

Incorporating Moral Education in the School Curricula as a Remedy to Moral Depravity in the Contemporary African Society

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ABSTRACT

This work is centred on incorporating moral education in the school curricula as a remedy to moral depravity in the contemporary African society. The society that we live in today is morally depraved such that people behave anyhow they like without a critical reflection of what might be the consequences of their immoral behaviours. Why is it that morality and moral behaviours have been debased in the contemporary African society? The paper found out that people have thrown morality to the dustbin in the sense that society attaches much importance and value to wealth and material things not minding the sources. The upshots of this are killings, lying, cheating, deception, backbiting, moral blackmailing, callous destruction of people's properties etc. What now can we do to stop all these vices? Here, moral education becomes very imperative so that people will be taught the acceptable standard of behaviour in the society. The paper employed phenomenological method in conducting this research. It established that for moral behaviours to be properly restored to the contemporary African society, hard work, honesty, truthfulness, obedience and courageous acts should be rewarded and indiscriminate conferment of chieftaincy titles on the rich should stop.

Keywords: Moral Education, School, Curricula, Moral Depravity, African, Society.

INTRODUCTION

The high rate of moral decadence in the contemporary African society is now a hydra-headed monster that wreaks havoc on the future of the present generation. In the past, people were afraid not to carry out certain acts because of their concomitant effects that could be disastrous, but at the present time, it is do or die. People now engage in mischievous acts especially the one that they will make money from and live a flamboyant lifestyle. During festive periods, especially Christmas celebration, youth would come back to village with exorbitant cars, some would build magnificent houses before then so that the villagers would know that they have made money. These people are worshipped like demigod and they throw parties here and there, splashing money like water. This flashy lifestyle is very magnetizing that some youth in the village would like to be like them. Some will go to them to appeal that they should be taken to the city, that they are tired of staying in the village. The questions that these youth fail to ask are: What is the source of this their money? How did they make this money?

Every day, people get lost, kidnapped and abducted. We hear of high way robbers, advance fee fraudsters, yahoo business, and others with the sole aim of making quick money. Now, money rules the world. Parents now compare their children who are not doing well with other children who are doing well. They are often told to go to city and hustle. How can one go to city to hustle without any money in his or her hand to pay for house rent, shop rent, buy food and goods or commodities that the person will sell? When such a person leaves village for city, he or she will register with gang of criminals in order to survive. The person will steal or kidnap, collect ransom and then buy a car and build house. The car will be taken to his or her parents and they will rejoice that God has blessed their son or daughter and rain blessings on the person but they will not ask: How did you get money for the car? What are you doing in the city? These are some of the things that have contributed to moral depravity in the contemporary African society. Ukoma and Nnachi say that it was morally unethical for any person in our traditional society to steal. For a man to lay with the mother or man with his daughter, cheat, take bribe, gossip, tell lies, deny the family, and avoid participating in social services and the

likes. Members of the traditional society sometimes make the observations of dos and don'ts unconsciously. As at then, one would be bold to talk of high moral and ethical standards. The elders would not accept any conditional excuse that may have forced a member to be involved in any illicit act capable of ruining the society (2009, p.172).

Therefore, moral education becomes necessary in the contemporary society that is antithetical to the traditional African society where moral values and attitudes were in existence. What is moral education?

Meaning of Moral Education

Before digging deep into the meaning of moral education, let us take a brief look at morality and education. Morality is the subject matter of ethics. According to Uduma, ethics has as its subject matter the morality of human actions and conduct; its major concern includes the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong. It raises questions as to how men should live, what is the moral standard? What is the nature of morality? What are the standards of moral judgement? What makes an action right or wrong? (2000, p.99). Although the morality of people and their ethics amount to the same thing, there is a usage that restricts morality to systems such as that of Kant, based on notions such as duty, obligation, and principles of conduct, reserving ethics for the more Aristotelian approach to practical reasoning, based on the notion of a virtue, and generally avoiding the separation of 'moral' considerations from other practical considerations (Blackburn, 2005, p.241). Morality is the basis of ethics. It provides the raw materials or data for ethics to work on. Thus ethics presupposes morality. It is the systematic study of and reflection on the basic principles of morality (Uduigwomen, 2001, p.13). Man is a moral being because he is free and rational. To be free and rational is to be subject to the moral law. Moral conduct is conduct that is voluntary and affects the basic direction of our living (Uduigwomen, 2001, p.7).

