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EDUCATION AND CHARACTER REFORMATION IN NIGERIA CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract: Education is a transformative tool that is critical to the progress and development of a nation. The goal of true education is more than the cognitive development and creative thought processes. It is also about character molding of a person, making a holistic individual. It is true that the foundation of a quality education is character. An individual's education cannot be complete without character, and the knowledge they have acquired will not benefit Nigerian society or themselves unless their character is transformed. This study identifies character deficit as a major challenge in Nigeria contemporary society. The research examines the issues and prospects, and how education can be applied through character reformation to address the problems. The study relies on secondary data collected from text books, journal articles, and was analyzed in relation to the scope of the study (Nigeria). The theoretical framework is drawn from the social learning theory of Albert Bandura's and moral development theory of Jean Piaget which set out the progressive model on how the Nigerian society can be morally re-engineered to produce citizens that will contribute to the progress and growth of Nigeria. It concludes and recommends that an integrative and consensus approach be adopted to achieve this objective.

Keywords— Character Reformation, Development, Education, Family, Morality

INTRODUCTION

The role of educational institutions or systems have significant impact on the progress of a country, with a focus on improving the quality of human resources being the main priority in national education (Farid, et al, 2024). Education and character reformation are two crucial elements that shape the development and progress of any society. In the context of Nigeria's contemporary society, these components have become increasingly relevant as the nation strives towards achieving social, economic, and political stability. However, the current state of education and character development in Nigeria is facing significant challenges that hinder the country's progress.

According to Aloy Chife (2023), in a tweet, he noted that, the tree of knowledge is barren except rooted in the awareness of one's moral responsibility. In the same way, C.S. Lewis famously said, "education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil." (Elevate Society, 2023) This implies that the goal of *total education* is more than the cognitive aspect, it is also about addressing the character aspect of a person making a holistic individual. It suggests that in the absence of sound moral foundations, the misuse of knowledge and skill is inevitable. The cornerstone for any nation's political, social, and economic development is education. The country can accomplish its goals if it has a functioning educational system. Human mind modification and behaviour modification are greatly aided by education, which instills in people a sense of awareness and motivation, resulting in the production of well-educated citizens who can steer the nation toward socioeconomic progress. Education is a social practice that is deeply rooted in social reconstruction, a process of learning and training of the child to guarantee his cognitive and socio-psychological development.

The foundational goals of the Nigerian educational system include, but are not limited to, the nation's unity, strength, and self-reliance as well as the development of a free, just, and equitable society. The quality of education citizens get has a significant impact on the achievement of these goals. Learners must internalize socially acceptable behaviors and positive habits that are required for the development of both the self and society in order to develop the capacity to learn and acquire the knowledge and skills that are essential for the transformation of individual and national values. Education remains the key to human capacity building, a well-ordered society is a well-educated society; and a well-educated society is a well-civilized society.

Carr (2023) notes that developing moral virtues is the key to moral development. Virtues are essentially character traits that lead to good or admirable behavior. Rebuilding or reforming one's character cannot be achieved solely through behavior modification or intellectual understanding of concepts; rather, it necessitates a practical introduction to the unique (Aristotelian) moral wisdom of phronesis (good judgment and excellence of character). Character building has become a necessary part of today's Nigerian society. One of the major reasons for that is the continuous degrading of moral values. Nigeria has fallen into "moral crises". The country is struggling to cope with the disturbing trend of moral decline. The invaluable role of education in character building will develop a better personality leading to the development of a better Nigerian society. Education is considered as a tool that can be used in character reformation, building of effective citizenship and bringing positive change to a nation. Realizing this, the National Policy on Education was created with the goal of fostering a sense of national identity, instilling the ideal values and attitudes necessary for both individual and societal survival in Nigeria, training the mind to comprehend the outside world, and providing individuals with the necessary mental and physical competencies to enable them to live in and support the growth of the nation. (National Policy on Education, 2013)

Bertrand Russell opined that character formation is an important function of education. (Chen, 2024) It is the development of character that is the most important purpose of education. Through character formation it is hoped that learners will be able to improve and use their knowledge, study and internalize and personalize values.-character values and noble morals so that they are manifested in everyday behaviour.(Miftachul, 2024) Education-based character development is a recognized strategy for addressing the various socioeconomic issues Nigeria is facing. It is the social duty of the educational system to generate morally upright individuals who appreciate and comprehend moral principles, as well as cultivate civic virtues and attitudes that enable them to engage in and support the advancement of their local communities and the nation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study will explore the concept of character reformation to support further discuss in this study.

