

Resuscitating the Educational Sector in a Depressed Economy: Relying on Transformational Leadership for Effective National Development

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Abstract: Education remains an indispensable tool for effective social transformation and economic prosperity of nations yet, it remains unfortunate that this all important sector is been toiled with by political leadership in Nigeria. This has marred developmental trend occasioned by leadership challenges due to failures to identify core values that could sustain the economy for national growth and development. However, some factors are responsible for this mischief which include among others; ethnicism and nepotism, political corruption, accountability challenge, poor leadership recruitment and promotion of mediocre to leadership positions of authority. The paper concluded that relying on leadership who would inspire subordinates to work for the wellbeing of their organization as well realize the individual need for self development, accomplishment and growth becomes the way forward to restore the lost glory in our educational system. The study suggested for the training of leaders ahead of the herculean task of leadership since no meaningful growth and development can be achieved by organizations without a clear vision and focus of its leadership. It further suggest for adequate funding and equipment of educational institutions with required facilities and manpower needed to be effective, if national development is to be achieved.

Keywords: Accountability challenge, ethnicism and nepotism, leadership crises, political corruption, repositioning education.

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INTRODUCTION

The deterioration in the standard of education and lack of leadership commitment towards revitalizing the sector for national growth has become a thing of worry. There is a clear indication to the fact that the Nigerian economy is at the verge of collapse considering the prevailing breakdown and lack of moral and social values among citizens. This has contributed to the declining quality of education in the Nigerian state and the negative impact on its economic sustainability (Kingdom & Maekae, 2013). Education is presupposed key to unlocking dwindling economies such that no nation talks of development without recourse to its educational system as it is the bedrock of development but the reverse becomes the case in Nigeria, where inequalities and double standards of operation seems prevalent. A situation where

indigenes of a particular zone are given free assesses to education and others from different zones deprived or given different standard to assess same standard and level of education in the same country.

Yekini (2013) argued that rather than becoming an instrument for effective national development, education in Nigeria had become the tool for mass destruction as most beneficiary of education are found to pawn frequently incited or mobilized into violence by political leadership due to their disadvantaged economic situation. Nevertheless, this failure is widely attributed to weak leadership roles and function as Eketu and Edeh (2019) contended that leadership in Nigeria has experienced sequential failures in all aspect of life thereby giving credence to depleting socioeconomic, cultural and political values in the entire system. Thus, this paper tends to seek for modalities to resuscitate the educational sector within the depressed Nigerian economic quagmire using transformational leadership approach as a way out of the ugly menace bedeviling the country. Hence, the call for a clear analytical approach that appreciates the inherent complexities that stand to proffering workable solutions for revamping the system other than politicizing it becomes inevitable (Kingdom & Maekae, 2013) if national development is to be achieved and or discussed in Nigeria.

EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

State of the Nigerian educational system

Illiteracy remains the leading factor widening the gap between developing and advanced nations of the world (Ofoha, 2012) which some scholars believed societies with high literacy rate boast economic growth and development and are somewhat the most wealthiest nations as they come close to controlling the global economy (Gabbar, Honarmand & Abdelsalam, 2014). However, it remains difficult to develop when greater percentage of a nation's population are excluded and or deprived of access to basic education. Nevertheless, this notion intensified efforts to the call for concern as there remain inequalities in term of access to education as several millions of indigent Nigerians are been denied or excluded from the process and outcome of education (Ofoha, 2012).

Unfortunately, the state of the Nigerian educational system is crumbling despite the abundant rich resources at the nations' disposal. This, Gbenu (2013) noted that school structures are dilapidating, infrastructures decay and collapse, poor method of quality assurance, declining teachers quality, etc. Yet leaders clamoured for national development without perceiving the educational need of the country on daily and annual basis. Also, Ugwu (2015) argued that in the past, Nigerian graduates were highly sorted due to their excellent performance globally but unfortunately the story made a u-turn from 1980s when the system started degenerating to the extent of it becoming drowsy and prostrate. The ugly scenario has even gone to the extent of primary school pupils not having seats to sit in classrooms and secondary schools hardly conduct practical while tertiary institutions lack infrastructure and are poorly funded as a result of mass corruption, poverty, politicization of the system to favour personal and group interest, etc (Ugwu, 2015). Hence, these are attributed to placing emphasis on certification than the required skills and knowledge in the individual. However, the question on how to bail Nigeria out of these shackles considering the kind of leadership we have in position of authorities that rather perceived corruption as a way into governance than evil to humanity becomes questionable while begging for critical answers.

