Re-Thinking Character Building Education Among School Youths In Resolving Social Problems In Nigeria

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Abstract— This work examines Re-Thinking Character Building Education Among School Youths In Resolving Social Problems In Nigeria, as it looks at the changing dynamics of values, ideologies and life vocation as it affects human thinking and character building, leading to character confusion among youths in Nigeria. This problem is said to have been traced to the 1960s when teachers begin their knowledge transmission to teaching and learning only for school achievement, void of social stratification. Giving this, the character building education among school youths which used to serve as a panacea to shaping youths social and moral life, as its stipulated in certification of various kinds "character and learning" has become only learning, being the major requirement for graduation. Giving this premises, the researcher analyze the following: Teaching for Effective Character Education, Approaches to Character Education in School, Eleven Principles of Quality Character Education, Character Building Education, and Strategies to Resolve Social Problems among Youths in Nigerian Schools. The researcher concludes that, Educational values can only be appreciated in any society, if specific efforts which cut across race, age, priority, educational level religion and knowledge of the 'core elements of values are being taught. The work among others recommend that school, families, religious organizations, communities and government/non-government organization, should plan to teach and live by example so that, the young ones access the 'absolutes' with regards to character building education for all.

Keywords—Character Building Education, School Youths, Social Problems, Nigeria Schools.

Introduction:

It is no news that the world is changing in terms of values, ideologies, discipline and life vocations, which affect human thinking and character building across the globe. Individuals whether old or young especially, the school youths are faced with many challenges in the society which create 'character confusion'. The family, religious organizations and community should collaborate with the school in laying good foundation for value orientation and eventual character building of the school youth (Sanni, 2016).

Unfortunately, since the 1960's, teacher education has down played on the teacher's role as a transmitter of social and personal values but only emphasized other areas such as teaching techniques, strategies, models, and skills for school achievement. Nucci (1986) cited in Sanni (2016) observes that, the current public perception about the vision of a 'good teacher' is like that of the 'good technician', 'the skilled crafts man', who has acquired those behavioural skills and strategies, such that the 'effective teacher's concept implies one who makes learners attain 'academic achievement', based on training and skills alone.

Today, the societal challenges faced by everyone including the school youth, is quite enormous that intellectualism alone cannot resolve them, except we turn attention to the affective domain of man. Education emphasizes the three aspects of man's development which are; the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor; which are all necessary in man's development. It is common knowledge that some social vices associated with the school youth include violent conflict, aside from conflict, fighting, examination misconducts, intra and inter personal problems like, stealing, lying, gambling, cheating, rape, kidnapping and other anti-social behaviours are on the increase than the social virtues rooted in societal values which the school youth is also known to exhibit.

The trend of social problems among school youth is on the increase globally, the solution has always been an issue to be sorted, looking back to what moral development and character formation meant to

great scholars like Aristotle, Nichomacean and Socrates' Meno's ethnics; which have lessons for modern day educators. Character Education in the several centuries ago, has been seen as a primary function of the school. That is why John Locke, the 17th century English Philosopher, advocated education for character development. This view continued till the 19th century when scholars during this period assert that the solution to 'social problems' and 'worthy education ideal' is, the development of character building. No wonder, the American education has had focus on 'character development' since its inception, largely due to the influence of scholars like John Dewey (an influential philosopher and educator, in the 20thcentury) who affirms that, moral education is central to schools' mission (Miller and Kim, 1988; Nucci, 1989; Cited in Sanni, 2016).

Since the education of school youth in character building is an integral part of their development as emphasized by the National policy on education (section 1, paragraph7b, 2004), that the national educational goal is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN,(2014). This paper proposed that, in resolving social problems of school age youth, character building education is a sin-qua-non. This idea envisages three areas as development of vision for one's life; development of one's character; and dealing with concerns of direction and quality of life. By this position, educators must serve as role models, aside from the collaborative efforts of parents, members of the public, government, and non governmental, religions organizations and other stake holders who share the vision of enhancing the affective part of the learner for a better society.

I. Teaching for Effective Character Education

To be able to integrate and create meaningful teaching-learning encounter. The National Commission on Character Education (NCCE) recommends the following teaching methods for effective character education according to Williams (2000:7)

i. Consensus building;

ii. Cooperative learning;

iii. Literature;

iv. Conflict resolution;

v. Discussing and engaging in moral reasoning; and

vi. Service learning methods.

Although, there are some observed challenges when the issue of teaching strategies are discussed. The acceptable argument is that 'reducing teaching to technique' is unacceptable but allowing teaching-learning conversations to link the human 'affective' is however, needful when teachers and their craft are humanly related, learning will be effective (Palmer, 1998).