Character reformation: Ezeugbor, (2023) defines character reformation as the process of reshaping an individual's identity and values, influencing their actions and decisions throughout their life. It is the cornerstone upon which the society is based. Arthur (2021) opined that character reformation is the

restoration of moral virtues by promoting ideal living. An endless process of becoming good because the weight of choosing morally is impossible to avoid. Kamaruddin, (2012) defines character reformation as character education done formally and informally oriented towards aspects of human character.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Learning theory of Albert Bandura and the Moral Theory of Jean Piaget on character reformation through education will be examined in this study. Both place a strong focus on fostering the growth of moral principles, which show models for constructive attitudes and a disposition towards changing a society positively.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory

According to Albert Bandura, a major factor in how and why people learn is observation and modeling. According to his Social Learning Theory, children's behaviour in the future is greatly influenced by what they see adults do and how that behaviour is rewarded or penalized. Children see a range of people in their life, and this can have an impact on how they behave, grow, and change. These individuals, who include parents, siblings, friends, and instructors, have the power to define a child by their actions. Children are influenced by the behaviours of the individuals they see, known as models. This is due to the fact that children imitate some of the behaviours of the models they see, remembering what they have seen. (Bandura, 1977)

Bandura's social learning theory can enhance moral and character building by emphasizing that individuals observe and imitate the behaviour of those around them. This highlights the crucial role of parents, teachers, and other authority figures in modeling moral and ethical behaviour for children. By setting a positive example, these individuals can help children develop a strong moral compass and character.

Reinforcement plays an important part in learning, according to the social learning theory. According to Bandura, individuals are more likely to repeat behaviours that are rewarded than those that are punished. This suggests that positive reinforcement can be used to encourage and reinforce moral and ethical behaviour in children. For example, schools and educational institutions can implement reward systems

for students who exhibit good moral and ethical behaviour, which can help shape their character positively.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory offers a powerful lens to examine character development and reformation in Nigeria. Like many other countries, Nigeria has witnessed a decline in moral values and character development in recent time. High rates of corruption and other unethical behaviour across the nation are indicative of this deterioration. Another clear indication of it is the high prevalence of violence, indiscipline, and other anti-social behaviours among young people in the country. Therefore, there is a pressing need to apply Bandura's social learning theory to address these issues and promote moral and character building in Nigeria.

Parents and teachers can act as positive role models to children by demonstrating moral and ethical behaviour in their actions and words. By setting a positive example, they can promote a culture of ethical responsibility and integrity in the younger generation. Additionally, educational institutions can adopt reward systems for students who exhibit good moral and ethical behaviour. This can help reinforce positive behaviour and discourage negative ones. Furthermore, Bandura emphasizes the importance of mentorship and role models. In Nigeria's contemporary context, mentorship programs connecting established professionals with young people can foster positive behaviour, a growth mindset that encourage a “can-do” attitude and celebrate effort over just outcomes, this will help build them into morally sound and responsible citizens.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides valuable insights into how young Nigerians can learn and shape their behaviour. By applying its core principles within the contemporary Nigerian context, the country can promote positive change, build a more empowered citizenry, and propel Nigeria towards a sustainable path of development.

Jean Piaget Moral Theory

Jean Piaget understood moral and cognitive development as a constructivist process. His research focused on moral and cognitive development. He argues that moral development is a construction project that occurs through stages as the child grows and matures, and further maintained that morality stops at adolescence. He described stages in the growth of moral understanding in his book *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. (Piaget, 1965).

