Original Paper

Moral Education: Panacea for a Free and Stable Nigerian Society

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Abstract

Societies are formed by humans in order to achieve stability by way of having protection from aggression, and engendering cooperation of others in overcoming individual weaknesses. Nigeria has witnessed some degree of social instability in recent years. This has manifested in insecurity of life and property, extreme poverty, youth unemployment, and mutual distrust in basic human relationships. The education sector can be implicated in the challenge of instability as it is the system which is saddled with the responsibility of human capital development. The education system seems to be lopsided towards intellectual development of learners as opposed to balanced (cognitive, affective and skill) development of individuals. This paper adopts method of philosophical analysis to survey relevant literatures and theoretical postulations on human freedom and social stability with a view of interrogating how extensive guarantee of freedom could be reconciled with realization of human development. The paper underscores the school system as a point of early social interaction, and a focal point in preparing individuals for participation in social life by way of inculcating in them the consciousness of their dependence on others in spite of their independence as free beings. It is advanced that education system needs to focus on producing balanced and cultured individuals who can rationally exercise their freedom. An integrative moral education model of teaching moral is proposed as innovative pedagogical skill which teachers can adopt to enhance learners' social consciousness.

Keywords

society, stability, freedom, moral education

1. Introduction

Education is believed by many to be an agent of social stability and at the same time an agent of social change. It serves the stabilization purpose by preserving and transmitting the positive core values that

bind a people together. Education performs the social change function by introducing worthwhile innovations into the society. Whenever there is social upheaval, it is not uncommon for people to castigate the education sector thereby seeking solutions in education. Right from pre modern times, the young were socialized and initiated into the ways of the society with a view to making them fit into the society and also to enhance their ability to contribute to its wellbeing. The twentieth century seems to have witnessed a wide acceptance of formal education as an avenue for transmitting specific skills and values that man may require to contribute to stability and development of a modern state. From this perspective, Nigerian government has adopted education as an instrument for maximizing the creative potentials and skill of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society (National Policy on Education NPE, 2013) This is premised on the fact that education is the most important instrument of change and it is vital for the promotion of a progressive society. As such, any fundamental change in the intellectual or social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

Nigeria has witnessed a considerable level of social instability in recent years. The instability has manifested in extreme poverty, insecurity of lives and properties, unemployment, ethno – religious conflicts and various forms of structural violence. Recently, Nigeria took over from India as the nation with the highest number of extremely poor people. A report by Brookings institute has shown that the number of Nigerians in extreme poverty increases by six every minute. According to the report, Nigeria has about 87 million people in extreme poverty as at the end of May, 2018 compared to India's 73 million. With life expectancy of 54.5 years, Nigeria has the lowest in West Africa. Again, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported in 2017 that Nigeria still retained its 152nd position out of 188 countries surveyed on Human Development Index (HDI). The country ranked low with other countries like Swaziland, Syria, and Angola. Factors such as social inequality, poor quality education, gender discrimination, absence of social inclusion, lack of accountability are identified as being responsible for low quality of life in Nigeria. International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said Nigerians are getting poorer and so the need for a coherent and comprehensive economic reform.

As observed by Eweta and Urhie (2014), in spite of the government's huge budgetary allocation to security, the level of insecurity is still high in the country. Insecurity is manifesting in rising wave of terrorism, violent crimes, kidnapping, assassination and general threat to life and property. As such, Nigeria is ranked low in Global Peace Index (GPI).

In spite of the social upheavals in the county, Nigerians still enjoy a level of freedom in terms of political rights and civil liberties. There has been an uninterrupted civil rule since 1999 and The Telegraph (2018) reported that Nigerians have been enjoying a considerable level of freedom of speech, religion, association, press and so on. As such, Freedom House ranks Nigeria among partly free countries. In terms of human freedom, Nigeria ranks better than tightly controlled countries like China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, North Korea and the like. However, in terms of quality of life, security of life and property, social stability, all these countries ranked better than Nigeria. One can

therefore infer that Nigerians do not enjoy basic needs of life as much as they enjoy political rights and civil liberties. In other words, political and civil liberties have not translated into the necessary social wellbeing and stability for Nigerians. This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the issues surrounding the concept of human freedom, the idea of free society, what is it to have social stability and the role education can and should play in engendering social well - being in a society which claims to uphold human freedom.

