

Value-based Education for Human Development – Eritrean Perspective

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Abstract

Education is important in any country since it promotes the knowledge, skills, habits, and values. The learning does not solely come from the teacher. Hence the educator for the child is both the teacher and his peer group. The societal values have been diminishing over the past few decades. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the holistic citizenship education. The problem of value education of the young African nation Eritrea is gaining prominence in educational discussions during the recent times. Hence, Eritrea emphasises on values in education and attempted to incorporate its National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2003. An attempt is made in this paper to discuss the Eritrean societal values in fighting for their freedom and it provides some conclusions and implications to develop the value education in Eritrea.

Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a central element in development (Bacchus,1992). It is considered as a vital input in modernization where the developing countries like Eritrea began its drive for social and economic development since its independence (Rena, 2003). Education is perceived as a means not only of raising political and social consciousness, but also of increasing the number of skilled workers and raising the level of trained man power (Rena, 2002). These benefits, together with the visible gains for individuals from education, stimulated an unprecedented growth of enrolment registered over the last fifteen years of its independence. It is to be noted that the enrolment rose up to 600,000 in 2005 from 189, 000 in 1992. Even in the case of teachers the number rose from 2,500 to 14,000. Furthermore, the government is making great efforts in constructing kindergarten schools in cities and rural areas. In addition, elementary, intermediate and secondary schools are on the increase every year. Substantial investment has been made in Eritrean education sector for the last one and half decades (Rena, 2005).

The question arises here is: what type of education is needed to empower citizens to become agents of change for better world societies? This was an issue before delegates at the eighth UNESCO-Asia Pacific Programme of Education Innovation for Development (APEID) held at Bangkok, Thailand in 2004. In a world struggling with the challenges posted by intolerance and fundamentalism, the perceptions about social-cohesion forever, the meaning of the term “citizenship education” assumes particular importance in the countries like Eritrea where still high degree of patriotism is found.

Eritrea is located in the Horn of Africa, bordered in the north and west by Sudan, in the south by Ethiopia and Djibouti, and in the east by the Red Sea. It has an estimated population of about 4 million and a total land area of some 12.2 million hectares. Its annual population growth is estimated at 2.9 percent (Rena, 2005). Eritrea has nine ethnic groups and six administrative *zobas* (provinces/regions).¹

Importance of Education

Education is important in a small country – Eritrea, because it promotes the knowledge, skills, habits, values, or attitudes and understanding of the people in the country (Bequist, 1992). And it is also considered as the backbone of the development of Eritrea (Rena, 2002). Therefore, greater concern and emphasis must be put into the means and ways by which education (learning and teaching process) transfer the needed knowledge and information to students/children. It helps people to become a useful member of the society and to develop an appreciation of their culture heritage and live more satisfying lives (Bequist, 1992; Bloom, et al., 1981). The most common way to get an education is to attend schools/colleges/university. Besides, the people acquire the needed skills through every day activities as reading news papers, magazines to understand more about the outside-world or managing their money. It also gives them a specialized training they may need to prepare for a job or career.

In Eritrea, the current emphasis on values in education National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2003 is a product of many years of contemplation into the sad degeneration of society into hedonism, corruption, poverty, inequity, injustice and the environment continue to send warning signals (Rena, 2004). Therefore, the problem of value education of the young is assuming increasing prominence in educational discussions during recent times. Parents, teachers and society at large have been concerned about values and value education of children in the country (Erwin, 1991). The present situation in Eritrea however demands a system of education, which, apart from strengthening national unity, must strengthen social solidarity through meaningful and constructive value education (MoE, 2001). Whatever be the cause of the present value crisis, there is no contradicting the fact that the weakening of moral values in social life is creating serious social and ethical conflicts. It is this changing context — the declining moral standards in personal and public life on the one hand, and the national ideological commitment to the values of democracy, socialism, secularism and modernization on the other, that constituted the driving force behind the recommendations, stressing the importance of value education in educational institutions in the country (MoE, 1999).

How Can We Prepare Good Citizens?

How can we prepare our future generations to cope with the challenges and fast changing realities of today and tomorrow? How can we develop citizens who can bring about the transformation of the culture of violence, intolerance and greed to one of peace, non-violence and respect for one another? These are not going to be achieved with the click of a finger (Bequist, 1992; Bloom, et al., 1981). There is no ready-made solution

waiting to be adopted. In fact there must be a debate in Eritrea over value education involving the best of the professional and academic intentions.

It is to be noted that Eritrea, is home for nine ethnic groups. Hence people have different faiths, should look to its own, rich spiritual tradition to find the ways to struggle with contemporary problems — look back into the future as it were.

There is no doubt that Eritrea is aware that the ideal type of citizen will be shaped by an educational paradigm. In line with this, it is been providing 12th Grade education in Warsay Yikeallo Secondary School in Sawa for the last 4 years, to integrate the students and promote the unity (Rena, 2005). The national goal of striking unity in diversity must be realised through the approaches that followed in Eritrean educational policies, programmes and practices and their implementation in the schools.

At the same time it needs the teacher's sensitivity to opportunities for teaching which result from the meaningful interaction between the educator and the learner and also among the learners themselves (Bequist, 1992; Bloom, et al., 1981). There is a popular misconception — which perhaps led to the postponement of value education instruction in Eritrea for years — that values are “*better caught than taught*”. In reality however, values are both caught and taught.

The learning does not solely come from the teacher but the educator for the child is both the teacher and his peer group. In this light, the teacher is more of a guide and facilitator, and indeed, the true partner in learning (Erwin, 1991). The success of the valuing process, according to contemporary educationists, lies in encouraging the learner to ask the “Why” and “What for” at the right times. This tendency checks the proliferation of blind faith.

