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Influence of the National Values Curriculum on Pupils' Cognitive and Emotional Development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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Sule Muhammad&*, Sani Ahmadu Gurjiya

Abstract:

Background: Recognizing the critical role of holistic National Value Education in shaping intellectual, moral, and emotional capacities, the research examined how structured value-based instruction affects reasoning, problem-solving, empathy, cooperation, and moral sensitivity among pupils.

Objective: The study investigated the influence of the National Values Curriculum (NVC) on pupils' cognitive and emotional development in basic schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Methods: A correlational research design was employed, with a sample of 384 pupils drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique from both urban and rural schools. Data were collected using a validated and reliable self-developed questionnaire, the National Values Curriculum Influence Questionnaire (NVCIQ), and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-tests.

Results: The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between the NVC and pupils' cognitive development ($r = 0.675, p < 0.001$), as well as emotional development ($r = 0.618, p < 0.001$), indicating that increased exposure to the curriculum significantly enhances both intellectual and affective competencies. Gender differences in cognitive development were not statistically significant, while school location had a significant impact on emotional development, with urban pupils demonstrating higher affective skills than rural pupils.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the NVC effectively promotes holistic development, fostering responsible, morally grounded, and socially competent pupils. It recommends continuous teacher training, provision of adequate instructional resources, and the incorporation of interactive and reflective activities to maximize the curriculum's cognitive and emotional benefits.

Keywords: Cognitive development, Emotional development, Holistic education, National Values Curriculum, Value-based learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Education remains globally acknowledged as a key driver of intellectual growth, moral refinement, and emotional balance in individuals, forming the backbone of societal advancement. In Nigeria, the basic education level is considered the most crucial phase for fostering pupils' cognitive and emotional competencies skills that are essential for lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and national development (Nwachukwu, 2024).

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Akubuilu et al., 2019) education should go beyond academic excellence to embrace a holistic approach that nurtures critical thinking, ethical conduct, and empathy among learners. To realize this vision, the National Values Curriculum (NVC) was developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) as an integrative framework that merges Civic Education, Social Studies, and Religious Studies into a unified subject aimed at moral and character formation (NERDC, n.d.). The curriculum was designed to instill essential values such as patriotism, discipline, empathy, and respect for cultural and religious diversity, while also improving pupils' cognitive abilities through inquiry-based and reflective learning approaches (Yayi & Abilagbo, 2020).

However, cognitive development entails the advancement of intellectual processes such as reasoning, comprehension, and memory (Kilag et al., 2022), while emotional development encompasses the acquisition of affective and interpersonal skills including empathy, cooperation, and moral awareness (Osinaike et al., 2025). Both domains are interrelated and form the cornerstone of holistic and value-based education. A number of researchers have examined how curriculum

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design and implementation influence pupils' cognitive and emotional development⁴³ in Nigerian schools. (ISAAC, 2025) investigated the impact of value-based education on learners' self-control and moral reasoning in basic schools across Southwest Nigeria. Their findings indicated that pupils who were consistently exposed to value-oriented instruction exhibited stronger problem-solving abilities, empathy, and emotional discipline than those who were not. In a related study, (Muhammad & Lawal, 2025) explored how Civic and Moral Education contribute to character formation and national unity. They discovered that pupils who actively engaged in value-based classroom discussions demonstrated improved emotional stability and better social interactions. Found that teachers often give more attention to cognitive learning objectives while neglecting affective and emotional outcomes, which hinders pupils' emotional growth and moral awareness (Angwaomadoko, 2023).

Furthermore, (Sambu et al., 2021) assessed the effectiveness of the National Values Curriculum in Northern Nigeria. Their research revealed that poor teacher preparation, limited teaching materials, and inconsistent instructional approaches negatively affected the success of the curriculum. Similarly, (Edinoh Phd et al., 2025) reported notable gender and location-based differences in pupils' acquisition of moral values and emotional adjustment, showing that learners in urban schools often performed better than⁴⁴ rural counterparts. This research is grounded in Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, which provides a comprehensive understanding of how children construct knowledge and develop emotionally through active engagement with their environment (Ede et al., 2023). Piaget proposed that learning is not a passive process but a dynamic one, in which learners continuously build and reorganize their understanding through the complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation. Within the context of the National Values Curriculum (NVC), this theoretical perspective explains how pupils in basic schools internalize moral, civic, and social principles through interactive, reflective, and participatory learning activities. Such experiences ranging from classroom dialogues to group projects and value-oriented tasks stimulate critical thinking, enhance reasoning skills, and enable learners to apply acquired values to real-life situations, thereby advancing their cognitive development (Izuagie, 2025).