Quality of education in Nigeria and the need for adequate funding

A nation's quality of education speaks laud of its access to the world body of knowledge (Gbenu,

2013) which by implication raises the level of individual skills and efficiency to express capabilities and potentials. Education in a civilized setting equip recipients to create jobs other than seeking job as it enable beneficiaries to explore and manipulate their environment to their advantage. However, the heart of national building hinges on the standard and quality of its educational system (Ugwu, 2015) therefore it becomes vital for nations to educationally equip its citizens in order to provide the needed foundation for genuine sustainable development.

A nations quality of education determine the quality of manpower as it reduces unemployment rate which impact positively on the individual quality of life and moral rectitude of society (Thom-Otuya & Inko-Tariah, 2016) as poor quality of education misplaces values. Iwundu and Inko-Tariah (2015) argued that it can only be feasible in an uncivilized setting that a rich trader becomes more recognized than a professor. However, the falling standard in Nigerian educational system is widely attributed to the high premium placed on certification than the quality of knowledge acquired by individuals (Uzorka, Uzorka & Okobia, 2011). Nevertheless, factors ranging from poor funding, incessant strikes, infrastructural decay, politicization of the system, bribery, double standards of operation, pulling down syndrome, etc (Thom-Otuya & Inko-Tariah, 2016; Iwundu and Inko-Tariah, 2015; Etesike, 2011) are responsible for the decline. Hence, Nigerian government need to adequately fund and equip its institutions of learning in order to avert the continual strike and provide the needed manpower to occupy strategic positions as well correct the issues of double standards of operation in-terms of admissions into tertiary institutions and employment among others in order to stimulate growth and development since quality educational system reflect on the quality of national workforce.

Repositioning education system in Nigeria

Education remains an indispensable tool for the attainment of national development (Amakiri & Igani, 2015) therefore concerted effort is required to bring about functional policies in the system in order to foster the needed growth and development. Nevertheless, the Nigerian nation need functional system of education to equip citizens with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude to enable individuals adapt to the change rapidly engulfing the political space (Ako & James, 2018). However, the nation can only surmount the intractable challenges facing its educational sector when political leadership changes the attitude of politicizing the system for personal gains and aspirations.

Hence, repositioning the sector for national growth becomes pivotal as scholars believed emphasis be placed on technical and vocational training of citizens as well as adequate funding by government to enhance easy accessibility becomes prominent (Abbah & Rifkatu, 2019) considering the serial failures of stakeholders in showing sincere concern and commitment to the development of the system despite its relevance to societal development.

STATE OF NIGERIAN ECONOMY

The crises ridden the Nigerian economy has evoked a lot of responses from scholars to the fact that the nation is under siege as it is driven by mass poverty, endemic corruption, economic stagnation, weak institution, political instability and social conflict (Lewis, 2014; Okeke & Aniche, 2013). However, the country's restiveness, social conflict and economic deterioration have placed the nation as a depressed economy considering the mismanagement of resources by political leadership. Recently, World Bank Report (2019) assert that the economic growth of the Nigerian economy remains muted since 2015 as 1.9% growth average was recorded in 2018 that remained stable at 2% in the first quarter of 2019 and domestic demand remains stagnated with private consumption at an inflation rate of 11%. Nevertheless, agricultural growth remains below

expectation due to herdsman farmer's conflict in the northeast and production has dropped as a result of power challenge.

