

**ETHICAL TENSION BETWEEN MORAL AND
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN CATHOLICS SCHOOL:
A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE**

By

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Abstract

Despite the progress of modern society in various fields of life, especially in education, people are yet to find true meaning, true happiness and real orientation towards ethical values. Most unfortunately, and on a daily basis, many young school leavers in Nigeria are far from real fulfillment and true happiness. They are either more confused themselves or confuse the entire system. Despite their well-paid jobs in public service, they still lack something tangibly meaningful. Alternatively, as the schools that produced them keep growing, glowing and blossoming in population/financial boom, the nation still suffers. Input determines output, and as a common elementary computer technology dictum goes, 'garbage in, garbage out.' This is our problem, and the root cause is not far-fetched. There is a discrepancy in the educational system due to lack of ethical ingredients in school management. It affects human behaviour, thoughts, actions. The in-thing is that because ethics is not given its proper place in schools, misplaced values take the center stage. Efforts to give ethics its proper place in educational institutions results in ethical tensions and dilemmas. This paper discusses the ethical predicaments that challenge most value-driven school managers in Nigerian Catholic/Mission school system which claims to be making a difference. Selecting the ethical issue of examination malpractice, we compared academic and moral excellence vis-à-vis ethics, its tensions, and the implications of its lack in Nigerian educational system. The rationale and root challenge are the corruption and injustice around the practice, and ethics alone paves the way forward.

Keywords: Moral Excellence, Academic Excellence, Ethical Tension, Value-Driven School Management, Examination Malpractice.

Introduction

Modern society has brought much noticeable progress to the fields of arts, medicine, agriculture, sciences, longevity, technology and lifestyles. Yet, people are not happier and many seem not to find orientation towards ethical values or some rational meaning in anything. (Rev. Prof. Obiora Ike, Executive Director, Globetics.net, Switzerland)

As school system constantly face challenges of “decline of moral values, intolerance, increasing trends of hostility and violence, [high rate of corruption], vandalism and other negative phenomena,”¹ the urgency for ethics in education becomes imperative. This describes a current global educational dilemma, traceable to tensions of misplaced values. Ethical problems constantly reduce education standards. It is often difficult to decode the underlying ethic behind the values that schools pursue nowadays. Some managers and teachers normalize various forms of mal-practices in pursuit of students’ excellent performance in examinations. Some students pay and engage in several moral misconducts to obtain high academic grades. Incidentally, they become lazy with their studies, disregard hard work, play away their time, indulge in truancy, and all other unbecoming school behaviour. Catholic schools record huge progress, making a difference through their insistence on high moral standard in the pursuance of academic excellence. However, this often breeds tensions between academics and morals, and places some school managers at the crossroads. This essay discusses some administrative challenges facing Nigerian Mission school managers, their possible causes, effects, and the ethical options for addressing them.

Moral Excellence

Morality is central to Christian ethics. Conscience is the teacher. Hence, moral excellence is the capacity and quality to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. It is synonymous with virtue,

goodness, and admirableness. For Christians, moral excellence is not an option but a divine command. The entire Bible focuses on virtuous living (2Tim. 3:16-17). The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7 are few instances among several other Christian moral codes. Therefore, Catholic education believes in pursuing academic excellence in moral ways.

Academic Excellence

Academic excellence is one of the keys to a meaningful future. California State University defines it as “the demonstrated ability to perform, achieve, and/or excel in scholastic activities... identified with achieving high grades and superior performance.” It is the “maximum development of...intellectual capacities and skills in service to humanity”² Through academic excellence, one makes significant and valuable contributions to the society. Here, we see that academic excellence is, by itself, a value to be cherished.

