

THE TEACHER AS A MORAL AGENT: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined philosophically the teacher as a moral agent. Findings from the study revealed that the teacher is a person who is specially trained in knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in a formal training institution to teach or impart same to the learner in the most acceptable ways. The study also revealed that besides the parents who should take the responsibilities in building their children' morality, teachers also play certain important role as the moral agents that promotes moral development and transmits the moral values for the students. Thus, acknowledging the importance of the role of teachers as moral agents, the study recommended among others that teacher education should include education in moral and aesthetic values that will assist in the moral development relevant to the needs the society.

INTRODUCTION

Education all over the world is seen as an investment for national development because it is expected to turn out the requisite quantity and quality of human resources for the economic growth using the appropriate inputs. It involves all the learning processes acquired through formal and informal settings. It is also a sure way of transmitting the dynamics of culture, tradition and modern socialization; a vital tool that will bring about improved living conditions of the citizenry in our communities and society at large. Education has no boundary; it is for all ages, personalities, linkages and all embracing. It is a concept that varies according to the perceptions of the scholars involved. The increased awareness of the importance of education to development has awakened in people and nations a conscious effort at devoting their resources to acquiring qualitative education. Incidentally, no education, no matter how beautifully designed or how well intended its visions are, can be attained without well-equipped, visionary and committed teachers. Just as education is the life-wire of any society, irrespective of people, time and place, the teacher is the life-wire of any educational system. The offshoot of education - national development cannot emerge on its own without the drivers - the teachers. Thus, the realization of the goals of education majorly depends on the teacher factor. It can conveniently be said that the educational system of any nation is the bedrock and manufacturer of its manpower through the instrumentality of the teachers.

Education which serves as a major instrument for the development of any society is made more relevant by the presence of the teacher. For education to play its role in ensuring the development of the society, quality teachers are a sine qua non. This is so because as the last man of defense in any formal educational system, the teacher remains the indispensable manager of knowledge and a sure factor in the successful implementation of any educational scheme/programme or policy anywhere in the world. It is a teacher who translates educational policies into practices and theories into action. Teachers are the main determinants of the quality of any educational system. This is so because it is upon their number, quality devotion, effectiveness and efficiency according to Ukeje (1986) that the success and future of any educational system depends. Stressing this further, the Nigerian government through its National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) opines that no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers. A teacher by all standards is expected to epitomize all the cherished values, norms and of the society.

Against the above background, it follows therefore that the teacher is the spark that fixes the whole development process; the key man in the drive to progress (Akinyemi, 1972) whose life touches the life of practically every citizen either as students, parents or guardians, administrators or planners (Fafunwa, 1974). This work therefore is an attempt to examine and analyze the notion that a teacher is a moral agent and in order to achieve this task, a conceptual analysis of such concepts like education, teacher, morality and moral agent is given to strengthen the discussion.

Education

Education as a concept is liable to many definitions based on the perspectives of the various authors. It is a concept that is very difficult to define. It is so broad and controversial that one doubts if it can be defined, since a definition has to be precise and targets to a definite point of view. This could be the reason why some people stress that it is better to explain what education means than to define. Although, it must be noted that in whatever perspective it is defined, education is education. Education can simply be defined as the overall process of knowledge acquisition for the purpose of making man more human (Gbari, 2016). Education according to Okeem (2000) can be seen as a process whereby the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior acquired for the overall development of man are to the general good of the society. Fafunwa (1974) on his part defines education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior, which have positive value to the society in which he lives. Similarly, Ogbole (2001) avows that education, whether seen from the point of an illiterate traditional community or from the point of view of the sophisticated Western or European system, whose education has been formalized, basically refers to the orientation given to people and which involved knowledge, skills and values.

If we go through the few definitions provided here, it can be seen that they are all emphasizing the transmission of skills, attitudes and behavior from a professional (teacher) to young children and adults.

Morality and Moral Agent

As a rational being, man has the highest faculty and ability to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong and also to choose rightly. As a social being, man cannot be comfortable and fulfilling in isolation. He necessarily needs the company of others. It follows from this that the growth and development of the society or any social organization depends largely on its uprightness, which is the conformity of man's action with the standards of behavior dictated by the society and ultimately by God. It becomes most pertinent today to ask - What is morality?

And who are the moral agents in a morally decadent society like ours with increasing nauseating activities such as rape, fraud, sexual immorality, killing and so on?

The term 'morality' is an indispensable condiment of life that covers a vast arena of human conduct and examines our interaction with other human beings. It touches every aspect and every moment of our life. As a concept, morality is the ability to establish the differences between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. It is related to conduct of individual's behaviors or attitudes. It deals with the goodness and badness of an action, character and disposition. The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines morality as the principles of good behavior. Morality provides the rules by which people love each other, fight each other in every conceivable way. It governs all our contacts with members of our family, with co-workers, with our church and with all aspects of our government. From the above definitions, it is imperative to uphold that morality deals with human behavior to his fellow human beings. Thus, Amaele in Mgbomo and Amaele (2018:338) avows that morality as a social phenomenon involves the evaluation of the consequences of our actions for others and their actions towards us.

