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## THE PLACE OF MORALITY IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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### Abstract

*This paper analyses the place of morality in the Nigerian educational system. This is necessary because of the declining moral values in the Nigerian society as evident in the frequency of immoral activities like fraud, sexual immorality, forgery, bribery and corruption. Unfortunately, immoral activities have adversely affected the Nigerian educational system. Thus this paper is interested in examining the place of morality in the Nigerian educational system. The method of research employed in the paper is the method of philosophical analysis. This is because the paper is a philosophical research. It therefore uses philosophical analysis which includes logical, linguistic, expository, and critical analyses. All these are to help in the clarification of the ideas in the study for better understanding of the issues and arrival at sound conclusions. It was found that moral education features in the Nigerian educational system. However, it features impressively only at the policy level, in the National Policy on Education. At the practice level, moral education does not feature impressively at the various levels of the educational system. However, the fault is traced to the unimpressive manifestation of moral rectitude in the larger society. This does not provide enabling environment for sound moral education in the schools. It is therefore recommended that, the leaders of thought in the larger society; politicians, parents, religious leaders, and so forth, should give better leadership to the society and the schools through demonstration of sound moral practices – this would provide enabling environment for the teaching of good moral education in the schools.*

**Keywords:** *Morality, moral education, National Policy on Education, principles of good moral behaviour, philosophical analysis.*

### Introduction

Traditionally education has had two-fold aims, these are; instruction and training in good conduct. In the learning situation, teachers and learners are usually involved in social activities in the classroom in order that the latter may learn and so become useful members of the society.

The activities that could lead to maximum learning through smooth interaction between teachers and learners are generally characterised by good morals. Thus, good moral conduct allows learners to perform their best in the school and also leads to effective achievement of the goals of the school in the society. However, today, a morally sound society has become utopian as can be observed from the high occurrence of immoral behaviours in the society, including criminality, religious fanaticism, immodest dressing, incessant industrial actions and students' unrest in the educational institutions. Hence, moral standards are now on the decline. In fact, conscious and deliberate efforts are made to do things that are not in consonance with the traditional Nigerian moral virtues. In other words, there is high moral decadence in Nigeria today because people no longer wish to follow the path of moral rectitude (Buhari, 2015:31-32).

However, the Federal Republic of Nigeria realises the need for moral development through education. Thus, the National Policy on Education (2013: 13-16) has as one of its goals, the "inculcation of moral values" Nigerian education is expected to promote the learning of moral values among Nigerians. Based on the above thinking, this paper intends to analyse the place of morality in the Nigerian educational system.

### Research Method

This paper is a philosophical study so it employs the research method used in philosophical researches. The method is that of philosophical analysis. In this case, it makes use of the following philosophical analysis: logical analysis, linguistic analysis, expository analysis, and critical analysis. The various analyses feature reflective thinking on the various aspects of the place of morality in Nigerian education such that the concept becomes clearer in terms of what morality is, and how it features in Nigerian education.

### Concept of Morality

Morality, according to Abimbola (2000) is partly a social, and partly an individual affair. Morality is social on the one hand, because it involves a system of norms governing interaction in the society and on the other hand it is partly an individual affair because it allows for individuals, when they are mature and normal, to use reason to make their own decisions on the concept frequently. Such individuals seek advice or stimulation from other people but the decisions they make ultimately are theirs and they take responsibility for them. Eventually, individuals could reach a stage where they have sufficiently matured in their morality to be able to criticize the norms and values of the society.

Maqsd (1983) states that, morality in a particular locality might be immorality in another. The whole concept is so multidimensional that various scholars view it differently. Dewey (1959) states that morality involves the ability to observe and comprehend situations. Okeke (1983) also gives his own impression of morality as acceptance of social norms and ability to behave according to the knowledge of right and wrong. Hudson (1978) views it as a concept which involves acquisition of respect for the norms and institutions of society. It means, according to these scholars that, once a person can behave according to the virtues of his locality, he is morally sound. Hence, the search

for the explanation of morality. According to Nielson (1973:82) morality can be located both in the thinking and in the interpretation of people. This point, perhaps, is responsible for the different meanings that morality has in different societies.

### **Morality in the Nigerian Society**

Every society in general, but Nigeria in particular, has what it understands life to mean, its purpose and how this can be achieved. Ocho (1988) states that, before the British rule in Nigeria and before Islam and Christianity, majority of the people in Nigeria believed in life after death, that is, the end of the present life was the beginning of life with dead ancestors and relations.

Okoh (1991) argues that, in Nigeria there are four main sources of traditional moral values. The sources are the external sources, the ancestors, the kings/elders and the community conscience. The first source (external sources) refers to the ultimate or absolute source that has God as the main authority. The people believe that God gives and upholds moral laws and as such, He is the source of all values. The second source (the ancestors), are the next in hierarchy after the divinities. They are great heroes with exemplary lives while on earth and are thus, acknowledged as sources of moral values among the living members of their families. Thus, old age is regarded highly and seen as blessing from God. Elders in any community in Nigeria are seen as possessors of wisdom because they inherit powers and wisdom of the ancestors, who are believed to exist in harmony with the divinities, communicate with the elders who, in turn, communicate with the people.

The third and fourth sources (the kings/elders and the leaders of thought in the society) are rated in the hierarchy as the next crucial sources of moral values. This is because they are expected to be the custodians of moral values in the society.

### **Morality in Education**

Morality has earlier been examined but for the purpose of its importance in education, one could refer to morality in education as practical consideration of others' interest in the process of education. As an elaboration of the above statement, and in the context of education, Brown (1985:35) indicates that morality implies having interest in others' well-being. Taking interest in what is beneficial to them, like security, mental and physical health and so forth.

