
**TOWARDS REDUCING MORAL DECADENCE AND
PROMOTING INTEGRAL FORMATION OF
CHARACTER IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper discussed moral decadence and integral formation of character among students in Nigeria. The entire discourse was done under moral education and integral formation of character, moral integrity and the development of students in education in Nigeria. The idea x-rayed in this paper is born out of the fact that moral integrity of any nation is paramount to its growth and development. One who has moral integrity does the right thing always, takes responsibility for his or her actions, treats others with respect, and is honest. These qualities are necessary for rebuilding a strong and cohesive society. Unfortunately, Nigeria is in serious deficit of moral rectitude which is demonstrated in increasing corruption and different forms of criminality. This shows that there is a gap in the character formation. It is an indication therefore that moral education is not given adequate

attention in the families, schools, formation programmes and public institutions. To reverse moral decline in Nigeria, this paper therefore called for integral formation of character among students. The paper is also a call on parents, religion leaders and the media to wake up to their responsibilities by words and example.

Keywords: Moral, Decadence, Integral formation, Character, Nigeria.

Introduction

Moral regeneration of Nigerian citizenry is a necessity for a sustainable development of the country. The best class to build is the students; they are the foundation of tomorrow growth, the driving force that determines the future and hope of the nation. Moral integrity of any nation according to Wilson *et al* (2017), is paramount to its growth and development. Students with moral integrity do the right thing and always take responsibility for their actions. The required qualities to rebuild a cohesive Nigeria and the nations at large are therefore not too far-fetched (Wilson, 2021). Nigeria no doubt is in deficit of moral rectitude as demonstrated in the increasing level of criminality, political corruption, social injustices and economic frustration. The increase level of criminality in Nigeria is a clear indication that there is continues increase of moral decadence. Nigeria is among the developing countries of the world that is experiencing a prevalence of rising crime waves, criminal intentions and varying degree of delinquencies (Abayomi, 2020).

The nature of these crimes to Dambazau (2014), includes armed robbery, murder, rape, car theft, burglary, fraud, bribery and corruption, food and drug adulteration, gambling, smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug trafficking, money laundering, internet scam, advanced fee fraud and other illegal activities. It is preposterous that in Nigeria, there is no adequate will and genuine intention by any government to rid the society of the criminal tendencies and manifestations, as people in the leadership positions are also guilty of corruption and crime. Modernisation process is

also a main reason for the increase rate in crimes to occur. This phenomenal rise in offences and crime in the cities is a matter of great concern. Political corruption in Nigeria for instance is viewed by Achuri (2019), as the use of powers by government officials or their network contacts for illegitimate private gain. On Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria scored 24 on a scale from 0 ("highly corrupt") to 100 ("very clean"). When ranked by score, Nigeria ranked 150th among the 180 countries in the Index.

Within educational settings to Ann (2019), social injustice leads to inequalities in resource allocation, differential access to skilled teachers, and disparate educational outcomes. Social injustice is a pervasive issue that continues to shape our societies and affect the lives of millions of individuals around the world. To combat these issues, social justice calls for targeted interventions that level the playing field, eradicate systemic barriers, and provide equitable opportunities across all social strata. Addressing social injustice to Odu (2020), requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the root causes and empowers marginalized communities. While the road to justice may be challenging, several potential solutions can contribute to positive change through moral education.

Criminality, political corruption, social injustices and economic frustration, lack of moral education are factors affecting character formation of students in Nigeria. The family for instance performs many societal functions to ensure the welfare and progress of its members. The functions ranges from reproduction of the human species, Care and rearing of the young offspring particularly at infancy and years of dependence. That is, the family equips the individual with the knowledge which he/she will need in order to play his/her roles in the society (Murdock, 2018). Family as an agent of socialization with a common set of values has to an extent failed in building of character among Nigerians students. The paper therefore examined why moral education is not given adequate attention in the families, schools, formations programmes and public institutions and provided a way forward.

Moral Education and Integral Formation of Character

To reverse moral decadence in Nigeria, moral education and integral formation of character have key roles to play. Moral education according to Ikeke (2014), concerned with proper ways to act toward other people and, in some cultures, proper ways to act toward supernatural forces (gods, ancestral spirits), nonhuman beings (animals of specified types), and physical surroundings (sacred forests, mountains, and waterways). Johann Herbert, the father of moral education in Eme and Anthony (2019), outlined some key elements of moral education to include; fairness, affection, caring, honesty, tolerance, respect for difference, resilience and perseverance. The authors stressed that moral education helped in the development of a strong sense of right and wrong, responsible, empathy, a sense of self-worth and a positive outlook on life. Most studies on teaching strategies for moral education recommend a problem based approach to instruction whereby students work in small groups. This approach gives room for dialogue and interaction between students, which is considered to be crucial for their moral and pro-social development. Ekong (2018), stressed on the essential moral values that build character and instill positive behaviour in kids such as respect; which is a vital moral value that student have to learn about at their early age. Honesty; the best policy children are taught in books. Compassion; the feeling of love and concern for others, hard work, kindness, gratitude, sharing and cooperation, including responsibility and generosity.

