



## **A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF MORAL EDUCATION IN TACKLING THE MORAL CHALLENGES OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS**

**Nnachi Charles Aruo, Nwinya Stephen Chijioke, Chukwu Donatus Oluwa and Orji Joseph Monday**

*Department Of Philosophy, Religion and Peace Studies Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria*

**Keywords,**

*Education, morality, youth, challenges, Nigeria*

**Abstract:** *Nigerian youths face various moral challenges in their daily lives, ranging from restiveness and insubordination, to criminality, social vices, etc. Moral education ought to play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. This paper aims at exploring the relationship between education and moral development in the Nigerian context. Through a philosophical lens, the work examines the theoretical foundations of moral education and its applications in addressing the unique challenges faced by the Nigerian youths. It considers what constitutes moral conduct and the reasons behind the youths drifting away from such conducts. This study adopted expository survey design in investigating the roles parents, teachers and stakeholders in the educational sector could play in curbing moral decadence among the youths. Furthermore, the work analyzed the current state of education in Nigeria and its shortcomings in addressing moral challenges. By identifying the gaps, the paper proposed potential solutions and strategies for incorporating moral education into the Nigerian education system. Additionally, the work discussed the role of teachers, parents, and the community in promoting moral development among the youths. Overall, this philosophical inquiry highlights the importance of education in shaping the moral values and behaviours of Nigerian youths. By providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of education in addressing moral challenges, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on moral education and its impact on the society*

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## Introduction

The rate at which many young people go into crime and other immoral behaviours nowadays without any qualms of conscience is overwhelming. Majority of our youths have become wayward, disobedient, disrespectful and ever ready to derail. Many of them go into kidnapping for ransom, while some go into arm robbery, whereas a host of young men and women go into prostitution. Many Nigerian youths have been wrongly lured into accepting lifestyles that are injurious to their aspirations. Such lifestyles like smoking, alcoholism, obsessive womanizing and prostitution, cultism, drug abuse, etc. have become the order of the day. The results of such unruly behaviours are seen in the geometrical increase in HIV infections among youths, heart attacks, cancers and other termly illnesses. These quite often lead to the untimely death of many young people. Misham (2007) observes that the youths are pushed by the exploitative and uncarpeted socio-economic system of the society. The young people in the bid to resist and revolt against the oppressive system resort to myriads of deviant behaviours such as disobedience to constituted authorities and as a result of that, they riot, vandalize school properties and even maim other students as a way of showcasing their feelings (Misham 2007, 24). Some even work as political thugs, terrorists or bodyguards while some

others engage in prostitution and other social vices.

Moral decadence, which could be seen as the deterioration of ethical values and norms that govern the individual and the society, has become the bane of many nations. Nigeria, like many other nations of the world, is not spared of the prevailing moral crises in the contemporary period. Moral and cultural values are now being denigrated especially among young people. In Nigeria today, there is widespread concern over the moral crises faced by the country. In times past, many educated people, especially in the Nigerian context were held in high esteem as a result of their comportment and high level of moral probity. Thus, bringing to bear moral development as a key objective of education. Nowadays, the case appears to be different. What may have gone wrong? Has education lost its values that it can no longer translate to moral development, especially in Nigeria? To what extent can more education bring about character formation in the youths of Nigeria?

According to Fafunwa (1996) education is: "A process through which societies train the younger ones to acquire knowledge, skills, morals, beliefs and competencies with the view to taking their values to the next generation" (Fafunwa 1996, 4). Education can play a critical role in shaping the values and behaviours of youths. In Nigeria, where moral challenges among the youths are prevalent, education has

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an even greater significance. This is because education provides not only the necessary skills, knowledge, and opportunities for young individuals to think critically but also enables ethical decision making and positive contributions to the society.

