

TEACHERS' BEHAVIOURAL PRACTICES AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AMONG PUPILS IN PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The study specifically investigated how teachers' modelling behaviour and reinforcement practices contribute to pupils' character development outcomes. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 48,750 teachers and head teachers across registered private primary schools within the six Area Councils of the FCT. A sample size of 381 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Teachers' Behavioural Practices and Character Development Questionnaire (TBPCDQ)*. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, while reliability was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 level

of significance. Findings revealed that teachers' modelling behaviour and reinforcement practices significantly relate to character development among pupils in private schools in the FCT, Abuja. The study further established that positive teacher behaviours such as punctuality, honesty, fairness, empathy, consistency, and respectful communication significantly contribute to the development of desirable character traits among pupils. The study concluded that teachers' behavioural practices constitute an important component of school-based character development processes. It was recommended among others that private school proprietors should institutionalise teacher behavioural standards, integrate character-based indicators into teacher performance evaluation systems, and provide continuous professional development programmes focused on behavioural modelling and positive reinforcement practices.

Keywords: Teachers' Behavioural Practices, Character Development, Modelling Behaviour, Reinforcement Practices, Private Schools, School Culture.

Introduction

Education is universally recognised as a strategic instrument for national development, social stability, and human capital formation. Beyond the transmission of academic knowledge, schools are expected to shape values, attitudes, behaviours, and ethical standards that prepare learners for responsible participation in society. Consequently, character development has become a critical concern within contemporary educational discourse, particularly in societies grappling with moral decline, indiscipline, youth misconduct, and weakening social values.

In Nigeria, concerns regarding declining moral standards among young people have intensified public attention on the role of schools in promoting

ethical behaviour, discipline, integrity, responsibility, empathy, and social consciousness. While families and religious institutions remain central to value formation, schools increasingly serve as structured environments where children spend significant periods during their formative years. Within this context, teachers occupy a uniquely influential position because their daily interactions, behaviours, attitudes, and professional conduct shape not only academic outcomes but also the moral and social development of learners.

Private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, operate within a highly competitive educational environment characterised by rising parental expectations, institutional branding pressures, and increasing emphasis on holistic child development. Parents who invest heavily in private education often expect schools to provide not only academic excellence but also sound moral upbringing and positive character formation. Consequently, private schools are increasingly evaluated not merely on examination performance but also on the behavioural disposition, discipline, emotional intelligence, and social conduct of their pupils.

Teachers' behavioural practices constitute a major mechanism through which character development occurs in school settings. Such behavioural practices include modelling behaviour, reinforcement practices, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, classroom management styles, fairness, integrity, and communication patterns. Pupils often learn not only through formal instruction but also through observation and imitation of significant authority figures within their environment. Teachers therefore function as behavioural models whose actions communicate values either consciously or unconsciously.

The theoretical basis for this position can be explained using Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory posits that

individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and values through observation, imitation, and modelling. According to Bandura, children are likely to imitate behaviours demonstrated by influential adults whom they perceive as credible, authoritative, or admirable. Within school settings, teachers become powerful behavioural models whose conduct may significantly influence pupils' moral reasoning, behavioural choices, and value systems.

A teacher who consistently demonstrates punctuality, honesty, empathy, fairness, emotional control, professionalism, and respect for others implicitly communicates acceptable standards of behaviour to pupils. Conversely, teachers who display favouritism, inconsistency, harshness, dishonesty, or disrespect may unintentionally reinforce negative behavioural patterns among learners. This implies that character development is not merely taught through moral instruction but is continuously shaped through the hidden curriculum embedded within teachers' daily behavioural practices.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to character education globally. Studies conducted across various educational systems have shown that teacher behaviour significantly influences pupils' social competence, emotional development, moral reasoning, and behavioural outcomes. In Ghana, Asare and Nsiah (2020) found that teachers' modelling of positive social behaviours significantly predicted pupils' demonstration of empathy and cooperation. Similarly, Mkhize and Naidoo (2021) reported that teacher reinforcement practices in South African primary schools contributed significantly to improved learner self-regulation and conflict management.

Within the Nigerian context, existing studies have largely focused on curriculum delivery, instructional effectiveness, academic achievement, and classroom management, with relatively limited empirical attention devoted to teachers' behavioural practices as determinants of character development among pupils, particularly in private primary schools. Yet,

private schools present unique organisational realities where institutional reputation, parental expectations, and competitive positioning often shape school priorities and teacher behaviour.