In Bamisaiye (1985:16), morality also has connection with education. According to her, education is a process of development; development of intellectual abilities, its skills, and attitudes, all of which help our various outlook and disposition towards the society and towards life generally. Bamisaiye considers education to help the development of a person such as to make him disposed to use his knowledge, according to principle of overriding social welfare. Norman (1983:95) states that in the process of education, no effective learning could be said to be taking place among the students when the character of the learner is still found wanting.

Childs (1967) also sees connection between morality and education. He states that, education should pursue the right of learners to make free choices after exposing the learners to the process of making valid judgements. In this connection, education helps in encouraging the society to make ethical judgements free of indoctrination. This is good after the learner might have been exposed to the process of making right judgements, to the

extent that he is considered to be mature in reasoning about various aspects of life that he might be involved in.

It follows that the basics, the principles, can be taught but the individuals should be left to make good decisions on individual ethical issues. That is, it is granted that sound basic moral education (in terms of principles) should translate to sound practical action by individuals. In effect, it is granted in this perspective that, knowledge of the right principles is sufficient condition for doing the right. This position therefore asserts that, education could give sound moral principles for sound moral behaviour of individuals in the society.

### **The Place of Morality in the Nigerian Educational System**

The history of education in Nigeria could be said to have two perspectives. Before independence, Western education first came to Nigeria through the Southern part of the country, through the Christian missionaries. The Northern part of the country dominated by Muslims resisted the coming of Western education because it was to be introduced by Christian missionaries, since they had fears that their Islamic faith would be tampered with. This situation gave rise to a wide gap in Western educational attainment between the South and the North (Adewole, 1989).

The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria took decisive steps after independence to bridge the educational gap. The continuous zeal of the federal government to improve the educational standards of its citizens gave birth to the "National Policy on Education" in 1977 and since then, the policy document has been revised four times and the latest edition was published in 2013. Section 1 of the revised edition of the National Policy on Education dwells on the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria (FRN, 2013:13-16). The concluding part of the section on philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria concentrates on what concerns us most in this paper:

That "the quality of instruction at all levels of education shall be oriented towards inculcating the following values (FRN, 2013:16)

- a. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- b. faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- c. moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
- d. shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- e. promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
- f. acquisition of functional skills and competencies necessary for self-reliance" (FRN, 2013:16).

The above stated values have relationship with morality directly. An obvious illustration could be seen in item "c" of the above list wherein Nigerian education is expected to stress "moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations." There is no doubt that these policy statements are intended to develop moral values of the Nigerian citizen in various perspectives of life.

However, the teaching of the principles also needs to be seen at various levels of education in Nigeria through various subjects that could help in pursuing the learning of moral education: subjects like civics, social studies, government, pure science, General Studies, and the Arts (including religious studies – when taught with the intention of

teaching good neighbourliness in *objective* manner). Many educational institutions in Nigeria teach many of these subjects, but the subjects still need to be taught in a manner that will encourage the learning of moral principles for sound moral development in the society. This is not seen to be the case yet, for happenings have shown that, the level of morality in Nigerian educational institutions have not been generally very high (Olugbamila and Nwaneri, 2016:21; and Ahangba, 2016:25). However, this may be as a result of what is happening in the larger society, for example; fraud, bribery and corruption; sexual immorality, drug abuse, kidnapping, cultism, militancy and other terrorism activities feature largely in the socio-political milieu (Buhari, 2015:31-32).

### Conclusion

The place of morality in the Nigerian educational system is such that morality is valued in the National Policy on Education, but it does not appear to be taught realistically enough in the educational institutions to bring about a good level of moral behaviour of people in the institutions and in the society at large. This is because of the many cases of immoral behaviour in the institutions and in the society at large (see again, Olugbamila and Uwaneri, 2016:21; Ahangba, 2016:25; and Buhari, 2015:31-32). It follows that the teaching of moral education should be improved upon in the educational institutions and happenings in the larger society should also be such that should encourage the teaching of moral education in the educational institutions. In this regard, the larger society, by the behaviours and statements of its leaders, parents, political leaders, and so forth, should be seen to be giving the educational institutions enabling environment for the realistic teaching of the moral principles.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the teaching of moral education in the Nigerian educational system should be seen to be the responsibility of teachers in the various schools, and the responsibility of the parents, the politicians, the leaders of thoughts and the religious leaders in the society. This is because the school is only a microcosm of the larger society, thus what happens in the larger society definitely influences happenings in the educational system. A sound moral society is bound to have a morally sound educational system. Similarly a largely immoral society is bound to have a largely immoral educational system.

Incidentally the Nigerian government now has a political leader who has proven record of morally sound disposition (President Muhammad Buhari). He is also bent on ensuring that the Nigerian society demonstrates good moral tendency. It is now left for the machinery of democratic governance which currently features in Nigeria to demonstrate the need to imbibe the culture of sound moral disposition as indicated by the president (Buhari, 2015:31-32; Buhari, 2016: 2,3, and 45). Steps are being taken by the president and some people, and some features of improved moral disposition are manifesting in the society. It is now left for more intensive features of sound moral behaviours to be found in the society (including the schools) through greater dynamics of advocacy for sound moral disposition in the society, whereby moral education would be taught more easily in the schools.

In effect moral education features largely in the Nigerian educational system only at the policy level; at the practice level moral education does not feature impressively. The

fault is traced to the unimpressive manifestations of moral rectitude in the larger society which do not provide enabling environment for moral education in the schools. It is therefore recommended that leaders of thoughts in the larger society and the schools demonstrate sound moral practices to provide enabling environment for the teaching of good moral education in the schools.

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