This work therefore highlights the fact that moral education indeed has a lot to contribute to the eradication of the moral decay among young people. Through moral education, Nigerian youths can be exposed to diverse perspectives and ideas, enabling them to develop empathy and understanding towards others. This is crucial in tackling moral challenges such as corruption, violence, and discrimination that often arise from a lack of empathy and understanding. Additionally, moral education can instill moral values and ethical principles, equipping youths with a strong moral compass to navigate and resist negative influences. Moreover, education can empower Nigerian youths to become agents of change in their communities. By providing them with a platform to learn about their rights and responsibilities, education can inspire youths to take action against social injustices and promote moral integrity. This is especially important in a country like Nigeria, where the youths make up a significant portion of the population and have the potential to drive positive change.

The role of moral education in tackling moral challenges among youths cannot be overemphasized. It is a powerful tool that can shape the values, behaviours, and actions of young individuals, ultimately leading to a more just and moral society. As such, it is imperative to invest in and prioritize moral education for Nigerian youths to build a brighter and more ethical future for all. A proper commitment towards the implementation of Nigerian educational policies, especially by those in the educational sector, will go a long way in bringing about the total transformation of the whole person. With such transformation which reflects the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning, the moral challenges facing the Nigerian youths will be drastically reduced.

## **Education and Morality in Perspective**

Philosophers have different opinions about whether morality is changeable or not. That explains why there are many schools of thought or ethical theories. Sevim (2021), avers that there are two main views on this issue. The first view states that morality is innate and underlies the belief that environmental factors will not bring about any change in human morality. Among the representatives of this view are Schopenhauer, Lamarck, Darwin, as well as the Islamic philosophers Yusuf Has Hacip, Sa'ddi-I Shirazi, and Nasreddin-iTusi (Sevim, 2021. 135-154). The second view claims that morality can change. According to this view, morality and

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temperament can be structured later by the effect of environmental factors. This second view also emphasizes the belief that people can become moral individuals through education. Socrates, who believed that virtue is knowledge, was among the first representatives of this view (Batista 2015, 143). On the contrary, John Locke, who was one of the representatives of the utilitarian view of morality, averred that the moral principles varied according to people, societies, and countries (Timuçin 2016, 76). However, both views believe that moral principles are necessary both for the happiness of the individual and for the social order. Kropotkin (2005) was one of the philosophers who thought morality was associated with social variables and claimed that it could be handled within different frameworks. Kropotkin classified morality into three categories, namely, religious morality, utilitarian morality, and morality resulting from the necessity of living in society. Religious morality refers to the behaviors shown with the expectation of reward or punishment as a result of religious teachings coming through revelation. Utilitarian morality means the determination of moral principles in line with one's own interests, while in the understanding of morality arising from the necessities of living in society, the individual evaluates whether a behavior is moral or not according to whether the criterion is appropriate for social life. In the third moral category, the

person is expected to feel the need to act with the feeling of sharing the joy and grief of others (Kropotkin 2005, 45).

It would not be wrong to say that education assumes the greatest role in the internalization of certain moral rules (Oral & Çoban, 2019, p. 28). For this reason, the definition of education has been associated with the concept of morality from past to present, and new approaches that aim to help students internalize moral values have been debated (Kirschenbaum 1995, 91). The adoption of morality and moral precepts is not just about the transfer of these rules to the next generation through education. At the same time, moral decisions have an effect on the implementation of educational practices, making changes in these practices, and making interventions in the education system (Stein and Fischer 2011, 56). In other words, failure to review whether a practice or change to be made in the education system complies with the moral precepts may adversely affect all stakeholders in the system. It is aimed that all stakeholders of education are aware of basic moral precepts and are willing to apply these rules. For this reason, it is seen that the concept of morality and values and teaching of them are given a special place especially in teacher education.

For Hafizi and Hadi (2023) moral education is becoming a major focus in building children's character, especially as we witness shifts in evolving social and cultural dynamics (345).