The object of study of moral philosophy is the human act directed towards its end. The material object of ethics is therefore human acts. These are responsible acts proceeding from human freewill. Its formal object is the relation of these human acts to a person's last end. Ethics is usually divided into general and social ethics. The first deals with principles regarding the morality of human acts: the last end of the human person, moral law, conscience, sin and virtue. The second applies these principles to the individual's life in relationship with others in the society. It therefore studies: common good, the relation between individuals and society, social authority, civil law (its binding character), the principle of subsidiarity, family (role and rights), and marriage (Makumba, 2005, p.55).

Education has no universally accepted definition because of the nature of human beings that is very complex, the differences in education theories and practices, human environment, educational differences from culture to culture and society to society. Education is meant only for human beings. We can train animals but we do not educate them, only human beings can be educated. Therefore, "education is the art of teaching and the training of the young. The aims of education can be nothing less than all-round efficiency and also the development of the child physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually" (Adeyemo, 1965, p.9). Education is also concerned with the development of the personality of the individual. Personality describes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual or moral characteristics of a person (Odo, 2001, p.7).

Education can be used in a broad sense and narrow sense or strict sense. Education in a broad perspective includes all the worthwhile activities which an individual engages in so as to become a contributing member of the society in which he belongs but in a narrow or strict sense, the concept 'education' refers to what happens in the institution of learning (Alu and Ugwu, 1999, p.86). They further define education as the process of preparing the child consciously or unconsciously, to enable him adapt himself in the society so that he is able to develop his potentialities for his own good and that of the society. This definition views education in three perspectives: as a process, a product and a discipline (Alu and Ugwu, 1999, p.89). As a process, education is used to cover all attempts being made to transform a person or equip the learner with knowledge. Education as a product involves schooling. In this connection, there is a close relationship between the teacher and the taught. The teacher processes the chosen curriculum content while the taught, the learner, receives the processed curriculum content. At the end, he is himself processed and he is turned out as a finished product for the society. As a finished product, the learner must have acquired basic skills, basic knowledge, basic

principles or attitudes while education is referred to as a discipline when it becomes a body of knowledge studied in education institutions (Alu and Ugwu, 1999, pp.89-90).

Moral education therefore, is a form of education designed to impart to people ethical values, ethical principles and moral knowledge (good behaviours) that would make them responsible and reasonable members of the society. It is also an education that inculcates moral values, moral attitudes, moral ideas and moral ways of life into people so that they can function as effective citizens in the society. It aims at making people to behave well and making morally depraved individuals to be morally sound. Chu and Co quoted in Ukoma and Nnachi see moral education as one of the major strategies with which to bring moral reorientation. For them, moral education is the developing of knowledge, mind, character, by formerly schooling, teaching or training in generally accepted standards. Values education is another term often used for moral education, while traditional values reflect those traits which have been considered valuable throughout history (2009, p.217). Moral education imparts sound and standard moral conduct and behaviour to people, enables them to acquire moral and spiritual efficiency, know the morals in human conducts, take actions that are right and avoid the ones that are wrong.

Moral education will enable people to ask critical questions that will guide them in their life endeavours. Among these questions are: Is abortion right? Should I cheat during examination? Should I tell the truth or not in the face of danger? What is the good life for man? Is there a standard of right by which all human actions can be judged? If such a single standard exists, on what basis will it be determined? What does goodness or badness of human conduct mean? Does right conduct imply curbing our natural desires, or seeking their fulfillment or some other alternative? What is duty? What is obligation? How should men conduct themselves? What general ideas should they pursue? These and the likes questions are questions of ethical moral value (Uduigwomen, 2001, p.1). Attempt to answer the above questions will equip one with moral knowledge to live a good life and contribute meaningfully to the development of the society. It can also help in character formation.

