# PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS ON FREEDOM AS A MORAL VALUE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EDO CENTRAL SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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#### Abstract

This study analyzed the concepts of freedom as moral values in teaching and learning in secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District. Three research questions were raised to guide the study. The theories of Determinism and Freewill gave direction to the study. The theories were used because of the illusionary nature of the topic. The philosophical research design was employed in the study, therefore, this work relied on library research, documentary report, and evidence from different authorities in fields of education, philosophy, religion, morality and values to provide in-depth background to the study. The population of the study consisted all the 68 principals in the Sixty-eight (68) public Senior Secondary Schools in Edo Central Senatorial District. A sample of 5 principals from senior secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District. The simple random sampling techniques was employed to arrive at a representative sample size. The instrument used was an open ended/structured interview schedule outline titled: Interview Schedule Outline for Principals (ISOP). Basic ethical guidelines such as voluntariness in participation, informed consent, non-malfeasance and anonymity of interviewee was observed while the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions fall within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. Three broad philosophical tools speculative, analytical and prescriptive were employed for analysis. The results showed that freedom in teaching and learning in secondary schools is only to an extent and therefore not absolute freedom. It was uncovered that respect for institutional authorities and elderly ones, including school teachers, school principals, parents and their relatives, moral value for education as a legacy, value for hardwork as against quick money syndrome or wealth accumulation from illgotten sources and moral value for sexual modesty or decency are all moral issues among students. Following these outcome, respect, good character, and patience are implied as the necessary moral values needed in secondary schools in the senatorial district. It was recommended that there is need for teaching moral values through Moral Education in a practical way as against the indoctrinated approach. It was recommended that school community and even Parents Teachers Association (PTA) should work together to ensure the freedom rights of students and teachers in the teaching and learning process are respected even within the ambits of the school instituted policies and code of conduct for students and staff.

Keywords: Principals, Perceptions, Freedom, Moral Value

#### Introduction

Teaching and learning, are two interdependent terms that are often used within the enterprise of education. While the former - teaching is the input factor that deals with the impartation of knowledge, the latter —learning is the expected outcome that deals with the behavioural changes that emerge from teaching. Both terms are not only restricted to the school system, but also applicable to non-formal trainings that bring about change in behaviour outside the school system.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in the National Policy Education recognizes that Nigeria's Philosophy of Education is based on a set of beliefs. These are: education is an instrument for national development and social change; education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria; education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society; education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society (FRN, 2013).

Prior to the revision of the National Policy on Education in 2004, the overall philosophy of Nigeria was geared towards: a) living in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice; b) promoting inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding (FRN, 2004, revised 2013). From the foregoing, it is evident that the place of freedom in our educational institutions is largely recognized as a key to promoting unity and harmony. In addition, the five (5) main national goals which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the NPE are the building of:

- a) a free and democratic society;
- b) a just and egalitarian society
- c) a united, strong and self -reliant nation;
- d) a great and dynamic economy; and
- e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2013).

The first of the five aforementioned goals, in the National Policy on Education has to do with "the building of a free and democratic society". This further establishes the fundamental role of freedom as a prerequisite for achieving any meaningful endeavour. Ohwovorione (2017) sees human freedom as the extent of one's access to autonomy, right to choice and independence. From his definition, two things are established. First, the word 'extent' depicts that freedom is to a measure or degree. Secondly, the definition shows that freedom is the issue of choice. The word "extent" thereby explains that freedom is not absolute since it is given to 'an extent' to everyone, at a given time. This thereby shows that an individual's right to freedom could be a moral issue.

The right to freedom is good and also bad. The extent of moral virtue applied in exercising freedom matters most (Ogundiya, 2015). For instance, the issue of deviant behaviour among students in Edo State has become worrisome in recent

times. It is observed that many students are found to disobey school rules and regulations, engage in drug abuse, truancy, raping, pilfering, abortion and having unlawful association. In the process of exercising their right to freedom, many secondary school students drop out of the school only to become hoodlums and miscreants in the society. This shows that whenever, one's right to freedom is at variance to morality and societal norms and ethos, that freedom is contested and questioned, and such questionable freedom is then regarded as evil (Ebeigbe, 2008).