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Amid global information flows and changing societal values, children are at risk of moral uncertainty that can affect their character development. Moral education has a crucial role to provide a solid foundation of ethical values, help children understand and accept differences, and guide them in facing complex moral challenges (Hutagaluh et al., 2020). According to Kohlberg (1971), character formation is the result of continuous moral development, which is influenced by interaction with the environment and understanding of social norms. However, with the dynamics of social change so rapidly, the role of moral education is increasingly becoming central in ensuring children have a solid moral foundation. In Piaget's view, moral education not only includes the provision of rules and punishments, but also involves understanding and internalizing moral values (Piaget, 1932). The moral crisis that has occurred in recent decades highlights the urgency of the need for more systematic and integrated moral education in the educational curriculum.

Nonetheless, effective moral education must involve collaboration between families, schools, and communities to create an educational environment that supports children's character development. Moral education has a very important role in the formation of children's character, for it has become the basic basis for shaping children's values and standards of behavior. It has been observed that children who

get moral education tend to show better behavior and have more noble values. They are more respectful of others, more honest, and have a strong commitment to justice. Moral education functions by conveying and teaching various values and principles to children. This can involve direct teaching about what is considered good and bad, right and wrong (Subianto, 2013). In addition, moral education also serves to foster empathy and justice, instill a sense of responsibility, and help children make ethical decisions. That is not to say that moral education has to be dogmatic or authoritarian. In contrast, the best moral education usually involves discussion, reflection, and criticism of ethical issues. This helps children learn to think morally, not just obey the rules given to them.

## **Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and De-emphasis of the Affective Domain in Nigeria Educational System**

Taxonomy is a term derived from the Greek word '*taxis*' which means systematic classification. It was Prof. Benjamin S. Bloom and his associate in the University of Chicago, who developed and classified the domains of educational objectives. Bloom (1956) presented his taxonomy related to cognitive domain giving emphasis to the hierarchy of cognitive process in attaining knowledge and development of thinking. Later Krathwhol (1964) introduced affective domain and Simpson (1966) developed psychomotor domain. They described the hierarchical

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development of the three domains of the learner through instruction.

Learning is a daily exercise and what one has learnt has a way of influencing the person, either positively or negatively. We can learn mental skills, develop our attitudes and acquire new physical skills as we perform daily activities. Learning is not an event. It is a process. It is the continual growth and change in the brain's architecture that results from the many ways we take in information, process it, connect it, catalogue it, and use it (Hoque 2016). Learning can generally be categorized into three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

The cognitive domain contains learning skills predominantly related to mental (thinking) processes. Learning processes in the cognitive domain include a hierarchy of skills involving processing information, constructing understanding, applying knowledge, solving problems, and conducting research. There are six levels of cognitive complexity: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. (Hoque, 2016. 223). The cognitive domain includes skill clusters that organize a complete, concise, and complementary listing of the learning skills most critical for each process. In affective domain, on the other hand, learning is seen not as an intellectual or mental function but includes the learning of attitudes, behaviors, and physical skills. The affective domain involves our feelings, emotions and attitudes. This

domain includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes. This domain is categorized into five sub-domains, which include: receiving, responding, valuing, organization and characterization. Affective domain forms a hierarchical structure and is arranged from simpler feelings to those that are more complex. This hierarchical structure is based on the principle of internalization. Internalization, according to Hoque (2016), refers to the process whereby your affect toward something goes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is internalized and consistently guides or controls your behavior. Therefore, with movement to more complexity, you become more involved, committed, and internally motivated.

Psychomotor objectives are those specific to discreet physical functions, reflex actions and interpretive movements. These types of objectives are concerned with the physically encoding of information, with movement and/or with activities where the gross and fine muscles are used for expressing or interpreting information or concepts. This area also refers to natural, autonomic responses or reflexes. The psychomotor domain is comprised of utilizing motor skills and coordinating them. The seven categories under this include: perception, the readiness to act, guided response, mechanism,

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complex overt response, adaptation and origination.