In Nigeria, most people seem to limit academic excellence to excellent scores during examinations to earn a required certificate. Hence, most schools focus on students passing examinations rather than teaching, studying and learning with a sense of responsibility. This hinders students from making meaningful contributions to the society because they lacked proper and in-depth teaching-learning process. Evidently, this is a misplacement of value: we teach and learn just to pass; and the fact that “our students do well” during exams is a step to getting huge population, which in turn seems to be the only parameter to measure ‘good schools’ nowadays. The contradiction is that one who performed academically well is unable to make useful contributions to the society. Reason? The process neglected ethical considerations.

Ethics in Brief

The noun, ethics, is a set of moral principles that governs a person’s behaviour or the conducting of an activity. This branch

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of knowledge, also called moral philosophy, is a discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong. The term is also applied to any system or theory of moral values or principles.³ Peter Singer defines ethics as “the philosophical study of the concepts of moral right and wrong and moral good and bad, to any philosophical theory of what is morally right and wrong or morally good and bad, and to any system or code of moral rules, principles, or values...associated with particular religions, cultures, professions, or virtually any other group that is at least partly characterized by its moral outlook.”⁴

Ethics deals with existential questions⁵ at all levels of life, and focuses on fundamental issues of practical decision making. The nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong are among its major concerns.

The origin of ethics is traceable to some mythical accounts of the introduction of the moral codes by humans. As a systematic study of what is morally right and wrong, ethics originally came into existence as human beings began to reflect and formulate the best ways to live. “This reflective stage emerged long after human societies had developed some kind of morality, usually in the form of customary standards of right and wrong. Virtually every human society has some form of myth to explain the origin of [its] morality.”⁶ Africans, for instance, have strong moral codes encoded in stories, folklores, proverbs and wise sayings, music and songs, mimes and dances, etc.

In the field of religion, ethical systems can generally be broken down into three categories namely: deontological, teleological and virtue-based ethics. Deontological ethics is “characterized primarily by...adherence to independent moral rules or duties.”⁷ Teleological moral systems “focus on the consequences which any action might have.”⁸ Virtue ethics develops good character traits by placing “much less emphasis on which rules people

should follow and instead focus(es) on helping people develop good character traits, such as kindness and generosity. These character traits will, in turn, allow a person to make the correct decisions later on in life. Virtue theorists also emphasize the need for people to learn how to break with bad habits of character, like greed or anger. These are called vices and stand in the way of becoming a good person.”⁹

Ethical Tensions

Kaye et al define ethical tension as “decision-making situations that necessitate choosing between two or more moral imperatives...”¹⁰ It is a dilemma, an inner conversation with the self-concerning two or more available propositions, and a choice between two or more courses of action, when obstacles on each side hinder the decision as to which course to pursue.¹¹ Education involves molding young minds towards the making of moral choices. The tension here is between academics and morals, whereby certificate is more important than skill. We unravel the depths of this tension by discussing ethics in education.

Ethics in Education and its dilemma

Ethics is a universal concern of all peoples around the world. So, it is still very relevant today as never before. Virtue ethics always talks about ethics of something. Hence, we have ethics of all fields of life: medicine, law, education, religion, politics, economy, etc. Education is a “vehicle of social transformation and socio-politico-cultural-economic dynamics.”¹² There is a general saying that “politics without principles, business without morality, [and] education without character are equally dangerous...”¹³ Ethics plays indispensable roles in education for the good of the society. Quality education is important for the powerful knowledge and the all-round dynamics necessary for navigating the 21st century. Such education is useless and meaningless if it is void of ethical dynamics.

Some of the main aims of ethics are “to stimulate ethical reflection, awareness, responsibility, and compassion; to provide insight into important ethical principles and values; to equip an individual with key cognitive and non-cognitive (moral) intellectual capacities.”¹⁴ To achieve this, ethics in schools (higher education) cover areas like “content and pedagogical competency, fair assessment, [and] respect to stakeholders, professional conduct, student development, reasonable pay, perks and leaves, avoidance of dual relationships, counselling to students and parents and involvement in community development.”¹⁵ Every school manager pays serious attention to the above, while at the same time, taking cognizance of further ethical issues and institutional puzzles such as sexual harassment of all kinds, examination malpractice, and exploitation of employees, bullying, and suicide of students, among others.

