



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The need for character development to strengthen institutional leadership cannot be underrated. The paper discussed character development for leadership effectiveness in higher educational institutions in Nigeria. The prevalent character bereavement experienced amongst higher education leaders and their subordinates necessitated the study. The paper asserts that the ills in the education sector and Nigerian society today emanate from the failure of leadership especially in higher institutions to embrace character development as part of administrative roles. The paper is of the view that unclear definition of leadership roles; inadequate support and resentment from subordinates, limited leadership training opportunities, limited access to leadership information and lack of mentorship programmes among others are the major barriers to character development in the institutions. The paper therefore suggests that: government and managers of higher educational institutions should be honest and transparent in the appointment of principal officers; deans, heads of departments and directors of units should 'lead by example' so as to inculcate good character in their staff and students; government and managers of higher educational institutions should encourage character training, mentorship and other leadership development programmes as measures for leadership effectiveness in the administration of higher education.

Keywords: Character Development, Leadership Effectiveness, Higher education, Institution.

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INTRODUCTION

Education play pivotal role in ensuring the socio-economic, political, cultural and technological development of any nation. It is for this reason that governments across the globe adopt education as instrument par excellence for National development. So, there is the need for institutional leaders of unquestionable character to be in positions to manage the affairs of

educational institutions if, the overall objectives of education are to be achieved. Effective leadership of any organization, society or group is unrealizable without sound character being consistently exhibited by those in positions of leadership. Character is the enduring distinguishing traits or attributes of an individual's ideals and conducts. It is fundamental in leadership such that organizational effectiveness, success and growth depend on it.

The need for competent and effective leaders of character in tertiary educational institutions has become necessary considering the revolutionary changes and the character crisis experienced in most organizations today. Effective leaders are needed in positions to respond to the changing and challenging issues and situations associated with institutional leadership. In the tertiary educational institutions, principal officers, deans of faculties, heads of departments and directors of units are major key player in institutional cohesion and growth. One of the many functions of school leaders is to create conditions in which other leaders emerge and be integrally involved in the problem solving and information process that drives the school forward (Smith & Piele, 2006). Therefore, the need to develop strong character not only in the leaders but also, in the followers is paramount.

Regrettably, in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria today, character related issues have remained a subsisting problem among the various shades of leadership. The leaders are observably, bereft of basic attributes (character) that are expected of them. Nkwor (2014) decried the flagrant display of immoral conducts and laxities among the leaders and entire staff community in tertiary educational institutions and how it has affected administrative effectiveness. According to him these character anomalies manifest in greed, selfishness, egotism, and all manners of untoward behaviours. It is observed that staff unconscientiously indulge in lateness to work, absenteeism, aiding and abetting of examination malpractices, altering of students' scores for sexual or financial gains, sexual harassment, rape, bloating of contract figures, receiving "kickbacks" from contractors and all sorts of corrupt manners resulting from character deficiency. Some do not see anything wrong in these acts as they are normal conditions for work

In this paper, it is believed that efforts at character development beginning from the principal officers, deans, heads of departments, and directors of units and students will strengthen leadership effectiveness in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The Concept of Character in Leadership

Since the introduction of character construct into organizational leadership, it has remained difficult to define. Etymologically, the word character is derived from an ancient Greek word "charakter" which refers to mark impressed upon a coin. Later, it came to mean a point by which one thing was differentiated from another; peculiar attribute, traits or qualities that distinguish an individual from another. The Greek philosophers in the early 5th century perceived character as an enduring mark of an individual's ideals and conduct as assessed in terms of will power (Helsey & Rriedman, 1981) cited in (de Brain & Verrier, 2007). In its most frequent usage, character applies to the series of psychological and emotional qualities of an individual which determine his behavior, thoughts, actions, temperament, and so on, it refers to the attribute or traits that define the actions and thought of someone that will determine the way in which the individual will tend to act in a particular circumstance. Character expresses the condition that

makes an individual unique and different from others. The major difference between character and behavior is that one's behavior in a particular situation defines his or her character. In other words behavior is the action that expresses the basic qualities or attributes that distinguish an individual from the other.

