

CONTEMPORARY IMMORAL PRACTICES IN TERTIARY EDUCATION: THE NIGERIAN CASE

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Abstract

Nigerian tertiary education today exhibits symptoms of serious moral malaise. Motivated by the pernicious reality of moral degradation in Nigeria tertiary education, the study is intrigued by the need for an urgent change of behaviour and character. The study is aimed at highlighting the contemporary immoral practices found in the Nigerian tertiary education using the philosophical research method. It explored the notions of education, tertiary education, moral and immoral practices. The study identified that the absence of moral studies in our educational system has contributed to high incidents of violence, unrest, crime, and other unwholesome behavior found among students and teachers. It concluded by recommending that awards of excellence should be given to outstanding individuals with moral excellence and other worthy values such as human integrity, hard work, dignity, selfless service, self-reliance, dedication to duty, and others as this will help in discouraging immorality and encouraging good works.

Introduction

Education is as old as humanity. Over time, it has become a magic wand that can shape and mould people to acceptable standard. It has been argued that it is useful, desirable and important for the survival of the human race. It is useful because without it, people would engage in careless acceptance of appearances, and society would be placed on a dizzy slope of chaos and extinction. What society is, today, and what it will become tomorrow, can be traced to the way its citizens have been educated. Without education, an individual cannot realize his potentiality and society will not progress. Unless a person is educated, he will not be able to adjust himself to the human world (socially, morally, economically, culturally, etc.). This is unarguably true because it is through education that every society orients its young generation in their worthwhile and desirable values and culture. The young through that are equipped with relevant knowledge, information and competencies that will enable them function well in the society and develop it. Hence, whatever happens to the educational system resonates to all

facets and aspect of a given society (Asogwa, 2020). In other words, if the educational system is good, the society becomes good and is able to develop positively, but if the educational system is bad or inept, the society misses its set goals and therefore can hardly be a great or developed nation.

It is the recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world (Nigeria inclusive) made commitments for its citizens to have access to education. The said commitments usually go along with comprehensive and clear-cut policies or roadmaps that will direct and guide the vision of attaining a qualitative and functional education. It is in line with this that Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) described education as an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development. Thus, by implication, education has a multi-dimensional role to play for Nigeria: to create good and effective citizens, citizens who will accept the traditional values and protect the “Nigerian way of life”; to provide gainful employment opportunities for Nigerians and thirdly for personal development of liberating individual citizens from the bond of ignorance and to prepare them to be able to maximize their intellectual, emotional, moral and social development. However, despite the fact that education is described or seen as a catalyst for effective development in the country, the sector is bedeviled with myriads of crises ranging from insufficient quality manpower, poor funding, overcrowded, dilapidated and ill equipped schools and most importantly immoral practices especially in the tertiary institutions. It is sad to note that tertiary education have not paid adequate attention to issues that border on the moral and spiritual development. Violent demonstrations, cultism, drug abuse, prostitution, nudity, gambling, tribalism, examination malpractice and various acts of indiscipline have become pervasive in the Nigerian tertiary educational system. There is hardly any academic session that tertiary education institutions in the country do not experience various forms of immoral activities done by teachers and students.

Morality ought to be maintained in our tertiary educational institutions as a state of immorality can never allow the attainment of educational goals/objectives. Therefore, it is on this basis that this paper is structured to examine the immoral practices in contemporary tertiary education system and in order to achieve its aim, a conceptual analysis of such concepts as education, morality, moral and immoral practice is given to strengthen the discussion.

Education

A definition of the term “education” that will satisfy everybody is probably impossible. Consider, however, the following definitions:

- Education is preparation for life. It is the acquisition of such knowledge and skills that will help the individual earn his livelihood and find a place in the adult society.
- Education is the sum total of processes by means of which a community or social groups whether small or large transmits its acquired power and aims to the younger generation with a view to securing its own continuous existence and growth (Encyclopedia Britannica).

- Education comprises organized and sustained communications designed to bring about learning (UNESCO, 1990).

From whatever angle we want to look at the term. Education can be equated with learning. We learn many things from the day we are born till the day we join our ancestors in the grave. We learn a lot from our ancestors - (moral transmission) and we pass on the same knowledge to coming generations.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education, higher education, further education, post-secondary education, third or last stage of formal education are synonymously used to refer to education pursued at any post-secondary educational institution bearing the name of university, college, institute or any other nomenclature.

Three categories of university exist in Nigeria. They are federal, state and private universities. Universities all over the world are accepted as the citadel of knowledge and human resource development. The Nigerian university system sprang out of the need for the development of high-level manpower to take the challenges of nation building after independence. It was/is the hope of the people that the universities shall produce the right type of manpower in sufficient quantity and quality for the transformation of the nation from a developing country to a developed one (Fadipe, 2000).

