

## **The Role of the Church in Qualitative Moral Education in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Over a hundred years ago, the missionaries brought western education to where we know today as Nigeria. They induced in their student's moral education. Many of the students grew to become not just clergies but also teachers in other schools and some even scholars. These teachers produced by the western mission, as well as their students became nation builders. As of the recent age, the church has proven to be a formidable predictor for qualitative and sustainable moral education in Nigeria. Christian churches have played an important role in the provision of primary, secondary and higher education in Nigeria and even in some parts of Africa. Though the participation of the church in education appears to be increasing more efforts are required in this regard. This paper will therefore, examine the role of churches in qualitative moral education in Nigeria, which will be an alternative source to supplement the efforts of the government, parents and local communities. The main objective of this article is to establish a better relationship between the church and sustainable moral education in Nigeria. This will be done through qualitative observation of the various roles the church has played and is still playing at fostering moral education.

### **Introduction**

There is no longer a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong, according to a close examination of primary schools in Nigeria. It is crucial that the church play a significant part in providing primary school students in Nigeria with a high-quality moral education. Every

society has a set of moral principles that inspire its members to act morally in their civic and cultural activities. The standards must be consistent with the societal values, objectives, and aspirations (Ujam, 2008). As a result, society transmits moral values from one generation to the next. Hence to give a qualitative moral education in primary school has been a matter of deep concern from parents to civic and religious leaders, whether formal or informal. This is because it occupies a greater part of an individual life.

The best legacy any nation can leave its citizens especially the young one is considered to be high-quality moral education. This is so because the quality of a country's education has a significant impact on its growth or development. It is generally accepted that it serves as a foundation for the real development of both human and natural resources. Therefore, formal education continues to be a means of promoting social and economic development as well as societal mobilization (Okoye, 2009). As an individual lives his life he acquires some knowledge, skills and abilities. These variables are used by the individual to get used to his environment and to ensure survival and comfort as he operates within his community. One other thing that occurs in him is that he continues to learn the culture of his people including the pattern of life and the norms and values. He treasures these and plays a part in transmitting them to the next generation. So, the early education of the child should be quality education. In this the society gets stabilized and grows. (Peretomode, 2008).

When considering the reason God founded the church, the involvement of the church in this topic cannot be disregarded. As the light and salt of the earth (Matthew), the church is tasked with illuminating, enhancing, and altering students' spiritual and moral character.

### **Problem Statement**

There have been many abnormalities in the life of pupils in primary schools in Nigeria. These abnormalities include high rate of juvenile delinquency, high incidence of kidnapping, ritual killing, vandalisation of public properties, children trafficking, misappropriation of public funds, etc. These abnormalities are linked to the fact that there is little or no qualitative moral education.

Mass immorality in homes, schools, and society at large is partly a result of primary school students' attitude toward moral instruction and religious studies, which is profoundly depressing. When examining the quality of moral education provided in primary schools in Nigeria, a number of variables must be taken into consideration, including the attitudes and personalities of the pupils, teachers, and parents or guardians. The role of the church in qualitative moral education in primary schools in Nigeria is the issue under investigation in this study. With the above problems in mind the purpose of this study is to explicitly state and coherently discuss the role of the church in qualitative moral education in primary schools in Nigeria, as a way of reminding the church of her responsibility to God and the society which the primary school belong.

### **Research questions**

The study sought answers to the following questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Are the Churches, Schools and Communities important agents of moral education?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Does moral education positively influence children in Nigeria?

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Does Sunday school in churches breed qualitative moral education in Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

It is indisputable that the quality of moral education plays a critical role in determining how a society develops. All parties involved in the educational sector should give education the proper impetus as a vital indicator of sustainable development. It's interesting to note that the church has always supported and offered high-quality educational programmes in Nigeria both before and after independence. Without mentioning the influence and contribution of the Christian Church, the history of education in Nigeria and other countries throughout the world would be incomplete. The belief that everyone should have access to education stems from the fact that everyone are entitled to it by virtue of being human (Isiramen, *et al*, 2010). Christian churches have played a pivotal role in the provision of primary education. However, the participation of the church in early childhood education

appears minimal. This study was, therefore interested in establishing the role of the church in qualitative moral education in primary schools in Nigeria.

