Education and Morality in The Contemporary Nigerian Society - The Role of Religion

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ABSTRACT

Morality until recently has been seen as a brainchild of education and religion thus an essential part of education and religion from which they seem to be inseparable. This assumption has even led some scholars to hold that there can be no morality without education and religion since morality is intrinsically a part of education and religion. Whether this is so is an issue that elicits fierce divergent views among scholars and people of various orientations. This chapter critically examines education and morality in the temporary Nigerian society with regards to the role of religion in upholding morality to determine whether the above claims and expectations are justified. Employing exploratory approach and critical analysis of the works of

other researchers, the paper examines the concepts of education and morality unveiling their meanings in detail. It also examines concepts of character education and morality and moral education and morality. The paper further examines school system and morality as well as the role of religion in upholding morality. It concludes that morality is an issue that remains worrisome in the contemporary Nigerian society as some unacceptable social behaviours like corruption, violence, prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, teen pregnancy, infidelity in marriage, stealing, injustice among other social evils persist in our society. It is therefore imperative that, educational institutions should encourage the teaching of character education and moral education to the younger generations and religious bodies should promote moral beliefs among their adherents.

Keywords: Education, morality, religion, contemporary Nigeria

Introduction

The topic of morality is a widely researched area in fields such as sociology, philosophy, education and religion. The scheme of affairs in the contemporary Nigerian society regarding morality is becoming nothing to write home about. Nigeria as a country is plagued with many issues of morality. Every day, through our print and electronic media, we hear and read about very nauseating news of immoral behaviours such as prevalent promiscuity, drug abuse, corruption, indecent dressing, examination malpractice, cultism, violent, destruction of lives and properties by many Nigerians especially the youths. These acts of immorality seem to persist in the contemporary Nigerian society in recent times despite the notion that education and morality have intrinsic relationship in which education influences morality.

The term 'morals' however implies behaviour and the adjectives 'moral' and 'immoral' suggest behaviour which

is acceptable and unacceptable. There is also a suggestion of 'social criteria', because when we talk about moral behaviour being acceptable and immoral behaviour being unacceptable, we think of the acceptance, or non-acceptance, by the society. Society has established norms or standards against which to measure different modes of behaviour to determine their acceptability or otherwise. And because norms or standards are established by society, there is a link between value-judgment, values and morals. All these are mutually related to education. Morality is the behaviour and beliefs that a society deems acceptable (Stein & Fischer, 2011). When society establishes its norms of good and bad behaviour, it is making a value-judgment. It is saying that some forms of behaviour are more socially acceptable, more in the interest of the majority than others. It makes these judgments not arbitrarily or in isolation, but in relation to the values which it holds. One may say that moral education is therefore only adequate if it both prepares learners to reach their own moral decision on the basis of valid criteria and also enables them to implement such decision. This apparently ensures that moral education results in actual moral conduct and so does not merely produce an ethically bankrupt learner. Thus morality is seen as the ultimate aim of education.

Although, over the years, the critical question of the role religion plays in upholding morality and their exclusive relationship which has been an old preoccupation of western philosophy has currently re-surfaced on the philosophical front burner. This question has elicited variety of opinions differing from the traditionally held opinions from Greek philosophy, Judaism, Christianity and other religious confessions that religion and morality are closely interwoven and thus inseparable. With regard to this perennial and topical question of whether or not morality requires religion, Socrates in Plato's work *Euthyphro* posed the famous question of whether goodness is loved by the gods

because it is good or whether goodness is good because it is loved by the gods. Although Socrates favoured the former proposal, many other scholars have argued that morality is unthinkable without God. Dostoevsky, for instance, insists that "if God does not exist, everything is permitted."

Before the modern period of philosophy, it was generally agreed that religion is the indisputable foundation of morality, thereby implying that without religion there can be no morality. This widespread and deeply ingrained notion that religion is a precondition for morality is still being held today as is promoted by scholars like Laura Schlesinger who insists that "morality is impossible without believe in God" and Zuckerman who claims that "declining moral standards are at least partly attributable to the rise of secularism and decline of organized religion." This assumption and all built upon it no longer appears very strong because some other modern and contemporary scholars have argued with facts that many religious doctrines and practices have failed the test of morality, hence the argument that religion is neither necessary nor sufficient for morality (Pierre Bayle). This view contradicts the age long position that morality has divine origin: either God created man with moral sensibility or man acquired the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong from lessons learnt from religious teachings.