Given the restrictions on importation of foreign goods, food items are expected to sky rocket thereby raising the standards of living to an unbearable strand. However, Olaopa, Ogundari, Akindele and Hassan (2012) attribute this shortfall to failed economic reform policies that couldn't guarantee dividends of democracy thereby worsen the socioeconomic fortunes of Nigerians who perhaps become victims to unfulfilled expectation and untold hardship with loss of confidence in the system thereby resolving to take solace in the political situation for survival while avoiding the government. Also, coupled with series of industrial actions and incessant killings in some part of the country without government taking moderate actions proves that, Nigeria as a sovereign nation lacks the political will for national development at the moment. Hence, it is believed with these indices that the Nigerian economy is under siege and this study seeks to come up with practical solutions that could aid policy makers develop workable policies that would address these inherent challenges via transformational leadership approach and models. However, considering the fact that Nigeria claims to be the giant of Africa with an estimated population of about 180 million people, she is still ranked 152 of 157 nations in the globe in terms of human capital index due to underinvestment with an unemployment rate of 23% and another 20% of its labour force underemployed as at 2018 (World Bank, 2019). The need becomes inevitable to resuscitate the educational sector if developmental stride is to be achieved.

LEADERSHIP

Owing to the fact that no entity survive without a leader, spell out the relevance of leadership to organization and survival of any nation which cannot be taken away from the development and advancement of Nigerian State. The concept is a crucial activity that requires the functioning of an individual called a leader who attempt to obtain co-operation and compliance from others in order to solve problems or accomplish an assigned task (Jaja, 2003). This individual must possess some basic skills to function effectively in the task and responsibility assigned. Amah (2010) sees leadership as the process of providing suitable environment that give rise to influencing people behaviour to strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the attainment and achievement of an organizational or group goal. McShane and Von Glinow (2018) view leadership as the process of influencing individuals as well providing an enabling environment for such individual to achieve organizational and team objectives. Also, Jones and George (2008) define leadership as the process by which an individual exerts influence over other people and inspires, motivate and directs their activities to help achieve group or organizational goals.

Central to these definitions is the theme of an individual called a leader who acts to convince or influence others to support and work for the accomplishment and achievement of an organizational goal (Jones & George, 2008; Jaja, 2003). However, Amah (2010) contended that the leader cannot be effective, if the working environment is not suitable for the smooth functioning of such individual to effectively execute his/her responsibility. Worthy of note is the theme of power and ability to command influence from subordinate hence, leaders need to be persistent with clear vision on goals it tends to pursue using the power within his/her control in an ethical manner.

Leadership Crises and Challenges in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, leadership in Nigeria has remained an elusive challenge since independence due to continuous failures to recognize core values that could sustain and position the economy for

national growth and development. The lack of identification to these core values had robbed Nigeria of its place of meaningful development such that it had rather become a blockage to the nation's wheel of progress (Kayode, Samuel & Isa, 2014). However, several factors account for these retrogression ranging from poor leadership recruitment and the promotion of mediocre to leadership position to political corruption, ethnicism and nepotism, accountability challenge, etc (Godwin, 2017). Interestingly, the need for value re-orientation to curb these menace among leadership in Nigeria becomes inevitable, considering the fact that leadership ineptitude has become pronounced to the extent that the nation is foist with leaders who lack effective and efficient ingredient for good governance in order to turn the wheels of Nigerian for good.

a. Poor leadership recruitment and the promotion of mediocre

One of the greatest challenges causing the slow pace of growth and development in Nigeria is the selection and promotion of mediocre into leadership positions. It is a fact that no institution runs on its own without an individual being in charge (Kayode, *et al.*, 2014) thus, a flaw in the leadership recruitment process leads to emergence of unqualified or ill-prepared leaders. Hence, Eketu and Edeh (2019) argued that the neglect on the culture of accountability by Nigerian public officers hinges on the promotion of mediocrity through political, religious and ethno-tribal bigotry. Nevertheless, it becomes a developmental tragedy and against the principles of development for an unqualified or person of no repute to oversee the activities of intellectuals as seen in the Nigerian State where illiterates and uncivilized citizens are placed in exalted positions to govern and lead the enlightened.

b. Political corruption

Corruption has remained an endemic global challenge that has marred development in all spheres of human endeavour. As an illegal and unethical exploitation of individual for personal gains, corruption strives in a politically weak institutional setting that is why developed economies put in effort towards its eradication from their environment in order to enhance progress and development. However, it is regrettably unfortunate that the democracy practiced in Nigeria had rather brought about retrogression, retardation, underdevelopment and poverty (Godwin, 2017) which had reduced Nigerians to endless misery. This proves the fact that leadership failures and their inability to rise up to their responsibility is a function of weak institutions which sets the template for leaders' desire for luxuries as a result of the erodent of moral values.