As a practical science of the morality of human conduct, ethics is concerned with human behavioural norms. Education ethics, therefore, comprises the realm of behaviour that schools display (managers, parents, staff, and students) to differentiate between right and wrong. This ideal involves defining work ethics to realize educational objectives. The rationale is that “education is for life and not merely for living...not mere accumulation of information but values in actions [that]...go a long way in creating future managers with openness to new idea, and readiness to learn from others. Our schools must ponder over the lofty ideals of practicing ethics in its day to day affairs.”¹⁶ For a good result, they have to surmount certain ethical issues. Reflecting on the ethical educational issues, Biswal observed that:

...schools are seen today suspiciously by parents, teachers, educators, administrators, union members & business persons, people inside and outside the school walls. Also schools face severe value crisis which has direct bearing on quality of the schooling as well as quality of outputs. Several unethical practices that mar the purpose of schools are : contract employment

strategy, drill & practice approach in school academic affair management, deliberate crocodile cry towards realization of educational objectives, use of one size fits for all formula in learning process, no action for minimum level of learning , low rate of employee's retention, no policy for teacher appointment, promotion and retention, no heed to learning of individual child, raising eyebrows to special government policies... to name a few. Hence it is very much essential that institutions of learning should be designed and run as learning organizations by practicing ethics in all walk of schooling.¹⁷

Similarly, the Nigerian educational system encounters various ethical issues that challenge the nation and as well affect the school administrators (principals and head teachers), and the learners. Obviously, ethics should permeate every facet of human life and organizations, including educational institutions of learning. Unfortunately, school administrators and managers struggle with problems of ethical predicaments and anguish that stare them in the face when taking critical decisions in the day-to-day school administration. Such problems sometimes lead to frustration, anger, and perplexity, which in turn affect their overall performance.¹⁸ The reason is clear; the practice and implementation of ethical values in all facets of Nigerian life, especially in education, is kept at arms-length. They appear only on paper policies without practical realization. We clarify this argument in a quick glance at the Nigerian educational system and the challenges posed by lack of policy implementation.

Nigeria and Educational Challenges

Nigeria's policy and philosophy of Education believes that education is a tool for development, founded on five major goals: building "a free, and democratic society; a just egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens."¹⁹ To this end, the policy opted for

...a quality of instructions...oriented towards inculcating the following values: respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations; shared responsibility for the common good of society; promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance.²⁰

Undoubtedly, the contents of the above policy are ideal and ethic-based while the implementation of is often unfortunately unrealistic. This is the problem. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) observes numerous problems of "corruption, abuse of power, insecurity, poverty, discrimination,"²¹ economic instability which affect Nigeria generally and the education sector in particular. Reasons are traceable to lack of the proposed 'quality of instructions.' Consequently, some Nigerian youth did not receive values-driven education, and some, who eventually became political leaders, could not deliver effectively because they cannot give what they do not have. Hence, the Nigerian education system fails.

Nigerian education is problematic because of what we may call 'neglect from top to bottom' and vice versa. From the top is leadership and governance, while the bottom is the family, and subsequently, the school. Every blame on poor economic system reverts back to bad leadership, which abandons schools without quality human and infrastructural resources. From the bottom are parents and teachers, some of whom, themselves lack or misplace values in child upbringing. Therefore, in a disoriented economy, everyone takes the easy way out, void of ethical responsibility. Additionally, political crises and religious conflicts in Nigeria grossly destabilizes education. Terrorist attacks deny many children access to quality education, lives are lost and properties (e.g. school buildings) destroyed. Leaders and wealthy Nigerians educate their children in the Western countries, thus abandoning Nigerian schools.

