

VALUE EDUCATION: TOWARDS THE REVIVAL OF MORAL VALUES AMONG IGBO YOUTHS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

In traditional Igbo society, moral education has always been considered the most essential component of education because the nurturing of moral persons is the prime function of schooling. The implementation of moral education has relied on the inculcation of values that reflect moral ideals. The emergence of the Information Age, with a plethora of information and ideas being disseminated instantly through informational technologies, has altered the educational landscape of the world and challenged the conventional approach to moral education especially among the Igbo youths. The resultant effect of unguided information from social media has led inexorably to decadence in morality and pursuit of wealth and material things without hard work. Given this context, this paper delves into the onerous task of reorientation and revitalization of moral values among the Igbo youths. It proffers and projects these moral values as the vital force for all development and progress especially in the contemporary Igbo society.

Key words: Education, Values, Moral values, Igbo.

Introduction

Mohandas K. Ghandi, the father of Indian nation once said “The things that will destroy the world are: politics without principle, pleasures without conscience, wealth without work, knowledge without character, business without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice. The theory that man is a product of his society is unequivocally true. This is because the individual is the product of the society and the process of character development derives a great influence from the values of the society in question (Albinus 2012). The present Nigerian society is a very morally sick society, inundated with key moral ailments as lust for quick wealth and power, embezzlement of public fund, prostitution, armed robbery, fraud, terrorism, kidnapping, ritual killing, street fighting and similar vices are now prevalent. The phenomenon of moral decadence among the young and old is in geometrical upsurge, yet the nation spends fortune in education. The pervasive moral ills as witnessed today will not abate until there is an uncompromising effort to overcome the gory phenomenon through the inculcation of moral values which is the essence of education.

Education is considered as a weapon of liberation from ignorance. However, when education happens without the concomitant appreciation of moral values, the result is not only disastrous but catastrophic. Education is not solely about imparting knowledge; it is also about shaping character. Certainly, every ship needs a compass, especially those that operate in troubled water, so too every education has to be guided by moral values in order to make positive impact in the society.

In this paper, effort is made in clarification major concepts like education, values and moral values and its importance in any community of humans; it further highlights some of the philosophical views on moral values and reveals the great importance the Igbo community places on moral values as the soul of education. Finally, deliberate effort is made to stimulate the desire to aspire for these moral values among Igbo youths.

This paper strives to establish the essence of value education among the Igbo youths. It traces the history of the Igbo people and the importance they attach to value education. It is evident that Igbo would only recognize that type of education which imparts moral values. Hence the popular saying ‘ *agwa bu mma*’ (good character is beauty) This implies that true beauty is demonstrated by good character. Again,

integrity is of great significance among the Igbo, hence the saying, “*ezi aha ka ego*” (good name is more precious than wealth). These phrases underscore the importance the Igbo attach to moral values. This paper having condemned the contemporary lethal behaviour among the Igbo youths, projects those amiable moral values for which the Igbo are known for and encourages the young Igbo youths to imbibe these virtues for meaningful growth and development.

This work has a greater significance in view of the growing apathy towards value education among the teeming Igbo youth. It is a clarion call to reawaken our collective consciousness for value education, and to jettison all immoral behaviours like “quick wealth without morality” syndrome that are inimical to human development.

Education

Etymologically, the word education comes from two Latin words; *educere* meaning “to lead forth, to draw out or guide away from” and *educare* meaning “to rear”, “to train or bring up”

The first nuance of education, *educere*, was held by the idealist who maintained that knowledge is innate in man. They believe that at birth the child is stocked with the required knowledge and all that remains is lead out, squeeze out, pull out this knowledge with the assistance of the teacher. The proponents of these ideas are Plato and neo-platonic philosophers,

The second word, *educare*, means “to form” or “to train” or “to mould”. This nuance of education was held by philosophers popularly known as the realist. They were opposed to the innate ideas of the idealist but held that the child’s mind at birth is a blank sheet of paper or *tabula rasa* on which experience can write. The major proponents of this idea are scientists, like Aristotle, John Locke and other empiricists.

It is pertinent to note that the two views by these two schools of thought suggest that education involves two important elements; one is the innate ideas, the other is the environment. The environment plays a greater role in the development of an individual.

This is to say that education involves willing submission of oneself to be taught in order to acquire enlightenment. Literally, therefore, education connotes a process of training or development of some skills, character or mind, usually under the guidance of a teacher or instructor. According to Fafunwa (1967):

Education is the aggregate 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...it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.