Religion is a set of organized beliefs, practices, and systems that most often relate to the belief and worship of a controlling force, such as a personal god or another supernatural being (Stibich, 2022). The moral crisis being experienced in our contemporary world in spite of the ubiquitous of religious bodies raises a greater objection with regard to the role of religion on morality especially in contemporary Nigerian society. If religion has such great role on morality, one may ask, why the moral decadence beclouding our contemporary Nigerian society where

moral values are being discarded in spite of the very loud, clear and sustained preaching by uncountable religious bodies in virtually every corner of our contemporary society?. In attempts to answer this question, this chapter apart from considering the review of some key concepts, it also looks at relationship between education and morality, the role of moral education in enhancing moral values and the role of religion in upholding morality in the contemporary Nigerian society in order to justify the claims.

Conceptual Clarifications

The conceptual clarifications consider detail explanation of the key concepts used in this chapter with regards to varying opinions of other scholars. Therefore, the concepts that are considered here are education, morality and religion.

Education

Education as a concept has no single definition that is universally accepted. Education is the process by which the individual acquires the many physical and social capacities demanded of him by the group into which he is born and within which he must function. It is also the process of teaching, training and learning in schools and colleges for the development of knowledge and skills so as to prepare individuals to live happily with themselves and others in the society where they live. Ruhmat, Bulama and Tijani (2011) conceptualize education as the sharing and transfer of knowledge, the development of new knowledge based on learning and understanding that is desirable. Denga (2015:67) comments on some current perception of education by Nigerians and states that Nigerians see education as follows: "the acquisition of a meal ticket or "gate pass", "a license to practice", "an unfulfilling academic exercise", "a tool for personal advancement", "an instrument of social change", "an instrument for national development" and "a tool for moral uprightness".

Education for most of us is looked upon as a value in itself and as an instrument for national development. It could also be seen as a mechanism through individual personality is molded in acceptable standards and patterns life of a society. This implies that education is a means for upholding morality. Morality deals with identifying what is right and wrong to live an acceptable life in a society.

Education is a process of developing ones personality and not just gaining a certificates and skills. It is a process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded and one learns to stand on ones feet (Thomas, 2014). The aim of education has been determined by philosophical, social, economic, political and cultural norms of the society. Education must be capable of stabilizing social order, conserving culture in the society and acts as an instrument of social reconstruction. Education decides the fate and future of our society or country as it equips the youth of the nation to the rational and pragmatic approach of life (Amali, Muhinat, Okafor & Ijeoma, 2012). Education helps the society to value life and work for the betterment. Unless proper education is provided, it will be panic and chaos for the citizens in the country. It is the education which makes the system value based and adheres to the accepted standards of morality. Although philosophers argue that morality is mutuality related with religion.

Religion

Religion is usually defined as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, beliefs, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that generally relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, and spiritual elements; however, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion. Different religions may or may not contain various elements ranging from the divine,

sacred things, faith, a supernatural being or supernatural beings or "some sort of ultimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life" (Nongbri, 2013). Religious practices may include rituals, sermons commemoration or veneration (of deities and/or saints), sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trances, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. Religions have sacred histories and narratives, which may be preserved in sacred scriptures, and symbols and holy places that aim mostly to give a meaning to life which is the premise of morality.

Morality

The word morality is derived from the Latin word "mores" which means "manners" or "morals". Schofield (1972) opines that morality is a social phenomenon whose aim is to secure a smooth and harmonious social relationship among human beings through fair and just consideration of the interest of all in the relationship. Morality, according to McConnell (2009), may be based on some social or cultural norms of a group of people, but such a moral code, even when hallowed by passage of time and made traditional, can still be subjected to question as to whether the particular moral code is really moral. The concept of morality, which is described as temperament, character, or manners, expresses the established character structure in humans and the behaviours of individuals that occur under their own will. Although moral perceptions vary by time, society, and culture, they also exhibit mandatory and unchanging rules of behaviour (Kılıç, 2012). This is one of the most emphasized concepts in the field of philosophy. Many philosophers have tried to answer the question of what morality is and associated morality with different concepts.