When we study "Principals' Perceptions on Freedom as a Moral Value in Secondary Schools," it's important to ask: do principals have the right to use their freedom over teachers? This is a complex issue tied to ethical leadership and professional responsibility. Studies show that principals in different countries may have leadership freedom, but it must be guided by accountability and fairness (Alkaabi & Alkaabi, 2020). Principals may see freedom as a moral value that shapes their leadership. But this doesn't mean they can act without limits or force their views on teachers. Their freedom must be balanced with their duty to create a positive school environment, follow educational standards, and respect the professional rights of teachers (Hallinger, 2018). Good leadership means leading with fairness, respect, and justice. For example, research in South Africa shows that when principals use a servant leadership approach—showing care and respect—teachers feel more supported and perform better (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). On the other hand, authoritarian leadership tends to lower teacher motivation (Bush & Glover, 2014). Principals' freedom must not come at the cost of teachers' rights. If a principal overrules or ignores teachers' professional voice without just cause, it can harm the school environment.

The wrong use of freedom could lead to immoralities in the Nigerian society. This further implies that abuse of freedom, excess freedom, could lead to ills in the society (Oroka, 2020). Hence, freedom should be exercised under moral virtues such as respect, love, patience, due regard, fairness and honesty (FRN, 2013). Igbiwu (2005) goes further to state that it is not uncommon to observe the wrong use of freedom by students such as indulging in truancy, being members of the secret cult and student unrest. Many verbally assault their teachers and other members of the school community, while some threaten to hurt them outside the school premises, where they believe school rules do not apply. All of these show that the freedom of movement, association and expression as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) remain the fundamental human rights of any students, but the exercise of this freedom is bound by rules and regulations within the school system. Hence, the issue of moral values or moral standard could interface with the exercise of freedom in any given institution. There are two examples of theories that explain moral standard: Theory of absolutism (changeless, eternal and binding to all) and Relativism (choice).

The theory of absolutism is also known as the theory of moral justification. It was first developed by Plato to combat the view by the Sophists that moral values are relative to particular societies. Plato argued that although different societies might adopt different moral values, that in itself, does not mean that they are all right or that value adopted by some societies are not better than those of others. Plato argued that regardless of what different societies practised, there were some things that ought to be valued and things not valued. He believed that there are values that are binding to all people at all times and all places. Moral values he claimed are absolute, eternal and changeless. Goodness, he said is somewhere beyond the material world. Religious absolutists believe this form of goodness is with God, and that God is good and pure. An action is good to the extent that it pertains of the goodness of God. John Stuart Mills, British Economist and Philosopher stated that an action or custom is bad or wrong if the action is promoting unhappiness (Mills, 1969). Many societies that once practised human sacrifice have long dropped the practice on the principle that humanness is better than humanity. While humanness borders on the characteristics or quality of being humane or benevolence of an individual, the latter – humanity implies the entire human race or mankind. Hence, a rational mind can therefore see moral goodness and freely choose to act accordingly. Wrong choices of moral action are therefore based on ignorance.

The other theory of moral standard is Relativism. This theory states that societal values are a matter of choice on the part of the society. To the relativists, eternal truths or moral values are artificially created. Relativists say that people are entitled to their own opinions; and that for instance, those who condemn human sacrifice should say that human sacrifice is wrong but not condemning it. Another opinion is that about the polygamy; while traditional African society values polygamy is while the Western World condemns it, at the preference of monogamy. The relativists say that none should be condemned, for every society is entitled to their choice. One of these relativists is Karl Marx who viewed moral values as culturally induced conventions, which reflected the economic structure of a given society. These are those who hold the position that power or wealth promotes standards or right and wrong. Unlike the absolutists, freedom is a moral action, determined by the moral values of society. Moral actions that are unacceptable to society are therefore condemned (Fagothey, 2005).

Moral actions are the principles that guide human behaviour, which stipulate that good must be done and evil must be avoided. Morality is concerned with what is right and wrong of human conduct and behaviour. Morality as a concept is the ability to establish differences between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. This relates to conduct of individual's behaviours or attitudes. Morality is about understanding if what people do, who they are, and how they usually behave is good or bad. Value is compared with the price paid for it. It is seen in regards to something cherished and qualitative (Abubakar, 2010). Moral values are standards that are endorsed, maintained and transmitted by the society

to her members. Moral values as philosophical concepts, have been exposed to different philosophical schools of thought. The realists maintained that values have independent existence outside man's experiences. Values exist in the supersensory world and unless conscious efforts are made by man through rational reasoning, he cannot know the values. Moral values therefore, are those behaviours, attitudes exhibited and encouraged by members of the society for the fact that they are both good and desirable to mankind generally. The unacceptable behaviours however, are immoral and have no value to the society for they are negative to the development of the society. An ideal education process is capable of identifying the genuine moral needs of the country such as freedom of the individual, honesty, truth, hard work, patience, patriotism, obedience and other virtues (Awake, 2003). In order to promote teaching and learning in secondary schools, an understanding of the extent of one's right to freedom is pertinent. Therefore, this study analyzes the concepts of freedom as moral values in teaching and learning in secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District.

