MORAL REORIENTATION: A PANACEA FOR REGENERATING AN EFFICIENT HUMAN CAPITAL BASE IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

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Abstract
Globally, education has been accepted as an instrument for national development. This paper focuses on building a strong human capital base for efficient educational system in Nigeria through moral regeneration. The paper appreciates the global contributions of education to national development. The paper x-rays the various problems facing Nigerian teachers which include poor, vague and inconsistent government policies towards the profession as well as poor remuneration and general lack of respect for the profession. The paper opines that a moral rebirth is necessary to reposition the Nigerian education system. The paper adopts an inter-disciplinary approach in the discussion and concludes that for any educational system to achieve its purpose, a proper training and retraining of its personnel as well as providing a good working condition is necessary

Globally, education has been accepted as the bedrock of every society. A good education therefore, is one that is based on sound moral principles. Since education is recognized as the catalyst for change, a good education must keep on updating itself through the training and retraining of its man power resources.

From whatever perception one may look at it, educational liberation liberates the mind from fear. Oguzor, Ukpong, Onwuchekwa and Ogolo (2007) held that “Education is not an individual but an intersectoral issue. They go on to say that education is no longer a tool in the hands of a few, but it is liberty, development, life and future for millions who are trapped in servitude, trafficking, forced beggary, domestic labour, prostitution and as child soldier”. Education is no longer a meal ticket but an instrument for self development (Obodoegbulam, 2012). In corroboration, Iheibereme Oyenike and Oyiloye (2007) submitted that “Education is seen to be a
strong force for nation building”. They further submitted that “a nation which does not give adequate attention to the education of its younger generation, is on the part of extinction from knowledge and viability”.

For any society or organization to move forward, it must operate on set principles, objectives or simple rules of ethical behaviour. The Nigerian constitution section 23, page 31 states as follows: the national ethics shall be “Discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self reliance and patriotism”. Unfortunately, on the part of the African workers, one can hardly think of commitment in their relationship to work. In fact, most of the public servants work under strenuous conditions. In the view of Amirize (2006); “it is necessary to reconstruct and rebuild not only the nation physically, but the faith and the pride of the individuals so that every Nigerian can assert his place confidently in Nigeria”. This assertion therefore, forms the focus of this paper.

Theoretical Background

Every generation or society discovers how best to foster development along a desirable direction. Development theories therefore are all about how a given society works towards a desirable change in their society.

According to Jacobs and Cleveland’s (1999), development thrives on certain principles. Firstly, it expands human consciousness and enhances social organization. In their view, “societies develop in response to the contacts and interaction between human beings and their materials, social and intellectual environment”. They further hold that “the incursion of external threats, the pleasure of physical and social condition, the mysteries of physical and natural and complexity of human behaviour prompt humanity to experiment, create and innovate new ideas”.

Jacobs and Cleveland’s (1999) held that effects of the interaction talked about manifests in three different aspects. At the physical level, it enhances control over material processes. At the social level, it enhances capacity for effective interaction between people at greater spheres and distances. At the mental level, it enhances knowledge.

From the perspectives of history, it is evident that societies the world over, developed through a process of trial and error typical of the physical experimentations. One direct result of this process of experimentation is the discovery of new skills and ways of doing things. In this way, the individual will be in a position to utilize his or her energy more efficiently and effectively. On the mental plane, it leads to organization of facts as information and interpretation of information as thoughts.
Moral Imperatives

About the middle of the twentieth century, the teaching profession was a revered profession. According to Isiaku in Anikweze, Ojo and Maiyanga (2002) as cited by Obodoegbulam (2007), “the teacher should be a carrier of the culture of his society, the agent for its propagation, perpetuation and renewal, as well as architect for its changes for the better.” The teacher serves as the mirror of his society. Everyone looks up to him for moral precept.

Among all the professions, the teaching profession is the only field with the requisite skill to develop the human capital. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Anikweze, Ojo and Maiyanga (2002) as quoted by Obodoegbulam (2007) defined teaching as “A deliberate and organized effort to initiate a learner into a way of thinking and behaviour as well as a core of norms, values, skills and techniques considered desirable for developmental purpose profession holds the key to the development of society in terms of social behaviour, ethnics, norms and value principles of every society. It is only the teacher who possesses the tool to make or remark the world. With the tool in his hand, he can turn the world into a games village or battle field, a community of illiterates or a society of civilized minds. As it is within the dictates of the teacher to manipulate the human intellect into anything he might wish.

In all human societies the essence of self examination is to give life a defined direction. To institute a just, fair and habitable society, certain acceptable standards of behaviour have to be put in place. In this regard, teachers take decisions, form habits, and adopt appropriate attitudes to shape life (National Teachers Institute, 2000) as a person is born, he is given certain training within and outside the family to enable him cope with the demands of the family unit and by extension the wider society. He is trained physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and morally. Physically, he is equipped to develop his physical ability. Mentally, he develops his mental or intellectual skills, to enable him think and reason critically in matters of problem solving. Emotionally, he is made to appreciate the virtue of self control both in times of peace or crises as he cohabits with other people. Socially, he is trained to learn how to live or relate with other people as a gregarious organism. And morally, he is trained to acquire those attitudes and values which will make his conducts and behaviours acceptable to other members of the society where he belongs (N.T.I, 2000).

