



SCHOOLS' MORAL LOADING AND ADOLESCENTS' VALUE ORIENTATION

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ABSTRACT

The study was to investigate if the quantity and quality of the moral atmosphere in the school (moral loading) is related to the students' value formation. The subjects consisted of 413 students aged 14 to 21 years, drawn from 8 secondary schools in Calabar metropolis in Cross River State, in Nigeria. The results showed that the relationship between value formation and the total moral loading, the moral orientation of the administrators, staff (teachers), and clubs (peers), was significant. However, there was no significant relationship between moral orientation of the other students, moral contents in school rules, and their value orientation. These were discussed in line with the theory of hidden curriculum.

Keywords: Moral Loading; value orientation; adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Values held by adolescents have continued to be a major source of interest to researchers. This apparently stems from the fact that adolescents hold the future of any society. Whatever values they hold are likely to influence their perception and actions about events and situations which would, in turn, determine the direction of development of the society. Adolescents' values (beliefs and attitudes concerning the way things should be) involve things that are important to the society. These include selection of friends, social adjustment, sex, politics, religion, education, money, helping others, self-respect, career, family, honesty, tolerance, efficiency, and many others (Santrock, 2005; Gimba, 2004; Mahmud, 2005). Such values vary with age, gender, context and generation (Musen, Conger & Kegan, 1974; Iheanacho & Asagwara, 2007)

Since the value adolescents hold could shape the future of any society positively or negatively, it becomes imperative to devise means of helping them acquire acceptable values. One approach could be by infusing high positive moral standard in them. as Mahmud (2005) believes that the development of moral system of adolescents is closely related to their level of moral development. Moral development consists of moral thoughts, behaviour and feelings (Santrock, 2005). Moral thoughts deal with the individual's reasoning to justify his or her moral decisions. while moral behaviour focused on how one behaves in moral circumstances. The way one feels about moral matters is the focus of moral feeling. Does the individual feel enough guilt to resist the temptation to commit an offence? Does the feeling of guilt after a transgression prevent him from committing the offence the next time he faces the temptation?

It is believed that moral development has both intrapersonal and interpersonal components (Gibbs, 2003). Intrapersonal component is an individual's basic values and sense of self which regulate the individual's activities when engaged in social interaction. The interpersonal component focuses on what individuals should do when interacting with others. This regulates their social interactions and arbitrates conflicts.

Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1976. 1984) studied and propounded theories on how morality develops through moral reasoning as a result of cognitive changes. One criticism against their theories is the lack of link between moral reasoning and moral behaviour as often observed (Onyeike, 2005; Meduoye, 2008; Enilama, 2008; Idenasi, 2008; Ogbodo, 2008). Bandura (1991, 2002) argues that morality is rooted in self-regulation rather than abstract reasoning. He believes that a combination of social and cognitive factors is responsible for understanding moral development. Adolescents in particular engage in things that provide them satisfaction and a sense of self-worth while refraining from things that violet their moral standard, just to avoid self-condemnation.

However, Kohlberg stresses the importance of the interpretation an individual gives to moral and factual aspects of a situation as leading to the person's moral decision. To avoid embarrassment the individual may fail to do what he believes to be morally right (Santrock, 2005).

Apparently, in agreement with Kohlberg, Good and Brophy (1995) believed that programmes that increase moral judgment will also increase moral behaviour, mostly for comprehensive programmes involving all facets of moral development rather than one of them. This is because adoption` of inductive socialization techniques in which the harmful consequences of inappropriate behaviour on others is stressed, is superior to power assertion technique, in which frequent threats and punishment are displayed (Eisikovitz & Sagi, 1982;; Olejnik, 1980). Good and Brophy' are convinced that moral development can be facilitated if teachers model and articulate prosocial values, such as treating others as they wish to be treated. For successful classroom socialization strategies, Goods and Brophy (1995) cautioned against listing of punishments threatened for specific violations, but prefer providing guidelines and limits while explaining the appropriateness of these.

