

THE RELEVANCE OF MORAL REASONING AS AN ESSENTIAL VALUE IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study has discussed the relevance of moral reasoning as an essential value in university education in Nigeria, in the wake of high decadence in values in the Nigeria society in all its sectors. The attitude of most Nigerians towards values is very poor; as demonstrated by extreme materialism, cultism, high level of corruption, election malpractice, examination malpractice, kidnapping, tribalism, banditry, religious intolerance, gender-based violence and lawlessness among others. These vices have been blamed on miseducation, unemployment, greed, poor governance, etc, while the problems emanating from them abound such as poor products from educational institutions, many killings, inter and intra communal unrests, poorly managed economy, extreme poverty, poor representation in government, decay in public infrastructure, democratic apathy, brain drain, etc. The nation cannot move forward unless its citizens are reoriented in values which should both be imbibed and utilized, one of which is moral reasoning. The application of this value will help Nigerian citizens in their activities and actions in order to make mature and positive choices that will help build themselves and the society. It was thus recommended among others that there should be effective and consistent communication between the teachers and students until values are inculcated in them; that teachers should constantly remember their role as models to students which should be shown in their conduct, attitude and teaching and that students should be taught the essence of values such as moral reasoning in the society.

Introduction

Moral reasoning addresses the capability to differentiate between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, honesty and dishonesty, just and unjust, correct and incorrect, etc in a given society. It explains the ability of people to differentiate between the above adjectives depending on their conscience and understanding. Human beings are known to have the ability to reason either rightly or wrongly and proceed with taking certain actions.

In the view of Aminigo (2003), an individual's moral knowledge does not have to do with his size, look, strength or stamina. It all depends on one's upbringing and consciousness; thus, a person's moral behaviour may be measured by one's moral reasoning, cultural values, understanding, laws of the land, level of education, essence and beliefs; economic condition, spiritual advancement and discipline among others. Everybody reasons but at different levels and forms; also, moral reasoning evolves or develops with time.

According to Bolerin (2007) and Blake (2001), moral reasoning is much needed in present day Nigeria where virtues such as honesty, truth-telling, incorruption, justice and chastity are fading. In a society where people are very corrupt including those who make laws, moral reasoning becomes imperative for people to imbibe. It is helpful to school administrators, lecturers, non-teaching staff, students, education policy makers, government and also to workers of other organizations as well as the ordinary man in the streets (Ugwu, 2015).

Education and Values

Education according to Fafunwa (1974), is the combination of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. As a social institution, education derives its form from the values of the society in which it exists. Education is the right acquisition of values and is the knowledge of things that are worthwhile (Peters, 1979). It exhibits relevance, potentiality and efficiency and is adapted to the needs of the society; and addresses issues such as dignity of labour, leadership and committed citizenship, self-reliance, industrial harmony, etc.

Education is further used by Ukeje in Okoli (2011) as a process, a product and as a discipline. As a process, it assists in developing, preserving and transmitting peoples' culture from generation to generation. As a product, it concerns itself with change (in character) whether overt or covert, implicit or explicit which is to be found in the life of the learner. Therefore, the product of education is an educated man who is expected to demonstrate intellectual and moral acumen in improving the society. As a discipline, education is a body of systematic and organized knowledge designed to help both the educator and educated in critical thinking.

Likewise, the development of sound values and moral character has remained a cardinal national objective of education in Nigeria, with the advent of Western education in the country. For instance, education is expected to equip its recipients with skills for economic resources to help them conquer poverty as well as social skills for forging excellent relationships with other members of the society. Hence, economic emancipation is achievable and the recipients' living standard enhanced. These features show that education is capable of making a man great and useful to his society through values enhancement (Aminigo, 2003a, Mann, 1990).

