
Consequences of the Neglect of Religious and Moral Values in Our Educational System

Samuel AMAELE

Department of Educational Foundations
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria

Donatus C. UKULOR

Department of Educational Foundations
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

The decline in moral standards in our educational system has adversely affected the fabric of our society. This is evident in the collapse of our national value system. This paper examines the importance of religion and religious/spiritual values in our educational system. The aim is to stimulate discussion on how to get rid of the hydra-headed problem of moral decadence that had plagued our educational system. Attempt was made to identify religious values as the basis for cultural and moral values. The termination of religion and religious influence from our educational system and detachment of religion from moral instruction witnessed decline in fallen standard of teaching and learning and equally an increase on our social problems. Human being is a religious being and cannot be detached from religion. Therefore, to treat him as though religion does not matter in his life or cultural formation in school or society is a grievous moral distortion and a cultural mutilation of his personality and vision of life. Based on this, some recommendations were made. These include, among others, that religion should form the basis for moral instructions in schools; that religious and moral instructions should be made compulsory in schools.

Keywords: Religious Values, Moral Values and Cultural Values.

INTRODUCTION

After the birth of Nigeria in 1914, we have witnessed a series of educational systems that did not actually address our yearnings, needs, aspirations and interests as they were based in the British educational system. This necessitated the convocation of 1969 curriculum conference which focused on Nigerian children in Nigerian society.

The National Policies on Education in 1977, 1981, 1998 and 2008 respectively, focused on Nigeria children with the sole purpose of improving the quality of education. They opined that Nigeria being a multi-ethnic nation possesses diverse cultural entities of over 350 distinct ethnic groups and indigenous languages with nearly 150 million inhabitants. Education, being the best legacy a country can give to her citizens, must be passed down from generation to generation to stimulate growth and development. Education, being this important is a human right and should be made accessible to all.

Education has the ability to develop any society and the youths who are to occupy leadership positions in the country should be properly educated in order to improve the society. Schools at various levels, therefore, should educate future leaders and develop the high level of technical capacities needed for growth and development.

In the National Policy on Education (2014), the Federal Government adopted education as an instrument, “Par excellence” for effecting national development. The Federal government aimed at equipping individuals with knowledge, skills and attitudes which will help them live meaningful life by contributing to the development and growth of the society. These individual citizens will in turn derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society as they competently carryout their civic obligations. In Spite of these noble government objectives and commitment to education, the quality of education in our schools has been greatly compromised due to the fact that religious and moral values are rendered inconsequential in our educational system.

Conceptual Framework

Values connotes the degree of importance of something or action. It is something worthwhile, cherished, admired, desired and desirable; that which provides satisfaction or sense of accomplishment (Okoh, 2003). Values can be defined, according to Rokeach (1973), as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. Values reflect one’s sense of right and wrong or what one ought to do or ought not to do. Values influence attitudes and behavior.

Cultural Values

Individual cultures emphasize values which their members broadly share:

- One can often identify the values of a society by noting which people receive honor or respect, e.g., is it professionals or is it measured in term of money. In many countries people would not willingly vote an atheist as president, suggesting belief in God as a generally shared value. Values clarification differs from cognitive moral education;
- Values clarification consists of helping people clarify what their lives are for and what is worth working for. It encourages students to define their own values and to understand others values;
- Cognitive moral education builds on the belief that students should learn things like democracy and justice as their moral reasoning develops (Santrock, 2007).

Values relate to the norms of a culture but they are more global and abstract than norms. Norms provide rules for behaviour in specific situations, while values identify what should be judge as good or evil, while norms are standards, patterns, rules and guides of expected behaviour, values are abstract concepts of what is important and worthwhile. Standing up when singing National anthem is a norm, but it reflects the value of patriotism (Cialdini, 2003)

Religion

Religion, according to Webster Dictionary, is a belief in and reverence for a supernatural power. Livingstone (2016) gave all embracing definition of religion as that system of activities and beliefs directed towards that which is perceived to be of sacred values and transforming power. Religion for him has characteristics of the ideal type which includes:

- Interaction with the supernatural;
- A diagnosis of something essentially wrong with the human condition, and a prescription for salvation or liberation from it;
- Regular, repeated behaviour (ritual);
- Community practice.