### **The Advent of Christian Missionary and Western Education**

When Portuguese traders first encountered Nigeria in 1472, the arrival of Christian missionaries to Nigeria dates back to the 15th century. When missionaries came to Lagos in 1515, Benin was granted permission by the Oba (king) of Benin to teach the basics of the Christian faith to his son and the sons of the other chiefs. As a result, a mission school where boys could learn to read was founded in 1539. As early as the second half of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had established contact with the Edo people of Benin (Osagie, 2002). The arrival of the Portuguese saw the beginning of international relation especially in the areas of commerce. In order for them to be effective in meaningfully dealing with the indigenous people, the Portuguese then, thought it wise to give the people some rudimentary education and Christianity (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002).

Following the abolition of slave trade in 1804 and the reawakening of christen missionary activities in the world, Nigeria again became an area of interest. The freed slaves who were settled in Sierra Leone and those who were intercepted by the British government were trained as missionaries and teachers who the British government used for the evangelization of West African, especially Nigeria (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002) According to Erhagbe and Osagie (2002), a number of African missionaries and teachers were produced in Sierra Leone from where some of them found their way to Badagry – a town near Lagos, where the first English speaking church was established. One of such pioneering Africa missionaries was Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther. The Christian Mission that was most prominent in the early education work in Nigeria were the Wesleyan Methodist mission in 1842, African mission of the South Baptist Convention in 1850, the Roman Catholic Mission in 1868 and the Church of Scotland Mission in 1846 (Itedjere, 1997).

### **Biblical Basis for Moral Education**

The Bible has a lot to say on moral instruction, education, and teaching. This is predicated on being aware of and comprehending what God has said, is saying, and will say regarding himself and his creation. Jack (1995) said that the Israelites stood out from the rest of the world even when mixed in because of their national identity (a monotheistic orientation) and educational system, which included morals. God gave the Israelites the directive in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to pass on to their offspring a love for Him and an understanding of His revealed laws.

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the You're your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart, and your shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as a frontless between your eyes. And you shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates.

The Bible is specific in highlighting that parents must teach their children the law of God when they sit at home, when they lie down and when they get up. In other words, the passage (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9) is calling on parents, teachers and pastors to use every available opportunity to teach the word of God to children because catching them young will breed the fear of God in them (Ayanrinola, 2008:). Deuteronomy 6:4-7 is a vital passage because it demonstrates God's view of child training at an early stage in the biblical account. Scripture reveals that children have the potentials of giving parents and teachers joy or sorrow depending on how they are trained (Lateju, 2007). Sell (1995) said that developing some formalized Christian instruction in the home is good biblically as well as educationally.

Furthermore, the New Testament is not silent over the issue of moral education. The general references to moral teaching are found in Matthew 5:19, Acts 15:1 and more. Jesus also commanded His disciples to teach others and also disciple them (Matthew 28:20). In the New Testament, teachers are selected and equipped by God

through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Moral education is the way forward in any society and human nature needs it. One cannot talk about moral education without making mention of the synagogue (Matthew 6:2, Luke 12:11) which also means the church. Jesus demonstrated by every essential indication that He is the master teacher. Jesus is the master of all skills of teaching (Prince, 1994). The place of moral education in the ministry of Jesus cannot be over emphasized, therefore moral education and uprightness is from God. Since God determined the standard of good and bad as revealed in the scriptures, it is appropriate that God's children are familiar with them. Moral education emanated from God for his people to know his will and thoughts towards them and pattern their lives after those morals. In order words, God want his creatures to be morally sound from the beginning. Moral education has to be based on God's plan to achieve meaningful result from it.

### **The Role of the Church in Qualitative Moral Education**

A history of education in Nigeria would be lacking without a mention of the church and missionary organizations' work. Additionally, the Christian church has continued to play a crucial role and work closely with the education sector as one of the few institutions of religion in society to support people not only in terms of meeting their spiritual needs but also in terms of developing their moral character. The church's actions have an impact on every aspect of human existence, including education (Umer & Enock, 2004). As part of her commitment to the liberation of every human life, the church has been actively involved in human capital development. Isiramen (2010), fully opined down the philosophy of the Christian on the issue of education that the goal of education is clearly illuminated by proverbs 1;1-7 of the sacred text of Christians which states that education is meant to teach people to acquire wisdom that will lead to "intelligent living" of persons in honesty, justice and equity. For the purpose of clarity it is stated again in Proverbs 22:6, a child should be trained in the way he or she should go, and he or she will not depart from it when grown up. Education therefore finds its fulfillment in successful living.