Consequently, values such as filial piety, respect for people e.g. elders; chastity, dignity of labour, patriotism, honesty, justice, and hospitality are taught the individual. Other values which education teaches people include courage, self-reliance, appreciation of one's language, folklore, music, art, drama, song, dance; truth- telling and very importantly moral reasoning (Okoh, 2012; Aminigo, 2003). The above compliments which are associated with education are further elaborated by Aminigo (2003: 2) in the following words:

... education is meant to enhance the attainment of social goals that are positive. This logically means that education prepares human beings to live well with their fellows: cooperating with and mutually understanding each other to ensure peaceful co-existence.

Peaceful co-existence itself is hinged on values such as honesty, truth-telling, justice, fairness, fraternity, goodness ...

Regretfully, in the present society, instead of seeing these values, what is prevalent are vices. It appears that something is missing in the current education system; otherwise, how can one explain the fact that most people go to school only to come out worse in character instead of the opposite? Education is supposed to build/mould/instill and strengthen positive character in individuals and not the other way. These days, vices abound such as bribery and corruption, kidnapping, drug and human trafficking, child abuse, sexual assault, killings, terrorism, robbery, cultism, vandalism, disregard for the rule of law and freedom of expression, hate speeches, extreme materialism among others (Okolo, 2011; Njoku, 2015). Sadly, many have blamed these vices on miseducation, poor guidance, greed and unemployment among others. It further shows the need for education stakeholders in the country to carefully appraise its education system; especially on the need to reinforce values in schools.

Values construct standards, principles or criteria for judging the worth of anything, for judging things on the one hand to be good, worthwhile or desirable; and on the other hand to be bad, worthless, despicable; or somewhere in between these extremes (Iheoma, 1995). Values are seen as beliefs in the sense that all beliefs have cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Therefore, values encapsulate the reasons and motives for human behaviour and existence.

Also, values are the indices of what the society expects of its members. This implies that values are considered as accepted norms/standards in a social system which gives meaning and direction to an attitude. Thus, the value system of a society emanates from the environment and how the individuals make use of the environment; such value system if presented, can be transferred to the coming generations (Okoli, 2011; Nwabuisi, 2000). Through appropriate and adequate education, the above can be achieved.

Moral Reasoning and Morality

Moral reasoning is discussed closely with morality. Bulls in Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2006), averred that morality is got from the Latin word 'mores' which construes "manners" or "morals", ie the general accepted code of human conduct in a society. It could also mean the pursuit of the good life without going by the accepted code of a society. This demonstrates that doing what is right, just and fair is equated with morality. Morality thus becomes a very crucial aspect of human beings since without it, a society is dead or will be in chaos (Akinpelu, 1983). Through it however, human beings display that natural sense of moral consciousness which enables them to regulate their dealings with one another; thus, facilitating social equilibrium and cohesiveness.

Morality is also needed for a peaceful society devoid of social unrest and fear as is in the *state of nature* which Thomas Hobbes discussed (Dewey, 1968). In Hobbes' state of nature, there was fear and tension within the human race. People were uncertain of the next moment since there was no one to watch over them. Their lives and property were at risk, amidst competition among men. There was the need to have common moral values that would

guide their conduct among themselves. They thus, sought for credible men who could rule over them to protect their interests (Bebibiafiai, 2003).

In present society, morality could imply the theory of what is right or wrong in human conduct or putting it objectively, a body or system of what is seen as right or wrong in human action (Osaat, 2006). It goes beyond personal behaviour or sexual behaviour as some thought in the past and embraces every action of individuals as well as how they affect themselves, others and the society at large.

The Nature of Moral Reasoning

Moral reasoning like other ethical concepts has its nature, which can be analyzed from at least three perspectives - logicity, stages and principles. In the first instance, moral reasoning is logical. For example, the individual is expected to weigh his options before taking a decision, He is faced with the choice of good and bad as well as right and wrong. He has to choose which one will benefit him more or what is expected of him (Akinpelu, 1983; Bebibiafiai, 2003). Assuming an individual is presented with a scenario of forging a signature (maybe as an accountant in a bank) in order to make some fast money in one day which is equivalent to 5 times his monthly salary, he has to choose to either forge the signature and steal in the process or remain loyal to his employer and wait for his pay.