So, value education is not simply the heart of education, but also the education of the heart. It is a necessary component of holistic citizenship education. The Ministry of Education (MoE) does not recommend mere teaching about values but rather learning how to value, how to bring knowledge into the deeper level of understanding and insights. The holistic learning experience aims at the internalisation of values by the learner and translating them into their behaviour.

Spiritual Education

A total learning process is therefore envisaged. It is a time for decision makers and professionals in the field of education to lead in the total effort of designing and implementing new and more effective ways of preparing the future citizens and future leaders of Eritrea into the creation of better societies. The priority should be to translate the valuable lessons from spiritual texts — *the Bible, Koran*, and to transform the growing culture of violence, greed and intolerance into one of peaceful co-existence (MoE, 1999).

Now, that is hardly achieved without designing a concrete yet flexible programme or of course complete with activities so that each school can fulfil its mission of creating “civic capacities”.

While there is general dissatisfaction with the fall in moral standards, there has been no concerted attempt on the part of society to address itself directly to the problem of value education. Unfortunately, education is becoming more or less materialistic and the value traditions are being slowly given up (Erwin, 1991). The degeneration in the present day life, the demoralization of public and private life and the utter disregard for values, are all traceable to the fact that moral, religious and spiritual education has not been given due place in the educational system. Indeed, it is observed that in the life of the majority of Eritreans, religion is a great motivating force and is intimately bound up with the formation of character and the inculcation of ethical values (Bequist, 1992). A national system of education that is related to life needs and inspiration of the people cannot afford to ignore this purposeful force. Value crisis of the present day life in Eritrea is mysterious the minds of educators and education as well.

The effect of the value crisis on present day life is witnessed in many ways. The democratic ideology that has been accepted by the country is yet to be actualised in the form of social and economic democracy as to realize democratic values guaranteed by the Constitution of Eritrea. Also the present Eritrean educational system is reflecting more or less borrowed ideologies and philosophies and the national values are demoted to the back. Apart from this, the teacher-educators and teachers are not being clearly oriented to the national values, ideas, ideals and ideologies that they have to inculcate in the students. However, they are not in a position to play their role as value educators.

The student community is drowned neck-deep in poverty, ignorance and unhealthy surroundings. Hence, they are not in a position to understand the real values of contemporary Eritrea. The present curriculum some extent reflect human values and the value system. Besides, the Eritrean schools and colleges have to promote the value-based education.

In educational reconstruction of Eritrea, the problem of an integrated perspective on values is pivotal, for its solution alone can provide organic unity for all the diverse activities of a school or college curriculum programme. An integrated education can provide for integrated growth of personality and integrated education is not possible without integration of values.

In value education, as in any other area of education, what is asked of the teacher is a total commitment to the development of rational autonomy in both thought and action. It should be noted that the most important aspect of value education consists not in unwilling adherence to a set of rules and regulations but in the building and strengthening of positive sentiments for people and ideals (Bequist, 1992). Value education should however, prepare individuals for participation in social life and

acceptance of social rules(Erwin, 1991). What is more important in value education is that schools should provide a healthy climate for sharing responsibilities, community life and relationships that prevailed in Eritrea for generations.

In this context, the new National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Eritrea gives uppermost importance to value education in schools. The MoE also organizes in-service education courses for key level persons and prepares instructional materials. The MoE also tried to develop different types of fables, stories, legends, biographies and folk tales related to values in different ethnic groups which will be of great use at primary stage in Eritrea. The Office of the National Curriculum has set up a plan to implement programmes on value-oriented education in Eritrea.

Conclusion

Education is the deliberate and systematic influence exerted by the mature person upon the immature, through instruction, discipline, and harmonious development of physical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual powers of the human beings (Erwin, 1991). Therefore, to fortify the values in education, it can be suggested that the MoE has to start a nation-wide consultation process and has to involve eminent scholars from varied religious and institutional backgrounds. Their valued inputs led to the decision to develop a Handbook for Schools on Strategies of Value Implementation which hopefully would keep those responsible for the selection and development of instructional material for inclusion in the schoolbooks they may think of developing. Simultaneously, National Curriculum Centre can start some projects for independent research and innovations in Value Education in collaboration with relevant institutions and organisations within and outside the country.

However, the other concerned parties, stakeholders and beneficiaries must work hard to strengthen value education. And the focus of this programme must be on generating awareness, material development, teacher training, development of school programmes, promotion of research and innovations in the area of education of human values and development of a framework of value education for the school system in Eritrea. In this context, the MoE has to set up a special department, which can be responsible for linkages, networking, monitoring and follow up, at the country level, zoba, sub-zoba and grass-root level for implementation of value education programmes in Eritrea. Besides, this department can also take up the responsibility of organising national consultation and regional workshops on value education with focus on strategies of awareness generation, material development and teacher training in the country.

Values cannot be forced, even if conveyed with good intentions. No real integration or internalisation of a value can be achieved unless the learner agrees with it. Communication is the key in this. This is one that we lack in Eritrea, but it can be developed with the cooperation of all. In value education, more than in the academics, educators will never be able to impose their values. Rather, they must circulate in the

community of the learner and pass on, through discipline, the fine humanism of respecting others in the same manner that one expects to be respected in return. As this climate of respect surrounds the learners, they automatically imbibe an attitude of tolerance towards their fellow men and this would certainly activate the human development that eventually leads national development.

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Notes:

¹ Eritrea has nine ethnic groups. They are: Tigriana, Tigre, Saho, Afar, Bilein, Hidareb, Kunama, Nara and Rashaida. All these ethnic groups have their own languages and cultures. There are six administrative regions: Anseba, Debub, Maekel, Gash Barka, Southern Red Sea, Northern Red Sea.