

ETHICS AND VALUES EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Ethics and moral values entail gaining the strength and independence to act in accordance with what is “moral” even if the “right” way is the more complicated one. To this end, ethics and values should be the heartthrob of any nation that desires the actualization of sustainable development. But the modern global dispensation has had its toll on the moral lives of the people and this has brought about a dwindling in the perception of people on what constitute morality. Be that as it may, for Nigeria to be safe and our environment conducive, we must not joke with ethics and values. Rather, we must hold in high esteem the moral development of our children from the age of 3 to 15. This is true because when they grow up, children constantly acquire new cognitive and motorical skills. At the same time, they get a sense of morality. Regrettably however, there have been cases of injustice, corruption, militancy, insurgencies, and other criminal groups parading themselves around the country. These show that moral laxity has become the order of the day. Even those in government are also culpable as many of them are corrupt and inept. The import of all these is that morality which should have been the parameter for controlling these vices no longer functions. This study therefore, posits that for there to be sanity in our social and moral lives as a nation, we must covet the principles enshrined in ethics and values as there cannot be development in a situation where ethics and values is not given its pride of place in the country.

Keywords: Ethics, values, moral problems, social and moral development

Introduction

Ethics refers to the guidelines for conducts that address questions of morality while values is defined as the principles and ideals which help them in making the judgment of what is more important. That is to say that ethics is a system of moral principles, in contrast to values which is the stimuli of our thinking. From time immemorial, the quest for moral principle is an intrinsic phenomenon which makes social life governable and blissful. As such, every person, irrespective of age, colour, sex, or social standing is subject to the dictates of the moral principle. This is because the concept of morality serves a holistic function as it is the bedrock upon which the edifice of a truly righteous and egalitarian society rests. Implicitly, ethics and values form a fundamental aspect of every culture as it outlines comprehensively, codes of behaviour or conducts for the individual on the one hand, and the society on the other. Morals refer to human behaviour where morality is the practical activity and, ethics describes the theoretical, systematic and rational reflection upon that human behaviour (Churchill, 1982). Values are linked to beliefs and attitudes and guide human behaviour (Rennie, 2007). Morals, values and ethics are strongly attached to society, spirituality and culture (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1991). There are three meanings of ethics. First, ethics is commonly taken as a synonym for morality, the universal values and standards of conduct that every rational person wants every other to follow. Secondly, ethics is a well-established branch of philosophy that studies the sources of human values and standards, and struggle to locate them within theories of human individual and social condition. Thirdly, professional ethics, and it is not universal nor is it ethical theory; it refers to the special codes of conduct adhered to by those who are engaged in common pursuit. Professional ethics is an integral part of a profession (Kovac, 1996).

However, Obasola (2003a: 1) avers that “morality is not an abstract phenomenon but a real practical means of developing the sense of justice in the people as a prerequisite for social solidarity, welfare and happiness in the society”. It is so crucial not only to the individual but also to the society at large. Consequently, the imperative of morality and ethics is to establish the justifiability or otherwise of an action or to establish whether an action is good or reprehensible. While morality and ethics are part of a way of life and cannot be separated from all other aspects of life experiences (Kang & Glassman, 2010), moral education aims at promoting students’ moral development and character formation. The theoretical framework of moral education is supported by moral philosophy, moral psychology and moral educational practices (Han 2014). To this end, morality regulates the personal and interpersonal relationships of peoples within an established social setup,

thereby paving the way for social harmony, which is the harbinger of socio-political development. That is to say that the development of man- socially, politically, and economically, will be incomplete without a residue of morality.

Again, ethics is the branch of philosophy which tries to probe the reasoning behind our moral life. The critical examination and analysis through the concepts and principles of ethics help to justify our moral choices and actions (Reiss, 1999). In real- life situation “ethics” is frequently used as a more consensual word than “morals” which is less favoured. Many students and professionals cannot find the sharp distinction between these two terms (McGavin, 2013). The key philosophical question for the study and promotion of moral education relies on the epistemic status of moral reflection or understanding and moral agency (Carr, 2014).

However, technological development orchestrated by globalization and civilization have attenuated and grossly affected our moral ethos. This has brought about a breakdown of the social structure on which society rests. Patrick (1998), notes that civilization has had and is still having a lot of negative impacts on the life of the Africans, most especially Nigerians. The problem of decline in public morality and national discipline in Nigeria is very alarming. Every sphere of life is not spared by this cankerworm which has eaten deep into every facet of the society. This prevailing situation has been incisively portrayed by Iwe (1991:82) who surmises that “over-concern with one’s self-importance and pre-occupation with self-aggrandizement naturally lead to total indiscipline or moral decadence from the self to the society”.