The Nigerian university system is increasingly challenged with many complex problems. There is a general outcry that the standard of education is falling and morals are failing. Some persons blame students for this apparent decline in quality of education and moral values. A thoughtful few think that they are due to the nature of changes in all directions such as in government policies, schools administrative policies, among others. Some blame the lecturers for the woes in our universities claiming that they are not as devoted and dedicated to the cause of education as their predecessors. Some blame parents and their children, while others blame government for unattractive condition of service and poor school facilities.

Moral and Immoral Practices

Moral Practices: Moral practices are those practices that follow or are in line with the social norms and such actions are acceptable to the public. It can also be seen as practices that are characterized by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal, professional and in research and scholarly activities. Moral practices respect the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people. Some examples of ethical practices include: obeying rules and regulations, taking responsibility, being accountable, upholding trust, having respect, etc. They are the complete opposite of unethical practices.

Immoral Practices: Immoral practices are those actions that are against or not in line with social norms or acts that are considered unacceptable to the public. It can also be seen as an action that lacks moral principles; unwilling to adhere to proper rules of conduct or an action that falls outside of what is considered morally right or proper for a person, group or organization. Some examples of immoral practices include: lying, insincerity, verbal

harassment/abuse, violence, theft/embezzlement, sexual harassment, corrupt practices, etc. They are the complete opposite of ethical practices.

Cotemporary Immoral Practices in Tertiary Education

The ill and vices of the society have become regular features in our life and have not only eaten deep into the fabrics of our society, they have taken their toll on students in various educational institutions. Agimon (2015) avows that various shades of immorality, vices, unethical practices ranging from tribalism, licentiousness, violent demonstration, thuggery, cultism, abortion, bribery and corruption, sycophancy, selfism, avarice, sabotage, oppression, fraud, apathy to work, sexual harassment, drug abuse, sexual permissiveness and so on are now found in our tertiary institutions. Let us take a closer look at some of them.

Truancy: This is irregular attendance in school or classes with many factors within or outside the school building, peer group influence, teacher method of teaching or severe discipline in some schools can lead to truancy. Hornby (2010), agree with the foregoing when he posits that truancy is the practice of staying away from school without profession. Some truancy factors outside the school may include poverty where the child might need to feed himself/herself, engage in labor to raised money, parenting/guarding methods of discipline, security among others. Truancy is one of the major anti-social disciplinary problems among school students in Nigeria.

Absenteeism: Hornby (2010) sees absenteeism as an act of being frequently away from work or school, especially without good reasons. This may result from the type of leadership obtained in a school. The school exercise greater control over students and may lead students to frustration, if there is insufficient supply of school materials and facilities such as food, water, toilet facilities which may lead to absenteeism or rebellion against authorities. If a student has formed destructive habit, be is also likely to consistently be absent or revolt against authority unaware of the consequences of his actions. Teachers may exhibit a negative attitude towards classroom instruction by employing unsuitable resources and content. This can lead to students feeling dissatisfied and frustrated with their schoolwork, thus causing them to be absent. Absenteeism and truancy have a negative impact on a child's examination performance. When a child is absent from class, they miss out on important topics that are discussed. This can lead to the child engaging in disruptive behavior during exams, such as making noise or cheating.

Indecent Dressing: Girls in Nigerian educational institutions wear dresses that expose their laps, tummy, breasts and other delicate parts. Most of them dress half naked, putting on sexy dresses that expose them to indecent assaults, such as topless, backless, jumpers, hot pants, miniskirts, body hog, tight fitting, sleeveless cloths, that expose their entire body contours. While putting on the above clothes, they walk swinging their buttocks dangling their breasts that are uncovered and in some cases with transparent clothes without brazier - an appearance that debases womanhood (Njoku, 2004). The boys expose their chest, belly and under wears through a mode of dressing they call “sagging”. Dressing pattern seen in our various educational institutions is a complete offense to public sensibilities.

Sexual Permissiveness: The present trend of licentiousness among our youths and adults is a source of concern. The rate at which Nigeria is being flooded by pornographic materials these days is quite intriguing. Most of our bookshops, supermarkets, tourist and holiday resorts, cinema houses and very remarkable bus stations, now stink with sexually lascivious writings, cartons, video tapes and pictures of nude women in highly beguiling postures. The inordinate and senseless quest for materialism on the part of the female folks, the evil concupiscence and unbridled appetite for women on the part of the men are all necessary and sufficient conditions for sexual permissiveness which breeds other forms of social-ethical vices such as armed robbery, murder, abortion, drug trafficking, drunkenness, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency and prostitution.