Nyerere (1967) defines education as the transmission of accumulated wisdom and knowledge of a society from one generation to another as a means of preparing the younger generation for their future role in the society and the effective participation in its maintenance and development. Correspondingly, Okafor (1984) sees education as a process of acculturation which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-fulfilment.

Education is not solely about imparting knowledge; it is also about shaping character. Moral values like honesty, integrity, empathy, hard work and respect and so on which falls under the affective domain of child development, is the heart or soul of any education anywhere in the world. Education and moral values cannot be treated in isolation. Both of them are inseparable! Any form of education that fails to conscientiously inculcate the required moral values fall short of what is generally known as education.

Values

The Oxford Advanced Learners’ defines value as “worth of something compared with the price paid for it, and the quality of being useful or worthwhile or important.” A renowned philosopher and

educationist, Dewey (1968) perceives value as primarily, to prize, esteem and secondarily, to estimate. Similarly Okeke (1989) asserts that value connotes importance and something qualitatively cherished. Values are standards of conduct, efficacy or worth which the society endorses, maintains and even transmits to her members-present and future generations. Values are ethical principles by which individuals and communities live, work and interact. Values as a philosophical concepts belong to the broad division of philosophy known as axiology. Values are generally regarded as things desirable and positive. Value forms deeply rooted mind-sets of commitments by an individual, which have direction on the actions and behaviours in the society. It is a vehicle for social change and unavoidable means of physical, social, political, religious, moral development for lifelong learning and survival Okolo (2009) cited in Umar (2013).

Philosophers have argued about the source of value. For the realists, values are relative and therefore have no existence outside the thoughts and actions of man. According to them, man is the creation and maker of values. From this point of view, Okeke (1989) asserts that all educational aims are regarded as valuable only to the extent that they are based upon the objective of meeting the needs of those being educated. For the realists, therefore, values are measured relative to the individual's reactions to things and situations.

According to the idealists, values have independent existence outside of man's experiences. In this regard, certain values exist in the super sensory world and unless conscious efforts are made by man through reasoning, he cannot know them. This implies that any real educational values must have existence independent of man's interest and desires. To the idealists, man does not create values, rather he discovers them.

The pragmatist, mediating between the realists and the idealists insists that something becomes of value or valuable only when it is experienced and/or used. Hence, it is argued that, objective value do not exist independently. Rather, through the interaction between persons, subjective values and society's objective standards, value emerges. Therefore, for the pragmatists what works for good is valued. However, the individual values should be considered in relation to those of the wider society in which he lives. Sequel to this, the individual value system remains useless if it does not respect the ultimate value of mankind; and remains relevant to the extent it conforms to the ultimate values. It is at this point that moral values evolve which is this crux of this paper.

Moral values

Moral is described as standards, principles of good behaviour. Moral values are those behaviours, attitudes exhibited and encouraged by members of the society for the fact that they are good and desirable to mankind generally, the society and to the person in particular, as against those behaviours condemned and discouraged for they have been proved to be bad and unhelpful to the person, society and entire mankind. Moral values are mainly concerned with the behavioural aspect of members of the society. Since every society anticipates positive growth and expects her citizens to evolve and develop certain behavioural pattern, moral values are geared towards the positive growth of the society. Moral values are perpetuated through norms and a normless society can hardly thrive. Some social imperatives which guide the conduct of members must be established and enforced. This contention is aptly buttressed by Bernard (1975) when he remarks that:

No society had been able to live without laws and regulations, and apparently the more complex the society, the greater is the need for detailed description of behaviours which are permitted and those which are proscribed. These social regulations are of different levels of visibility-they are called mores, folkways or laws! They are designed to make it possible for men to live together harmoniously and thus in contemporary society to enhance the living conditions of individuals.

In line with this Agrawal (1985) opines that moral values must be universally acceptable values, transcending the limitations of creed, race and culture. Values are termed moral having been subjected to rational discussions and are found to represent an ultimate human value. Therefore, moral values are those values that seek the ultimate value of man. Moral values include; truth, honesty, integrity, justice,

perseverance, hard-work, respect and so on. The essence of education is therefore to inculcate moral values. Moral education is a program of study which teaches the pupil about behaving in accordance with what is good while rejecting the bad. It is a holistic approach to stimulate character building and moral development (Okoh, 2003).

Philosophical views on Moral Values

As a philosophical concept, moral values have a long pedigree. Some of the ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle ruminated deeply on the concept of moral values. Socrates holds that knowledge or philosophy is sought to enable men live a morally upright life. He argues that his intention was to do the greatest good to the people of Athens, to persuade every one of them to look into himself to embrace virtues rather than seeking for selfish interests. Socrates did not only teach virtue but also practised it up to his death.