As mission schools emerged, and individuals and organizations established private schools, the situation becomes more disappointing and difficult for the average Nigerian child. The objectives of these mission and private schools are to fill the lacunae and make a difference through the teaching of ethics and morals. But because they lacked government support, they became expensive as they must recruit qualified teachers, pay them justly, and provide adequate facilities for the desired quality education. Some made little progress amidst critical economic, religious and political challenges. Although a few mission schools opt for quality education, their efforts seem like a drop in an ocean. According to Richard Omolade, “only a few can really be said to be providing a creditable alternative to government’s delivery of education,”²² and this few suffer untold predicaments for that. This dilemma confronts and challenges typical managers of some Catholic schools in Nigeria in a tension of balancing academics and morals while struggling to make a difference by attaining some levels of enviable excellence among other schools.

Catholic Schools: Making a Difference

Catholic schools have distinctive identity and ethos. They inculcate ethics and morals in the child through moral and religious studies. One could describe Catholic education as ‘education in Christ, and for life,’ responding to emerging contextual challenges. For instance, according to the Congregation for Catholic Education, Vatican City, Rome, “the context in which the mission of education is carried out is characterized by challenges emerging from varying forms of an ideology.”²³ A recent ideology is the ‘gender theory’, which “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family.”²⁴ To address this gender and human sexuality theory, the Roman Catholic Church, in her recent education document, *Male And Female He Created Them: Towards A Path Of Dialogue On The Question Of Gender Theory In Education*,

developed “a methodology based on three guiding principles... to meet the needs of both individuals and communities. The principles are: to listen, to reason and to propose.”²⁵ This model addresses educational crises the ethical way, and gives Catholic education a unique feature.

Concurrent with the Universal Church, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) developed a Catholic Policy on Education in Nigeria, which intends “to guide the church and help parents fulfil the obligation of providing Christian education for their children. While drawing principally from Catholic Educational principles, it works in consonance with Nigeria’s National Policy on Education.”²⁶ Thus, Catholic education in Nigeria seeks to fulfil, complement and supplement the national objectives. Under the auspices of CBCN, Catholic education is rooted in the universal aims and objectives for a Christocentric and value-oriented education. The third National Catholic Education Summit held in 2018, resonates the Vatican’s response to the ‘gender theory’ and sexuality issues. Since the first and second summits in 2006 and 2014 respectively, the Nigerian Catholic education has maintained its primary focus on “provision of qualitative and holistic education for the average Nigerian child irrespective of religious or ethnic differences.”²⁷ According to the summit report, this goal “combines intellectual, physical, moral, spiritual and cultural formation that is premised on Christian religious principles and the social teachings of the Church.”²⁸

Local Churches (Dioceses) break down and apply the policy to contextual needs and challenges without neglecting the universal and national focus. Finally, each Catholic school, considering the immediate needs of the domicile community, develops specific education objectives according to government and Church policies at all levels. This system creates a balance between theory and practice, and between morals and academics. For instance, the Society of Jesus articulates the identity and ethos which Catholic schools must reflect “if they are to have

a characteristic identity and mission.” Although they share many features with other schools...“Catholic schools also draw distinctive features from their Christian heritage and the way in which they combine their educational and religious missions.” The Jesuits present key characteristics of Catholic schools this way:

Jesus Christ is at the center of the Catholic School... [He] is presented to pupils and to staff. The values and attitudes of Christ are modelled by the adults of the school community. Pupils are encouraged to make the values and attitudes of Jesus Christ their own. The school recognizes the Spirit of the Risen Christ, present, alive and active in the school community. From this vision of the Catholic School centered on the person of Jesus Christ, come values and actions which are articulated in the four main areas of school life: Studies, Pastoral Care, Religious Life and Personal Formation.²⁹

On this background, *Odetoyinbo* and *Asogo* noted that Catholic educators “share in the mission of the Church - to teach and educate, and build the virtue of the children through moral education which, not only builds the person, but also helps to make the society a better place.”³⁰ This means that a typical catholic educator must be a value-driven leader, courageous enough to face the tension between the ideal and the actual, between the policies written on scripts and their actualization.