Eketu and Edeh (2019) noted that selective positions of honour within the Nigerian polity are mostly given to individuals with grievous allegations of public fund embezzlement or trial related cases. This behaviour tends to enhance corrupt practices among leaders that rather perceived the act as a way of life leading to political relevance than evil to mankind. Nevertheless, Nigeria can only surmount corruption challenges when honest analytical approach is taken (Kayode, *et al.*, 2014) and institutions strengthened with transparency through rudiment procedures.

c. Accountability challenge

Leadership failures in Nigeria are partly orchestrated by lack of accountability which has rather given impetus to corrupt practices among public officers. As a prerequisite for sustainable development and growth, leaders in organization need to account for their actions in order to build mutual trust among subordinate. Thus, the Nigerian environment

lack this due to weak political institution which has rather given rise to corrupt practices as most leaders in Nigeria see every given opportunity as a call to amass wealth rather than service to human need. Unfortunately, those held accountable for misbehavior often see the action as cruel and witch-hunt by an unfriendly successor in position of authority (Eketu & Edeh, 2019) rather than normality.

d. Nepotism and ethnicism

Nation building is near impossible in a State beleaguered with nepotism and ethnicism due to the diverse dialectical barriers. The development of the Nigerian State is not far from the above as the duo concept continues to cause colossal damage to its progress both in political, economic and social life of its existence. A situation where meritocracy is replaced for favoritism, language, friendship, relations, etc, rather than competencies and individual abilities. Godwin (2017) noted that the issue in Nigeria has been exalted beyond comparison as political appointment has been brazenly skewed in favour of certain region to the expense of others thereby reducing to nothingness the Federal Character Principles as enshrined in the constitution. Thus, the nation needs a transformational leader with a shared vision and purpose (Kayode, *et al.*, 2014) that would enable subordinates to be aware of the relevance of their jobs and performance (Jones & George, 2008) towards the growth and development of the economy and that of their own personal need of growth for the benefit of all. However, leaders must be chosen on the basis of moral and ethical standard through rudiment and transparent process.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Given the deteriorating state of the Nigerian economy and its educational sector occasioned by incessant strikes due to poor funding and the deplorable state of facilities in our institutions of learning, national development seems to be near impossible unless leaders with the requisite knowledge emerges to literally transform the system by making sweeping changes to revitalize this all important sector for renewed operation, Nigeria would remain underdeveloped. Leaders who would be ready to stimulate and inspire subordinate without considering the consequences it might face from political leadership. AlQatawenh (2018) believed that organizations in contemporary time require leadership with the potentials to inspire subordinates to get the best out of them in order to develop their skill and deliver these subordinate to advanced level of intellectualism. However, Weiping, Xianbo and Jiongbin (2017) noted that transformational leadership is a useful tool and strategy to achieving sustainable development.

The concept according to Cogner (2002) goes beyond incentive for performance to encourage and develop workers intellectually by transforming employee concern into significant part of organizational mission. Danguole (2013) believed that transformational leader understand the need for change in order to create certain ideal and get individuals to reach this ideal as well create cultures that could support the needed change and watch for signals requiring the new change. However, in the context of this paper, transformational leadership entails visionary leadership that inspires and motivates subordinates to accomplish an assigned task for the benefit of organization and its entire whole while ignoring self interest. Taking this definition to heart, transformational leadership requires an individual with an exceptional ability to deal with changes effectively. These changes according to Bass (1985) in Jones and George (2008) occur when managers transform their subordinate mindset and behaviour in three significant approaches.