Plato, who was a student of Socrates and later, the father of idealism as a philosophical school of thought, argue in his famous book, *The Republic*, that morals standards are unchangeable and that, laws that are approved must not change. He emphasises that moral training should start at the primary or even pre-primary stages of education, stating that all that is ugly and immoral should be avoided or omitted from children's stories. He further warns that the weakness of the gods should not be taught to children. Plato, therefore, made moral values the main objective of education, and thus maintains that there is a clear distinction between a process which produces a retail trader or a captain of a ship or a soldier or boxer and the likes; and the broad-based education which pursues the ideal of citizenship and how rightly to rule or obey. To him, any process which aims at mere acquisition of wealth, bodily strength or mere cleverness without intelligence and justice is not worthy of the name-education. Sequel to this, Plato stresses that the essence of life happiness and that the only road to happiness is a virtuous life (Rusk, 1969).

Meanwhile, Aristotle, who was Plato's pupil and later a philosophical giant and father of realism, makes moral education a central feature of his philosophy. He illustrates education as a practical wisdom which, according to him, is the moral insight of a virtuous man. Aristotle holds that moral virtue is a product of practice. In his view, a man is said to be morally virtuous only when he understands the principles which guide his action and why he should obey such principles. He further argues that if a child is trained to act rightly through habit formation, he can hardly change his right ways. Hence, one of the purposes of education in his philosophy is to inculcate wisdom in the individual for practical living, good conduct and concern for his fellow citizens.

In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's seminal work, *Emile or on Education*, the development of moral values is a central theme, intricately woven into his philosophy of natural education. Rousseau believes that humans are born inherently good, but society corrupts this natural goodness. Therefore, his education approach in *Emile* aims to nurture the child's innate morality by allowing it to develop naturally, free from the artificial constraints and negative influences of society.

In his work, *The Moral Judgement of the Child* (1932), Piaget presents a view of moral development based on the outcome of his experiment. According to Piaget, two kinds of morality operate in children- authoritarian, adult-imposed rules and the democratically evolved rules of the peer group. As a philosopher, Piaget was mainly interested on how we come to know and understand the world. Despite the different horizon of understanding adopted by many philosophers, it is evident that philosophers are in unanimous agreement that moral values constitute an indispensable aspect of any education process.

The Igbo people of the South-eastern, Nigeria

For the purpose of this paper, the term Igbo is used to refer to that section of the Nigerian population that speaks the Igbo language as its mother tongue. The Igbo people are found mainly in the present Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, and Abia States, and extend to parts of Delta and Rivers states. These Igbo communities are not only linked by a common language, but also by broadly common traditional

beliefs (despite variations), and many other cultural traits which differentiate them from other groups in Nigeria.

The Igbo people are located in the south-eastern part of the country called Nigeria and they occupy a geographical space of about 15,800 square miles, have a population of about 93 million and located between latitude 5-7 degrees north, and longitude 6-8 degrees on the east. The geographical territory occupied by the Igbo people and Igbo language itself (Iwunna, 2009).

The Igbo people who form the focal point of this paper are one of the three largest ethnic groups among Nigeria's estimated 256 ethnic and 490 linguistic groups.

They are so rich in cultural and traditional values which are celebrated by the people. These characteristics clearly distinguish them from the rest of the country's ethno-cultural units. It is the uniqueness of such cultures and traditional value systems that draw the huge line of distinction between the Igbo and all the other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Igbo people are ingenious, brilliant, successful traders, great travellers, accomplished educationists. Igbo people revere hard work, honesty, truthfulness, generosity, humility, respect for elders, respect for cultural and traditional values, but hate acrimony, backbiting, arrogance, greed, stinginess, dishonesty, stealing, ill-gotten wealth to mention but a few (Obasi, Obi & Ndukwu, 2017).

A renowned writer Okigbo (1986) sagaciously said, "You can tell the spirit of a people by the qualities they admire" In describing the spirit of the people, one is describing their values and what they consider to be education. The cultural and traditional identities define who the Igbos are, what they value and celebrate, where they came from, and what their Igboness really entails. It could be categorically stated that Igbos are entrenched in the belief that education cannot be said to have taken place if it is devoid of moral values. Therefore, Igbo society assigns a pride of place to basic moral values like hard work, honesty, integrity, justice, sincerity, and so on.

Unfortunately, these moral values which are so much admired and preserved among the Igbo people from time immemorial continue to wear down especially among Igbo youths of today. The emergence of the Information Age, with a plethora of information and ideas being disseminated instantly through informational technologies, has altered the educational landscape of the world and challenged the conventional approach to moral education especially among the Igbo youths. Hence, it is a sacred mandate to re-establish among the teeming Igbo youths the essence of education by reorientation and revitalization of these core Igbo moral values.

