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CHARACTER EDUCATION: A SOLUTION TO DEVELOPING GOOD CITIZENS IN THE NIGERIA SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper examines the place of character education in Nigeria education. Its objective is to highlight its values to the Nigerian society; its place in Nigeria education system and its contribution in the development of the individual and the society at large. Further it makes suggestions on how schools in Nigeria could provide the teaching and learning programme of character education. The paper recommends quality assurance through character education on the teacher training through which Nigerian teachers would learn and acquire good morals and ethical standard necessary to influence the lives of the learners in our schools and the society. The paper gives impetus to the entrenchment of ethical and moral values badly needed in the present Nigeria society.

Introduction

Moral education is not a new idea. It is, in fact, as old as education itself. Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had as its goals: "help young people become academically sound and to help them become good citizen". Good character is not automatic; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning, and practice. It is developed through character education. The deliberate teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society, since our youth face many life difficulties and problems unknown to earlier generations. Today, there are many negative influences that pose a great challenge to the character of our children. Also, the consequences of the day-to-day pressures infringing on the time that parents and children have together. Studies show that children spend only 38.5 minutes a week (33.4 hours a year) in meaningful conversation with their parents, while they spend 1,500 hours watching television (American Family Research Council, 1990 & Harper's November, 1999). Since children spend about 900 hours a year in school, it is essential that schools play a proactive role in assisting families and communities by developing caring and respectful environments where students learn core ethical values.

In order to create a better society through schooling, schools should have their mission deeply embedded and rooted in the moral dimensions of teaching and learning. This paper suggests that teaching character should be just as important as any teaching academic subject. School education can be used as a way to significantly decrease moral decadence in the society.

To do this, character education must use the school curriculum and include the school community which must reflect the culture of the people. It must be designed to promote core values in all phases of human life and would require proactive strategies and practices that would help children, not only to understand core ethical values, but to care about and act upon them. Ryan (1997, p.14) stated guidelines for the elements needed for effective, comprehensive character education as follows:

- Promotion of core ethical values;

- Teaching of students to understand, care about and act upon these core ethical values;
- Encompassing all aspects of the school culture;
- Fostering a caring school community;
- Offering opportunities for moral action;
- Supporting academic achievement;
- Developing intrinsic motivation;
- Whole-staff involvement;
- Positive leadership of staff and students;
- Involving parents and community members;
- Assessing results and striving to improve on them.

Abraham Lincoln, United State of America president, once stated that “a child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting and, when you are gone, he would attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control your cities, states and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands” (Lickona, 2004). This quote adequately expresses the strong impact that teachers have on their students because they are entrusted with the development of their students. Given this information, should education exist without values?

Conceptual Clarification

Character Education: character is one of those concepts that are the subject of many disciplines from philosophy to theology and from psychology to sociology. It has many competing and conflicting theories. Character, as it relates to character education, is most often used to refer to how “good” a person is. In other words, a person who exhibits personal qualities which fit with those considered desirable by a society might be considered to have good character; developing such personal qualities is seen as a purpose of education (www.freewikipedia).

According to Kolade (2011), character education is an umbrella term loosely used to describe the teaching of children in a manner that will help them develop towards good moral conduct, civic responsibilities, good manner, healthy behaviours, non-bullying life style, healthy development, critical thinking, successful living and to be a socially acceptable beings. Education has always emphasised these values.

Character education is integral to the educational enterprise. Chang (1994) described teaching as “moral by nature” and Sockett (1993) purported that “moral character matters in teaching.” Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik (1990) contended that, “Teaching is a fundamentally moral enterprise in which adults ask and require children to change in directions chosen by adults.” The historic mission of education is emphasized by Doyle (1997) who noted that, “To abandon education’s historic mission to shape character... flies in the face of history and reason.” This was while Ginott wrote that “Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.”

In the school setting, character education is an act of creating schools that foster ethical responsibility and providing the young good models and teaching them good character through emphasis on universal values that are designable for every member of the society to share. It should be the proactive effort of the schools to instill in their students, important core ethical values such as honesty, fair play, responsibility and respect for self and others.