Need for Moral Education to Boost Morality and for African Societal Development

Moral education is needed in Africa for her development. Sekhaulelo (2021) states that there is decline in morality in South Africa and apart from the economic and political crisis, and the erosion of the core competence to actually get things done in the municipalities, that South Africa is an ailing society with disturbing pathologies in terms of indiscipline, violence, rape, assault, fraud and a failure to accept personal accountability for the high levels of crime, corruption, xenophobic attacks, gender-based violence and disintegration of families. Gurney quoted in Asare-Danso (2018) discloses that Religious and Moral Education was consequently removed from the Basic School curriculum in Ghana in 2007. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana described the integration of religion into other subjects as making religion "an appendix" to those subjects. In response to this public agitations, President Kuffour used his 2008 May Day Anniversary Speech to instruct authorities of the Ghana Education Service to reintroduce Religious and Moral Education as a subject on its own from 2008/2009 academic year. The subject therefore continued to be used in teaching Moral Education in Ghanaian basic schools. Kowino et al quoted in Ngussa et al (2016) equally notes that in Kenya, curriculum and syllabus guides do not elaborate on the element of critical thinking that would lead learners to make accurate moral decisions. With this regard, curriculum guides are expected to be reviewed to include the missing critical thinking skills that are needed in inculcating the ability for school leavers to think critically in regard to moral issues (2016). This situation applies to all African countries.

Accomplishing the aims of moral education in Africa, demands an integration of some components from traditional community-based systems, religious frame works and modern pedagogical approaches, viz. community service-learning curriculum integration, problem-based learning, students' centred learning, experiential learning and critical pedagogy etc. which challenge the patterns that influence individual actions and can be based on economic, social, political or cultural factors. Indigenous methods like vocational training and rituals have been used in African countries like Ghana and Kenya to inculcate a sense of belonging and cultural heritage. Also, community service learning is used to make students learn moral action through repeated moral deeds in their communities.

In one of Aristotle's books entitled *Politics*, he stresses much on the need to live in society by saying that anybody who is unable to live in the society or who has no need of the society because he is sufficient for himself must either be a beast or a god. That means that the person is not part of a society (state) but no human being is a beast or a god. What that means is that everyone needs the society to live in (Aristotle, 1999). The questions are: Can there be a sound African society without morality? Can development take place in African society if there is moral depravity? The answer is no. The state of nature was hostile because there was no morality in it. People were harsh to each other and their rights were not protected and respected. For example, in Nigeria, "the aim of traditional education is to produce all round efficiency: physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, vocational, recreational, political and civil efficiency. Traditional education in Nigeria emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, spiritual and moral values"(Alu and Ugwu, 1999, p.99). In fact, even if one demonstrates proficiency in other aspects of education and lack good character, nobody will appreciate the former. On the other hand, if one is very well behaved, such a person is highly recommended even if he/she is found wanting in other aspects of education. In Igbo, the adage, "*agwa bu mma*" (character is beauty) sums it up (Ugadu, 2008, pp.39-40).

It is very disheartening that in this contemporary time, moral education is not given the adequate attention that it deserves. People now behave anyhow they like. They engage in social vices like disrespectful behaviour, dishonesty, plagiarism, gambling, cultism, indecent dressing, theft, substance abuse, cheating, discrimination, telling lies, indiscipline, sexual immorality, truancy, corruption, bribery, selfism, examination malpractice, keeping late nights, nonchalant attitude to work, discrimination, harassment, violence, electoral malpractice, embezzlement of public funds and ritual killings. All these results in moral depravity in the contemporary African society. Ukegbu et al notes that achievement is judged or measured by wealth acquisition and not by the dignity of labour. They believe so much in the maxim that "the end justifies the means" and with this, they engage in all kinds of atrocities, games and acts in order to make it fast and big. Some very bad ones go to the extent of organizing the helpless young ones into criminal groups, teaching them how to disregard the laws of the land, and resist constituted authorities (2019, p.11). The adults are not exonerated because some of them are going back to get what they did not enjoy during their youth days. This looks like "adult delinquency". They put on dresses that make them appear like street men and women. They also engage in anti-social behaviours like keeping young teenage girls for sexual satisfaction. They engage in child trafficking, rituals, and all manners of wrong doings (Ukegbu et al, 2019, p.11).