2. Conceptualizing a Stable Society

The idea of stability connotes permanence, being firmly established, balanced, and not being destroyed or altered in value. When a standing object is stable, it suggests that it neither tilts to the left or right, it is not being pulled or dragged left and right. A sick person is said to be stable when his or her condition is improving and there is a steady progress towards his or her recovery.

Philosophers over the ages have postulated a number of theories with regard to what makes or constitutes an ideal, a peaceful or stable society. If Plato was asked what an ideal society would be like? He would respond that the peace or stability of a society is a question of who leads the society. He believes that a group of intellectuals (philosopher kings) should govern because they possess the skill and knowledge of the "good", so they are best qualified to lead. Plato applied his three-fold distinction between the faculties of the soul to the composition of the society. He thinks that a society is composed of three classes – the class of philosophers, the military class and the artisans or labourers. The philosophers, who are considered to be given to intellectual activities represent the leadership of the society; the military class are meant to defend the state from external aggression; and the labourers who represent the most physical element in the system are meant to submit to the authorities of the upper layers of the society (Lindsay & Renford, 1970).

Plato submits that because of the multiplicity of human wants and the insufficiency of any one individual to satisfy these wants by his or her own efforts, the greatest efficiency can only be attained by the application of division of labour and cooperative effort. In his view, peace and stability would be guaranteed when the best fitted to rule (intellectuals) are made to rule and when each member of society contributes to the welfare of the society in the area which he or she has the greatest expertise. In other words, to achieve peace and stability, a society needs justice, and justice to him is to make member of a society to serve in areas where they are best fitted. Plato's political philosophy is by every means undemocratic and authoritarian. It is not in any way a government of the people as it recommends a government of the few aristocrats. One can question the reality and possibility of the clear division of society as attempted by Plato. Another weakness of this view is that members of a society have little or no choice in what they want to become or how they want to contribute to the society rather it is the leadership that decides for them their role in the society. A society in which people are not free to take decisions on affairs that concern them cannot be said to be ideal and is not likely to be stable and peaceful.

Thomas Hobbes is another thinker who advanced an undemocratic view of society. In his famous treaties on political thought, Leviathan, he submits that man is by nature selfish and egoistic. His view of human nature emphasizes the tendency of man to act only in his own self-interest, without regard for others. This, in his view, produces a war – like situation which he describes as a way of life that is certain to prove solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Kermerling, 2006). In order to avoid this problem of life in the state of nature, Hobbes thinks that there should be an agreement by people to delegate their right of nature to a Leviathan, a powerful force above all and to which all are subject. His idea of an ideal, peaceful and stable society therefore, is a situation or condition in which people abide by the rules of society and the laws are enforced by an enforcing agency which must be granted an absolute power. The absolute power, in his view, must be in the hand of a King (Monarch). Hobbes put forth this idea in order to overcome chaos that may emanate from granting people excessive freedom or when no one has absolute power to govern a society. However, his political philosophy can easily breed abuse as the society is put at the mercy of an individual's whims and caprices. Hobbes' submission that human being are naturally selfish is enough reason to question the idea of granting an individual absolute power as such is very likely to lead to abuse. Some have described Hobbes political philosophy as a 'peace at any price philosophy' on account of its insistence on surrendering liberty in return for security (Richard & Avrum, 1989). However, absence of civil liberty in itself is a possible precursor for social chaos that often ensued in situations whereby a society is governed by the whims and caprices of the individual who has absolute power. The possible abuse of power would invariably generate rebellion on the part of the conscious member of society and this would take the society back to chaos which Hobbes is trying to avoid at all cost.