Moreover, Piaget's theory recognizes that learning within social contexts also nurtures emotional growth, as pupils develop empathy, cooperation, tolerance, and self-regulation through meaningful social interactions (Abdullahi & Tambuwal, 2025). This interplay between cognition and emotion supports Piaget's assertion that moral reasoning and affective development evolve in tandem with intellectual maturity (Kilag et al., 2022). Contemporary researchers have further affirmed this connection. For instance, (ISAAC, 2025) found that

pupils who participated in value-based instruction demonstrated stronger analytical thinking and emotional discipline, while (Osinaike et al., 2025) highlighted that value-driven and reflective learning fosters social-emotional competence among Nigerian learners. Similarly, (Okokoyo, 2024) argued that integrating moral and civic values into classroom learning enhances both emotional intelligence and academic achievement.

Consequently, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding how the National Values Curriculum contributes to pupils' holistic development by harmonizing cognitive and emotional learning processes (Ugolo & Onukwu, 2025). Through its emphasis on active, reflective, and moral learning experiences, the NVC supports the cultivation of responsible, empathetic, and intellectually capable citizens in Zamfara State's basic education system (Muhammad, 2026).

Education is widely regarded as the foundation for developing learners' intellectual, moral, and emotional capacities, and it plays a key role in national transformation (Muhammad & Jibril, 2026). In Nigeria, the National Values Curriculum (NVC) was introduced within the Basic Education Curriculum to nurture civic responsibility, moral discipline, and positive attitudes among pupils (Muhammad et al., 2023). The curriculum combines Civic Education, Social Studies, and Religious Studies to promote the all-round development of learners and to encourage responsible citizenship and peaceful coexistence (Ekeh, 2019). Despite these noble intentions, there are growing concerns that many pupils in Zamfara State still exhibit weak problem-solving abilities, poor emotional regulation, low moral reasoning, and limited interpersonal skills (Abdullahi et al., 2025). Research evidence suggests that teachers often focus mainly on the intellectual aspects of instruction, giving less attention to the emotional and value-based components of the curriculum. This imbalance has made it difficult to achieve the expected harmony between pupils' cognitive growth and emotional maturity (Ndazhaga & Ibrahim, 2024).

In addition, differences in learning environments, teacher competence, and resource availability across gender and school location (urban and rural) may also influence how pupils internalize and demonstrate the values promoted by the curriculum (Agukwe, 2025). While previous studies have discussed civic and moral education in general terms, there is still a lack of empirical research that examines how the National Values Curriculum specifically affects both the cognitive and emotional development of⁴⁵ pupils in Zamfara State (Suleiman & Lawal, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the influence of the National Values Curriculum on pupils' cognitive and emotional development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria, with special consideration of gender and school location differences (Tunfang & Jackson, 2025).

The study is designed to determine the extent to which the National Values Curriculum influences pupils' cognitive development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. It also seeks to examine the impact of the National Values Curriculum on pupils' emotional development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. Furthermore, the study investigates whether there is any significant difference in the cognitive and emotional development of pupils based on gender and school location in Zamfara State.

This study comprises three research questions. First, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the National Values Curriculum influences pupils' cognitive development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. Second, it examines how the National Values Curriculum affects pupils' emotional development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. Third, the study investigates whether there are significant differences in pupils' cognitive and emotional development based on gender and school location in Zamfara State.