In our educational institutions, prostitution is now rampant as young girls have seen it as the most lucrative business (Ezeh, 2015). Most girls live very big in school, pay their school fees, buy text books and handouts and sort lecturers for better result with money realized from illicit business – prostitution. They are very much patronized by wealthy businessmen, politicians, and other well to do individuals who come to school with their flashy cars to pick them based on an agreed price. Some female students have lost their lives in the process by being used for rituals by unscrupulous men in the society.

Examination Malpractices: Any act of wrong doing or neglect that contravenes the rules of acceptable practice before, during and after an examination by anybody in any way according to Awusaku and Ugwulebo (2013) is examination malpractice. In recent times, most students in Nigerian higher institutions hold strongly to their belief that they can only scale through in their academic endeavors by examination malpractice (Expo) or by paying to ensure they have good grades. This may not be far from the reason underlying rampant educational malpractices in our educational institutions. Examination malpractice among students ranges from bringing in foreign materials such as textbooks, notebooks, pieces of paper with notes made on them, retrieval or substitution of re-worked scripts long after the examination is over, impersonation, super prints (writing on palms, thighs/laps, handkerchiefs, dresses, etc.) mutual copying and cooperation in the examination hall, use of phones, text messages for examination and paying for the upgrade of their scores or alteration of marks on the computer.

Bribery, Corruption and Materialism: A bribe is something given or promised to somebody in order to influence or persuade him (often to do something wrong) in favour of the giver. On the other hand, corruption is a derivative of the word “corrupt” meaning actions of persons which are immoral, depraved and dishonest especially through offering and accepting of bribes. Materialism can be seen as the undue attachment of much value to material things, especially wealth and luxury at the expense of spiritual things or moral values. The cultivation of the above named evil habits has led to the loss of sense of the Holy from the mind and sensibility, leaving a void which is one of our most cruel wounds (Esomonu, 1981).

Treasury looting, dishonesty, and avarice have come to be appreciated in our society as a norm and circumscribed as smartness. Unmasking the ugly scenario, Omoregbe (1993:xi) lamented that “the situation has degenerated to such an extent that anybody who finds himself

in a position to enrich himself through fraudulent and corrupt practices but refuses to do so is regarded as a fool and scorned by his friends and especially his relations. Many Nigerians especially now believe that there is nothing wrong in paying or accepting bribe to upgrade students result or stealing the money belonging to the institution or any large organization if one is lucky to find oneself in a position to do so without being caught.

Stealing: This is the taking/removal of another person's property without his/her permission. The socio-economic environment including status of parents, home background and a natural tendency to steal is responsible for this among students. The conduct is mostly influenced by peer group pressure, the value structure of the society, such as the get rich quick syndrome in Nigeria has led many young people to the false conviction that there is no need to pursue life course with appropriate hard work and consequent success. Some parents spoil their children by exhibiting highly permissive behavior. They allow children to have everything on demand and task themselves to overdo what they believed is their responsibility. This attitude encourages children to interpret any form of lack as hardship and frustration to the extent of justifying their removal of other people's property. The social vices in school is a reflection of what is going on in the society for example there are lot of cases of armed robbery/bandits, kidnapping among others that have send many people to their early graves, loss of properties and a sense of insecurity among Nigerians.

Tribalism: Nigeria is blessed with so many ethnic groups which according to many should be a means of integration therefore leading to national development. This has rather become a catalyst for national disintegration. In the face of the earth, Nigerians are the most tribal people and this has become a menace to our society. In foreign countries, a person from Chicago or Michigan does not see himself as such but rather sees himself first as an American. This problem of tribe is beginning to have an embarrassing and repulsive odour and it has hampered on our social, economic and political life, thereby causing social injustice and upholding mediocrity in our national agenda. In some of our educational institutions, fellow Nigerians suffer various forms of discrimination in violation of their civil and constitutional rights. Nigerians in some parts of the country or away from their own state are practically treated as foreigners in their own country. Under such devices as “State of Origin”, “Other States”, “Indigenes of the State”, “Sons of the Soil”, hideous form of tribal discrimination and prejudice have been practiced to the detriment of nation-building and Nigerian unity. Tribalism has assumed higher dimension of awfulness with the activities of some tribal chauvinistic politicians and academics who often whip-up sentiments detrimental to our collective interests. Lewis in Iwe (1991:42) puts it thus: “... in that unfortunate country, the educated were even more tribalistic than the uneducated, with some of the nastiest incidents occurring inside the educational institutions”.

Moral Decay in Nigerian Educational System: What is the cause?