The school youths are young people who may be in their early and late adolescence as well as those within the young adulthood periods. Chronologically, individuals existing in the periods may be found around ages 12 to 35 years. The school youths are either adolescents whom have attained maturity with age brackets between 12 to 18 years or young adults whom have long reach maturity but are still young and are within the age brackets from 18 to 35 years. Both are still assumed to be in the school; secondary or at the tertiary level (Sanni, 2013)

School youths may be involved in negative or positive behaviours which may characterize social problems or promote social growth and adjustment. A number of factors have been adduced by Campbell and Bond (1982; and Huitt, 1999), as being responsible for the moral development and behaviour of youths in contemporary society, especially among the Americans thus:

i. Heredity;

ii. Early childhood experiences;

iii. Peer influence;

iv. General physical and social environment;

v. The communications media;

vi. What is taught in schools and other institutions;

vii. Specific situations and roles that elicit corresponding behaviour.

These sources of influence are reasons why we seek solutions to social problems through schools. Hence, in the development of character education, the school, families, communities and the general public have important roles to play.

II. Approaches to Character Education in School

In order to deal with issues of character education in the school, different approaches have been suggested by many authors among which is Witkins (1976): who suggests the use of any these in addressing character building education in school to include:

i. Ignoring the use of any method by allowing the individual to come up with his template:

ii. Take a 'value neutral' approach which is to, only create opportunities for learners to clarify and defend their use of values without giving recommendations;

iii. Teach students a specific process to follow when making decisions and putting these into actions;

iv. Engaging students in discussion on relevant moral issues with their peers (cognitive oriented);

v.   Inculcate in students some set of values with appropriate actions, and lastly, the

vi.   Inculcating, values' education, analyses, and moral development approaches (an eclectic approach) used by teachers. This approach can lead to learners using the volition and expressing action appropriate. It is also called the 'systems actions' of human behaviour.

III.   Eleven Principles of Quality Character Education

In order to enhance qualitative character building education, Lickona, Schaps and Lewis (1996) have outlined eleven principles of effective character education which can be used either to plan or assess a character education programme. The principles address the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of character development and they have also been found to be relevant in school learner's achievement. Quality character education should be able to:

1.   promote core ethical values as the basis of good character;

2.   comprehensively define thinking, feeling, and behaviour;

3.   display an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life;

4.   project the school as a caring community;

5.   develop character, through which the school provides students the opportunity for moral action;

6.   inculcate a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and help them succeed;

7.   strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation for developing character;

8.   give school staff effective learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students;

9.   afford staff and students the opportunity to demonstrate moral leadership;

10.   solicit through school, parents and community members as full stakers in the character building effort; and

11.   evaluate character education and that of the school; where the staff functions as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

IV. Character Building Education:

Character, whether it is good or bad is an observable conduct which is different from values but includes value as a source orientation for one, who expresses character. Whereas, values are embedded in both cognitive and affective components. That is why human behaviour character involves the activation of knowledge and values.

Sanni (2016) asserts that education aims at the idea of helping students understand their world but educational values are those life enhancing details of what make the society good or bad. She equally, observes that education is to equip individual or group of people to help them become smart and good, in the overall interest of the society. Character building education however entails a process of integrating the different acceptable social values and inculcating them into the individual for positive growth and self-direction.

Character building education is as old as the western education, itself, which developed in the 19th century. It evolved by way of storytelling or narration from one person to the other. For instance, Plato learned from his teacher Socrates through engagement in conservation, travelling and living with him to imbibe his qualities (Shea, 2003). Sanni (2016) corroborates this when she affirms that stories have been used to transmit the culture and history of a people in the ancient times, which was holistic in nature because, moral lessons were drawn from what were taught and learners imbibed positive traits from the teachers.

In the United States for instance, Shea (2013) observes that, 'character education' foundation has been traced to prominent educationists, philosophers and psychologists to include;

i.   John Dewey- early part of the 20th century and North whitehead (Dewey, 1916), who advocated that, for education to be useful, it must create a 'whole person';

ii.   Thorndike (1926) researched for five years into 'character education' through moral education which led to his theory of, classic stimulus-Response framework, which links learning to the association between stimulus and response;

iii. Jean Piaget's (1932/1965) cognitive theory expert claims that cognitive development in:-

a)   Schema to structure changes over time, through the process of,

b)   Assimilation by interpreting event in the light of existing schema to,

c)   Accommodating (consulting) new schema to make sense of the environment;

iv.   Kohlberg's (1969/1984) theory of moral/character formation which establishes stages that children must pass through, in order to move to a higher stage of development is another example of how character is formed or sustained. He is popular for his 'moral dilemmas' kohlberg's stages of moral development (1984);

v. Finally, his student, Carol Gilligan (1982), developed a contrary theory to Kohlberg and distinguishes in her research the difference in the moral orientation between a woman and man. She proposed that a woman's morality is based on 'caring and responsibility' while man's is influenced by 'justice orientation;

