

THE NEXUS BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY, THE TEACHER AND THE MORAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE SCHOOL

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Introduction

Education all over the world is acclaimed as a potent tool for individual and societal development. For the society, it is magic wand that can turn around it fortune either economically, politically, socially, morally or religiously. Thus, education is a vehicle for change and social transformation. Like every enterprise, it success in dependent upon certain factors. These factors are very pertinent especially if the objectives behind the educational system is to be achieved. One of such indispensable factor is the teacher. The teacher is at the center of every educative process. The fact remains that teaching and learning depends on teachers for there can be no meaningful socio and political development in any society without the teachers. It is on teacher's number, quality and devotion that rest the effectiveness of all educational arrangements, development and growth. Even with the best educational placings and policies and colossal expenditure of money on education, the ultimate realization of any set of aims for education depends on the teacher. The teacher invariably is a critical stakeholder in the educational enterprise as there is always a transition from the home to the school and it is expected that the will be a transformation from the school to the home.

This can only be possible through the instrumentality of the teacher. The teacher is indeed the image maker of the school. His role is very critical in every aspect of the learner's development, be it intellectual, psychologically, socially, academically and morally. All these important roles of the teacher, gave impetus to the choice

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of this study tagged, the nexus between philosophy, the teacher and the moral atmosphere of the school:

To effectively undertake the study, the following sub-heads shall be considered: Introduction, explication of key concepts, theoretical framework, role of the teacher in the moral atmosphere of the school, summary, conclusion and recommendations.

Explication of key concepts

Philosophy: this concept or word has been subjected to many explications. Etymologically, it has to do with the love for pure knowledge divorced of materialistic inclination, nay, knowledge for its sake. Contemporary, the concept emphasizes its role as a critical and reflective discipline that seeks to understand fundamental aspects of human existence, knowledge, value, morality, reason, mind and language. All these, involve critical inquiry, interdisciplinary exploration, search for meaning, practical application (like the issue of morality), etc. In a lucid form, philosophy occupies central role in human existence, navigating and critically assessing the complexities of the modern world. This is perhaps why Kneller (1972) in Ategwu (2004) describes it as the fundamental resumptptions of other branches of knowledge. Thus, philosophy attempts to examine life and the world as a whole. It appraises all kinds of knowledge claim, either to clarify those claims, to criticize them or to propose better ways of understanding

them, like the role of the teacher in the moral atmosphere of the school.

Thus, philosophy is an activity. This is because it lead us to a better understanding of the world around us. It teaches us how to relate with one another, how to live well, comport ourselves according to the laws of the society. Through its elements, we can understand one another, respect the feelings of others, appreciate the gift of nature etc. Based on these, philosophy has many branches that touches every facets of human endeavor such as metaphysic, epistemology, axiology and logic.

Axiology as it relates to this study is coined from the Greek word “axious” meaning “worthy” and “logos” (study or science). The literal interpretation of “axious” has to do with values. And values as it were is a determinant of a man’s life. This branch of philosophy deals with values both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic values are personal value pursued for their own sake. On the other hand, extrinsic values are pursued as means to an end, example education, when it is seen as a means to the acquisition of moral rectitude. Axiology is further sub-divided; ethics, aesthetics, social and political philosophy, philosophies of law and education. Ethics as it concerns this study is derived from the Greek word “Ethos”, meaning “custom” or “character”. Ipso facto, it is said to deal with values concomitant with human conduct and human character. In a nutshell, ethics has to do with the rightness and wrongness of acts, goodness and badness. It is with this purview that moral judgements are based hence, its connectivity with moral philosophy. Moral Philosophy is the branch of philosophy that contemplates what is right and wrong. It explores the nature of morality and examine how people should live their lives in relation to others. Thus, there are many components upon which the foundation of morality is discussed. For instance, in psychology, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg “are two modern psychologists who have developed this foundation of morality to a high degree. Both postulated stages of moral development through which a child passes sequentially or hierarchically, from the egocentric to the full, mature and rational adult individual”. (Akinpelu, 2005). Piaget postulated two stages (moral heteronomy and moral autonomy) while Kohlberg elaborated his own into six which are also collapsible into three stages of viz pre-conventional, Conventional and post-conventional (Akinpelu, 2005). Worthy of note is the fact that each of the afore-mentioned stages is drawn parallel to the stages of cognitive development in the child, and the maturity of each stage is based on the level of rational thinking that underlies it. This is made possible through involvement of teachers.