At the family level, children are supposed to be taught societal values and norms like truthfulness, honesty, discipline, integrity, tolerance, trust, obedience, commitment, piety, reliability, cooperation, self-reliance, law abiding, gratitude, patience, contentment and respect for authority and elders but suffice to say that this type of education no longer take place at home because parents are busy all the time pursuing wealth. They leave very early in the morning and come back very late in the night. Ukoma and Nnachi observe that children are left on free range like the fowls and they move like sheep without shepherd. Like rolling stones in this circumstance, they gather none. Parents find no time to rebuke, teach, correct, and mete out corrective punishments, hence the manifestation of all kinds of character in our contemporary society (2009, p.199). As things have fallen apart in the moral aspect of contemporary African society, what can we do to have good citizens? Moral education remains the answer. It is only morality that can build up a society but immorality destroys it. Development can never take place in a society where the leaders are morally depraved. Morally depraved leaders engage in corruption and embezzle funds that should be used for the development of the society. This corruption is at a different level.

For Momoh, there are three levels of corruption in the society that are caused by lack of morality. These include: low grade, the medium grade and the high grade. The low-grade corruption is practiced in the lower cadre of any ministry, company or parastatal. The office messenger who is not excited about fetching someone's file until he is tipped is involved in the low grade level. The NEPA technician who wants his palms greased before he goes out to connect or reconnect electricity supply and the policeman manning road blocks or checkpoints are in the same category. Middle or medium grade corruption is practiced in the executive, administrative and managerial cadres of our ministries, companies and parastatals. Corrupt professionals in public and private services belong to this category. High grade corruption actually is what it is-corruption in highest places and by the most highly placed public and private servants. Directors, permanent secretaries, general managers, managing directors and chairmen easily fit into this category, vice chancellors, registrars

and governors of banks also easily answer to this classification. Others are rulers, political leaders, public office holders and some traditional rulers (2005, p.24).

Only a few is free from corruption that takes place as a result of deficiency in morality in the contemporary African society. Political corruption and moral decay are the evils that bedevil our society today. That is the cause of retardation of growth and development that we experience today and get rich quick syndrome that our youth suffer from in this contemporary time. Momoh further states that our problem is moral in the sense that we are corrupt and we hate to be accountable. As a pious and sententious doctrine, moralism can take care of corruption in the sense that if a ruler puts the interest of the people and the nation first he would need not line up his pocket with public funds. Similarly if the ruler thinks of the burden of leadership, the interests of other people and the nation first, he too will not be corrupt and he will perform his duty. But that is taking moralism on the moralistic and pious plane (2005, p.32). Internet has equally contributed to the moral depravity in the society today. Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, television and print media also have a negative role to play in both the young and old. They watch pornographic movies and videos that destroy moral character. This makes it difficult for most people to make sound moral judgement because their minds have been clouded, befuddled and muddled.

Incorporating Moral Education in the School Curriculum: A Necessity

Education systems can integrate moral instructions in the existing school curricula by ingraining it into the shared values and norms that guide students' behavior like integrity, honesty, fairness, compassion, courage, discipline, respect and obedience. Curriculum activities like classroom discussions, group projects and extracurricular activities like sports, arts, debate, volunteering and science clubs can be organized in a way to help students develop a high sense of morality. Integrity, respect, responsibility, empathy and sound decision can equally be stimulated in students by adopting teaching methods like value clarification, role-playing and cognitive moral development. Others include telling moral stories, encouraging community service, reinforcing good behaviour, discussing moral issues and situations. A good and complete curriculum should include moral virtues that enable students to act decently and morally in different situations by finding the right balance between excesses which can be possible by seeking a middle ground between two extremes. Curriculum is the subject matter of instruction. There are two types of curriculum, one is child centered and the other is the subject-matter of instruction. The child centered curriculum makes a complete development of the child; all aspects of the nature must be centred for i.e. physical, mental, social and emotional. The learning experiences are based on the needs of the child in the subject-matter with the basic needs of the child, which is fitted to the subject (Adeyemo, 1965, p.121).

