

ENTRENCING MORAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines the entrenching moral education in Nigeria for sustainable development. This write up has taken an overview of the general failure in the education sector in Nigeria and in relation to the challenge of moral deficit or the absence of moral training among the learners. The country is today overwhelmed with so many challenges most of which surround the country's youth and inordinate behaviours. Youth restiveness, juvenile delinquencies, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, extortion, bribery and corruption which are common place in Nigeria today are sign posts to the dire need for entrenching moral values in our educational institutions from Nursery to University levels. A large proportion of the problems of the youths and the development of children or their education in general revolve around the absence of moral values and/or training. Scholar in the field has most frequently turned a blind eye to the subject of moral education. The few that have attempted an effort have met a brick wall of resistance from both policy formulators and practitioners alike. This area has hardly enjoyed a robust research impact as the

other areas of educational enterprise. Religious organizations have not helped matters either. In conclusion, the sound learning begins from moral education both from the family and from school and recommends that the school curriculum from Nursery to University levels should be heavily laced with moral values in our children and funding Element of Education and in Particular Moral Education should be intensified.

Keywords: Entrenchment, Education, Morality, Moral Education, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

There has been a tremendous upsurge in moral decadence, generational degeneration and a general loss of moral values in Nigeria most recently. This is particularly the case among young Nigerians, students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions have not been spared from this hydra headed vice that is eating deep into society's fabric. And the wider society, teacher training institutions has been enmeshed into various forms of juvenile delinquencies, anti social behaviours and all categories of inappropriate behaviours.

Government wobbling social and educational policies and the intermittent changes in those policies have further compounded the problem here. Furthermore, the implementation element of our educational policies element has also left much to be desired as far as moral training of children is concerned. Similarly, societal and family values have indicated a trend of deterioration over the years in Nigeria.

Nigeria is part of what was once referred to as "the Dark Continent." By the subjective judgment of Western education, before the advent of colonialism, there was a complete absence of moral values here. Read below the writings and reflections of Wheeler (1961): *"Of the Negro, whose part in world affairs grows apace, we know astonishingly little; where he came from, when and how."*

But this has since been debunked by successive scholars on traditional African religion who have discovered the rich moral values of the peoples here.

STAGES OF MORAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION EXPERIENCED IN NIGERIA

a. Traditional Education and Moral Values in Pre-Colonial Nigeria:

This was the earliest and most strident system of traditional and moral education in every society in Nigeria. Often referred to as *"Informal Education"*, this is the training and education every Nigerian child get from home before school age. It is not often the foundation upon which *"formal education"* is built. This education is passed on to successive generations from the parents –to-child relationship. Every child is expected to imbibe the core-moral values of the culture of their parents before reaching the age of adulthood and maturity.

b. Educational Policy in the Colonial Administration: Lord Lugard et al (1914-1960):

This was the period when the British Colonial Administrative Working in tandem with Christian missionary societies stepped up activities to mould young Nigerians to adopt

Christian and Western values and moral codes. This time, these values and moral codes were written. Therefore; the only way of learning these written coded values was to learn how to read and write.

It must be mentioned however, that the Portuguese were the first to set foot on the land presently called Nigeria. They were said to have arrived Lagos and later Benin as early as 1472. The Portuguese Catholic Mission went on to establish a Seminary in Sao Tome in 1571. But their activities were affected by a combination factors such as the unwelcoming attitude of the locals, the effects of the inhuman Trans Atlantic Slave Trade which was gaining ground then, and the debilitating tropical diseases caused by mosquitoes and tse-tse flies which attacked the visitors then. Shortly, they were forced to fold up unceremoniously thereafter. Centuries later, Christian Missionaries resuscitated their activities in Nigeria. Missionary groups such as the Sudan United Mission (SUM), Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). The Presbyterian Mission, the Methodist Mission and several other missions started to plant churches and schools as early as 1843. But the Colonial Government did not build schools until 1909.