Generally speaking, morality is defined as "the group or network of beliefs, values, norms, orders, prohibitions, and designs which are involved in the life of

a person, group, people, social class, nation, or cultural environment in a certain historical period and which guide their actions" (Özlem, 2004). The nature of morality calls for preventing the wrong and doing the right. Moral precepts basically tell us what is important and how we should behave towards other people (as well as animals and nature) (Folger, Cropanzano & Goldman, 2005). In this sense, morality is utilized both to determine the concepts associated with good and bad, right and wrong in a society, and to evaluate the status of a particular action and practice in that area. However, concepts of good and bad, right and wrong may differ from society to society.

For example, while female circumcision is seen as necessary and moral in some societies, it is defined as a violation of rights and seen as immoral in others (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). Morality is seen as cases under a special light as the reasons for actions, rather than behaving in line with learned principles and it is stated that once this perceptual capacity is acquired, it can be predicted in different situations and can be used in new conditions. Morality requires individuals behaving in acceptable way. This can be achieved through character education and moral education which teaches individuals acceptable behaviours.

Upholding Morality: A Focus on Character Education

It would not be wrong to say that education assumes the greatest role in the internalization of certain moral rules (Oral & Çoban, 2019). Consequently, the definition of education has been associated with the concept of morality from past to present, and new approaches that aim to help students internalize moral values have been debated (Kirschenbaum, 1995). For this reason, it is seen that the concept of morality is associated with education and is given a special place in the teaching of character education especially in schools (Hand, 2014; Samuelsson & Lindström, 2017). In the past, when

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religions had great influence on society, the importance of character education was realized. Thus it is important that educators emphasize character education to develop virtues, quality attributes, personality and leadership in students. Character education is mainly required in the early school years when young students are at the stages of developing their own world views. The great philosopher, Aristotle, offered an account of human moral or virtuous character in terms of its natural purpose, function and utility (Carr, 2014). Aristotle regarded moral exemplification as important for virtuous and admirable character education.

Practical wisdom or *phronesis* is central to the development of Aristotelian virtue which is about intrinsic human values. The main goal of *phronesis* is the virtuous ordering of appetites, desires, emotions and feelings for building an admirable character (Arthur & Carr, 2013). Aristotelian character education may be successfully applied in current situations by identifying the main processes that Aristotle considered necessary for development of virtue such as emphasizing the practical nature of virtues and for early training in habits of honesty, self-restraint, and courage. Teachers can guide and instruct properly so that young people acquire good habits of honesty, courage and fairness from parents, guardians or teachers who themselves should display such virtues. And teachers can explore the scope of formal educational opportunities to inform and exercise the reflection, slow and careful consideration, and evaluation of the Aristotelian *phronesis* required for building a superb character (Arthur & Carr, 2013).

Upholding Morality: A Focus on Moral Education

It is not enough to know the good, one must equally be committed to it. One must not only know, one must also have the conviction that a particular course of action is the right one to take. For education of any kind to be more than a system of instruction, one must make a

total response with the whole personality. It must entail comprehension and commitment. If either is lacking, then, the process becomes incomplete (Ayeni, 2012). Moral education is a programme of study which teaches the pupil about behaving in accordance with what is good while rejecting the bad. Being moral or being morally conscious means adopting standards or principles to guide one's actions and conduct in society. Moral education is a holistic approach to stimulate character building and moral development (Okoh, 2003). Moral education should lead individuals especially children to develop from a stage of anomie; often characterized by pre-morality to a stage where an individual is not forced to be moral and is personally convinced on standards that ought to guide his/her conduct in society. The connection between moral education and morality is an important one. Through moral education, people understand the difference between right and wrong, between good conduct and bad conduct. Thus since moral education and morality are connected, children are made to reconcile the demands made by the general code of behaviour established by society and the sub-codes accepted by the smaller units within the society. This makes the teaching of morality values in schools imperative.