Education is a veritable tool for the development of the human person. This is demonstrated by the different domains of educational objectives. However, the non-adherence to these domains in Nigerian educational system has contributed to the moral depravity in the country. Most often in Nigeria, more attention is given to what the human mind can comprehend (cognitive domain) and what our hands can produce (psychomotor domains) to the neglect of the feelings of the human heart (affective domain) with which those actions are done. That explains why we have many intelligent and hardworking people in the society, but who lack moral probity. In most cases, academic qualifications are valued more than moral probity. No wonder many go extra miles to acquire paper certificates, either by hook or by crook, for the end they say, justifies the means. In some homes, parents speak highly of their children who do well academically, even though they are mischievous and arrogant, but disregard or neglect the child who though not too intelligent, but is hardworking and responsible. In many communities, and even religious circles, those who have amassed wealth and are said to be doing well in their businesses are given many awards and recognitions, even when the sources of their wealth are questionable. Thus, moral and cultural values are daily being eroded as a result of the inability of our educational system to

marry the three domains of learning, no wonder the increase in moral decadence among the Nigerian youths.

## **Moral Decadence among Nigerian Youths**

Nigeria, like any other nation of the world, is not spared of the prevailing moral crises in the contemporary period. Moral and cultural values are now being denigrated especially among young people. In Nigeria today, there is widespread concern about the moral crises faced by the country. Moral decadence permeates all aspects of our public life and rampant corruption is noticeable.

Moral decadence could be seen as the decay of ethical values and norms that govern an individual and the society at large. It is an abnormality involving basic conflict with the society's value system. For Njoku (2015), it can be defined as "failure to uphold sound morality in society" (187). Thus, it lowers standards of moral behavior and creates new but lower criteria for ethics and justice. Moral decadence involves any act or behaviour which violates the norms and codes of the society. It could be better described as an aggressive behaviour which defiles the established values in a given society. Due to lack of moral education, the Nigerian youths have come to see anti-social behaviours as the only hope of enriching themselves. Thus, stealing, prostitution, political thuggery, militancy, kidnapping, etc., have, in recent times,

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become major sources of income in Nigeria. In view of this, Kayode and Adeyinka (2009) pointed out that:

The majority of youths who are currently engaged in militancy, thuggery, gangsterism, cultism and other forms of anti-social behaviour are usually people who are aggrieved with the social system and who are deprived one way or the other. The provision of access to quality education is thus one of the ways of curing the social ills of the society and better regime of human development (38)

Behaviours deemed wrong in the traditional Nigerian society are, in recent times, tolerated and even praised. Omordu (2007) is of the opinion that:

The Nigeria youths today are in a state of confusion on account of conflicting messages from parents and elders on one hand and the effects of the various mass media such as radio, video, television, books, newspapers, computer networks etc. Instead of submitting themselves to the control and advice of the elders and parents, the youths rather resort to personal choice and right to live one's life (32).

Many Nigerian youths have been wrongly lured into accepting lifestyles that can, at best be injurious to their present and future aspirations. Such lifestyles include smoking, alcoholism, obsessive womanizing, cultism etc. Some even work as political thugs, terrorists or bodyguards while females engage in prostitution and other

social vices. In all these things, one wonders whether these decays are part of the school curriculum? To what extent can education bring about a change of attitude among the youths of our country?

## **Curbing Moral Decadence among Nigerian Youths: The Role of Education**

There is no gain saying the fact that moral values have been drastically eroded in the Nigerian society. For Junare (2015), education as a sector of development in every nation, plays vital role in the transformation and changing the fortunes of individuals and the nation as a whole positively. It is therefore imperative to make sure that resources for education are appropriately managed with least wastages (Junare 2015, 1). However, if education is without discipline and moral values, the whole system becomes fruitless. It is no doubt that the importance of education to human beings cannot be overemphasized.