Morality in this context expects the individual to go for the latter which is remaining faithful. Other situations could be: Should a staff lie in the office to cover up the mistakes of his boss, colleague, etc or lie to gain promotion? Should one open a church because of money making or open a school to extort the public build houses to extort tenants? Should vacancies be advertised to extort the public and give applicants false hopes? Should a person sell a parcel of land to an individual only to resell it to another individual because of bigger profits? Many instances abound. Hence the ability of individuals to apply moral reasoning in their actions comes as a result of moral grooming and mental development (Aminigo, 2003; Oputa, 2023).

Likewise, moral reasoning occurs in stages which are majorly four, namely anomy (or pre-morality), heteronomy, socionomy and autonomy. The anomy stage is that stage where children mainly between the ages of 1 - 5 are involved. These children are innocent in their thinking as they know nothing. They cannot differentiate between right and wrong. At this stage, moral reasoning is very low. Almond (2004:134) presented an exciting picture about this stage:

For interaction with the world and other human beings starts even before the ability to walk or talk are required, and certainly before the ability to reason can play a role. When a human infant is first aware of itself as facing a situation of choice, it has, consciously or unconsciously, had its first encounter with the possibility of morality. It is to be expected that the grounds of that first choice will be the satisfaction of its own needs and wants. Later, the interest of others will be encountered as a constraint. Perhaps, later still,

the awareness of a more distinctively moral ground for action will emerge. It is the search for the source of this potential moral life and the attempt to ground it on a secure theoretical basis that provides much of the substance of moral philosophy.

While examining the work of Piaget, May in Aminigo and Nwaokugha (2006), stated that the anomy stage is marked by egocentrism as the child is only concerned about himself and is indifferent to the welfare of others. The second stage (about 6-11years) which is the heteronomy stage captures the child showing awareness of the interests of others. He shares time with others and accepts the family-imposed rules especially from his parents as final. The morality of this stage is objective, not subjective and is dependent on the guidance of the rule of adults and those in authority. Also, the judgment of the child is based on the immediate consequences of actions he takes with regard to available rules and regulations.

The socionomy stage is an improvement on the heteronomy stage since the child lives his life in consideration of what the society expects from him (Mbagwe, 2018; Aminigo, 2003). The morality of this stage is partly objective and partly subjective. Likewise, the fourth stage is the autonomy stage where the individual is matured in thinking and acts not because of what is expected of him but because of what he thinks is right to do. The individual puts the interest and welfare of himself and others at heart in his dealings and does not wait for people to tell him what to do.

Very essentially, moral reasoning assists in developing the critical thinking skills in people. Critical thinking involves the careful analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to make a judgment. It is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing and generating information through observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Osaat et al, 2018). It is dependent on universal intellectual values which transcend subject matter decisions such as clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, sound evidence, consistency, good reason, breadth, depth and fairness and entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem or question-of-issue, concepts, assumptions and reasoning, leading to conclusions, implications, consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints and frame of reference. Critical thinking is essential in proving a point, interpreting what something means or solving a problem and enables individuals to make essential distinctions (Paul & Garrett, 2014).

Strengthening Moral Reasoning in University Education

The apex level of the education system in Nigeria is the tertiary institution. In a bid to pass the message of moral reasoning to students at this level, general courses should be useful. Especially at the undergraduate level, two major courses that cut across disciplines are *Nigerian Peoples and Culture* as well as *Philosophy and Logic*. Consequently, the virtue of moral reasoning should be fully treated either as a topic in the two courses or as a course on its own. Lecturers will do well to carefully and painstakingly discuss its relevance in the decaying society, knowing that this level of learning presents the final opportunity of

inculcating values into students. The facilitators of knowledge should do their best in their various institutions to promote values in the lives of the students for a better society. If they get it right, the society gains but if they get it wrong, the society loses/suffers.