This study comprises three hypotheses. The first hypothesis (Ho₁) states that there is no significant relationship between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' cognitive development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. The second hypothesis (Ho₂) states that there is no significant relationship between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' emotional development in Basic Schools in Zamfara State. The third hypothesis (Ho₃) states that there is no significant difference in pupils' cognitive and emotional development based on gender and school location in Basic Schools in Zamfara State.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a correlational research design, which is appropriate for examining the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. The design was chosen because it provides a systematic approach for assessing the degree of association between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' cognitive as well as emotional development in Zamfara State. The population of the study comprised all pupils enrolled in both public and private basic schools across Zamfara State, totaling 52,321 pupils, according to the records obtained from the Zamfara State Ministry of Education. Due to the large size of the population, a sample of 384 pupils was selected based on the Research Advisors sample size determination table, which provides a statistically adequate representation for populations exceeding 50,000 at a 95% confidence level. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to ensure fair representation across gender and geographical locations. In the first stage, two local government areas were randomly

chosen from each of the three senatorial districts, making a total of six local government areas. In the second stage, one urban and one rural school were selected from each local government area.

Finally, pupils were randomly drawn from the chosen schools to form the study sample. Data for the study were gathered using a self-developed questionnaire titled National Values Curriculum Influence Questionnaire (NVCIQ). The instrument consisted of three major sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic information; Section B assessed aspects of cognitive development such as reasoning and problem-solving abilities; while Section C measured emotional development, including empathy, cooperation, and moral sensitivity. The instrument utilized a 4-point Likert rating scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was subjected to expert review by three specialists from the Department of Educational Foundations, Federal University Gusau, who evaluated its clarity, content relevance, and consistency with the study's objectives (Kilag et al., 2022). For reliability testing, a pilot study involving 30 pupils outside the study area was conducted. The responses obtained were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.89, indicating a high level of internal consistency. After establishing validity and reliability, the researcher, with the assistance of trained research aides, administered the questionnaire personally. Prior consent was obtained from school authorities, and participation was entirely voluntary to maintain ethical integrity and encourage honest responses.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and standard deviation were employed to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics were used to test the study's hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Specifically, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was utilized to determine the relationship between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' cognitive and emotional development, whereas the independent samples t-test was used to identify differences in responses based on gender and school location. Throughout the research process, strict ethical standards were upheld to ensure confidentiality, transparency, and the credibility of findings, in line with the recommendations of (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pupils' Cognitive Development (Research Question 1, N = 384)

Cognitive Development Indicators	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Reasoning Skills	384	3.34	0.61	1	4	3
Problem Solving Ability	384	3.28	0.63	1	4	3
Comprehensive Skills	384	3.45	0.57	1	4	3



Overall Cognitive Development	384	3.36	0.59	1	4	3
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⁴⁹ The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that the pupils' cognitive development in terms of reasoning skills, problem-solving ability, and comprehensive skills is generally high. Specifically, the mean scores indicate that comprehensive skills ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.57$) are slightly stronger than reasoning skills ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.61$) and problem-solving ability ($M = 3.28$, $SD =$

0.63). The overall cognitive development of the pupils also reflects a high level ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.59$), with all indicators ranging from 1 to 4. These results suggest that pupils in the study demonstrate relatively strong cognitive capacities across the assessed domains, with minimal variability as shown by the standard deviations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Pupils' Emotional Development (Research Question 2, $N = 384$)

Cognitive Development Indicators	¹ N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Empathy	384	3.30	0.62	1	4	3
Cooperation	384	3.27	0.61	1	4	3
Moral Sensitivity	384	3.36	0.60	1	4	3
Overall Cognitive Development	384	3.31	0.61	1	4	3

⁴⁵ Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for pupils' emotional development. The results indicate that moral sensitivity ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.60$) slightly surpasses empathy ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.62$) and cooperation ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.61$). Overall, pupils exhibit a high level of emotional development ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.61$), with

scores ranging from 1 to 4 across all indicators. The relatively low standard deviations suggest that pupils' emotional competencies are consistently developed, reflecting strong abilities in empathy, cooperation, and moral awareness.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive and Emotional Development by Gender and School Location (Research Question 3, $N = 384$)