The Value-Driven School Leader and Dilemma of the Administrative Crossroad

Crossroads suggest tension situations that lead to confusion, loss of capacity for navigation, need to ask questions, and to seek guidance, for redirection and for discernment. Government neglect of schools leads to economic and financial crunch, compelling most Nigerians to keep ethics and morals at *arms-length* in pursuit of survival. Some school proprietors, parents,

teachers, and students develop various survival strategies contrary to Christian norms and conscience. There are unhealthy competitions among schools to get the highest population and the best academic grades. Again there are agitations from parents who want their wards to get excellent results. Hence, excellence in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) becomes the yardstick for school popularity and students' university admissions. The system affects parents some of whom are teachers. One way out is to tolerate malpractice of all sorts, rationalized as 'examination logistics.'

When a school manager says 'no' to this, agitating and contradictory voices arise, even from church leaders who argue for the impossibility of students to pass examinations without any 'help,' and that 'almost every school' and/or 'school head' does it. But the fact that everybody does something doesn't make it right. Surprisingly, some parents who could not pay the normal termly/annual school fees are ready to pay whatever it takes 'for the logistics.' This is cheer corruption, indiscipline, bad example, and lack of fairness to our children, and above all, a sin. It is an administrative dilemma, which places the ethically value-driven leader at the crossroads. Here also comes the 'moment of moments' to define who you are. What actually defined the leader? Does the manager allow circumstances, problems, what people say, what they think, what they do, etc. determine who he/she is or does? More often, it is what we do that defines us. This is where ethics comes to play because in as much as we decide and act according to what we value, ethics makes our decisions and actions more generally acceptable and worthy in terms of morals.

Shapira-Lishchinsky detailed five other ethical tensions related to that of morals and academics in teacher education, which also challenge a typical value-driven school manager. According to Shapira, these are ethical tensions between "Caring climate vs. formal climate, distributive justice vs. school standards, confidentiality vs. school rules, loyalty to a colleague vs. school norms, and family agenda vs. educational standards."³¹

A close look at these pairs of values calls the leader to a critical evaluation of the reason behind decisions and actions taken in the running of the school. Oftentimes, the later parts of the pairs are upheld to the detriment of the former.

For instance, one could drive family agenda to such an extent that educational standards are swept underground. A parent itching for examination malpractice, in the name of ‘helping the students pass their external exams, does that because he/she had already set out career (Medicine, Engineering, Law etc.) for the child. Whether their average academic performance matches or not is not their concern. Hence, general educational standards are sacrificed on the altar of family agenda; loyalty to colleagues are upheld to the detriment of school norms; distributive justice suffers as individual school standards enjoy greater preference, etc.

A typical researcher shared an experience in Globethics.net³² Annual Report where she defined her three years of serving as principal of a girls’ secondary school as ‘years of an ethical fight.’ It was an experience of struggling to strike a balance amidst similar tensions mentioned above, to let the ‘ethical’ prevail in school matters, and at the same time maintain the status quo of the school. They were years of critical thinking as to ‘why you do what you do’, and she was so determined to follow the ethical way even if the Church and school authorities may suggest the alternative in the name of searching for the material gain of the school alone. According to the researcher,

The climax was my three-year experience as principal of a Girls’ Secondary School, famous and popularly known for her zero-tolerance in examination malpractice. Consequently, I faced several challenges including lack of population, financial setbacks and many others. In pursuit of moral and academic excellence, I wished the students to make different through discipline and responsible hard work. But I was totally misunderstood, misinterpreted, misquoted, suspected, misrepresented

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and vehemently opposed from all angles by students, parents, staff/workers, and fellow colleagues. There were furious anger, attacks, secret meetings, confrontations, hatred, and bias. I was called names and became object of discussion, accused of mounting unnecessary tension and pressure on the staff, parents and students, all because I said an ethical 'NO' to corruption.

