

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL FOR RESTRUCTURING THE NATION

By

OPELOYE BOLANLE AMUDAT

Department of Educational Management, Osun State College of Education, Ilesa.
+2347030282190 | adelayoopeloye@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper discusses the various moral decadences taking place in Nigeria in the present dispensation. It looks at the opinions of scholars that the school system should be the actual place to eliminate these banes through character development especially in the youths. It highlights the relevance of character development in Nigerian education in restructuring the nation to bring it out of the abyss of moral decadences it has fallen into, to return it to that golden era of people having values and respect for the nation. Modalities for inculcating character development are expressed. Recommendations on the agents of socialization like the family, schools and social media to be more proactive in their activities to bring the nation to its glory are hereby given.

Key words: *Character, development, restructuring.*

Introduction

Globally, it has been realized that moral decadences pervade every facets of human life. Nigeria is not an exception in this. In Nigeria, many have eschewed from virtuous life. Rather, they are engaged in nefarious activities that have left the nation in a poor state of development socially, politically and economically.

Education seems to be an important tool for solving this precarious situation. Just as Ajala (2008) puts it, that education is no more about schooling alone and not altogether as “learning”, but as a continuous lifelong process of change, modification or adjustment of the individual – in or out of school resulting from his own responses to the stimuli or situations of his external or internal environment. He reiterates further that these changes resulting from activity affect the physical, emotional and moral or ethical aspects of the individual’s life as well as the mental aspect and the effect may be for better or for worse according to accepted standard.

In line with Ajala (2008) submission is Encyclopedia (2002) view of American education which reconsiders its early goals by taking character building more seriously. According to this, most people share the view that schools should be formally and strategically involved in building moral, character, virtues and ethical behavior and should work in concert with parents and the community. In the same vein, Silay (2013) narrates the Turkey’s case where the disappearance of some

sensitivity provides a sufficient reason for character education. These include disobedience to parents or teachers, addiction to substances, increasing rates of suicide, self- destruction, violence, fraud, decrease in work, ethics and social responsibility. The story in Nigeria is not different, if not even worst. This magnificent theme on character development couldn't have come up at a better time than when people of this nation, in positions of trust blatantly claimed that money placed in their custody has been swallowed by animals. It is against this background therefore, that this paper would examine character development in Nigerian education for restructuring the nation from its many banes to bring about the much desired goals.

Character development

Character according to Hornby (2015) in one of the meanings given, is all the qualities and features that make a person, groups of people and places different from others. While Encyclopedia (2002) describes it as when a person is said to have character, it usually implies they have distinguishing moral qualities, moral virtues, and moral reasoning abilities. Hence, this paper adopts Encyclopedia (2002) definition.

Development on the other hand, has been variously described by many scholars. Fadeyiye (2005) feels that development could be described as those changes or progress which enhances better quality of the generality of people in the society. Such desirable and positive changes are observable in all human endeavours with particular reference to social, economic, political and cultural aspects of life which usher in progress for the overall benefit of the entire population in the society. Hornby (2015) sees development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advance, stronger and so on. Fadeyiye (2005) definition seems more appropriate to this write up.

From the foregoing definitions, one can safely look at what character development is all about. It is a concept that is very much related with moral education, critical thinking, or character education. As such, the term will be used interchangeably with these other concepts in this paper. Many scholars because of the dire need of this concept have written so much on character education which they feel is the avenue through which the school systems can reshape the mind sets of especially the youths towards developing their societies morally. Wikipedia (2018) explains character education as an "umbrella term" loosely used to describe the teaching of children in a manner that will help them develop variously as moral, civic, good mannered, well behaved, non bullying, healthy, critical, successful, traditional compliant or socially acceptable beings. Wikipedia (2018) expatiates further that other concept that have now and in the past fallen under this term include social and emotional learning, moral reasoning and cognitive development, life skills education, health education, violence prevention, critical

thinking, ethical reasoning, conflict resolution and mediation. Silay (2013) sees character education as a school- based activity which shapes students behavior systematically. Dike (2007) quoting McBrien (1997) is of the opinion that character education is being a national movement in many advanced nations which involves teaching children and youths basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality and respect. In a nutshell, character development can be explained as the attitude of imbibing all that is virtuous to engage in tasks that will benefits one and others. This is a pointer that Nigeria too as to be very much proactive in what the children of this country are learning that has made most of the citizens both young and old go morally bankrupt.

Character development in Nigeria education at present.