Moral values are taught in moral education as certain acceptable, valuable and cherished qualities that are worthwhile in developing a sound character. Ekpiwre (2008) defines values as "things considered worthwhile, desirable, right and good and thus craved for and applied on a daily basis to enhance existence by the people". Values determine people's identity and cultural continuity. Moral values are essential values that determine individuals' perception of morality and moral consciousness in society. Moral values include truthfulness, patience, obedience, honesty, integrity, hard work, responsibility, respect, tolerance, loyalty, public spiritedness, freedom, respect for human life and dignity

of persons. Others include justice, fairness and equality. Moral values are taught to be imbibed by members of the society to enhance character development and promote good moral upbringing in individuals in the school system.

The School System and Morality

People frequently debate whether morality can be promoted through religion or through the school system. Society generally agrees that morality not only can but 'ought' to be taught in schools. It also accepts that the teacher is the one best qualified for the task. Keninston raised the fear that the family and the adult society have abandoned their duties to morally educate, so also teachers in schools are becoming indifferent to the moral education of the children in their charge (Keniston, 1970). In schools, there is little or no specific moral education or moral instruction existing as examinable curriculum unit. Where moral education is said to exist, the subject usually referred to, is religious education. Moral education in its real sense is undoubtedly lacking in most of our primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, the extension of which is noticeable in tertiary institutions. To tackle the problems that emanates from the above, a lot needs to be done.

Firstly, the concept of morality must be properly understood as a form of arrangement between individuals in social situations which gives adequate considerations to the interests of others. In other words, rational or reason-based morality must be preferred to religious or traditional morality. The reason-based ethics make students see the whole point to morality, why they must be moral and how they can develop and progress morally. Such a morality while admitting of sanctions plays down the role of fear and threats in obtaining compliance, instead it appeals to their reason and enables them adjust their behaviours or attitudes. To enhance this type of reason-based moral education, school managers must thoroughly understand the foundations of morality,

especially, the philosophical foundation which is fundamental to all the other foundations. Through this, they will be exposed to the conditions that must be satisfied before an act is described as moral. The psychological foundation is also very important for effective delivery of moral education since this will provide stages of moral development and understanding of the children, and at what stages to introduce different topics and different teaching methods according to the state of their psychological readiness.

Secondly at the early stages of a child's moral education, there should be preponderance of learning specific moral rules and principles without sophisticated justification, at the early stage the starting point should be the inculcation of rules of ethics, courtesies, civility and good manners. As a matter of fact, a child who has been accustomed to taking into consideration the feelings of others in his environment would more easily develop into a morally mature adult. As his reasoning ability develops and matures, the rational method will take on greater emphasis until all that would be taught will be procedural rules for making moral judgment.

Thirdly, schools must assume greater roles in moral education of students because of the failure of the homes, the religious bodies and adult world to be true moral educators. Teachers must apply themselves more zealously to the moral education of their students; schools must offer greater opportunities for effective reason-based moral education, through the development of the moral sensitivity of students and their capacity to make moral decisions. This theoretical learning must be complemented by a proliferation of philanthropic and humanitarian projects by which students can display in action some of the moral principles and procedures learnt in classroom situations. The role of the teacher is most influential, and courtesy demands that they be first morally sensitized and educated before transferring it to

their students. In actual fact, while teachers cannot carry the whole blame for the moral laxity among their students, they cannot at the same time pretend to be innocent.

The teacher in the area of morals is an interpreter. The philosopher is able to describe different types of life. The teacher must determine, in terms of the society in which he teaches and in terms of the experience of his pupils, which type of life it is best for them to lead. This is one example of the teacher having to consider the needs of the child in conjunction with the needs of society, and the demands developing out of them. The teacher has to deal at the practical level with material which the philosopher considers at the theoretical level. The ultimate aim of the teacher is to bring his pupils to understand the difference between just and unjust, fair and unfair, good and bad conduct. It is argued that morality is inseparable from religion. If morality can be totally separated from religion well and good. It matters little whether religion is taught in schools or not, since the school can still discharge its social responsibility of teaching morality. However, if morality cannot be totally separated from religion, there are very clearly definable consequences for both teachers and pupils in the school system.