A moral agent is any person or collective entity with the capacity to discern between right and wrong and be held accountable for the consequences of their actions. Moral agents have the responsibility to anticipate and avoid causing unjust harm. They are those agents expected to meet the demands of morality.

Moral Education

Education is widely regarded as a moral enterprise (Brewster, 1985). It is that field of activity which seeks to expand the mind to give direction, to promote awareness, to allow us "to see" things which the under-educated do not see" (Kneller, 1971). And as a functional part of a total society, its purpose is "the inculcation of knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes by means of instructions that have been created for this end." But in "practical" activity, "man is neither concerned with knowledge

for its own sake, nor with the production for immediate needs, but with living a distinctively human life of virtue and perfection" (Nwala, 1980).

Moral education according to Osaat and Ekwe (2012) is that education geared towards teaching people the principles of right and wrong behavior. It is that education directed at encouraging the desirable and acceptable set of behavioral patterns and promote the standards and values of a given society and on the other hand, discouraging negative and undesirable attitudes inherent in the same society. In other word, this study concerns itself mainly to the affective domain of the individual. It deals with the upbringing of the child to make best decisions in life. These decisions could bring about positive transformation to the individual, the family, the local, and the national and international communities. Moral education refers to helping children acquire those virtues or moral habits that will help them individually live good lives and at the same time become productive, contributing members of their communities. It talks about character molding, positive attitudinal changes: dedication to duty, honesty, hardworking, perseverance, trustworthy, love, patience, truthfulness. It is against the spirit of all forms of examination malpractice, indecent appearances, cultism, bribery, and corruption, sexual abuse, drug abuse, sexual harassments, thuggery, brutality and other vices that clouded the contemporary society and schools (Ibekwe, 2015).

It is an established fact that moral formation is important and essential at different stages of development of children; hence, morality cannot be detached from education. Education devoid of morality is like tea with no sugar. But while it is possible to take tea without sugar, the survival of the society does not permit education without morality. Thus, education and moral revalues cannot be treated in Isolation (Akinsanya, 2015). Any education that fails to conscientiously inculcate the required moral values among its products is not worth its salt. After all, education implies worthwhileness. And so, what is worthwhile in any society should include moral values. The degree of goodness or badness may vary from society to society but every society knows that it is good to do good and avoid bad whether relative or absolute. To be educated therefore, implies not only standards of behavior and comporment which give meaning to existence. Morality is thus an indispensable condiment of life (Amaele, 2010).

Purpose of Moral Education

Nord and Haynes (1998) points out that there are two main purposes of moral education and they include:

- (1) To help make children virtuous - honest, responsible, compassionate, humble and so on
- (2) To make mature students informed about important and controversial moral issues.

Who is the Teacher?

Who the teacher is commands diverse responses due majorly to the obvious multidimensional roles he is saddled with by the society. The teacher has been described as that personality who is imbued with the necessary capacity to facilitate, transmit learning and sustain the teaching and learning process towards achieving intended goals of education in any given society (Duruh, 2005). The teachers' registration council of Nigeria in FRN (2002) defined the teacher as that individual who has been exposed to professional training in education at specified levels and is certified as capable of expressing knowledge, attitude and skills to a learner. A teacher is one at the center of the success of any educational programme no matter the quality of learning activities blueprints, learning materials and available physical facilities (Moronkola, 2002).

A teacher is a specialist who imparts knowledge to the learners. A teacher serves as a connecting factor between the learner and the content to be learnt. Ajayi in Akindutire and Ekundayo (2012) posits that the teacher is someone who imparts knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to a group of learners. On their part, Wosu, etal (2017) defines a teacher as a person who is specially trained in knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in a formal training institution to teach or impart same to the learner in the most acceptable ways. This implies that the teacher should be an embodiment of knowledge before imparting same to the learners who are dependents. The role of the teacher

includes the following; delivering the subject matter to the students, counseling and judging, a societal mirror, an evaluator, a self-developer, a curriculum developer, a role model and many others.

The Teacher as a Moral Agent

Education and moral values are inter-woven and cannot be separated. Moral education guides our decision as to what is good, true and right. Moral education is of great significance in all areas of education because it helps in the development of an academically, morally, psychologically and mentally sound individual. It is a key dimension of building peace, social conduct, tolerance, justice and intercultural understanding. For the real progress of a nation, it is very important and necessary to develop moral values in all citizens and to achieve this goal, teachers have a very important role to play. In the world over, the teaching job is one that has received and is still receiving varying degree of attention both from government and its citizens because of the key role it plays in the development of individuals and the society at large. Hence to make a significant development in any nation or society, such a nation or society has to look towards the teachers because they are the builders of the society and nation.