In Elegbeleye's (2015) opinion, moral values are the foundation of kid's character. Help them become strong and undeterred individuals by shaping their moral values, thoughts, and beliefs. The greatest approach to getting your youngster on the right track is to start early. It's also important to remember that as a parent, you must invest time and effort in your child's moral growth. The first step towards ensuring your child's sense of right and wrong begins with selecting a school that will, besides offering knowledge, inculcate good moral values from the student's young age. It is believed that rewarding positive behaviour is more effective than punishment in eliciting a positive reaction and instilling high morals.

Social study is a subject that is cultivating moral values that will help every child build character and become the best version of themselves. These elements discussed to Ekong (2018), can lead to moral integrity. Bring about positive character development of students in education in Nigeria.

Moral Integrity and the Development of Students in Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, new approaches have been continually introduced all in a bid to stress the usefulness of the indispensability of moral education at the basic educational levels (Nursery, Primary, and Secondary Schools). To an extent it has being made a compulsory subject offered by all students at that level; examinations and critical evaluation should be carried out to ascertain the level of comprehension and productivity each student produces in terms of his moral behaviours. This will enable such a student to grow having a full understanding of the concept “moral integrity”, what they are and how they can be developed, maintained and exhibited. Kohlberg (2017), sees moral education as an attempt to promote the development of children’s and adolescents’ moral cognitive structures (moral reasoning stages and integrity) in school settings. It is worthy to note that great Philosophers of education Plato’s Republic and Dewey have agreed on one thing which is that the two basic aims of education are for intellectual and moral development. Education is hidden in these two major aims and any nation without education wallows in Ignorance which is definite to affect the National growth and development of such a Country (Igwe & Obasi, 2017). Dewey puts it thus:

The aim of education is growth and development. Intellectual and moral, ethical and psychological principles can aid the school in the greatest of all constructions, the building of a free and powerful-character. Only knowledge of the other and connection of the stage in psychological development can insure this. Education is the work of supplying the conditions which will enable the psychological function to mature in the freest and fullest manner (Dewey, 1964 in Igwe & Obasi, 2017).

Wilson and Sugarman (2017), asserts that morality and integrity pervades every aspect of our lives. Every activities of man demands regulation. Moral integrity is evidence in all spheres of life. Learning at University rightly differs from learning at nursery, primary and college schools; where *students develop the skills needed for independent study and thinking, guided by academics*. In all, *education socializes students into society by teaching cultural values and norms*. It equips them with the skills needed to become productive members of society (Fafunwa, 2016). This way, it stimulates economic growth and raises awareness of local and global problems. Organized institutions affect many aspects of education. For example, governments set education policies to determine when school classes happen, what is taught, and who can or must attend. International organizations, like UNESCO, have been influential in promoting primary education for all children. Nigeria educational curriculum acknowledges the development of student's right from the primary to the tertiary institutions where independency is diplomatically released into the doings and the don'ts of the individual student.

On students' development in education is a process of learning, Hilsdon (2011) believed it is a complex set of multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic roles and functions, involving teaching, tutoring, research, and the design and production of learning materials, as well as involvement in staff development, policy-making and other consultative activities. The learning development movement in Nigeria has aligned itself closely with the Nigeria Educational Development movement in light of its developmental work with academic staff. However, the primary objective of learning development remains the development of student learning. A student with integrity behaves ethically and does the right thing, even behind closed doors. For instance, informing a cashier that they gave you too much change or going back to the store to pay for something you forgot to pay for are two examples of showing integrity in everyday circumstances. Individuals who consistently act with integrity are more likely to build strong relationships, both personally and professionally, which can help them to achieve their goals and aspirations in life (Wilson, 2021). In the absence of integrity student's

self-esteem and self-worth may suffer as they grapple with guilt, shame, or a sense of disconnection between their actions and their values. Their relationships may also suffer, as trust is eroded and conflicts arise.

