

CHARACTER FORMATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF ETHICS

Solomon Babatunde Kumakpayi,¹

Edwin Dooyum Tor-Anyiin² & Terfa Kahaga Anjov³

Abstract

It has become the culture of universities in the world to talk about awarding degrees in learning and character. The learning aspect is clearly seen in the choice of a course an individual decides to study. A student of philosophy learns how to philosophise by doing. You will engage with the texts, cultivating critical thinking through practicing with the use of argumentation with lecturers, friends during tutorials and consistent self-practice. The learning of philosophy is much easier to evaluate using assessments and examinations. Character is a vital part of human development. It is difficult to inculcate in an individual as it is not always built directly in the curriculum. Any studies that negate the cultivation of character is not completely successfully carried out. This study explains how character formation is better handled with the touch of ethics. The objectives are to show the significance of making character formation a critical moment in the life of an individual, to show that the absence of character in the life of an individual with a society is harmful to the moral values of the community. This is a qualitative research design. The study reveals that paper qualification is valued much more than character in Nigeria, materialism and societal ills are prioritise to the detriment of character of an individual. The paper concludes that education in Nigeria should be refocused on character formation as an essential pathway to combat perennial moral decay, inequality and lack of opportunity. The idea of learning by doing where parents are the first teachers of morality must be encouraged to produce honest, transparent, accountable men and women with self-control, discipline as a hallmark of integrity.

Keywords: Character Formation, Integrity, Ethics, Materialism, Moral Values, Nigeria

¹. Dr. Solomon Babatunde KumaKpayi is of the International Academy for Gender and Peace, Calabar-Nigeria.

². Dr. Edwin Dooyum Tor Anyiin is of the National Institute for Security Studies, Lower Usuna, Bwari, Abuja-Nigeria.

³. Terfa Kahaga Anjov is an Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi.

Introduction

Commentators on human development have made a lot of efforts to bring about the desired development in Nigeria, yet there appears to be a very little crack on moral character. The inability to get higher productivity is due to over concentration of efforts in the wrong direction. It is very difficult to hear in family circles speak of the phrase “learning and character”. Here, the first teacher to every child is the parents; the father and mother. My personal experience with handling kids shows that the first child can be added to the parents as one of the elementary teachers at home. The interaction of these three at home adds value to the learning ability of a child. The things children learn at home are very difficult to be erased from the memory of any child. The child at home learns through imitation of the actions of parents and the other siblings. What becomes of the child when s/he grows up as an admirable, moral or inferior or immoral adult is rightly traced to the infant stage and activities as “the family is the cornerstone upon which the society is based”.⁴ A child that learns by doing from the parents internalises what is right and wrong. The child understands the language of honesty, respect for elders, and empathy and grows up to be responsible, accountable and self-discipline and control between the ages of 2 to 12.

The Nigerian society has always postponed the formation of character of individuals to a later stage in life. When the child grows

⁴. Onyinye Ezeugbor. Character Formation: A Parental Determinant Perspective on Quality Personhood”. Retrieved from [https://serveby.flashtalking.com/click/7/249648;8674159;0;209;0/?gdpdpr=\\${GDPR}&gdpdpr_consent=\\${GDPR_CONSENT_78}&ft_width=300&ft_height=250&url=39713871](https://serveby.flashtalking.com/click/7/249648;8674159;0;209;0/?gdpdpr=${GDPR}&gdpdpr_consent=${GDPR_CONSENT_78}&ft_width=300&ft_height=250&url=39713871) 31/01/2026.

up would decide on who s/he wants to do with his/her life. However, the shift is not in all aspects of life. Parents and most guardians enroll their children/wards into school at a very tender age. Some of the parents do so to have space at home or workplace. They see the presence of the toddler around them as hindering them from fulfilling their roles at home or in the workplace. Parents or guardians who indulge in this practice are ignorant of the seamless transfer of knowledge to their children or relations. However, there is need to provide space for children who become wayward despite serious home training by parents, teachers and community members. Most of the times children are negatively affected when they grow up. It is based on the conscious or unconscious application of ethics on character formation in Nigeria that this topic was conceived.

What is Character?

