Ethical Foundations for Sustainable National Development: Integrating Morality and Business Education

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ABSTRACT

Quality education is, no doubt, a good tool for national development. For quality education to be available in any nation, there is the need for well-trained human resources and the availability of quality material resources. Business educators are very important in this regard because they are the purveyor of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be inculcated into trainees for both self- and national sustainability. This paper looks into morality and vocational education as essential tools of quality education for sustainable national development. Areas dealt with include conceptual clarifications, sustainable national development; indispensability of quality character in vocational development, and morality and successful vocation for sustainable national development. The paper concluded that education is the cornerstone of achieving a sustainable national development and this can be achievable through effective business education programme and character development.

Keywords: Morality, Business Education, National Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Morality and vocational education are essential and indispensable tools of quality education to sustain national development. Education is significant in human capital development globally. Every nation strives towards sustainable development and the vital roles played by education in this regard cannot be overemphasized. This is because there is a strong connecting link between education and development, socially, economically, technologically and politically opens people's mind for freedom, in addition to offering an opportunity for profitable investment. (Ayodele, 2013). Vocational education and training seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competences and international capabilities that are needed in an increasingly versatile international labour market and multicultural society (Finnish National Board of Education, 2008).

There is no doubting the fact that the rate of moral decadence in Nigeria is on the high side and this has affected the pace of development in the country. This calls for urgent re-orientation, a re-engendering and a re-focusing on our moral values which will assist in actualizing our potentials and harnessing our human and material resources, for a greater, purposeful, egalitarian and vibrant society. Obasola (2015) argued that for Nigeria achieve sanity in her social and political lives as a nation, citizens must covet the principles enshrined in our moral values because there cannot be development where morality is not given prominence among the people.

1.1 Quality Education and Development

Education is an important, potent, and essential key to achieving sustainable national development which can only be possible when the quality of its education should is improved (Boyi, 2013). Several developing and underdeveloped countries have sought economic development through several strategies and techniques but have not achieved the desired results (Elakhe, 2014). Quality education, as a dynamic concept, changes and evolves with time and is modified according to the social, economic, and environmental contexts, hence, quality education must be locally relevant and culturally appropriate, and take many forms around the world (UNESCO, 2005).

Laurie, Nonoyama-Tarumi, and Mckeown (2016) pointed out learners' cognitive development as a major explicit objective of all education systems and emphasized the role of education in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development as two important principles that characterize most attempts that define quality in education. Consequently, the major basis for discourse around quality includes 'respect for individual rights, improved equity of access and quality of learning outcomes, and, increased relevance'. Consequently, Nikel and Lowe (2010), analyzing various studies on quality education, proposed a framework of seven dimensions of quality that are held in dynamic tension which are: effectiveness, equity, responsiveness, relevance, reflexivity, and sustainability. Quality education is a mirage in Nigeria, hence the distance from sustainable development. There is therefore the need to put mechanisms in place to inculcate quality education for development.

1.2 Vocational Education and Development

Any education system that fails to equip its recipients with the necessary skills for self-reliance is incomplete. According to Udoye and Udum (2013), business education, as a branch of vocational education, should provide practical knowledge that enhances the performance of students, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to the nation's economic development. This means that students should graduate with competencies that enable them to adapt to the ever-changing society, acquire business-related skills, and become self-reliant, independent, and productive members of society.

Nwokike, Ezeabii, and Jim (2018) emphasized the importance of business education in students' lives, as it equips them with economic success skills and prepares them for successful careers. They stressed the relevance of business education in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria, as it equips recipients with lifelong skills for self-employment. Business education has the potential to drive industrialization through its entrepreneurship offerings and can contribute to social equity and sustainable development when given proper recognition by the government and other stakeholders.

Business education is a vital branch of Technical and Vocational Education programs.
It aims to instill in students the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for successful careers in business and office environments. Anyaeneh and Nzegwu (2015) defined business education as a program that enriches basic education by teaching careers, entrepreneurship, business understanding, office practices, and vocational skills. Onajite (2016) described business education as encompassing programs that cover business, office occupations, economic understanding, entrepreneurship, and the development of personal skills for future use. Schell (2003) highlighted that the objectives of business education include providing students with leadership and communication skills, as well as comprehensive knowledge about all aspects of business.

2. INDISPENSABILITY OF QUALITY CHARACTER IN VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Business education, as recognized by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), aims to contribute to the economic and social development of the nation by helping individuals understand and actively participate in society's growth. One aspect of this education involves teaching ethical principles and rules that should govern people's behavior in the workplace. According to Abiodun and Oyeniyi (2014), ethics is grounded in fundamental principles such as integrity, transparency, accountability, responsibility, and fairness. It also encompasses considerations of product quality, customer satisfaction, employee wages and benefits, and responsibilities towards the local community and the environment. Ethics, as a field of study, deals with distinguishing between right and wrong, good and bad, and encompasses moral duties and obligations. Ethical rules of conduct aim to provide guidelines for human behavior that contribute to the preservation of society and the well-being of its individual members.

Elakhe (2014) suggests that personal values and beliefs play a significant role in determining moral behavior and, subsequently, economic performance. The views of Velentzas and Broni (2010) indicate that business ethics refers to the moral principles and values that govern an organization's behavior, distinguishing between right and wrong. Business ethics can vary depending on factors such as the employees' cultural background and differs from one business to another. Incorporating core values like honesty, trust, respect, and fairness into policies, practices, and decision-making is a crucial aspect of business ethics (Hellriegel et al., 2008). Business ethics aim to establish a foundation of trust between consumers and various market participants, ensuring a certain level of confidence and reliability in business interactions (Alexandra, 2023).