Teacher: Education is a process of the transmission of knowledge. It is a process of passing new information to another person. Whoever engages in the activities of impartation of knowledge can be termed a teacher. Teaching thus, is an activity which a more educated and experienced person can engage in so as to enable others learn or get ideas (Eyibe, 2000). In this sense, a teacher is an individual who facilitates learning by sharing knowledge, skills, and values (moral values) with others, typically students. These activities can be in a structured or unstructured environment. Teachers guides learners in developing understanding, critical thinking, and practical skills or abilities. The teacher also assists the learner by guiding him in the process towards the cultivation of his mind (Obot, 2015).

In a broader sense, a teacher is not limited to formal educational institutions, anyone who imparts knowledge or insight,

be it in a designated classroom, workplace, community, or family can be seen as a teacher. The role often involves planning of lessons, assessment of progress, inspiring curiosity, and fostering a positive and conducive learning atmosphere or environment.

Philosophically; by inference, a teacher can be seen as mentor, guide, role model, a gardener, midwife, an artist etc, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of the learning process. This is imperative because learning has to do with knowing what one has not known before or doing what one has not done before. In tandem with this, Eyibe (2000) described the activity of a teacher as a process of making it possible for someone to grope towards ideas. One activity of the teacher therefore is to impact new knowledge on the learner which will in turn leads to positive changes in the behavior of the learner in this regard, Peters in Ategwu (2004) saw education as the process of transmission of what is worthwhile to the learner. The role of education in this light is to make the learner a worthy member of the family in all ramifications. Thus, the society look up to the teacher as an agent of transformation in the lives of the learners.

Moral Atmosphere: Etymologically, the concept “moral” comes from the Latin word “mores”. This concept literally means “habits” or “conventions”. This was derived from the phrase “moralis” which in turn relates to manners or morals. Historically, this word was first used by Cicero. It was translated from the ancient Greek word “ethikos” which means “moral”. The concept moral or morality is an aspect of philosophy as earlier mentioned-ethics from the Greek word “Ethos” relating to custom or character. Thus, the words ethics and morality are often used interchangeably though they evoke different meanings as their usage may demand. Morality connotes the customs and practices of a person or social group, while ethics refers to a set of moral principles and rules.

In the words of Okoro (2002), ethics is the study of morality and morality may be considered as the conduct described by the ethical symbols “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”. Nduka (2002) on his part viewed morality as the behaviour in accordance with certain standards of what is good or what is evil-striving for good or what is evil-striving for the good and rejecting the evil. For Ekpo (2009:164),

Moral is concerned with standards of behaviour which constitute the fundamental principle which guide individuals and enable them to distinguish between what is right or wrong, good or bad. In other words, morals guide people towards the right direction and enables individuals and society to appreciate and preserve some fundamental norms such as love, honesty, modesty, discipline etc... the fundamental principle of morality is the rational nature and destiny of man. Morals therefore aim at evoking the attitude of virtue in man.

This being the case, the teacher should through moral education inculcate in the learner the right moral values. Onwuka, Enemuo and Abiogu (2023) opinated that morality is the health of any society and any society that is plagued by immorality is sick. Moral education is therefore necessary in the school system of any society. Moral education in this sense refers to the process of teaching people (learners, students) how to behave properly and develop a set of value that guide their behaviour, attitudes and intentions. Moral education aims to develop a solid moral rectitude, character, integrity and commitment to ethical conducts,

norms and values. It teaches recipients the value of honesty, loyalty, respect, courage, patriotism etc.