There is no universal definition of character like most words in the humanities. The definitions and meanings are as many as the scholars and their fields of studies. It is common to use the word character in literary works such as poetry. The etymology of the word character is derived from the Greek term *charaktêr*, which means the mark impressed upon a coin. This mark distinguishes one coin from another. It is possible to use a mark on the face of an identical twin to differentiate one from the other. This is applicable to animals or figures with near resemblance. In philosophical parlance, especially in ethics, character refers to the moral dimension of a person which gives out the synonymic relation between ethics and morality. Confer *Ethics and Democracy in Nigeria*.⁵ Charact is defined as “a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform

⁵. See Terfa Kahaga Anjov's *Ethics and Democracy in Nigeria*.

motivation and guide conduct”.⁶ This definition can best be understood if the use of character by philosophers and psychologists can be distinguished thus:

Philosophers typically think that moral character traits, unlike other personality or psychological traits, have an irreducibly evaluative dimension; that is, they involve a normative judgment. The evaluative dimension is directly related to the idea that the agent is morally responsible for having the trait itself or for the outcome of that trait. Thus, a specifically moral character trait is a character trait for which the agent is morally responsible.⁷

Throughout this paper the use of character takes with it the moral dimension which is consistent with the Aristotelian concept of character which is driven the term virtue. Character as virtue is gotten from the Greek word is ἀρετή arete which Aristotle interpreted it to “excellence”. He defines excellence as a quality that makes an individual a good member of its kind. The ax has the ability to cut wood. This means that it is not the ax that is excellence. It is its possession of the ability to cut wood well or finely that makes it excellence. It is what the ax possesses that makes the example fitting in the ax. The nature of an ax is to cut wood well. Whenever an ax is able to cut wood well, it is considered to be excellence thus with the ability to fulfil its primary function. In the same way the Aristotle's analogy excellence applies to a human being. The courageous person has emotions, feelings and actions. How the person puts these properties to an event defines whether or

⁶. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

⁷. Moral Character. Retrieved from <https://iep.utm.edu/moral-ch/>

not a right action is sufficiently having moral excellence.

The human being is by nature a rational being. He possesses the ability to reason. It is this ability to reason that compels Aristotle to talk about good moral character as “human excellence” or one with “excellence of soul”.⁸ It is only when a human being has good moral character that the individual can act humanly. The art of acting humanly is not automatic to every human being. Here, ethics brings out its true meaning of custom. A habit that becomes a second nature of an individual. There is a fitting disposition which is not mistaken to be epileptic in occurrence. An individual human being who is sane must consciously learn to have good moral character through constant instruction and teaching. The moral agent decides for the intermediate response between the excessive and deficient using his excellencies of character or practical wisdom.

As used in ethics, character goes beyond “the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves”.⁹ It is a framework for cultivating good character. The 'good' provide ethical ingredients to character. Such vital ethical values are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. When dealing with the character of an individual, care should be taken not to generalise it to imply other members of society. The character of an individual defines the quality through which a particular individual expresses him/herself. A kind, honest, respectful, helpful person is always kind hearted at all times, not occasionally and are easily used to paint a picture of a good or bad person.

⁸. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1. 13

⁹. The Britannica Dictionary of Character

The Trouble with Education in Nigeria

There is no day that passes without the news of the complaint that most graduates in Nigeria are unemployable with most of them not able to read and write even a bad sentence fluently. This is in addition to their inability to defend their certificates they parade around aimlessly. The universities have become avenues for breeding cultists, immoral and hotbeds for training corrupt leaders. As if the nomenclature is not bad enough to handle, there is persistent definition of the graduates of most universities in Nigeria as certificate racketeers with lecturers' strong interests in seeking sorting for grades. At the point of admission applicants are offered admission based on the highest bidder not the highest scorer in Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) result. Graduating students who do not have cash offer their bodies for scores not just for graduation, but to graduate in flying colours. These practices have defiled the notion of every degree is offered in learning and character.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as one of the critical stakeholders in education pours out the blame of poor education on “Chronic underfunding, bad leadership, infrastructural decay, poor conditions of learning and service, promotion of mediocrity, shortage of personnel (academic, technical and administrative), and entrenchment of orthodoxy, parochialism and chauvinism.” In spite of these challenges, the salient idea of character formation is drowned away by the necessity to graduate with a degree. Those who have found their way into the universities, the quality of degree might not matter, what makes sense is that a degree is awarded. What really matters outside of the university is the person you know to make the connection workable. People who have read English language are

working in the bank, graduates of medicine are politicians, political scientists are farmers while graduates of philosophy are in most managerial positions.

