

# Reform and Quality Education in Nigeria: The Imperatives of Value Reorientation through Character Education

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## Abstract

The frustration and disappointment of scholars, political observers and ordinary people on the current problems of development in Nigeria is not news. It is now obvious that the giant of Africa is on the verge of colossal failure demonstrative of acute, chronic and rapid growth in negative developments. Despite her huge natural and human resources and phenomenal development in educational fields, why is development qua development eluding this nation?. The present effort argues that our development as a nation must come about with dismantling the current value system that favours invidious locust mentality and ensure a conscientious pursuit of serious transformation through character education. The paper also proposes the strategies that could midwife the new Nigeria that would emerge from such advocacy.

**Keywords:** Reform, Quality Education, Value Re-orientation, Character Education.

## Introduction

When Barber Conable, the former president of the World Bank was quoted by Ojo (2000) as saying that “without education, development will not occur” he would be seen as recognizing the universal truth that education is a potent ingredient for national development-technological, economic, social and political. Human achievements are premised on the kind and level of educational attainment which presents education as an investment in human resources. Man stands as the greatest development resource. All developments are therefore inconceivable without prior human development and there is no better way this can be brought about except through education.

Obafemi Awolowo sees man as the sole creative and purposive dynamic in nature (1981). Technologically Awolowo links the Industrial Revolution with the men of education (1981). Politically; he holds the view that a truly educated citizenry is one of the most powerful deterrents to dictatorship, oligarchy and feudal autocracy (1960). The assumption which is the norm of liberal democrats according to Enoh (2002) links a conclusion or end with the means the society, prosperous, free and democratic in the social sense, a situation which is considered best achieved when every individual develops fully and optimally. The means becomes education through which individuals are assisted to develop themselves for the purpose of becoming facilitator in the arduous task of development. Development is achieved when the values appreciated by a particular society are realized through the instrumentality of the individuals who must be efficient in the discharge of their responsibilities. In other words, education must have quality in the sense of the degree of relative worth of a thing, worth being determined by the efficiency and use expected of it (Akinpelu 2001). This is reminding us of what Plato called *arête* (excellence). The *arête* in education therefore is to reform and improve the ability and capability of individuals to discharge most efficiently and effectively the duties and responsibility of life and living.

This paper is an attempt to state the importance of education in national development of some countries. It will as well show why such developments predicated on education are not achieved in Nigeria despite her huge human and natural endowments. The missing link, the author traces to false value orientation and calls for quality education through character transformation.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Reform

The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (2000) defines reform as to improve by removing faults and weaknesses or by strengthening good qualities; to put an end to (an evil, abuse etc.) to correct; to persuade a person to change his ways for the better (p. 837), Man’s journey on earth has witnessed three remarkable periods in his socio-economic revolution (the agrarian, the industrial and the information age. All these milestones are in an effort to align himself with and respond appropriately to the needs and demands of the times as they exert pressure on his various institutions-religious, political, economic and educational (Riegle, 2007). It therefore follows as noted by Enemu and Onwuka (2007) that reform is implicated

When man through actions congruous with the demands of the changed and changing circumstances of life, aligns himself accordingly, he alters his situation and environment for the better, witnessing himself enabled to attain his goals faster with enhanced efficiency and at a reduced cost (p.50).

At this point in the continuum of time, both man and his environment are bound to witness thereby some form of reform and reconstruction. The reform is aimed at making changes or modification or establish some innovation. Hence, there could be social reform, military reform, religious reform and educational reform which in any case may be either trivial, structural or fundamental.

In all, it is the candid position of the author that reform is necessitated when prevailing policies or practices are considered out of tone with the demands of the present and foreseeable future. That could entail partial amendment, major changes or total reorganization of the entire system in a bid to make the system more relevant.