Moral education cut across all types of education be it traditional, Islamic and western. It has been in practice since the creation or evolution of the world or universe and man. Traditionally, children are taught the essence of living a morally upright life. In Islamic education it is there. Western education is not devoid of it. It was a core component of the missionary school curriculum. The teacher is the one to implement the curriculum. The teacher is therefore seen as an agent of moral interpretation. The linkage between moral education and character development is very important; and the onus lies on the teacher. Indeed, this is important as the acquisition of knowledge itself. Unfortunately, current happenings point to the fact that moral rectitude has been eroded in our school systems. Shedding more light on this, Harry (2020) wrote;

If we peep into the Nigerian classroom to see what passes for moral education, we will be appalled at what is happening there. Just as the family and adult society have abandoned their duties to morally educate, so also teachers in schools are becoming indifferent to the moral education of the children in their charge. The role of loco-parentis is conveniently forgotten, even though they too are sometimes jotted by the behaviour of their wards.

The above is a pointer to the fact that there is problem in the moral atmosphere in Nigerian school system. The concept of moral atmosphere of the school as used here simply refers to the ethical norms, values and behaviours that permeate its environment. Thus, this study intends to serve as a wake-up call to all teachers.

Theoretical framework

No gain saying that theoretical frameworks are crucial in academic writings. Theoretical frameworks provide the foundations and structures for researches. Its importance lies in its ability to guide the research process and thus, link the study to existing knowledge in the field. Accordingly, two theories judged to be relevant to this study are hereby considered:

❖ Attribution Theory

Fritz Heider (1896 - 1988). He was an Austrian psychologist whose work was related to the Gestalt school. In 1958, he published the *Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, which expanded upon his creations of balance theory and attribution theory. The attribution theory was put forth in 1944. He Heider contended that behaviour can be accounted for by both personal and environmental forces. In essence, the theory explains how people interpret the causes of events and behaviour. These takes place in three stages viz (i) Behaviour is observed, (ii) Behaviour is determined to be deliberate, and (iii) Behaviour is attributed to internal or external causes.

This theory was later proposed for education by J. M. Frasher and R. S. Frasher in 1980. They argue that attribution process explain how individual can manage themselves and their environment to achieve desired or set goals. Simply, put, and attribution is a judgement about the causes of another's behaviour. This goes to show that there must be critical observation before drawing conclusion about an individual's behaviour, act or action as behaviour can be influenced by external factors.

Relating to this study, immoral behaviour by learners or students may be influenced by various factors. The teacher should be knowledgeable in those factors in order to advice the students accordingly.

❖ Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura (1925 - 2021). Albert Bandura was Canadian-American Psychologist. He was a professor of Social Science in psychology at Stanford University. He was best known for his Social Learning Theory, the concept of self-efficacy, and his famous Bobo-doll experiments.

This theory highlights the significance of observational learning and influence of cognitive processes on behaviour. Social learning theory suggests that individual learn by observing others and imitating their actions. It also considers the role of internal mental processes in learning. In summary, social learning theory

- Acknowledges that people can learn without direct reinforcement or punishment unlike behavioural learning theory.
- Recognizes that people can learn from observing others as well as from their own experiences
- Incorporates cognitive factors as well as environmental factors in explaining behaviour.

This theory is relevant to the teaching on moral education because it emphasizes how individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and values through observation, imitation, and modeling. In a nutshell, this theory provides insights into how moral values and ethical behaviours can be taught and internalized, hence it usage here.

The role of the teacher in the moral atmosphere of the school

The teacher plays a critical and central role in tailoring the moral atmosphere of the school. This role goes in diverse categories, shapes, forms or modes. Moral education has been a focal point in educational philosophy since the era of Aristotle. Aristotle viewed education as key to fostering good citizens. In contemporary epoch, John Dewey (1933) argued that education nurture both intellectual and moral development. He was of the opinion that schools are by implication moral institutions, and teachers pivotal to students' ethical growth. The teacher can execute this in the following ways in order to ensure serene moral atmosphere in the school.

The teachers as a role model

At home, children may not have the idea of imitation. At school, the look up to their teachers. They try to imitate their teachers. They teacher therefore plays a key role in the moral atmosphere of school by acting as an exemplar to the learners. As portray by a psychologist (Bandura, 1977) in his social learning theory as presented above, children learn behaviours, values, and norms through observing others. It therefore behooves on the teacher to be conscious of his/her behaviour, speech, interaction with colleagues, students, knowing very well that they learners are watching. Osam (2016) observed that children are highly perceptive of their teacher's ways of life. The teacher should at all times, be a role model to the students. He should be conscious of this and comport himself in a manner befitting to his calling. Professional ethics should guide him in whatever he is doing. Any professional misconduct will send a bad signal to the students.