In contrast to Platonic and Hobbessian political philosophy of aristocracy and monarchy, John Locke in his 'Two treaties of Government' advanced a social political theory which emphasizes extensive freedom for citizens of a country. He can be described as the theoretical architect of democracy as it exists in most western countries in contemporary times. Locke contends that in the state of nature, all men are in a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions. In contrast to Hobbes, he opines that men are not always selfish; they sometimes work and cooperate for the good of others. Life in the state of nature to him is peaceful but men occasionally transgress. Therefore, there is a need for law to exist in order to punish those who transgress or misbehave. He contends that law as opposed to force should be the basis of society. According to Locke, there are certain areas of human conduct that should be immune from government interference. These are called rights and this is the origin of Bill of Rights in the American Constitution. He does not believe that any single individual should be given absolute power in order to have a peaceful, stable society; rather people should be the source of authority. The government should be appointed by the people in order to carry out the will of the people. One main weakness of Locke's political philosophy is the possible and usual conflict between individual rights and public good. In order to build a stable and peaceful society, human rights cannot be absolute and government may hold a right of citizens so as to achieve or promote public

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good.

2.1 Is Nigeria a Free Society?

Nigeria is a country between Central and West Africa, bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, and Benin in the west. It is a Federation of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory where the capital is located. The country is multinational as it is made of over 250 ethnic groups out of which three are dominant; Hausa Yoruba and Igbo. The overall philosophy of Nigeria is to live in unity as one indivisible, indissoluble democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; and to promote inter African solidarity and world peace through understanding (FGN, 2013). Again, one of the five national goals of Nigeria as stated in Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is to build a free and democratic society. For a great part of Nigeria's history, military regimes held sway. However, from 1999 to date, the Nigerians have experienced uninterrupted civilian governments that have provided relative civil liberties.

A free society is one in which individuals are granted ample opportunities to live their lives as they wish, as long as they do not infringe on the right of others to do the same. A free society is one where individuals act out of their own will, for example, they can say whatever they want, freely associate, practice religion of their choice, move freely without let or hindrance. Government in a free society interferes less in the private affairs of the people. As such, people are granted freedom to obtain power and resources to fulfill their own potentials; freedom to express their views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, harassment, persecution, physical harm; little or no restrictions on trade and wealth creation; freedom to practice religion of their choice publicly and privately. As observed by Walter (2009) in a free society, the state does not administer the affairs of men, it administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs.

Freedom is a basic psycho social need of human beings. However, societies which grant it are few from the ancient times to the contemporary world. In recent times the world has witnessed a decline in the provision and guarantee of freedom and democratic rights. It has been reported by Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion freedom and democracy, that in the last 12 year, 71 countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties, with only 35 registering gains. Even countries like United States of America seems to be retreating from their traditional role as both a champion and an exemplar of democracy and accelerating decline in American political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2018). Freedom House further noted that the global slide which began in 2006 saw 113 countries witnessing a net decline, and only 62 have experienced a net improvement. Political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated to their lowest in more than a decade in 2017, extending a period characterized by emboldened autocrats, beleaguered democracies, and the US seeming withdrawal from its leadership role in the global struggle for human freedom.

While Nigeria cannot be said to be the freest society in the world, it is not among the tightly controlled states where citizens enjoy little or no freedom of thought, speech, association, movement and freedom

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of the press. Nigeria is ranked by Freedom House, among partly free countries in the world. Nigeria ranked better than African countries like Ethiopia, Angola, Chad, Rwanda, Swaziland and the like. Nigeria's political rights rating improved from 4 to 3 due to increased transparency under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, and military gains against Boko Haram. Nigeria has also made significant improvements in the competitiveness and quality of national elections in recent years. However, political corruption remains a challenge, security officials consistently violate the rights of Nigerians through extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, and torture of civilians. Religious and ethnic bias is still high, discrimination against women is still rampant. Nigeria is ranked partly free in press freedom status and net freedom status.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Nigerians are getting a relatively good deal in terms of political freedom and civil liberty. However, the same cannot be said of basic requirements of living a long, healthy life. This is against the spirit and the letters of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which clearly state in its chapter two, the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, and in chapter four the fundamental rights of citizens. In chapter two, the Constitution clearly states that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood, just and humane conditions of work, adequate medical and health facilities as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment. With respect to education, it is also stated that the State shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and when practicable, provide free, compulsory and universal primary, secondary, university and adult literacy programme. This suggests that the State is envisaged to guarantee both the fundamental rights of citizens to life, personal liberty, thought, religion, association and the like as well as their maximum welfare and happiness on the basis of social justice and equality. It therefore, appears as if the Constitution envisaged that citizens ought to enjoy a life of enlightenment, dignity and prosperity as a prelude to rational exercise of their freedoms.