### **Quality**

This concept is slippery and has ambiguous meaning in common parlance and therefore passes for a relative term. However, the Oxford Advanced Dictionary refers to quality as the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it, how good or bad something is (Hornby 2000). It is deducible therefore that quality can be represented in a continuum starting from low to high and passes for a comparative concept in which case, the quality of one thing could be higher or lower than the other. Akinpelu

(2001) views quality as the defining essence of anything, that characteristic which makes the object what it is, and without which the object will not be a good instance of it. A similarity thus emerges between quality and standard which Okonkwo (1990) citing Flanagan (1951) has asserted that the latter come in when degrees or levels of excellence are indicated for the achievement of purposes. He therefore views standard as desirable or desired levels of attainment preferably expressed in terms of outcomes of instruction.

Should this definition be stretched further to include the entire educational system, it becomes similar to that of quality and can also find representation in a continuum including low and high level positions in the standards. This similarity in conception between quality and standard is also implicated in the New Webster's Dictionary definition of standard which considers it as something established as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring or judging quantity, quality and value. They therefore share identical connotation such that some writers cannot explain the concept of standard without using quality and vice versa. It becomes safer to pinch tent with Afemikhe (1988) who avers that it is pertinent to point out that standard and quality of education are very related; quality being on extension of standard. The exploration so far can be anchored on the premise that quality/ standard is a state of operating in efficiency and relevance. Hence, a thing or person has a minimum expectation by the society and its or his functions are evaluated, in accordance with such expectation. Thus, Amaele (2013) draws the point home as he recognizes that the quality of leadership is determined by the quality of life of its citizen just as the quality of an educational system could be assessed from the quality of its product.

### **Quality Education**

When quality is used to describe the kind of education received at any level of the formal school system, what reality comes to mind is the degree of conformity with the expectations of that level of education. The product of such system is expected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, competence, performance and character concomitant to that level. Hence the child must be fully developed in order to become relevant, dedicated, committed and honest enough to contribute to the good of the society as a result of the wholistic preparation—morally, intellectually, physically and spiritually. Amaele (2013) captures this trite fact clearly by stating that quality education deals with standard, excellence, efficiency, relevance, appropriateness and values. In so much as quality education, involves some conditions and levels from which it can be measured in school business, it deals in addition with issues of validity, functionalism and efficiency of an educational system in the attainment of national goals and aspirations. A basic factor in the consideration of the quality of an educational system is its efficiency in the attainment of national goals for economic and social transformation.

Majasan (1988) has directed the focus of this paper by his argument that

Quality education should produce disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage, patiently acquired skills, valuable techniques, acceptance of teachers' leadership role, mutual respect within and outside the school community (p.3)

He further cautions that:

an education system which encourages its youths to be corrupt with drugs, sensuousness, uncontrolled youth culture, unprecedented sense of generational self consciousness,

opposition to constituted authority and collusion in various shapes and forms cannot be measured as quality education (p. 3)

Education is therefore a value laden concept and except such ingrained values are fully appreciated and demonstrated, the growth and development of such a society could only be likened to the proverbial double-headed snake the net result of whose forward and backward movements is zero.

### **Education and National Development**

Every industrialized nation of the world attained such height only by tapping from the tremendous power of education in their march towards attainment of national objectives. The Germans during the Second Reich (1871) used education as an instrument per excellence for the unification of the erstwhile disparate and some what bellicose elements within the empire while the Japanese during the Maji Restoration used education to inculcate and propagate such cardinal virtues of shintoism as filial piety, benevolence, fidelity, justice, propriety and integrity. In these cases, each country demonstrated unflinching commitment to the realization of national imperatives.

Also that Soviet Union (so it was called then) showed great commitment to a system of education of high quality as an instrument of control and planning through scientific and technological fields command notice and acknowledgment. Worthy of mention is the Russian Spurtunc of 1957 at which America felt challenged and threatened and so in a hurry turned to the school for helps. In the full realization noted Ukeje (1996) that one of the functions of the school indeed the prime function is to provide a setting within which boys and girls can grow intellectually. This can only be accomplished through the learners' association with information, knowledge and facts. Books can help. So can laboratories.

