

## ***The Role of a Teacher in the Moral Atmosphere of Primary Schools in Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*The school is a social institution and a complex organization that comprises of different persons with diverse background, culture and values, needs and interest, to be transformed into viable and productive citizens with a high moral standard through the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, teachers as role models, instructors, counsellors, advisers, authorities and guidance are expected to inculcate morals into the lives of these children particularly at the primary school level, being the foundation level of education where formation of characters and building of desirable and acceptable morals are emphasized. This paper focuses on the current state of moral decadence in the primary school system, the moral atmosphere of the school, and the contributions of school to the moral development of the pupils. The paper also highlights the crucial roles of a teacher in the moral atmosphere of the primary school system in Nigeria. It concluded by offering suggestions to the relevant stakeholders on the way forward.*

**Keywords:** teachers, moral, atmosphere, school, development

### **Introduction**

Over the years, the Nigerian society had been plagued by a number of ills including lying, cheating, stealing, bribery and corruption, robbery, drugs addiction, examination malpractices, embezzlement of public funds and many others. However because of the moral collapse in the society, one would have thought that school being the social institution set aside for imparting and inculcating into the children the right values, norms, customs, attitudes, skills, knowledge and temperament will accomplish

its institutional goals and objectives of primary education in terms of moral development.

Teachers who are the role model, guidance, leader, authority, and instructor, are saddled with the responsibilities of inculcating moral values and principles into the children; they seem to be blamed for not discharging their professional responsibilities because of the downturn of moral development in the primary schools.

Primary school which is the foundational level of education in which the subsequent level built upon, is experiencing total moral collapse. There are numerous moral decadence among the pupils such as indiscipline, disrespect, examination malpractices, poor performance in examination, cultism, and high rate of drop-out amongst the pupils. Therefore, there is alarming and increasing rate of anti-social behaviours particularly in the public primary schools (Nwachukwu, 2000).

### **Who is a teacher?**

The teacher is that individual who has the ability to teach, correct, modify, train and develop a child in character and inculcate the acceptable values and ethics to meet the societal expectations. The teacher is a trained professional with knowledge and skills, as well as a level of competence in the task of teaching and learning process in the classroom situation. The teacher teaches and serves as a surrogate parent, especially in the rural environment; he/she is also the surrogate counsellor, surrogate nurse as well as a community leader (Isangedighi, 1996). If a teacher has to face adequately the realities of his or her professional demands within the context of the school system, he or she must be competent for effective classroom instructional delivery. If not, they may not be able to comprehend the process of teaching and learning situation. For better understanding of what teachers do in the professional task of teaching, one need to picture the scenario of the work setting of the teacher (Isangedighi, 2004).

A teacher is a person that possesses the ability, skills, knowledge and has the capability to carry along the children entrusted into his/her care irrespective of their different backgrounds, values, attitudes and potentials. The teachers have the responsibility of transforming their lives through imparting of knowledge, ideas, experiences, morals which will enhance their becoming productive and useful in any society they may find themselves. According to Esu (2012), teaching is a noble profession. It goes with enormous responsibilities. The important aspect of teachers' responsibilities is the production of quality individuals for the society. For this reason, teachers are perceived as nation builders and their task of moulding the young minds is seen as a critical endeavour in nation building. Children are the future adult; their exposure to the

guidance and instructional services of an accomplished teacher guarantees a viable future for the country.

Uriah (2006) asserted that a value teacher is a person who possesses a high moral standard in a society. A value teacher is expected to be a model to the children. A value teacher is required to have adequate knowledge of the child. A teacher who does not know a child in his care may not be conversant with those things that the child treasures. The child needs love, care, praise, patience, tolerance and counselling. Therefore, if a teacher saddled with the responsibilities of taking care of the child does not understand the child, he/she may not proffer solution to the child's problems, and may not be able to attend to the child's interest, needs, emotion and aspiration.