2.1.1 Free Society versus Stable Society

While liberal societies place much emphasis on building a free society, conservative societies stress and work towards having a stable society. Often times, to achieve social stability is to establish a link among individuals making up a society through a process of homogenization such that they are bound with common values. As such, an organic society which is characterized with less strife, disagreements and acrimony is built. In conservative societies, rules, regulations, and authorities evolved over time through consensus and they are considered to be worth preserving as way of binding the society together. In this sense, public good, stability, unity and the wellbeing of the entire society is placed above personal freedom. Conversely, in liberal societies, members of society are considered as competing individuals, each with his personal values and interest to protect.

To ask an individual to choose between freedom and stability is to create an unhealthy dichotomy as the two are desirable for wellbeing of members of society. The reasonable question to ask is how can social stability be ensured in a free society? The crux of the matter is the erroneous assumption that people are

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always free and whatever action that have emanated from them has been freely done. Can an individual who has acted ignorantly be said to have acted freely? Ojong (2000) cited Aristotle as giving two conditions for the origination of a free action: (1) the action is not due to external compulsion and (2) the action is not done due to the agent's ignorance. Many times when people act in a particular way, they are influenced by various social, economic and environmental factors. Though existentialists would argue that those factors will not determine how an individual acts, the reality of human life is that those social, emotional attachments cannot be discountenanced in moral actions. As such, rationality and knowledge are closely tied to the concept of freedom. As an insane person is not liable in a court of law, a mass of ignorant populace cannot be said to be free. As opined by Thomas Jefferson (1816):

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. The functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty and property of their constituents. There is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves; nor can they be safe with them without information. Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe.

This above underscores the significance of education in guaranteeing true freedom for the people. With illiteracy and poverty at an alarming rate in Nigeria, sloganeering about building a free and democratic society is nothing short of deception in the hand of political elite to cajole the people. Literacy means people aged 15 and above can read and write. Total literate population in Nigeria stands at 51.1% (CIA World Factbook 2018 estimates). Literacy is a progression of skills that begins with the ability to understand spoken words, decode written words, and culminates in deep understanding of text. It is also the capacity and ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in the community- to achieve ones goals, and to develop ones knowledge and potential.

World Bank report of 2017 raises alarm over learning crisis saying education is tilting towards schooling without learning. Schooling without learning is not just a wasted development opportunity but also a great injustice to children and young people worldwide. The report warned that millions of young students in Nigeria and other low and middle – income countries may face the challenge of lost opportunity and lower wages in future as the primary and secondary schools are failing to educate them to succeed in life. For instance, it said that "among young adults in Nigeria, only about 20% of those who completed primary education can read". Those statistics do not account for millions of children who for reasons of conflict, discrimination, disability, and other obstacles, are not enrolled in primary or secondary school. According to the report, when fourth grade students in Nigeria were asked to complete a simple two – digit subtraction problem, more than three- quarter could not solve it.

3. Moral Education as a Panacea for a Stable Society

There are several postulations on the best way to teach moral education in schools. There are those who believe that morality can only be taught by teaching religion. Proponents of the position are of the view that there is no need for separate curriculum for moral education as long as religious studies are being taught in schools. This position has been criticized for being dogmatic and for having the potential of being problematic in a multi religious society like Nigeria. There is also the indoctrinative approach advanced by Berkowitz (1998) which embraces teaching of content. It involves highlighting a list of values or virtues that serve as the core of the curriculum. The highlighted values are then taught as specific topics. The approach has been termed indoctrinative because there is tendency to teach the selected values as absolutes, thereby preventing learners from questioning them or thinking of situations when such values may not be workable especially when they are held by other values. It may also suggest that moral education should exist as a separate academic subject in which the identified and selected values are taught.

