

REPOSITIONING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN NIGERIA FOR DEVELOPING MORALLY UPRIGHT CITIZENS

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Abstract

Issues concerning morality and moral development have become a source of concern to all and sundry in Nigeria today. Due to the high level of moral decadence in our society today, one begins to question the nature, contents, theory and practice of our education. Some scholars have established the links between what we experience in the society and what education had given to its products. Of course scholars and educationists have hinged the incidence of moral decadence on our educational practice. In line with these scholars, this paper argues that the social, economic, religious, political, cultural, technological and educational challenges in Nigeria today are essentially moral in nature. This paper therefore calls for moral development through educational practice in Nigeria and concludes that the members of the public must play their role accordingly. Especially the art industry should show concern for this national organizations, including teachers, public office holders, politicians and parents who should lead by example as studies have shown that those who grew up under a corrupt system tend to be corrupt.

Keywords: Moral, development, educational practice, national development, education, antidote.

Introduction

In spite of the different forms of education in every society (formal, non-formal and informal), they are all meant for national development. This is why the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) refers to education as an instrument per excellence for effecting national development. It is therefore, important to embrace education for its all-encompassing task. In other words, education is an essential tool for producing civil conscious citizens who, in every measure share and meet the needs and aspirations of our founding fathers.

Furthermore, it is believed that education is a viable tool for building and developing a sense of morality in the youths. Put differently, formal education has an apt setting for moral development of children because the main goal of education is students' learning, and the purpose of learning is to promote students' cognitive development (DeRoche, 1998). In support of this, Williams (1995) echoed the two major purposes of education as cognitive-academic development and character formation. For him, cognitive-academic development contributes to enhancing learners' knowledge and intellectual skills while character formation helps shape their attitudes and behaviours reflected in such values as honesty, integrity, respect, responsibility, self-discipline, and reliability. In other words, cognitive-academic and character development prepares students for the world of work, for further education, for lifelong learning and for citizenship (Williams, 1995).

However, issues surrounding morality and moral development have become a source of concern to all and sundry in Nigeria today. Due to the high level of moral decadence in our society today, one begins to question the nature, contents, theory and practice of our education. Some scholars have established the links between what we experience in the society and what education had given to its products. That is, education has failed to achieve its set objects in Nigeria. For example, Uchara (2013) argued that ever since the missionary schools were handed over to the government had immorality and other forms of vices entered our education and by extension, our large society. Today the Nigerian society is bedeviled with a series of social vices ranging from corruption, kidnapping, ritual killings, communal crises, religious bigotry, insurgency, cybercrime, fraud among other corrupt practices.

This immorality pervaded virtually every nook and cranny of the nation ranging from the leaders to the followers. Historically, teaching or the development of morality is associated with three social institutions in every society – the religion, the family and the school. When these institutions fail to play their role as expected, forces hostile to moral consciousness rush in to fill the void. Through discipline, the teacher's good example, and school curriculum, schools teach children and youths the virtues of patriotism, hard work, honesty, altruism and courage.

Of course, the Nigerian society cherishes its moral values as reflected in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) but there is a wide gap between

education theory and practice in Nigeria. It is high time to asked whether Nigeria is getting exactly what the education has prepared Nigerians to give back to its society. It is against this background that this paper examines current educational practice in Nigeria and calls for its repositioning for the development of morally upright citizens.

Conceptual Clarifications

Education

The term “education” cannot be dismissed with just one definition due to numerous roles and conceptions of authors about the subject matter. Etymologically, the term education is a derivation of the Latin words ‘Educere’ or ‘Educare’, the former means to ‘draw out’ or ‘lead out’. That is, education is a systematic process or activity which is directed towards inculcating learning in an individual who is exposed to such an educational process (Avwerosuoghene, 2013). The later equally suggests to ‘nourish, bring up or raise’. Therefore, education is seen as a process aimed at helping the individual live the fullest of life he is capable of living.