However, some teachers are characterized by characters and attitude which are not worthy of emulation. This implies that not all the teachers are qualified to teach values to children, because they do not exhibit the right attitude that can guarantee them to be described as models (Duruamaku-Dim & Anero, 2011). According to Amaele and Amaele (2003), the qualities of value teachers are manifested in the level of discipline as follows: punctuality to work and other engagement, simplicity and modesty in speech, appearance and approach to issues, neatness in dressing, sincerity, humorous, truthfulness in action, patience, courtesy, love and sympathy in expression as well as self-control. The authors concluded that, looking into the qualities of moral teachers, it is obvious that some teachers are found wanting in their responsibility of exhibiting attitude and character that are worthy of being emulated by the children. Nevertheless, some teachers display lack of love and sympathy for children, poor dressing code, lateness to school, dishonesty, and insincerity, among others.

### **Concept of morals and morality**

Many people insisted on values and moral teaching in the primary school system because of the increased incidence of emotional problems for adolescents and unwanted pregnancy among teenagers, children and youth, who seem to be increasingly lacking in decency, integrity, concern for others and morality (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, 2001). It is opined that incorporating character education and moral principles into the schools will help lower many of the alarming statistics related to drug abuse, crime and emotional disorders among adolescents, according to Kohlberg (1982). Moral is concerned with the principles of wrong and right. It follows the standard of behaviour considered acceptable and right by most people. Moral is also being able to understand the difference between right or wrong. Morality is the extent or degree of good or bad, right or wrong. It is the principle concerning the right or wrong, good or bad behaviour.

The term morality comes from a Latin word, “moralitas,” meaning conduct, the way of life of man in society, the relation of human act to man’s absolute value. Morality becomes the sum total of the outlook and a way of life of any given society, their concept of what may be done or avoided. According to Mbiti (2000), morality deals with human conduct and on deciding what good conduct is and what bad conduct is, among the kind of conduct in practice which people are called upon to practice. Throughout history, transmission of morality has been in existence in the education sector. Many people believe that there is a connection between learning academically, the development of mental power, the learning of moral values and the development of the strength of character. Morality is the judgement to distinguish between right and wrong, the vision to see the truth, courage to act on it, dedication to that which is good, and integrity to stand by it at any time (Cornelius-Ukpepi, 2019). Therefore, the restoration of morality and moral development by values teachers becomes emergent issues in primary education in Nigeria.

### **School contributions in the development of moral values**

The essence of any school system as a social institution and as a complex organization is to educate individuals who would acquire the necessary skills, attitude, experience, knowledge, ideas, morals and values relevant to the survival and existence of the society. This is to inculcate the right type of experiences and moral development which would equip them for viable and productive living in the society. The school serves as a channel of transmitting culture from one generation to another. It also promotes the process of socialization and develops in pupils acceptable and desirable standards of life which will prepare them for responsible adulthood with the right values in any society they may find themselves.

However primary school being the foundational level of education where subsequent level of education is built is one of the most complex systems. Primary school is the system where children come in as raw materials from different backgrounds, with diverse attitudes, characters deformation, deviant behaviour etc to be processed and refined into viable finished products by the teachers through teaching and learning processes.

### **The concept of moral atmosphere**

According to Kohlberg (1986), “Moral atmosphere is described as a shared culture of mutual understanding of what is an appropriate or inappropriate behaviour based upon the interactions among group members”. Based on the foregoing definition, it implies that moral atmosphere of the school helps in building a good personal and professional life. Moreover, problems that are most likely to be encountered such as violence, dishonesty, corruption, backbiting, disrespect and many others would be eliminated.

The interaction among members of a particular group, precisely the school as a group, has its own rules and regulations; as such any deviant behaviour is considered inappropriate. Such a deviant behaviour would not be accepted among the group. In a situation whereby there is no mutual understanding among the group (school), it would in one way or the other create a negative impact on the teacher as well as the pupils. Nevertheless, inappropriate behaviours such as jealousy, dishonesty among others would be avoided because of the shared culture of mutual understanding which is already in existence.

