



ARISTOTLE'S ETHIC IN RELATION TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN KENYA: PHRONËSIS PRAXIS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Since time in memorial human beings have been in pursuit of moral values and right conduct. It has remained a challenge to lead an honest and earnest life despite going through formal training. Aristotle argues that virtue is a habit and can be learned and gained through practice. The study therefore attempts to examine Aristotle's theory of virtue in the Nicomechean Ethics and trace the implications in the contemporary Kenyan society. Consequently, education and training are inadequate in several ways, there is need for education to embrace multidimensional orientation to ensure lifelong learning, moral and mental training for learners towards self-actualization in virtue and integrity.

Keywords: Aristotle's Phronêsis Praxis, ethic, education and training

1. Introduction

Aristotle was born in Greece colony of Stagira and his father, Nichomachus was a physician to the king of Macedonia. As a pupil in "The Academy" as school set up by his teacher Plato, he spent 20 years learning and training the art of philosophy until Plato's death (Hummel, 1999).

Aristotle opines that by nature man is wondering and for a life worth living virtue was virtue (*arete*) was a necessary condition (*hexis*) for development of a state (*polis*). The *telos* of man is to live a "life worth living" a life of virtue (Collins, 1990).

According to Ladikos, 2010 Aristotle's happiness (*eudemonia*) is central and must be the highest good of all human beings. And since young children are not born with

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virtue, they must be introduced to virtue by the process of education via *media aurea* (originally to *Messos*) which is a middle way between two extremes. Through practical reasoning young people can acquire virtue and thus relate well with one another in the society.

1.1 Technical Education and Training

Education and training has remained a crucial aspect that every government prepares its citizens to obey laws and also champion its developmental agenda. Despite the adoption of religious values and their spiritualities in education and training these adoptions are losing relevance and impact in the contemporary society (Chowdhury, 2016).

The technical education and training in Kenya have been in primary, secondary and tertiary levels. There are three main post school training programmes under the 8.4.4 system of education. These are:

- a) Artisan training programmes: this is the lowest level that target primary school leavers and secondary students who have gotten Grade D –(Minus) and below.
- b) Craft training programmes: this level targets graduates of artisan training programmes and secondary school leavers in possession of KCSE with average grade D+ (Plus). Some courses are modular for instance Certificate in Building Technology, Certificate in Laboratory Technology etc. whereas others are Technical (TEP) Education Programmes i.e., Craft in Plumbing, Craft masonry, Craft Carpentry and Joinery etc.
- c) Technician/Diploma Training Programmes: this target graduates of Craft training programmes and secondary school leavers with KCSE grade C-(Minus)

Although in the past artisan courses were entirely for youth polytechnics, craft course for Technical training institutes and Harambee institutes of Technology and finally Diploma courses for National Polytechnics, the introduction of Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) to accredit and certify colleges in admitting students in relevant courses the above programmes are carried out in National Polytechnics, Technical Training Institutes, Institutes of Technology and Technical Vocational Colleges.

Graduates of the above level are expected by the end of their course to have relevant skills for the job market and at the same time serve the nation through national building, volunteer programmes and self or government employment. The overemphasis on university entry grades has diluted the attitude towards Technical Education and Training; first by making it also book oriented rather than skill (Muricho, P., & Chang'ach, J., 2013), downgraded as an entry for exam failures to tertiary level of education and finally manual orientedness thus no touch for humanities (Cheserek G., & Mugalavai, V., 2012).

The technical education reforms have only been featured within general education programmes and thus to address technical training as such has only come with the TVET ACT 2013 that clearly states the role of TVET and its orientation towards attaining vision 2030. Despite the documentation and overemphasis of the transformative actions to be

undertaken, technical education still encounters the cheating in exams, placement of student in tertiary institutions based on grades by Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) yet education ought to foster national unity and integration, employers rejecting graduates on premise that they are undertrained and finally the systems is void of competency skills (Marcella, 2013).