A look at character development in Nigerian educational system at present from the primary to secondary and tertiary levels is nothing to write home about. It is all tales of woe, not with the behaviours being exhibited by the youths who are supposed to be the future of the country. Dike (2007) describes how the schools in Nigeria are today strewn with cases of vandalism, cultism and cheating in school examination, disrespect for authority and an upsurge in prostitution, drug –abuse, truancy and other self-destructive behaviours. According to him, the moral decay in the nation is widespread and it has affected the school that is supposed to be caring and character molding institution.

The present banes of character development in the citizens of this country can be blamed however, on the failure on the parts of the three institutions that are supposed to develop a child holistically. These are: the family/parents, the society/environment/community/public and the educational institutions/schools. Dike (2007) recalls how serous societies since the time of Plato have made moral education a deliberate aim of the school. He explains that, they educated for good character as well as intellect, decency as well as literacy, virtue as well as knowledge and they tried to train citizens who would use their intelligence to benefit others as well as themselves.

This was the case of some citizens in the early years in Nigeria too. Dike (2007) capitulates, further too, that, as the society began to worship money and material wealth (with less regard for good character) support for old fashioned character education in the society crumbled, with morality taking a dangerous nosedive. Okolo (2011) quoting Oderinde (2004) similarly laments what is happening in and outside the school and indeed the larger society for the past two decades which indicates that there is serious missing gap in the inculcation of values in Nigerian schools at all levels of education. He stresses further that the home, school and government attitude towards the desirable values in the society contributed immensely to decadence of earlier cherished socio- cultural values.

The institution of marriage under which is the family/home is now bedevilled with high rates of divorce where parents go their separate ways, thus, not helping in the character development of these youths who automatically become nuisances to the society. Their parents end up breeding cultists, thugs, kidnappers, armed robbers and so on that is detrimental to any meaningful development.

Most of these youths that the society, family and education institutions have failed to develop their character positively, continue with their anti - social behaviours to adult lives thereby causing the rampant bribery and corruption and electoral frauds in the country. Aside this, it has given the country a bad name in the comity of nations. Not with Transparency International ranking Nigeria 148th World's least corrupt country out of 180 (Saharaporters,2018). It then behoves, that every stakeholder in this country must sit up to stymie this hydra headed monster through character development in the nation's education system.

Relevance of character development in Nigerian education.

Many schools have seen the need for the school system to be very much alert to their responsibilities of character development in having citizens who would be morally upright and looking forward to the upliftment of the country socially, politically and economically. Oyinola (2011) on his own part is of the opinion that to curb and eventually eradicate corruption, children, youths and adults must be given the power to distinguish right from wrong. That all schools, should return to the teaching of moral education to empower children with the spirit of stewardship while adults live exemplary lives, reflecting truth, kindness, dignity of labour and integrity. In Oyeyinka (1997) view, since some other agents of education have failed to give moral education, the teacher is seen to be qualified to teach these virtues of character development. Though, he is of the opinion that the implication here is that the teacher himself must be seen to be virtuous and in addition must possess a good knowledge of what constitutes virtues and vices within the cultural system he operates.

With reference to Encyclopedia (2002) narration of American education that was so much concerned about academic competence and teaching specific values that caused character education to be put aside as a formal undertaking, this thereby led to public concern about a moral decline in society and the disintegration of families and communities to the reemergence of character education in the 1980's. In the same vein, Nigeria must wake up from its slumber to see the need that character development must be well integrated and emphasized in every school curricular and extracurricular activities to build the mindsets of the citizenry especially the youths towards moving the nation to a greater height.

Character development in restructuring the nation.

To restructure according to Hornby (2015) is to organize something such as a system or a company in a new and different way. Collins dictionary (2010) also sees

restructuring of an organization or system as meaning to change the way it is organized, usually in order to make it work more effectively. In addition, it is to plan or provide a new structure or organization.

From the above definitions, it is high time this country recapitulated on the way forward to promoting core ethical values as the basis of good character development to bring the country out of the abyss of moral decadences it has fallen into. In accordance with this, Bello (2007) succinctly puts it that no amount of political or economic restructure can bring any meaningful progress unless, the nation first restructure and re - orientate the mindset of the people, change the value system and develop sound character. He vehemently points it out that by far, the most important restructuring in Nigeria today is that of mindset which has compliance with character development. This should be the starting point and the mother of all restructuring. When the right attitude of mind through character development is adopted to improve socio-economic and political life of the people, the country will be the better for it. Moreover, restructuring will bring back the conditions for a return to that golden era of people having values and respect for the nation. Character development should therefore be the key to the future and the foundation on which other forms of restructuring be built.

Modalities for inculcating character development.