This suggests the relevance of schools in moral development and supports Russell's (1990) assertion that the programmes and purposes of study in schools always exhibit what adults of a

society cherish and deeply desire to nurture in their own children. Russell declared that since school curriculum is filled with a lot of value judgment, it is imperative for them to teach values. A number of instructional approaches to values education have been examined. These include values inculcation, values clarification, values analysis, Kohlberg's "Just community", service learning, and the hidden curriculum (Good & Brophy, 1995; Powers, 1990; Santrock, 2005).

Values inculcation (or character education) involves teaching moral values and related character traits and habits directly as part of school curriculum to instill them. These include honesty and hard work (Williams, Vancher, Johnson & Lewis, 2003). Schools are expected to assign sanctions on explicit moral codes violation (Bennett, 1993). This approach has been criticized on the basis of being contrary to most of the available research on moral development and behaviour (NUCCI, 1989), and that it derives from the faulty belief that conduct could be effectively shapes through direct teaching and that behavior could be guided by listing virtues (Walnryb & Turiel, 1993).

Values clarification approach focuses on helping students to examine their attitudes, beliefs and values, and choose freely, if they are to act consistently on them. No particular values are promoted as being preferable to others. The students are encouraged to embark on reflective thinking concerning the consequences of their actions, analyse their lifestyles for hidden value meanings, among others. Research data indicate its failure to affect measures of students' values. Other criticisms against it include its definitional and theoretical base that is deficient; an implicit ethical relativism; and the apparent haphazard manner the curricular interventions have been conceived and applied (Lockwood, 1978). It is also argued that it is relativistic nature undermines accepted values and does not distinguish between right and wrong behaviour (Santrock, 2005).

In value analysis approach, values conflicts are analyzed and investigated by using inquiry, decision making and thinking skills. It helps the students to develop moral judgments that are rationally and logically defensible if you teach them processes of reasoning about moral and value questions.

Kohlberg's "just community" approach was Kohlberg's answer to critics of his moral reasoning approach. Power, Higgins and Kohlberg (1989) explained that moral dilemma discussion create opportunities for groups of students to participate in the establishment and maintenance of democratic system of governing classrooms.

Service learning approach focused on promoting social responsibility and service to the community. It aims at ensuring that adolescents are less self-centred but are more strongly motivated to help others (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004).

The hidden curriculum is John Dewey's (1933) conception of the moral atmosphere that exists in every school, even though no specific moral programmes are available. The school and classroom, the moral orientation of classroom teachers and school administrators, and text materials which may be reflected in the curriculum (Olofu, 2003; Obidike, 2004; Igwe, 2007), all produce the moral atmosphere. Together with the others, peer relations enable administrators to infuse the school with good value system (Santrock, 2005).

The individual tends to internalize things held dear by loved ones he identifies with (Iheanacho, 2002; Gahmey & Mensah, 2007 Duodu, 2002), through introjections Russell (1990). Russel cautioned against 'pseudo-values' in which children learn to go through certain rituals imposed by significant others to obtain primary goals. Such values are not internalized.

Since hidden curriculum appears to be a more natural pattern of learning (Santrock, 2005), this study, therefore was to examine its effectiveness in value formation of adolescents. It attempts to find out if adolescents' value orientation (or their beliefs and attitudes) is related to such school, moral variables as the moral orientation of teachers, school administrators, peer relations, other students, and school rules. It also investigated the gender and socio-economic differences in the adolescents' value orientation.

METHODOLOGY

Participants: The sample of the study was 413 students. Out of this, 224 were males while the females were 189 students. The age range of the sample was from 14 to 21 years with a mean of 16.8 years. This sample was drawn from all the students in Senior Secondary Two (SS2) in all the secondary schools in Calabar metropolis in Cross River State of Nigeria.