Self-control: There is a Latin adage that “*nemo dat quod non habet*” (meaning, no one, gives what he has not). Every teacher must have the ability to control his/her instinct emotion, value system, ego, drives, desire etc, as a good teacher will produce good students and vice versa. Teachers therefore through professional training cultivate the spirit of self-control. Osam (2016:89), wrote thus; “A person who lacks self-control is not fit to be a teacher. It is a characteristic that has to be learned and practiced until it becomes a habit”.

The value of self-control cannot be overemphasized here. Self-control is a necessary ingredient if a teacher must maintain his or her integrity especially in difficult times. Self-control is the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in the face of temptations and impulses. This are the hallmarks of a good teacher and this goes a long way in influencing the moral atmosphere of the school.

Teacher-student rapport and school moral atmosphere

Rapport vis-a-vis the teacher and student is one of the major channel through which the moral atmosphere of the school can be influenced. A good teacher-student relationship is crucial for establishing a positive classroom climate, which includes a moral dimension. Enaible and Inmonivwerha (2010) asserted that a good teacher who intends to impact positively on the moral development of his students must first of all make the students have confidence in him. There cannot be any meaningful good confidence outside a closer tie between the teacher and the students.

Moral atmosphere as argued by Ryan and Bohlin (2022) is significantly shaped by the nature of interaction between students. This goes a long way in fostering an atmosphere of trust and ethical engagement. When this happens, the learners are most likely to replicate these moral behaviours in their interactions with their friends, peers, colleagues and or immediate environment members.

From experience, a good and sincere teacher is an asset to so many students and the teacher will in turn realize that student take him very much into confidence. And as it were, it is the teachers who show understanding and acceptance that students go for advice, guidance, and counselling (Nwabuisi, 2010). By this, the teacher will be able to deal with students that are having morality problem. In this way, the teacher is in a better position to influence students in very important decision making situation. This is where the quality of the teacher’s relationship with the student’s matters most.

Moral and Ethical Responsibilities of Teachers

By virtue of his professional calling and training, the teacher is not to impart only cognitive knowledge. If we go by the type of domain as elucidated by Benjamin Bloom in his Taxonomy. The learner sitting before every teacher is to be affected by all his domains, cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The affective domain implicitly engulfs the moral aspect of the learner. Therefore, teachers not only impart knowledge in the cognitive domain, but also engages in moral decision-making that affects the lives of the students and the larger society. This falls in line with Ekpo (2009:166) position that there are two approaches in moral education: the cognitive and practical formation of good habit. In the cognitive approach, emphasis is placed on sufficient factual knowledge which is relevant to moral issues in which one needs to take decisions. This means that one must be sufficiently

well informed on such matters as the possible consequence of alternative cause of action. On the other hand, there is emphasis on the practice and development of good habits as the foundation of moral education.

Nwabuisi (2010) suggested that the teacher should act as a moral leader within the school environment, influencing both the moral and academic dimensions of the students. His stand was borne out of the fact that the teachers are agents whose roles extend beyond the classroom, they model ethical leadership, foster moral dialogue, and promote democratic values within the school. Their daily decisions, how they handle issues of fairness, discipline, and interpersonal conflicts, are important components in creating enabling moral atmosphere that can either enhance or diminish students’ moral growth. Indeed, there are various ethical codes guiding the teacher, it is expedient that he abide by them to guarantee conducive moral atmosphere in the school.

Dealing with Concupiscence issues

The modern day teacher is faced with myriad of moral issues or problems. The 21st century has brought along with it so many issues broading on the moral rectitude of students. It is not an overstatement that today, it is common to see academic giants, intellectually sound, but morally debased. Social maladjustment is commonly seen among both the teachers and students alike. There is no single day that acts of moral imbecilities are not announced on the social media. The social media itself is a potent tool in the fueling of social or moral malaises plaguing the society. Parents are at the verge of despondency not knowing what to do. Government seems to have ran out of solutions to the problem of immorality among the teaming population of the nation. Correctional centers are overpopulated with underage as a result of one sort of immoral acts or juvenile delinquency. “Yahoo” the cancerous worm blowing unhealthy air cross the length and breadth of the country calling for whether there is still an lotta of moral consciousness among even students today. Is it cultism, gangsterism, rape, hard drugs or wanton destruction of lives and properties, name it, all moral issues.