The right to life and freedom of expression, movement and association remains one of the fundamental rights of every human, secondary school students inclusive. Interestingly, the exercise of this freedom is often trampled upon within the school system as parents, principals and teachers sometimes often restrict the movement and right of association of students. Under the auspices of the National Youths Council of Nigeria (NYCN), the Nigerian youths have reportedly taken a stand against popular cross-dresser, Idris Okuneye, popularly known as Bobrisky. The Nigerian youths staged a mass protest to condemn the negative culture promoted by Bobrisky and other cross-dressers like him on social media. They staged a protest in Abuja, on Wednesday, September 18, 2019 joining groups like Women Society, Christian Association of Nigeria and others to take a stand against Bobrisky and the influence he creates among Nigeria students; particularly at the secondary school level (Ayoola, 2019). They noted that Bobrisky and other crossdressers represent a high level of moral decadence and considering the high followership enjoyed by Bobrisky on social media handles like Facebook and Instagram; fears are that many students even at the secondary school level, are exercising their right and freedom of association in a manner that threatens our moral values.

Not much was known about Afeez Fashola also known as (a.k.a) Naira Marley, at least in Nigeria, until his world cup anthem, 'Issa goal' featuring another musical artiste - Olamide in 2017 became a hit. Since then, the "Naira Marley fever" is one that has swept across the entertainment scene like a flood, giving rise to a new generation of people called 'Marlians'. Now the term 'Marlians' is used by people who are fans and followers of Naira Marley, with obvious characteristics. In fact, many have confessed to becoming or associating with deviants, rebellion, among other vices in order to be tagged as true 'Marlians' (Rotimi, 2020). Since Naira Marley's arrest in early 2019 for seeking support for people involved in advance fee fraud ("Yahoo Yahoo"), the rapper has become a

phenomenon not just in Nigeria, but around the world. Thus, the 'Marlian gang' became a trend.

The gang convener - Naira Marley refers to himself as 'Igbolabi' (meaning Born for weed) and so 'Marlians' are expected to be able to smoke weed, drink and also mix local concoctions/herbs which boost sexual performance as rendered in his song 'Mafo'. Fourth, zero manners is another famous way to identify a 'Marlian'. They are expected to fear nothing as explained in his song titled 'Mafo' (Don't break). Another recall to Naira Marley is post on his Twitter handle where he tweeted, "Admit it, life would be boring without me... Having a big booty is better than having a Master's degree". Lastly, Marlians are expected to have none or minimal education (Lukman & Hamadi, 2014; Rotimi, 2020). This may be because Naira Marley always prides himself as being a self-made individual having dropped out of school abroad and returned to Nigeria. So, a trend of secondary school students is emerging who believe that "schooling is nothing but scam". Hence, real 'Marlians' don't graduate! They drop out (Rotimi, 2020). foregoing shows that the freedom of secondary school students to associate or take membership with certain movement is gradually becoming a threat to teaching and learning in the secondary school system. Hence, many problems are seemingly besieging the secondary school system to the point of questioning effective moral order (Lukman & Hamadi, 2014). The problem of how to direct the mind of individual members of the society towards acculturating and internalizing moral values has therefore become pertinent.

In secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District, the exercise of freedom right by students has resulted in cultism and the joining of fraternities by students as there are alleged cases of teachers being threatened by students who are members of various cults in the course of discharging their lawful duties. Nakpodia (2010) attested to this when he noted that teachers tender their resignation in some schools where their security is at stake in search for better schools where students' indiscipline is bearable. In search of peace and tranquility, some teachers even move from other schools to faith-based schools (missionary schools) in a bid to work in a school where students can be taught some morals along with school instructions. Consequently, freedom of man may now be seen as yielding negative result within the context of teaching and learning in secondary schools. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyze the concepts of freedom and moral values in teaching and learning in secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District.

## **Research Ouestions**

The following research question was raised to guide the study:

- 1) What is freedom?
- 2) Do principals have the right to exercise their freedom on teachers?
- 3) What is the place of freedom in teaching and learning in secondary schools in Edo State?