These concerns raise moral questions on the technical education and training programmes and thus the need to assess whether any theoretical framework as proposed by the ancient ethicists can guide the theory and practice of technical education towards shaping trainees in virtue and also provide a manual towards getting the golden mean in establishing relationship between trainers and trainees.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Virtue Theory

According to virtue ethicists, the greatest good of man is happiness (Ladikos, 2010). Aristotle as the founder of Virtue ethicist held that virtue is related to vices and both are not innate as tendencies and therefore can be acquired through emulation and practical orientation over a period of time (Sanni A., 2019).

The theory also holds to the assumption that there exist individuals who are virtuous and their character can be emulated. Once one becomes virtuous it is automatic that the person shall know the right action, perform the right action and perform it because it is the right action (Ladikos, 2010).

Virtue as the only good was an end in itself (*teleos*) and thus moral and character formation was to be acquired through habitual training without following rules in order to obtain certain results but a mutual relationship between the virtuous and practicing virtues by observing the golden mean.

The golden mean concept can be related to Kantian categorical imperative however, Kantian view is pegged on a rule. The mean here is the degree of avoiding extremes of an action for example giving out material objects to people (wasteful) and giving nothing at all (miser/mean fellow. Virtue can only be generosity not the two extremes (Ladikos, 2010).

2.2 Conservation Theory

The term conservation is etymologically gotten from a Latin word "*Conservare*" meaning to protect from harm or loss. This theory is a set of assumptions facts and explanations describing political philosophies that favour tradition and gradual change for the attainment of development is it individual or societal. Tradition may be in this case religious, cultural or nationally defined beliefs and customs. In addition, the conservative thought is associated with a conceptual defence of forms of life and experience that are threatened by transformation and upheavals Strand (2019). Secondly it is drawn towards the concrete and the traditional in contrast with abstractions, ideologies describing certain aspirations. Finally, but not the least this theory seeks to warn against reforms

and efforts at social change in part by emphasizing limit to rationality, reason and knowledge (Robin, 2017).

2.3 Aristotelian Ethical Principles

Aristotle works on assumption that every activity that men engage in aims at a certain good. This teleological point of view affirms that the knowledge of the good by an individual helps him or her to pursue it. But before we pursue it there has to be elements that provoke us to go for it and this must be the common good since individual good is not satisfactory enough.

Aristotle envisioned man living well and doing well however the beginning of crisis is when he fails to aim at happiness (Eudaimonia) that is an end in itself rather than material things such as wealth, honour etc. that are pursued for the sake of something else. Amidst this crisis, the role of man is to use his rational faculties in seeking the highest good. Reason here ought to be merged with virtue or excellence.

2.4 Character Education and Training: A *Phronêsis Praxis* Perspective

2.4.1 Elements of *Phronêsis Praxis*

"What ought we to do?" is the central question that concerns modern ethical theorists. The deontologist, the divine command theorist, the consequentialist, and the egoist all propose basic moral values that tell us how to behave in morally complex situations (Kucukuysal, 2011). Though the above theorists handle the content of moral education and training, they lack the basic concept of what character the human person ought to develop in the training process.

The proponents of character education and training were early Greek philosophers; Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates against the sophists aimed at reorienting teacher learner relationship through dialogical method "*Elenchic* method" without exhorting money from trainees, knowledge was to be pursued for its own sake. Plato continued the method and termed it Socratic method however emphasized the ideal values of the state.

Education as a tool for individual preparation to serve the state had to inculcate values in the individuals to forego personal interest above the state interests found in the common good. It is therefore Aristotle who authored about the perspective of education and training in character in his treatises *Nichomechean Ethic* and *Politics*. Aristotle identified happiness, virtue, choice, friendship and contemplation as critical elements of the *phronêsis praxis* approach in character development. The interplay between the elements results to modeling a human person for the dynamic world.

Thus, the perspective insisted on the relationship between the trainer and the student within a formal set up and expose the learner to informal set ups for evaluation and affirming the acquired values through internship programme. Aristotle posed for at least 15 years after *agoge* training.