The Stages of Moral Development

Based mostly on his observations of children, Piaget identified three stages in the development of a child's moral knowledge of laws. During the initial phase, the child demonstrates proficiency in motor and social abilities and displays a lack of concern about morals. The child's complete respect for authority figures and rules is typified by the second stage. In the final stage, the child realizes that rules are flexible and subject to change with the approval of the social group they belong. (Patanella, 2011)

Jean Piaget's theory of moral development offers a valuable framework for understanding how important character development is to Nigeria contemporary society, particularly how children and young adults, develop their sense of right and wrong. Incorporating age-appropriate moral dilemmas and discussions into the curriculum can encourage students to move beyond understanding morality as an abstract concept and develop more nuanced moral reasoning. Nigeria's rapidly changing society presents new moral dilemmas. Open discussions and critical thinking skills are essential for young Nigerians to navigate these complexities.

Piaget's theory can be applied to equip educators with the necessary skills to facilitate moral development in their students as much as their cognitive development. Teachers can be trained to create a classroom environment that promotes moral reasoning and encourages students to question and challenge external rules and authority. Jean Piaget's moral development theory has the potential to enhance moral development and character building in a society like Nigeria, which is facing a decline in moral values. By understanding the different stages of moral reasoning, educators and policymakers can design effective strategies to promote moral development in children.

By incorporating Piaget's moral development into education, and even parenting styles, the system can empower young Nigerians to develop strong moral compasses, fostering a more just and ethical Nigerian society, allowing young Nigerians to navigate their evolving world with a strong foundation of ethical principles.

CHALLENGES POSED BY MORAL DECLINE AND CHARACTER DEFICIT

According to Akhtar (2017), when character is examined closely, it becomes clear that deficiencies in moral character or unethical behaviour are the underlying causes of all societal evils, conflicts, and discord that befall humanity. Any country without strong morality is a nation without a soul; it is a nation

without direction. Ethical character deficit underpins societal ills, necessitating urgent character reformation. Nigeria grapples with moral decline, reflected in widespread corruption and indiscipline. The nation's intellectual prowess contrasts with moral shortcomings, hindering its development trajectory.

While morality may seem utopic but the existence of society depends on it. That is to say, no country can advance and realize its goals without well established moral and ethical standards. Morality is the fabric that weaves social conscience and cohesion together. Nigeria has become a nation without sound moral principles, and this has led to poor output in effective citizenry and collective aspirations of the nation, this equally means that we have lost our collective soul as a nation, leaving the nation in a decayed state. This is seen in the severely distorted sense of national and socio-cultural consciousness, the distorted sense of morality and ethical behaviour, the self-serving political elite, the emasculating and expanding population, the economic and social disarray, etc. These persistent challenges act as significant impediments to Nigeria's advancement on its path to development.

The social problems Nigeria has today can be traced to education devoid of morality. (Ukolor, 2013). Contemporary Nigeria is beset with low moral standards, manifested in widespread corruption in public and private sectors, which have been staples of Nigerian life, despite efforts to address it. With the bountiful human and material resources in Nigeria, one is likely to conclude; that such nation should not have problem of development, however, the story is otherwise' (Adegbami & Uche, 2016).

Adegbami and Osungboye (2019) note that unethical and irresponsible citizens in public and private sector have been the bane of development at all levels in Nigeria. The consequence of which are evident in insecurity, shortage in the provision of healthcare service, poor educational facilities and learning environment, among other social problems. They discover that unethical practices or moral decline in the citizens was the bane of national development.

Nigeria's contemporary society has many intellectual giants but moral dwarfs. In the words of Okoh (2005) the system has rather produced "book-full blockheads" lacking the essential skills of comprehension, analysis, solving problems and drawing conclusions. Nigeria boasts of intellectuals that have learnt quite a lot, yet morally empty, we have many intellectual leaders and citizens, but when we examine their actions, they fall short of expectations. This research reveals that Nigerian contemporary society is facing many challenges such as corruption, insecurity, crime, violence, drug abuse, and a

decline in civility, with weakening social institutions that have made it difficult to achieve and sustain a progressive society because of character deformation, hence, posing threat to growth and development of the country. These challenges are considered to be closely tied to evidence of a weak character of individuals or deformation in character. This decline in moral standards has affected the fabric of our society adversely and there is an urgent need for its restoration, to impart socially acceptable behavior and discipline among the young people being groomed for future leadership roles.

