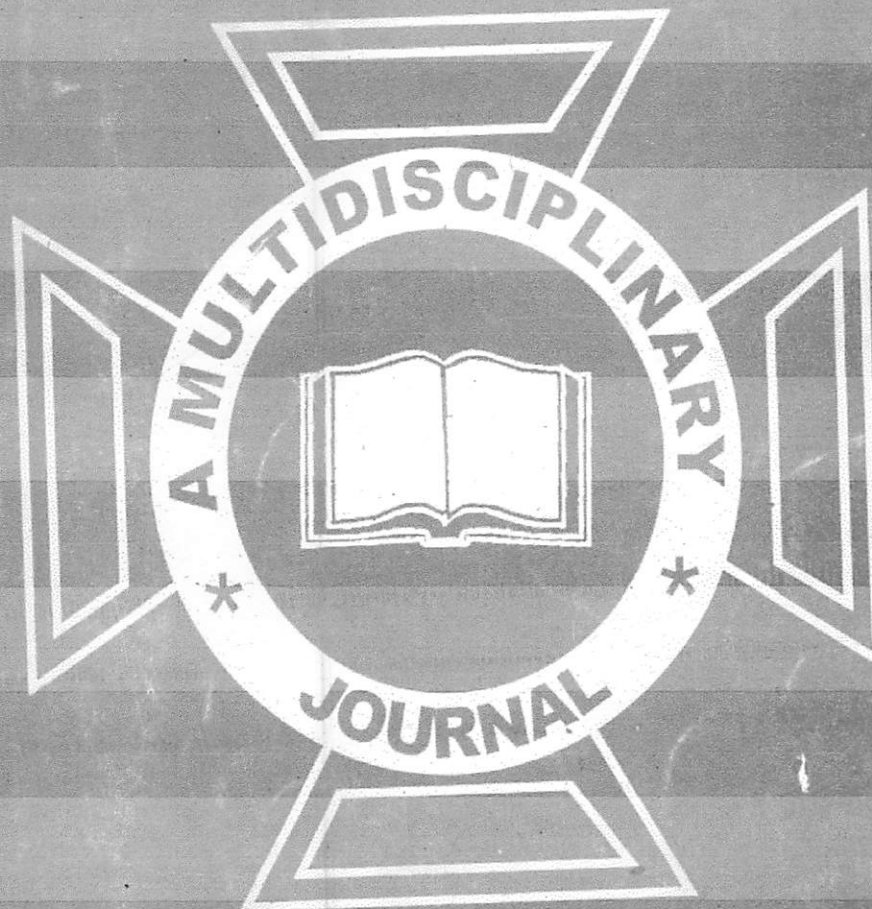


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MORAL EDUCATION AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Dr. A. F. Oyelade

Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the issue of moral education and education in Nigeria. It analyzes the concept of moral education and the features of moral education in Nigeria. It employs philosophical analysis. It was found that moral education involves education in principles that would make us make good moral judgements and take good moral actions. Principles behind values such as honesty, fidelity, hospitality, truthfulness, justice, contentment, regard and concern for the interests of others and discipline are thus, among the principles that would be taught in moral education. Principles that would help us to shun vices such as lying, stealing, fraud, arson, bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, forgery, dictatorship and the like, would also be taught in moral education. It was also found that Nigerian education does not pursue moral education to a desirable extent, judging by the moral behaviour of our pupils, students and the public at large over the years. It is therefore, recommended that our curriculum of moral education be reviewed to feature more of reason-based teaching and practical demonstrations of principles, by students and teachers and the public at large, in their schedules and lifestyles.

Introduction

Moral education is supposed to be a very important aspect of our education but it is not seen obviously as a very important aspect of our education in the available curriculum in our schools. This is not to suggest that morality is not taught at all in our schools, but rather to state that it is not taught with the same level of importance as subjects in the realm of science and technology – which are regarded as very important subjects for national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004 pp. 38, 39). The government is interested in spending a large proportion of its educational budget on science and technology curriculum and on educating science and technology students (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004 pp. 38, 39). The arts and the social sciences are to be satisfied with the lesser proportion of the educational budget. But straightaway it can be seen that education is supposed to produce a balanced individual not a lopsided individual; moreover a lopsided pursuit of education in the society would produce a society of individuals with lopsided education.

