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INSTRUMENTALITY OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION FOR PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper is prompted by the noticeable indiscipline acts being perpetuated in Nigerian tertiary institution. Lax discipline due to moral decadence has resulted in disturbance of peace and harmony of academic environments and the entire society. This paper therefore, attempted a conceptual definition of the concepts of education, religious and moral education and peace-building. It also enumerated various acts of indiscipline that pose threats to peace building in the academic setting. In addition, the importance of religious and moral education in maintaining discipline in tertiary institutions is analyzed. The paper concludes by reiterating the need for incorporation of religious and moral education into tertiary institutions' curricular as a remedy for the menace of indiscipline that poses threats to peace and harmony within schools in particular and society at large.

Introduction

The expected outcome of education is production of individuals who would be useful to the society in which they found themselves and be self-reliant and self-disciplined. This is why the school, as a prominent agent of education, is expected to ensure that every student who passes through it, is found worthy both in learning and character. Unfortunately, the level of indiscipline in Nigerian schools today is so high that one begins to wonder what is responsible for this. Different acts of indiscipline that are exhibited by students are lateness, truancy, rudeness, cheating, fighting, cultism, gangsterism, sexual immoralities, drug abuse, violence and academic dishonesty. In addition, students go on to protest and demonstrate against some school policies they seem not comfortable with. These indiscipline acts could threaten the peace of not only the academic environment but also the society in general.

Education is a process of handing down the ideas, values and norms of the society across the generations. It involves the transmission of worthwhile knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs.¹ Religion could be viewed as a belief system of a person or group of persons which guides individual or group practice in the worship of the spiritual being.² 'Moral' means behaviour and 'morality' is the way people behave.³ Such behaviour must be in accordance with the certain standard set by the society as regard what is good and acceptable as compared with what is bad and unacceptable.⁴

The survival of peace in any human society contributes immensely to all round development of such an environment. This is because, in a chaotic situation, hardly could a tangible task take a shape. Peace is important because we need a better world for our next generations. Peace is important because we can enjoy the benefits of the latest technological and scientific advancements only in times of

peace.⁵ However, in our society today, various social vices that pose threats to existence of peace are perpetuated in the society. Tribal conflicts, religious crises, protests, fighting, hostility, violence, corruption, bribery and indiscipline have become the orders of the day. Worse still, the academic settings where discipline is supposed to prevail among all stakeholders involved are not left out of the fouls. Writers like Adeniyi ⁶, Taiwo ⁷ and Jekayinfa ⁸ observed the absence of discipline in our campuses. To remedy the situation through religious and moral education therefore, informed this research.

Concept of Peace-building

The word peace is linguistically synonymous to words like: accord, concord, ceasefire, harmony, reconciliation and tranquility.⁹ The connotations revolve around absence of war, freedom from war, ending conflict, calm and quite state, freedom from disturbances and absence of violence or disturbances within a state.¹⁰ Peace refers to absence of hostility. It refers to an environment that is characterized by healthy interpersonal and international relationships, acknowledgment of equality and fairness etc.¹¹ Peace is not merely the absence of war and hatred (negative peace/cold war) but also the presence of cooperation, compassion and worldwide justice (positive peace/hot peace).¹² A peaceful land however, is a place where peace survives or reigns throughout its nooks and crannies.

Peace-building is a term describing outside interventions that are designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict within a nation by creating a sustainable peace. Peace-building involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development.¹³

Successful peace-building activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace; reconcile opponents; prevent conflict from restarting; integrate civil society; create rule of law mechanisms; and address underlying structural and societal issues.¹⁴