The reformation of character through education provides a good basis for addressing these challenges. It also means that the issue of character reformation through education must be emphasized because education occupies a key place in the society. As a result, greater dedication and involvement are required from those tasked with helping children transform their character. This is because education without moral values is incomplete. Clearly, the gap is the lack of character and moral values in these individuals. Citizens without moral rectitude can hardly be responsible, and without being responsible, they cannot become effective citizens. Could character reformation be a solution to the aforementioned problems? Ukulor (2013) argues that an educational system that tries to avoid the big question of socio-cultural and philosophical issues of the society will end up producing graduates who are completely irrelevant to the society. Can character reformation then be achieved in contemporary Nigeria through education?

PROSPECTS OF QUALITY EDUCATION BASED ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND REFORMATION

Education offers a potent path for national development, instilling values essential for responsible citizenship. Integrating character reformation into education programs can address societal challenges, fostering a morally upright society poised for progress. A nation's ability to thrive through education is unmatched. It is a fundamental human right that empowers individuals, strengthens economies, and builds nations. The importance of education in Nigeria cannot be overstated, as it is the key to unlocking the potential of its citizens and achieving sustainable development. It is among the best tools for assisting in the development of a worldview that is more in line with the goals of a people. Education is also viewed as the primary means of social transmission, with a major role to play in character development and in giving children the mental, emotional, social, and moral tools they need to participate in a shared process of decision-making and evaluation in a multicultural setting.

Character education is one of the fundamental pillars of education because education not only aims to develop specific skills and knowledge but also fosters certain attitudes, norms, and values in students. (Sartika, et al, 2024) Febriyanti, and Tirtoni (2024) argue that the implementation of character reformation through the educational system is oriented towards developing an educational culture based on main character values in an integral manner. It requires integration of character education content in the curriculum. kozorez, et al (2022) assert that, for the benefit of the individual, family, community, and the state, character development ought to be a part of the core curriculum. This indicates that education is a pursuit that aims to advance society as a whole in addition to individual growth. Education is a prerequisite and it constitutes the most fundamental bedrock in the development of any society, it is an indispensable instrument in so far as the acquisition of knowledge and character molding are concerned. It is worthy of note that character cannot be separated from education, while it involves learning and training of the child to guarantee his cognitive development, it is also a process of character reformation and reconstruction of human experiences.

Dean, (2020) referencing Immanuel Kant observes that morality stands out as the most inclusive category of human values and, thus, the best indicator of defining the core of humanity. Immanuel Kant effectively explains this in his idea of the "Categorical Imperative" where he identifies reason, universality, and kindness as the primary moral standards. Put simply, it means that a moral act must to have been performed out of unconditional love, be the result of reason, and apply to all individuals and groups without exception. "We act according to that maxim whereby we can at the same time will that it should become a universal law," is the key idea in Kant's concept of universality that has to be emphasized for the sake of this study. Moral universality, sometimes known as the "Golden Rule" is the idea that people should treat others the way they wish to be treated. Notwithstanding differences in race, time, or location, this idea has additional subtleties, such as the understanding that moral competence and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, are inherent qualities of all human societies.

Pradana, et al (2020) submit that beyond the family or outside the school, learning resources that focus on character development can impart values such as nationalism and becoming a responsible citizen. Since these students will be the generation to lead the country in the future. Character education is crucial to cultivate in their thoughts and consciousness, and it is an important component through which various societal issues can be solved.

