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Dília Miguel

Universidade Católica Moçambique

dmiguel@ucm.ac.mz

Bianca Gerente

Universidade Católica Moçambique

bgerente@ucm.ac.mz

The construction of ethical values in university students: an analysis of the concepts and practices of university lecturers

Abstract

This article has as its theme the construction of ethical values in university students: an analysis of the concepts and practices of university lecturers. The aim was to understand the practices of university lecturers in the construction of ethical values in university students. A qualitative methodology was chosen based on a literature review allied with an open questionnaire conducted with fifteen university lecturers from two higher education institutions in Pemba City, the Catholic University of Mozambique (Faculty of Tourism and Informatics Management and the Department of Ethics and Citizenship) and the Lúrio University (Faculty of Engineering). Faced with the transformations of society, the importance of ethics in the students' constructive process is discussed, whether in high school or higher education (university). It is concluded that university lecturers have the role not only of supporting students in the construction of pedagogical knowledge, experiences and good behavior, but they are also mentors in the construction of ethical values in the students' constructive process, combining the intellectual part and knowledge with the adoption of certain practices of ethical values of citizenship that are linked in society.

Keywords: Ethical Values; Higher Education; University Lecturers.



Rua: Comandante Gaivão nº 688

C.P.: 821

Website: <http://www.ucm.ac.mz/cms/>

Revista: <http://www.reid.ucm.ac.mz>

Email: reid@ucm.ac.mz

Tel.: (+258) 23 324 809

Fax: (+258) 23 324 858

Beira, Moçambique

Introduction

The construction of ethical values in university students today has become the subject of debates in universities, congresses and conferences, because it is perceived that it is entering a crisis in the knowledge society. The main objective of the study was to analyze the concepts and practices of university lecturers in the construction of ethical values of university students. Higher education refers to universities, which are public spaces where higher education students must live, in a favorable way, for educational training and the construction of their own ethical values. Specifically, the article identified the practices used by teachers and explained their role in the construction of the ethical values of university students and finally presented the ethical values prioritized by teachers in the training of students. To this end, the article had as its starting question the following: what are the teachers' conceptions and practices in the construction of the ethical values of university students? Qualitative methodology was used, based on a literature review and combined with an open questionnaire that facilitated the understanding of the concepts and practices of university lecturer.

Ethics in society

Speaking of ethics is not an innovation nowadays, and ethics has never been discussed as much as today. Man has been asking himself about the meaning of his actions and character and what will be the final consequence of his actions. Ethics expresses what belongs to the ethos, which meant "good custom", "superior custom", or "character bearer" (Walker, 2015). One of the possible definitions of ethics would be that it is a part of philosophy (and also pertinent to the humanities) that deals with the understanding of the notions and principles that support the bases of social morality and fundamental individual life (Walker, 2015). However, being ethical serves as an indication of a set of norms that guide the conduct of members of a given profession, because ethics refers to the values, principles and standards of conduct employed that legitimize a particular community or individual (Laille, Sousa & Vizioli, 2004).

The question of ethics is always asked in our lives. It is considered a fair society when ethics are applied in its routines and responsible behavior is adopted to reduce inequalities and injustices that are evident today. A society is guided by the behavior of people, whether they are good or bad. Therefore, ethics allows us to live as human beings and with principles that govern our actions. And it is understood that the behavior of individuals would be a distinctive factor of ethics, the way of acting before others, before oneself and before humanity.

Values in Society

According to Menin (2002), values are the criteria for defining goals or ends for human actions and do not need further explanations beyond themselves in order to exist. These criteria refer people to the duty to be honest because honesty is a value as are other values such as solidarity, tolerance and piety that have a natural, universal and mandatory character in our existence.

From the perspective of Guzmán et al. (2005), values are acquired gradually as the person becomes socialized. It is from this process that a person adopts society's codes and rules of conduct. Values are seen as actions in personal relationships that we look for in our behavior,

throughout our lives, and that are always a personal concept of something that is preferable to you or to the other.

The definition of value for Hessen (1944, p. 49 cit. In Da Silva, 2017) is “the ideal Being or the Value”. The author says that “value is the quality of something, which can only belong to it when perceived by a subject with a conscience capable of registering it” (pp.35-36). Given the requirement of society in order to build a harmonious society of ethically accepted people, it is necessary that people have certain ethical, fundamental and absolute values.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used combined with a literature review. This research is developed from secondary sources consisting of books, scientific articles and articles published in scientific internet portals (Lundin, 2016). This study was based on the use of an open-ended questionnaire technique applied to university lecturer from two higher education institutions in the city of Pemba: the Catholic University of Mozambique (Faculty of Management, Tourism and Informatics and the Department of Ethics and Citizenship) and Lúrio University (Faculty of Engineering).