However, one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria and making it difficult for good quality education is inadequate moral behaviour, especially among the youths, which is generally referred to as indiscipline. Moral principles guide human conduct thereby indicating certain things or ways of behavior which should be adopted and things or ways of behaviour which should be avoided. They in fact tell us more specifically the good which the moral law obliges us to do and the evil which it prohibits us from

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doing. Studies have shown that moral principles require us to cultivate justice, honesty, kindness, truthfulness, respect for human life and dignity, respect for other people's interests, etc. These principles however, prohibit murder, stealing, embezzlement of public fund, bribery, cheating, hatred and adultery among others, which constitute the forms of moral decadence.

On a closer look at the traditional African education model, one would understand that it lays much more emphasis on character and values related education, believing that when this aspect of man is made right other aspects will be right. For instance, the seven points agenda for traditional education, put forward by Fafunwa (1995) lay credence to character and values related issues. The aim of traditional education is multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, cooperative and conforms to the social order of the day. Although the educational objectives cannot be clearly distinguished, seven aspects have been identified by Fafunwa (1995) as follows: (i) To develop the child's latent physical skills. (ii) To develop character. (iii) To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority. (iv) To develop intellectual skills. (v.) To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards labour. (vi) To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs. (vii) To understand,

appreciate and promote cultural heritage of the community at large (Fafunwa 1995, 6).

Indeed, the contemporary Nigerian system of education has been functioning with Western concepts of values without much emphasis on the aims of the African education. Because we do not function with the aims and objectives of our education, we cannot but experience some cultural and moral disorientations. Functioning with European frame of reference is not only extremely damaging to our sense of identity, but could be the root cause of our present moral decadence. Application of these traditional African education model among young people, would go a long way in encouraging moral rectitude in the Nigerian youths. In the traditional African setting, moral development is a collective responsibility of the community. The society, family, peer groups, age grades, etc., contribute to the character formation of the individual. In such settings, those who go contrary to the societal norms are usually disciplined. This approach goes a long way in curbing moral decadence among the youths.

The African traditional education model is carefully drawn by traditional Africa, Nigeria inclusive, to produce the people-oriented man through education. The Nigerian education should be for the development of man and not materials; a man of good character, a man who develops his skills and knowledge to the maximum capacity, so as to provide services to

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others first and himself last; to produce a man whose wealth is to the advantage of the society in which he lives.

Education plays a major role in the character formation of a child. School is meant to be a training ground, especially for young people. Here, teachers act as role models in the formation of students. However, it must be noted that in some case, those who are supposed to be role models exhibit some sort of anti-social behaviours, thereby misleading the children they are supposed to form.

The purpose of education, among other things, is to produce a citizen, who is useful to himself and the society in which he lives. This is obvious in the Nigerian philosophy of education, which is based on: The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the full integration of the individual into the community. The national educational goals, which derive from the philosophy, are therefore: (a) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity. (b) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. (c) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and (d) The acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Ezeanolue, 2023. 489). These educational

policies when properly implemented bring about the total transformation of the whole person. With such transformation, which reflects the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning, the moral decadence among the youths of Nigeria will be ameliorated. Hence, one can infer that the kind of story a nation tells; whether it would be of sweet dreams or haunting nightmares depends on the kind of education its people get. No wonder, Bolaji (2008) avers that “when a nation’s education is poisoned, its story is poisoned. A nation with a poisoned story is a nation without future” (Bolaji 2008, 3).

Furthermore, education instills discipline in people. With it, the decadence among youths can be put on check. Discipline connotes the practice or method of teaching and enforcing acceptable patterns of behavior. It is also the ability to behave in a controlled and calm way even in a difficult or stressful condition. More importantly, it remains mental self- control used in directing or changing behavior; learning something or training for something.

