



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DIGITALIZATION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC COMPETENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary education systems, reshaping teaching, learning, and civic engagement across the globe. In Nigeria, where democratic consolidation and sustainable development remains pressing national concerns, the digitalization of citizenship education offers significant potential for developing civic competence among learners. This position paper examines how the integration of digital technologies into citizenship education can enhance learners' civic knowledge, skills, values, and participatory dispositions necessary for sustainable development. Anchored on constructivist learning theory, civic republican theory, and digital citizenship theory, the paper adopts a documentary and conceptual research design, relying on extensive analysis of scholarly literature, policy documents, and international frameworks. Key concepts such as digitalization, citizenship education, civic competence, and sustainable development are clarified to establish a shared analytical foundation. The paper identifies pedagogical strategies for developing civic competence through digital platforms, highlights the critical role of citizenship education in nurturing responsible and active citizens, and discusses contextual challenges confronting Nigeria, including the digital divide, infrastructural deficits, teachers capacity gaps, and policy implementation constraints. The paper concludes that purposeful digitalization of citizenship education can significantly strengthen civic competence and democratic culture in Nigeria if supported by inclusive policies, adequate infrastructure, teacher professional development and stakeholder collaboration. Practical recommendations are offered to guide policy makers, educators and curriculum developers towards leveraging digital tools for sustainable civic development.

Keywords: Digitalization, Citizenship Education, Civic Competence, Sustainable Development.

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Received: 3/1/2026; **Revised:** 28/2/2026; **Accepted:** 12/3/2026; **Published:** 29/3/2026



1.0. INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education occupies a central position in the preparation of individuals for responsible participation in democratic societies. It equips learners with the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions required to understand societal issues, exercise civic rights, fulfill civic responsibilities and contribute meaningfully to national development (Banks, 2017; Kerr, 2016). In Nigeria, citizenship education taught primarily through Civic Education and Social Studies has been positioned as a strategic instrument for promoting national unity, democratic values, political awareness, social cohesion and respect for the rule of law in a multi-ethnic and pluralistic society (FRN, 2014).

The increasing complexity of contemporary societal challenges, including political apathy, corruption, insecurity, environmental degradation, youth unemployment and weak civic participation, has intensified calls for a re-orientation of citizenship education in Nigeria. These challenges threaten democratic consideration and undermine the attainment of sustainable development goals. Education systems are therefore expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to empower learners with competences that enable them to engage critically with societal problems and participate actively in democratic and developmental process (UNESCO, 2021).

In recent decades, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the landscape of education, governance and civic engagement globally. Digitalization characterized by the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), internet with civic and political issues through digital spaces such as social media, online discussion forums, blogs (Bennett, 2015). These digital environments, have become new public spheres where civic identities are formed, opinions are expressed and collective action is mobilized.

In Nigeria, digital technologies are increasingly influencing political participation, civic advocacy and social mobilization, particularly among youths. The use of social media in election monitoring, civic awareness campaigns, and protest movements illustrate the growing relevance of digital civic engagement. However, formal citizenship education has not sufficiently adapted to these digital realities. Traditional pedagogical approaches, which emphasize rote learning, textbook-based instruction, and examination-oriented outcomes, remain dominant in many Nigerian classrooms. Such approaches are increasingly inadequate for preparing learners to navigate the opportunities and risks of digital civic spaces.

The pursuit of sustainable development further underscores the urgency of rethinking citizenship education. Sustainable development, as articulated in the United Nations 2030 Agenda, emphasizes the interdependence of social inclusion, economic growth, environmental sustainability, peace, and strong institutions (United Nations, 2015). Achieving these goals requires citizens who are civically competent — individuals who possess critical thinking skills, democratic values, social responsibility, digital literacy, and the capacity to participate constructively in decision-making processes. Civic competence is therefore essential for fostering democratic engagement and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

Despite policy recognition of ICT integration in education, Nigeria continues to face challenges in aligning citizenship education with digital transformation. Issues such as limited access to digital



infrastructure, inadequate teacher preparation, curriculum rigidity, and uneven policy implementation constrain the effective use of digital tools for civic learning (Aina & Adeyemo, 2020). This position paper therefore argues that the digitalization of citizenship education is not merely a technological upgrade but a pedagogical and civic imperative for developing civic competence for sustainable development in Nigeria.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive conceptual analysis of the digitalization of citizenship education and its implications for civic competence development in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper clarifies key concepts, discusses relevant theoretical frameworks, outlines the materials and methods adopted, proposes strategies for developing civic competence through digitalized citizenship education, examines the role of citizenship education in promoting civic competence for sustainable development, identifies contextual challenges, and offers policy-relevant recommendations. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on education reform, digital transformation, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