It is on this basis that education is viewed as an 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 (Oroka cited in Avwerosuoghene, 2013). For Ayodele (2008) the goal of education has always been to satisfy both personal and societal needs. Spring (1980) explains that the goal of education for Awolowo is the development in each individual of the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits and powers that can be used to shape the individual and the society for the better. Solarin argued fervently that the goal of education should be the building of a new community by producing individual’s who can stand on their feet, men and women who are mentally free and independent (Solarin, 1963).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that education is a moral concept, which is aimed at improving the quality of life of both the individuals in the society and the society as a whole. Put differently, education creates in the child the awareness of those behaviours, 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 behaviours condemned and discouraged for they have been proven to be bad and unhelpful. This was reflected in Plato’s concept of education where the aims of education were geared towards political and social cohesion of the nation it serves (Plato 427 BC-347). For Plato, good education promotes the good conduct which in turn breeds peace and concord necessary for building a nation. Analytically, the aim of education from Plato’s philosophical thought is to put a man in the right order to show him the right path and to instill in him the spirit of dedication towards social stability

and cohesion. Suffice it to say education is meant to produce morally upright citizens.

Moral Development

Moral development is a process of being focused on the emergence, change, and understanding of morality from infancy through adulthood. The concept is best understood from the principle for how individuals ought to treat one another, with respect to justice, others' welfare, and rights. That is, it is a way of ascertaining how individuals understand morality through beliefs, emotions, attitudes and behaviours that display their moral understanding. Moral development has a direct connection with those influential factors such as the role of peers and parents in facilitating, the role of conscience and values, socialization and cultural influences, empathy and altruism, and positive development. For instance, Freud had once established the existence of a tension between the needs of society and the individual. For Freud, moral development proceeds when the individual's selfish desires are repressed and replaced by the values of important socializing agents in one's life (e.g one's parents) (Freud, 1962).

However, in contemporary philosophy, moral development is conceived teleologically. This means defining the inherent reality or essence of a moral phenomenon by the valuable function or purpose it ultimately serves. In this wise, teleology is a strong version of functionalism – x is what x does. Puka (2017) asserted that human nature is naturally good. At least it leans decidedly towards an awareness of the good, and a preference for it, over evil and injustice. Thus morality grows in human beings spontaneously alongside physical limbs, basic mental and social capacity. Both at individual and social level, the human species evolve mature moral conscience and character despite the many psychological and social impediments that slow or derail the process for over time.

Blasi (2004) argued that the logic of moral development suggested philosophical progress on the concept. For him, human inherent goodness is best viewed as akin to genetic instruction for seeking social competence, and competence in the general sense. The basic instruction is to unpack and upgrade personality potencies as suits whichever environments will welcome their designs. Some parts of the social environment will welcome the combined expression of cognitive and social talents that enable cooperation. Some combination will be practically geared, some geared across these dimensions will progress, in a general sense of beneficial or valuable. Some will function to produce norms, and institutionalize them – norms of various sorts.

No wonder Aristotle focused on habituation regarding ethical virtues. But strands of natural growth and moral evolution are embedded throughout his depiction of human flourishing. For him, ethical happiness or flourishing is the fulfillment of our natural human function. Aristotlean principle was directed to the

development of the intellectual virtues as largely a process of natural growth towards natural function. And some of these play necessary roles in the proper expression of ethical virtues (Aristotle, 1980). This shows that moral development provides tools and tendencies for able behaviour through natural growth.

Drawing from the literature of moral philosophy, Kohlberg (1981) hypothesized that justice-as-fairness was the centrality of moral development and that conflict resolution and fostering mutual cooperation were its chief aims and marks of adequacy, although the social domain theory had drawn the idea that there was a connection between the child's developing concepts of morality and other domains of social knowledge, such as social convention. For instance, Turiel had asked his test groups if they would hit their friends. They all said no because they would get into trouble. He then offered the idea that if they wouldn't get into trouble would they do it and most said no because they knew the other person would get hurt and that would be wrong (Turiel cited in Puka, 2017). This test showed that society creates standards for us and teaches us the right and wrong from interactions with other people and how they adhere to/keep/observe societal rules.

There is no doubt that the development and internalization of morals at an early age has been shown to be predictive of future adaptive skills and future socialization skills. Turiel in one of his studies tested children at 25, 38 and 52 months on internalization of their mothers' and fathers' rules, and the children's perception of their morals found that the children were more competent and better socialized if they were highly developed in the two areas tested. The relation between the child's history of empathy towards the mother and future socialization was also significant. Children who are empathic at a young age also, will find it easier to maintain relationship, both romantically and with friends and co-workers. This skill is extremely important in building and developing morally upright citizens in Nigeria.