Character education and production of good citizens needed for good leadership

Character education, according to Ryan (2010) is aimed at developing students socially, ethically and academically by infusing character development into every aspect of the school culture and curriculum. To help students develop good character, it would require good teachers that are caring and acting upon core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness and compassion needed for good and effective leadership. Importantly, the social, ethical and emotional development of young people is just as important as their academic development. As Roosevelt in Kolade (2011) stated: "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." After all, we know that it is critical to create schools that simultaneously foster character development and promote learning. In fact, character education promotes academic excellence for quality life because it lays a foundation for all learning that takes place in school. Research shows that character education should be in classrooms where students are ready to learn and where teachers are freer to teach (DeRoche & Williams, 1998). That is a formalized character education, which begins when the school, along with the broad involvement of community members, come together to determine the core ethical values needed to be shared as the basis for good education of the particular school. The values then become the foundation for all that the school does, such as the school curriculum, teaching strategies, school culture, extracurricular activities. Presides, character education is infused into the broader community objectives of the school.

Ryan (1997) described character education as not an "add-on" but is instead a different way of teaching; it is a comprehensive approach that promotes core values in all phases of school life and permeates the entire school culture. It is not an imposition on already overburdened schools; rather, it helps educators fulfill their fundamental responsibility to prepare young children for the future by laying a foundation for learning through the creation of caring, respectful school environments. This was testified to by the

Character education should not be a "quick fix." Education provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical and academic issues of growing concern to human society and adopted through the use of school curriculum (Kohn, 1997). This is why Ryan (1997) opines that character education is not only the cultivation of the minds, but should nurture the heart of the recipients. This implies that it should be a learning process of distinguishing between virtues and vices (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). This, in essence, would promote good customs (virtues), but also condemn bad customs (vices).

Citizenship: Being a good citizen means going beyond our own interests and demonstrating a concern for the needs of others. Good citizens recognize their obligations to make their homes, schools, neighborhoods, communities, and country the best they can be. Good citizens learn that they can make a difference when they follow rules, voice opinions, vote, and work and play cooperatively with one another. They stay informed, listen, do their part for community endeavors, respect authority, and volunteer. Being a good citizen according to Ryan (2010) means:

- Fulfilling your civic duties
- Doing your share
- Playing by the rules
- Respecting authority and law
- Attempting to pursue civic virtues

findings of Fraenkel in Ryan (1996) on the perception of the introduction of character education in the U.S, where it was discovered that more than 1/3 of the sampled school teachers affirmed to the fact that their jobs become easier with the implementation of character education as there are fewer disciplines and behavioral problems to detract from teaching time.

It was on this premise that Kolade (2011) suggested that character education should take place throughout the entire school period in Nigeria and in schools at all levels. He further stressed that, administrators, teachers and other staff are presented with opportunities to model and teach positive character traits. And that character education should not be relegated to a "character education class" but should be infused throughout the structures and processes of the entire school curriculum and culture (Kolade, 2011).

Although character education has always been of vital importance, schools often stray from proactive efforts to incorporate character development into their teaching programme. Ironically, this neglect came at a time when the need became greater, due to increased challenges in raising children, with moral ethical conduct. Arising from a number of factors, such as a weakening in guidance by some families and communities toward the end of the 21st century, the need for character education becomes obvious.

This is why Lickona (2004) highlighted six core values defining character called, The Six Pillars of Character, which he maintained had resulted from a search for enduring moral truths that allow individuals to distinguish right from wrong and define the essence of ethics and good character. It makes sense that our communities benefit when people understand the importance of being involved and caring citizens and "doing the right thing." An effective character education program encourages individuals to do the right thing by incorporating the following core ethical values in their daily lives:

trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, Fairness, caring citizenship

These six pillars describe character and ethical behavior in ways an individual can understand how a person of character thinks and behaves.

How school should promote the teaching of character education in Nigeria

It is believed that character education will be an effective tool to tackle social problems in Nigerian today. This is because character education, if taught in schools, will help to educate the children and the youth and bring them up with positive thinking and skills. This is in line with Covey in Ryan, (1997) who asserted that, for development to take place in any human society, the people require "a new mind set, a new set of skills, a new set of tools and a new habit". It thus requires that character education should be made compulsory in Nigerian schools.