Moral laxity and other social vices especially as depicted in corruption in high and low places, drug trafficking, smuggling, advanced free fraud popularly called 419, increasing crime wave, theft, robbery, religious and ethnic violence, injustice, examination malpractice, sorting and so on are now the order of the day in Nigeria. Abogunrin (1994:5) states categorically that “there was never a time when humanity was so degraded and spiritually blind as is evidence in the madness we see around us daily in Nigeria”. Apparently, meaningful development has been halted and the nation is in the throes of disintegration.

It is against this backdrop that the study advocates for the re-orientation of ethics and moral values as a panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria. Attention will be placed on teaching morals, values, ethics and character education in schools.

Causes of Moral Problems in Nigeria

At this juncture, it is important to examine the causes of these moral vices that are bedeviling the Nigerian nation. They include:

Break down of the family unit/lack of parental influence

As we all know, the home is the foundation for acceptable behaviour. The quality of this foundation determines the quality of subsequent effort towards desirable behaviour. There is a break-down of the family structure due to the individualistic tendencies now exhibited by our people due principally to the economic situation in the country. This has also forced many parents to abandon their responsibilities to their children and to their families for a white collar job that keeps them on the street for a better part of the day. The care of children are now trusted into the hands of “house girls and boys” who in turn will corrupt the children. The end product of this seemingly “abandoned children” is moral decadence.

Materialism: This is a factor which has been responsible for the high level of moral problems facing the Nigerian nation. It has been noted that attention of people has been shifted from morality to instant wealth. This desire for instant wealth has led many people to get involve in acts that are inimical to the society not minding whose ox is gored. It is in this regard that Awokoya (1978:3 states categorically that: “The type of environment now developing is very materialist. Most people love and worship money because of what it can buy. In the quest for it, kindness, love, justice, social responsibility gets undervalued and the virtues of yesterday are replaced by the vices of today”. This presupposes that attention has shifted from the things which are of value and emphasis is now placed on material gains. These materialistic tendencies have a negative implication for our development.

Mind Set: Kehinde, (2015) states that this is the problem which is affecting most Nigerians causing them to behave in a particular way. Also, Osagie (1985:133) asserts: “By mental set is meant an unconscious mental disposition to behave in a particular way irrespective of the circumstance. It is a rigid adherence to a “way” of doing things whether or not that way “way” works...These characteristic mental set retards rather than facilitates activity. It leads to apathy in the performance of official duties; it creates inefficiency rather than efficiency, and it complicates rather than simplify”.

This has engendered a lackadaisical attitude among Nigerians in the way they attend to issues. There is a phenomenon now called “the Nigerian factor” or the Nigerian or African time, which permits lateness in all official responsibilities. This mental set encourages indolence, laziness, confusion,

discouragement, apathy and inefficiency in both public and private lives. The nonchalant attitude ultimately engenders low productivity and hinders the sustainable development of the nation.

Effects of the Demeaning of Ethics and Values

In this materialistic world which values only worldly possessions and demeans the essence of character, it needs to be asked how one can develop and maintain self-awareness and self-consciousness during the course of our life. Almost two decades ago, words such as jealousy, distrust, corruption abuse, were highly unlikely to be heard of. Today, these words have become an everyday occurrence. What does this tell us about society, individuals and the nation? A society unappreciative of moral values, ethics and proper mannerism is not worth living in.

Lack of morals and ethics has resulted in individuals being selfish, greedy and corrupt. On the other hand, lack of respect, civility, proper etiquette and a manner have made it difficult for many young people to maintain healthy relationships and interactions with others.

Despite morals and ethics being of great importance, the individuals in the modern society do not observe them, and as a result, many negative things can be seen. First, failure to act in a moral and ethical way has resulted in many people being greedy and less concerned about humanity. What differentiates humans from an animal are the ability to act in a humane way, and ethical as well as moral values are the strongest tools of ensuring a person is better than an animal. When individuals fail to observe the acceptable moral and ethical values in the society, it means that they can do anything, even harming their fellow human beings as long as they can benefit personally. This is the case in the business world. Some businesses have been found guilty of offering unsafe products to customers, such as Samsung in the recent case of its Note7 smart phone batteries exploding. On the other hand, managers in the business world have acted in the unethical way leading to the collapse of giant multinational companies, making many individuals jobless due to their greed. For instance, the collapse of Enron and Lehman Brothers, which collapsed due to senior managers' greed for better bonuses, forcing them to manipulate financial figures, eventually resulting in the collapse of these two organizations and if the managers could have observed moral and ethical values, and then they would have acted in the right way.