Moral Development and Educational Practice: A Philosophical View

Since the time of Plato, serious societies of the world have made moral development a deliberate aim of schooling. That is, education was meant for good character as well as intellect, decency as well as literacy, virtue as well as knowledge, and they tried to train citizens who would use their intelligence to benefit others as well as themselves. Plato dwelt extensively on the roles of education in his Republic. For Plato (427BC-327BC) the aim of a good education is not only for the mental or intellectual development of the citizens, but also and more importantly, for character building and moral development. Similarly, Awolowo maintains that:

“The cardinal aim of education is not as is popularly but narrowly conceived, to teach a man to read and write, to acquire a profession, to master as vocation,

or to be versed in the liberal art. All these are only means to the end of true education which is to help man to live a full, happy and triumphant life. In other words, any system of education which does not help man to have a healthy and sound body, an alert brain and balanced and disciplined instinctive urge is both misconceived and dangerous (Awolowo, 1968:268).

That was the true picture of early years in Nigeria, but as the societal values changed, the society began to worship money and material wealth (with no regard for morality). Support for old-fashioned moral education in the society faded. Today, schools in Nigeria are witnessing cases of vandalism and cultism, exam mal-practice, disruptive behaviours and an upsurge in prostitution, drug abuse and other self-destructive behaviours. Often times, those youths engaged in these anti-social behaviours remained unchanged in their adult lives thereby promoting bribery and corruption most especially electoral frauds in the society.

Evidently, if education is concerned with moral development, it will help students develop sense of responsibility for what they think, say and do. In this wise, significant role of moral development and indeed morality in the society has been recognized by the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2004), hence the introduction of Logic and Philosophy as a mandatory course for all undergraduates in Nigeria. The essence of the course is to create the sense of morality, rationality and criticism in the students. This is because philosophy encourages and promotes self-criticism – the ability to ask questions that are personal, communal, societal, national and global. Despite the inclusion of this course in the last ten years in Nigerian universities, no fellow-feeling cultivated and nurtured among Nigerians, hence the cases of corruption, breakdown of infrastructures, robbery, kidnapping, human and drug trafficking, electoral frauds, money rituals, religious extremism, Boko Haram, etc are still on the rise.

However, there is no society without one problem or the other, but the so-called societal problems, upon a careful X-ray are linked with morality. The social, economic, religious, political, cultural, technological and educational challenges in Nigeria today are essentially moral in nature. For instance, one of the major challenges facing Nigeria today is insecurity which scholars like Fayemi (2014) had linked with high rate of unemployment. So, if people are not productively engaged, they put morality aside and strive for survival, in that case there is no amount of moral crusade that can dissuade their minds from immoral acts. Succinctly put, an idle hand is the devil's workshop.

Nigerian universities turn out thousands of graduates with multitude first class without moral knowledge and character development that can turn her situation around for the better. For example, Television Commercial Nigeria

reported that University of Ilorin graduated 89 first-class on the 14th of October, 2017. Premium Times reported 67 first-class graduates from the same University of Ilorin on 17th of October, 2016 while the number of first-class produced by private universities is in manifold (see, <http://www.uniziikmata.comng/2014/49-first-class-as-bowen-university.html>).

As Nigeria and Nigerians celebrated 59 years of independence and 20 years of uninterrupted democratic practice in the country this year, it would have been an appropriate thing for a country that is wallowing in moral decadence to make a campaign for moral restoration through her educational practice. The need for moral rebirth in Nigeria is justified on the basis of the exponential rates at which immoralities and other forms of unethical practice have almost become the Lords of the country ambushing the dreams of our founding fathers from becoming the realities their children and grandchildren live with (Uchara, 2013).

In Nigeria today, students now know what a secret society is all about but if you ask these leaders of tomorrow to quote a verse from any Holy Books (Quran/Bible), they do not know. This is evidence of ignorance of sacred books and ignorance of God. The most pathetic situation in our dear country today, is the “chasing” of money by all means by our youths. Francis (2013) lamented the new idols in the society, saying money has to serve, not to rule. According to him:

There is a new idol; the ancient worship of the golden calf has found a new ruthless image in fetishism of money and the dictatorship of the economy without purpose nor truly human face, it only reduces man to one of its demands... the human being is today considered as a commodity that you use and then throw away.. while wanting power and possession has become limitless... the selfish sprawling of corruption and tax evasion have gone global (Francis as cited in Uchara, 2013:104).

