MORAL EDUCATION AND IT'S IMPLICATION FOR THE CHARACTER FORMATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IMO STATE

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Abstract

The study examined moral education and its implications for the character formation of Secondary School Students in Imo State. Three research objectives and questions were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted philosophical research design because of the nature of research. The researchers collected his data from textbooks, existing records, journals and materials gotten from the internet. In analysing the data,speculative, prescriptive and analytic modes of philosophy were implored. The moral worth of an action is determined by the human will, which is the only thing in the world that can be considered good without qualification. Good will is exercised by acting according to moral duty or law. The study also pointed out that, the basis of moral education is not to teach children a lot of moral contents, but instead to help the children to learn the principles of morality that will form their character. Discipline makes it possible for parents to pass their values and attitudes to their children in an atmosphere of genuine love. The study concluded that challenges teachers face in the teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students includes exclusion of moral education in the curriculum, lack of trained teachers, lack of skills which are necessary to make good or reasonable moral decisions and to act on them etc. Also, teachers training and skill acquisition enhance their teaching of moral education. It was therefore recommended that teachers and school administrators should be properly trained to handle the teaching of moral education, ministry of education should include the teaching of moral education in secondary schools, to improve on the character of students and disciplinary measures should always be put in place to check erring students. With this, student's character can be checked.

Keywords: Moral, Education, Character, Training,Teachers, Discipline.

Introduction

A desire for an effective moral order has become an issue of both serious and urgent concern to all rational minds in recent times, which includes young people. The concern for a sound moral status is occasioned by the alarming rate of decline in the moral consciousness among youth and adults in the Nigerian society. This

decline has become a disease eating systematically into the very vein of the entire nation. In the last few years, the Nigerian nation began to experience ever than before a serious collapse in discipline, not only in the educational institutions but also in other sectors of the nation.

Morality as it has been argued is the life wire of any successful society. Therefore, a society that is faced with the problem of immorality is not only being inactive but indeed sick. This is why our political, economic and even religious life is in danger. The Nigeria of today is characterized by all forms of immoral practices ranging from robbery, cheating, forgery, fraud, disrespect for constituted authority, lawlessness etc. It is against this background that our school system is expected to renew its efforts in handling issues of moral regeneration in our schools with all sense of dedication. There is no doubt that the Nigerian secondary school system is failing in its duty towards inculcation of expected moral values in Nigerian students. Mkpa (1999) observed that part of the reason why morality appears to be at its lowest ebb in the Nigerian society is the lack of focus on sound values in our schools.

Elliot in Ogbebor (1996), defined education as a means of preserving the way of life in which the person believes. Peters as cited by Oroka (2005 p.45) viewed education as "the intentional bringing about of a desirable state of mind, and relates to processes and activities that can contribute to or involves something that is worthwhile". Flowing from the definitions of education, it is necessary to emphasis here that, implicit in the definitions given earlier is the fact that, education is a moral concept. Moral, on the other hand, has been defined as standards, principles of good behaviour. Thus, moral values imply behaviour, attitude exhibited and encouraged by members of the society for the fact that they are both good and desirable to mankind generally as against those behaviours condemned and discouraged. Examples of moral values include faithfulness, self-discipline, honesty, humility, brotherliness, patience, hardworking, truthfulness etc.

Peters in Okorodudu (2004), opined that moral education is simply a process which is aimed at promoting in the individual a desire to gain the greatest possible knowledge and understanding of his ability whatever kind, which will help within the framework and interest. For Okorodudu, moral education involves the internalization of the societal values in relation to the do's and the don'ts of a given community to her citizens. Maqsud (1994) asserted that, moral education should be able to produce an individual who could manifest the following behavioural trait;

(a) A positive commitment towards the value of morality.

(b) Ability to communicate with others.

(c) The ability to understand feelings of others and those of his own.

Similarly, moral education can be said to mean any activity/process geared towards helping the individual imbibe the societal norms or moral values in order for such an individual to become useful to himself, others and the society in general. Thus, the influence of the school and other agents of socialization on the moral development of the citizen is quite fundamental.

In the light of moral education, Kant (1963) subscribed to the fundamental pedagogical position that education is imperative for the development of mankind. Precisely because all human beings have 'such a strong inclination to freedom, they must be 'accustomed from an early age to accept the dictates of reason'. He further pointed out that the idea of education is a yardstick for the practice of education. It allows a critique of education and a critique of schools and training. Even if it has not yet been put into practice, or has only been done so in its basic principles by a process of approximation, the 'idea of an education that develops all the natural gifts of man' appears to contain the 'truth'. Kant named the following as the main tasks for education: (a) disciplined thinking; (b) creation of a cultivated outlook; (c) enhancement of civilization; and (d) imparting moral rectitude (Maqsud, 1994). He believed that education in his day took care of the first three of these tasks, but complained that 'we are living in an age of discipline, culture and civilization but the age of moral rectitude still lies in the distant future' (Maqsud, 1994).