As pragmatic scholars and educationists sometimes, one may want to analyze recent happenings in the country e.g. its education system and see if the pre-colonial period is preferred to the present era. However, as eclectic and autonomous beings, it is necessary that values are drawn from both traditional and western cultures by individuals to become better citizens. Consequently, lecturers in higher institutions of learning through courses such as *Nigerian Peoples and Culture* and *Philosophy and Logic*, among others, can expose students to the realm of great critical thinking for knowledge creation, generalization and usage.

Case Study 1: Human Rights Violation of the Niger Deltans (Using Nigerian People and Culture as a Course)

The human rights violations in Niger Delta by the government of Nigeria appear to be perpetrated under the guise of maintenance of law and order in the country. An observer at first sight would rush to the side of the government in view of the destruction of common goods, not understanding the genesis of the pursuit of these Niger Deltans and their sufferings and deaths. Since May 1999; the inauguration of the first democratically elected president of the country, President Olusegun Obasanjo, the government has continuously used indiscriminate lethal force in response to criminal activities, protests relating to oil production or ethnic conflict in the regions (Human Rights Watch, 2000); due to government's persistence of siding with the oil corporations and avoidance of their primary responsibilities to protect lives and properties in the region. Some of the human rights violations in the Niger Delta region thus include:

a. Environmental Hazards:

The primary right of every human being is the right to life. Life is facilitated by different natural mechanisms and when through human interventions those facilitators are being disrupted to provide from the sustenance of life, a huge problem hence emanates. The reckless oil drilling practices of the oil corporations which leads to pollution of the air, water degradation, extinction of sea animals and death of innocent children who drink the polluted water and die from the resultant effect and more have been a decade long issues yet unsolved.

b. Inequalities in Resource Allocations:

Logically speaking, it is a sad situation for a landlord to be begging his tenants for a space in his house. This analogy is practically what the situation is like between the Niger Deltans and the Nigerian Government. The resources in their land are extracted and, in most cases, even without their consent, which is where the Fair, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) option is denied them. The revenues are distributed at will by the governments without any consultations or a collectively agreed sharing formula. Also, the development projects in their communities are not fully agreed upon by the government and the local communities. This attitude by the government was reflected in the creation of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo against the outcry of the people. The people rejected the move as it did not hold the answer to their problems as

the commission would be as corruption-ridden as the previously created bodies that brought no solutions. The commission was to disburse funds for the developmental projects in the region but the government paid deaf ears. As the natural instinct of humans is to love and care for oneself prior to another however, the Nigerian government thinks otherwise; that they love and care for the Niger Deltans more than the Niger Deltans love and care for themselves. Thus, the control over the natural resources was denied the indigenous people alongside the accrued benefits in large quantum.

c. Lack of Corporate Social Responsibility by the Oil Corporations:

Research carried out by Amnesty International and Judicial Watch in the Niger Delta region revealed serious violations of Human Rights. The violations included forceful displacement of people and properties as well as environmental degradation amongst other “war crimes” and extrajudicial killings aided by the oil corporations who took advantage of the weak regulatory structure by maximizing profits instead of engaging in their corporate social responsibilities to their host communities. If the corporations had been more responsible despite the existing weak regulatory structures, much difference could have been made to maintain peace and more still, save their staff from the nefarious activities of the armed youths such as being kidnapped.

d. Forceful Displacement:

In 1999, shortly after the killing of 12 Nigerian policemen by an armed group in Odi Community in Bayelsa State (a community of about 15,000 people), the then President of the country, Olusegun Obasanjo deployed soldiers from the Nigerian Army who went on to demolish every single residential building in the community and more than 2,000 people were killed- young, old and children inclusive. Again, in April 2000, some mobile policemen entered the K-Dere village in Gokanna Local Government Area (LGA) in Rivers State and burnt at least ten houses and detained some people due to their opposition to the road projects in the area; including the Human Rights activist Ledum Mitee and at least four of them were later shot dead by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2000). Consequently, communities have been in fear of the consequences of exercising their rights of association, right to life and their indigenous rights.