Procedure: The stratified random sampling technique was adopted in choosing the schools to ensure a fair representation of schools in Calabar South Local Government Area and Calabar Municipal Council and fair representation of public and private schools as well as co-educational and single sex schools. Four schools were selected from each Local Government, two of which were public and other two private. Two of the schools were also co-educational while the other two were single-sex schools that are either boys only or girls only, ensuring that they were equally represented.

The number of students selected from each school through simple random sampling depended on the population of SS 2 students in the school. Approximately 50 percent of the students were selected from each school. Those who filled the questionnaire incorrectly were rejected.

The instrument used for the data collection was a 'Schools' Moral Loading and Value Orientation Questionnaire (SMLVOQ) constructed by the researchers. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on 40 students in the population who were not part of the sample. A reliability coefficient of 79 was computed using the Crombach technique. A Likert-Type scale preferred by Anastasi and Urbina (2005) for measuring attitudes and value was used for the questionnaire, using strongly agree (SA), agree (A) disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The responses were scored 4 for SA, 3 for A, 2 for D, and 1 for SD, for positively worded statements, while the reverse was adopted for scoring the negatively worded items.

The instrument had two sections, A and B, While section A sought to gather on biographic data, such as age and gender, section B aimed at gathering data on moral loading and value orientation. The items on moral loading and value orientation were derived from the literature and the researchers' observation. Examples of items on moral loading include "Our principal is a caring father (or mother), "Our school authorities

punish students unjustly” for administration. For staff (teachers), examples of items used included “Many of our teachers favour some students with high examination grades”, “Majority of our teachers always come to school early”, “Majority of our teachers dress decently always”, while items on clubs (peers) included “Clubs in my school promote tribal or state discrimination”, Many clubs are for helping the needy (or poor). Items on other students included “Stealing in any name (e.g tapping, pilfering) is not common among our students”, “Many of our students enjoy telling lies”. “Many students leave the school before time for closing”, “No student is seen outside the classroom when lessons are going on”, For value orientation, examples of items included are: “I believe that: Honest people do not succeed in life; Hard work is very important in everybody’s life; Promoting the welfare of old people is very important” .

Other colleagues in Educational psychology and Educational Evaluation assessed the contents of the questionnaire and judged it to have high content and face validity. The researchers waited patiently to answer any possible questions from the respondents. Pearson product moment correlation was adopted for computing the relationship between moral loading and values orientation, while independent t-test was used for finding the gender and socio-economic status difference in value orientation of the adolescents.

There were a few limitations of the study. A few of the respondents appeared not to have understood some items in the questionnaire and were shy to ask for clarification. A few others appeared to be in a hurry and could not have responded honestly. However, these limitations do not pose any significant threat, as such respondents were very few.

RESULTS:

The results for the relationship between the schools’ moral loading and adolescents’ value orientation are presented in Table 1 (see after the references).

Table 1 shows that the calculated r-value for other students’ morality (0.1055) and school rules (0.028) of moral loading are lower than the critical value of 0.195. That means the relationship between these variables (other students and school rules) and value orientation of the adolescents is not significant. However, the calculated r-values for the other variables of administration (0.393), staff (0.250), clubs (0.299) and the total school morality (0.260) are all higher than the critical value of 0.195. This means that their relationship with the adolescents’ value orientation is significant. So as the morality of these variables increases, the level of the adolescents’ value orientation also increases. This is to state that schools that have administrators, staff (teaching staff) and clubs with high moral standard, will also have students with high moral standard, and vice versa.

The results of the gender and socio-economic status differences in value orientation of the adolescents are presented in Table 2 (see after the references).

The results on Table 2 indicated no significant gender difference in the adolescents value orientation. This is because the calculated t-value of -1.283 is lower than the critical t-value of 1.650 at .05 level of significance and 411 degrees of

freedom. However, students from high socio-economic class (mean = 33.6) tend to have better value orientation that those from lower class (mean = 32.0).