Brugman et al. (2003) opine that how pupils perceive the moral atmosphere in their school may affect their behaviour in and around their school. This goes a long way to show that moral atmosphere of the school in one way or the other is very important to the role of a teacher, student, school and administrator as the case maybe. The six pillars of the core moral values include trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. The six pillars can be thought as virtues because developing such traits of character in children can lead to a state of moral excellence through practice and repetition over time.

The moral atmosphere of the school should have an element of confidence which is based on trust and confidentiality which is a necessary virtue in the school environment. In a situation where there is no trustworthiness, violence, dishonesty and jealousy would thrive. As such there would be no mutual understanding. Any moral atmosphere that is devoid of respect would give room to jealousy and hatred. The school's progress would also be affected. The moral atmosphere of the school that has respect can lead to a conducive state of moral excellence.

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

Given the crucial roles of teachers in teaching and learning as instructors, counsellors, authority and helper to the children in teaching/learning situation, they are the appropriate person to teach morals to the children because the pupils are looking unto their teachers for effective instructional delivery that enhances permanent change in behaviour.

Therefore the role of a teacher in the moral atmosphere of the school is crucial, tasking and challenging. Children are amoral in nature. They are product of different home background, and they attend school with home related traits and characteristics. In some homes, parents are constantly given to the use of arbitrary corporal punishment; in some others, parents use counselling and persuasion. Arbitrary punishment nurtures in them aggressiveness, hostility and antagonistic attitude (Isangedighi, 1996). In this case, the teacher has the moral responsibilities, obligations and duty to inculcate in

children moral principles. He has to expose them to some moral values such as love, self-control, security, discipline, conformity, respect, honesty, endurance, interest, truthfulness, patience, responsibilities and integrity and also admonished the children to avoid stealing, lying, fighting and other anti-social behaviours and emphasize on rules and regulations of the school. By so doing the teachers will impose and compel the children to the right attitudes. Having emphasized the right and wrong doing, the teacher should spell out the consequences of involving in such an act or behaviour and try to tame down such behaviour in children by exploring so many approaches.

It is useful to apply Bible story in religious knowledge, on character moulding and development, morality, play, using characters to represent bad or good qualities and the consequences, to draw moral lessons to children. Also teachers as the translator of curriculum contents into meaningful experiences should also use subjects like social studies, and civil education to inculcate norms, values and virtues into the pupils, to enhance their total moral development (Esu, 2012).

Moreso, a teacher being their instructor, an authority to children, they will definitely listen to him/her because children inherently know how to respect and listen to people in positions of authority. The teacher represents an important adult and an authority figure in children's lives and therefore capable of making a huge impression upon them. Also teachers spend a large portion of the day with the children, often more than the parents. Therefore, the teacher has ample opportunity to educate children on moral principles and standard. Teacher as a moral agent must be acquainted with the child emotions, interest, problems, aspiration, temperament etc. He must know the child very well in his behaviour, attitude, character, habit; he should know that, the child is unpredictable. Therefore a moral teacher should be acquainted to those things the child treasures. Teacher must possess qualities and characteristic that are worthy to emulate by the pupils not only in important academic subjects, but in character and moral development as well (Duruamaku-Dim & Anero, 2011).

However, in order for a teacher to create moral atmosphere in the school system, the teacher has to devise approaches and methods in his instructional delivery, when it comes to teaching of moral values in the classroom situation. This involves the following approaches and strategies.

1. Deliberate, systematic and sustainable effort to transmit, and evoke the right attitudes, beliefs, moral codes, principles and sensibilities of the school system into the children.
2. The teacher teaches a child to show self-control and consider others in his doings.

3. He also teaches a child how to understand the Biblical expression of “do to others what you would like them to do unto you” and allow him to learn about the right and feelings of others.