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Range
Cognitive Development	Male	182	3.33	0.58	1	4	3
	Female	202	3.38	0.60	1	4	3
Emotional Development	Urban Schools	198	3.39	0.55	1	4	3
	Rural Schools	186	3.20	0.63	1	4	3

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of pupils' cognitive and emotional development by gender and school location. In terms of cognitive development, female pupils ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.60$) slightly outperformed male pupils ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.58$), suggesting minimal gender differences in cognitive abilities. For emotional development, pupils in urban

⁶ schools ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.55$) scored higher than those in rural schools ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.63$), indicating that school location may influence emotional competencies. Across all groups, scores ranged from 1 to 4, and standard deviations were relatively low, showing consistent development among pupils.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Analysis of National Values Curriculum and Pupils' Cognitive Development ($N = 384$)

Variables	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Pupils' Cognitive Development	3.36	0.59	0.675	.000	Significant
National Values Curriculum	3.23	0.65			

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation analysis between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' cognitive development. The results show a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.675$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher exposure to the National Values Curriculum is

associated with higher levels of cognitive development among pupils. The relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that the National Values Curriculum has a meaningful influence on pupils' cognitive abilities.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Analysis of National Values Curriculum and Pupils' Emotional Development (N = 384)

Variables	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Pupils' Emotional Development	3.31	0.65	0.618	.000	Significant
National Values Curriculum	3.23	0.59			

Table 5 shows the Pearson correlation between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' emotional development. The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.618$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater exposure to the National Values Curriculum is

associated with higher levels of emotional development among pupils. The relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that the curriculum meaningfully contributes to enhancing pupils' emotional competencies.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-test of Pupils' Cognitive and Emotional Development by Gender and School Location (N = 384)

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Range
Cognitive Development	Male	182	3.33	0.58	1.62	382	.100
	Female	202	3.38	0.60			
Emotional Development	Urban Schools	198	3.39	0.55	3.27	382	.000
	Rural Schools	186	3.20	0.63			

Table 6 presents the results of independent samples t-tests comparing pupils' cognitive and emotional development by gender and school location. For cognitive development, female pupils ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.60$) slightly outperformed male pupils ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.58$), but the difference was not statistically significant, $t(382) = 1.62$, $p = 0.100$. This suggests that gender does not have a significant effect on cognitive development in this sample. In contrast, for emotional development, pupils in urban schools ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.55$) scored significantly higher than those in rural schools ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.63$), $t(382) = 3.27$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that school location has a significant influence on pupils' emotional development.

3.2 Discussion

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between the National Values Curriculum (NVC) and pupils' cognitive development. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.675$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increased exposure to the NVC is associated with higher cognitive development among pupils. This aligns with Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, which emphasizes that active engagement with structured learning experiences enhances reasoning, comprehension, and problem-solving skills (Kilag et al., 2022). The results support previous studies that highlight the role of value-based education in improving learners' intellectual capacities (Adubuola et al., 2023) Yayi & Abilagbo, 2020), suggesting that the NVC effectively promotes critical thinking and analytical skills in basic school pupils.

The second hypothesis investigated the relationship between the NVC and pupils' emotional development. The analysis showed a significant positive correlation (r

$= 0.618$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that the curriculum positively influences pupils' emotional competencies, including empathy, cooperation, and moral sensitivity. This finding corroborates the work of (Osinaike et al., 2025), who emphasized that reflective and value-driven learning enhances social-emotional skills in Nigerian learners. Similarly, (Adubuola et al., 2023) noted that pupils exposed to moral and civic instruction exhibit stronger emotional regulation and interpersonal skills. Therefore, the NVC appears to foster both affective development and moral awareness, which are essential for holistic education and responsible citizenship.

The third hypothesis explored differences in cognitive and emotional development based on gender and school location. The results indicated no significant gender difference in cognitive development ($t(382) = 1.62$, $p = 0.100$), suggesting that both male and female pupils benefit equally from the curriculum in terms of intellectual growth. This finding is consistent with the assertion of (Ainscow, 2020) that equitable curriculum delivery can minimize gender disparities in learning outcomes. Conversely, significant differences were observed in emotional development by school location ($t(382) = 3.27$, $p < 0.001$), with pupils in urban schools demonstrating higher emotional competencies than their rural counterparts. This outcome reflects the influence of environmental and resource factors on affective learning, as noted by (Edinoh Phd et al., 2025) and (Adebayo et al., 2024), indicating that urban schools may provide richer social interactions and exposure to value-based activities that promote emotional growth.