This is present in all religions and is fundamental to the formation of morality. Morality is the distinction between right and wrong. It is the determination of what should be done and what should not be done. Morals deal with behaviours as well as motives. Christian religion holds that morals are derived from God's character and revealed to us through the scriptures. Morality can be relative; dependent upon situations and context e.g. traffic rules differ from country to country, ways of greeting etc. There are also some morals that are universal in nature, e.g., respect for human life. Therefore, morality deals with moral code, relationships between persons. Ethics is the philosophy that questions moral reactions. It involves systemizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct.

Religious/ Spiritual Values

Okoh (2003) defines this as having to do with salvation, God or the gods, the next world, beliefs etc. This agrees with Hardon (2003) definition of religion as the sum total of all the principles and laws which determine our responsibilities to God. For him the term religion is generic and covers both the natural and supernatural forms but indispensable in either case is the recognition of a personal God. Man is a creature, and as such is subject to his creator in all that he does. It is recognition of a higher being than himself. This is an acknowledgement of a superior Being, possessing a superior power and authority and can deal decisively with any creature. His moral conduct is measured by its compliance with or disobedience to the order established by God in the world. Consequently, morality has its source in God and cannot be divorced from Him. Unless man's conscience is enlightened by the knowledge of principles that express the divine law, there can be no firm and lasting morality, so that without religion morality becomes simply a matter of individual taste, public opinion or of popular vote.

Moral Values

Moral values, according to Okoh (2013), have to do with man's conduct towards man, liberty, fraternity, justice and honesty. Moral values refer to a set of principles that guide an individual on how to evaluate right versus wrong. People generally apply moral values to justify decisions, intentions and actions and it also defines the personal character of a person. An individual with high moral values typically displays characteristics of integrity, courage, respect, fairness, honesty and compassion. The basic foundation of an individual's character is developed during a child's early years and partly shaped by the values and beliefs of parents. Educators also play important roles in the formation of moral values.

Religion and Morality

Prior to the erosion of values and standards in the 1980's and 90s, Nigeria used to boast of a vibrant, progressive, highly and widely recognized educational system which compared favourably with any educational system in developed societies, despite the fact that Nigeria is still classified as underdeveloped. The erosion of values and standards in our education

system in particular and our society in general was consequent upon implementation of secularization of education policy, that is, termination of religion and religious influence from our education system and detachment of religion from moral instruction. Morality without religion lacks enabling force.

Christian philosophy of education, according to Okoh (1988), insists that religion must be the only sound basis of discipline and all morality. Lemu (1983) rightly observes that our social problems are consequent upon the detachment of morality from the religious sanction. Some separate moral instruction from religious instruction, others detach moral instruction from religion and church. Religion is the authority behind morality, and moral education that is not based on religion creates confusion in the minds of the youths. This is in line with the position of Astor (1973) when in his definition of secularization said it is to live in the world as if there were no God. God is not necessarily denied, He is simply considered as removed and separated from His creation. If religion is removed from our educational system, it means that God is removed and when God is removed there will be no objective morality. Hence Astor (1973) maintains that in practice the removal of God leads to a progressive removal of objective moral values.

Discipline as training in morality was applied by the missionary educators when necessary to drive home the message contained in the popular saying “spare the rod and spoil the child”. This agrees with Okafor (1991) when he says there is no excellence without discipline and tenacity of purpose, even geniuses are characterized not only by lofty intellection but also by a desire to excel and by readiness on the road to excellence. The Christian concept of discipline as a corrective measure was fully captured by Fafunwa (1973, p. 90) when he wrote that the missionaries were generally strong disciplinarians and they had abiding faith in manual labour and the rod as the cure to all ills – idleness, laziness, slow learning, truancy, disobedience, irregularity of attendance and the like.

Hence Iwe (1985) remarked that to handle a child or treat him as though religion has little or nothing to do with his life or cultural formation in school or society is a grievous moral distortion, and a cultural mutilation of his personality and vision of life

Resultant Effects of Detachment of Morality from Religion

From the foregoing we observe that morals and religious education expunged from our school curriculum precipitated moral decadence in our schools today. It was properly handled by the missions when they were managing the schools. Brain (1980) says that the church has always held the conception that schools are agents for transmission of knowledge, culture and social norms as agents of the maintenance of social order. Agu (1989) noted the rapid deterioration of moral standard and quality in our educational system started with the government takeover of schools from mission voluntary agency. The public education Edict, 1970 of the then East Central state which read in part: ...the state by virtue of this Edict, all interests in or attaching to premises used for the purposes of a voluntary agency or private school and in equipment, furniture or other removable property used in or in connection with such premises, being interests held immediately before the appointed day by the proprietor of the school or by trustees solely for the purposes of that school, and all rights and liabilities to which any such proprietor or trustees were entitled or subject immediately before the appointed day, being rights and liabilities acquired or incurred solely for the purpose of managing any such premises or property as aforesaid or otherwise carrying on the business of the school of any part thereof...