It can be succinctly adduced from the desire of the church to fully and actively be involved with education in Nigeria as in other countries.

The government of Nigeria has also followed this in its policy formulation in the education sector. This is one visible contribution of education of the church to development of education in Nigeria some claimed that Islamic education also aimed at same objective (Lemu, 2002).

Early on in this project, an attempt was made to determine how the missions had affected Nigeria's educational system. The missions have always been at the forefront of offering dependable moral education in Nigeria before independence. Even after the country gained independence, the church remained committed to education and had an unbreakable link with it. The unity of the Christian Church and education, according to Olawoyin (2010) and Isiramen (2010), can only be explained by the fundamental Christian tenet that Jesus is the Logos, the guiding principle of the universe. Without contradiction, there was a time the church was in full control of providing basic education in Nigeria. The effectiveness of its involvement in providing education saw the gradual development and its venture into provision of secondary education. The church has played significant roles in primary and post primary education. One of the undeniable contributions of the church in the educational sector is its continuous insistence on standard and quality education. The church has also argued that one of the keys to fighting the entrenched corrupted system in the nation is qualitative moral education from primary school through tertiary levels. Hence the church has seized every opportunity afforded her in providing good moral education.

There are many schools now that are owned and run by large Pentecostals in addition to others that are owned and run by mainline denominations like the Roman Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, etc. Today, it is rare to find a large church in Nigeria without at least an elementary school. The destiny of the numerous adult illiterates who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to complete their early education has also been taken into consideration by the church. Many churches have begun to create adult literacy programmes for their members in order to accomplish this.

In a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria there is need to guard against tendencies of disintegration and any religious manifestation or attitude that is capable of generating into crisis. In line with this most

churches in Nigeria have established seminaries for the training of clergies, as also their part of contribution to education in the country. As Nigeria look into the future with sincere desire to make meaningful progress especially in the realm of education, it must engage the church by ensuring appropriate policies frame work so that the school system, mostly primary schools will experience qualitative moral education.

### **Agencies of Moral Education**

Children's primary education cannot be left only in the hands of one institution; rather, several social institutions should collaborate and efficiently communicate with one another in order to provide the child with a meaningful moral education. It should be understood that the home, the school, the mass media, religious communities, and the community have all been responsible for moral upbringing (education). In the intricate process of moral growth, all these moral agencies must interact with one another. This effort will focus on four moral education organizations.

#### **A. *The Family***

The family is the foundation unit for moral education of new members of the society. According to Peretomode (2001), the family is the fundamental biological and social group to which a child is born, or to which he comes into contact and learn its first language. The family is the first major educational driver for the child. No human society ever existed or could exist without some forms of family organization. He further stated that the family provides the major means of transforming the mentally naked infant organism into an adult clothed in its own personality. Matera (2001) pointed out that parent have the primary influence on children through their parenting practices, structural development theorist. He said that the approach used by the parents has the greatest impact on how the child will internalize the moral lessons being taught. Therefore, the level of bonding between the child and parent yield more productive environment to receive information pertaining to the moral issue. More so that when children feel that parent understands and care about them deeply, they have the intrinsic motivation to learn the lesson of love and character that the parents shared. With all these, the



family remains the most powerful formative factor in the moral development of the child.

### ***B. The School***

This is a social institution and the most important and unique secondary moralizer of the child. The school takes over from the family in the upbringing of the children. Avwata (2005) says that the learning that takes place at home is through observation, imitation, initiation and indoctrination in an informal way, while the transmitting knowledge and skills to the child. The school further improved upon the training for moral character, intellectual, vocational, etc, which started with the family. He said that it is the school that basically provides role moralization. The school does not only inculcate the norms and values of the society in the children but deliberately teach them to learn to be productive members to be passed on from one generation to another. Oroka (2005) maintains that in the school as an institution must have an environment which must reflect desirable values and practices of the democratic way of life. He further said that the organizational structure should also promote discipline, and peaceful communication between staff and pupils. He also said that each subject taught in the school has its own contribution to moral education. The teachers in the area of moral education are interpreters (Schofield, 1992). And as teachers they should understand how important it is to display justice, care and dignity to their learners.