Alexandra (2023) highlighted the following as principles of business ethics:

Fairness: Corporations strive to treat all stakeholders fairly. It is essential for a company to regularly assess its actions to ensure they align with community issues and activities, demonstrating good corporate citizenship. The company should actively engage in community development initiatives, promoting equal opportunities and equitable treatment for everyone.

Respect for others: As a responsible corporate citizen, it is important to treat clients and customers with utmost respect. Interactions with others should always be characterized by professionalism, courtesy, and respect.

Leadership: Many companies today aspire to excellence in fulfilling their responsibilities. Ethically conscientious executives understand the significance of their leadership roles and aim to serve as positive ethical role models through their conduct and decisions.

Accountability: Accountability involves holding oneself and others responsible for their actions. It entails a commitment to adhering to ethical practices and ensuring that others also follow ethical guidelines. Additionally, maintaining accurate records and accounting practices is crucial for business ethics, as it helps prevent any dubious activities.

Integrity: Integrity encompasses having a consistent character that aligns thoughts, words, and actions. Upholding integrity requires moral courage and staying true to one's principles, even when faced with challenges. It also includes values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and reliability. Individuals with integrity consistently make ethical choices and strive to uphold higher standards.
Honesty: Truthfulness is vital for fostering an ethical environment. Engaging in partial truths, omissions, or misrepresentations does not contribute to the improvement of a business's performance. It is important to communicate both good and bad news honestly, allowing for the development of effective solutions.

Law Abiding: Ethical leaders should ensure compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws. They should prioritize legality over exploiting any loopholes or engaging in unethical practices.
Responsibility: Employees must take responsibility for their work, and leaders should be accountable for their own actions as well.

Transparency: Stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, the local community, and employees' family members, should have access to relevant information about the company's financials, price changes, employment practices, wages and salaries, and promotions. While trade secrets need to be protected, businesses should strive for truthfulness and transparency to foster trust and success.

Compassion: Treating employees, the surrounding community, business partners, and customers with care and concern for their well-being helps foster a sense of closeness and positive relationships.

Loyalty: Leadership should demonstrate confidentiality and commitment to both employees and the company. Inspiring loyalty among employees and management ensures their dedication to ethical best practices.

Environmental concern: In a world with limited resources, damaged ecosystems, and changing climate, it is crucial for businesses to be aware of and concerned about their environmental impact. Companies should encourage all employees to discover and report solutions for practices that can contribute to existing damages and strive to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

According to Nwokike et al (2018), sustainable development can be defined as the comprehensive development of an individual. China, Lilly, and Igbemi (2017) and Hansa (2014) emphasize that sustainable development aims to enhance people's lives. Additionally, Hansa (2014) characterizes sustainable development as addressing the capacity of natural systems, along with the social, political, and economic challenges faced by society. It is seen as a holistic approach to improving the quality of life by responsibly utilizing available natural resources. In the context of business, sustainable development involves adopting strategies and practices that fulfill the present needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders, while also safeguarding and enhancing the human and natural resources required for the future.

3. MORALITY AND SUCCESSFUL VOCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The need arises for character development in our schools in preparation for our business organizations that our schools will be a reflection of the world of work. This will build into student's strength of character and reasoning in their relationship at work. According to Obasola (2015), it is argued that the development of individuals in social, political, and economic aspects cannot be considered complete without the presence of morality. The inherent qualities and characteristics that exist within every person are crucial for promoting social order, cohesion, and peaceful coexistence, and they serve as fundamental indicators for societal growth and development.

Therefore, true development can only be achieved when individuals in society embrace a culture of internal transformation that fosters the overall well-being of the community. In essence, development should be based not only on economic gains but also on the moral values of the people, as a nation that lacks moral potential alongside economic potential will likely experience severe poverty, as seen in the case of Nigeria. Human development is deemed more significant than solely focusing on increasing national incomes, as it creates an environment that enables individuals to realize their full potential and live productive, fulfilling lives in line with their needs and interests. Therefore, it is the people themselves who represent the true wealth of nations.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Education is an open door to freedom of mind, soul and body, the best of which opens people's minds to think critically, their hearts to embrace all, even when there is disagreement and all hands are to be practical in all endeavors. Sustainable development aims to balancing and transforming the world, when an individual develops in a field, having a sound education and a befitting life style, it helps personal development of that individual to be sustained which will result in the much needed growth in our national lives.

In view of the great importance of character for success in the development of the individual and the nation in general, it is, suggested among others, that:
➢ Management of institutions should make policies that condemn negative character in the school environment, applying sanctions where necessary.
➢ Seminars and workshops should be organized regularly for the students and lecturers of business and other vocational courses in the area of communication and moral living.

➢ Morality shold be emphasized in achieving vocational success.
➢ The methods and materials used in vocational education should be carefully adapted to the learners' needs. Programmes should be based on curricula designed around core knowledge, competencies and skills; to include the study of at least one foreign language of international use, which, while conducive to a higher cultural level, will give special emphasis to the requirements of communication, the acquisition of a scientific and technical vocabulary, and the need to prepare for international employment and multicultural working environments.
➢ Business/vocational educators should engage in personal development in order to be able to deliver appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude to trainees.
➢ Curriculum of business education should be relevant to the needs of both students and teachers.

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