There is also the romanticist or value clarification approach which considers content to be idiosyncratic and to be latent in the individual. Here, there would be no content to teach but an attempt to develop the capacity of learners for moral reasoning. Value clarification involves raising moral issues and discussing real or hypothetical cases on which learners are allowed to freely make contributions. The teacher uses learners' responses to know their level of moral development and then help them to move to the next higher level. The approach can be productive if it is not implemented in a value free way as proposed by some of its proponents. Learners should ultimately be guided as to the moral way to behave Value clarifications without the inculcation and modeling would however, not suffice for sound moral education. The competence of the teacher to effectively coordinate the discussions and guide the learners to discover what is moral and what is immoral is also critical for value clarification to be productive.

This study proposes an integrative approach to moral education. The proposal is based on consensus theory which originated from the works of leading scholars like Durkheim and Parsons. Consensus theory considers the society as a system which is made up of interdependent social institutions such as family, religion, politics, education and other systems. All the social institutions work together to bring about order in a society. In their view, social order can be achieved when people are socialised into similar norms and values which promote value consensus. It is held that the norms, values and the belief system of society are meant to be embedded in the school curriculum and the entire school life such that learners are imparted through daily routines, curricular contents, and social relationship. Durkheim (2007) contends that society can survive only if there exists among its members a significant degree of homogeneity.

Education helps to perpetuate and reinforce this homogeneity by fixing in the child the essential similarities demanded by social life. Parson (1975) further argued that a stable and orderly society demands the existence of a moral consensus or a set of common values. Promoting this consensus for

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the peace, progress and stability of society is to him the primary function of education. Therefore, in order to use the education to address the negative social values militating against the stability of the Nigerian society, there is the need to provide a comprehensive moral education programme at all levels of education and most significantly at the basic education level bearing in mind that learners at that level are still in their formative years whereby they are more receptive of any form of values presented to them. Moral education in the context of this paper, is defined as the process of inculcating in learners the social thinking, values, virtues, and habits that enable them to distinguish between good and bad actions such that they are able to contribute to the peace, harmony and stability of the society.

The hallmark of good education is instilling on the learner knowledge, skills and character to contribute to the wellbeing of society. When character education takes the back seat, the consequence is that production of human beings who have difficulty in reconciling their own interest with the public good or interest. For there to be stability in a society that seeks to be free, individuals need to be education to recognise their dependence on other in spite of their independence as free human beings. In order to achieve this, the teaching learning process needs to be made integrative such that moral values are infused into the programmes of learning, programmes of activities as well as programmes of guidance within the school. Not only that, every teacher of every subject contribute to character education of the learners. Every subject should be used to teach moral and social values required by individuals to function as agents of stability in the society. The integrated model of moral education is illustrated in Figure 1 below.
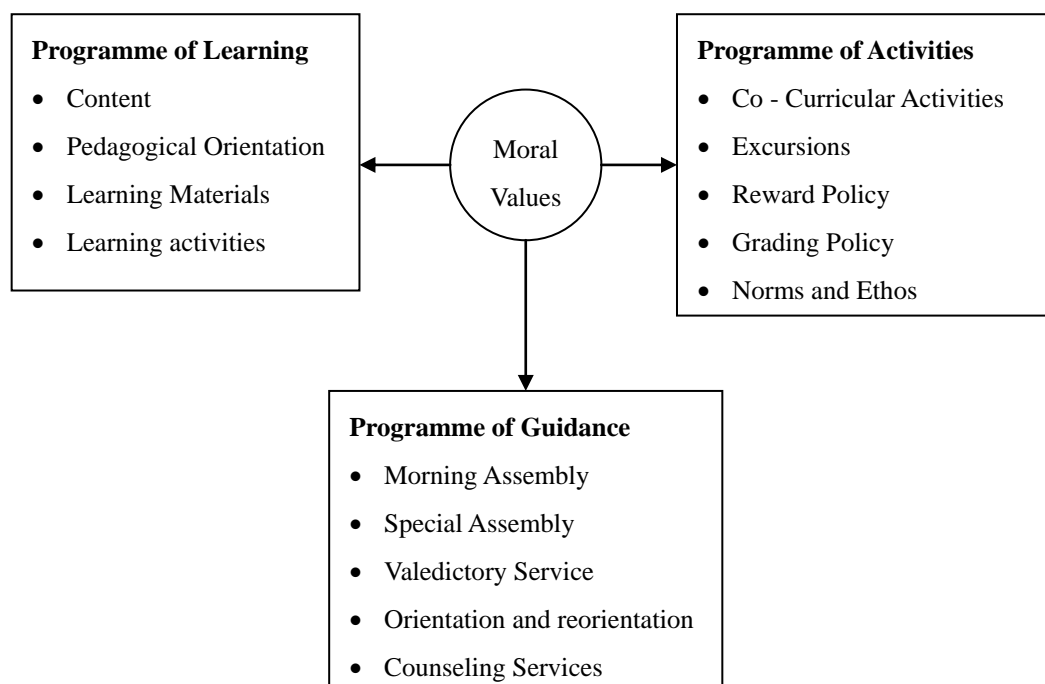