Navigating these managerial crossroads requires strong ethical decisions that defines who we are and which standards we stand for. As we can see in the example of the above school principal, any value-driven leader always takes the ethical way at all times without fear or favor, and considering precisely the ethical effects of examination misconducts.

Ethical Implications of Examination Malpractice

Examination malpractice, which takes various forms (leakage of questions, impersonation, smuggling of foreign materials, copying, collusion, markers' malpractice),³⁴ is generally caused by "misplaced priority for certificate acquisition against knowledge and skill acquisition due to the certificate syndrome in the society, lack of preparation by teachers and inadequate preparation by students." This is because of the Nigerian idea that "certificate is most important than the skill to deliver."³⁵ Some schools approve it for economic gain: to attain the enviable height of population and financial boom among peer schools.

It has several ethical implications and grave consequences on individuals, institutions of learning, communities and the country at large. These include lack of self- confidence, dismissal/termination/loss of position in public service, and lots of embarrassment and suffering to individuals, families and the entire nation. Examination malpractice discourages students from hard work, leads to poor job performances, low productivity, bribery, corruption, and certificate clamor. The above disadvantages seriously and negatively affect the entire society.

Any society that approves it - through compliance, questionable silence, or by pretending not to know it exists or happens, all in the name of helping them to pass - is not only unfair to, but have failed the kids entrusted to their care. We miss the point, destroy their future, and deprive them the proud opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the society.

Consequently, we produce a generation of '*half-bakes*' or "square pegs in round holes [who] lack the required knowledge and experience to carry out their assignment and professional duties effectively" because they "have low morale and academic value...and eventually "end up with unfulfilled dreams in their chosen career."³⁶ Having received negative orientations, they end up being future fraudulent and corrupt leaders in their various offices because they've actually built on false and faulty foundations.

Furthermore, this generation will forever be asking the very questions that the poet and literary giant T. S. Eliot asked a century ago: "Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in Introduction knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"³⁷ The answer to these questions lies in the domain of ethics.

Additionally, we produce a generation already at the dead ends of life. Obiora Ike, sees these dead ends "in the world of business and politics, in commerce and industry, governance and education, religion and culture, in technology and social behaviours, thus the confusion, the disorientation and the lack of happiness noticeable everywhere. We are aware that the center is not holding any more. Such a situation is a reflection of something gravely wrong in society - a crisis of values and moral uprightness perpetuated by untruths."³⁸ The center fails because ethics is absent, everything falls apart. The only way out of the dilemma is to brave the ethical way.

Facing the Challenge: Ethical Way

To address these situations, responsible managers apply practical steps to achieve balanced success. The basic steps include first, to educate the staff, parents and students on morals. Secondly, to develop concrete job definitions and description of staff work ethics, code of conduct for managers, parents, teachers and students. Thirdly, regular and ongoing staff seminars on teaching ethics. Fourthly, firmness and fairness, accompanied by constant supervision, constructive criticisms and confrontations, and application of some sanction for recalcitrant behaviours.

These steps require fortitude and readiness to face the challenges that arise when one decides to ‘go against the grain.’ Ethics swims against the current, hence the tension. This is similar to the injunctions of the biblical Sirach, who advises us to “prepare yourself for an ordeal when you come to serve the Lord” (Sirach 2: 1-9). It needs patience, discipline and hope for a far-reaching result of transforming lives in higher education. In fact, it takes a lot of other virtues to remain ethical in the pursuit of values. The result is something close to the researcher’s testimony in Globethics.net Annual Report,