Consequently, the findings collectively demonstrate that the National Values Curriculum has a meaningful and positive impact on pupils' cognitive and emotional development in Zamfara State. The curriculum's

integrative approach, combining moral, civic, and social education, appears effective in promoting holistic learning, though contextual factors such as school location may moderate emotional outcomes. These results underscore the importance of adequate teacher preparation, resource provision, and equitable curriculum implementation to maximize the benefits of value-based education (Sambu et al., 2021); (Adeoye et al., 2025); (Angwaomadoko, 2023).

3.2.1 Implications

The study implies that the National Values Curriculum (NVC) is effective in promoting both cognitive and emotional development among pupils, supporting holistic education. It highlights the need for policymakers to strengthen value-based curriculum implementation and for teachers to adopt interactive teaching methods. The findings also stress the importance of improving resources in rural schools to reduce disparities in emotional development. Additionally, the results support gender equality in learning outcomes and encourage further research on other factors influencing pupils' development.

3.2.2 Research Contribution

This study makes significant contributions to the field of educational research, particularly in the area of value-based education in Nigeria. Firstly, it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the National Values Curriculum in promoting both cognitive and emotional development among pupils, thereby supporting the concept of holistic education. Secondly, the study contributes to existing literature by establishing a strong positive relationship between value-based curriculum exposure and pupils' intellectual and affective competencies. It also highlights the role of contextual factors such as school location in influencing emotional development, thereby extending current knowledge on educational inequalities. Furthermore, the research offers practical implications for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators by emphasizing the need for improved teacher training, adequate instructional materials, and interactive teaching approaches. It also serves as a reference point for future researchers interested in curriculum evaluation and pupils' developmental outcomes in similar contexts.

3.2.3 Limitations

Despite the valuable findings, this study has some limitations. The use of a correlational research design limits the ability to establish causality between the National Values Curriculum and pupils' development. The study relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias or social desirability effects. Additionally, the research was confined to selected basic schools in Zamfara State, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other states or regions in Nigeria. Time and resource constraints also restricted the sample size and scope of

the study. Lastly, other potential influencing variables such as teachers' instructional styles, parental background, and socio-economic status were not extensively examined.

3.2.4 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made. Teachers should receive regular professional development on the effective implementation of the National Values Curriculum to ensure that both cognitive and emotional learning objectives are achieved. In addition, adequate teaching materials and supportive learning environments should be provided, particularly in rural schools, in order to minimize disparities in emotional development. Schools should also incorporate interactive and reflective activities, such as group discussions, community projects, and moral reasoning exercises, to reinforce both cognitive and affective skills among pupils. Furthermore, educational authorities should regularly assess the effectiveness of the National Values Curriculum (NVC) to identify gaps in implementation and make necessary adjustments for continuous improvement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the National Values Curriculum (NVC) significantly influences both the cognitive and emotional development of pupils in basic schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Findings revealed that pupils exposed to the NVC exhibited strong reasoning, problem-solving, and comprehensive skills, alongside enhanced empathy, cooperation, and moral sensitivity. While cognitive benefits were similar across genders, emotional development was notably higher among pupils in urban schools, highlighting the role of environmental and contextual factors. Overall, the research confirms that an integrative, value-based curriculum can effectively promote holistic development, preparing pupils to become responsible, morally grounded, and socially competent citizens. The results underscore the need for consistent curriculum implementation, adequate teacher training, and provision of learning resources to maximize the full benefits of the NVC.