The Role of Religion in Upholding Morality in the Contemporary Society

Religion may contain symbolic stories, which are sometimes said by followers to be true, that may also attempt to explain the origin of live, the universe, and other phenomena. Traditionally, faith, in addition to reason, has been considered a source of religious beliefs (Swindal, 2010). Some people believe that there is a great relationship between religious education and moral education. Others say there is none, for each has different aims. The more sophisticated plead for a total severance, arguing that when a child's morality is supported by religious notions, it will collapse if religion is rejected in puberty. On the other hand, some say that many objectives

of religious and moral education coincide, for although religion and morality each make distinct contributions to human life. There is a large area of overlap. Even a brief perusal of modern religious education syllabuses makes this clear. Such contention, they say, is supported by studies which reveal a correlation between religions and moral behaviour, by the persistence with which the two are constantly synthesized and by the ease with which religious morality can be accommodated to the ethos of a secular society, without shedding any of its essentials.

It is possible to argue that morality requires religious motivation. This is a positive approach to motivation and one which says that many people are good only for religious reasons, because they wish to obtain salvation. Again, there may be an element of negative religious motivation in some people's moral behaviour (Swindal, 2010). They may fear that failure to live the good life will result in damnation, which of course, they wish to avoid. However, one cannot argue from this that all people live the good life only for religious reasons. Denga (2015) opines that we can find people like Tai Solarin of Nigeria who were motivated to live the good life and did the right because he believed, not in a supernatural Being, but in such concepts as peace, and social justice.

It is generally believed that believed and assumed that religion positively influence the moral lives of its adherents. Hence it is supposed that a good religious person is also a morally sound person. This supposition is premised on the assumption that religion more than every other institution encourages its adherents to live moral lives based on love and justice (Mondal, 2018). Christianity for instance, helped immensely in reforming the laws of the Roman Empire through its teachings on love of neighbor, justice, forgiveness, common brotherhood of all men and moderation in the punishment of criminals. The Roman laws, as much as we know, highly

influenced the laws of the Western world as well as those of the South American and African nations colonized by the West. Religion admonishes its adherents to be heroes of faith or saints by living exemplary moral lives as outlined in their sacred books like the Bible, Koran etc. These moral codes, precepts, statutes, ordinances and commandments contained in the sacred books if fully embraced and practiced will make its adherent living saints, heroes of faith and morally impeccable characters. This will in turn impact positively on the society thereby making the world a better place.

Conclusion

Morality is an issue that keeps tormenting the contemporary Nigerian society as some unacceptable social behaviours like corruption, violence, prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, teen pregnancy, infidelity in marriage, stealing, injustice among other social evils persist. The discussion above points to the fact that education and religion plays pivotal roles in upholding morality. Education through the teaching of character education and moral education inculcate moral values to the learners to live a worthwhile life in a given society. Also, religion strengthen moral believes of its adherents which helps to promote morality in society. As a matter of fact, it has established that education and religion functioned as instruments that are used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, thereby making morality an inescapable phenomenon in the societies of the world.

Recommendations

It is therefore imperative that, educational institutions should encourage the teaching of character education and moral education to the younger generations. The ethical or moral assembly should deliberate on the kinds of values that are acceptable to the whole world,

using religion in this regard to propagate morality may look reasonable but it must be noted that there is little homogeneity in terms of universal religion and universal morality. The home, the larger society and the school should not renounce their responsibility as regards the moral development of the child. All the agencies of education first have to complement each other in making morality an achievable phenomenon in every society of the world and Nigeria in particular. Considering the divergent views of scholars on the topic of morality with the regards to its relationship with education and the role religion plays in upholding morality in the contemporary society, attempt made in this chapter may not fully justify these notions hence further research should be conducted to fill the gap.

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