

Moral Education and Societal Development: Is the Reintroduction of Social Education Ethics the Panacea for Society's Moral Challenges?

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1.1 Abstract

Societies worldwide are faced with the challenge of increased social ills that were previously unheard of. Commonly reported in the media are cases of drug abuse, suicide, homicide, femicide, rape, teenage pregnancy and rampant engagement in corruption, an indicator that something is amiss in the value system of the young people. While some scholars have argued that these activities may be a rational response to social conditions, it is the contention of this paper that if young people were equipped with moral education, perhaps they would make moral decisions. Traditionally the role of providing Moral Education (ME) was the preserve of parents and society but this has changed with the times and so school is increasingly being looked at to provide solutions in terms of imparting a value system to the young people. Currently in the Kenyan school system, values are given very little attention while subjects like religious education for both the Christians and Muslims are relied on to offer more in terms of moral education. Despite the existence of both Islamic religious education and Christian Religious Education as subjects in the education system, moral standards have consistently deteriorated. This positional paper makes a case for the re-introduction of Social Education and Ethics (SEE) as a subject at all levels of education to specifically focus on moral education. The paper will argue out this thesis informed by literature and studies. The discussion will provide useful information for Education policy developers concerning moral education and the development of society. It is hoped that a re-introduction of a subject focusing on moral education will equip Kenyan young people with the right predispositions, attitudes and reasoning that will lead them to develop a sense of right and wrong.

Key words: *moral development, moral education, social education and ethics, social ills, values*

1.2 Introduction

The issue of declining value systems is one that has attracted scrutiny by scholars the world over (Muthamba, 2017; Nyabul, 2009; Kira and Komba, 2015; Swartz, 2010; Boldysheva, 2009). While the effect of this moral decline is evident in societies and among adult populations, schools where a large population of the citizens of any nation are found in pursuit of education have not been spared. The greatest dilemma for governments the world is an educated citizenry that is undergoing moral crisis, a factor that is evident in increased violence, financial malpractices, corruption and a general lack of concern for others and the environment. Yet an examination of literature reveals that efforts have been made in the past to provide guidance to the young people in society in regard to values and ethics.

Over 2000 years ago, Aristotle argued that children needed clear guidance on how to be moral human beings and his Moral Theory provides the content and methodology of Moral education which is still applicable (Kira & Komba, 2015). In Tanzania, educational institutions have for a long time been tasked with ensuring moral education through a subject called Sports and Personality Studies (MoEVT, 2015) although there are contentions on the techniques of delivering moral education. For the Japanese, moral education has always been an integral part of the education system with the goal of cultivating morality that is evident in orderliness, mindfulness, hard-work, fairness, harmony in relationships with others and nature (Jones, 2017). In India, the history of moral education dates back to the Verdic age from 400 BC to 1000 BC and is infused with messages of peace non-violence, brotherhood and other positive values (Boldysheva, 2009). Yet despite this rich history, India has not been spared from moral erosion. In the United States of America and the United Kingdom, there is a growing movement in character education as a response to the moral decadence that is evident in the two communities, originating from juveniles

(Arthur, KristJansson, Walker, Sanderse & Jones, 2015). The above communities are a small sample representing the search for an answer to the issue of ensuring morality.

The phenomenon of Moral Education has also been an issue of concern in Kenya from as far back as pre-independence times. The interest in this issue is evident in the varied Education Commissions and reports like the Ominde Commission (1964), the Gachathi Report (1976) and the Koech Report (1999). These commissions concurred on the idea that despite moral education being taught to young people using Christian religious education as a discipline, moral standards did not seem to improve, painting a grim picture of a future society replete with people who have no moral standards. Commonly reported in the media are cases of juvenile crimes, suicide, homicide, rape, teenage pregnancy and rampant embezzlement of public funds, an indicator that something is amiss in the value system of the young people. These are cases that were unheard of in the past. As Wepukhulu (2001) points out, a child in the traditional African society was brought up under rules of avoidances, prohibitions and permission which were accepted as ethical by the community. These rules were passed on from elders to the younger generation and any deviation from what was considered right was dealt with through some system of punishment, while right actions were encouraged through a variety of methods. Bull (1969) cited in Devine (2006) posits that a child is not born with a moral conscience, but a natural, purposive capacity that can make him a potential moral being. This implies that given some instruction, formally or informally, the child will most probably acquire the correct disposition, attitudes and reasoning that will lead them to make moral decisions that define a moral being.