4. Teachers inculcate into the child, the principles of honesty and respect for the authority and property of others.

5. The teachers inculcate into the child the ability to draw a balance between what is his due and what is the due of others, and help him/her to postpone immediate pleasure for a fuller satisfaction in the future.

6. The teachers should try to imbibe into the child control over his emotions and impulses in the face of challenges, and also help in developing to maturity from the selfish egocentric consideration state of the children (Oladipo, 2009). This goes to confirm with Piaget observations that children begin in a “heteronymous” stage of moral reasoning, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and regulations and obedience to authority.

This heteronomy results from two factors. The first facet is the young child’s cognitive structure. According to Piaget (1932), the thinking of young children is characterized by egocentrism which leads children to project their own thoughts and wishes unto others. For young children, rules are seen as inflexible things that do not change, which Piaget calls “moral realism”. Children at this stage also judge how wrong a particular action is by its immediate consequences. Negative consequences or punishment is seen as an automatic response to breaking a rule. Piaget also noted that social relationship between adults and children also supported this stage. Adults have a natural authority over children at a young age, and power and rules are handed down without discussion (Schmidt, 2018).

The second stage is Autonomous morality (Moral Relativism). At this stage, children begin to learn new things about the world through their interactions with other children and adult; they progress into the second stage of moral development. In this stage, Piaget states that children learn how to critically evaluate rules and apply them based on cooperation and respect with other children. Children begin to learn to take the perspective of others at this stage.

Teachers as a role model to children, have the responsibility to create a moral atmosphere in the school system for the children to emulate their character, habit, temperament and behaviour. In all, the teacher is a role model to learners; it is expected of the teacher to live an exemplary life for the pupils to emulate, especially in the areas of knowledge, morality, standard of behaviour and ethical values. Models have great influences on behaviour change. It produces a new behaviour pattern which could be good or bad. Models could inhibit or modify behaviour and they function as effective

response facilitators. The role of a teacher as a model imposes much restriction on the teacher in point of view of the desire for him to be himself or herself (Isangedighi, 1996). Teachers as role model should also help the children to develop love for one another and respect other children's views.

It is a well-known fact that, children are great imitators and very observant; so teachers, in order to actualize their role as a moral agent in the school system, should be very conscious of their conducts and behaviour, when dealing with the children. This is because teachers' conduct may either enhance moral development of a child or inhibit the moral development of a child. This is also in line with the objectives of primary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education in which moulding the character and developing sound "attitude and morals in the child" is clearly indicated (FRN, 2004)

Therefore, teacher's competency in teaching primary school subjects such as religious knowledge, social studies and civic education which enable inculcation of the basic principles of morals, values, right attitudes, right and wrong, will go a long way in developing morals in the lives of the children. And this will impede the rate of immoral and anti-social behaviours in children at the primary level of education in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, given the crucial roles of the teacher in the moral atmosphere of the primary school as a model, guidance counsellor, instructor, facilitator, motivator, authority and a helper to children particularly in the primary school level, emphasis should be placed on the quality of the teacher teaching in the primary schools.

### **Suggestions**

- 1) The teaching of moral education should be intensified in schools and colleges while moral philosophy should be made compulsory in tertiary institutions.
- 2) School administrators and teachers should encourage children to participate in those activities which will foster personal discipline and character training.
- 3) The teachers that teach moral education should be a model for the children to imitate; he/she should be simple, disciplined, tolerant and morally upright.
- 4) The religious groups, Christians or Moslems, should embark on rigorous religious preaching to lead notorious youths into the path of deep moral understanding.
- 5) Value based curriculum content should be designed by curriculum planners for primary education.
- 6) Rules and regulation of the school on moral behaviours should be spelt out for children, and consequences for not adhering to it should be made known.

7) Children should participate in discussions pertaining to moral issues during classroom activities.

8) Teachers with high moral standards and principle should be recruited to teach morality based subjects such as Religion knowledge, Civil Education, and Social Studies in primary schools.

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