The FCT, Abuja, represents a particularly important setting for this investigation due to its socio-cultural diversity, rapid educational expansion, and concentration of private educational institutions serving pupils from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Despite the strategic role teachers play in shaping character outcomes, many private schools lack clearly institutionalised behavioural standards, structured mentoring systems, and comprehensive teacher development frameworks focused on character modelling.

Furthermore, concerns have emerged regarding inconsistent teacher conduct, harsh disciplinary practices, favouritism, emotional instability, and inadequate professional ethics within some private school settings. Such behaviours may undermine formal character education efforts and create contradictions between what pupils are taught and what they observe in practice.

It is against this background that this study investigated the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Statement of the Problem

Character development remains one of the fundamental objectives of education because societies depend on morally responsible citizens for social stability, ethical leadership, peaceful coexistence, and national development. In Nigeria, increasing concerns regarding indiscipline, dishonesty, violence, disrespect for authority, examination malpractice, cybercrime, and declining ethical standards among young people have

heightened public discourse on the role of educational institutions in shaping desirable character traits among children.

Private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, are widely perceived as providers of quality education and holistic child development. Parents who enrol their children in these schools often expect not only strong academic performance but also the cultivation of positive values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, respect, fairness, and integrity. Consequently, teachers in private schools are expected to function not only as instructors but also as moral guides and behavioural models.

However, observations and preliminary interactions within some private schools suggest that teachers' behavioural practices may not always align with the character development goals expected by parents and society. Cases of teacher absenteeism, inconsistent discipline, favouritism, emotional outbursts, disrespectful communication, poor ethical conduct, and inadequate professionalism have been reported within certain school environments. Such behavioural inconsistencies may create contradictions between formal moral instruction and the actual behavioural realities pupils observe daily.

The problem becomes more significant because pupils at the primary school level are highly impressionable and often learn behaviours through observation and imitation. Where teachers fail to model desirable character traits consistently, pupils may internalise negative behavioural patterns that undermine the objectives of character education.

Furthermore, many private schools in the FCT lack comprehensive behavioural frameworks that explicitly define expected teacher conduct regarding character modelling and reinforcement practices. Teacher evaluation systems within some schools also focus predominantly on instructional delivery and academic performance while giving limited

attention to behavioural practices that influence pupils' character development.

Despite growing concern about moral decline within society, empirical studies examining the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the FCT remain limited. Most existing studies focus largely on academic achievement, curriculum implementation, or parental influence, with insufficient attention given to teachers' daily behavioural practices as determinants of pupil character outcomes.

This gap in knowledge creates difficulty for policymakers, school proprietors, educational administrators, and teacher development institutions seeking evidence-based strategies for strengthening character education within private schools. It is therefore necessary to investigate how teachers' behavioural practices relate to character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The specific objectives were to:

1. determine the relationship between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
2. examine the relationship between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What relationship exists between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?
2. What relationship exists between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). The theory explains that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modelling. According to Bandura, individuals, particularly

children, learn behaviours by observing the actions, attitudes, and emotional reactions of significant others within their environment.

Bandura argued that behaviour is influenced through reciprocal interaction between personal factors, environmental conditions, and behavioural experiences. The theory emphasises observational learning, where individuals acquire behaviours by watching role models whom they perceive as influential, credible, or authoritative.

Within educational settings, teachers function as highly influential behavioural models because pupils spend substantial periods interacting with them during critical developmental stages. Pupils observe how teachers communicate, solve problems, manage emotions, respond to conflict, demonstrate fairness, and interact with others. Such observations shape pupils' understanding of acceptable social and moral behaviour.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because teachers' behavioural practices represent observable actions capable of influencing pupils' character formation. Positive teacher behaviours such as honesty, punctuality, empathy, fairness, emotional regulation, and respectful communication may encourage pupils to internalise similar values and behaviours. Conversely, negative teacher behaviours may reinforce undesirable behavioural tendencies among learners.

The theory also explains the significance of reinforcement practices within learning environments. Positive reinforcement such as praise, encouragement, recognition, and constructive feedback increases the likelihood of desirable behaviours being repeated, while inconsistent or punitive reinforcement may negatively affect behavioural development.

Social Learning Theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for understanding how teachers' behavioural practices may contribute to character development among pupils in private primary schools.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the assumption that teachers' behavioural practices significantly relate to pupils' character development.

The independent variable comprised teachers' behavioural practices measured through:

- Modelling Behaviour
- Reinforcement Practices

The dependent variable was:

- Character Development among Pupils

The framework assumes that positive behavioural practices demonstrated consistently by teachers may contribute to the development of desirable character traits such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, respect, cooperation, fairness, and emotional regulation among pupils.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between teacher behaviour and learner character development across different educational contexts. Existing literature generally supports the position that teachers' behavioural dispositions, classroom interactions, and reinforcement practices significantly contribute to pupils' moral, emotional, and social development.