The importance of moral integrity in the development of students cannot be overemphasized. It is needed in every aspect just as human beings need air. Its absence spells doom on individuals and the Nation at large. To Elegbeleye (2015), integrity is the product of moral education. The basic importance of moral education vis-à-vis national development includes; national integration, provisions of ethical principle and patriotic services, reduction in insecurity and global unrest. Temilayo et al (2004) sees national integration as the incorporation of disparate ethnic or religious elements of the population into a unified society, providing equality of opportunity for all members of that society. National integration allows every member of a country equal participation at the political, religious, economic and educational level. Opportunities for the ownership of property, basic social, public or private facility, as well as employment opportunities are neither denied nor limited by reason of race, religion, or cultural background. This accentuates the process and goals of different community of people who cohabit harmoniously by forging a common identity that is shared by all, and emphasizing the common lifestyle that we share such as; the love for justice, values, laws among others. Ujomu (2006), has stated that, the persistent national instability renders meaningless the numerous attempts to find lasting solution to the problem that pervades Nigerian society such as poverty, pestilence, illiteracy, Inadequate social infrastructure, poor health, unemployment, and politic disenfranchisement. This persistent national discord can be brought to its barest minimal if not eliminated completely when all embrace morality, and allow moral integrity strive.

It is no longer news that insecurity has become the deadliest threat faced in Nigeria today. Igwe (2017), stressed that cases of insurgency, genocide, robbery attacks among others abound. The peace of Nigerians has been stolen as a result of moral neglects at the basic developmental stage of most students/citizens. Many people

especially the youths are misinformed at their primary, secondary school level about the concept of peaceful coexistence and tolerance. We cannot entirely depend on religion for moral upbringing of a child, because, Nigeria is a multi- religious country with each having its beliefs, doctrines and ways of viewing values. It is therefore morality that will help to regulate the actions of individuals thereby maintaining peace. It is sad to see youths used as miscreants in perpetuating evil in our society today. The question is where the moral integrity is.

The factors identified include: the peer motivated excitement of being a student, jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and the perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation. Others are lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of government officials, inadequate training programmes, unemployment, and lack of quality education among others. Moral education at this stage appears to be that pragmatic approach to the security challenge.

Moral education provides ethical principles that safeguard the right of the individual in the society and points to him his reciprocal duties and responsibilities (Temitaya et al, 2014). Morality and integrity to some extent which is gained through moral education is indispensable in every human existence. Any society without an iota of morality is bound to collapse. This is why Fafunwa (2016), viewed that moral education helps amend corruption: the overall cause of corruption in Nigeria can be traced to a large extent moral decadence. Even in schools, the youths who are supposed leaders of tomorrow engage in all kinds of corrupt practices such as sorting, impersonation, and computer fraud among others. Integrity is a crucial aspect of one's character and is defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is a crucial aspect of one's personal and professional life as it affects how one is perceived by others and helps build trust and respect. Integrity is the foundation of trust. When people trust each other, they feel more comfortable and confident in their interactions, and this is crucial for building healthy and meaningful relationships. A person with integrity is trustworthy, and others are more likely to trust them

with important tasks and responsibilities.

Though there are numerous challenges towards actualization of moral integrity in Nigeria today. These challenges are sum up to lack of moral values as a result of little or low attention on the moral education among students. There is need therefore to resuscitate and restore the dignity of Nigeria as a country that is currently at the verge of disintegration.

Conclusion

This paper draws its conclusion from the famous quote of Billy Graham on character and value that “If wealth is lost, nothing is lost; if health is lost, something is lost; when a character is lost, all is lost” (Ikeke, 2014). Having moral values means having a strong root for the trees, having a healthy root means having healthy leaves and branches. Moral values are important components of any individual’s character and they should be taught right from early age. The importance of teaching values to students is that it helps them to choose the right way. Moral values give students the right direction which helps them to get accepted and respected by society. Inadequate attention on moral education is a road map to worsening situations of immoral society. In Nigeria, so much have gone wrong. Such as embezzlement of public funds by political leaders, making policies for their benefits, and living luxurious life at the expense of a common man. We see also moral decadence at the economic, political, cultural, religious levels and painfully in our educational institutions. To correct this immorality pervading and affecting our national growth and development, there is an urgent need to introduce moral education at all levels in the learning institutions.

Suggestions

This paper therefore recommends as follows that parent, schools and the media ought to wake up to their responsibilities by word and example in raising student’s according to ethical values, considered integrity and moral rectitude as a priority in student’s relationships and operations. Moral education should be introduced as a compulsory subject at the primary, secondary and tertiary

institutions to help inculcate moral values in them. Beside curriculum experts should be engaged to develop a sound moral education curriculum that will reflect the expected moral values of the Nigerian society such as honesty, modesty, peaceful coexistence, patriotism, national integration, love and unity. The inculcation of moral values, character and civil responsibility should not be done by the teacher alone; parents, religious leaders, government and community leaders have to contribute their quota to ensure that there is moral serenity in the country.

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