### ***C. The Church***

The church is the home of worship and praise to God almighty. It is an important institution that provide for the expressive and spiritual needs of members of the society. Further church moral training is an essential condition for the child to become an acceptable member of his society. The teachings of the church is to enable members imbibe the virtues of love, respect, humility and obedience (Avwata, 2005). Peretomode (2001) asserts that the church play a vital role in molding the character of the child. And that the church also effects and influences the economic, political orientation, beliefs, values, intellectual and moral development and the social growth of her members through her practices and teachings.

#### ***D. The Community***

In this work, community means other members of the society outside the child's home and school. Aavwate (2007) asserts that the member of the community teach the young ones to develop the spirit of co-operation, hard work, participation in community affairs, respect for elders, and promotion of the cultural heritage. He also said that there is informal education where every community adult members are teachers of the child, that the unwritten curriculum of the community teacher relates largely to discipline, ethics, good conduct and intellect, and any wrongdoing or misconduct, attracts appropriate sanctions and are imposed by the community. The above agencies help to facilitate the knowledge or ability to work hard, respect for the law, self esteem, citizenship, responsibility, respect for the right of others, courage to one's convictions, obedience to proper authority, anticipating the consequences of one's action, fairness etc. If children possess these values, then success and happiness of the society, and as well as the individual is assured.

#### **Methodology**

The research design employed is the descriptive design, historical and phenomenological approach. The sample and sampling techniques used in this study is random sampling techniques. The researcher purposively selected five schools to represent the population. The sampling technique employed in the selecting of schools ensured that the result can be generalized to the entire population. The research instrument used for the collection of data is the questionnaire, it has two sections. The administration and collection of data were undertaken by the researcher. The methods of data collection for this study is by instructed questionnaires on 100 which was drawn and administration in five schools in the local government, they were expected to tick against and for, depending on the information or option that best appealed to their view out of the questions. Some set of questions were administered by the researcher with respondents who are illiterate, in this case the researcher asked questions based on the questionnaire and the respondents answered and the researcher ticked down the answers made by the respondents.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

One hundred and five questionnaires were administered all of which were returned, the data was drawn from various schools. Hypothesis were formulated and tested.

However, as earlier on mentioned, the completed questionnaire were collected and analyzed, that is, the information pertaining to the investigation into the role of the church in qualitative moral education in primary schools in Nigeria.

The results of the study in response to research question one revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that churches, schools and community are agents of moral education while less than two percent of the respondents disagreed that they are not.

The results of the study in response to research question two maintained that all the respondents agree that moral education positively influence children in Nigeria.

The results of the study in response to research question three signified that churches bring about qualitative moral education in Nigeria.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Though the data collected this study was duly interpreted, it is interesting to note that a number of five communities were sampled and from the interpretation, other necessary facts need to be highlighted such facts make up the bases for the study itself.

Based on the findings on research question one, the study that churches, schools and community are agents of moral education, the responses to question three further affirms the fact. Research question two is in relation to the collected information and has made it clear that moral education positively influence children in Nigeria. Responses on the research question three formulated from this study affirms that churches breed qualitative moral education in Nigeria as shown by the responses.

Our discussion cannot be complete without bringing out some obvious ideas that the church, school and community have a huge role

to play in the promotion of morality in the environment. Also from the information collected it was observed that majority of the respondents wish that more is done to improve morality of children as they are the leaders of tomorrow.

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis of the data and the findings of the study, it was concluded that churches, schools and community are agents of moral education. More so, moral education positively influence children in Nigeria, the study further concludes that churches breed qualitative moral education in Nigeria through Sunday school activities. Theological education has a take in ensuring her curriculum trains pastors to enable them play their role in offering qualitative moral education to persons in the society.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion reached in the study, it was recommended that churches should introduce moral programmes targeted to children and young adults. Parents are also recommended to teach their children morality at home, especially young children. The study also recommends that teachers in schools should teach children to develop good moral standards. Finally the federal, state and local government are also recommended to raise funds to award children who perform well in moral related subjects in primary school thus encouraging pupils to study more about morality.

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