1.3 Moral Education and Schooling

Traditionally, imparting Moral Education (ME) was the sole duty of parents, with the child finding opportunities to practice what they learnt in their interactions with family and society, as well as seeing morally accepted behavior being modeled by people around them (Ivor, 1988). With an increasingly individualistic society and families which are fragmented, many children have to learn more in school, thus the “silent” delegation of ME to schools. Although this new role of the school has raised contentions about what, how and who to teach ME, it is the contention of this paper that school is best suited to partner with parents and the church in imparting ME because of the following reasons:

First, schools have the mandate to produce a person who will exist harmoniously with the environment and fellow beings. An examination of the national goals of education in Kenya reveals among others; the authority to “promote sound moral and religious values” (MOEST, 2005, p.iv). This implies that officially, the education system can adopt its curriculum to include the provision of moral education to the learners so as to ensure that school leavers will co-exist harmoniously with others in the society. It is a truism that students begin their ME at home, but before they grasp much, they join school and thus the need for school to continue from where parents had reached. The assumption in both the parents and school is that a causal relationship exists between knowing what is right and refraining from crime and thus the efforts by both groups to equip the learner with the ability to think and act morally (Tubb, 2003)

Secondly, school is a vehicle of direct instruction, with the teacher as the model of morality (Oladipo, 2009). The formal curriculum in schools includes subjects like Religious Education and Social Studies which have long been associated with the issues of what a society upholds as right or wrong and whose content is geared to helping the learner to fit in society. For the learner whose day is spent in school in interaction with peers and teachers, their learning can emanate from school/classroom rules and regulations, school ceremonies, visual aids containing moral content and academic subjects infused with moral issues. The teacher may provide scenarios which can be discussed for moral lessons or exploit emerging situations like a fight between learners, to address the issue of how conflicts should be resolved and the need to exercise justice and fair play in such circumstances.

Thirdly, school serves as a strong agent of socialization. School is by design a place where children expand their social circle and where they get to meet a variety of fellow learners and teachers. School allows the

learners to operate within the confines of the school rules and regulations by putting into practice some of the moral values that they have learnt in the course of interacting with fellow students and teachers. Agreeing with this, Berkowitz (1998) asserts that the school ideology, behavior of adults, governance structure, rules made and enforced, open discussions of moral issues, exposure to different perspectives and peer norms as found in a school, are a means of learning morals. This is important for two reasons: morality is seen in the way we treat others and secondly, it demystifies the expectations of a moral society by moving ME from the realm of theory to practice. Children learn more from what others do and lessons learnt in this way remain in their sub-conscious for a lifetime, acting as a reference point unless changed by a more impressionistic or powerful view.

Lastly, school provides numerous opportunities for the learner to possibly observe and make moral decisions. This is especially so if the person the student is observing is the teacher or peer they admire or respect, irrespective of if what is modeled is right or wrong. This is important because it provides an example of what right or wrong means, in consideration of what has been learnt in the classroom lessons. Teachers are obligated to provide a leading role in terms of exercising what they teach, so that learners can emulate them. While a good number of adults can speak enthusiastically about the positive things they learnt from their teachers, an equal number would associate their character to what they saw and copied from their teachers.

However, teachers have not always modeled what is right as seen in an article by Nyingi (2009) where the writer quotes a joint study by Teachers Service Commission (Kenya) and a Centre for Right Education and Awareness which revealed that teachers abuse more than 12,000 girls in the country each year! In view of such revelations, one realizes that teachers, parents and even society are only guides to point the young people to the way, but ultimately the choice to take an action that is moral or immoral is with the individual.

This reality points to the need for moral education so that young people are equipped to make a moral choice and to develop a moral sense (Mbae, n.d). Piaget cited in Nucci (2008) views moral development as resulting from interpersonal interactions through which individuals work out resolutions which they deem to be fair, as they draw on the foundation that enable them to make judgment in the course of encountering moral variants within society.

The above reasons provide a rationale why school is well placed to ensure the moral development of the children within it. This is not to dismiss the other vehicles of ME that include parents, religious organization and culture, since the concerted effort of all these avenues could help the young people of this century to develop a sense of what is right and wrong.