Apart from students who just want to graduate because they have a successful family name to support them or they have their bodies to use or wealth to get whatever they want, there are the bookworm types in most institutions. This group of students do not have any need for moral character. All they seek to get is good results. They are not interested when mention is made of character. They have made promises to their parents or themselves to graduate in flying colours. They want to post on their Facebook page their final result of First Class Honours in their chosen discipline. The interest they have is in the learning aspect of education because they intellectually excel in the age of technological advancement. They think and feel that they can fit into the work force and face the challenges of life. They are unaware of the missing link which is the absence of a moral life which was to be initiated by their parents, teachers and members of the community.

Most of the parents have relinquished this responsibility to teachers. This poor attitude has culminated in the unholy culture of celebrating quick wealth and riches to the detriment of hard work especially the over dependence on “paper qualification”.¹⁰ The kind of education required in Nigeria today is one that can inculcate moral character to achieve a certain kind of person who is the total man. The total man is defined as “one who's cognitive, affective, and psycho-motive domains have been sharpened by the instrument of education, and thus can contribute maximally in high level job

¹⁰. Dailytimes Newspaper (2015). Rush for paper qualification. Dailytimes, Sunday, 23 August Editorial.

positions with minimal supervision”¹¹ is completely lost on the altar of insecurity of human interest. It is very difficult to get the targeted balanced employees who has distinguished in both learning and character.

Character Formation through Education

Education was introduced to younger children because they are the best agents of change in any society. No society should be interested in shifting responsibility of child education to either the parents or schools. It is the primary responsibility of parents to enroll their children in schools and the government must consider the education especially character formation of the children who would later become competent adult citizens as a human right not a privilege. The first teacher of a child is the parent or parents. The child learns and expresses whatever is learnt without any fear of contradiction. The child at the age of 2 – 12 years has no need of understanding extremism of ethical theories such as deontologism and teleologism. They have no need for Aristotle's virtue ethics. They are more concerned with human action which in most cases was their immediate parent or parents and the recipient of the things said or done by their parents who is often the friends, children around the house or the children themselves.

Character is initially formed through observation of how individuals behave within a given environment. This is a practical approach to developing positive personal strengths by a personalised individual in life. This individualised learning is what I have

¹¹. Ukpai, Ukpai Eni and Ereh, Cecilia Emuji. “Current Challenges and the Needed Competencies in the Management of University Education in Nigeria”. *British Journal of Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development, UK, 2016: 74 – 86, 80.

described elsewhere as learning by doing.¹² It is suitable for apprenticeship engagements, for seminarians training for the priesthood, and for marriages. It was useful in Tiv traditional system when male children were taught how to dig heaps for planting yams. A child who observed the parents' actions and performs them accurately was rewarded with words of appreciation. A child who did not follow the parents' ways of actions was greeted with insults as punishment for wrong doing.

Parents who are very keen at the reaction of their toddlers may wonder why their children are excited at the use of words like good, sweet, excellent and beautiful. How did they learn these words without being taught? They are sad and express it immediately words like stupid, ugly, are used on them. Obviously, they have observed the words used on people around and have seen the reaction of such people. Traditional African societies, found reward and punishment as the most successful way of training a child or character formation. The aspect of rewarding good acts was not emphasised it was never wiped out. Young adult who was benevolent to the father was rewarded with a wife and the father bore all the expenses. What was always rang to the hearing of children was punishment for wrong acts. Scholars have always encouraged the adoption of this pattern for parents, teachers and community members to be morally upright when dealing with little children. However, in practice most adults take things for granted as some adults go round naked, some engage in sexual acts before their children in the name that the children are too small to remember the things they observe from their immediate vicinity.

^{12.} Terfa Kahaga Anjov, Damian Tersoo Anyam and Paul Dzwaiyol.

The Nigerians have been having several policies on education ranging from the 6-3-3-4 introduced in 1982/83 to the 9-3-4 model. The content of the first six (6) years of education at the primary level is centred on early learning and basic education. The junior secondary stage is characterised by a curriculum designed to equip students with basic skills for self-reliance, yet there is nothing in the curriculum of junior secondary schools in Nigeria on character formation or education. The error is attributed to manipulators of the educational system who have not seen “any difference between religious instructions in schools and character education; hence, for them, it amounts to a duplication of efforts to have another subject in form of moral or character education when teaching of religious values may play the role of character education”.¹³ The mistake of the curricula manipulators do is the failure to see character formation as something deeper than memorising ethical values.