On the other hand, character education is closely linked to the concepts of moral and values education, the latter two concepts are generally broader in scope, if much less specific about what constitutes character education. Consequently, character education can be understood to be a specific approach to moral or values education. The definition of character education can be quite complicated because of the many values it encompasses. The definition is universal and the outcomes are distinguished. Pearson and Nicholson (2000), feel that there are three interconnected areas that represent good character: self, others, and the community. It differs from some other forms of moral education in that it prescribes specific values and forms of behaviour. Character is ultimately about who we are and who we become, good or bad. It constitutes an interlocked set of personal values which normally guide our conduct, but these values are not a fixed set easily measured or incapable of modification. Character education is theact of deliberately teaching character traits such as tolerance, loyalty, respect for thecreator and for the natural environment, kindness, honesty, self-control, cleanliness, etc. Schaeffer (1999) recommended that educators and reform advocates give up thenumerous band-aid student discipline approaches designed to curb disruptive and violentbehaviour in today's schools, which can form their character. He contends that turning to such quick-fix, knee-jerksolutions are just another reactive response. He strongly advocates that schools, parents,the community, teachers, administrators, and society seek out a much more rewarding long-term solution, preferably character education. He stated that "We must focus on theroot causes of violence and anti-social behaviour and take the methodical and importantsteps to create school environments where these types of behaviour cannot thrive-wherethey can be detected and thwarted early on" (Schaeffer, 1999 p.56).

Character education experts, Rayan and Bohlin (1999), stress that students must be encouraged to be intellectually honest by grounding their value education discussion in facts and by respecting the religious significance attached to certain moral issues related to friendship, family, health, work, love, sex, drugs, leisure time, personal taste, or politics (Kirchenbaum, 2000). If not, the trend that this new generation is bent on self-destruction will continue. For a better society, especially among the upcoming youths, there is need for moral education in secondary schools. Imo State in Nigeria is a place where a lot of social vices takes place and will need young people with good morals to be able to overcome the menace.

The Problem

Developing strong character traits in children is an important issue in today's world. Teaching of moral education in secondary schools can positively influence student success in academics as well as their social interaction. By this, they will develop the right attitude towards things around them, speak respectfully toward others and become responsible citizens by caring for others. It is important that educators understand the impact moral education can have.

Over time, statistics have shown in Imo State that, sexual promiscuity, indiscipline, gang activity and other vices are on the increase , yet little attention is been paid on it, rather their focus is on other things such as; drop-out prevention, annual yearly progress and test scores. These have become a great challenge, as character formation of the teeming youth is important. According to Kie (2008) regarding teaching character: with today's emphasis on standards and testing, it's critical to remember the true goal of education, as Socrates said, 'to make kids both smart and good. It is therefore important to understand how teachers' training can contribute in students' character formation. Also, the academic performance of students can be affected by their behaviours, which is why teaching of moral education is vital. It is against this bedrock, that the researchers examine moral education as it applies to character formation of secondary school students.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate moral education and its implications for the character formation of secondary schools' students in Imo State. Specifically, the study will be designed to:

i. Find out the challenges faced by the teachers in the teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State.
ii. Examine how teachers' training could enhance teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State.
iii. Ascertain the strategies that can be adopted in the teaching of moral education in secondary school for students' character formation in Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study;

i. What challenges are faced by the teachers in the teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State?
ii. In what ways does teachers' training enhance teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State?
iii. What are the strategies that can be adopted in the teaching of moral education in secondary school for students' character formation in Imo State?

Methodology

The study adopted a philosophical research design. Method of data collection included textbooks, records, journals and materials gotten from the internet. In the method of data analysis speculative, prescriptive (also normative) and analytic modes of philosophy were applied in analysing the data which was aimed at explaining clearly moral education for character formationof secondary school students.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What challenges are faced by teachers in the teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State?

Moral education has always been a continuous aim of education. The function of schools, it was believed, was not only to make people smart but also to make them good. However, with industrialization, the moral aim of education receded to the background as the demands of capitalist markets centered mainly on the provision of skilled manpower, culturally ready to integrate into labour markets. The return of moral education to the limelight is attributable to the fact that modern societies increasingly have to deal with disturbing trends both within schools, and in the wider society. Mounting discipline problems culminating in violent outbursts, alarming rates of teenage pregnancy and drug abuse are phenomena often explained by the breakdown of the family or are generally situated in the aftermath of industrialization. Many have also located the dysfunction of the school as one contributing factor to the degeneration of social mores. Prime among these dysfunctions is the fact that schools are not adequately providing for one important aspect of child and adolescent development, that is, moral education which have tendency of reshaping student's character.