All property transferred to the state under this section shall vest in the state free of any trust existing immediately before the appointed day, and the administrator may use any such property for the purpose of any of this functions under this Edict.

This was the last straw that broke the Carmel's back. Agu (1989) noted, that whereas in the mission school curriculum religion was very important and attendance to religious lessons was compulsory, the Public Education Edict 970 for religious instructions only provided for religious instructions to be organized one day in the week and participation of pupils in it was to be completely optional. Rivers state Education (proprietorship and management of schools) Edict 1971 had no place for moral instructions or religious education at all. The resultant effect is, according to Okoh (2005) a system that has rather produced "bookfull blockhead" lacking the essential skills of comprehension, analysis, solving problems and drawing conclusion. What we have is an educational system that neglected the traditional, cultural and spiritual values of our people and has produced education to money venture that is open to all and sundry. Okere (1983) rightly noted that today it is impossible for any observant citizen to ignore the stalk gross indiscipline in our schools such as examination malpractice, sexual abuse, roguery, pilfering, cult activities, truancy, violent revolt against discipline. It is a thing of great concern as citizens watch our future generations, being malformed, half educated, mentally misshapen and spiritually dwarfed due to indifference and neglect of religious and moral values.

In the light of seeing religion as authority behind morality, some advocates of return of mission schools have made it clear that it is to combat the social evils that have plagued our society since the takeover of schools by government. The catholic bishops of Nigeria in 1980 issued a communiqué that calls for the handover of schools to the church to resume its mode of combating such evils as dishonesty, stealing, armed robbery, immorality, violence and indiscipline. Amaeshi (1983) supporting the bishops' position for the return of schools to the missions has this to say, if the school is not a temple, it becomes a den of criminals. When, literarily, school, domestic and religious education do not go hand in hand, the outcome is a man who is both unhappy and helpless. He noted that the education of the child means to nurture him and direct his destiny in a way he will be properly equipped for the performance of additional duties other than mere intellectual exhibition. Bethe (1982) supporting this observed that education without Christianity (Religion) is nothing but paganism and vandalism.

Related to the issue of the fast collapsing educational sector is the all important issue of the total collapse of the national values system and what Governor Babatunde Fashola of Lagos State told an audience not long ago in Abuja at the public symposium at the Bishop Hassan Kukah center that Nigerians generally have abandoned our long cherished moral and religious value system and have rather embraced a new culture of consumerism and the unbridled quest for wealth at all cost. The Holy Father, Pope Francis had also during his inaugural Mass, about two years ago, in the Vatican City also raised similar concern and called on humanity to have rethink.

The decline in moral standards in our educational system has affected the fabric of our society adversely, our youths are so much distracted that they spend most of their valuable and quality time in the use of the social media (gsm wahala, internet surfing & home videos etc). There is an urgent call for the restoration of our moral and cultural values.

Ogwu (2014) in his critical examination of Nigerian educational system said that there is drift that needs urgent attention. He maintained that: our education system is in shambles, we can see that in the result of WAEC and NECO in the last two years and the products from our universities and polytechnics. We are in an increasingly competitive world where the correct training and development of the human resource is vital for the growth and development of any society. For Nigeria to join the emerging global powers and develop its economy, it must look at her educational system, look at the problems and try to find a solution. This is the path towards achieving a sustainable, productive and competitive workforce.

The product of the Nigerian system has to some extent impacted negatively on our educational system. The pervasive corruption around us, erosion of our values system, lack of good governance, bad policy implementation and too much emphasis and importance place on certificates should be looked into. Education is not different from any other sector where most of the basic things are not functioning the way it should be. Government is not the only one to be blamed but all the stakeholder.

According to Abati (2010), the country is a victim also of the collapse of values, bottom – up and top- to bottom, he blamed the politicians who steal public resources and live ostentatiously; the administrators who steal the funds meant for the educational sector, the religious leaders who preach the message of miracles and prosperity gospel and parents who are willing to help their children cheat.