Character formation provides the student with competent skills which “equip students and teachers with both skills and attitudes for sustainable future”.¹⁴ This is a skill which reveals a deeper appreciation of the maxim 'practice makes perfect'. Becoming an individual with good moral character is an everyday task. It is like learning how to play a musical instrument on a daily basis. It is like practicing mathematics, like philosophising with the asking of questions and question of answers until your questions are unanswerable and your answers are unquestionable. The inability to build the questioning elements in the curriculum at the primary

^{13.} Akinjide Aboluwodi & Kehinde E. Akinsanoye. “Character Education and Virtue Ethics in Nigerian Schools”. *Journal of Education, Teaching and Social Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2019: 1 – 11, 2.

^{14.} P. Bakhati. Promoting Education for sustainable development. Role of teachers. *Journal of Training and Development*, 1(1) 2015: 21-26, 22. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jtd.v1i0.13086>.

level has denied pupils of the inspiration to cultivate the spirit of self-reliance and control.

The senior secondary level curriculum is focused on preparation for higher education; emphasis should be built on creating avenues during interactive session for dialectic using complex situations students may find themselves in. There is great need for secondary school teachers to be taught during in service trainings to generate principles that can guide students to participate in the questioning and answering sessions in an attempt to satisfy their philosophical curiosity. and finally, the tertiary education the general studies should provide avenues that can enhance students' understanding of ethical principles that are meant to develop higher-level skills sets for effective and efficient manpower development for the larger society.

However, due to poor implementation of the core objectives of the system, it failed to deliver on the mandate it was designed. Probably, this is the reason for the modification of the structure to the 9-3-4 model. The challenge in the Nigerian educational sector is alarming. The sector was encumbered by shortage of enrolment of pupils and students, shortage of qualified teachers and lecturers, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, lack of quality teaching materials, and in recent times, it is the infestation of corruption that is supporting insecurity. Other frustrating challenges militating against balance education in Nigeria are high out-of-school rate which is likely traced to insecurity and increasing craze for mobility of children of school age to yahoo educational centres. This drastic shift has increased the rate of cybercrime. The poor implementation of entrepreneurship centres has negatively affected the relevance of curriculum and vocational trainings at all levels of education.

Constitution as the Reservoir of National Ethics

The Constitution of a country may be either written or unwritten. The constitution contains moral principles, values such as justice, equality, freedom, responsibility and common good and the ethical standards that reflect the cultural, historical and ideological foundations which are collectively endorsed and upheld within a nation or society. It is in the light of the above that it is right to refer to the Constitution as the Reservoir of National ethics. What then is national ethics? “National ethics are the moral principles, values, and standards that are collectively endorsed and upheld within a nation or society”.¹⁵ The role of national ethics is “shape societal norms, attitudes, behaviour and influence various aspects of public and private life including education, politics, economics, and social relations”.¹⁶ The idea of reservoir used in this study goes beyond serving as a melting point for unity in diversity of the different historical experiences, cultural beliefs, societal priorities.

National ethics provides a unifying force for effective promotion of social cohesion, civic responsibility and a sense of belonging for every citizen. The manner a citizen of Nigeria conducts his/herself within or outside the shores of the country is often referred to as the Nigerian way of behaving is not a mistake. It ordinarily means that the individual has drank from the ethical waters of Nigeria. The individual is expected to think as a Nigerian, dance as a Nigerian, sing as a Nigerian and act as a Nigerian. The negative exploiters of the Nigerian syndrome see nothing good in and with Nigeria as a

^{15.} Olokooba, Issa Nasiru & Lebari Michael. “Influence of National Ethics on Character Building among Social Studies Undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria”. *Kontagora International Journal of Educational Research (KIJER)* Vol. 2, Issue 1, January 2025: 138 – 150, 138.

^{16.} W. A. Galston, “Anti-pluralism: The populist threat to liberal democracy”. In Hahn, C. L., & Kahne, J. *Teaching democracy: Educator*, 42(1), 2018: 12-17.

state and Nigerians as citizens. This group of people do not see anything good in the well framed national ethics which represents the moral foundation of the country. They have held it upside down for their personal interests and aggrandisements. The stance of this group is the result of failed education in Nigeria which has a significant role to play in shaping the character of individuals in society.