DISCUSSION

The findings on the relationship between schools’ moral loading and adolescents’ value orientation show that a significant relationship exists between them. The findings further show that the morality of the sub-variables of administration, staff and clubs is significantly related to their value orientation, while the morality of the other students and moral contents of school rules are not significant. Except for the morality of the other students and its contents in school rules, all the other findings correspond to the postulations of the hidden curriculum theory.

The significant relationship between the overall schools’ moral loading and the value orientation of the students, suggests that the moral atmosphere the school produced could have enabled the school administration to infuse the school with good value system just as Santrock (2005) believed. This apparent comprehensive programme could have advanced the students moral judgment and moral behaviour, paving way for satisfying values. Furthermore, since adolescents tend to internalize things held dear by their loved ones through introjections (Russell, 1990; Iheanacho & Asagwara, 2007; Ghanney & Mensah, 2007; Duodu, 2008), these students could have internalized the moral standard of the administrators, staff, and club members (peers) to form their values (beliefs and attitudes).

That the relationship between morality of the “other students” and their value orientation is not significant may have arisen because the students do not normally view every other student as their model. One may also attribute the absence of significant relationship between the moral content of school rules and the adolescents’ value formation to the possibility of adoption of power assertive technique in the rules. It shows that displaying frequent threats is not helpful (Eisikovits & Sagi, 1982; Olejnik, 1980), as often observed in many schools in Nigeria.

The finding that no significant gender difference exists in adolescents’ value orientation, shows that age and generation may have played greater role in this instance. Values may vary with age, gender, context and generation (Mussen et al, 1974, Iheanacho & Asagwara, 2007). The students in the study were virtually of the same age and generation. The significant difference found for the socio-economic status suggests greater influence the context exerted. The subjects were from different socio-economic backgrounds, and could form different values. Their basic values and sense of self (intrapersonal component of moral development) could have regulated activities differently in their social interaction (Gibbs, 2003).

Conclusion

Since the finding shows that the quantity and quality of morality (moral loading) in the school environment is significantly related to the value orientation of the adolescents, it becomes very rewarding to ensure a positive moral atmosphere exists in schools. Employment of administrators and staff of high positive moral orientation should be emphasized.

The school authorities should embark on regular checks on the schools' moral loading to ensure that the staff and different clubs exhibit high moral standard. The employment process should be very transparent to ensure that only morally upright staff are recruited. The same should apply to the quality of applicants admitted as students. Since the morality of the teachers is related to that of the students, it is important not to lose sight of both the public and private life-style of the teacher. This suggestion is informed by the possibility of some teachers pretending to be morally upright while in the school. One needs to bear in mind that the students' perception of the teachers may not be confined to the school premises.

Clubs with questionable moral standard should give way for others with positive moral orientation. All these and more will pave way for the formation of morally acceptable values, such as helping others, honesty, tolerance, work efficiency, positive attitude towards education, and so on.

TABLE 1: Relationship between schools' moral loading and adolescents' value orientation.

Variable	n	mean	SD	r-cal
Value orientation	413	32.6	5.2	
Moral loading				
Administration	413	15.3	3.2	0.393*
Staff (Teacher)	413	13.4	3.3	0.2505*
Clubs (Peers)	413	14.7	2.9	0.299*
Other students	413	17.7	4.6	0.1055
Rules	413	12.8	3.6	0.028
Overall	413	103.4	15.8	0.2603*

*Significant at .05 alpha level 411 degrees of freedom, critical value - 0.195

TABLE 2: Gender and socio-economic status differences in adolescents' value orientation.

Variable	n	mean	SD	r-cal
Gender	413			-1.283
Male	225	32.2	5.7	
Female	188	32.9	5.1	
Socio-economic status	413			3.054*
High	155	33.6	4.7	
Low	258	32.0	5.4	

*Significant at .05 alpha level; critical value of 1.65, df=411

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