From the above, the need for moral development in our schools, communities and society at large cannot be underrated. For similar reasons, the need for moral development is justified. For instance, it was reported in 2012 how some students who failed the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations embarked on a violent protest in one of the North Central States, destroying and burning school properties, while some went after the school principal and teachers wrongly perceived to be instrumental for their failures. If it were in the past, how dare at student threaten his or her school principal? But because we have lost the moral foundations of our society, we now live a life of anything goes! As a nation in search of role models, our youths now look up to some of the morally bankrupt politicians and government officials.

Again, government officials have become a good example of immoral behaviour through corruption and corrupt practices exhibited on a daily basis. Corruption is a serious threat to Nigeria's economic development and democracy, but with the power of corruption many dishonest individuals have become role models for the youths leading to continuous decline in moral standards and rampant corrupt practices in Nigeria's public life. Ogbeidi (2012) concluded that Nigeria has continuously made the list of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released annually by Transparency International from year 2000 to 2015 among the most corrupt nations in the world. See table 1.

Table 1: Showing Nigeria's Position on Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (from 2000-2015)

Year	No of Country	Nigeria's Position	Remarks
2000	90	90	Most corrupt
2001	91	91	Second most corrupt
2002	102	101	Second most corrupt
2003	102	101	Second most corrupt
2004	145	142	Third most corrupt
2005	158	152	Sixth most corrupt
2006	163	145	Eighteen most corrupt
2007	180	148	Thirty second most corrupt
2008	180	122	Twenty-fifth most corrupt
2009	180	134	Twenty-ninth most corrupt
2010	178	-	-
2011	183	143	Thirty-second most corrupt
2012	176	139	Thirty-seventh most corrupt
2013	177	144	Thirty-third most corrupt
2014	176	136	Thirty-eight most corrupt
2015	168	136	Twenty-sixth most corrupt

Source: The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2000-2015

Rationale for Repositioning Educational Practice for Developing Morally Upright Citizens

From the foregoing, it is imperative to underscore national issues that prioritize repositioning of educational practice in Nigeria for developing morally upright citizens. It should be emphasized that the importance of education to the survival of our nascent democracy cannot be underrated. As noted by scholars that democracy needs a certain level of educated citizenry to work well, for Durkheim (cited in Dike, 2016), the primary element in fostering morality is the development of a sense of disincline, followed by a willingness to behave in accordance with collective interest and a sense of autonomy. In the same vein, Dewey (1916) noted that democracy requires a public that is educated to understand the social duties and responsibilities of political life. In this wise, the purpose of education is to transmit the culture of a people, to initiate the young ones into their way of life and to mould their character for the well-being of their moral reasoning with concrete suggestion for those who work in schools while Aristotlean principle of character formation maintains that a man becomes virtuous by performing virtuous deeds; brave by doing brave deeds (Aristotle, 1980).

From the above, moral development which is rigidly rooted in educational practice in Nigeria will go a long way in addressing our societal problems. Also, it is glaring that morality has important roles to play in the course of nation building. This is supported by Wiredu (1998) who asserted that a society without a modicum of morality must collapse, because in every society there are different individuals and groups with different and conflicting interests. For Hobbes, cited in Ebun and Omotayo, (2015) if any two men desire the same thing which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies, and in the way to their own end... they endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. Therefore, the role of morality here is to regulate the affairs of these individuals and groups with opposing and conflicting interests in such a manner that there will be peace and harmony in the society. That is, moral development serves as an antidote for societal crises and potent tool for promoting tranquility in the society.