For a nation like Kenya, it is important to refer to the wisdom in the words of Chairman Gachathi (Republic of Kenya, 1976) that “A society that cannot define or teach its values will inevitably be subjected to invasion by other values...” For Kenya, the nation must have arrived at the point of being invaded, given the many reports of social ills that are prevalent in the society.

1.4 Moral Development and Societal Development

Oladipo (2009) defines the term moral as the right conduct in social relations while morality as the system of rules that regulate these social relations based on what is regarded as right or wrong, according to the society. Previous efforts at understanding the nature of human beings were dominated by contributions from philosophers like Plato who supported a view of human nature that is now understood as the ‘*innocent theory*’. This theory proposes that children do not come into this world either good or bad. They come with a neutral nature ready to take any shape from the influences of nature, experiences, upbringing and education. Some philosophers such as Descartes and St. Thomas disagreed with this *innocent theory* and instead defend the *original sin theory*. This theory teaches that human beings come into the world defiled following the downfall of the original parents: Adam and Eve.

While scholars do not have consensus as to how and when a child becomes immoral, they are however in agreement that young people need to learn rules of social interaction that include justice, trust, welfare and respect for human rights. Traditionally, the role of providing moral education was the preserve of parents and the culture of the community, however, this role has expanded to include religious organizations and school. Oladipo (2009) argues that all these vehicles of ME must work together, driven by the desire to ensure future generations co-exist harmoniously and that society is able to develop in all spheres. For education systems, scholars like Kohlberg provide a framework for structuring the curriculum based on the six stages of a child's moral development, that define the level of reasoning of a child and how they are able to handle a dilemma (Crain, 1985). Additionally, he proposes that the lessons in moral education should be carried out using scenarios that lead to stimulating discussions and decision making.

Arguably, a society like the Kenyan one that is on the path to development requires manpower that is both qualified and moral, if it has to realize development and sustain it. This view agrees with the contention of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed (2017) that whatever progress a nation will achieve will be preserved by values and principles of moral action. In the recent past, reports abound in the media of officers in public service whose academic achievements were celebrated by the community but who come back to misappropriate public resources, leaving the people suffering.

As a nation, our reputation globally is not one to be proud of courtesy of a few people who lack the moral code to guide their conduct in the workplace and with the wider society. Kenya needs to urgently address the issue of the value system of the young people of this nation, if there is to be hope of a future which we will all be proud of. This position paper makes a case for the re-introduction of social education and ethics in the syllabus, at all education levels.

1.5 A Case for the Re-introduction of Social Education and Ethics in Kenya

Social Education and Ethics (S.E.E) was introduced in the education system in 1986 after several education reports revealed the inability of religious education to serve as a vehicle for moral education (Ominde commission -Republic of Kenya, 1964; Gachathi report- Republic of Kenya, 1976; Koech report –Republic of Kenya-1999). The reports identified the key weakness of Christian religious education as the fact that it seemed to promote values and doctrines of Western Christianity and not values based on the African social system. S.E.E was thus proposed as a separate vehicle through which to impart ethics while separating it from religion, in order to address social issues irrespective of one's beliefs. S.E.E was intended to provide a more focused means of addressing social problems instead of piecemeal discussions across the curriculum.

A review of literature on moral education in Kenya, reveals a convergence on the view that S.E.E is a necessary discipline now more than before because the Kenyan society is faced with more social ills than those experienced two decades ago (Wepukhulu, 2001; Bennars, 1990; Shiundu, 1990). While the rationale for this agreement is undisputed, a number of studies exist that reveal that the acceptance and implementation of S.E.E as a separate subject from C.R.E faced opposition majorly from teachers of C.R.E and religious organizations, for a number of reasons. For the teachers of C.R.E who were expected to teach S.E.E, the contention was lack of training to equip them to handle this subject that was suddenly added to their work load (Makori, 1998). Secondly, the teachers felt that the subject content of S.E.E was complex and vague and an intrusion into the traditional position of established subjects like C.R.E (Bennars, 1990). For the religious organizations like the Catholic Secretariat and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the introduction of S.E.E was perceived as a means of doing away with religious education in the school curriculum and introducing controversial topics like sex education to the youth, leading to further deterioration of morals.

In her study that examined the attitudes of the Christian church and teachers in Bungoma District towards S.E.E as a discipline in secondary schools, Wepukhulu (2001) established that the Quaker church perceived S.E.E as an important subject, unlike their Catholic counterparts. She however counters the argument by

the Catholic Church by pointing out that the syllabus of S.E.E does not address issues of sex education. Additionally, she argues that there exist other avenues through which the youth could be exposed to immoral behavior.