Education is expected to play a very important role in the moral development of an individual. Education cannot do this without developing appropriate curricula as the foundation and ingredient to fashion the direction and sustain the efforts of systematically going through the process, which usually lasts over a specified period of time. In some instances, new curriculum needs to be developed to meet the specific needs. In other situations, existing curricula need to be reviewed or even completely revised (Obioma, 2014, p.53). A curriculum on moral education should be developed to inculcate the right type of behaviours in the students and pupils. Maqsued quoted in Uduigwomen argues that the emphasis on moral education in our school curriculum today is informed by the realization of the deep connection between ethics and education. The current emphasis on moral education is to inculcate the right type of values and attitudes in the students and hence enhance the improvement of the moral tone of the individual and the survival of the society. It is also to promote in the individual the desire to gain the greatest possible knowledge and understanding of whatever kind that will help him make autonomous choices that are based on careful and informed thinking about the issues involved (2001, p.13)

In the National Policy on Education (2004) under the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria; the education planners discovered the fallen standard of moral behaviours and state that education shall inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. This implies that without morality and moral education, the individual can hardly survive in the contemporary society. "This is because no matter how educated one is, if his moral is bad, he is nothing to the community, for nobody wants to know about the stuffs he has in his brain but the amount of good manners and morals he is able to

exhibit to the public, and it is upon this that people are able to assess what type of man he is"(Adeyemo,1965, p.9). Incorporating moral education in the school curriculum will help to provide sound human beings with sound minds who can make sound moral judgements. This will contribute a lot to achieving the goal of education which is the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizens. Only a morally sound person can fully integrate himself or herself in the community. Based on the above premise, moral education becomes imperative to be incorporated in the school curricula. Lack of moral education has caused a lot of havoc to the African contemporary society. What is the cause? Achebe answers thus: "we refuse to see what we do not want to see. That is why we have not brought about the changes which our society must undergo or be written off. We have no option really; if we do not move, we shall be moved" (1983, p.30).

We should wake up from slumber and live up to our moral responsibilities so that we can raise people who will move African society forward. These our self-imposed obligations are:

1. To challenge our educational policy makers to face up to the imperatives of moral education for our generation.
2. To stir up discussions and further research on moral education towards the production of well-behaved persons in our society, and
3. To suggest some out of classroom strategies that could assist in the realization of objectives of education through moral education (Ukoma and Nnachi, 2009, p.168).

CONCLUSION

For moral education to be institutionalized in sustainable ways in a morally sick society like ours, it should be made a compulsory subject in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Various pedagogies should be used to encourage critical thinking and moral reasoning starting from infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Moral education can also be incorporated in different media platforms in order to promote the development of moral principles and shared values. We should go back to the root and start teaching morality to the young ones. Families, schools and churches should live up to their moral responsibilities of bringing up the young ones in the way and fear of God rather than being interested in the acquisition of material things. Children should be told moral lessons, traditions and stories. Parents and elders should start telling fairy tales to the young ones. These fairy tales will teach them bad consequences of telling lies, disobeying one's parents and elders and involving in immoral acts like the fairy-tales of the boy who cried wolf, Cinderella, the tortoise and the hare, the ant and the grasshopper, beauty and the beast, the princess and the pea, Jack and the bean stalk, the ugly duckling etc. Another one is having moral leaders. Our leaders should hold onto morality. They should practice what they preach. They cannot be preaching against examination malpractice yet they engage in election malpractice. Moral regeneration and re-orientation should start from our leaders down to their subjects. Hard work, honesty, truthfulness, obedience and courageous acts should be rewarded while indiscriminate conferment of chieftaincy titles on the rich should stop.

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