Table 1: Participation of lecturers in the questionnaire

Higher education institutions	Lecturers responding to questionnaire		Total of participating lecturers
	Female	Male	
Catholic University of Mozambique (FGTI)-Pemba	2 lecturers	4 lecturers	6 lecturers
Catholic University of Mozambique (Department of Ethics and Citizenship) – Pemba	1 lecturer	3 lecturers	4 lecturers
Lurio University–(Faculty of Engineering- Pemba	2 lecturers	3 lecturers	5 lecturers
Total			15 lecturers

Table 2: Categories, subcategories e sources of data

Categories	Subcategoria	Fonte
Category A: Practices developed by university lecturers to construct ethical values in university students.	a) Activities developed by lecturers for ethical education of students; a) Difficulties encountered by lecturers in the teaching of ethical values in university students.	Questionnaire given to lecturers
Category B: The role of lectures in the construction of ethical values in university students.	b) Role of lecturers in relation to ethics education of their students.	Questionnaire given to lecturers
Category C: Lecturers' concept of students' ethical values	a) Fundamental ethical values; b) Importance of ethical values	Questionnaire given to lecturers

Presentation and Discussion of Results

Category A: Practices developed by university lecturer in the construction of ethical values.

Subcategory a) Activities developed by teachers for the construction of ethical values in university students.

With regard to activities, university lecturers adopt different strategies such as:

“... Create reflection on subjects, not only academic, but of society in general” (FGTI, Lect..6).

“... Give group work to stimulate interaction and mutual help” (FGTI, Lect..3)

“... Demand the application of some ethical values in the classroom and be role models for students” (UniLúrio, Lect.. 5)

“... Show students that each one is as they are, and it is necessary to respect the principles of others” (Depart. Ethics and Citizenship Lect..2).

In addition, university teachers make students aware of the adoption of good behavior towards others; they are guided by the integral training of students, as well as encouraging them not to practice corruption and not to be subjected to bribery practices in order to obtain gains. Also, the same teachers cultivate in students acts that make them reflect that before being ‘ academics’ they must be people.

According to Moellmann (2016), universities as well as teachers have the role of inserting the professional into society; they must be committed to training ethical and responsible subjects; they must assist the student in the training period so that he develops an ethically responsible posture committed to the profession. Higher education institutions should think about training students to develop intellectual autonomy, with a passion for the pursuit of knowledge, with an ethical stance that also makes them committed to the destinies of society.

Universities also have to create policies that aim at mandatory compliance with all ethical values or they must create transversal disciplines, and enhance the training of teachers in these transversal disciplines. They can also develop debates and lectures around ethical values for students, since it is the task of higher education institutions to commit themselves to a type of education that involves, not only the domestic sphere that is consecrated as specialist, but also clarify to the students where they intend to go by not putting their values to the test, but creating adult, free and enlightened people (Moellmann, 2016).

Category B: The role of university lecturer in the construction of ethical values in university students.

a) Subcategory: Role of lecturers in relation to the ethical training of their students.

University lecturer perceive that they have a preponderant role in the education of the student and to insert him as a professional in the job market; in the construction of knowledge and absorption of new concepts in a critical way. Teachers, too, have the role of assisting students during their training period, so that they develop an ethical and responsible posture committed to the profession. It is also the role of teachers to train students with intellectual autonomy, with a passion for the pursuit of knowledge, with an ethical stance, so that they become committed to the destinies of society.

As shown by Libardi (2010), the university professor has a fundamental role in the student's growth, learning, maturation and ethical education. It plays an important role in the challenge of building solid knowledge. However, the ethical education of individuals at university requires a relationship between teacher and student, in order for the recognition and legitimacy of ethics in the educational process to occur. For this reason, more than teaching concepts and values such as citizenship, criticism, democracy, solidarity and respect, it is necessary that the teacher and students experience and share such values in the university environment, as it is up to the educator, whose main role is to guide their education in how to interpret ethics as a set of behavioral rules in different contexts, as explained by the authors Moellmann (2016); Sousa (S / D); Longo and Lins (2018).

Category C: University lecturers' concepts about the ethical values prioritized by lecturers

Subcategory a) Ethical and fundamental values

It was found that university lecturers, in the context of the training of their students, take as

“fundamental ethical values solidarity, active respect, recognition of the value of the other and the conviction of giving possibility to the other, peace and dialogue, the taste for work well done, for the personal effort to achieve good results without looking for other ways, honesty, fidelity to the word given ” (Depart. Ethics and Citizenship Lect..1).

A FGTI lecturer indicated that “respect for others, solidarity, responsibility, confidentiality in different domains, empathy among others, these ethical values are fundamental for the ethical education of their students” (FGTI Lect..3).

