

Research Article

Moral education in Nigerian secondary schools: A realistic approach

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Abstract

This paper is occasioned by the alarming trend of moral decadence among the Nigerian Secondary school students in recent times. This paper therefore, attempted a conceptual definition of the concepts of education, moral values and moral education. It also logically analyzed the present Nigerian secondary school curriculum as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004) and methods of teaching morality in our schools with a view of exposing their weakness. Among other things, quarried is the fact that moral education does not stand out as an independent core subject. The use of indoctrination as a method of teaching morality is equally faulted. Thus, student-centered methods such as questioning and discussion methods are suggested. The following are recommended as realistic approaches towards enhancing moral education in Nigerian secondary schools. (1) Adoption of effective and comprehensive continuous assessment techniques. (2) Introduction of biographical studies. (3) Professionalization of teaching. (4) Revival of school games. (5) Effective evaluation of students moral status and indication of same in their certificates upon graduation etc.

Keywords: Moral values, Moral education, Curriculum, Continuous assessment, Indoctrination, Affective domain

INTRODUCTION

A desire for an effective moral order has become an issue of both serious and urgent concern to all rational minds in recent times. The concern for a sound moral status is occasioned by the alarming rate of decline in the moral consciousness among youth and adults in the Nigerian society. This decline has become a disease eating systematically into the very vein of the entire nation. In the last few years, the Nigerian nation began to experience ever than before a serious collapse of discipline, not only in the educational institutions but also in other sectors of the nation.

Morality as it has been argued, is the life wire of any successful society. Therefore, a society that is faced with the problem of immorality is not only being inactive but indeed sick. This is why our political, economic and even religious life are in danger. The Nigeria of today is characterized by all forms of immoral practices ranging from robbery, cheating, forgery, fraud, disrespect for constituted authority, lawlessness etc. It is against this background that our school system is expected to renew its efforts in handling issues of moral regeneration in our schools with all sense of dedication.

There is no doubt that the Nigerian secondary school system is failing in its duty towards inculcation of expected moral values in Nigerian students. Mkpa (1999) observed thus; part of the reason why morality appears to be at its lowest ebb in the Nigerian society is the lack of focus on sound values in our schools. Today, dishonesty and other forms of

malpractices manifest themselves in the various Nigerian schools in form of cheating during examination, riots, cultism, kidnapping, raping, abuse of drugs etc. The major challenge of the school system therefore is to redeem its image and take up vigorously more than ever its primary and fundamental duty of providing a balance education for the Nigerian youth. To this end, this paper attempts an examination of the methodological approach to the teaching of morality in the Nigerian secondary schools; identifying and bringing to lime line factors that may have bedeviled or militated against proper inculcation of moral values in the Nigerian secondary schools and suggesting realistic approaches to the moral education of the Nigerian secondary school students.

SOME CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS: THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

The term, education is polymorphous and thus appears to have defied a universally accepted definition. The concept is defined in various ways by different scholars, sometimes even with the same scholar depending on the time, condition and place under which such individual is giving the definition.

Etymologically, the term education is derived from the Latin words 'Educere' and 'Educare'. The former means to 'draw out' or 'to lead out'. In this light, education is seen as a systematic process or activity which is directed towards inducing learning in an individual who is exposed or committed to such an educational process.

The later 'Educare', means to 'Nourish' 'to bring up' or 'to raise'. From this angle, education is seen as a process aimed at helping the individual lead the fullest of life he is capable of living.

Perhaps, these different etymological orientations about the term, education, gave rise to the variations in definitions given by different scholars. However, in this paper, the term is viewed from a sociological and humanistic view points. Frankena, in Amaele(1998) states that, education is a process of enculturation or socialization of the younger by the elder members of the society. He stressed further that education in its broadest sense, involves the process through which an individual acquires the various physical and social capabilities demanded of him in the society by the group into which he is born and within which he must function effectively.

Elliot in Ogbebor (1996), defines education as a means of preserving the way of life in which the person believes.

Durkheim in Kalusi (1996), defines education as 'the systematic socialization of the younger generation by which the later learns religious and moral beliefs, feelings or nationality and the collective opinions of all kinds,

In the humanistic view point the following definitions are worthy of note: Okafor (1981), defines education as 'the acculturation by which the individual is assisted to attain the maximum activation of his potentiality according to the right reason and to achieve thereby self fulfillment or self realization.

Okeke (1993) sees education as rearing, upbringing, fostering, training'. This implies that education aims at helping the individual to develop. Similarly, Igborgbor (2000) sees education as 'the acquisition of needed competencies for life in the society.

R.S. Peters as cited by Oroka (2005) viewed education as 'the intentional bringing about of a desirable state of mind, and relates to processes and activities that can contribute to or involves something that is worthwhile.