2.0 Conceptual Foundation and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Digitalization in Secondary and Tertiary Education

Digitalization in education refers to the systematic integration of digital technologies into teaching, learning, assessment, and school administration to enhance educational outcomes (OECD, 2021). In the context of secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria, digitalization involves the use of computers, mobile devices, internet connectivity, learning management systems (LMS), virtual classrooms, digital libraries, and online collaboration tools to support formal instruction. At the secondary school level, digitalization supports foundational civic learning by promoting interactive and inquiry-based learning, while at the tertiary level it enables advanced civic discourse, research engagement, and critical analysis of national and global issues.

Digitalization at these levels is particularly important because secondary and tertiary institutions serve as critical spaces for shaping learners' civic identity, political awareness, and social responsibility. Adolescents and young adults are at formative stages of civic consciousness, and exposure to digital civic learning environments equips them with competencies needed to participate responsibly in both offline and online public spheres.

Citizenship Education in Secondary and Tertiary Institutions

Citizenship education is a structured educational process aimed at developing learners' understanding of civic rights and responsibilities, democratic values, political institutions and social norms that govern collective life (Kerr, 2016). In Nigerian secondary schools, citizenship education is delivered mainly through Civic Education and Social Studies, focusing on national values, civic duties, human rights, and democratic principles. At the tertiary level, citizenship education is embedded in general studies (GST) courses, political science, social studies education, and related disciplines that emphasize critical thinking, leadership and nation building. At both levels, citizenship education serves as a mechanism for preparing learners to become informed, responsible, and active citizens. The integration of digital tools into citizenship education enhances learners' engagement, thereby strengthening the link between classroom learning and societal participation.



Civic Competence among Secondary and Tertiary Learners

Civic competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable individuals to participate effectively and responsibly in civic and political life (Hoskins & Creek, 2010). For secondary school students, civic competence involves foundational civic knowledge, moral values, respect for authority and diversity, and basic participatory skills. At the tertiary level, civic competence extends to advanced critical thinking, political literacy, advocacy skills, leadership, and active engagement in governance and community development.

Digitalized civic learning environments support the development of civic competence by enabling learners to access diverse information sources, engage in online civic discussions, analyze public policies, and participate in virtual civic actions. These experiences are particularly relevant for tertiary students who are closer to active political participation and leadership roles.

Sustainable Development and Education

Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Education is recognized as a key driver of sustainable development, particularly through its role in developing informed, ethical, and participatory citizens (UNESCO, 2021). Secondary and tertiary education institutions play a strategic role in advancing sustainable development by equipping learners with civic competence, environmental awareness, social responsibility, and problem-solving skills necessary for addressing complex national and global challenges.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Constructivists Learning Theory, Civic Republican Theory and Digital Citizenship Theory. Constructivists Learning Theory emphasized active social and experiential learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Civic Republican Theory underscores active participation, Civic virtue and participation (Oldfield, 1990). Digital Citizenship Theory emphasizes responsible participation in digital environments (Ribble, 2015). Together, these frameworks inform the integration of digital technologies to develop civic in secondary and tertiary levels.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a documentary and conceptual research design. Data were drawn from peer reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents and reports from reputable international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, and the United Nations. The materials were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, concepts and arguments relevant to digitalization, citizenship education, civic competence and sustainable development in Nigeria.

4.0. DISCOURSES

4.1. Strategies for Developing Civic Competence through Digitalized Citizenship Education

The development of civic competence through digitalized citizenship education requires deliberate learner-centered and context-sensitive strategies that leverage digital technologies to transform



learners into active, reflective and responsible citizens, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. Digitalized technologies, when effectively integrated into pedagogy, can transform learners from passive recipients of civic information into active civic actors capable of critical reflection, participation, and responsible decision-making.

Strategies at the Secondary Education Level

Digital Interactive Platform: At the secondary school level, digitalized citizenship should focus on building foundational civic knowledge, value, and participatory skills. Teachers can employ interactive digital platforms such as virtual classrooms, educational apps, and multimedia resources to present civic concepts in engaging and relatable ways.

Online Debates and Moderated Discussion Forums: Online debates, moderated discussion forums, and virtual town hall meetings can be used to stimulate democratic dialogue, helping students learn how to express opinions respectfully, listen to opposing views, and engage in reasoned argumentation.

Project Based Learning: Project based learning supported by digital tools allows secondary school students to investigate community issues such as environmental sanitation, election participation or school governance.