Religious and Moral Education

In Islam, religion is all man's activities carried out to please his Creator and his fellow human beings as taught by the Qur'ān and the prophet, Muhammad (SAW). While in Christianity, religion is a guided belief in the heritage of Jesus Christ and his acceptance as the saviour as illustrated in the Bible.¹⁵ Religious education could be viewed as the process through which religious principles, practice and values are transmitted from one generation to another. It involves systematic treatment of issues concerning religious matters.¹⁶ In its sense, Moral education is described as direct or indirect teaching of issues concerned with right conduct rather than on law or custom.¹⁷ Moral education could be said to mean bringing out the moral qualities in individuals in order to suppress the immoral behaviours in them. It can also be seen as the process of passing the generally accepted code of conduct of a given society from one generation to another. It is a process of enlightening or educating the young people in a society about good or bad behaviours of characters,

encouraging them to uphold the good ones and discouraging them from bad ones in order to live a meaningful life worthy of emulation.

Although, Amaele¹⁸ have argued that there is no relationship between religious and moral education, it has been established that religion has always been seen as a veritable tool for teaching and inculcation of moral values.¹⁹ Moral values can be accomplished only with the teaching of religions, either formally, informally or non-formally. Scholars agreed that both morals and religion are inseparable twins. It is difficult, if not impossible to teach or seek to inculcate morals without reference to religion.²⁰ One can therefore, conclude that religious and moral education are inextricable as morality has its basis and justification in religion. Where religion goes, morality follows.²¹

Religious and moral education exposes learner to religious principles, doctrines and norms. It broadens learners' religious outlook on issues affecting religion; it helps in wiping out cases of religious fanaticism in the society. It helps in promoting morality; it helps learner to discern right from wrong and good from evil; it gives meaning to life and living; through moral lessons, learners learn to work and live together; young ones are introduced to moral requirements of society in which they live and they are acquainted with acceptable moral standards.

Religious and Moral Education as an Instrument for Peace-building

Religious and moral education when properly employed for truth and reconciliation processes would be a tremendous instrument for peace building. On this point, Aquiline Tarimo,²² suggested that all religious education should be accompanied by a new way of encounter that respects people of other faiths without the burden of barriers caused by prejudice, but rather in listening to and learning from one another, which opens up new horizons to all sides. This way of overcoming prejudice is an essential contribution to education for peace that can be made uniquely by religious communities. A balanced formative curriculum today must be designed to promote mutual understanding and mutual respect between religions and ethnic groups. Students must be exposed to each other's religion and culture.²³

Aspects of religious and moral education that facilitate peace-building include the biblical injunction that stresses the essence of peace like: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27)

In addition, the principle of peace is stressed by many Qur'ānic verses, such as:

And the (faithful) slaves of the Most Gracious (Allah) are those who walk on the earth in humility and sedateness, and when the foolish address them (with bad words) they respond back with mild words of gentleness. (Qur'ān 25:63)
Verily, Allah enjoin *Al-adl* (i.e. justice and worship none but Allah alnoe Islamic monotheism) and *Al-ihsan* (i.e. to be patient in performing your duties to Allah, totally for Allah's sake and in accordance with the Sunnah (legal ways) of the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in a perfect manner)

and giving help to kith and kin (i.e., all that Allah has ordered you to give them e.g., wealth, visiting, looking after them or any other kind of help), and forbids *Al-Fahshā* (i.e. all evil deeds, e.g. illegal sexual acts, disobedience of parents, polytheism, to tell lies, to give false witness, to kill a life without right) and *Al-munkar* (i.e. all that is prohibited by Islamic law: polytheism of every kind, disbelief and every kind of evil deeds), and *Al-baghy* (u.e, all kinds of oppression). He admonishes you, that you may take heed. (Q. 16:90).

Academic institutions are saddled with responsibilities of educating young adults and getting them acquainted with what is required of them in order to be useful to themselves and the society at large. What is expected of the products of any school, especially the products of higher institutions, is so enormous because they are supposed not to be found wanting in both learning and character. This, however, makes it imperative on our institutions to equip the intakes with necessary professional and personal qualities required of them in their dispositions. Ogunlola²⁴ canvassed for the teaching of moral education at all levels of education. He submitted thus:

To instill moral discipline in the citizenry in general and in our students in particular, moral education need to be taken as core course in our institutions of learning....it should be seen as means of training individuals how to behave well as it allows them to know the difference between the good and bad, right and acceptable mode of behaviour.