The emphasis in the educational policy on education at this early stage was the 3R^s – namely: Reading, writing and Arithmetic. On the moral front, by “reading” here, was meant the religious reading and recitation of the scriptures – the Bible. Thus, Christian moral education began to gain ground in the heart on many young Nigerians. And while the Church “preached”, the school was saddled with the responsibility to “teach”, these ideals as adequately enshrined in the Bible.

c. Islamic Education:

By this time however, Quoranic Schools (Makarantanallo) were everywhere in many parts of Northern Nigeria. Islam had infiltrated this part of the country as early as the 11th and 12th Centuries AD. This was through the caravanserais (trading groups) and other early contacts with the Arab World with Kanem Bornu Empire. As early as the 9th century, there was evidence of contact with the Islamic world. Find below:

“Islam was first introduced to what is now modern-day Nigeria through contact with traders from North Africa and the Middle East. The earliest record of Islam in Nigeria dates back to the 9th Century when a Muslim trader named Ali Ibn Ghanim visited the kingdom of Kanem-Bornu in present day Chad,”

Education then was not just seen as a means for political and economic liberation from the grip of the colonial masters, but the sheer clean appearance of a school child then was sufficient indication of personal, social, economic, cultural and physiological advancement of the individual. And with good physical appearance came the need for good attitude with all fairness the colonial administration placed high moral standards as a priority and so did the Christian Mission. They did not lay emphasis on school population but the quality of the products.

d. The Educational Policy under Tafawa Balewa Administration (1960 – 1966):

The high point of educational policy of the Balewa Administration was the submission of the Ashby Report on Education in 1960. The Report placed emphasis on the advancement

of higher education rather than the inculcation of moral standards in these schools. The UPE was formally launched in the Western Region by Awolowo who was the Premier of the Western Region then.

e. Educational Policies during the Ironsi – Gowon – Murtala – Obasanjo Military Era (1966 – 1979):

The various military administrations spanning this period initiated steps to raise the enrolment of students into all segments of educational endeavours – Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions. In 1976, the Obasanjo Administration replicated the Universal Free Primary Education for implementation in all parts of the country. This exponentially raised the enrolment of students as well as the need for teacher training institutions to meet this demand. Unfortunately quality teachers became a far cry against their high demand across the country. The result was the turning out of unqualified teachers with the resultant effect of preparing morally bankrupt children.

The civil war had also hampered most of the lofty goals on education of the Gowon administration. Another major feature here was the haphazard takeover of all voluntary and mission schools by government without making adequate plans to run them well and implant the moral element of education.

Obasanjo in 1979 handed to the next civilian administration this huge gap between qualitative education and development.

f. Educational Policies during the Second Republic of the Shehu Shagari Administration (1979-1983):

The civilian administration of Alhaji. Shehu Shagari was quite unprepared to face the huge problem in the education sector – the demand for men, money and materials. But the government went ahead to introduce a new system – 6 – 3 – 3- 4 (6 years in Primary, 3 years in Junior Secondary, 3 years in Senior Secondary and 4 years in University or Tertiary).

To compound the problem, the 1979 constitution empowered states the establish state owned Universities, Colleges of Education, Colleges of Agriculture, Colleges of Health Technology, Polytechnics etc.

Consequently, many states especially in Southern Nigeria took this advantage to build state owned tertiary institutions. Yet, moral education was not given any priority in educational policies at both the State and Federal levels.

g. Moral Education During the Murtala – Buhari – Babangida – Abacha – Abdulsalam Abubakar Military Administration (1983-1999):

The General Murtala administration is adjudged to be one of the best since Nigeria's independence to have deliberately attempted to instill cohesion, discipline and moral values in all aspects of life including the education sector. The introduction of "War Against Indiscipline" during the Buhari administration was to further this policy objective as was aptly enshrined in Decree 21 of 1984 (Udon and Akpa 2010).

For instance, all institutions of learning – secondary and tertiary were compelled to establish WAI units in their schools and military personnel were posted there to oversee their activities. This was geared at enforcing moral values in these schools.