Should our society be full of individuals with great education in the sciences and technology, but with little education in the arts and in the social sciences, we would have a society of technocrats that may have little knowledge of humanistic dimension that is needed to handle the sophistication of our technological development. But since science develops everyday as there are scientific innovations and challenges everyday there is need for a balance of humanistic educational development in our society that would help us to cope with the necessities of handling the sophistication in the development in science and technology.

Various illustrations can be given in this connection: military weapons are becoming more sophisticated by the day, chemical procedures of manufacturing are becoming more complex, and various products of science and technology could be put into good or bad use (including information and communication facilities like the computer and internet facilities). Thus, if our education is lopsided in the direction of science and technology we might be heading for having a society with high scientific consciousness but little humanistic consciousness particularly in terms of humane perspective of life. This is to suggest that we need equal emphasis in subjects like moral and religious education to balance our emphasis in science and technological education. Without such a balance, we might be heading for moral and social crisis in a society of high scientific and technological development. Such a crisis could render to nothing whatever advancement we might have attained in our scientific and technological education.

This is the case when a nation that is rich in mineral and human resources engages for instance, in: fraud and cheating, forgery, bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds,

violent ethnic crises, and examination malpractice. These examples constitute social malaises that cripple the scientific and technological development in the society.

Let us consider the case of Nigeria for instance. Over the years particularly after the civil war there have been various alarming dimensions of the crises mentioned above to the extent that our national leaders have had to constitute various agencies and measures of reform to correct the social crises. These include General Murtala Muhammed's retirement of alleged fraudulent public officers; the Ethical Revolution of Alhaji Shehu Shagari's administration; the War Against Indiscipline of General Muhammadu Buhari; General Ibrahim Babangida's Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER); and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). These efforts by our national leaders to reform the society and stop the social decay that actually affect the socio-economic advancement of our nation, can be seen to be continuous and consistent in spite of our technological educational emphasis – all of these suggest the need for moral emphasis in our education.

It is obvious, therefore, that the problem of moral and religious crises can be very catastrophic and need to be handled not just at the leadership socio-political level, but also and more importantly at the educational level (in the school system).

This is why it is important to examine the issue of moral and religious education in our school system. But the scope of this paper is limited to the issue of examining the need for greater emphasis in moral education in our educational system.

What is Moral Education?

Moral education involves education in morality, with particular emphasis on what is morally good. What is morality? Morality involves human principles of right and wrong. "how humans treat themselves in order to promote mutual welfare, growth, ... and meaning in a striving for what is good over what is bad, and what is right over what is wrong" (Throux, 1982 pp. 7-8). Thus morality involves principles, human principles of right and wrong, good and bad. These are articulated and reflected upon such as to help us make good moral judgments and take good moral actions.

Moral education would therefore involve education in such principles that would make us make good moral judgments and take good moral actions. Principles behind values such as honesty, fidelity, hospitality, truthfulness, justice, contentment, regard and concern for the interest of others and discipline are thus, among the principles that would be taught in moral education. Principles that would help us to shun vices such as lying, stealing, fraud, arson, bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, forgery, dictatorship and the like would also be taught in moral education.

It follows that morality is a very important aspect of our social life. It is of great importance, as great as science and technology if not greater than science and technology. If this is so, and it has been seen to be thus far, then our education should put more emphasis on moral education than it has hitherto done. The argument of inclusion of certain subjects that could educate our students about morality in our school curriculum and thereby claiming that there is no need for greater emphasis in moral education is not good enough. For the subjects included in our curriculum in this connection which include: Social Studies and Citizenship Education, Religious Knowledge, and General Studies courses in History of Ideas, Philosophy of Knowledge and Nationalism, found in the Basic, Secondary and Tertiary education curriculum have not been able to give our students thus far sound moral disposition.

If a subject or a course of study has not achieved its societal objective then it has to be reviewed. And this is the point with our subjects and courses that are expected to give our students and society good moral direction.