- a. Leaders who would make subordinates to be aware of how relevant their assigned duties are to the organization and how necessary it is for them to immerse themselves in the job in order that the organization achieve its goal.
- b. Leaders who would make employees' realize the need for individual growth, development and self accomplishment.
- c. Leaders who would stimulate employees to work for the wellbeing of the entire organization and not just for their personal gains and benefit.

These behaviours need coincidence with assigned responsibility in order that the desired change comes to be effective as desired. Nevertheless, scholars have identified four mechanism, components or dimensions to measure transformational leadership (Warrilow, 2012; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Idealized influence: The extent to which a leader engage in promotion of clear vision that engender followers trust, respect and loyalty. The leader provides a role model for high ethical behaviour, instill pride, gain respect and trust (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Fatile, 2013).

Intellectual stimulation: The extent to which the leader encourages subordinates to be creative thereby challenging themselves to creatively overcome problems in cause of executing their task. These followers are encouraged and empowered by the leader to take personal responsibility for solving organizational problems in their groups and organizational level in consistency with the leader's vision.

Individualized or developmental consideration: The extent to which the leader encourages and support followers by giving them opportunity to improve on their capabilities and skills in order to grow and contribute independently to the success of the team. This enhance and fulfils individual need for self fulfillment, self worth, further growth and achievement (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013).

Inspirational motivation: The extent to which the leader present vision that inspires and spur followers to achieve future goals. In this context, the subordinates need to have a strong sense of purpose and meaning in the assigned task as this provides the compelling energy that drives success among the team or group.

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Nigeria undoubtedly boasts among the community of nations to be the giant of Africa whereas its teeming population wallows in abject poverty, penury and wants in all aspect of life yet, the country is flourished with abundance of resources. Unfortunately, these resources end in the custody and control of few who perhaps lack moral and social value orientations of life to sustain the nation for economic growth and prosperity. The implication of these maladies is that, despite the abundance Nigerian educational system lacks the quality and standard to compete with its contemporaries in Africa as none of its tertiary institutions is listed among the best ten institutions, yet we clamoured for development.

Regrettably, education has been universally acclaimed as an instrument for economic prosperity and social transformation such that no nation survives without recourse to its educational system but it remains unfortunate that this important sector is been toiled with by political leadership in Nigeria. However, it is not to the fact that the relevance of education is not felt in Nigeria but the challenge lies in the fact that unqualified and or mediocre are placed in

exalted positions of authority to oversee the qualified and most experienced. This becomes a developmental tragedy and suicidal for the desired growth and development of the nation hence, the dwindling state of the nation.

Given the above situation, hope is not lost if individuals with the requisite knowledge are given positions of authority to literally transform the system by making changes to revitalize the system for renewed operation. These individuals must be leaders who would remain an index for social change and be willing to motivate and inspire subordinates without expecting a beneficial consequence for their personal gains. Leaders that would go beyond personal incentive gains to encourage subordinates to achieving sustainable development for the entire system and not mediocre are what Nigeria need for effective national development. The paper concludes that relying on leadership who would spur individuals to work for the wellbeing of the entire system in congruence with their individual need for growth, development and self accomplishment remains the only way out of the dwindling economic situation as well as restoring the lost glory in our educational system.

In line with the stated conclusions above, we suggest the following as way forward in restoring the lost glory in our educational system;

1. Considering the relevance of education in nation building, the sector should be well funded and equipped with adequate facilities and requisite manpower needed to be effective, if national development is to be achieved.
2. Since no meaningful development can be achieve without efficient and effective leadership, mediocre in leadership positions should be discouraged or eradicated and replace with qualified individuals, experienced with sound minds.
3. Organizations at all level should endeavour to train leaders ahead of the herculean task of leadership since no meaningful growth and development can be achieved without leadership with clear vision and focus.
4. The promotion and placement of leadership positions in all sectors of the Nigerian economy should be on merit, moral and ethical standard rather than tribal and ethnicity background and orientations.

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