But again, this was short lived by the takeover of government by the Babangida Administration in 1985 who only paid lip service to this policy. And while he decorated the WAI with beautiful uniforms the administration could not demonstrate transparency in governance as was envisioned by his predecessors. Nigeria was back to square one. By the end of that administration, moral values and indiscipline had taken the greater part of the educational enterprise in Nigeria.

h. Moral Education and the Obasanjo – Yar’adua – Jonathan – Buhari- Tinubu Administration (1999 to date):

Like all the previous policies on education, there has not been any real paradigm shift for the inculcation of moral values in our schools in Nigeria. Secondly, political leaders, especially during the present civilian administration have been interested in repeating failed promises in developing the education sector. They have also failed in entrenching moral values in our youths.

But worst still, the activities of Boko Haram, Bandits and Fulani Herdsmen, which has spanned almost throughout this period unabated, has further negatively depleted the already deplorable situation. This has further reduced any genuine effort in this direction. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) reports that between 2022 and 2023, no fewer than 1,436 school children had been abducted with 15 months mostly in the North Central and North West Nigeria. In a related report, eight years after the Chibok abduction, no fewer than 11,536 schools mostly in Northern Nigeria have been closed down. By July 2023, the figure must have increased by a wider margin. Still in another report no fewer than 2295 teachers have been killed in the North Eastern Part of Nigeria alone between 2009 and 2022. The threat to child upbringing, children’s education and peaceful co-existence is as strident as the destruction of moral values in this part of the country.

THE LINK BETWEEN MORAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The evidence is overwhelming that there is a positive co-relationship between moral education and sustainable development. Firstly, moral education provides the basis upon which sustainable development takes place. Moral education serves as the “base” upon which sustainable development as “superstructure” is built. Moral education is the foundation upon which the teacher as a builder continues to raise other levels of the child’s acumen and learning level.

Secondly, sustainable development is the by-product of moral development. The quality, quantity and sustainability of development largely depend on the absence of human moral deficits (immorality). Sustainable development is guaranteed where there is a sound moral base in a people.

Furthermore, Wynne (1963) wrote:

Education is thus a divine process in which God throughout human history is engaged in man-making. As a human process, education is also a function of the home, the Church, the School and the State. And the self as the key factor.

Indeed, Moral Education helps shape the mind. It helps people cultivate abilities and qualities that are useful throughout one's lifespan. These qualities include thinking ability, language and communication, skills, decision making skills, sound interaction and responsibility, personal identity, developing and ideology, developing moral character with acceptable values, sound judgment, humane traits, self control, goodness, service to others and humanity, kindness etc.

Holmes (1991) lists eleven objectives that moral education in a Christian context should achieve: Consciousness raising, Consciousness sensitizing, Values analysis, Values clarification, Values criticism, Moral imagination, Ethical analysis, Moral decision making, Responsible agents, Virtue development and Moral identity. By this premise therefore, a morally sound character has a higher capacity to assimilate, decide and deliver in every given situation compared to a morally bankrupt individual. This is because the aforementioned qualities go a long way to help self goals in the morally sound mind compared to morally bankrupt mind.

THE TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A MORAL FRAMED MIND/CHILD

- a. **Fairness:** A morally sound learner measures, the goodness of a thing or action from the perspective of fairness. Fairness refers to forming a quality of judgment that places others before the self. A quality of judgment that takes into consideration the implication of every decision on others.
- b. **Affection:** Affection means developing a love for others. It is a feeling of fondness or likeness for someone. Every human being love to be loved, liked or admired. This in turn generates a reciprocation of liking or love to the one conveying his feelings.
- c. **Caring:** Caring simply refers to taking the pains, time or cost to bother about others and the worries. One who takes his time and pains to attend to the problems of other express care. It is an important qualification for a moral learner or individual.
- d. **Honestly:** This is the attribute of being truthful and sincere. An honest individual insists on what is right, truthful and factual. An honest individual does not opposed to ox is being gored in presenting the truth as opposed to falsehood. The testimony of an honest person is reliable and points to justice.
- e. **Tolerance:** An important virtue of moral education is tolerance. Tolerance means bearing with one another. This also means carrying one another's burdens or exercises:.
- f. **Respect for Differences:** Respect demands that individual, social, economic or even religious differences must be accepted as a moral law. Just as no two individuals are perfectly the same, it becomes morally, incumbent that teaches and students must respect the differences of each other.
- g. **Perseverance:** To persevere means to withstand. It also means to continue in the course of action despite the difficulties or the absence of success. The common factor in perseverance is withstanding suffering. This is sometimes referred to as the moral minds last bus stop.