## Methodology

The researcher adopted the philosophical design for the study. The methodological coverage of this study took a philosophical dimension. Hence, this work relied on library research, documentary report, and evidence from different authorities in fields of education, philosophy, religion, morality and values to provide in-depth background to the study. One instrument developed by the researcher was used in this study. The instrument is an open ended/structured interview schedule outline titled: Interview Schedule Outline for Principals (ISOP). This instrument (ISOP) was used to collect primary data from principals. ISOP was divided into two sections: A and B. Part A deals with personal profile of the respondents which contained data such as age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and years of experience of the respondents. The Part B of the outline contained open ended questions which bordered on freedom and constraints to the exercise of freedom in secondary schools. The ISOP therefore helped to collect primary data (first hand) from respondents. In addition to the primary data which collected first-hand information from school administrators (principals), secondary data was collected from library research, documentary reports, the National Policy on Education, newspapers, textbooks, electronic journal and published articles on Philosophy, Religion and Morality. Three broad philosophical tools based on descriptive methods were employed in this study. These philosophical tools included: speculative, analytical and prescriptive tools. First, the researcher made use of speculative tools in anticipating mixed perspectives on the subject matter of freedom.

#### **Results**

The result of the interview are presented as follows:

## **Research Question One:** What is freedom?

Interview Question: In your own words, how can you define freedom within the secondary school system?

Analysis of interview Question One for Research Question One shows that most of the interviewees, described freedom within the school context as a vague and subjective question that could mean various things to stakeholders within the school community. Many described it using phrases such as: "liberty to act", "autonomy to act in a certain manner", "freewill to decide", "unrestricted access or lack of restriction to do something" and "independence of an individual" among others. Some of the definitions on freedom as defined by five of the interviewees are provided below:

Interviewee One: "Freedom to me, is the extent of being free, the liberty or freewill a person has such as, the freewill I have to exercise some authority using my office as the principal of this school…..My views on freedom is certainly going to be different from Mr. A and B and even yours (referring to the researcher), ...depending on what we consider important"

Interviewee Two: "Well, freedom is not a simple term to define but something I think is vague, ambiguous and complex. Well, I will say, freedom is the ability to use ones power or authority in a certain way ...without fear or intimidation... it is how much right a person has to do what he/she feel is right or wrong"

Interviewee Three: "I think I can describe freedom as the state of being free within a given area, a domain, locality, society, place or organization such as this school for instance...."

Interviewee Four: "I am not so good at defining things but I think...(hesitating); to me ooo (pointing at self), freedom from a school perspective may have something to do with the right or level of access or openness to do certain things. Such as the freedom to talk, walk, write as student and the freedom to teach and correct a student in class as a teacher....."

Interviewee Five: "I think freedom is the right or level of autonomy to act or carry out an action.....the right to act independently"

A content analysis of the above, shows that the freedom concept means various things to principals within the teaching-learning process and school system. However, two things can be inferred from the definitions. First, the above definitions shows that majority of the interviewees used synonymous words like – liberty, autonomy, freewill, access, openness and independence to describe freedom.

1) **Research Question Two:** Do principals have the right to exercise their freedom on teachers?

An analysis on this dichotomous question shows that four of the interviewees affirmed a "Yes" indicating that they were free to exercise their right of control on teachers while three others stated otherwise "No". The four interviewees indicated how they exercise their freedom right on teachers. He/she responses cover one or more of: the freedom to supervise, direct, order, guide and plan instructions, co-curicular and administrative activities with both teaching and non-teaching staff of the school system. For those that indicated a "No" on their right to exercise their freedom on teachers, some of the limiting factors were identified as follows:

- Inability to correct "high and mighty teachers" who may be superior to you in age, experience or even connections.
- Lack of interest of teachers in participating in school decision making matters
- Avoidance of autocratic attitude on teachers
- Control from education regulatory agencies
- Interference from parents/guardian and relatives

**Research Question Three:** What is the place of freedom in teaching and learning in secondary schools in Edo State?

Analysis of responses has shown that the place of freedom in teaching and learning is highly limited and constrained by several variables. For instance, there is

disparity of freedom in teaching/learning situations in schools in Edo Central Senatorial District due to shortage of qualified teachers in various subject specializations. Hence, some teachers may be subjected by the principal to teach some subjects outside their area of specialization, in addition to their areas of specialization; thereby heaping heavy work-load on the teacher.

The place of freedom by teachers and students is limited as the teacher may be forced to accept the principal's directive; while students are not given the freedom to change their school out of will. If students had teachers in all the relevant subjects, then it could be said that they have the freedom of learning all the subjects required of them by the curriculum. The students will then be opportune to make alternative choice of subjects to determine the choice of career unlike when their choice of subject to learn is determined by the number of teachers available in the school. The theory of Determinism acts upon students who have few teachers who cannot teach the entire subjects required by the curriculum while the "Free will" theory will act on students in other secondary schools who have many specialized teachers of different subjects. Such students will be exposed to diverse knowledge of different subjects and they can have wide range of career choices for life.