Character remains a necessary ingredient in institutional leadership. It is therefore necessary that those in positions of authority should possess good character if they must continue to be in charge in inspiring, directing and influencing the actions of others in the group. Ololube (2017) had stated that strong character equips institutional leaders with the skills to determine the richness of institutional presentation, growth and change. Stone and Stone (2013) described character construct in organizational leadership as a "tool box" containing the necessary elements required of a leader to overcome challenges. Unfortunately most leaders in business, politics, religion and academics have ruined their careers due to character deficiency, hence, the need for character development especially among leaders in higher educational institutions.

The Basic Character Traits an Institutional Leader Should Possess

Of course, there are certain inherent qualities and traits possessed by a leader which help him carryout the various leadership roles of directing, organizing, controlling and wielding a commanding influence over group members. Some of these traits are humility, honesty, integrity, courage, self-confidence and empathy.

Humility: One attribute that differentiate good leaders from the bad ones is their sense of humility. Humility is the quality of not thinking that one is better or more important than the other, Ololube (2018) had asserted that humility is that leadership attribute of being down-to-earth. However, leaders with humility usually take the initiative of lowering their status, not being arrogant but modest and doing things down-to-earth. Several researchers have viewed humility to be at the core of effective institutional leadership (Weick, 2001; Matteson & Irving, 2006; Van Dierendonck, 2011). This is because humility reveals the leaders' ability and readiness to acknowledge personal faults, mistakes and limits while spotlighting subordinates contributions and strengths (Dye & Lepine, 1998).

Honesty: Honesty is another fundamental character trait and one of the most admired personality attributes of any successful leader (Ololube, 2018). Honesty is the character attribute of being straight forward, truthful, trustworthy, fair and sincere in one's conduct, actions and deeds. In other words, honesty connotes consistent transparency and openness; willingness to communicate one's feelings or thoughts even when they are uncomfortable or unpopular. Bunting (2016) described honesty as the leader's most valued quality which serves as a gateway for trust and inspiration. An honest leader will always win the confidence as well as the respect of his subordinates.

Integrity: This refers to leader's unwavering commitment to do the right thing at the right time and place for the right reason (s). Abraham (2013) argued that integrity is an attribute which differentiates effective leaders from other people as integrity involves constant adherence to the truth by the leader regardless of whose interests are affected (Okoroma, 2016). In other words, leaders' integrity implies consistent morality irrespective of where or who is affected.

Courage: Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defined courage as mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty. Courage is a necessary trait of effective leadership. Voyer (2011) argued that other traits such as integrity, honesty, altruism, communication skills and decisiveness are not qualities of an effective leader if not backed up by courage. This means that, without courage no leader can display any of the traits expected of an effective leader. Courage is a leadership trait that distinguishes great leaders from excellent managers as it concerns having the spirit or mind to face difficulty, danger, pain and the power to take decisions without fear.

Obviously, leading in tertiary education institution is not easy, it is therefore, important that all those in various leadership positions in the tertiary educational institutions possess moral courage to be able to deliver in their leadership tasks.

Self-Discipline: Self-discipline, self-control and self-awareness are contextually interrelated. Self-discipline is a veritable leadership quality that enables the leader sharpens his willpower and decision making skills by displaying exemplary leadership. Disciplined leaders are self-aware and self-controlled in everything they do. Ololube (2018) defined self-discipline as the ability to discipline and train oneself for improvement. However, Tracy (2010) defined self-discipline as the ability to put off satisfaction in the short term in order to enjoy greater rewards in the long term. He viewed self-discipline from the lens of self-mastery, self-control and self-denial. Self-discipline is necessary for effective leadership in tertiary education institutions to strengthen staff confidence level, trust, motivation and overall discipline.

The Concept of Character Development in Higher Education Leadership

The leadership of higher education institutions for sometimes now have been on the search light of scholars of organizational behaviour especially with the increase in management responsibilities resulting from increase in students and staff population and due to advancement in technology. However, the Wallace Foundation (2013) is of the view that the central part of being a great leader is cultivating leadership in others. So, in this era of change, higher education institutions are required to consider how to develop their leaders on the appropriate leadership traits or qualities (character) to enable them adapt to the changing circumstances for the attainment of set goals.