Parents and the society do not see anything wrong in applying short cut, cheating and over reliance on the results instead of a sustainable process. A society that sees certificate as source of status symbol, access to wealth and recognition, accepts the product without questioning the process. Students do no longer read and prepare for examination but depend on examination malpractice instead. This is dangerous as such individuals may end up being threats in the nearest future and make our society unsafe. Except we change our mindset and be serious with religious and moral values, we will still be going round in circles in whatever system of education we would want to adopt. We no longer respect merit and hard work but easy access and admiration to unaccounted wealth in the name of miracles, culture of lawlessness and faulty value system. Students and all other stakeholders are not helping matters. They are compounding the problems by their way of life. This is evidenced in the rampant examination malpractice; recruitment of unqualified teachers, inadequate funding, and the little fund available stands the chance of being embezzled because of corruption. The teachers and school administrators who are not qualified but found their way to the classroom by accident, try as much as possible to survive from the difficult economic environment by compromising the standards. These are equally the products of the same faulty educational system since the diseased tree from its roots cannot produce healthy fruits, according to a wise aphorism. Some well placed individuals and the rich in our society may think that they can avert the inevitable by sending their children and wards to universities around the globe like in UK, USA, UAE, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Malaysia and even Ghana. Running away from responsibilities cannot solve any problem. The time bomb that we are sitting on may one day explode if we don't act now and these children/ wards that are abroad studying now may not find a home to come back to.

CONCLUSION

Education is all about integral development of human person. Its objective can only be achieved when it performs the onerous task of rearing up the physical, mental and spiritual component of man. The door of moral decadence was thrown open when our education system was secularized and religious values jettisoned. Consequently, cultural and moral values were neglected because they lack basis without religious values. When this devastating phenomenon became the norm in our schools general decline in morality was common experience. This, as it were, adversely affected the standard of teaching and learning. There is urgent need for a radical healing “Sanatio in radice” healing from the root.

REFERENCES

Abati, R. (2010). 6-3-3-4 Desecrating Fatunwa's Memory. Retrieved from <http://www.nesdiaronline.com/abati-fafunwa.html>.

- Agu, C. C. (1989). *Secularization in Igbo land*. Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang. Gmtt.
- Astor, P. (1973). Modern civilization and Religious life in Kenya: The Impact of Secularization. In F. Konig (Ed.), *Secularization in Africa* (pp. 134-164) Rome: Tipografica LEBERIT.
- Cialdini, R. D. (2003). Crafting normative messages to protect the environment: current Directions in Psychological Science. Retrieved from <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/protectenvironment>.
- East Central state (1970). *Public Education Edict*. Enugu: Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture.
- Fafunwa, A. B (1991). *History of education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: NPS Educational Publishers.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2014). *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: NERDC.
- Handon, J. A. (2003). Moral and Spiritual values in public education. Retrieved from <http://www.jahandon.com/moralandspiritualvalues.html>.
- Iwe, N. S. S. (1985). *Christian, Culture and Colonialism in Africa*. Port Harcourt: RSNC.
- Lemu, S. A. (1983). The Role of Religion in moral Education. In O. A. Nduka & A. O Iheoma (Eds.), *New Perspective in Moral Education* (pp. 62-82) Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- Livingston, J. C. (2016). Anatomy of the sacred an introduction of religion. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com>.
- Ogwu, P. O. (2014). Nigeria Educational System: Drifts needs urgent attention. Retrieved from <http://nigeriavillagesquare.com>.
- Okafor, F. C. (1992). *Philosophy of Education and Third world perspectives*. Enugu: Enugu State Publishing.
- Okere, T. (1983). The Role of Religion in Moral Education – Christian perspective. In O. A. Nduka & E. O Iheoma (Eds.), *New perspective in moral Education* (pp. 52-61). Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- Okoh, J. D. (1988). *Educational Ideas of Outstanding Nigeria Educators*. Owerri: Corporate Impressions.
- Okoh, J. D. (2005). *The Risk of an Educational System without a Philosophical Base*. Port Harcourt: UPPL.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Natural of Human values*. New York. The Free Press.
- Sandrock, J. W. (2007). *A topical Approach to Life- Span Development*, New York, NY: McGraw Hill.