Japan and some of the Asian tigers in spite of their multiethnic nature have accelerated their political, technological, social and economic progress through education and urbanization. Foremost in their drive is education. The success of their industrialization Omatseye (2006) submits is based on the effectiveness of education as a functional instrument of development. With less material resources, even India has grabbed world spotlight in information technology occasioned by her outsourcing of work from Europe and the United States. Agreed that these Asian nations have their challenges, the use of education as a way out cannot but command the attention of Africans particularly Nigeria. All the development noticed could not have come about if the moral tone of such nations were at a low ebb.

### **Education and Development in Nigeria**

United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) on September 8, 2005 pronounced a grim verdict on Nigeria. While people are living longer throughout the world, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. It specified that life expectancy in Nigeria has fallen from 51:6 years to 43.4 years. Following this grim picture, UNHDR deranked Nigeria's over all rating on the global development table from the 151<sup>st</sup> position it occupied in 2004 to 158<sup>th</sup> position out of a total of 177 countries covered in the assessment. We must also recall that the Guardian of September 16, 2005 carried a front page report titled "World Bank rates Nigeria second poorest nation". It was stated thus:

It (WB) cites Nigeria as a resource dependent nation, which could have produced capital five times higher than it did in 2000, if only it had made a moderate effort to save.

What we have today are chronic debt problem, declining productivity, negative growth rate, ignorance, disease and fear for hunger on many of our People, low rate of capacity utilization of refineries which has resulted in large-scale import of petroleum products to meet domestic demand while much of the produced crude oil is exported (a serious paradox), the poor management of the proceed of the oil exports by the successive military and civilian policies over the years continue to impede the socio-economic development of the nation. Thus, Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources by providence. It must be in realization of the potential of the country in men, material and money that are sufficient to place her among the top twenty nations of the world (Kayode 1987) that some have described the country as the "United States of Africa". Unfortunately these potentials are misdirected and the major reason seems to exist in a paradox: namely that Nigeria also has all the elements that can dwarf if not drown the progress of a nation. This negative aspect of

Nigeria is well brought out by Prof. Tamuno, the former V.C of University of Ibadan in his valedictory address. As he aptly puts it.

From one institution to another  
From one sector of our national activity to another from one community  
to another  
From one generation to another  
We observe this pathetic phenomenon.  
All things bright and beautiful  
All creatures' great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
Nigerians kill them all. (Kayode 1987:1)

Njoku (2007:11) captures the rate of moral decadence in Nigeria so vividly when he submits that

Every thing about Nigeria is corrupt.  
The political power elites are corrupt,  
The people are aspiring to be corrupt,  
Elections are corrupt. Census is corrupt.  
Electricity is corrupt. The water is corrupt. The land is corrupt. The air is  
corrupt. Even the war against corruption is corrupt.

Njoku goes on to discuss the devastating consequence of corruption which he says is worse than Hiv/Aids, nuclear bombs, armed robbery and terrorism combined.

Though some writers believe that the simultaneous presence of negative and positive factors of progress is natural and universal, however, the magnitude and nature of the negative factors seem peculiarly Nigerian and are regarded by many as the distinguishing features of the country.

With the foregoing scenario, one is constrained to ask is Nigeria education contributing to technological progress or retrogression? Has education socially become a major cause of social instability rather than one of stability? Are the benefits of education in economic term limited to the capitalist few as the very structure of the economy set up worsens rather than solve the problem of unemployment?

One must not pretend to wish away the obvious that the education sector in Nigeria is faced with a myriad of problems. These problems Wokocha (2005) contends include but not limited to cultism, examination malpractices, sexual harassment, corruption, handout merchandizing and inadequate funding resulting in incessant strikes, under staffing, brain drain, inadequate infrastructure, poor infrastructure, inability to recruit and sustain the right quality of academics, outdated laboratories and equipment etc. These aberrations no doubt cannot contribute to quality education that can generate development of the Nigerian nation.