Truth

For the Igbo, the belief that the survival and wellbeing of the individual and the society depend on truthful adherence to moral prescription and norms is sacrosanct. This belief stems from the firm bond of connectivity that joins members of the Igbo community together as a people. The truth is the major strand that welds society together and drives progress. Without truth there was no need for human society. The trust built in Igbo society lies mainly on the ability of the individual members to tell one another the truth. Amandikwa (2013) observes that the Igbo believes that one good act of an individual could bring blessings and good fortune to the entire society while the evil or misbehaviour of one person could also spell misfortune and calamity for the entire society. Hence, the saying, "*otu mkpisi aka rụta mmanụ, ozuo ọha ọnụ*" (when one finger, get soiled with oil, it will spill to others). Thus, it is obvious that the pillar stone of every community is telling the truth. Thus the Igbo say: "*eziokwu bu ndụ*" ("truth is life"). On the other hand "*onye okwu asi*" ("a liar") is someone who negates this life principle which the truth gives. Truth has its own reward.

Today, being truthful is looked upon as weakness. Many young Igbo youths now discard truth as unfashionable. Education for many has been understood as being deceitful and roguish. As a result of this misconception, the modern society bleeds and retrogresses for lack of this fundamental moral value. It is therefore pertinent to note that, the embodiment of truth in our actions both in private and public

affairs stands the chance of dealing with embezzlements of public funds, examination malpractice, cultism, arm robbery, drug addiction, prostitution, sale of fake drugs, human trafficking, and the lapses in our judicial systems among others.

Hard work

In his classical work entitled, “The Dignity of Human Labour” Francesco Russo (1992) rightly asserts that, work links the human being directly with the natural world. It is the immediate human code and means of responding to the exigency of his natural world. It is the human being’s instrument of survival and his greatest tool of domination over natural forces. The Igbo people have a great appreciation of the essence of human labour and values work as fundamental human characteristics.

Igbo people are known for their strength and energetic abilities. For the traditional Igbo, the ability to work hard and to put one’s physical strength into effective use is seen as the key to success and survival. One of the earliest allusions to this fact was made by Olaudah Equino, who published in 1789 a book entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equinano or Gustavus Vasa the Africa*. On his people’s (Igbo) attitude to work, Equino writes:

We are all habituated to labour from our earliest years. Everyone contributed someone to common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious. The West Indies planter prefers the slaves of Benin or Igbo to those of any other part of Guinea for their hardiness intelligence, integrity and zeal.

The evidences portraying the Igbo people as industrious are multiple. This would not be surprising given the fact that traditionally the Igbo were predominantly farmers and relied mostly on their farm produce for sustenance. In the past, mechanised equipment for agriculture were not available, every aspect of farm work was done manually. The Igbo believe that the ability to till the land and plant crop is a way of demonstrating success. In Igbo land, it is a popular saying that “*aka aja, aja na- ebute ọnu mmanụ, mmanụ*” (soiled hands bring about bounty harvest) The concept of hard-work in Igbo moral setting is antithetical to the contemporary notion of quick wealth without hard work popularly known as “*ego mbute*”.

For the traditional Igbo society, therefore, diligence, dedication, and the ability to work hard are not only needed for manual work on the farm, they are essential ingredients that are required for the achievement of success in every human endeavour. Igbo concern for hard-work and achievement tend to leave them with little patience for the lazy and for failure. The Igbo reserved the purest scorn for the lazy and the incompetent. The story of Okonkwo and his father Unoka in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* brings to the fore the great value and admiration the Igbo have for strength, bravery and hardworking abilities, and their resentment for laziness and indolence. Okonkwo, who was presented as a typical Igbo man, manifested unreserved antipathy towards his father Unoka, who was known for his laziness, weakness, and laissez-faire attitude to life. Okonkwo acting in total contrast to his father was industrious and brave displaying characteristics of a true Igbo man. Igbo people are known to be resilient and they carry this trait to every life enterprise they embark on. They possess the ability to endure and persevere even in the face of precarious situations.

Nowadays, it is a common phenomenon among many Igbo youths to live in idealness with the dream of becoming wealthy. This trait is contrary to Igbo spirit of hard-work. It is the cause of incessant unrest in the contemporary Igbo society. The Igbo youths are called to recognise that hard-work is at the heart of meaningful education and without it progress will continue to be elusive.