In the light of the above submission of Ogunlola, tertiary institutions as places where intakes are mostly the youths, are supposed to champion the teaching of religious and moral education. Religious and moral education is needed in tertiary institutions to educate youths to be useful to themselves and the society by transmitting the worthwhile societal cultural values to the younger generations. Meanwhile, this can be achieved when the individual learner has acquired a round balanced personality, not just to acquire certificate and the book knowledge, but be able to adjust to situation and be responsible, reliable and disciplined individuals.

Tertiary institutions are supposed to be citadel of learning and character but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This is because tertiary institutions are lagging behind in term of discipline and moralities. The studies conducted by Odejide, Oheri, Adelekan & Ikuesan²⁵ and Taiwo²⁶ revealed that immoral behaviours do prevail in Nigerian schools. The following are some forms of immoralities that are rampant in our schools at all levels: religious crises, protests, fighting, hostility, violence, breaking of bounds, bullying, lateness to school, absenteeism, truancy, rioting, cultism, smoking, drinking, disobedience, stealing, extortion, drug addiction, sex offences, examination malpractices, gangsterism and willful destruction of school properties.²⁷ All the aforementioned vices can, however, pose threats to peace-

building in our academic environment in particular and the society at large. Adebayo²⁸ submitted that for our nation to be restored truly to the fear and honour of God, the teaching and learning of moral education have to be revived. It is difficult to achieve corruption free society without the teaching and learning of morality, ethics and religion.

The point above is an emphasis on the need for incorporation of religion and moral education in our schools in which when neglected, the achievement of goal of education, which included production of disciplined citizens and building a just and egalitarian state would be difficult.

In addition, Jawondo²⁹ suggested thus:

In addition to educational or professional qualifications, the government should consider the moral status of every individual before he or she is given any appointment in any government establishment. The society should also emulate the government in this respect. By so doing, the rapid positive changes are guaranteed sooner. Nigeria will be listed among the developed nations of the world.

The fact above also stresses the essence of morality in individual's personality. If morality is to be made a part of qualities required for job placement of an individual, such an individual therefore, needs to be exposed to religious and moral education during his professional training course. However, Jimoh³⁰ contended that all the country's efforts to inculcate morals in our youth have failed because religious and moral education has been ignored in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religion and morality are inseparable twins. They facilitate discipline which is essential qualities added to academic and professional qualities of any good citizen. Today, high level of immorality is prevalent in our schools and colleges. Indiscipline has become the order of the day in schools and public places. It is disheartening that today many so called 'educated Nigerians' are morally indisciplined and trouble makers. Stealing, violence, bullying, protest, mayhem, uprising, robbery, corruption and cultism and other immoralities have become rampant everywhere. These vices, however, pose threats to peace-building.

In this paper, attempt is made to explain the meaning of religious and moral education and peace-building. The paper also emphasized the roles of religious and moral education in maintenance of discipline in Nigerian schools with special emphasis on higher institutions. With the goal and objectives and contents of religious and moral education briefly enumerated in this paper, the writer submits that peace building could also be facilitated through the teaching of religious and moral education.

It is recommended here that tertiary institutions as places where majority youths and elites are trained and educated, should include religious and moral education as a core course in the tertiary institution programme.

Federal and state ministries of education are hereby called upon to see to the disciplinary problems in tertiary institutions and assist in finding solutions to those

problems through unalloyed support for introduction of religious and moral education as a core course in the tertiary institutions programme. Private institutions should also be compelled to adopt the same. Individual intakes are advised to endeavour to put the ideas and knowledge gained through religious and moral education into practice so as to contribute meaningfully to peace building.

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