...however, I won [the ethical fight], and the students that stayed [back] scored 100% in their final examinations without cheating. Ethics cannot be sacrificed on the altar of any human or material gain...life is about values, discovered, spoken of, lived and died for. Values make life meaningful, and ethical values [make life more meaningful and] set us on the path to freedom of simply good, right, just...living. However, the ambivalence of human freedom makes values-driven lives difficult, throwing humans into confusion and tension. In this dilemma, ethics guides, mentors, and introduces us to principles of behavioural conduct, itself becoming a tool for navigating the storms of life. Discernment plays a vital role at such crossroads, thus confirming that our

values inform our decisions. This is why ethics matters. This is my story; this defines me.³⁹

This is the purpose of ethics: as a value-driven leader, to train future value-driven leaders. To get to this point of success is not easy. The manager needs to possess a balanced personality, with enough emotional intelligence to know the difference between “the good and the traditional.”⁴⁰ Above all the leader must “think outside the box.” For Mike Sturm, this means “creative thinking, different from the conventional, and applying new perspectives.”⁴¹ It means knowing that school management is not a one-man game. The manager cannot do it alone, but must carry others along. Sturm has three strategies for thinking outside the box: eliminating the goal-directedness of one’s thinking, encounter rather than come up with ideas, and thinking wide. The result is a good networking, combined with positive attitude and appreciation of persons.

Hence, we can infer why ethics matters. Education without ethics is like growth without a soul. The ethical way is the only way. According to Obiora Ike, ethics provides a “link between education, development and culture, especially in the African context.”⁴² Development would elude socio-economic, religious, political structures if education systems neglect ethics, the principles of which “leads to transformation...ethics determines what is ought, what is right, what adds value to the common good and what leads to sustainable development.”⁴³

Catholic schools follow the Vatican method of listening, reasoning and proposing morals. This is the starting point on the way of ethics. It requires the values of listening to the environment and the situation, the reasoning capacity to decipher the difference, and the courage to stand firm while proposing the true, the just and the right line of action. It involves the simple way of moral instructions for edifying lifestyles, for commitment, for focus in life, and for responsibility in teaching and learning. In all, it is the value of listening to the voice in the inner world.

Bibhuti Narayan presents us with more concrete steps on how to manage ethics in schools. These include a) Emphasis on Vision & Mission of school; b) setting the ‘dos’ (and don’ts) for educational managers, c) Use of affirmative language, d) Documentation / dissemination, e) Institution of Internal Quality Assessment Cell & ethics committee in school, f) Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act 2012, g) Following “ W-A-T-C-H” Model. This simply means watching your Words-Actions-Thoughts-Character-Heart/habit; h) Performance Appraisal / Promotion and Reward; and i) Conflicts Management,⁴⁴ all because ethics matters.

Why Ethics Matters

Ethics matters because of its utmost importance in life. Think life think ethics. With ethics we can be our best, and without it we are at our worst, heading towards the dead-end road. Ethics is fundamental and foundational to human life. Lucy Howe Lopez recalls how Obiora Ike demonstrates the ‘who, why and where’ of ethics. According to Lucy, Obiora often says that “Ethics is where life is,” demonstrating it by bringing [the] fingertips and thumbs of each hand together that ethics touches life, it does not exist in a vacuum, unrelated to and distinct from our day-to-day lives and concerns.”⁴⁵

This means that to the Globethics.net family, ethics lies at the very fabric of life. The Executive Director of Globethics.net, Obiora Ike, summarizes why the organization sees ethics as the hinge on which every facet of life particularly education, must hold. Ike had stated that

Ethics is the queen of sciences that addresses the Good Life. It promotes living well and rightly. Ethics is about doing the right thing, making the right choices, protecting the common good, promoting good behaviour and avoiding harm. Ethics helps to promote collaboration and community coexistence and is a subject taught within the family, in schools and higher education institutions.