The quality of education a citizen gets from the country helps in the promotion of national consciousness. A child is well groom educationally appreciates the philosophy of collective interests and works hard to remain loyal to it. He does not run away from carrying out civic responsibilities like voting at elections. Most educated Nigerians are ready to serve the country as Independent National Electoral Commission ad hoc staff. Voting at elections for them is a waste of time. They are interested in deploring their wealth of knowledge and experience in the areas that can pay them peanuts as collation officers and returning officers. Politics is a dirty game for the devil and his cohorts. They are not call to serve the devil, but often than not they are quick to comply that the devil in the political leaders is not handling their welfare issues with dispatch. These are the same individuals who in their days in school were not committed to the idea of character formation. The ultimate thing to do is to engage in the education ethics cycle.

Ethical education Cycle

Ethics is a universal discipline. It is found in every single activity of humans. There is ethics in teaching and learning. It is found in the market place, it is central to the relationship between the physician and patient, between the lawyer and client and the religious leader and the congregant, the political leader and the led. This simply

means that no one can deny the inevitability of ethics in living a worthy life free of blemish. This idea propels in the mind the need for building an ethical education cycle in life for every individual can be traced to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. According to him, "One diligently strives to formulate moral values and principles that hold validity and applicability independently from the influence of the group of individuals holding them and apart from the individual's identification with that group".¹⁷ It is a truism that ethical education is a further development that revolves around Jean Piaget's cognitive development which ultimately begins at the early stage in the life of a child.

However, Lawrence Kohlberg identifies the six stages of moral development into three categories as pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. He goes on to explain that in the first stage, the child learns by observing how the actions of those around him/her directly affect him/her physically. The child observes friendliness and harshness from the mother. A mother that speaks softly grooms a soft-spoken individual if all things are equal. Through ages 2 – 12, the child has no need for rationalisation of ethical theories to decide on the action to take. The child is controlled in instinct and observation to meet the demands of life and to avoid being punished for carrying out certain actions.

When the child enters the conventional stage which is between the ages of 7 and 16, individual children begin to apply principles to determine the choices and decisions that guide their actions which are beneficial to them. The choices and decisions come with responsibility as the choices must be in conformity with social

^{17.} Lawrence Kohlberg. *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development*. Vol. 1. Harper & Row. 1981

norms and societal expectations. The post-conventional stage is referred to as adulthood. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria sets the age one becomes an adult at 18 years. Every action count and responsibility is fully covered. A fully grown individual should be well directed by reflectively contemplating on moral principles and universal values.

This is a necessary ethical push needed to live a life in fulfilment of human nature as a rational human being. Good moral character comes with clearer understanding of diverse ethical perspectives that bring about social agreements. This pragmatic approach is purposeful transfer of knowledge from what was achieved through learning by doing at the early stage of life and the teaching of philosophy, logic and human existence at the tertiary institutions and adoption of universal moral principles that prioritise living a good life or the cultivation of a virtuous life.

Ethical education cycle is successfully achieved when an individual agrees to have lived a happy life. Is a happy life achievable? This is very difficult to say, but it is not an impossibility if an individual consciously strives to be better on a daily basis. A happy life is achievable by constantly pursuing a virtuous life which needs interpersonal skills, popular participation in positive activities that contribute to the well-being of others in society. it is important for students to engage themselves in valuable societies and union activities. These engagements have the potential to introduce students into governance, community service and other forms of volunteerism.

Effective participation in school activities is a gateway to inculcating the culture of active citizenship which enriches the

graduates' socio-political competences. The mandatory national service year through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), provides the avenue for graduates to practice some of the democratic values like freedom, equality, justice, and human rights. The critical thinking learnt during philosophy, logic, and human existence is put into practice by analysing contemporary social movements like political parties, materialism, power and authority.

Personalised Ethical Attitude

The essence of an educational ethics cycle is to build a personalised ethical attitude. It keeps the individual ethically on the toes. This is a life cycle that reflects a well-groomed moral character - personal attitude. It is referred to as personal attitude, but its outcome has far reached influence on the individual, members of the immediate community and above all for a greater future of generations yet unborn. People who have developed personal attitude in life are good leaders. They emerge as responsible citizens with the idea of providing service to humanity. When they assume leadership positions, they are servant leaders not by name but by action. The lead by example of practicing what they say and saying only the things that they too can do in every circumstance.