## Summary and Conclusion

Moral decadence, seen as the deterioration of ethical values and norms that govern the individual and the society, has become the bane of many nations and Nigeria is not left out. Many young people in Nigeria engage themselves in some clandestine activities, maiming of fellow students, vandalization of school properties, and robbery/stealing. Some get involved in

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examination malpractice, gross disobedient to authorities, dishonesty, sexual misconduct, etc. Many have died in the process of getting involved in one form of youth restiveness or the other. Education which has been etymologically defined as “to lead” or “bring out”, or “bring forth what is within” or “bring out potential” has indeed the potentials of leading the youths out of these moral quagmires.

The different domains of educational objectives: the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains have the prospects of developing the whole person, in knowledge, skill and character. However, the non-adherence to these domains in Nigerian educational system has contributed to the moral depravity in the country. There is more emphasis on what the human mind can comprehend (cognitive domain) and the produces of our hands (psychomotor domains) to the neglect of the feelings of the human heart (affective domain).

This research, while calling for character formation, sees the de-emphasis on the affective domain in the educational sector in Nigeria as the major factor militating against moral probity among the youths. A situation where integrity is sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity and paper qualifications cannot but result to a decay in the society.

Furthermore, poor parental upbringing, lack of affection and care, quest for materialism, teachers’ unethical behaviours, decline in

religious training, poor economy and peer influence to mention but a few equally contribute to the moral decay among youths. Parents and teachers being the major agents of socialization could go a long way in the character formation of the youths. Parents should be proactive in ensuring that the type of relationship their children keep are good because it exacts great influence on their behaviour. Thus, parents and teachers ought to exercise more power in instilling discipline both at home and in the school as a means of checkmating children’s excesses before it becomes their permanent way of life. In this same vein teachers should be endowed with moral power to train and shape behaviours which are the major aims of education. It is therefore expected that all hands should be on deck to salvage the Nigerian youths from moral decadence through a holistic education. This will go a long way in reducing the likelihood of youth engagement in immoral activities out of desperation. With access to quality education and skills training, youths can acquire gainful employments; enabling them to support themselves and their families in many ways.

Moral decadence connotes the collapse in moral norms, values and ethical standards. The decadence among youths can come in the form of cultism, examination malpractice, teenage pregnancy, rape, sexual harassment, etc. These defy the accepted norms and values of the society

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and are in direct conflict with the society's values. Such behaviours denoting immorality such as rape, sexual abuse, drug abuse, school violence and killings have known to be common among youths and children all over the world. These problems reduce the value of education, destroy the human capacity for leadership and good citizenship, including lowering the academic integrity of institutions especially where parents have provided these young lads with access to education. These acts have had adverse effects on society, because they change cultural, moral, and social norms and set new but lower standards for appropriate behaviors. Moral decadence equally promotes public acceptance of violence, justifies discrimination and injustice, and limits opportunities for social development that is so important to keep societies flourishing.

Education, has the objectives of developing the individual into a sound and effective citizen, the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. A proper implementation of Nigerian educational policies will go a long way in bringing about the total transformation of the whole person. With such transformation, which reflects the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning,

the moral challenges facing the Nigerian youths will be drastically reduced.

Moral education should also be made compulsory in all Nigerian institutions of learning. There should equally be good orientation and re-orientation programs for students on the danger of immoral behaviour. Parents should devote more time in observation, correction and instilling discipline appropriately as a way of shaping and reshaping behaviours of children at home. Both parents and teachers should as a matter of fact live out what they teach, both at home and in schools. This will go a long way in the character formation of the youths.

Going by the assessment of educational system in Nigeria, states and federal institutions should work out modalities that will assist them by giving aptitude test to applicants who wish to join the teaching profession as a way of minimizing the number of unqualified ones. The government should take strict measures against unscrupulous staff and flush them out, if necessary. This is because the government and parents need only the services of people with proven integrity and sense of maturity. Parents as well as stakeholders in education should assist Government in its effort to raise the standard of the nation's education to a greater height. If all these are done, then qualitative and competitive education would be ensured making it thus in line with modern advancement. Moral

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uprightness should be one of the requirements for appointment into any institutions of learning throughout the Federation.

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