However, it will amount to intellectual dishonesty to accuse the Nigerian society of lacking in the production of highly qualified and suitable personnel that are capable of propelling the engine of development of the nation in all its ramifications. To say the least many Nigerians are highly respected outside the shore of the country on account of their wonderful contributions to societal growth.

Apart from Nigerian education, we may still ask ourselves why the few Nigerians that received their education in the developed countries of the world are not able to make the country the envy of the world. We do not need the assistance of a prophet to be convinced that something fundamental is lacking in the society which has not left the school unaffected. The weight of this discussion suggests that Nigeria's problem of development should be conceived as a function of a larger picture namely, the prevailing value system (that condones graft as a necessary means to ends), collective ignorance and a general lack of common sense among Nigerian elite and leaders. One believes that not much has been done to educate the citizenry in its entirety. Alter all, the three domains of education cognitive, affective and psychomotor should be taken note of. But the author is of the opinion that the affective is the most important as the success of the others depends on it.

#### **The needed Reform for Quality Education in Nigeria:**

Transformation through character Education

It is important at this point to agree with Albert Schweitzer (196 1:76) that

The prosperity of a society depends on  
the moral disposition of its members,  
For to the extent in which moral laxity,  
Selfishness, embezzlement of public funds,  
bribery and corruption, lack of sense of  
duty and social responsibility, disregard

for public good etc prevail in any society,  
to that extent is the development  
of that society obstructed and rendered impossible

Corroborating the above view is the position of Omoregbe (1990: 199) that  
...if a country produces “intellectual  
giants but who are moral dwarfs” it is simply producing obstacles to its  
own development. Educated men with a very low degree of morality are  
the greatest obstacles to development of their own country.

The implication of the foregoing positions is that the all round development of a society find anchorage on the moral disposition of its citizens.

So the manifestations of all the negative factors that have earned Nigeria the derogatory statement of a country where nothing works” corroborate the fact that the teaching of values is neither being stressed nor implemented in manner that values are understood, internalized and actualized in ways that make significant impact on our lives. If not, how does one explain the accusation that schools are turning out moral illiterates incapable of becoming role models and exhibiting refined, disciplined and acceptable behaviour?

Whatever image that has been created for Nigeria, there is a general disenchantment as the number of converts of despair seem to be increasing at such an alarming rate that unless something surgical and radical is done, this potentially great country may become one of the least.

This is an invitation to dismantle the current prevailing value system where the end justifies the means and money becomes an object of worship. A good starting point therefore is the conscientization of teachers who will in turn execute the desirable and expected redress processes. There is therefore the urgent task of revitalizing the educator’s roles as builders of character to be able to distil the values cherished by the society and inculcate same into the learners. The National Policy on Education (2004) places a high premium on the development of human values through schooling. For example it lists the following as desired ends for educational activities in the country; respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions, moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of society, respect for the dignity of labour and promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children. (p8)

To attain these values the NPE recommends that Nigerian education be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as social, cultural economic, political, scientific and technological progress. (NPE 2004:7)

It is not surprising that Akinpelu (1981) submits that “the question of value arises every where in the educational process whether in the classroom, in the school at large or in respect of education in the society”. Hence Wronski (1975) argues that “whoever thinks we can avoid values in the classroom is committing an educational felony”. Accordingly, values that foster social living and engender development include among others according to Solarin as cited by Enoch (1996) hard work, fairness, respect for self and others, responsibility, truthfulness, courage, humility, dedication, honesty, pluck, modesty, service. To this bag of virtues, Akinpelu (1983) has added, integrity, chastity, tolerance, self-discipline, brotherliness, honour, patience, industry and self-control. These qualities constitute the right types of values that teachers need to help the learners understand, internalize and actualize for personal growth and national development.