Adeyemi and Bello (2021) investigated teacher modelling and character development among primary school pupils in Lagos State, Nigeria. Using a

descriptive survey design, the study found that teachers who consistently demonstrated punctuality, honesty, fairness, and respectful communication significantly influenced pupils' behavioural disposition and interpersonal conduct. The study concluded that pupils are more likely to internalise values consistently demonstrated by teachers within the school environment.

Ogunlade and Fasasi (2022) examined teacher behavioural standards and character outcomes in private schools within Ibadan metropolis. Their findings revealed that schools with stronger teacher behavioural monitoring systems recorded lower incidences of pupil misconduct and higher levels of positive social behaviour. The researchers further observed that inconsistencies between formal moral instruction and teacher behaviour weakened character education outcomes.

In Ghana, Asare and Nsiah (2020) investigated the influence of teacher behavioural practices on pupil character development in private schools. Using a correlational design, the study found that teachers' demonstration of empathy, cooperation, fairness, and emotional control significantly predicted pupils' interpersonal relationships and conflict management skills.

Similarly, Mkhize and Naidoo (2021) studied teacher modelling and reinforcement practices in South African primary schools. The study established that restorative disciplinary approaches and positive reinforcement practices contributed significantly to learner self-regulation, emotional stability, and responsible behaviour.

Within the Nigerian context, Eze and Okonkwo (2023) investigated reinforcement practices and character formation among pupils in private primary schools in Anambra State. Their findings indicated that positive reinforcement strategies such as praise, encouragement, recognition, and

constructive feedback significantly improved prosocial behaviour among pupils.

Okafor and Nwankwo (2022) also examined consistency in teacher reinforcement practices and pupils' internalisation of fairness in Enugu State. The study revealed that inconsistent disciplinary approaches negatively affected pupils' understanding of justice, accountability, and behavioural expectations.

Beyond the African context, research in Europe and North America has similarly highlighted the significance of teacher behaviour in learner development. Lickona (1991) argued that schools function as ethical communities where teachers serve as moral agents whose behaviour shapes pupils' understanding of acceptable conduct. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) further emphasised that effective character education depends significantly on adult modelling, positive school culture, and reinforcement systems.

Although existing studies provide useful insights into teacher influence on learner development, many studies focus primarily on curriculum delivery, discipline management, or academic achievement. Relatively few studies have specifically examined the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils within private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Furthermore, several previous studies concentrated largely on public schools or broader educational environments without adequately addressing the unique realities of private schools where institutional branding, parental expectations, and competitive pressures may influence teacher behaviour differently.

This study therefore fills an existing gap by examining how teachers' modelling behaviour and reinforcement practices relate to character development among pupils in private primary schools within the FCT, Abuja.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a large population in order to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables without manipulating them.

The study was conducted in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, comprising the six Area Councils namely Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji.

The population of the study comprised 48,750 teachers and head teachers in registered private primary schools across the Federal Capital Territory.

A sample size of 381 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. First, the six Area Councils in the FCT were stratified geographically. Secondly, private primary schools were selected proportionately from each Area Council using simple random sampling techniques. Finally, teachers and head teachers were randomly selected from the sampled schools to ensure fair representation.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Teachers' Behavioural Practices and Character Development Questionnaire (TBPCDQ)*. The instrument consisted of three clusters. Cluster A measured teachers' modelling behaviour, Cluster B measured reinforcement practices, while Cluster C measured indicators of pupils' character development such as honesty, respect, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, discipline, and accountability.

Responses were structured using a four-point Likert scale of:

- Strongly Agree (SA)

- Agree (A)
- Disagree (D)
- Strongly Disagree (SD)

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. A Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.82 was obtained.

Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted among 40 teachers in private schools within Nasarawa State. Using the test-retest method with a two-week interval, a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained, indicating acceptable reliability.

Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision making.

The study acknowledged the possibility of social desirability bias because responses were self-reported by teachers and head teachers. However, confidentiality and anonymity were assured in order to encourage honest responses from participants.

Results

Research Question One

What relationship exists between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Teachers' Modelling Behaviour and Character Development

S/ N	Item Description	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Teachers' punctuality encourages pupils to value time consciousness	3.19	0.87	Agreed
2	Teachers' honesty in assessment promotes truthfulness among pupils	3.24	0.85	Agreed
3	Respectful communication by teachers promotes politeness among pupils	3.16	0.88	Agreed
4	Teachers who admit mistakes encourage humility among pupils	3.17	0.86	Agreed
5	Fair treatment of pupils promotes fairness and justice among learners	3.21	0.85	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	3.19	0.86	Agreed

The result in Table 1 indicates that all items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.19 suggests that respondents agreed that teachers' modelling behaviour relates positively with character development among pupils in private schools within the FCT.