Figure 1. Illustrating an Integrative Approach to Moral Education

Source: Jabaar, 2013.

In order to integrate moral values to the content as well as the pedagogical orientation of teacher the model below can be instructive. The model is meant to show and guide teachers that moral and social values are inherent in all subjects in the curriculum both in terms of the contents and the methods of teaching. It is up to the teacher to bring out the social implications of what is being taught. For example, while teaching a topic like 'environmental conservation and safety' in Basic Science, the teacher while explaining water, carbon and nitrogen cycle as evidences of the natural and physical order can as well draw parallels between the physical and moral order. When the physical order is degraded, human life is also at peril so, environmental preservation and conservation become a value. The teacher can also draw out the social and moral implications from the topic by portraying negative social practices such as cheating, injustice, stealing, embezzling of public funds as kinds of social pollution that disrupt social and moral order of society.
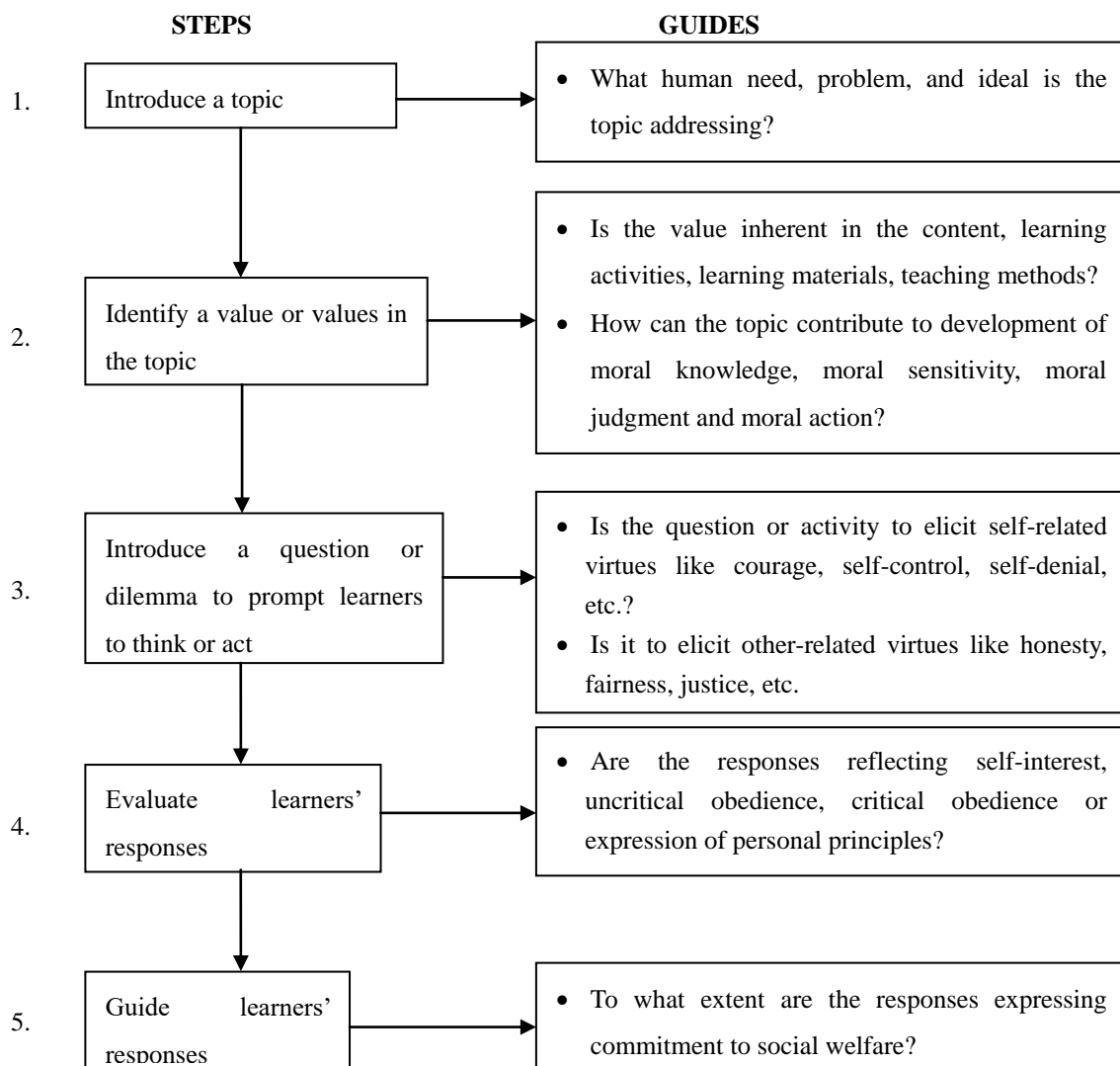
STEPS   **GUIDES**