The writer is advocating for transformation through character education. As a moral concept<sup>7</sup> teaching requires educators, in addition to acting ethically, also realize the objective of inculcating into the students the shared values of the society. Morally literate children do not just appear from the sky but have to be groomed and socialized. There is a compelling call for teaching values strategically and painstakingly.

By this advocacy, a new teacher is expected to emerge. This is a teacher that appreciates the fact that the classroom has a moral odour which permeates nearly every aspect of student’s life and activity. And circumscribed in his professional role submitted Elechi (2004) as mediator of learning, manager of instruction, planner of instruction, disciplinarian/controller of student behaviour, confidant of student, parent substitute, judge of achievement, scholar/research specialist, curriculum implementer and above all a role model, the teacher exerts direct moral influence on his students. Demanded in the call is a change in pedagogy. Teachers of the new dispensation should highlight the values embedded in each subject of study. They should teach for comparison -while exposing students to the current social realities that are contributory to our present malaise also highlight the transformed aspect and the attendant benefits to the individual and the society at large.

Also the new teacher should stress the desirability of good character by making students act them in drama form as drama helps in actualizing social experiences thereby bringing, nearer home the desired changes than just telling the story.

Above all teachers should understand their impact as moral educators and so endeavour to be good role model for their students. They should realize that they cannot expect honesty from their student without being honest.

Expectedly, while the above pedagogical approach in teaching for good character is advocated, they should be accompanied by appropriate evaluation strategies in order to consolidate the epistemological gains of pedagogy. A two way traffic evaluation is advocated. While the teacher should use the moral behaviour of students in line with the declared national values as part of the assessment, the students also should be given the opportunity to assess the moral behaviours of their teachers which will constitute a veritable yardstick for promotion. In this way a practical orientation would have been given to our transformation process which will be more meaningful to the attainment of the expected reform.

Accordingly, the new teacher will need good preparation and constant re-training. It is important to introduce a change but more important that a freezing point for performance should be attained. According to Goodman et al (1930) cited in Achuonye (2007) there are five methods which can be used to ensure change sustenance.

> Reward allocation system: Rewards of different forms can be given to teachers based on their added responsibilities. For instance payment of excess workload, allowance for observed change in character in line with the new tasks from the students. After all educational reform Omatseye (2006) recognizes "is itself a costly and painful process".

> Support of a sponsor to maintain a shift from the status quo as a result of change: it is imperative that support be given to the implementers of change. All stake holders in education-- Ministries of Education, Local Education Authority, National Universities Commission, National Council on Colleges of Education, National Commission for Adult and Non-formal Education and the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council should be adequately supported by the leaders and civil society.

> Proper communication: proper communication channels that permit free flow of information both vertically and horizontally will help to sustain any change. Information should be on expectations of staff about the change in order to avoid resistance.

> Commitment to change: School authorities should employ appropriate strategies that can guarantee the support of staff

and students as well as parents to change in order to win the commitment of staff. The home should be supportive of the change.

> Diffusion: Information regarding job description must be communicated to all departments, units and divisions in the school to give acceptance and legitimacy to change.

### **Conclusion**

The happenings around us in terms of corrupt and criminal activities are eloquent signal that not only are individuals in trouble, the country is on the brink of collapse. This trouble revolves around skewed educational practice that emphasizes more of the cognitive than the affective domain. Rousseau as cited by Galtung (1980:19-44) maintains that education should emphasis the learning of virtuous behaviour and patriotism just as the Bhuddists see the essence of civilization not in multiplication of wants but in the purification of character.

Just as our educational system was a carrier of alien values that account for our failures in technological, economic, social and political realms of life so our salvation will come from a serious transformation through character education. An educational system that seeks to ensure the smooth functioning of the socio-economic system is dearly an essential part of modern national society (Dias 1982:7). And the socio-economic system can only operate optimally,

if education can instill in men the appreciation of the interrelationships of the interests of all and out of which will evolve the most eminent civic virtues that we refer to as moral courage, sense of justice and unselfish devotion to the community (Bottcher 1980:12).

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