As established, education is a crucial tool to improve character. Achigaonye (2014) noted that education is an indispensable tool in national development. In terms of a nation, the better holistically educated a people, the better the state of the nation. This remains an advanced as solution to reform character and build effective citizenry to save Nigeria as it trudges down the road to perdition. For the purpose of actively developing the nation, it is critical to equip citizens with the knowledge and abilities necessary to function in a variety of social contexts, to recognize and address societal issues, to become leaders, to understand their responsibilities, to tolerate others, to coexist peacefully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends an integrative and consensus approach towards improving education and the attainment of character reformation. This approach involves bringing together different stakeholders and building a common understanding to achieve the unified goal of developing a more holistic education system that addresses not just academic excellence but also character development. This, in turn, will aid in the production of well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society. The study makes the following recommendations:

The Role of the Family

The child's character development begins in the family. Nevertheless, a lot of families have fallen behind in their obligations, and some children don't have role models at home. Consequently, the family must assume its central role and instill values. Families have a responsibility to ensure that their homes foster the development of their children's character at all times. Parents need to provide a positive example for their children at home.

It is the responsibility of the family as a whole to teach the child about the positive aspects of their culture. Restoring the damaged family-child bond is necessary. This will set up the right atmosphere for teaching morality to the child. Families must provide opportunities for their children to spend time with them, especially from a young age, as it is during this time that a child's foundation is established for their entire later life. By doing this, the child will develop moral principles and a solid foundation to flourish in the future.

The Role of the Ministry of Education

In order to favorably affect students' character, it is the duty of the Ministry of Education, both at the national and sub-national levels, to engage qualified educators who uphold moral principles and who can act as role models for their students. In addition, they should supervise school operations, offer educational materials for efficient teaching and learning, and guarantee that the curriculum is applied correctly to help students develop positive character traits. To comprehensively prepare instructors for the responsibility of reforming students' characters, they should also offer in-service training and professional development.

The Role of Teachers

Nabila and Ritonga (2024) note that teacher hold role important in develop the character of each student. Through education, teachers can create national character based on norms, ethics and morals. The primary implementers of curricula are teachers. Teachers should employ learner-centered techniques in place of teacher-centered ones. The later impedes transfer of values and knowledge, while the learner-centered approach supports students' continued interest, aid in their understanding of what they have been taught, and positively impact their lives. Teachers should also make an effort to lead honourable lives and uphold impartial discipline among their students at all times.

National Orientation Agency

The significance of national ethos cannot be overemphasized. This Agency is saddled with the responsibility to develop a Nigerian society that is orderly, responsible and discipline, where citizens develop core values, therefore, a solid, sound ideological and philosophical bedrock must be established for Nigeria. The provision of national ideology based on morals will create consciousness of justice, truth, honesty, patriotism, and nationalism in the citizens for the nation and not self.

CONCLUSION

Education and character reformation are essential elements for the progress and advancement of any society, and this holds true for Nigeria as well. However, to truly harness this power, the country must acknowledge and address the critical challenges that currently hinder the effectiveness of efforts steered in that direction. The development of this component is vital to shaping the collective future of the nation, and cannot be overlooked. However, the current state of education and character in Nigeria is plagued with challenges and shortcomings which must be addressed comprehensively. Character

development and reformation efforts are often fragmented and lack a unified approach. The lack of a holistic framework leaves many young Nigerians vulnerable to negative influences. An integrative and consensus approach is necessary to overcome the issues and improve this crucial aspect of the Nigerian society. This necessitates collaboration between various stakeholders, including the family, the ministry of education and the teachers, that will prioritize education reform, character development and reformation. The ultimate outcome of this effort will lead to reduced social ills and sustainable development. This study acknowledges the importance of sound education that is grounded in character development and reformation, but also shows how broad these challenges are, therefore, further research is needed to explore deeper into specific aspects of this topic, such as carrying out comparative studies that will analyze how other developing nations that have addressed similar challenges can provide valuable insights and best practices. Also, probe into proposed solutions that are culturally relevant and have a higher chance of success. The collective action and an unwavering commitment from stakeholders is key to building a future where quality education, character development and reformation will serve as the driving forces propelling Nigeria towards a more prosperous future. The road ahead will undoubtedly be challenging, however, with this collaborative approach, significant progress can be made and the prospects for a better-educated and morally upright Nigeria are within reach.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report that are relevant to the content of this research.

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