A good leader develops emotional and social quotient. The leader feels the feelings and needs of the people. Positive personal attitude throws out every sense of egoism by avoiding self-centeredness. It is a well-known fact that the task of leadership is achieved through a life of cohesion that is highly driven by ethical values of justice, equality, equity and respect for human dignity and rights. The best way to achieve this goal in life is to decentralise activities and programmes. For instance, a governor can delegate powers to deal with contractors to the commissions in various ministries. The local

government chairpersons can award contracts to qualified contractors at the local government areas without sending the applications to the governor for approvals.

Nigeria's Problem is Strictly Attitudinal

The teachings on character formation are assumed to create an individual with a certain kind of disposition to conduct or act in certain ways and certain sort of circumstances. The disposition does not take place instantaneously. It is built over very long time – it is an assumed habit or second nature of a person. An individual is known for a certain conduct. So, when a particular individual performs a certain action, the people who know that individual are no longer in doubt whether or not the person was the same person that did the act. The trailing description of Nigerians by A Grzankowski speaks volumes of the attitude of average educated elites in the country. He refers to some educated elites in Nigerians as “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”.¹⁸

This observation is not based on occasional occurrences. It has strong support to repeated actions of a particular individual within a wider spectrum of diverse conditions. Consider a person who tells the truth to friends always, but lies to the school authority can be said to be honest and therefore possesses the attitude of truth telling.

¹⁸. A. Grzankowski. *Real sparks of artificial intelligence and the importance of inner interpretability. Inquiry*, 2024: 1 – 27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2023.2296468>

It is significant for everyone to strive to be associated with a particular attitude by being consistent with the things we say, the things we do and at every given opportunity, there should be no diversion even if it is going to cost us unhappiness. This is always the missing link when dealing with most Nigerians in contemporary society.

It is an attitude for a group of people to refuse to participate in partisan politics, because it is a dirty game. A good person who decides to go into partisan politics to offer selfless service and change the narrative should see that path less travelled is irrelevant to his success. For instance, teachers are always condemned for poor performance in public service, but the case of Governor Aper Apollos Aku, the first elected governor of Benue State has lived an unmatched legacy in the administration of the state. What governors do after him is to rehabilitate and renovate the edifices constructed during his tenure. The lesson to be learnt from the good works of late governor Aper Aku is John Rawls suggests in *A Theory of Justice* that “the representative member of a well-ordered society will find that he wants others to have the basic virtues, and in particular a sense of justice”.¹⁹ This is the output of a good citizen who is inculcated with moral character.

It is an attitude for students to refuse to read hard for examination, but spend their valuable time copying on small pieces of papers to use as chips in examination halls during examinations. It is an attitude for a governor to receive subversion from the Federal Government allocation for payment of workers' salaries and refuse to pay the others their due wages. It is an attitude for drivers to overload their vehicles with passengers and goods to make

¹⁹ John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1971, Pg. 436.

maximum gains to the detriment of the safety of humans in the vehicle, it is an attitude for teachers to abandon their classes for other side hustles to meet their personal and family needs in the name that the wages cannot take them home. It is an attitude for the police to attach their men and women to VIPs, rather than protect the communities from lawless and harmful citizens. It is apt to reiterate at this juncture that an attitude is not a one-off thing. It is consistent and long-term human process.

Poor Rewarding System

It is on record that children at the early stage in life perform actions essentially because of the reward system. This thought pattern drives the individual throughout life. The moment reward system appears to reduce its force of applicability; there is bound to be an increase in the rate of misconduct which is caused by a “decline in moral values”²⁰ among individuals within a particular society. Character formation mixed with ethical values is expected to produce a mature human being with human capacity for reason. The real humans are persons of high moral standards. In Akan, they are referred to as *oye onipa paa* which literally means she is a real (human) person²¹ as a moral agent and must always be held responsible for any action that is performed. It is with this mature individual in mind that reward system can be discussed in Nigeria.