Concupiscence issues are one of the moral problems besieging the school system today. Concupiscence as a concept has to do with strong sexual desires. The concept of concupiscence offers a veritable background for exploration especially with regards to theological and philosophical discourses. The concept also refers to a strong desire, often associated with sensual or material appellative. This is a cause of concern in our school environment today. Technological breakthrough and their available devices has made the concupiscence, issue more worrisome. Learners openly engages in some of these acts. They leave school to go for hook-ups. Engages in sexually related acts without minding that the school authority is watching them. Teachers themselves get involved in this too ranging from sex for grade, etc.

There is an urgent need therefore for teachers to be abreast with this and include it in their daily counselling of the students. Like earlier said, concupiscence is a common topic in both theological and philosophical discourses. In theological discourse, it is looked at as sin committed by getting involved in sexually related acts. And anyone who is involved in this, creates a demarcation between him and the Absolute Being who is so pure that he cannot withstand iniquity. This is why St. Augustine in one of his writings held that concupiscence weakened human will, and necessitate divine grace for moral living. In philosophical discourse, the problem of man’s inability to control his rationality,

freedom and responsibility etc comes to the fore. This therefore begs for the cultivation of proper virtue and moral character. The teacher himself should be wary of this as the Latin axiom has it **“Agere Sequitur esse”** (“To Be Is To Do”, “To Do Is To Be”). Philosophically, this implies that “any moral ought” is based on the “is” of an individual’s reality. Literally translated, it refers to action speaks louder than words or leadership by example or as a thing is, so does it behave.

In the discussion about morality, the scholastic philosophers which includes St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, St. Augustine etc were prone to using these phrases. In the present contest, the teachers should lead by examples and encourage their students to desist from all sexually immoral acts. Onwuka, Enemuo and Abiogu (2023) are in support of this when they advised that the teacher should inculcate in their learners the dangers of indulging in concupiscence related acts and they teachers in turn should live above the temptation of concupiscence desires. Frequent seminars, counselling, debates etc are necessary in this regard.

Recommendations

The National Policy on Education (2014) is aware of enormous role the teachers play in fulfilment of the objective of providing education to all citizens including children of school going ages. In order to tackle the moral issues, section 1, sub-section 8, a, b, c, d, e and f spoke about values to be inculcated in Nigerian schools. Value as earlier mentioned, is synonymous with morality. The discussion on morality is a necessary condition precedent for the peaceful coexistence and the development of the society. The topic therefore should not be treated with levity or wave of hand. This work therefore was necessitated by the desire to lend a voice to the teething problems related to immorality.

Aside from the points raised above, few recommendations are hereby made.

- Moral instruction should be reintroduced as a core curriculum right from nursery school up to the secondary school level.
- The introduction of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer/Questioning) in some foreign countries should not be allowed to enter into Nigeria.
- Policy banning related issues, topic, book or movies should be enacted.
- More guidance-counsellors should be deploying to schools.
- National Orientation Agency should intensify efforts on public awareness on dangers related to immoral acts.
- Constant seminars, workshops training should be organized where resources persons will talk to both teachers and the students.

Summary and conclusion

Existentialist philosophers are of the view that man is a bundle of possibilities which can constantly be actualized. In view of this, one cannot say that the immoral acts prevalent in the society will destroy it believing that the problem can be arrested. This work is an attempt in that direction, though it cannot claim to be the magic wand. However, within its limitations, it started with introduction, explication of terms, theoretical framework and the role of teacher in the moral atmosphere, recommendations, summary and conclusion.

Conclusively, from literatures reviewed, it can be established that the society is experiencing moral problems ranging from kidnapping, sexual pervasions, cultism, gangsterism, yahoo, ritual killings, disrespect to elders and constituted authorities etc. However, all hope is not lost as this writer strongly believed that there will be light at the end of the tunnel if views presented here are taken into considerations. Teachers should therefore be equipped and encouraged to take a bold step to arrest the ugly trend of moral imbecilities among the students.

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