2.4.2 Virtue

The term virtue ethics originates from ancient Greek word "*arete*" meaning "excellence" Aristotle's basic assumption that "*all actions aim at a good*" in raising the question to what the good was, Aristotle proposes that Happiness should be that good. According to Aristotle virtue is not innate, its only acquired through training (Kucukuysal, 2011).

This ideal character education aims at acquisition of virtue and through repetition and practical orientation (outdoor earning) virtuous people are identified and emulated. In the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the highest form of human activity is contemplating the good from a theoretical view, however, practical training according to Aristotle is analogous to productive disciplines way of making things or making action or "*poietike*". Just as the artisans' practice to make items out of exercising skills what Greeks call "*Techne*" it's the same way through habitual training virtue is acquired. According to (Ladikos, 2010), it flows from plan or design of work "*eidōs*", skill required to perform action "*Techne*" a basis for action "*poietike*" and finally a product."

The interplay of knowledge, choice and character in the individual's faculties instills the drive for practical wisdom (phronesis) that defines the essence of practical ethics. Young people through training encounter a multitude of extremes and thus through training they gain this faculty of practical reasoning. This is why Aristotle proposes 15 years the period of internship in the fields of Ethics and Politics to every Athenian citizen to acquire virtue.

The method of training thus becomes modelling and admiration of virtuous individual within the state. This method of education and training in virtue presupposes that the student and the learner are two parties that require a strong relationship, and the trainer is full or rich in virtue to be emulated. Trainees reciprocate by attempting virtuous activities by avoiding extremes by observing the golden mean.

The training method proposed indicated existence of two parties who are not equals. This crisis exists in educational set ups and sometimes symbolizes authoritarianism. For Aristotle to qualify the method of training he proposes "friendship" as a *hexis* for effective practical training in virtue.

2.4.3 Friendship

Friendship *philia*; *philein* (the verb cognate to the noun "*philia*", can sometimes be translated "like" or even "love"). According to Aristotle, *philia* is *arete*. Friendship is virtue and at the same time friendship involves virtue. Friendship is a necessary requirement that brings interplay between an individual and the state (polis). In Aristotelian terms, friendship is reciprocal in nature, and it involves benevolence or anything that might be referred to as good will (*eunoia*) (Aydede, 1998).

There has to exist something lovable (*philetos*) in the other party that requires admiration. That something must be good, pleasant, beautiful (*kalon*) or useful. This alludes to forms of friendship that exist. When a person loves the other because of the function an individual will play in a certain situation or value added in the life, the utility aspects occupy this relationship and thus its utility friendship. On the other hand, when

emotions (*pathos*) become the condition "*hexis*" of loving somebody then such is pleasure friendship. The purest of all is perfect/fine/noble friendship which is only acquired through moral education and training and this is only acquired when the rational part of the soul teaches the irrational to always act in accordance to virtue. Practical reason (*Phroresis*) can only be possible when an individual is disposed and exposed to ethical extremes which are multiple in nature.

According to Aristotle only fine (*Kalon*) friendship lasts whereas others diminish because this true friendship enables partners to seek each other solely for the sake of one another not pleasure or use. Parties here operate at the same level. The relationship is mutual when parties that develop such a liking possess same levels or degree of virtue. However, majority of relationships in education and training set ups are between unequal parties, young and old do interact however Aristotle does not analyse relations between educators and children, teachers and pupils despite being the tutor to Alexandria the Great. Something also not clear is whether the training in virtue of nobles is the same as common men (Kakkori L., 2007).

2.4.4 Choice-virtue Relationship

Aristotle states that choice is voluntary, but not every voluntary action is made by choice. Choices are the things that can be brought about by one's own efforts. In choices therefore human abilities are put into use rather than subscribing to nature or eternal forces (Kucukuysal, 2011). The exercising of free will of every person is primary. In other words, choice relates to the means while wish relates to the ends. For example, everybody wishes to be healthy, but everyone chooses the acts that will make them healthy for instance one can choose to eat well, do physical exercises, etc.