However, an examination of the objectives of S.E.E could reveal the good intentions that are underpinned by the need to promote social justice, morality and socially desirable ethics. During the introduction of S.E.E, the objectives of the subject were stated as follows:

- a) To develop a harmonious ethical and moral relationship between the youth and the home, the school, the neighborhood, Kenya and other nations;
- b) To appreciate the necessity and dignity of moral education in Kenya and other societies;
- c) To base decisions on sound ethical principles as an integral part of personality development;
- d) To develop a rational attitude and outlook towards life;
- e) To acquire, appreciate and commit oneself to universal values and virtues that cement unity and understanding among the various ethnic communities in Kenya;
- f) To rationally sort out conflicts arising from traditional, extraneous and inner-directed moral values;
- g) To understand and appreciate the social fulfillment and moral rewards accruing from cultivating and adopting virtues and values offered by moral and ethical education.

From the objectives above, it is evident that S.E.E is a subject that will provide the moral education that Kenyan youths require. The benefits of S.E.E will be threefold: first, to the individual, the subject will instill the right attitudes, impart values for family and the workplace, train them in social obligations and responsibility and encourage them to be diligent (Wepukhulu, 2001).

For the society, S.E.E will hopefully produce members who value unity, harmony, hard-work and all other moral principles that can lead to a harmonious co-existence. For the Nation, she will benefit from citizens who value democracy, rule of law, are loyal, respect public property and are committed to the prosperity of their motherland. These indeed are key pillars of a nation that is forging ahead in terms of development.

1.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

The re-introduction of S.E.E as a discipline in the Kenyan Education system has implications for policy and practice. For curriculum developers, there will be a need to re-examine the objectives and content of the subject in order to make them clear and achievable. According to teachers who were interviewed in a number of studies like that of Itolondo (1998), teachers felt that the objectives were vague and the content widely borrowed. There is also a need to ensure that the subject is taught at all levels of education since moral development is a process that takes place across the ages but with varying levels of complexity. Additionally, teachers who will handle the subject should be given training to equip them with relevant techniques of teaching the subject and examining the acquisition of knowledge.

For practice, it is evident that moral education is a life skill subject that will impart values to the youth. Moral education will result in a person who has the capacity, knowledge, freedom, and willingness to be guided by ethical values in making their decisions and their actions (Nyabul, 2009). This will necessitate that teachers are trained to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies that will make it interesting and meaningful. S.E.E as a discipline dealing with real issues in life cannot be taught like Christian religious education that seeks to develop values alongside great amounts of information that is historical in nature.

It will also be important to develop strategies of examining its application in the life of learners, that is, apart from using paper and pencil exams. In a study carried out in Kitui Central deanery, Muthamba (2017), established that there was little uptake of values because of the way moral education was being taught. It is therefore important that for a subject whose application is in real life situations, examiners should identify strategies of establishing if learners have grasped the content or not.

1.7 Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that moral education for the youth is a time tested means of ensuring a nation where people live in harmony because of engaging in moral actions. While C.R.E, IRE and other syllabi guided by religious beliefs have been the medium of moral education in Kenya, evidence of increasing social ills in the current Kenyan society point to their ineffectiveness in instilling the moral codes that can enable an individual to make moral choices. Indeed, as Nyabul(2009) points out, religion is concerned about morality, though morality is not necessarily concerned about religion and thus the possibility of being moral without being religious. This brings up the issue of a subject/discipline that will focus specifically on dealing with the moral education of young people in a way that is practical and interesting, while offering youth the chance to make moral decisions. Social Education and Ethics (S.E.E) is a subject whose objectives can help Kenya to meet the need for moral education.

While its first appearance in the Kenyan curriculum was faced with resistance, it is the contention of this paper that its objectives, content and implementation should be re-examined to avail this important knowledge to the Kenyan youth. All the parties that found contentious aspects of the subject should be brought on board to ensure that all grey areas are cleared. S.E.E is without doubt a discipline that will offer moral education without the bias for a specific religious group, as in the case of C.R.E for Christians or IRE for the Muslims.

Indeed, if Kenya is to take her place among the respected nations of the world, then she must have citizens who espouse moral uprightness. This can be achieved through school being mandated to teach moral education through a subject like Social Education and Ethics.

1.8 References

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