Peterson and Seligman, (2004) defined character development as a chosen process or mechanism by which the universal virtues that are common across cultures, religions and societies are strengthened and expressed in the words and deeds of institutional leaders. They outlined the virtues as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperament and transcendence. Crossan, Mazutis and Seijts (2013) argued that character building relates to leadership development. They view leadership as not focused only on power or position, but rather on the capacity of individuals to bring the best of them to support and enable others, ensure the organizations they work with achieve at the highest level, and in doing so, contribute to the society. In this context, character development refers to the process employed by institutional leadership to instill or inculcate leadership qualities in the conduct of group members. It suggests strengthening leadership through display of unquestionable character for all to copy or emulate.

However, the puzzle about whether character can be taught, learnt and developed in organizations has generated divergent opinions. The ancient Greek philosophers including Plato and Aristotle had argued that character is something that is habituated, that it could be acquired

through the consistent application of the virtues over the course of one's lifetime rather than mere teaching of its principles in the classroom, conferences or seminars (Arjoon, 2000). This implies that, it is only through practicing virtuous acts that one can develop character since it is something not formed on one's own (in isolation) but, rather requires relationships and community – it is only through sharing of interests and goals with others that the bonds of kinship will allow for the development of social virtues (Crossan et al, 2013). Since individuals have the tendency to learn what is right or wrong, good or bad by observing people doing the same thing, one can deduce that character can be learned. Therefore, it is the responsibility of educational institutions generally to teach character by providing conducive school climate that will support virtuous behaviours by observing and discovering moral awareness and moral reasoning and self-reflection.

Concept of Leadership Effectiveness in Higher Educational Institutions

It is a common maxim in organizational leadership that, “success of any organization, society or group depends on the effectiveness of leadership in place”. In spite of this, the concept of ‘effectiveness’ is still misconstrued as it has always divided the academia in contentious debates. In the words of Peter F. Drucker “effectiveness means “doing the right things”. In leadership, effectiveness is reflected on the contingency theory which suggests that group effectiveness depends on interaction between leaders and the degree to which situations enable leaders to exert influence. Nkwor (2019) opined that leadership effectiveness is not about coercive and manipulative tactics employed in forcing people to act according to the wishes and aspirations of the leader rather, it is a key factor for any organizational success which results in enabling and empowering group members to do what they ought to do.

Robbins (1998) cited in Nkwor (2019) describes effective leaders as being capable of influencing their subordinates in their daily goal attainment efforts to perform beyond the actions dictated by formal authority. Jaiyeoba (2011) had maintained that educational leadership effectiveness should be determined by its productivity, stability, morale, turnover rate, degree of integration, maximization of individual staff potentialities and values contributed to the society. Therefore, organizational leadership effectiveness including educational institutions is attained when leaders are able to achieve the established organizational goals through day-to-day leadership efforts.

Balogun (1980) cited in Bassey and Bassey (2011) argued that leadership effectiveness of higher education leaders should be measured by the congruence between expected leadership behaviour of leaders in relation to their leadership tasks. This means that leaders' behaviours, attitudes or character can influence organizational effectiveness. Therefore, since character development is about leaders building or strengthening strong leadership traits, values and virtues to bring out the best in themselves and their subordinates for organizational goals achievement, it is believed that, leaders' display of humility, self-discipline, self-control, honesty, integrity, courage among others in the higher educational institutions could also inculcate good character in their subordinates.

Indicators of Effective Leadership in Higher Education of Institutions

The major feature that distinguishes a successful organization from an unsuccessful organization is effective leadership. Unarguably, leaders that make extraordinary achievements have certain

notable qualities. Kouzes and Posner (2002) posited that effective leaders seem to be almost universally proficient in five (5) different categories of leadership practices:

- **Challenge the process:** This is the first key indicator of effective leadership which according to Kouzes and Posner (2002) implies that successful leaders are willing to take calculated risks. Effective leaders also encourage and motivate their followers by providing opportunities for personal growth and development.
- **Inspire a shared vision:** Effective leaders help their followers connect to, and become supportive of, a common mission (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). When people can see an attractive picture of the future that embodies their values and believe that is achievable, it inspires their commitment and focuses their energies (Smith & Piele, 2006). Effective higher education leaders possess strong value orientation that sustains both individual and collective vision that unifies the staff and students.
- **Effective leaders enable others to act:** Effective leaders develop trusting and participatory relationships which inherently involve and value everyone in the organization (Goldering & Greenfield, 2002). Effective leaders of higher education empower their staff in order to nurture or sustain time collaboration.
- **Effective leaders model the way:** They lead by example; consistently and conscientiously advocating the values that represent the collective interest. Kouzes and Posner (2002) noted that effective leaders tend to model effective leadership when they are seen as dealing with complex issues in a thoughtful and incremental manner by mobilizing people to act as one.
- **Effective leaders encourage the heart:** Effective leadership attaches importance to recognizing and celebrating the efforts and accomplishments of followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Effective leaders are willing to share the credit of a job well done with others in order to validate their contributions, enhance their credibility and further motivate them (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Common Barriers to Effective Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

On campuses around the world, the leaders of higher educational institutions are faced with tremendous challenges; being called to meet the demands associated with an unprecedented increase in student population and expansion of higher education (Hughey, 2003; Maddux, 2003). This means that building effective leadership is necessary as it determines the overall performance of staff and students, as well as the success of the institution. However, there are several barriers which hinder the development of effective leadership in higher education. They are:

- **Unclear definition of leadership roles:** Role ambiguity is one of the major barriers towards effective leadership of higher educational institutions in Nigeria. For instance, in the first and second generation universities in Nigeria, the registrar was initially in charge of the student affairs office. The attempt to take out student affairs office from the registrar office was naturally resisted. However, the law establishing the university put the student affairs office in the hands of the vice chancellor who may appoint whosoever he wants to act on his behalf. The Dean of student affairs appointed by the Vice Chancellor has a good number of his officers from the registry department which by

extension, according to Nwafor (2006) gives the registrar a role in the administration of student affairs. In this case, there is always a clash of responsibility (role conflict) between the director and the student affairs officers on one part as registry staff and the Dean of students' affairs as an appointee of the Vice Chancellor. This affects the effective leadership of the unit.

- **In adequate support and resentment from colleagues:** This is one of the key barriers to effective leadership of higher education institutions in Nigeria. Often time the principal officers, deans and heads of departments experience passive or expressed displeasure from their staff on issues or policies they consider to be unfriendly (Henderson & Hawthorne 2000). Such resentment impedes leadership development and effectiveness which makes change implementation difficult in the institution. Oftentimes, staff members use their unions to resent management decisions. Without support from all stakeholders effective leadership development in higher institutions is impossible.
- **Limited opportunity for leadership training:** This is a factor that has contributed to poor leadership experienced in higher education in Nigeria today. The higher education leaders (principal officers, deans, heads of departments and directors) rarely have the opportunity to embark on leadership training to equip or improve themselves on the basic leadership skills. This is a major barrier towards the effective leadership development in higher educational institutions.
- **Limited access to leadership information:** Information is an essential factor for effective leadership development. However, due to the limited resources committed to and or researches conducted on leadership in education, most leaders in the higher education institutions find it difficult to access information about higher education leadership hence improving on leadership skills becomes difficult (Graybeal, 2006).
- **Lack of mentorship programmes:** This is one of the key barriers to effective leadership in education (Graybeal, 2006). It is not gainsaying the fact that, no higher education institution in Nigeria runs mentorship programme where young leaders (staff and students) can be nurtured in educational leadership. It has been observed that leaders of higher education institutions are saddled with so much work – management, administration and classroom responsibilities as in the case of deans and heads of department thereby not having enough time to mentor younger staff on basic leadership qualities.

Measures to Develop Leadership Character

The great Aristotle viewed character as something that is not formed on one's own, but rather that it requires relationships and community. It is only through sharing of our interest and goals with others that the bonds of kinship allow us to develop virtues such as temperance, generosity and friendliness (Horvath, 1995; Solomon, 1992) cited in Crossan, Mazitus and Seijts (2013). Therefore, the commitment to character development of institutional leaders should be approached from two dimensions:

Institutional commitment: At this level, institutional leaders can develop leadership character in their subordinates by legitimizing character as a valued topic of discussion, stimulating discussion and facilitating individual relation. As institutional leaders develop leadership profiles and address leadership character in those profiles, they emphasize the importance of leadership and promote discussion of it, especially in the context of developmental

coaching. More so, institutional leaders should formulate core values in the context of the work that staff do, and in a meaningful way. Values and virtues are learned in abstraction, they need to be inculcated explicitly in the institutions coaching and mentoring reinforced through training and development, and actively used in recruitments, selection and time management to achieve institutionally set goals.

