation capable of leading with integrity, respecting diversity, and contributing meaningfully to a sustainable and unified nation. Digital divide presents a significant challenge in the provision of ethical and values education, affecting the moral development of individuals and, consequently, sustainable national development. By re-engineering education systems to promote digital inclusion, governments and stakeholders can ensure that all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to value-based education. Bridging this gap will create ethically responsible individuals who contribute positively to national growth, governance, and social harmony.



Recommendations for Sustainable National Development

1. Invest in Inclusive Digital Infrastructure

Governments and stakeholders should prioritize investment in digital infrastructure across rural and urban areas to ensure equitable access to the internet, digital devices, and educational technologies. This includes solar-powered ICT centers for off-grid communities, affordable broadband, and mobile-based platforms to reach underserved populations.

2. Integrate Ethics and Values into Digital Curriculum

Ethics and civic education should be intentionally embedded in digital learning content. Online educational platforms and e-learning programs should include interactive modules on integrity, responsibility, tolerance, respect, and national identity. These values should be tailored to local cultures while aligning with global citizenship education.

3. Bridge the Digital Literacy Gap

Training programs should be developed for teachers, students, and parents to enhance digital literacy. Educators, in particular, need capacity-building initiatives to effectively deliver ethics and values through digital means, using tools like online simulations, role-playing apps, and storytelling platforms.

4. Promote Public-Private Partnerships

Collaborations between the government, private sector, NGOs, and international development partners can facilitate resource sharing, innovation, and sustainable funding models. Such partnerships can help in the creation of accessible value-based content and provide support for digital device distribution in underserved schools.

5. Develop Policy Frameworks for Ethical Digital Education

National education policies should include guidelines that ensure the responsible use of technology in teaching values. This includes ethical use of AI, data privacy, content moderation, and protecting children from harmful online content, while promoting positive digital citizenship.

6. Foster Community-Based Digital Ethics Education

Community centers, religious groups, and traditional institutions can play a vital role in promoting ethics and values through digital storytelling, webinars, and grassroots campaigns. These efforts ensure that moral education goes beyond the classroom and reaches the wider society.



7. Encourage Local Content Creation

Support should be provided for educators, creatives, and developers to produce culturally relevant digital content in local languages. These materials can be used to teach values that resonate with the community's heritage and contemporary moral challenges.

These recommendations are essential for re-engineering the education system to ensure that all learners regardless of their socio-economic or geographic status — have equal opportunities to develop strong ethical foundations. Bridging the digital divide in this way is not just a technological imperative, but a moral one, crucial to nurturing responsible citizens for sustainable national development.

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