Also, failure of individuals observing moral and ethical values has resulted in cases of crime rising, such as homicide, theft, rape, and drug trafficking and so on. Due to deterioration of morals and ethics, most of the individuals in the

modern society engage in criminal behaviours without fear. Young people are easily joining criminal gangs which are terrorizing innocent citizens through raping women, stealing, and murdering people.

The sum total of the effects of degradation of ethics and moral values is myriad as a lot of negative consequences are discernible. Among these problems is the stunted economic growth which the country is experiencing due largely to the hyper inflation, low capital utilization and decline in foreign investments. The country is enmeshed in foreign debts and the economy is controlled by a group of cabals who are interested in their pockets. As such, a lot of money is siphoned into foreign accounts while the citizens of the country are being pauperized. No public utility or infrastructure is functioning due to this moral recklessness. In the past one year, power generation and distribution have nosedived throwing the country into complete darkness and forcing lots of businesses to collapse and the resultant effect is unemployment and retrenchment of workers.

Moreover, there is the danger of insecurity. Lives of people are threatened from time to time by miscreants and hired assassins. Cases of armed robbery attacks are rampant. Abogunrin (1994:5) surmises that “the loss of the sense of security in human existence today is due to injustice, to violence, to the sinister aspects of the present day politics, to religious wars, to economic problems, unemployment...etc”. The nation has been plunged into series of violent attacks from different militant groups and this paints a picture of a nation that is incapable of solving its problems.

What about the education **sector**? In this area, things have fallen apart. Educational institutions which are suppose to be the bedrock of moral instructions have been hit by this cancer orchestrated by poor funding. The rapacity of strikes and industrial actions in our institutions is ferocious. This culminates in half baked graduates with little or nothing to show at the end of the day. It equally accounts for high incidence of cultism in our tertiary institutions. Again on the part of the students, loss of morals has made a good number of them to engage all their time viewing pornographic videos with their android phones. When it is time for examinations, you see them engaging in examination malpractice. Some even go to the extent of “sorting” their lecturers in order to pass.

One can go on and on with the devastating effects of the rubbishing of ethics and moral values as it cuts across all sectors. The truth, therefore, is that the demeaning of ethics and moral values remains the cause of the problems facing us as a nation and until urgent steps are taken to remedy it, Nigeria will

continue to wallow in this moral mess. In a nutshell, national growth and development cannot be achieved given the state of moral decadence staring us in the face. Now, the question that demands an urgent answer is: what can we do as a nation to overcome these ethical and moral problems to achieve sustainable development?

Teaching Ethics in Education

In our present age, ethics has an important place in all areas of life. Ethics has also become important in education, because education is a fundamental process of human life. Therefore, ethics is very important subject in education. We can easily reach all knowledge by technology. In order to understand the importance of ethics, ethics should be placed as a course in educational system. In general, ethics is moral philosophy. The term ethics is derived from Greek term Ethos which means custom, character. It is related to our values and virtues. Therefore, our actions and our experiences in everyday life are the subjects of ethics. We have the capacity to think about our choices, so we are responsible for all our decisions and actions. In addition to this, it can be said that ethics is the study of what is wrong or what is right. Good-evil, right-wrong, virtue-vice, justice-injustice are some ethical concepts. Ethics is divided into two parts: theoretical ethics and applied ethics. Theoretical ethics include normative ethics, descriptive ethics and met ethics. Applied (practical) ethics refers to professional ethics.

Normative ethics is the study of what makes actions right and wrong. Meta ethics is about the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions. Descriptive ethics is about facts. It examines ethics from observations of actual choices made by moral agents in practice.

Applied ethics examines the particular ethical issues of private and public life. Professional ethics is one of the important branches of applied ethics. In general, professional ethics can be defined as standards or codes to provide people to guidance to their professional lives. In general, there are four basic principles in ethical codes:

1. Honesty
2. Confidentiality
3. Conflict of interest
4. Responsibilities

Education

In general sense, education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. Etymologically, the word education is derived from the Latin Educo, which means educate, train.

Education is a process of acquiring information. It means teaching and learning. Education affects on human mind, character and physical abilities. The history of education begins with the human history itself. Education is also a way to become civilized individuals and it maximizes human potential. Culture and cultural heritage can be transmitted by education, because the main occupation of man is to pass knowledge, skills and attitude from one generation to another.

In ancient Greece, some philosophers' views of education such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle contribute to the development of our present educational system. In general, they all believe that the purpose of education is to improve humankind. Socrates' method is still used in modern educational practices. In this method, teachers ask some questions to improve the intellectual abilities of students and students try to answer these questions by using their reasons. Today's educational theories are based on the philosophies of these philosophers. Plato, who was the founder of Idealism, claimed that the aim of education was to develop individual's abilities to better serve society. He also was the founder of Academy, the first university of the world. For him, both men and women had the right to have education. He claimed that there were different stages of education. According to him, education was a key element for a society.