Personal Commitment to Character Building

The question of individual's responsibility in becoming a leader with strong character has been addressed by Warren Bennis when he said that the leader never lies to himself, especially about himself, knows his flaws as well as his assets, and deals with them directly. A leader is his own raw material (Bennis, 1998) cited in Crossan, Ganz and Seijts, (2013).

Individual staff personal commitment to character building requires a degree of self-awareness, self-preparedness to examine habitual behaviour and consider whether there may be better ways to improve upon what could not work before. Staff limits their development as leaders by not having the discipline and courage to conduct honest self-assessment.

Character Development as an Option for Higher Education Leadership Effectiveness

The role of character development in leadership effectiveness cannot be understated in as much as character has been pin-pointed as a major contributing factor in the apparent decline of effective ethical leadership. Leaders need character, competencies and commitment to do the challenging and rewarding work of leadership (Gandz, Crossan, Seijts & Stephenson, 2010; Thompson, Gradek, Phillips, & Fay, 2008). When it comes to leadership, competencies determine what a person can do, commitment determines what they want to do, and character determines what they will do. It is therefore, imperative that leaders of higher educational institutions possess and consistently exhibit strong character in their day-to-day leadership tasks in order to be effective to realize institutionally set goals. Strong character in leadership engenders:

- **Effective decision-making:** A virtuous person had practical wisdom-the ability to know when and how best to apply moral perspectives (Bhuyan, 2007). According to Aristotle (n.d), a genuinely virtuous action precedes from firm and unchangeable character. Character is fundamental for effective decision-making as it enables leaders to act as complete moral individuals for the success of the organization. The leaders of higher education institutions are saddled with myriads of demanding responsibilities which the ability to be courageous, unwavering and honest in making decisions place them in the position to succeed.
- **Decent institutional culture:** True leaders lead by example and form an ethical culture that brings others along (Mackey, 2016). The leaders' character (values and inherent personalities) shape the belief and values that will thrive in an organization over time which in turn influence the belief, work, attitudes and behaviours of organizational members.
- **Trust needed for effective organizational leadership and success:** Trust is the foundation of leadership of which it is nearly impossible to recruit and retain staff without trust. Leaders with character devote consistent effort to building and maintaining

trust of their subordinates. Morrissey (2019) noted that when character is flawed, the leader's potential to lead would be of no effect as his intentions would also not be trusted by his subordinates. This limits leadership and managerial abilities. Therefore, it is important that leaders of higher education institutions consistently do the right things; matching their words with actions showcasing the evidence of their character.

- **Motivation of employees Morals.** Institutional leaders with strong character are likely to also have a strong moral code (Morrissey, 2019). In order to be effective, tertiary educational institution leaders should respect their moral code so that their staff would emulate and be more supportive working towards the shared goals of the institution. The respect and admiration that followers have for morally competent leaders are reflected in the zeal of followers to perform well (Riggio, 2002). This will as well enhance the public image of their institutions.

CONCLUSION

Institutional leaders' character sets the foundation for employee's job effectiveness; growth and success of the institution. However the issue of character development in the leadership of higher education institutions in Nigeria has not being given the honest attention it deserves hence; the character crises, corporate scandals and internal conflicts experienced in the higher educational institutions today. This study therefore concludes that leaders of higher education in Nigeria can be effective to achieve institutionally set goals if character development initiative is earnestly embraced.

Suggestions

In order for higher education institution leadership in Nigeria to be effective through character development efforts and play leading role in the realization of its fundamental goal of overall national development, the following suggestions are made:

- In the first instance, the government and managers of higher education institutions should be honest and transparent in the appointment of principal officers.
- The principal officers should endeavour to inculcate in their staff good character; by displaying exemplary leadership.
- The government and managers of higher education institutions should be proactive in providing for leaders of all levels in the institutions the opportunity for character training and development. This can be done through regular leadership workshops, conferences, capacity building, symposia, colloquiums and seminars.
- Mentorship programmes initiatives should be introduced into the system and upheld as a requisite for up-coming and aspiring leaders in higher education institutions.

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