

## PHILOSOPHY AS A PANACEA FOR BUILDING RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP FOR STRONG EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The big question is, what service has philosophy rendered to our society to help tackle its challenges? Employing the descriptive and analytic philosophical methods, this paper examines philosophy as a panacea for building strong educational institutions through responsible leadership in Nigeria. This paper argues that unless Nigerians produced committed and competent leaders who are fitted for leadership, with the mindset of restructuring and making the educational system standard, development in education sector will be impossible. This is because; education is the bedrock of development and the soul of a country. It plays a vital and vigorous role in the progress of a country. It is no longer breaking news that education in Nigeria is at the verge of collapsing. Lack of funds, incessant strikes, poor infrastructure and examination malpractice are the challenges confronting education institution in Nigeria. This ugly state of the country's poor education is as a result of failure of leadership. And for sustained development in education to be possible, we need philosophers, those who love to seek the truth and naturally fitted for political leadership in Plato's parlance. They are the ones who know the solution to Nigeria's educational challenges and are ready to lead Nigeria to the promise land by prioritizing education.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Nigeria, Philosophy, Education.

### INTRODUCTION

It is no longer a breaking news that Nigeria, since her independence in 1960 till date is still battling with a lot of challenges. Apart from security challenges, poverty and unemployment issues that Nigeria is faced with today, poor education system is another challenge that is raising its ugly head in Nigeria today. Scholars over the years have given divergent opinions and reasons why some nations failed to develop despite all the measures that have been put in place to have sustained development. A reading of the book, *Why Nations Fail* opened my eyes widely to discover that there are many reasons nations, basically poor nations like Nigeria have failed to have quality education system. Obviously, the low education level in Nigeria is caused by poor leadership that has failed to prioritize education sector, provide a well conducive atmosphere for learning, build, finance, and support schools and as well create appropriate supervision and

monitoring in education system. It is pertinent to know that all these nations that have become rich today never neglected education. They made education their number one priority; this is because they knew that education is an engine that paves a way for sustainable development. And to achieve success, they engaged their young talents with innovative ideas by encouraging incentives and creating a level playing field for their citizens. But this is not so in Nigeria particularly. The Nigerian leaders do not take education as their main priority. This is because, Nigeria has a political system that allows their leaders to send their children abroad to have quality education, and the poor citizens are left in schools that do not have good facilities for learning. Nigeria has many potential Bill Gates and innovators who are now working as prostitutes, kidnappers and internet fraudsters being forced to do what they do not want to do, because they never had the opportunity to actualize their dreams in life.

It is against this backdrop that this paper asks: what service has philosophy rendered to our society to help tackle its problems? Or is our philosophy only armchair philosophy, irrelevant in getting true leaders that will address Nigeria's real problem? This paper argues that since Nigeria has tried many systems of government and failed, it is now obvious that our real problem is "failure of leadership". So, for there to be inclusiveness and stability in education, Nigerians need to engage the minds of philosophers, leaders who can know the real problem of Nigeria and who are ready to scarify their lives in order to lead Nigeria to the promise land. For proper understanding and clarification, this paper shall begin by analyzing some concepts like education, leadership and philosophy. This is because, in the words of Chinweuba (2021:82), unexplained concepts are largely misnomers that obstruct understanding and knowledge. But analysis sets the limit of concepts, clarifies them, creates better insight into the imports of words and clearly unveils the meanings lurking in them.

### **Ideas on Philosophy and Philosopher**

The question: "what is philosophy?" is thus not as elementary as it sounds. It is a very difficult one to answer. This is because the term philosophy happens not to be a discipline with one generally acceptable definition. Uduma (2000:7) agrees that since there is no universally accepted definition of philosophy, any one definition of the subject is limited, one sided and, therefore, superfluous. He further states that this legendary problem associated with the definition of philosophy is as a result of the peculiar nature and scope of the subject. "Every definition" Oizermann in Uduma (2000:7) points out "is a limitation of the content of a subject and, therefore, is itself limited". Etymologically, the word philosophy was derived from the composite Greek noun philo-sophia, literally meaning "Love of wisdom."