Digital Storytelling: Through guided online research, digital storytelling, and presentation tools, learners can propose civic solutions while developing digital literacy and teamwork skills.

Educational Games and Simulations: Civic simulations and educational games that model electoral processes, rule of law, and human rights further strengthen experiential learning and moral reasoning at this level.

Strategies at the Tertiary Education Level: In tertiary institutions, strategies should emphasize advanced civic engagement critical analysis, and leadership development.

Learning Management System and Online Civic Platforms: Learning management systems and online civic platforms can facilitate policy debates, collaborative research, and peer reviewed discussions, on national and global issues.

Virtual Simulations: Virtual simulations of legislative processes, constitutional debates, and judicial decision-making can deepen students' understanding of governance structures and democratic accountability.

Digital Service Learning: Digital Service learning is another effective strategy, where student apply academic knowledge to real life civic challenges using digital tools.

Online Advocacy Campaigns: Through online advocacy campaigns, civic awareness blogs and data-driven community project, students develop advocacy skills ethical responsibility, and social commitment.

Social Media Literacy Training: Social media literacy training should be incorporated to help students critically evaluate information, combat misinformation, and engage responsively in digital civic spaces.



Interdisciplinary Research Projects

Interdisciplinary Research Projects links social studies, political science and technology to real-worlds civic challenges.

4.2. Role of Citizenship Education in Developing Civic Competence for Sustainable Development

Citizenship education plays a fundamental role in nurturing civic competence by equipping learners with democratic knowledge participatory skills, civic values and a sense of social responsibility. Through digitalization, citizenship education becomes more responsive to contemporary civic realities and learners' digital experiences. Digitalized citizenship education enhances access to civic information, encourages active participation, and promotes inclusive dialogue across diverse social groups.

At both secondary and tertiary levels, citizenship education fosters democratic consciousness by helping learners understand their rights and obligations within society. Digital tools further strengthen this role by enabling learners to engage with real-time civic issues, public policies, and governance processes. By promoting critical thinking ethical judgment, and collaborative problem-solving, citizenship education contributes directly to sustainable development, democratic stability and social cohesion.

4.3. Challenges of Digitalizing Citizenship Education in Nigeria

Despite its potential benefits, the digitalization of citizenship education in Nigeria faces several structural institutional and socio-cultural challenges.

Digital Divide: One major challenge is the persistent digital divide between urban and rural areas which limits equitable access to digital tools and internet connectivity.

Infrastructure Gap: Many public secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria lack adequate ICT infrastructure, stable electricity supply and affordable internet access which constrains effective teaching and learning of citizenship education.

Teacher Capacity: Another significant challenge is inadequate teacher capacity for digital pedagogy. Many citizenship education teachers in Nigerian schools have limited training in the use of digital technologies for civic instruction, which affects effective classroom integration.

Curriculum Rigidity: Curriculum rigidity and examination-oriented practices further constrain innovative digital approaches to civic learning.

Ethical Challenges: Ethical challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation, online hate speech and political manipulation, pose risks to learners' civic development if not properly addressed.

Policy and Funding Constraints: Weak policy implementation, insufficient funding and limited coordination among educational stakeholders also undermine the sustainability of digital citizenship education initiatives in Nigeria.



5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the digitalization of citizenship education is a critical pathway for developing civic competence among learners in Nigerian secondary schools and tertiary institutions. In an era characterized by rapid technological change and complex socio-political challenges, traditional approaches to citizenship education are no longer sufficient, digitalized pedagogical strategies enhanced learners' civic knowledge, participatory skills, democratic values and digital responsibility, which are essential for sustainable development.

This paper concludes that while digitalization offers significant opportunities for strengthening civic competence, its success depend on deliberate policy support, institutional readiness, teacher capacity and inclusive access. A digitally empowerment citizenship education system can contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation, social cohesion, and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

5.2. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of digitalized citizenship education and the development of civic competence for sustainable development in Nigeria, several recommendations are proposed:

- Government at all levels should invest in robust digital infrastructure, particularly in public secondary schools and tertiary institutions to insure equitable access to ICT facilities and internet connectivity.
- Teacher professional development programmes should be strengthened to build digital pedagogical competence among citizenship education teachers.
- Curriculum developers should review and update citizenship education curricula to integrate digital civic competences, experiential learning and ethical digital citizenship.
- Educational institutions should promote inclusive digital policies that address accessibility, equity and online safety.

Finally, collaboration among government agencies, schools, universities, civil society organizations and technological providers should be encouraged to support sustainable digital civic learning initiatives aligned with national development goals

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest in this manuscript.



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