Flowing from the definitions of education, it is necessary to emphases here that, implicit in the definitions given earlier is the fact that, education is a moral concept. Both the sociological and humanistic views portray education as a process or activity aimed at improving the quality of life of both the individuals in the society and the society as a whole. In fact, education-be it formal or informal-is like other agencies of socialization such as the family, church, peer group, mass media etc established by the society to nurture the child to imbibe those standards that will make him or her acceptable to other members of the society. By implication, education creates in the child the awareness of those behaviors, attitudes and skills exhibited and encouraged by members of the society because they are both good and desirable to mankind generally, the society and the individual child in particular as against those behaviors condemned and discouraged for they have been proven to be bad and unhelpful. In the light of the this understanding, can one confidently say that, the present Nigerian secondary school system is capable of making the students who are committed to it become adults who are responsible, progressive and known for behavior that is worthwhile in the future? Put differently, is the present schooling system equipped enough in terms of human resources, curriculum content, etc to produce individuals with the expected moral values?. These and other thought provoking questions informed this paper.

THE CONCEPT OF MORAL VALUES

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines value as 'worth of something compared with price paid for it' 'quality of being useful or worthwhile or important.

Value, like other philosophical concepts, has a complex and multiple meanings. Nevertheless, etymologically, the term 'value' is derived from the Latin verb, 'valere' which means to be 'strong to be worth'. Against this background, Angeles, according to Etaghene (2005) defines value as the quality of a thing which makes it desirable, useful or an object of interest.

Values, according to Kalusi (1996), refers to our desires, wants, needs, interest and aspirations. Similarly, it can be said in a concise way that value is the function of anything or practice which makes it desirable and acceptable to the society and maintained by the society (Ohwovorione, 2008).

Moral, on the other hand, has been defined as standards, principles of good behavior. Thus, moral values implies behavior, attitude exhibited and encouraged by members of the society for the fact that they are both good and desirable to mankind generally as against those behaviors condemned and discouraged. Examples of moral values include faithfulness, self discipline, honesty, humility, brotherliness, patience, hardworking, truthfulness etc.

MORAL EDUCATION EXPLAINED

Having defined the concept of education and moral separately, it is pertinent to attempt a definition of moral education. As cited by Okorodudu (2004), Peters opined that moral education is simply a process which is aimed at promoting in the individual a desire to gain the greatest possible knowledge and understanding of his ability whatever kind, which will help within the framework and interest. For Okorodudu, moral education involves the internalization of the societal values in relation to the do and the don'ts of a given community to her citizens.

Maqsd (1994) asserted that, moral education should be able to produce an individual who could manifest the following behavioral trait;

- (a) A positive commitment towards the value of morality.
- (b) Ability to communicate with others.
- (c) The ability to understand feelings of others and those of his own.

Similarly, moral education can be said to mean any activity/process geared towards helping the individual imbibe the societal norms or moral values in order for such an individual to become useful to himself, others and the society in general. Thus, the influence of the school and other agents of socialization on the moral development of the citizen is quite fundamental.

THE NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MORAL EDUCATION

In the examination of how the Nigerian secondary school is committed to the inculcation of moral values among the students, it is vital to refer to the Nigerian secondary school curriculum as contained in the National Policy on Education (2004). Section 5 of this document provides for the knowledge of English language, French, mathematics, language of the environment, one major Nigerian language other than the one in the environment, Integrated Science, Social Studies, Introductory Technology and at least one subject each from the pre-vocational and non-prevocational electives such as Agriculture, Business Studies, Home Economics, Local Craft, Computer Education (as pre-vocational electives), Religious Knowledge, Physical and Health Education, Fine Art, Music and Arabic (as non-prevocational elective).

A prudent look at the core subjects listed, would show vividly that at this level of secondary education, students are taught bearing in mind that they will be critically examined on these core subjects in order for them to obtain the Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSSC). Thus, the assessment is basically in academic performance and consequently bias. Much attention is not given to the teaching and evaluation of students on the affective domain wherein moral values belong since that will not in any way add to their grades during their certificate examination. It is logical to say that the introduction of continuous assessment (CA) would have taken care of moral assessment of the students. But the challenging question is, how many schools actually go about continuous assessment objectively and are equipped enough in terms of human and material resources to objectively assess the moral conduct or affective competence of their students. The concern of parents, teachers and even the students themselves is the paper qualification. This lukewarm attitude towards continuous assessment has adversely affected the moral behavior of the students. Thus, the Nigerian secondary school education seems only to be educating the 'head' (cogitative domain) and the 'hands' (psycho-motive domain) of the students leaving out the heart (affective domain).

At the senior secondary level, the National Policy on Education puts the core subjects to be English Language, Mathematics, a major Nigerian language, one of Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science, one of Literature-in-English, History, Geography or Religious Studies and one vocational subject leaving out moral instruction. Perhaps, the understanding is that moral instruction could be taught or incorporated into the teaching of all subjects.