Through ethics, young people and adults reconnect with a moral and ethical compass for life by practicing virtue. It is indeed clear that without ethics and values-based education, a better world is not possible. Our common challenge therefore is to integrate ethics in education so that people think ethically, govern ethically and act ethically. Education has a value to add by integrating ethical thinking in the young as they shape the future. This is why ethics matters, and it matters for all peoples globally and urgently.⁴⁶

Furthermore, ethics challenges us to reflect on the realities of life. Ethics matters because (1) “it is part of how many groups define themselves and thus part of the identity of their individual members, (2) other-regarding values in most ethical systems both reflect and foster close human relationships and mutual respect and trust, and (3) it could be “rational” for a self-interested person to be moral, because his or her self-interest is arguably best served in the long run by reciprocating the moral behaviour of others.”⁴⁷

Finally, ethics balances extremes, filling the valleys and leveling the mountains in human conduct. It supplies needed values where they lack, levels the unethical and replaces them with the ethical. Ethics balances moral and academic tensions. Therefore, it is either the ethical way or not at all.

Conclusion

This work has reflected on the ethical tensions and struggles between moral and academic excellence in Nigerian schools. Hence, we have showcased the fact that ethics in education matters because it provides the link between all human activities in order to make them worthwhile and meaningful. Everything about development in all ramifications boils down to education, which is total failure if it does not inculcate ethical and moral values in the human person. This essay encourages school leaders and all teaching professionals to stand firm on their decision to take

the ethical way in school management and administration. We agree with Globethics.net that ethics in general, and particularly in education means empowerment, transformation, holistic approach, integrity, competence and sustainability. Central to these is human dignity. Respect for the human person and his inherent worth compels his proper education along the ethical path.

Endnotes

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⁴Peter Singer, *Top Questions: What is Ethics?* in Encyclopedia Britanica, Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy>. Assessed 29 March 2022.

⁵Peter Singer, *Ethics*, some of the existential questions that ethics continues to ask include: “ How should we live? Shall we aim at happiness or at knowledge, virtue, or the creation of beautiful objects? If we choose happiness, will it be our own or the happiness of all? And what of the more particular questions that face us: is it right to be dishonest in a good cause? Can we justify living in opulence while elsewhere in the world people are starving? Is

going to war justified in cases where it is likely that innocent people will be killed? Is it wrong to clone a human being or to destroy human embryos in medical research? What are our obligations, if any, to the generations of humans who will come after us and to the nonhuman animals with whom we share the planet?"

⁶Singer, *Ethics*.

⁷Austin Cline, "Three types of Ethical Systems," in *Learning Religions*, 2018, Available at: <https://www.learnreligions.com/atheism-types-of-ethical-systems-4058406>. Accessed on 29 March, 2022. Cline explained further that, "In order to make the correct moral choices, you simply have to understand what your moral duties are and what correct rules exist which regulate those duties. When you follow your duty, you are behaving morally. When you fail to follow your duty, you are behaving immorally. A deontological moral system may be seen in many religions, where you follow the rules and duties that are said to have been established by God or the church."

⁸Ibid. Again, for Cline, "In order to make correct moral choices, you have to have some understanding of what will result from your choices. When you make choices which result in the correct consequences, then you are acting morally; when you make choices which result in the incorrect consequences, then you are acting immorally. The problem comes in determining correct consequences when an action can produce a variety of outcomes. Also, there may be a tendency to adopt an attitude of the ends justifying the means."

⁹Ibid.

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¹⁷Ibid. 32.

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²⁵Ibid. 2

²⁶Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Catholic Education Policy, (2015) <https://www.cbcn-ng.org/publications.php>. Accessed 2 June 2020.

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³²Globethics.net is an ethics network of teachers and institutions based in Geneva, with an international Board of Foundation and with ECOSOC status with the United Nations. Our vision is to embed ethics in higher education. We strive for a world in which people, and especially leaders, are educated in, informed by and act according to ethical values and thus contribute to building sustainable, just and peaceful societies. The founding conviction of Globethics.net is that having equal access to knowledge resources in the field of applied ethics enables individuals and institutions from developing and transition economies to become more visible and audible in the global discourse. This International organization that focuses on ethics in Higher Education with a high ethical value of zero tolerance of any type of com-

promise in life.

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