Honesty

Honesty or truthfulness is a fact of moral character that connotes positive and virtuous attribute such as integrity, truthfulness, straightforwardness especially of conduct. Honesty and integrity are inseparable, it signifies having strong moral principles and adhering to them consistently. It is evident among the Igbo community, that wealth was only regarded where its source was clean and clear. Good name is considered the highest honour that a man deserves such that a man who became rich through some

nefarious means has no regard and his riches are not valued. The Igbo place great emphasis on integrity, hence the say, “*ezi aha ka ego*” (good name is more precious than wealth).

Honesty implies absence of deceit, lying, cheating and theft. Honesty could be said to be the bedrock of trust, because when someone is honest, he is considered reliable and dependable. Honesty has everything to do with being treating others fairly and being straightforward in one's conduct. It entails avoiding manipulative or deceptive tactics. In essence, honesty is about being genuine, ethical and reliable in one's interactions with others and with oneself.

It is from the cradle, the Igbo child is taught honesty, truthfulness and openness as a way of life. The Igbo describe this transparent and honest living as “*mmadu ikwuwa aka otu*” which means being straightforward in one's dealing with others. Honesty is esteemed so highly in traditional Igbo that immoral act like theft is looked upon with disdain. If a thief is caught in the very act of stealing, he is beaten mercilessly and taken round the village market place with the stolen property tied around him. He is jeered and mocked at by passers-by. According to Okafor (1992) nobody sympathises with a thief. There is in fact a saying in Igbo that “*onye ohi aburo nwanne mmadu*” (a thief is nobody's brother). A thief has no social regard and has no say either among members of his age-grade or in the community at large. Therefore, in Igbo culture emphasis is placed on living an honesty life that is devoid of deceit. It is regrettable to note that, honesty which is the hallmark of the Igbo people is no longer emphasized and observed as of yesteryears. Today, there is a significant change to the opposite especially among the Igbo youths. The youths seem to have shifted their respect for moral values like honesty to power, prestige and material wealth. It is a common but disturbing phenomenon that thieves are celebrated and honoured instead of facing public opprobrium. This negative development contradicts the moral standards of the Igbo people and endangers value education.

Justice

Igbo moral ethics revolve around justice. The just man in Igbo moral estimation is one who gives to everyone what is his due; one who tells the truth regardless of who or what is at stake; one who is objective in his judgement. The Igbo culture is anchored on the principle of “*onye biri ibe ya biri*” (live and let live). Based on this principle, every person has the right to life as well as access to the means of maintaining that life. Justice as a paramount moral value in Igbo culture assures that each person is offered that opportunity. The emphasis on right to life and property is expressed in the popular Igbo expression “*egbe belu, ugo belu, nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwa ya!*” (Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, whichever says that the other will not perch let its wings break off!) For the Igbo people, the classical sinner is the thief. This is because theft is seen as an aggression and an infringement on other people's right which is a violation of social justice.

The Igbo concept of justice is materially represented in Ofo. Ofo is the most important symbol in Igbo culture. Its value is more on its symbolic representation than its material value. Justice for the Igbo is embodied in fair play. Hence, the Igbo say “*E mee onye ka emelu ibe ya, obi adi ya mma*” (Fair treatment dispels rancour and acrimony).

However, the virtue of justice has been thrown into oblivion by many Igbo youth. Little or no regard is apportioned to fair treatment of others. For this reason, the society groans under the devastating effect of these immoral epidemics. The contemporary educational curriculum, should take cognisance of the lack in value education especially the core Igbo values for effective and qualitative education.

Conclusion

Morality is the foundation of social life and indeed social existence. The dissolution of morality is the dissolution of the fabric which makes social existence possible. The great thinkers recognized and gave credence to reality of morality as sacrosanct.

It is disheartening that the aforementioned moral values are fast becoming a scarce commodity among the Igbo youths. The nation bleeds because both the family and the school system have recklessly abandoned the inculcation of moral values on the youths. The youths are the future of every nation and

progressive nation exerts much effort in building up the youth. If the behaviour of the youth does not show the basic principles which are required for the growth and development of any society it will definitely drift into anarchy.

The modern society especially the Igbo youths should return to the glorious path of moral rectitude. By so doing education will have meaning and bear fruits that will bring about positive change in the society. There is no doubt that with sound moral base, national development will be enhanced. In turn, robbery, prostitution, arson, disrespect, cheating, forgery, fraud, nepotism, violence, vandalism, examination malpractices, drunkenness, students' unrest, occultism and so many other vices will be minimized if not eradicated in our society. It is only then that we shall admire the quality and quantity of education.

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