Secondary school teachers are subject to transfer from time to time. The 'school' to which an individual teacher belongs cannot but influence his teaching of moral instruction. This challenge should not be taken lightly while designing moral instruction curriculum for the students.

Another challenge likely to be faced in teaching of moral instruction in secondary school level is the mode of teaching the subject. Teaching morality is one thing but moralizing is another thing entirely. To know how to teach moral instruction is never the same as moralizing the students. Example is always better than precept. What this point boils down to is that, it is possible for a teacher to be able to teach moral concepts and theories very well but if he does not live up to what he teaches, the desired outcome may not be achieved. Teachers of moral instructions have to be more careful than other people, colleagues, students and neighbours because of the sensitive nature of their subject.

Availability of teachers and teaching materials, especially, textbooks may also constitute challenge to teaching of moral instructions in secondary schools. Following the poor disposition of the federal government towards humanities some years past, students were encouraged and motivated to study science courses. Universities were to give 60% admission to those in sciences and 40% to those in humanities. The outcome of this policy is that, unlike what obtained before, the number of students in science related courses is higher than those in humanities. To teach moral instruction in the secondary schools will be hampered in the interim by shortage of teachers. Inadequate textbooks on Kant's philosophy on moral instruction will also be a problem at the beginning.

Award of marks and scores may also constitute a great challenge to teaching moral instruction in secondary school level. A student that writes the most correct points, discusses them in organized manner, usually gets the highest marks in subjects like Chemistry or Agriculture. The aim of testing students in these subjects is to find out if they actually 'know', and one is said to know in this regard

by what he writes. But the goal of moral education, as Fasoro (2004) observed, is not to be able to explain ethical theories and concepts, and to be able to make ethical judgments, but is in one's ability to offer *reasons* for one's actions and decisions. The problem here is that, if there are two students, in their examination, one writes very well but behaves immorally and the other behaves morally well but writes poorly, who has the highest mark? The student that behaves immorally does so not because he is incontinent or because he does not understand the ethical terms and theories, but because he does not see the need to be moral when he can 'make it sharply' through immoral means. Secondary schools in Imo State are not exempted from all these challenges pointed out, that impedes teaching of moral education.

Research Question Two: In what ways does teachers' training enhance teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students in Imo State?

Good character could be cultivated through knowledge and appreciation of morals. People who do not have good character will be the cause of violence, crime, corruption and various forms of anti-social activities which prevail when a society has no morality since morality is indispensable in character building. The frequent waves of violence witnessed on the African continent could be associated with a weakened structure of moral development (Chukwu, 2002, p.86).

The school on the other hand has a concentration of experts in the form of teachers and counsellors. The trained teachers are a resource for managing the strong desires of the youth, through the teaching of good morals and character formation. The youth who are in their early developmental stage often experiment with many 'new things' in their social environment and would like to experiment on them (Kibera & Kimakoti, 2007, p.71).

Various literatures have stressed the centrality of moral education in teacher training. According to Sirotnik (1990, p. 316) "teacher education is more a process of building moral character than a process of building knowledge-based skills, and expertise (not that the latter are unimportant)". The concern over moral character is indeed a mission of every teacher education facility, irrespective of its geographical location. Also, such a duty extends beyond the socio-economic status of the geographical contexts in which teacher educational programmes are executed. The centrality of moral education in teacher training is connected with the ethical character and very nature of the teaching undertaking. Whereas many studies widely documented the teaching enterprise in general, scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers specializing in the philosophy of education have normatively raised and addressed the ethical dimension of teaching and/or education in much more specific terms. The point here lies on the fact that teachers' training which has a way of building their moral character, will obviously influence their teaching of moral education in schools, for reforming student's character.

Teachers are directly involved in teaching behaviours that are right and correct those that are wrong to students in school. They also function as role models to student. This does not imply that all teachers are good role models to students and that all teachers teach good morals, yet the fact remains that teachers have very important roles to play in the moral development of the child. Teachers teach children to respect the right of others; they also promote the acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. Teachers are responsible for the teaching of the importance of honesty, dedication and right behaviour. Success or failure in the achievement of the building of a society that is made up of morally upright citizens depend more upon the adoption of education methods calculated to effect the change than upon anything else. These methods formulated, executed and evaluated by the teachers, hence the relevance of the teachers in the moral development of the child. This can effectively be achieved when teachers are properly trained on how to impact such knowledge.