Beyond this etymological definition, many philosophers have their various definitions of philosophy depending on their ideologies. Martin (2006:340) sees philosophy as the great art of the perfect life where the common notion of it is transcended and the Supreme Being which is identical with existence itself is realized. Nwala in Martin (2006:339) defines philosophy "as a worldview (*weltanschauung*), the basic beliefs which a people have or a person has about the origin, nature and end of the universe, life

or existence”. He however maintains that holding basic ideas and beliefs about the universe, life or existence does not make one to have a philosophy or becomes a philosopher. To possess a philosophy for him is not a yardstick to being a philosopher. The point he is buttressing here is that one can have a philosophy that is a philosophy of life without being a philosopher.

To have a philosophy says Martin (2006:340), is to acquire a systematic body of knowledge, which serves as an instrument for changing natural and social reality. He states that the aim of philosophy is right living. In other words, genuine or real philosophy of its name is expected to enable man to live the truest life that is, a life of wisdom, free from the imperfections by which ordinary unphilosophical life is characterized. Okpara citing Okere (2021:4), philosophy is a man being himself at his most specific, at his best-being man and not beast or thing. “Being at his “specific” best, speaking as it was ex cathedra as a human i.e. a vegetal, animal, rational being all at once.” Okere gave another definition of philosophy as *weiter fragen* meaning asking further, going wider and deeper, wondering all the more and venturing other or newer answers. From these definitions given, it is clear that philosophy is a discipline that deals with critical thinking. It equips man with a high intellectual ability and capability to enrich his moral capacity which the task of leadership demands.

### **Who is a Philosopher (Philosophos)?**

It is remarkable to point out here that the word philosophy was first used by Pythagoras; in fact, he was the first to call himself a philosopher (philosophos). He classified men into three: those who love pleasure, those who love activity and those who love wisdom. “Socrates called himself a philosopher in the sense that he was ignorant and confined himself to the role of a seeker after wisdom.” However, it was because of the brutish and nasty treatment given to Socrates by the Athenian politicians that made Plato to change his ambition from aspiring to become a politician. His zest and enthusiasm for politics began to diminish. Plato believes that as far as the kind of persons who did such injustice to Socrates are still in leadership position; it will be very difficult to administer government correctly. This made him to think of better ways to solve and address the situation. In the *Republic*, a philosopher is the one who loves to see the truth. Plato avers that they are the ones naturally fitted for philosophy and political leadership, while the rest should follow lead but let philosophy alone. Martin (2006:341) earlier cited defines a philosopher as the machine that processes the raw materials (philosophy) into finished goods. What this expression means clearly is that philosophy provides the materials that one theorizes on them. He further maintains that to be a philosopher requires a keen interest in the phenomena of the world. One who has the influencing capacity of pursuing knowledge with all manner of openness and collaboration. Whatever a philosopher does, it is done in the name of truth.

### **Leadership**

To lead is to be head of or to show the way. A leader according to Odimegwu (2006:290) is the person that goes first whose example is followed by others. However,

from this definition given, Odimegwu defines leadership as to act or ability of leading. He tells us that leadership also refers to the group of leaders in a society or organization. Collaborating Iroegbu, Odimegwu (2006:291) also gave another perspective to leadership. He presents leadership as a “tripodal relationship or phenomenon of responsibility, community and goals”. Leadership in the words of Iroegbu in Odimegwu (2006:391) “is the responsibility of conducting a people or group towards the achievement of determined goals. This is to say that leadership entails being in charge, as well as having the power to direct the affairs of such people to arrive at expected results.”

Ejeh (2021:186) defines leadership as the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. In our context here leadership simply means political leadership. Ejeh earlier cited defines political leadership as the volition and ability of an individual or group to sustainably shape social processes, in adherence to human rights, common good prior to self interest and inclusion of all participants. He thus gave three categories of political leaders:

- 1) Those that exist through votes of the people and go by the names such as councilors, parliamentarians, governors, prime ministers and presidents.
- 2) Those who exist through direct appointments made by national leaders in the name of presidents and prime ministers, and they go by names such as ministers, ambassadors, regional commissioners and district commissioners depending on the nature of the named country.
- 3) Those that emanate from political parties of political level.