The origins of immorality in the Nigerian school system are complex, arising from a confluence of factors including corruption and lack of accountability, economic adversity, societal expectations, insufficient moral teaching, and peer influence. Here is a detailed analysis of these causes:

Corruption and absence of accountability: The Nigerian educational system is plagued by widespread corruption, which is evident in several behaviors like bribery, embezzlement, and the act of students paying lecturers for better results, commonly known as "sorting" (Omonijo Nnedom & Uche, 2013). The prevalence of corruption is intensified by the inadequate implementation of measures designed to prevent unethical conduct, resulting in a climate of impunity within educational establishments.

Economic adversity: The presence of economic difficulties significantly contributes to the promotion of unethical behavior inside the educational system. Numerous students and educators experience significant financial burdens, which may compel them to resort to unethical behaviors, such as cheating on exams or engaging in extortion, in order to sustain their livelihoods (Ijaiya, Alabi, & Fasasi, 2011). Furthermore, the lack of sufficient finance for educational institutions leads to substandard facilities and insufficient resources, which worsens the problem (Ijaiya et al., 2011).

Societal pressures and erosion of moral values: Societal pressures and the degradation of moral ideals lead to the prevalence of immorality in schools. The cultural emphasis on academic achievement frequently compels students to engage in cheating and other unethical actions in order to fulfill expectations (Omotosho, 2012). Moreover, the erosion of traditional African values, along with the impact of Western culture, has undermined the ethical foundation of society, resulting in a rise in occurrences of immorality such as sexual harassment and cultism (Omotosho, 2012).

Insufficient Moral and Civic Education: The curriculum's failure to prioritize moral and civic education results in pupils lacking a solid ethical basis, rendering them more prone to engaging in unethical acts (Osakwe, 2012). In addition, the lack of exemplary figures within the educational system, including educators who may themselves participate in unethical activities, contributes to the continuation of immoral conduct among students (Osakwe, 2012).

Peer pressure and influence: Peer pressure is a major contributing factor to immorality in Nigerian schools. Secret cults and gangs at educational institutions expose students to detrimental effects, fostering engagement in behaviors such as substance misuse, aggression, and academic dishonesty (Olutola & Olatunde, 2015). Conforming to specific social circles frequently supersedes individual principles, resulting in unethical choices.

The Way Forward

Appointment: It is unfortunate that, it is only in the education sector that all comers' affairs usually become the order of day; lawyers manage the ministry of justice, medical doctors manage the ministry of health, but anybody can manage education; a round peg in a square hole. It is the suggestion of Ekundayo (2019), that government should always appoint an expert as a leader of our tertiary educational system and not a political party lackey to manage it, because in the past, Nigeria's tertiary education system had fared better under experts as leaders, who earned their stripes through the system.

Teacher's welfare: There is no gainsaying the fact, that a good number of Nigeria teachers, are frustrated, despondent, distressed and depressed because of poor salaries and poor welfare packages. Our teachers today seem demotivated and demoralized. It is only good welfare packages and regular payments of salaries that can incentivize them to put in their best and by extension raise the quality of education in Nigeria.

Code of Ethics: A code of ethics is an important management tool which can positively shape the culture of our institutions and transform the declining status. Therefore, strict adherence to the ethics of teaching profession should be maintained. Code of ethics should be used to help prevent immoral practices in its entire ramifications why alerting staff on the conduct that could appear immoral. Any negative tendency should not be given any chance to manifest in the system. Every citizen needs to have change in attitudes, behaviour and mindset concerning immorality and material wealth which are perishable and inculcate the spirit of contentment, thereby acting based on the ethical codes of conducts outlined in the tertiary institutions.

Remuneration: In addition, moral excellence and other worthy values such as human integrity, hard work, dignity, selfless service, self-reliance, dedication to duty, and others should be encouraged. Awards of excellence should be given to outstanding individuals to encourage good works.

Conclusion

The argument we have tried to sustain in this paper is that immoral practices has marred tertiary education in Nigeria. It is observed that immorality has weakened the tertiary educational system leading to low efficiency, low quality service delivery, etc. We strongly believe that the tertiary educational system is one of the systems that is greatly committed in human capital development and human development is the highest development that is capable of affecting every other development positively. Therefore, the need for moral education cannot be overemphasized given that it will cultivate genuine values in us that will nurture and foster our spirit of patriotism, pride for our nation, loyalty and love for our country. Moral education will enable the individuals to acquire the right attitudes that engender growth. It will make individuals to subdue their environment and fully participate in the affairs of the society. This is because if the person is well and morally trained, the person will have the sky as the starting point when it comes to the possession of knowledge.

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