Furthermore, moral development is a way of planting an attitude of fellow-feeling. That is, morality makes everyone to be sympathetic to his fellow men. The spirit of joy and pain sharing is promulgated. Through moral development, one is conscious of the fact that the misfortune that befell another person may also happen to him. After all, one is expected to be helped when is in a difficult situation, therefore, one may be encouraged to assist others in such a situation. This explains the centrality of the 'Law of Karma', 'Golden Rule' and 'Law of Nemesis' for instance in the Kantian Rule, it is emphasized that we should treat others in the like manner we would like to be treated under the same circumstance. Put differently, a man of high dignity ought to respect and treat others in a peaceful manner. In

relation to our practice in the society today, if you do not want to be scammed, don't scam others.

Again, Nigeria is in dire need of moral renewal through educational practice today than ever before. This is important because the section 23 of the 1999 Constitution as amended says "The national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self Respect and Patriotism". Thus it is the moral development that will address indiscipline behaviours among youths and restore the sanctity of life in our society.

On the other hand, poor attitude to work and public services constitute a major bane of development in Nigeria today. Moral development of the workforce through educational programme will definitely teach youths to do the right thing at the right time, without minding compensation or commendation but simply because moral sense demands it. Similarly, it will caution children against what is bad and wrong without inflicting punishment or condemnation but simply because it is morally unjustifiable. This is similar to Aristotelian ethics, that a virtuous man does not need that law enforcement agent to do the right thing, he does the right thing for his own happiness. To this end, moral development will serve the Nigerian civil and public servants to be alive to their responsibilities and strictly observe the ethics of their profession. In the same vein, Nigerian politicians will be morally prepared for public offices thereby keeping to their electoral promises and discharge their civic responsibilities as at when due.

Moral decay in the education sector has caused serious damages to the schools that are saddled with the responsibility of developing and moulding character of our youths. Of course, Nigeria's schools offer moral education through religious and social studies but the nation's social morality is in a mess. Students in most of our schools are under the threat of cultism, drug abuse, exam mal-practice and lack of good role models. However, the idea of moral development through educational practice goes beyond mere theory, it involves moral mission or purpose of education stakeholders in providing necessary human and material resources for moral development of our future leaders.

Again, it has been observed that lack of moral development is the main reason for the leadership challenge facing the nation today. As Kilpatrick (1992) has noted the core problem facing our schools is a moral one; all the other problems derive from it. Jarvis argued that even academic reform depends on putting character first (Jarvis cited in Dike, 2017). Therefore, the society must brace up to build and develop morally upright citizens for future purpose. It is pertinent to say other countries and regions of the world have taken similar measure, a notable example is Hong Kong that adopted moral cultivation in the promotion of national education.

On a general note, most countries focus on the cultivation of national identity and values and attitudes among the youth implementing national education

(Ebun & Omotayo, 2015). For instance, the French government places emphasis on deepening students' understanding of their country and affirming their national identity to develop the youth into citizens who have a sense of responsibility, while the US government raises its nationals' recognition and support for core values such as freedom, equality, democracy and justice through promoting civic knowledge and encouraging civic participation. The Australian government deepens students' understanding of the country as well as fosters the development of its nationals into responsible citizens and global citizens. It is therefore high time for the Nigerian government to utilize educational practice in such a way that youths will be prepared to share the vision and mission of our founding fathers and become responsible future leaders.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that moral development is urgently required in our bid as a nation to cater for future leaders. This paper has argued for the use of educational practice in achieving this national course. Especially the art industry which will help to achieve this mandate in no time; the film industry, mass media, musicians of all sorts and contemporary comedian should make positive impact on this national assignment. Again, the leaders of Nigeria (parents, politicians and educators) should show concern about the unethical behaviour and poor work ethics of adults and their negative effect on national development.

Suggestions

Based on this paper, the following suggestions are made.

Teachers, school administrators and parents should serve as models to youths so as to cultivate their positive values and attitudes, facilitate identity building and commitment of the individual in various domains (personal, family, social, national and global domains).

Moral development should reflect in a flexible curriculum framework that facilitates the provision of a curriculum relevant to students' daily life and developmental needs, taking into consideration the school contexts and students' needs.

Research shows that those who grew up under a corrupt system tend to be corrupt. Therefore, all leaders (various associations and organizations, including teachers, public office holders, politicians and parents) should lead by example.

Youths should learn to identify pride in self-worth regardless of race, colour, or creed, discrimination will disappear from society when persons are judged not by skin colour, ethnic groups, or the class to which they belong, but by their ability and integrity.

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