For effective war against societal problems in Nigeria, the proper strategy is to target the young and instill good character and morality in them while in school. Through good character education, the society would help the young develop good judgment, integrity, trustworthiness, and other essential virtues (Lickona, 2004). If the young ones are properly educated and if their minds and hearts are disabused from corruption, they will grow up knowing what is right and wrong, and become aware of their social responsibilities and limitations. The absence of good character education could be the cause of greed, selfishness and bad leadership.

Although character education has always been an essential part of our schools' mission in Nigeria education, since the introduction of western education by the missionaries,

it has continued to be an integral part of schooling and existed side by side with academics. The best way it can be taught successfully in Nigerian schools is when:

- a. The school sees the parents as primary educators: This is because development of good character is, first and foremost, a parental responsibility, but the task must also be shared with schools and the broader member of the community. As today's society are faced with more and tougher challenges to raising ethical, responsible children, parents and communities are increasingly looking into schools for assistance. Thus, the school may be the only place where some children are taught virtuous behavior because they live in homes where their families are not serving as positive role models and are not providing adequate character training.
- b. The school identifies all adult members of school as those involved in the teaching of character education. It is inherent that each and every adult in a school is a character educator by virtue of their exposure to students. Regardless of whether a school has formalized character education or not, all adults should serve as role models. Students constantly watch adults life and conduct in the school; such as teachers, administrators, counsellors, coaches, secretaries, cleaners, bus drivers and so on and their character is likely to be influenced by these people. They serve as models for character development. Beyond modeling, no matter what the academic subject or extracurricular activity, educators are afforded the opportunity of developing good character in their students on a daily basis by intentionally selecting character-based lessons and activities, either using academic subjects or extra-curriculum activities of the school. Ryan (2010) has advocated the five Es as the best method teachers can adopt in the teaching of character to students in schools. These are Example, Explanation, Exhortation, Environment, and Experience.
- i. Example: this has to do with the good moral or character examples the teacher provides for their students in the classroom, as well as outside the classroom.
- ii. Explanation for definite meaning and purpose for the learners to understand the meaning of concepts. In this respect, Durkheim in Hurn (1987) maintained that, "to teach morality, is neither to preach nor to indoctrinate, it is to explain". This shows that character education needs to be explained to children and youths and not simply to stuff student's heads with the rules and regulations of society. This simply means Exhortation.
- iii. Environment has to do with good as well as students-teacher friendly and conducive school surrounding.
- iv. Also problem solving, discussion, and role play methods can also be adopted in developing good character in the youths. Good role modelling in and outside the classroom is important in moral education. Through role playing and discussions, students could see how their actions and decisions affect others in the society. Thus, it has been noted that morals are "caught, not taught," and "classroom life is saturated with morals that shape students' character development" Ryan (1997). In many developed societies, character education is introduced into the classroom through the study of heroes and heroines and special teachers are hired for the purpose. Those identified by the community as good role models are often invited by school authorities to visit local schools to address students. And the students would use the opportunity to examine the character traits personified in the speakers and aspire to emulate their good character and life.
- c. The government should formulate Legislation and policies to encourage the teaching of character education, such as including it in the education curriculum. DeRoche and Williams (1998) sees character education as being the best approach, local schools and communities could use to work together to identify the core values needed in the society. The school

would then provide particular approaches to teaching those values. States should encourage comprehensive approaches to develop character education that involve all aspects of societal culture required in the curriculum.

d. Assessment of character education should not be based on cognitive format, rather, it should be on affective domain of education.

e. Teacher education programmes need to be re-defined and re-focused on the training of character education in pre-service or students teacher training. This can result in the production of effective and well cultured teachers who would be able to serve as role models for the learners. Nigeria requires quality assurance and teacher can provide this with emphasis on character education.

Conclusion

If character education is taught in Nigeria schools, it will give the young good moral compass, set clear standards of behavior and enable them to acquire ethical values, such as honesty, integrity, respect, responsibility, self-discipline and reliability. Character and moral education will also provide the young and adults with 'other essential virtues' to enable them become good citizens and be successful in the rapidly changing and highly competitive global economy.

Recommendations

It is on this premise that this paper recommends that character education should to be taught in Nigeria schools. It is being used in developed countries like America to solve social problems and the training of their children into becoming functional and responsible citizens in the society.

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