The lecturers point out that ethical values are fundamental in the education of students, that they should keep in mind that ethical values are part of their academic education. This is because the education of the subject is not limited to the transmission of pedagogical knowledge, but there is a set of ethical dimensions that are part of the education of an ethical person, such as: order, discipline, norms, justice, good, affection, responsibility, values, truth, happiness, guilt, disapproval, approval, conscience, rights and duties, attendance and many others (Arroyo, 2007). Ethics serves as the main regulator of the development of humanity.

Subcategory b) Importance of ethical values

From the analyses made of the registered concepts, it is considered not only important, but fundamental, to include ethical values in the training of students in higher education, as ethics determines the behavior of man in the social environment, shapes the personality of the human being and develops critical thoughts towards humanity. All of this contributes to building a society made up of ethically trained and potentially very competent people.

“the ethical values that determine the individual's behavior in the social environment” (UniLúrio Lect..4).

... “Not only is it important, but it is fundamental. Without the presence of ethical values, we make competent people, but perhaps not very human. Higher education training needs to train good citizens, not just technicians. Ethical values cannot be ignored. Teachers well trained in

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competences, but without a personal human category are a failure in higher education” (Depart. Ethics and Citizenship Lect..1).

Furthermore, “history shows that not only has academic knowledge changed a nation, but it is fundamental to have more prevalent ethical values’ (UniLúrio Lect.. 5).

According to Moellmann (2016), ethical values have been gaining space in discussions in schools as well as in school curricula, as schools are the reference point for the education of the individual. Higher education institutions should be concerned with training people for life, preparing them not only for the job market, but also teaching the student to think, learn and create a capacity for analysis and synthesis.

It is noted that, today, society is in crisis, with regard to ethical values on the part of students who graduate from higher education institutions, as they carry with them a lack of respect, dignity, truth, attendance, among other values. The school is an extremely favorable space for the construction of ethical values and training of individuals, as the importance and responsibility of the school with integral training and the ethical dimension of individuals grows (Sousa, S / D).

Conclusion

In this article, reflections on the concepts and practices of university lecturer in the construction of ethical values in university students were presented. It is assumed that higher education institutions promote educational training, but they are challenged to promote the construction of ethical values in their students, making them acquire, in addition to intellectual training, certain skills and competences for the job market as well as the ethical component within themselves as ethical and morally accepted people within a globalized society like ours.

In addition, it was noticed, from the study, that university lecturers develop certain activities, such as sensitizing students towards adopting good behavior towards others, encouraging them not to practice corruption and not to subject themselves to bribery practices to make gains in the future. However, the same teachers find it difficult to develop their activities related to the construction of students' ethical values. They point out, on the one hand, the lack of honesty, solidarity, lack of compassion and respect for the other, on the part of the students. On the other hand, traditional culture contributes to social, cultural and linguistic prejudices in the classroom, which often lead to the impediment of moral and self-critical acceptance as well as the lack of dialogue. Educational training is a difficult task, but it is not impossible to carry out in order to face the daily challenges imposed by society.

Within this line of thought, it is recommended that universities opt for various mechanisms and strategies to develop activities to be practiced by students, with the help of their teachers, for the construction of ethical values. It can be taken as an example, that teachers are the key players in this process of educational and moral training of students because students look to teachers' posture, capacity and skills as a reference and model to follow. Since these represent examples for students during or even after the course ends.

From the article, it was also understood that university lecturers, in addition to having the role of inserting professionals into the job market, have a commitment to creating ethical and responsible subjects so that they develop an ethically responsible posture committed to the profession. It is also believed that they have the role of training students with intellectual autonomy, with a passion for the pursuit of knowledge, with an ethical stance in order to make

commitments to the destinies of society. Therefore, it is suggested that universities adapt their curricula to the current reality to face the challenges of everyday life, and, in particular, teachers, who are the link between pedagogical knowledge and the student, should tirelessly contribute to the training and the construction of ethical values.

Every day, the crisis of ethical values intensifies and there is a breakdown of ethics in society. It is necessary for the teachers to make efforts to constantly create a strategy to awaken in students themselves the discovery of ethical values, and seek to guide them towards training with skills and abilities, which is also accompanied by ethical values because these contribute to the integral education of the person.

Finally, the article discussed that, in a way, the subject's educational training is not limited to the transmission of pedagogical knowledge, as there is a set of ethical dimensions that are part of the student's educational training that university teachers instill in their students as fundamental ethical values: solidarity, active respect, recognition of the other's value and the conviction of giving others the possibility, peace and dialogue, a taste for work well done, for the personal effort to achieve good results without looking for ways, fidelity, responsibility, empathy, justice, among others. However, the adequacy of the construction of these ethical values depends a lot on where there is ethics education in higher education institutions.

Finally, the article sought to show that ethics in society contributes to the interaction of different individuals in different spaces, as it guides the conduct of individuals in a certain group or society in which they are inserted.

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