Based on the above, it is obvious that moral values are standards of behaviour which define what is good and therefore acceptable and what is evil and as such rejected. Most often than not, moral standards are set by government where this obtains, moral values may change in tandem with changes in the direction of government. Similarly, changes in moral values could be brought about by (i) scientific findings (ii)
evaluation of religious beliefs (iii) changes in moral values (iv) a vision driven advocate, (v) media (vi) changes in the economy (vii) technological innovation, (viii) demographic shift and (ix) lack of new ideas. In the light of the above, it is argued that a particular moral view held by a people may last for between twenty to fifty years.

In another respect, moral virtues such as honesty, trustfulness, respectfulness, loyalty, faithfulness, courage, dedication, commitment and diligence among others, enhance effectiveness and appropriate role playing in the society.

Challenges
The teaching profession in Nigeria, is one of the worst socially challenged. Yet it is the chief character molder recognized world wide. Among all the chosen fields of human endeavour, the teaching field parades the highest number of quarks (Obodoegbulam, 2007). From the kindergarten to the university level, we find over 30% of the teaching personnel being unqualified. Yet, this field, is the central unit for knowledge generation and dissemination.

Unfortunately, the high level of confidence paraded by Nigeria’s educational system has gradually been eroded. Ibekwe (2011) citing Tawary (1995) and Ocho (2003) revealed that “tertiary institutions are facing many crises today, brought about by an increasing lack of public confidence in their worth. This could be attributed to factors including vague definition of educational goals, multiple and conflicting nature of educational goals and the incomparable nature of many goals”. From the kindergarten to university level, it is obvious, that the government lacks the political will to put education on the proper pedestal.

Owing to excruciating poverty faced by a majority of Nigerian educators, their rating in the society is nothing to write home about. A Nigerian educator whether at the primary, secondary or tertiary level, is looked upon as a second class citizen. They work under difficult condition and very harsh environment, yet, very low rating in the society. Obodoegbulam, (2007) quoting NCCE in Anikweze, Ojo and Maiyanga (2002) submitted despite the laudable provisions of the National Policy on Education concerning teacher education, nothing is said about their welfare. The implication of this is that teachers are still considered in Nigeria as the goose that lays the golden egg. Nigerian educators are still considered as “King makers” who can never be made ‘king’. Teachers educate presidents and ministers, judges and clergy yet remain at the lowest rung of the social ladder.

In recent time, brain drain has been a perennial problem confronting Nigeria’s educational system. Secondary and at tertiary levels of education, there is an exodus of quality personnels to other fields considered as greener pastures. Mobility of labour is
both occupational and geographical. We have a sizeable proportion of Nigeria’s good brains migrating to other parts of the world. Some others left the academic field completely as a result of frustration. It is said that the teaching field, are loosing some good hands who would have contributed towards the advancement of this country.

The frustration mentioned above, was caused by a multi dimensional problem. Poor infrastructural facilities, poor funding, inconsistent education policy, administrative inefficiency and poor working environment all work negatively against the teaching field and by extension the education system. No one will like to work in an environment where his safety is not certain or where he has little or no prospect. In the education sector, prospect for growth and development is very slow and therefore demoralizing.

Nigerians generally have a wrong value orientation. In the beginning and about the middle of the twentieth century, personal achievement was celebrated. Today, wealth no matter the source is the in-thing.

On a general note, the Nigerian education system is suffering from a marked crisis of confidence. The abundant cases of examination malpractices and bribery are clear examples of this scenario. Parents and the society in general have little or no regard for the education. In private schools, parents dictate to teachers what instructions to give to their children. They feel very upset to learn that their children and wards are reprimanded for doing any wrong. Some insist that they ought to have been consulted before meting out any punishment to their children for anything what so ever and for under any circumstance.

Looking Forward

According to Ukeje (1987) as cited by Obodegbulam, (2007), “If education is the key to national development, teachers are the people that hold that key”. A good teacher needs to be knowledgeable. Ali (2005) held that “fully aware that knowledge of important concepts, skills, facts, ideas, principles and practices forms the bedrock of gaining competitive edge in all aspect of human possibilities and material powers ... powers that may reside in an individual, tribe, region or amongst certain professionals, a nation, race, continent...” In view of the above, it will not be an over statement to reaffirm the old saying that “knowledge is power”.

To ensure a strong human capital base for our educational system, the process of knowledge generation and dissemination need to be strengthened. Ivowi (2005) asserted that “various mechanisms have to be put in place as a parameter for the quality assurance of the knowledge generated and disseminated in Nigeria. According to Ivowi (2005), some of these include “establishment of infrastructure, personnel and teaching, learning facilities, setting admission criteria to institutional programmes, laid down
processes for establishing and ...“ The teaching and learning programme in Nigeria, deserves a total over haul to give it a new direction.

With adequate remuneration and other fringe benefits, educators in Nigeria will be given a new social status. Their dignity, prestige and social worth will be enhanced. Under a good working condition, some of the good brains who had left will be attracted back into the country. This class of educational personnel, will invariably join hands in their own little way, toward rebuilding the sector. In corroboration, Mbayauv (2009) argued that “to ensure professional efficiency in teaching, the teacher should be motivated”.

Conclusion
To reposition the education system in Nigeria, the human capital base needs to be repositioned first. Nigerian teachers need to be trained and constantly retrained to keep pace with changing government policies. As at present, the 9.3.4 educational policy is still misunderstood. A good number of teachers and some policy formulators still refer to the former 6.3.3.4 without knowing that the policy has changed. Okon (1984) as cited by Olowonijuearo (2005) submitted that “Nigerians must change before the nation can”.

References