The relative lack of interest in 'character education in the last five decades has made Lickona (1990) as cited in Sanni (2016), observed that, in 1987, the National School Boards Association in the US. Department of Education, proposed a project on 'Building character in the public schools', which aimed at enhancing character development in the schools, through the involvement of more than 15,000 local school boards, with two main goals:

i. To heighten national awareness of the importance of character development programmes in local public schools; for the continued success and stability of American society; as well as

ii. To encourage the establishment programme in public elementary and secondary schools.

These are indicators of how high the United States have taken character education in their society. The US under her school reform policy has also passed the bill of 'No child left behind act' (2001), to ensure shift in federal education policy, provide funding for programmes design to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice; so that no child is left uncared for. Character education in the public and private schools is increasing in patronage as 'value' has taken over purpose, priorities and the outcome of learning. Parents have also been encouraged by the state, to be part of the crusade on working on their children's character (Gauld and Gauld, 2000).

Character Building and School Youth

It has been observed that schools need to build learners character in order to address school issues in a systemic way (Lickona, 1990). Williams (2000) has suggested to teachers, helpful methods for addressing character development for school youths while writing for the national commission on character education, in the U. S. which include that,

i. Educators must serve as role models to learners;

ii. School and classroom climates must be caring, collaborative, and civil in nature; and

iii. Teachers must establish an interpersonal atmosphere where respect is continually practiced.

The essence is for educators to be able to address pressing character based issues as, honesty, obedience, self-esteem, tolerance, responsibility, punctuality, hard work, self-control, respect for others, to mention but a few.

V. Challenges of Character Building Education in Nigerian Schools

Since the Nigeria Education system largely depends on paper certification, even though, much is said about character development and learning in the National Policy on Education, the reality is that no school runs a character building programmes that is accessed and evaluated. The following challenges abound:

i. Lack of clear cut measures of character assessment in Educational institution;

ii. inconsistencies in the school curriculum;

iii. Insincerity on the part of government, to have a home grown national character education policy and implementation. For example, the anti-corruption crusade of the Buhari's administration started from the top and not bottom levels, which has been highly controversial and not really yielding the required results; and

iv. System failure of all sectors of the Nigeria State, which has posed more problems for the policy, than ever before in Nigeria.

VI. Strategies to Resolve Social Problems among Youths in Nigerian Schools.

Seng (2000) observes that, in resolving social problems among the youth, some decisive measures must be imbibed. The school youths stand to gain a lot of benefits from a character education programme of the school, in the following ways to:

i. Improved genuine achievement of learners;

ii. gain greater accountability by school administrators on school problems;

iii. provide skills necessary to address issues in a systemic way;

iv. provides better public image of the school system;

v. reduce disciplinary problems in school system; and

vi. provide value sustainable to educational communities and their importance in societal change.

CONCLUSION

Educational values cannot be appreciated in any society, if there are no specific efforts which cut across race, age, priority, educational level religion and knowledge of the 'core elements of values to be taught. Collaborative and deliberate plans to implement values and character building Education would be an appropriate design in the right direction to help school youths address their social problems with the views to making adjustments in schools and the Nigerian society as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION

It becomes obligatory that school, families, religious organizations, communities and government/non-government organization, should plan to teach and live by example so that, the young ones access the 'absolutes' with regards to character building education for all. The following points were recommended to:

1. Create a sustainable value system for students; so that they can pick from the reservoir of knowledge and value base inculcation for a plausible action, for a better tomorrow.

2. Help student utilize explicit 'self knowledge judiciously, this would go a long way in solving their social problems.

3. Help students to develop the process of commitment and planning, so as to make their behaviour more intentional, in the face of soling their social problem.

4. Educators should evolve a more comprehensive and multifaceted approaches to values' education for effective character development, that can catalize problem solving skills in the young youths.

5. Create a supportive adult-child relationship which should be encouraged by the school because children are inclined to emulate adults with whom they have positive relationships; school youths can never be exceptional in this regard.

6. The young learners should be exposed to societal values, not only social customs and conventions but also the accumulated moral wisdom of adult society; with good exposure to pro-social models and will be able to explain the reasons for moral action.

Opportunities should be created for peer interaction as school youths would find pro-social action helpful development of self control, increase in their moral and social understanding, as well as develop concerns for their fellow youths and others around them.

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