Training of teachers provides them the knowledge, skill, and ability that are relevant to the professional life of a teacher. Teacher training moulds the personality of a teacher such that their attitudes are reshaped, their habits are reformed and their personality is reconstituted through teachers training. Training is of two types (Edwards & Briers, 2002).There is a great need for the training and re-training of teachers for the improvement of student's character, especially in Imo State.

Research Question Three: What are the strategies that can be adopted in the teaching of moral education in secondary school for students' character formation in Imo State?

The dilemma that teacher educators face, then, is whether it is acceptable to allow character education to remain part of a school's hidden curriculum or whether advocacy for the value commitments immanent to education and teaching should be transparent, intentional, and public.

Two alternative approaches are presented here. The first approach views character education as immanent to best practice instruction. This approach argued that there is little need for specialized instruction in ethics or in the design of distinctly moral education curriculum. Rather, character development is an outcome of effective teaching. It is a precipitate of best practice instruction. Hence, in order to be assured that the moral formation of students will be in good hands, the teacher educator need only ensure that pre-service teachers are prepared to be outstanding teachers.

The second view is that best practice teaching is necessary but not sufficient for effective moral formation of students. Perhaps at some point in the past it was sufficient, but in the present cultural milieu, children are often reared in toxic environments that pose special challenges for their moral and social development (Garbarino, 2004; Quart, 2003). As a result, teachers are called upon to offer a counterweight to the mal-formative elements permeating children's lives, a responsibility that calls for a more intentional and deliberate approach. This intentional strategy is committed to the view that students flourish in classroom communities and that children are best equipped to take on the challenges of development when they master the skill sets required for responsible membership in a democratic society (Guttman, 1987).

In any domain, moral character skills must be practiced in order to be developed. Teachers must be oriented to providing good practice opportunities for students. For example, if students do not get practice in helping others, they are less likely to do it independently when the occasion arises (Youniss& Yates, 1997). With adult coaching, each student can monitor ethical skill development and hone a particular set of expert skills. Once developed, virtues must be maintained through the selection of appropriate friends and environments (Aristotle, 1988). Virtuous individuals are autonomous enough to monitor their behaviour and choices.

Value neutrality can be seen as an approach in itself or can be embedded in other approaches such as values clarification and moral reasoning. Neutrality is a central value in the western liberal tradition (Gordon, 1978). Teachers are expected to be free of bias and should set aside their opinions, feelings and agendas to

encourage students to express themselves on an issue without inhibition. Neutrality promotes lack of commitment to either side while aiming at establishing trust, credibility and respect among students. Teachers are expected to act as neutral chairpersons of classroom discussions and should not use their power of authority to promote their own opinions. The assumption is that if teachers were to make their values known, it might prevent students from establishing personal values for themselves. However, students do need the assistance and encouragement of teachers for them to advance toward higher forms of moral thought (Bricker, 1972).

Moral reasoning is one of the strategies used in teaching character education in schools. It was developed by Jean Piaget and popularized by Lawrence Kohlberg (Straughan, 2000; Kohlberg, 1987, 1975). In this approach, morality is based on universal human concern and the principle of fairness, justice, equality and reciprocity (Kohlberg, 1975). Students are taught the principles of moral reasoning based on moral concepts that involve one's intentions and how one understands them in relation to their actions (Kohlberg, 1987). This approach discourages what Bricker (1972) referred to as a "teacher's uncritical sermonizing about his own personal values" (p. 619). Teachers should engage students intellectually and emotionally through discussion and solving hypothetical moral issues and dilemmas in order to help children reach higher stages of moral thinking (Paisey, Kobayashi & Li, 2007; Straughan, 2000; Kohlberg, 1987, 1975). This is done because it has been found that moral thought goes through a predictable sequence of developmental stages (Kohlberg, 1975). Throughout this process, students are assisted by teachers who play a crucial role by listening closely in order to understand students' reasoning and then helping them to move to the next level of reasoning. Since the approach is based on the principles of justice and fairness in society, the discussions are expected to stress the importance of operating as moral agents in our communities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study it is concluded that challenges teachers face in the teaching of moral education for character formation of secondary school students includes exclusion of moral education in the curriculum, lack of trained teachers, lack of skills which are necessary to make good or reasonable moral decisions and to act on them etc. Also, teachers training and skills acquisition enhance their teaching of moral education.

Recommendations

i. Teachers and school administrators should be properly trained to handle the teaching of moral education.
ii. Ministry of education should include the teaching of moral education in secondary schools, to improve on the character of students.
iii. Disciplinary measures should always be put in place to check erring students. With this, student's character can be checked.
iv. Studying of philosophy in tertiary institutions should be encouraged. This is to enable more teachers with philosophy background to be employed.

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