Food for Thought

1. How best can government in Nigeria curb human rights violations?
2. How best can government compensate Niger Deltans for rights' violation?
3. Why are the Niger Deltans suffering from unemployment and poverty in spite of the abundant resources in the region?
4. How can one correct the mindset of some of the youths in the region who feel that quick money is all that matters and that education is irrelevant?
5. What should be the responsibilities of multi-national oil companies that work in the region with regard to the welfare of the Niger Deltans?
6. What have been the conditions that the government of Nigeria gave for multinational oil companies in Niger Delta over the years?

7. Why should host communities in the Niger Delta take only 3% derivation from oil produced in their region and frontal exploration takes 30% in view of the Petroleum Industrial Act (PIA) assented to, by President Muhammadu Buhari on August 16, 2021?
8. Why do the elite in Nigeria send their children overseas for education?
9. Why do the elite in Nigeria go abroad for medical check - ups?
10. Why are social amenities such as good roads, school infrastructure, health facilities, power, etc grossly deficient in the Niger Delta region?

Lessons

1. The people of Niger delta deserve adequate compensation of all the years they have been denied adequate social justice by the government.
2. Where there are enough job opportunities for the youths in the Niger delta region, they will not engage in vices such as robbery, kidnaping, oil bunkering, etc.
3. Government should be sincere with the welfare of all citizens in the country including Niger Deltans.
4. For unity to thrive in Nigeria, all the regions in the country should be carried along. That is, true federal character principles should be respected.

Case Study 2: Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe (Using either Nigerian People and Culture or Philosophy and Logic as a Course)

In the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, written by Chinua Achebe in 1958, the author masterfully draws the attention of his audience to certain societal changes with the coming of the Missionaries in Nigeria. Reading through the chapters and using Okonkwo as a major character, he lucidly differentiates the Nigerian culture from that of the Whites; highlighting their merits and demerits in a skilful manner (Achebe, 1958). One can thus argue that he did not condemn either of both cultures; rather, he narrated the unfolding that ensued. In other words, he was able to highlight essential values in Nigerian traditional culture such as industry, truth-telling, respect and unity just as he highlighted important Western values to include knowledge of the true God (or right passage to Him), the rejection of idols, western education, white collar jobs, social developments, etc.

Food for Thought

1. What was in the mind of the author Chinua Achebe when wrote the novel *Things Fall Apart*?
2. How can contemporary students in Nigeria compare their culture with those of other nations?

Lessons

1. Moral reasoning is a powerful tool that helps people to be independent in reasoning and also assists people in doing what is right at all times.
2. Every citizen should be able to apply moral reasoning to life issues. This will enable them to grow in character and do what is expected of them at all times.
3. There is always a solution to societal challenges.

On a serious note, the lecturer should brainstorm with his students on these issues. Likewise, students should be encouraged to make contributions, suggestions and ask questions where necessary. These will help in strengthening their moral reasoning abilities.

Conclusion

The paper has shown that moral reasoning as a value is very much needed in university education due to decadence in values in the society.. Common vices include high level of corruption, election malpractice, examination malpractice, excessive materialism, kidnapping, cultism, kidnapping, gender-based violence, laziness, lawlessness, etc. Many have blamed decadence in values on miseducation, poor governance, greed, miseducation, unemployment, etc. Consequently, problems associated with these vices include poor education products, many killings, inter and intra communal unrest, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, poverty, poor representation in government, decay in public infrastructure, etc. These societal ills may however be corrected by strengthening the value of moral reasoning in the university education curriculum.

Recommendations

The following steps are recommended:

1. There should be effective and consistent communication between the teachers and students until the value of moral reasoning is fully embraced and displayed by the students.
2. Teachers should continually demonstrate their role as *models* to students in their conduct, attitudes and teachings,.
3. The conduct of students in schools should be monitored at all times by school teachers and authorities. If any of them is derailing, such should be counseled and those who refuse good counseling should be disciplined.

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