Consequently, a nation can hope to achieve sound development of the personality of a child by the teacher. It is universally true that the personality of a teacher has a corresponding relationship on the personality of his/her learners. This is because a teacher has the capacity to influence the students in their thoughts and personality and engage them in certain activities. The aim of the teacher is, among others, to teach the student a process through which he can set standards and make moral decision himself, within the context and demands of his relevant culture.

Essentially, teaching is a noble profession which has a high moral value. It holds a mission to produce better humane generation for the nation. Teachers play a key role in developing the values of the students. Teachers teach morals by what they do as much as by what they say; their actions, words and so on carry a moral significant in themselves. Besides the parents who should take the responsibilities in building their children' morality, teachers also play an important role as the moral agents that promotes moral development and transmits the moral values for the students. In school, teachers act as surrogate parents to the students who take over the responsibilities not only in teaching, but also in building the student's morality. In buttressing the above, Gui, etal (2020) avow that the following functions or roles played by a teacher can be seen as some of the reasons why the teacher can be seen as a moral agent and they include:

Moral Model or Exemplar: Teachers play important role as moral model or exemplar to the students. They are the second important persons in the children's life after their parents as they spend more time with their teachers in school when compared with their working parents. The children are most likely to imitate the actions and behaviors of their teachers who have some attractive characteristics like being caring, optimistic, passionate and so on. Thus, teachers ought to have a sound moral personality and also act morally so that they can act as moral exemplar to their students. They also ought to demonstrate their moral virtues such as respect and responsibility both in and out of the school so that the students would learn them in their daily life too. It is also important for the teachers to understand that every aspect of their life teaches or sets an example for their students.

Moral Mentor: Teachers do not only convey subject matter knowledge to their students but also helps in the moral development of their students who may seek for their advice in moral reasoning process and decision-making process. Hence, by providing moral instruction and guidance to their students, teachers serve as moral mentor. Also, as moral mentors, teachers can easily identify the cause of students' behavior and use suitable teaching strategies to assist them in shaping moral character.

Creator of Caring Environment: It is important for teachers to create a caring environment to enable them get closer to and understand their students deeply in order to help them to learn and develop their morality as this will influence students' academic and social outcomes. Teachers who care for their students are always sensitive and considerate of their feeling because they always

observe students' behavior and affirm their conduct by giving praises. The praises act as motivation and encouragement for students to maintain their moral behavior. Students who are being cared for will learn to care for others in their lives. Thus, a caring environment in school can encourage social and emotional bonding of students which are essential for formation of students' moral character.

Inculcating moral value: Owing to the fact that students spend a large amount of time in school, it is important for teachers to internalize moral values that students will be able to apply in and outside the classroom because they are the important persons to inculcate those moral values to students in the school. They can inculcate the moral values either overtly or covertly to students using various types of instructional materials and activities in the classroom. For instance, teachers can inculcate moral values by telling a moral story to their students. They can also ask questions about the characteristics of the characters to help students to practice their moral reasoning skills and can also ask students to think about the lesson learnt from the story and teach them to learn or practice the positive attitude of the character in the story.

Moral Communicator: Teachers act as a communication bridge between students and their parents by communicating with the parents when they find that the students are not behaving well or when some conflicts occurred so that their parents can know about their children's behavior in the school. By doing so, they discuss the problems and find out solutions with both students and parents which will also help in shaping moral character.

Counselor: Teachers act as counselor who can listen to students' problem and offer advice in their moral reasoning process. Teachers ought to be good listeners in order to understand students' mindsets and feelings. They need to be empathetic to their students. They should give advice to students about what they should do in any situation in their lives. They should raise the awareness of the students about immoral behavior and give suggestions or recommendation for students to live their life based on moral virtues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Teacher education should include education in moral and aesthetic values that will assist in the moral development relevant to the needs of the society.
- (2) The leaders of teacher education should be appointed based on merit, seniority, qualification, character, ability and so on. In other words, non-professionals should not be appointed to decide the affairs of teachers in Nigeria.
- (3) Teaching should be treated as a profession both within and outside Nigeria
- (4) The salaries of teachers and other entitlements should be paid regularly and promptly too in order to avoid brain drain syndrome.
- (5) There should be regular training and retraining of teachers to meet world standards in the teaching and learning process

CONCLUSION

We have not exhausted the topic, but as we gear towards a conclusion, it becomes necessary that we bear in mind that the aim of this work is a philosophical examination of the teacher as a moral agent. The role of moral education and the teacher as a moral agent is imperative in transforming society with a more sustainable way of living. Thus, it is important for teachers to know more about their roles and challenges in developing students' morality. When teachers understand their role as moral agents, it enhances their ability to identify ethical problems, draw contextually appropriate conclusions and execute the soundest course of action.

However, it must be noted that the teacher should not impose ethical codes or standards of behaviour on the learners. This should arise from social situations and the learners evaluation of his/her own ways of behaviour. Thus, if the child is taught to understand how to relate well with other people, the understandings will open doors to many good possibilities for them and the nation or society at large.

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