Though, it is an indisputable fact that, there is a great deal of moral values in subjects like social studies and religious studies. These subjects as it were in terms of curriculum content, have some appreciated strength in inculcation of moral values. It is to the credit of social studies in particular that its content is drawn from the practice of the people and culture of those of the immediate environment thereby exposing the students to the norms of the society with a view of helping them becoming better integrated members of the society. Meanwhile, it should be stressed here that even though some moral benefits are derivable from these subjects their weakness are inherent in them. For instance, the teaching of religious studies in schools is usually done through indoctrination. Thus, it must be noted that, even though the teaching of morality is possible via all subjects as earlier mentioned, teaching moral education at both level of secondary school as a core subject standing out on its own in Nigeria will go a long way to fine tune the moral conduct of the Nigerian youth and precisely school children. It is regrettable that the school system and indeed educational stakeholders handle the issue of student morality with levity. This is why upon graduation in tertiary institutions, it is usually said that they (graduates) have been found fit both in character and learning. Of course, this is a mere ceremonial statement because some of such graduates are known cultists. If the Nigerian society must match forward, the entire school system charged with the responsibility of raising a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals, live as good citizens, must be completely over hauled.

METHODS OF TEACHING MORALITY IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Nigeria as a nature is a complex one; it is a multi-ethnic and religion society. It therefore follows that the school system consists of learners from different religious and ethnic background with different orientations. Thus, the teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of teaching morality to the students might find himself in a confused state trying to teach religion and moral instruction collectively, if he, for instance, teaches morality from any of the religion angles, he may incur the wrath of some of his learners. Therefore, it is not proper to teach secular morality through religion studies or indoctrination as it is being done today in Nigerian secondary schools.

The adoption of indoctrination as a method of teaching morality to students is not in any way proper. It is a teacher centered technique which renders learners passive. It does not enable students to appreciate the 'why' and perhaps the 'how' of an action. For instance, it is a common knowledge that Christian religion studies teachers teach their students as a moral instruction that the Bible says we should not kill. In this case perhaps; the only reason why the students should not kill is that God or the Bible has commanded so and not necessary that they see killing as being bad or inhuman. Hence in secular or civil society like Nigeria, religion should not be the main avenue of teaching morality to school children. Enoh (2004) summarizes this problem as follows:

When, therefore, we present values as immutable to learners in the name of enabling them know these, we make a huge mistake. Learners never really know them; they merely accept uncritically and with a high chance of their abandoning such values as they grow older'.

The approach to be adopted in moral education and orientation should provide ample opportunity for learners to critically/objectively examine and evaluate the issues that arise and to make reasoned choices and judgment. Thus, questioning or discussion methods could be adopted. For instance, a teacher who wants to teach that killing is bad, may begin by asking the students if any one of them will ever want to be killed by another person. The answer definitely will be negative since no sane natural man would love to be killed under normal condition. The teacher can proceed to ask a second question. Is it good for any of you to kill an innocent and just fellow human? Of course, this will also attract a negative respond; thus the teacher can conclude that since no one wants to be killed by others, no one should also aim at killing others. The implication of the above instance is that, students will go home and live with the mentality that killing is bad not necessary because the Bible or Quran has commanded against it but because they have an understanding that killing is bad and inhuman. This logic could still be applied when instructing students on other moral issues like honesty, love, justice, obedience, hardworking, respect for constituted authority etc.

Section 8 of the National Policy on Education document state clearly that no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers. Thus, another way that can be a realistic approach to the teaching of morality to students is the exemplary life of the teacher. This understanding underscores the definition of teaching by Macdonald in Ochonogor and Ajaja (2004) when he defined teaching as 'teacher's behavior'. As a matter of seriousness, teachers should avoid over dependence on threats and punishment as a way of instructing students on moral principles in schools, but instead, the teacher should demonstrate those moral virtues he wishes his learners to imbibe. He should also punish erring and reward good virtues demonstrated by students. It is only by these measures that the Nigerian secondary schools can teach values in the right direction.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the discourse so far, this paper has been able to reveal some of the factors militating against proper inculcation of expected moral values in the Nigerian secondary schools. Such factors identified include poor assessment of students competences which has resulted in over emphasis on the cognitive domain and psycho-motor development of the school child at the expense of the education of the heart (affective domain); teachers' unwholesome behavior/activities; adoption of indoctrination as a method of teaching morality via religious studies etc.

In view of this, it is logical to conclude that for an effective moral education of the Nigerian secondary school students, the following approaches would be very helpful and realistic:

(1) The continuous assessment of students carried out by school teachers should be improved upon. Both state and federal government should organize periodic workshop for practicing teachers both in public and private schools in order to make them get more acquainted with necessary techniques of continuous assessment of students especially in the affective domain.

(2) Government should evolve for the Nigerian secondary system a sound logical moral instruction curriculum that is void of religious indoctrination which can be taught under moral education as an independent and core subject at all levels of the Nigerian secondary education. Its curriculum content should be systematically drawn by experts to reflect basically those expected moral values of the Nigerian society such as patriotism, justice, peace, honesty, dignity of labour, unity and national integration etc.

(3) Learners-centred teaching methodology like discussion, questioning and project methods should be adopted in instructing students on moral issues in schools.

(4) The government should introduce biographical study. In this regard, the biography of Nigerians and non-Nigerians alike who demonstrated exemplary life style in terms of moral conducts should become part of the study materials in the Nigerian secondary schools.

(5) Efforts should be geared towards revival of games in our school as this will help to instill discipline, cooperation and team spirit in students.

(6) The moral status of every school child should be objectively and effectively evaluated and truly indicated in his/her certificate at the point of graduation. This could be achieved through an effective continuous assessment system.

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