- h. Resilience:** This refers to the attribute of springing back to action, shape or progress after a distortion or harm. Resilience is the ability to take available options to re-strategize or reorganize a bad situation. Every morally sound mind develops the virtue of resilience.

THE JUSTIFICATION FOR MORAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

- a. Moral Education helps in moulding the character of our young ones and directs their minds towards meeting set standards and appropriate ways of behaviour.
- b. Moral Education creates harmony and understanding between the child and his parents or guardian; between members of the extended family; between members of the community; between members of different economic, social and religious faiths; and between different segments of society at large.
- c. Moral Education enhances the individual's better understanding of civic responsibility and eases the process of governance. It also reduces the cost of governance investigations, litigations, and expenditure on security.
- d. Moral Education eases and enhances the teaching and learning process. This is achieved through instilling disciplines and cohesion in the system.
- e. Moral education guarantees a future and a hope for the child and the society at large. A hope in this life and the life hereafter.

THE WAY FORWARD

It is high time to check Nigeria's drift to self destruction and possible extinction as a result of her intractable moral decay in our society today. The way forwarded here will include among them the under listed strategies.

1. The school curriculum from Nursery to University levels should be heavily laced with moral values in our children. The present curriculum is dry and lacking as regards the resuscitation of moral values at all levels of education.
2. There is need for a more inclusive approach in educational planning. The present situation where the direct beneficiaries are relegated to the background at the panning of educational programmes must be adjusted. Parents and community leaders must take their place to play key roles in educational planning and organizational structures.
3. Materials, resources and teaching aids must conform to the new moral ideals. This means books; novels and magazines with immoral contents should be removed from the school environment. Film clips and videos which have suspicious contents should be discarded and withdrawn forthwith from the students and young learners.
4. Non-exploitation of students. It has been observed in most public primary and secondary schools, there are frequent exploitations of students who are forced to use study hours to carry out manual labour for their teachers – either on their farms, houses or other projects.
5. Instilling in the young ones the freedom to vote and be voted for. There is a need to encourage and develop faith in our institutional democracy. Young learners from the classroom should be groomed in good habits and virtues in the selection of their leaders. For instance, selecting a class monitor or representative instead of appointing them.
6. Freedom of faith and worship. One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria today is the question of freedom of worship. While this is fully guaranteed in the 1999 Constitution, it is hardly true, whether in practice, this is so. The case of Leah, the teenage girl in Northern Nigeria who was abducted six years ago but was denied release on account of her faith-

being the only Christian among over one hundred students from Dapchi after all others were set free.

7. Implementation and supremacy roles in support of moral education. There is need to revitalize the supervisory roles in enforcing moral education in Nigeria. This will require assessment and reportage of periodic target achievements on child growth and development.
8. The role of parents and Guardians: Parents and guardians must brace up and take their place in the moral upbringing upon which the school build a child's moral virtues. The continuation of this critical role at the child progress in school becomes more and more relevant.
9. The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations: They need to create a support system and encouragement of all well meaning programmes aimed at increasing the child's ability to attain sound moral virtues must be central in the activities of NGO's. Providing materials, teaching aids and other instructional materials such as books, pamphlets, flyers etc can go a long way in enhancing a morally sound and egalitarian society, equity and social cohesion.
10. The Funding Element of Education and in Particular Moral Education: In teaching and learning, nothing much can be achieved if the funds are not made available or being given haphazardly. Teoho (2000) notes this in the following except:

Another role player is the National Primary Education Commission. This commission was established in 1988, abolished in 1991, and re-established by Decree No. 96 of 1993. The Commission has been unable to meet the demands of implementing Universal Basic Education Scheme due to the limited financial resources at their disposal.

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