For the inculcation of character development, not only must the society engage families and community members as partners in the character - building efforts as expressed by Lickona and Schap (1996) quoted by Dike (2007), the school system must be actively involved too. After all, formal education according to Ajala (2008) enriches human life, builds consensus on values which condition attitudes towards work, cooperation and nationhood. This indicates that apart from having subjects like Civic Education, Moral Education and so on, other subjects areas must also teach character development probably through hidden curriculum or as a subject of its own. The implication is that the onerous lies on the teachers who are supposed to be role models as well as transmitters of cultural values of the society. They must however, be seen as virtuous themselves. Silay (2013) in another of his findings, supports the idea of teachers as role models to their learners as the most effective factor in character education especially when the academics are of good behavior. For instance, he cites the influence of academics on their students as not arguable. Their self - awareness regarding being role models is of utmost importance. He explains that, it should be kept in mind that among the most direct ways of conveying character education, academics' behavior, the words they choose while talking, their interaction with their students and their reaction towards their students could be listed. This boils down to the personalities of the teachers and their personal conducts helping to influence the character development of their learners.

The inclusion of character development in the school curriculum at every level of the educational system is very important. In accordance with this, is Dike's (2007) submission that, for effective character education, "effective schools" would reinforce good character traits through a systematic approach that includes adult modeling curriculum integration, a positive school climate and access to comprehensive guidance and counseling services. As part of adult modeling curriculum, people who are known with good virtues in the society can be invited to the schools to give talks and share their experiences with the learners. This will be a good avenue for dissemination of positive character development.

The families similarly have the duty of inculcating the expected values and attitude into children through the informal means of education. These values are honesty, patriotism, love, obedience, unity, work habit, positive attitudes to life and good leadership quality. Unfortunately; this family institution seems to have lost a grip of these cherished values.

Further means of inculcating character development is through television and other social media. The media houses should lay more emphases on Nigerian cultural values rather than mirroring western values, lifestyles and language that has left the country in a serious quagmire of character development.

Conclusion

For Nigeria to achieve the restructuring it is clamouring for, to achieve socio-economic and political upliftment, the education of the citizenry in the areas of character development has to be proactively looked into and emphasized by every stakeholder of the nation. It is only through character development that moral decadences can be eliminated in any society has expressed by scholars even in advanced countries. Therefore, all the agents of socialization, starting from the family, school, public to the government must wake up from their doldrums to partake in this character development of especially the youths to bring the much desired restructuring to move the nation forward to its position of glory.

Recommendations

- Serious public awareness and education must be put in place for parents to monitor the character of their children by the government at every level.
- Television, radio stations and other social media must be encouraged but highly monitored to promote character development through the programmes they present.
- Schools at all levels should lay more emphases in the teaching of character development in the school curriculum and extra - curriculum activities.

- Teachers, lecturers, politicians, adults and leaders in different professions must present themselves as role models for character development.
- A functional guidance and counseling unit should be well entrenched in all educational levels in the character development of learners.
- Public enlightenment campaigns should also be organized once in a while by all tiers of government in character development to create awareness against the moral decadences that have pervaded the society

References

- Ajala, J.A (2008) Primary - secondary education curriculum in Nigeria: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. In M. Bouconvalas & R.Aderinoye (Eds). Education for millennium development (pp.171). Ibadan: Polygraphics Ventures Limited.
- Bello, S.A. (2017). Restructuring Nigeria: A critical analysis/THIS DAYLIVE. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com> > politics
- Collins English Dictionary (2010). Restructuring. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com> > restr.....
- Dike, V.E (2007). Tackling corruption through character and moral education. Retrieved from www.nigeriavillagesquare.com > article.
- Encyclopedia (2002). Character development. Retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com> > education
- Fadeyiye, J. O.(2005). A Social studies textbook for colleges and universities (part two). Ibadan: Akin Johnson Press and Publishers.
- Hornby, A.S. (2015). Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Okolo, A.N. (2011) Education, value re-orientation and the rebranding process of Nigeria, ASEN Publication, 1, 60-68
- Oyeyinka, A.F. (1997). Education and moral development of the Nigerian adolescents: implication on culture and pedagogy. In O.J. Nwanyanwu, Opajobi & S. Olayinka (pp.77 - 183). Abeokuta: Published by visual Resources.
- Oyinola, O.A. (2011) Corruption eradication in Nigeria: An appraisal. Retrieved from <http://un/:b.un/edu/Lpp/library> philosophy and practice.
- Sahara reporters (2018) Transparency International ranks Nigeria 148th World's least Retrieved from saharareporters.com > 2018/21 > trans.....
- Silay, N. (2013). Character education at universities. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3(1), 43-49.
- Wikipedia (2018) Character education. Retrieved from <https://en.n.m.wikipedia.org> > wiki > chara