Analysis of responses has shown that the place of freedom in teaching and learning is highly constrained by how students abuse their freedom and how their freedom is being abused by school administrators. On the one hand, students abuse their freedom in various ways including abuse of speech, association and assembly among others. Freedom of speech is to have right to self-expression. Abuse of freedom of speech by students is not uncommon in schools where students use vulgar language and even insult their teachers. One of the interviewees (principal in one of the schools) reported that there are cases where students have reached for their teachers' phone numbers to call and sternly warn them of a disciplinary action meted out on them. Some have even sent threat-filled messages and directly confronted their teachers within or out of school in an offensive manner all in exercising their freedom of speech.

In one of the secondary schools covered in the target sample, the interviewee (name withheld) reported that a student in senior secondary school (name withheld) during assembly pointed at him speaking in pidgin English: "Oh boy! commot for there, if you no get better thing to talk". This shows that some students abuse their freedom of speech to the extent of insulting their teachers and also harassing their teachers for the slightest provocation. On the other hand, students abuse their freedom of association by organizing cultism. These inhuman and unethical operations no longer take place in the night or in a secret place. Innocent students and staff are harassed by gang members of these cult groups through the abuse of freedom of association. In some cases, peaceful, lawful, and freedom of assembly has turned into an assembly for riots. In some cases the riots lead to injuries being inflicted on teachers, other school staff and even destruction of school properties. Some students hi-jack freedom of assembly, abuse it and cause the society to suffer

loss of lives and properties. They are the common abuse of freedom by the students in secondary schools in Nigeria.

# **Discussion of Findings**

The perception of freedom shows that freedom in the school context is understood to mean "autonomy" and "unrestricted access to do anything". This result agrees with the position of Bertrand, Berg-Schlosser and Morlino, (2011), who noted that something is "free" if it can change easily and is not constrained in its present state. In this context, freedom is associated with having <u>free will</u> and being without undue or unjust constraints, or <u>enslavement</u>, and is an idea closely related to the concept of <u>liberty</u>. The perception in this study that liberty and freedom are the same, was earlier disproved by Chun (2008) who explained the differences between liberty and freedom in terms of their relation to institutions by stating that: "liberty is linked to human subjectivity; freedom is not. The Declaration of Independence, for example, describes men as having liberty and the nation as being free. Free will—the quality of being free from the control of fate or necessity—may first have been attributed to human will, but <u>Newtonian physics</u> attributes <u>degrees of freedom</u>, <u>free bodies</u>—to objects"

The result agrees with the above statement which shows that liberty is rather subjective (personal as it relates to humans) while freedom is objective as it relates to a broader notion. The result also agrees with the words of Chun (2008) who added that: "freedom differs from liberty as control differs from discipline. Liberty, like discipline, is linked to institutions and political parties, whether liberal or libertarian; freedom is not. Although, freedom can work for or against institutions, it is not bound to them—it travels through unofficial networks. To have liberty is to be liberated from something; to be free is to be self-determining, autonomous. Freedom can or cannot exist within a state of liberty: one can be liberated yet unfree, or free yet enslaved. Orlando Patterson has argued in his book titled: 'Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture' that freedom arose from the yearnings of slaves.

An analysis of the concept of freedom as defined by one of the interviewees in this study suggests that freedom "is vague and ambiguous" and could be applied to various contextual meanings. This agrees with the conceptual clarification by Okoh (2003) who identified four kinds of freedom. The first is absolute freedom which implies that the individual has full responsibility for the choices he makes for himself and their effects on people. The second is negative freedom which means absence of obstacles in attainment of one's interest or desire. For instance, freedom to steal simply because security regulations in a school are not put in school.

#### Conclusion

Freedom in teaching and learning in secondary schools is only to an extent and therefore not absolute. It is interchangeably described by school heads in Edo Central Senatorial District with terms such as liberty, autonomy and independence of choice. In terms of necessary moral values, respect, good character, and patience are considerably important to students as there is a seeming rise of disrespect for institutional authorities and elderly ones. There is loss of value for education as a legacy, value loss for hardwork and sexual modesty or decency among students.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusion as follows:

- 1) The school community and even Parents Teachers Association (PTA) should work together to ensure the freedom rights of students and teachers in the teaching and learning process are respected even within the ambits of the school instituted policies and code of conduct for students and staff.
- 2) School Based Management Committee (SBMC) should try to involve students in participative decision making on matters that border on their welfare and freedom rights in secondary schools. This could help to promote good morals as the school system is considered the transmitter of norms in the society.
- 3) Parents/guardians should be guided by school management on the implications of enforcing their career choices on their children/wards to the point of affecting their freedom to choice of their subjects of interest and career decisions.

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