Nigeria can never be challenged by lack of scholars, scientists,

^{20.} Emmanuel Lucas Nwachukwu, Chukwuma Victoria Azuka, and Unegbu Lasbrey Ikechukwu. “Education and Character Reformation in Nigeria Contemporary Society: Challenges and Prospects”. *Journal of Education Method and Learning Strategy*, Vol. 2, Issues 03, September, 2024: 946 – 956, 950

^{21.} Wiredu, Kwasi and Kwame Gyekye. *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992, Pg. 108.

entrepreneurs, artists, technologist that can inspire the whole world. What is seriously missing is the ability to think reflectively and strategically as rational human beings. How else can lack of electricity, clean safe water, functioning schools, public safety, security in our nation? With the abundance of mineral and human resources, the target of the Nigerian populace is to build workable systems, to govern with vision and to act in the principle of unity in diversity and purposefulness to achieve order in the nation. It has always been on my mind that what have been the obstacle to good governance, development and speedy transformation of Nigeria is the lack of appropriate reward systems.

Democratic governance returned to Nigeria since 1999, political leaders have emerged on the political stage, they have made promises with philosophy, yet they have won elections. During their first term in office majority of them have become consumed with staying in power. This does not tie them to a particular position in politics. They move from being a party official to winning political office like the chairman of a Local Government Area; after winning several local government elections, they move to the senatorial elections. An individual can be a Senator, then become a Minister and a Secretary to the Government of the Federation like in the case of Senator, Dr George Akume. What some of the leaders in Nigeria do is to manage crises in a way that a state of emergency may not be declared. Many of our leaders in recent times think of the kind of society to be built for the future.

There are no role models to serve as standards, to provide a sense of direction that goes beyond winning periodic elections as a fulfilment of personal ambitions of politicians. Public funds are referred to as national cakes. The civil servants who have

knowledge of their institutions in every department have shifted from guiding the implementation of policies to guiding corrupt political leaders to loot the common wealth with impunity. They are involved with budget padding. The university system is not left out of the rot and is rapidly going down. There are glaring cases of corruption against Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, members of the Governing Councils and Contractors and lecturers are not paid well.

There is death in organising graduation and prize giving day in most of the primary schools in Nigeria. Best performing pupils and teachers were called out to be appreciated with gifts and prizes. It was a way of boosting the morale of those who did well and a way of encouraging other to develop the spirit of hard work, commitment and dedication to duty whenever the opportunity arises. When the spirit of reward was not diluted with materialism, those who awards were fulfilled and it served as a springboard to do more. What is obtainable in most primary and secondary schools is that parents are tasked heavily to contribute money for graduation for every programme. The toddlers in the creche graduate into nursery class, while those in the nursery graduate into the primary class. The sacrifices of school administrators made to buy drinks and snacks have been lost. Graduation and prizegiving days are ceremonies organised to rift hard earned money from parents or guardians. The aspect of encouraging young learners to copy good attitudes from their peers is completely replaced pageant contest of Mr and Miss this or that.

Convocation ceremonies in most universities are well planned for as a conduit pipe to siphon money from unsuspecting public. Graduating students are forced to pay heavily for the graduation

gowns, honorary doctorate degrees are awarded to individuals who are expected to pay so much money to the coffers of the university for the use of the Vice-Chancellor of the day. Most universities do not give out the certificates together with the value of awards as publicly announced at the convocation. In Nigeria, more funds are spent on entertainment shows than encourage researchers through adequate funding. There is no educational programme that is done to bring out the best young innovators in Nigeria to match the BBNajia. Even if one is thought of and executed, the value of award in cash is far from encouraging participant to engage in the activity.

Conclusion

Nigerians are docile followers who are forever looking forward for a greater society. The good intention of leaders to make Nigeria better by introducing character formation at the early stage of child upbringing at the level of the family will yield positive fruits. The moral education of these younger Nigerians is intentional. A conscious refocusing on character formation is an essential pathway to shaping not just intelligent citizens, but the production of morally and ethically sound generation that is willing to combat perennial moral decay, inequality and put to an end cry for lack of opportunities due to selfishness of few individuals in the country.

The idea of learning by doing must be encouraged among parents who should be made to see themselves as the first teachers of morality. It is very important to encourage the character part of education more than the learning aspect to cushion the poor attitude expressed by the Gen Z in contemporary society. There is abundant hope that if the opportunities of early child training are put to use, citizens that are honest, transparent, accountable, self-control, discipline and integrity will be found in Nigeria in their numbers.

This turnaround education project will produce great Nigeria youth that will change the status of Nigeria as derogatorily used outside the shores of this wonderful country.