When critically studied, the themes and modules in the Social Studies and Citizenship Education curriculum for our Primary and Secondary schools are such that the pupils and students could learn morality largely in theory and less in practice – whereas morality is a theoretical and a practical issue, and more of a practical issue. The same goes for the General Studies courses in our tertiary educational institutions meant to teach "all-round improvement in university education" such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004: 38); the courses have not remarkably helped to improve the moral disposition of our tertiary education

students. Otherwise how do we explain the consistency in students' crises in our tertiary institutions (for instance see *Daily Sketch*, January 15, 1993, p. 1; *Nigerian Tribune*, August 14, 1991, p. 1; *Nigerian Tribune*, July 17, 2006, p. 10; and *Unilorin BULLETIN*, May 28, 2004, p. 3).

Thus our moral education curriculum in our Basic education, a Secondary and Tertiary educational institution has to be reviewed in terms of moral activities of the pupils and students in the course of their moral education. They need to be made to demonstrate notable improvement in their understanding of moral principles behind good moral behaviours. They need to be taken through the procedure of taking good moral decisions and abiding by such decisions. The procedure would involve getting them to the rational basis of the various principles: for instance, they need to understand that the concept of morality involves an arrangement between individuals in social situations which gives adequate considerations for the interests of others. They need to have rational basis for the principles, and they need to be taken along in accordance with their reasoning ability. They also need to complement their knowledge of principles based on rationality with practical activities in humanitarian and philanthropic programmes.

The evaluation in such education would therefore, not be based only on what they write but also on what they do. In fact it has to be more on what they do than on what they write. Ways have to be found to effect this sort of education – after all morality is more of a practical activity than a theoretical activity.

It follows that the teachers of morality, and in effect moral education teachers, have themselves to be conscious not just of the principles and theories of morality and moral education, but also of the practice of morality in their lifestyles. This is easier said than done; but we have to start from somewhere. As teachers of computer and information and communication technology do not just teach in theory without good practical demonstration and sustained use of the required facilities in their routine schedules; so also teachers of moral education can not do thorough job without engaging themselves in the cultivation of moral virtues and in sustained practice of such virtues.

The demonstration of sustained moral virtues by the moral education teachers would encourage the pupils and students to learn more and in a sustained manner. And when the teachers correct the pupils and students they would be more easily convinced than if the teachers act only (or mainly), in theory. It follows that the moral education teachers by extension include the public too. For our leaders in the society (our parents, political leaders, and so forth), if they really value good moral disposition of members of the society through moral education would give moral leadership in their various schedules too.

For example, the public and our leaders want our education to feature great appreciation of information and communication technology. But the leaders do not just stop at the declaration, nor at ensuring that computer education and introductory technology feature on the Primary and Secondary School curricula; rather our leaders proceed to ensure that more money is spent on science education and in the procurement of information and communication technology facilities in our educational institutions. (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004 pp. 38, 39).

Besides the government and the public encourage the masses, not only the students, to be information and communication technology conscious. There is a lot of public awareness on this and various education programmes are organized by government and non-government organizations for continuous and consistent consciousness of the students and the masses in information and communication technology. In the various places of work people are told to be ICT conscious in stern terms.

The same measures taken by the government and the people in connection with science and technology development of the populace would have to be taken in connection with moral development of the populace if we really want moral development of our populace through moral education. There has to be the same intensity in public awareness, in public leadership, in the mounting of programmes of education by government and non-governmental organizations, and demonstrations of seriousness.

When the society is permeated with an environment of moral education at the level that it is permeated with the environment of information and communication technology education, then we are moving gradually towards attaining the desired level of moral education expected in Nigerian education.

Recommendations

- i. It is therefore recommended that steps be taken to review our moral education curriculum in Nigeria such that the content of the curriculum and the teachers feature more of practical demonstrations in reality than theory.
- ii. Moreover, the government and the people have to join hands with the moral education teachers in the schools as co-moral education teachers, for desired success.

Conclusion

It has been found that moral education is very necessary in our educational system, it is very necessary in Nigerian education. But it has not been pursued to the desired level of attainment that could make it have the desired impact in our pupils and students and in the society at large. Its present level of pursuit, its present features in terms of the curriculum and the teachers' dispositions therefore need to be reviewed such that the impact of the education can be felt just as the impact of our societal education in science and technology, particularly in information and communication technology is being felt in our socio-political milieu. This would help to improve our society, as science and technology without (or with little) morality would constitute lopsided development in the society and in fact threatened development, in the sense that such a development would eventually lead to socio-economic crisis – as the case has been found to be in the Nigerian socio-political milieu over the years.

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