Research Question Two

What relationship exists between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Teachers' Reinforcement Practices and Character Development

S/ N	Item Description	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Praise for honest behaviour encourages truthfulness among pupils	3.26	0.84	Agreed
7	Rewarding acts of kindness motivates positive behaviour	3.24	0.84	Agreed
8	Consistent consequences teach accountability	3.21	0.85	Agreed
9	Restorative discipline promotes responsibility among pupils	3.16	0.87	Agreed
10	Ignoring misconduct may encourage undesirable behaviour	3.17	0.86	Agreed
	Cluster Mean	3.21	0.85	Agreed

The findings in Table 2 show that all items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.21 indicates that respondents agreed that teachers' reinforcement practices significantly relate to character development among pupils.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis on Teachers' Modelling Behaviour and Character Development

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Teachers' Modelling Behaviour and Character Development	381	0.71	0.000	Significant

The result in Table 3 revealed a significant positive relationship between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis on Teachers' Reinforcement Practices and Character Development

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Teachers' Reinforcement Practices and Character Development	381	0.69	0.000	Significant

The result in Table 4 showed a significant positive relationship between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between teachers' modelling behaviour and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This finding supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises observational learning and behavioural imitation as major mechanisms through which children acquire attitudes, values, and behavioural patterns.

The implication of this finding is that pupils tend to internalise behaviours consistently demonstrated by teachers within the school environment. Teachers who display punctuality, honesty, empathy, fairness, emotional control, professionalism, and respectful communication may indirectly reinforce similar values among learners.

The finding agrees with Adeyemi and Bello (2021), who established that teacher modelling significantly predicted pupils' behavioural disposition in Nigerian primary schools. Similarly, Asare and Nsiah (2020) found that pupils exposed to positive teacher behavioural models demonstrated higher levels of empathy, cooperation, and moral reasoning.

The study also established a significant relationship between teachers' reinforcement practices and character development among pupils. This finding suggests that positive reinforcement strategies such as praise, recognition, encouragement, constructive feedback, and restorative disciplinary practices contribute significantly to pupils' internalisation of desirable character traits.

The finding aligns with Eze and Okonkwo (2023), who found that positive reinforcement practices improved prosocial behaviour among pupils in private schools. The finding also supports Mkhize and Naidoo (2021), who reported that restorative disciplinary approaches contributed significantly to learner self-regulation and responsible behaviour.

The study further indicates that consistency in reinforcement practices is important for effective character development. Inconsistent discipline, favouritism, or selective rule enforcement may create confusion among pupils regarding acceptable standards of behaviour.

Overall, the findings reinforce the position that teachers' behavioural practices remain central to effective character development within school environments. Character education therefore extends beyond formal moral instruction to include the hidden curriculum embedded in teachers' daily behavioural conduct.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between teachers' behavioural practices and character development among pupils in private primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The findings revealed that teachers' modelling behaviour and reinforcement practices significantly relate to pupils' character development outcomes.

The study established that positive teacher behaviours such as punctuality, honesty, fairness, empathy, emotional regulation, professionalism, respectful communication, and consistent reinforcement contribute significantly to the development of desirable character traits among pupils.

The study therefore concludes that teachers' behavioural practices constitute an important determinant of character development in private primary schools. Consequently, private school administrators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders must recognise that character education is not achieved solely through curriculum content but also through the behavioural realities pupils observe daily within school environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Private school proprietors should establish clear behavioural standards for teachers that explicitly address professionalism, fairness, integrity, emotional regulation, punctuality, respectful communication, and ethical conduct.
2. Teacher recruitment and appraisal systems should incorporate behavioural indicators related to character modelling and positive reinforcement practices.
3. Continuous professional development programmes should be organised to strengthen teachers' understanding of behavioural modelling, restorative discipline, emotional intelligence, and positive reinforcement strategies.
4. School administrators should institutionalise mentoring and supervision systems that promote consistency in teacher behavioural practices across classrooms.
5. The Federal Capital Territory Universal Basic Education Board (FCT-UBEB) should develop policy guidelines supporting teacher behavioural standards and school-based character development frameworks.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to private primary schools within the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, thereby restricting generalisation to public schools or other geographical locations. The study also relied on self-reported

responses from teachers and head teachers, which may be subject to response bias.

Additionally, the descriptive survey design examined relationships among variables without establishing direct causality.

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