On the other hand, Aristotle who was the father of realism believed that only citizens could be educated. He believed that educated person was a fulfilled person. He defended theoretical, practical and technical education. Education helps the development of bodily and mental faculties. Education builds character, gives knowledge and helps progressing of state. Education makes a man complete and it also plays an important role in developing society and state. Schools are basic frameworks of education. School helps children to become good citizens and human beings. This is possible only by ethical education, so teaching ethics in school is important.

The Role of Ethical Education in National Development

At this juncture, it becomes expedient to discuss why ethics should be taught and what kind of ethics should be taught in schools. The importance of ethical education in nation building/ national development cannot be overemphasized. Teaching ethics in schools will help us reflect on the moral dimensions of the decisions we make. Moral decisions are difficult, and will often be the most important decisions of our life. Ethics education can be divided into four stages:

1. Ethics education in family
2. Ethics education in school

3. Ethics education in university
4. Ethics education in business

In family, ethics education should focus on descriptive facts. Children observe their parents' (role models) ethical behaviours and they learn social facts about ethical behaviour.

In school, students learn what is right and what is wrong. This is a value education or character education. In educational systems, general ethics is associated with religion. Therefore, instead of ethics course, students take religious course. However, students should learn values clarification, and making ethical decisions. In addition, school fosters to students become trustful, responsible and just person. Ethics in school can benefit to this.

In university, ethics should be professional ethics. Only some students can take ethics course related to their professions in universities, because in universities, ethics is not offered as a course in all departments. This kind of ethical education provides students to realize what is right, make good decisions about ethical issues in their professions. In addition, students learn to evaluate different moral standpoints.

Business ethics refers to contemporary organizational standards, principles, sets of values and norms that govern the actions and behaviour of an individual in the business organization. In business, people learn some ethical codes about their occupations. This kind of ethics tells how people should act in business life.

Why Should We Teach Ethics?

After we leave school, few of us will ever need to solve another quadratic equation, or remember the minutiae of cell biology. But we will be faced with moral decisions. We face these decisions every day. Most of the time, we do not think about it, but ethics is everywhere: in the products we buy, the careers we choose, and the way we interact with others. The first reason to teach ethics is to help us reflect on the moral dimensions of the decisions we make.

The second reason to teach ethics is that moral decisions are difficult, and will often be amongst the most important decisions of our life. In making them, we will be almost entirely dependent upon our own capacities. We cannot escape the ultimate responsibility for making them, and even when we can seek the counsel of those we trust, we may receive competing advice.

Moreover, there is a public interest in teaching ethics. The ability to reason morally is a fundamental requirement of good citizenship, and an aspect of

‘civic education’ broadly understood. It is important that citizens know how laws are made, and how decisions can be challenged. But a robust democracy requires more: it requires citizens with the capacity to reflect on how their country ought to be. Issues as diverse as taxation and inequality, the limits to free speech, and the claims of future generations, all have a moral dimension. Citizens need to be able to spot flaws in arguments and weigh competing considerations if they are to exercise ‘self government’ in the fullest sense.

Gardelli, Alerby, and Perssons present three arguments about why ethics should be taught in schools. These arguments are socialization argument, the quality of life argument, and the tool argument. According to socialization argument school should help students to become good citizens. To do this, ethics, ethics is necessary in schools. The second argument, the quality of life argument claims that school helps students to live a good life. “School has an obligation to foster the students to become persons who act in a morally correct way. This is possible by ethics being taught in schools” (Gardelli, 2014: 19). Then according to the last argument, the tool argument, “the students’ results in other subjects would improve if the students had ethics in school”. (Gardelli, 2014: 19). From these arguments, it can be concluded that ethics is necessary in schools because it provides a better life to students and equally make them good citizens who will make morally strong decisions for the development of the nation.

Conclusion

There is no gain saying the fact that the rate of moral decadence in Nigeria is disturbingly alarming and this has affected the pace of development in the country. In this regard, there is the urgent need for a re-orientation, a re-engendering and a re-focusing on our moral values with a view to actualizing our potentials and harnessing our resources, both human and material, for a greater, purposeful, egalitarian and vibrant society.

To this effect, all hands must be on deck to actualize this goal. In this regard, ethics education must be given a pride of place in all our educational institutions starting from the primary to the tertiary levels. Also, every citizen must imbibe the culture of moral value recognizing that “society as a sui-generi is real only to the extent to which the members are instructed and guided by their value system” (Isokun 2003:123). This presupposes that every social institution such as the family, the church, the schools, and the government must take the culture of punctuality very seriously, we must preach against violence, insolence and other vices which will project the nation in bad light.

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