1. Introduce a topic → • What human need, problem, and ideal is the topic addressing?

2. Identify a value or values in the topic → • Is the value inherent in the content, learning activities, learning materials, teaching methods?
• How can the topic contribute to development of moral knowledge, moral sensitivity, moral judgment and moral action?

3. Introduce a question or dilemma to prompt learners to think or act → • Is the question or activity to elicit self-related virtues like courage, self-control, self-denial, etc.?
• Is it to elicit other-related virtues like honesty, fairness, justice, etc.

4. Evaluate learners' responses → • Are the responses reflecting self-interest, uncritical obedience, critical obedience or expression of personal principles?

5. Guide learners' responses → • To what extent are the responses expressing commitment to social welfare?

Figure 2. Illustrating a Model for Integrating Values into a Program of Learning

Source: Jabaar, 2018.

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4. Conclusion

An attempt has been made to critically analyse the concepts of social stability and human freedom in the context of the Nigerian society. It has been established that stability is a desire of every society and some theoretical postulations with regard to how stability could be guaranteed in human society are examined. The Nigerian society has been shown to be one with relative social instability and relative guarantee of human freedom but one with abysmal decline in human and social development. The education sector has been portrayed as a focal point in addressing the social - moral crisis occasioned by seeming lack of cohesion and rational use of freedom to reconcile self - interest with the public good. The paper highlights major methods of moral education and recommends an integrative model of teaching which seeks to infuse social - moral values to the teaching and learning process is suggested to prepare learners for realization of their dependence on others in spite of their independence as free human beings. The integrative model of moral education can be effective in Nigerian schools if adequate attention is paid to training and re - training of teachers and the challenge of evaluation often associated with moral education is addressed. The model can be challenged for attempting to threaten the integrity of academic subjects but this is not necessary so, considering the fact that all academic subject are founded on human needs and values.

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