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6. CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sule Muhammad conceptualized the study, designed the research methodology, developed the instrument, supervised data collection, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Sani Ahmadu Gurjiya contributed to the data collection process, assisted in data analysis, and participated in the review and editing of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Authors

⁴⁷ Sule Muhammad, Federal University Gusau, Nigeria
¹⁰ <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0591-7511>
 Email: muhammadsule@fugusau.edu.ng

Authors

⁴⁷ Sani Ahmadu Gurjiya, Federal University Gusau, Nigeria
¹⁰ <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3062-4970>
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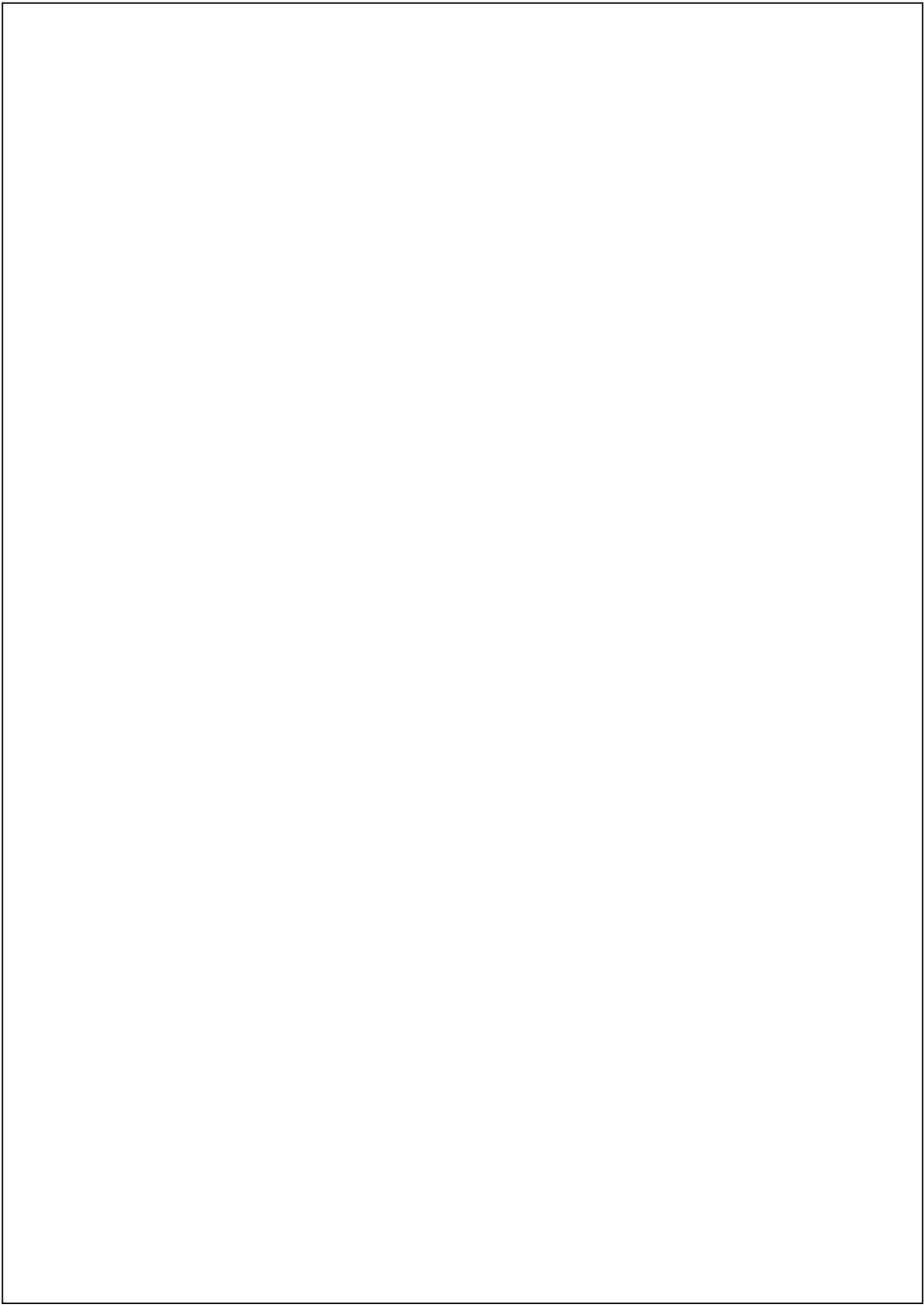
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