Means of acquiring something must be considered rather than the end. This is because means are activities or things, we can do that are within our powers. Aristotle thus suggests that if happiness is activity in conformity with virtue, then it should be in conformity with the highest virtue, which is the best thing in us. This activity is what he calls contemplation. The highest degree of *Phronêsis praxis* and it is maintained always in daily choices that a human being makes.

2.4.5 Golden Mean

In practical training full of choices, Aristotle acknowledges the difficulty in aiming at a middle course. In order to help human persons, he proposes rule to guide the process. First rule is that human being to avoid extremes, for instance, in case of danger of death, one should avoid cowardice on one extreme and also avoid foolhardiness and in trying to avoid them courage which is true virtue is acquired.

Sometime its practically difficult in avoiding extremes, Aristotle suggests the second rule that requires each human person to be aware of the mistakes to which s/he is most vulnerable. This rule alludes to Socratic rule of Know thyself. By knowing strengths, weaknesses and natural tendencies one possesses one can control the choices and also avoid extremes.

Lastly, we must always try to see pleasant things and pleasant feelings in everything. Even in death Socrates who was gadfly to the Athenian society as presented in the Apology, Plato expresses the heroic action of his teacher in taking hemlock.

2.4.6 Implications of *Phronêsis Praxis* in Education and Training in Contemporary Kenya

The themes of happiness, virtue, friendship and contemplation tend to underscore Aristotle's vision of ideal character training. First and foremost, education and training in Kenya has been refined towards achieving the set goals of education as outlined by the 8.4.4 system among them moral soundness. The system in this case aims at the "good". Every family embrace education as means towards socializing the young in values for good citizenry and future responsible beings. This has been reflected in the inclusion of the goal of sound morals in the National goals of education in Kenya (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2013).

In addition, there are several approaches that have been incorporated in to facilitate education and training in virtue. For instance, in project-based method the trainer as a guide, role model and yardstick, accompanies trainees towards actualizing the set items. Modelling has always been a challenge because human weakness and ability to display continuously virtues worthy emulation by trainees (Gülcan, 2015).

Internship method on the other hand requires that the learner gets attached at an industrial set up to acquire specific skills and attitudes relevant for the field of trade. Aristotle proposes healthy friendship between the trainee and the supervisors. Though Aristotle proposes (15) fifteen years of internship, the 8.4.4 system in Kenya has adopted 3 (three) months after every module whereas for technical education programme (TEP) three months after the end of course (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2013). Duration in this case is too short to realize the experiences required for development of character worthy transforming the human person for the contemporary society.

Learning process as hinted by Aristotle must be in a friendly environment. Friendship for knowledge's sake. Student teacher relationship has to be based on such an objective notion. Aristotle identified true friendship as core in character education and training. The challenge has always been to contemplate the good and observe the golden mean in student teacher relationship to avoid carnal knowledge issues and student trainee conflicts. Freire talks of intersubjectivity rather than teacher being authoritarian. However, student freedom has also proved poisonous to a society void of virtuous individuals to be emulated. Creation of friendly environment sometimes has led to liaises-fare approach and extremes in education practice where students have attempted arson attacks, torched schools and even engaged the police.

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

Education reforms in Technical Education and Training have always overemphasized production of graduates for the labour market forgetting that the very trainees are human

beings who ought to interact with other towards realizing a just society. In addition, the overemphasis of the cognitive dimension by orienting trainees towards exams has made the *phronesis praxis* approach silent and insignificant. However, it is core in all daily activities for lifelong learning. The study, therefore, found out that despite the effort by educationist, trainers and teacher emphasizing hidden curriculum, the society has availed technological devices with their own set of values that greatly influence the young, the increased protectionism of the Kenyan child by activists and feminist educationist creating fear in teachers to guide and counsel and correct the young and finally, the varied parenting styles that expose the young to different sets of values. The study therefore recommended for a multidimensional approach in addressing ethical issues that are emerging in education today by engaging social institutions in offering internship opportunities towards grounding the young in virtue.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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