From the above definitions, one can see that leadership has to do with conducting people for the purpose of achieving certain goals. In other words, society chooses who becomes her leader and lays down principles to be followed by the leader. A responsible leader is one who knows these principles and is ready to guide his society towards realizing these goals. The bad leader on the other hand says Odimegwu (2006:291) is a leader “who either does not know or does not do, or does neither know nor do. Okaneme (2012:42) stresses that good political leadership is so much important in any democracy, that often the progress of a nation is judged by the quality of its leadership. It is very unfortunate and perturbing that more than two decades of practicing democracy, Nigeria has not been so lucky to elect responsible, dedicated, trustworthy and selfless leaders who can lead the country to the promise land. A responsible leader is one who is committed and ready to serve his people. His plans are always on how to develop and move his country forward and not on how to develop his own pocket as leaders in Nigeria does. No wonder Okolo in Okaneme (2012: PP42-43) laments that “leadership failure is identified as the cause of myriads of problems besieging the Nigerian nation at the social, political, educational, economic and developmental spheres”. Similarly, the legend Achebe (1983:1) categorically states that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. The Nigerian problem, Achebe observes is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the

responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.

### **The Concept of Education**

Etymologically, the word “education” is derived from the Latin word `educ`atio` (“a breeding, a bringing up, a rearing”) from `educ`o (“ I educate, I train”) which is related to the homonym educo (“ I lead forth, I take out , I raise up, I erect”) from `e` (“from out of”) and d`uc`o (“ I lead, I conduct”). Also, Craft (1984: no page) notes that there are two different Latin roots of the English word “education.” They are “educare, which means to train or to mold, and educere”, meaning to lead. Whichever Latin words above one may choose to describe education, the most important thing to note is that “education aims at the development of human being for the development of the society.” Education is the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in school. It is a weapon to improve one’s life. Education of a child begins at home. It is a lifelong process that ends with death. Education improves one’s knowledge, skills and develops the personality and attitudes. Dewey sees education as a process of living through the unceasing restoration of experiences. In the view of Fafunwa in Okolie (2009:3), education is the aggregate of all the processes on which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society in which we live. Also, Petersen in Okolie (2009: 3) sees “education as the function of being that strives for the humanization of man”. Again, Osaat in Okpara (2021:34) states that “education involves the process by which society through schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions transmit knowledge, norm and elements of culture, values and skills from generation to generation, in a morally acceptable manner”. Iwuchukwu in Okpara (2021:34) also defines education as the “application of an assemblage of processes by which packages of illustration and information are passed on the learner, either formally in the school which is the micro-society or outside the school system”.

From all these views, it is clear that education is a social phenomenon. It provides intellectual, corporeal, philosophical, ethical exercise and training to the people. No nation could be developed without education. By the process of education, a nation develops and improves its self-awareness. This is done by preparing and educating its individuals who constitute the whole nation. The role of education in nation-building is pivotal. It is certainly a hope for a good life. All children, no matter where they live or their circumstances, have the right to quality education. To deny this right is evil. Uneducated youth is the worst thing for humanity. Unfortunately, education in Nigeria is faced with a lot of problems. These includes; poor educational infrastructures, poor funding, inadequate teaching aids such as (laboratories, libraries and computers) and unconducive environment. These bad attitudes found in most youths in Nigeria is as a result of high level of illiteracy followed by frustrations caused by bad government that has failed to engage and encourage the youth.

## **Education System in Nigeria**

According to Omowumi (2019: no page), Nigeria's education system is based on the (1)- 6-3-3-4 formula: one year pre-primary education, six years primary, three years junior secondary, three years senior secondary, and a minimum of four years tertiary education. For him, this model had been used successfully in China, Germany and Ghana before Nigeria adopted it in 1989. Unfortunately, the educational system in Nigeria faces several barriers and assorted crises of neglect, poor funding, uncondusive learning environment. Omowumi citing UNESCO (2019) states that "Nigeria, Chad, Pakistan, and Ethiopia are among countries, which are way off target on the six key educational goals that 164 countries agreed to try to achieve". Also Omuwumi has it that the report launched in Paris, New York, New Delhi and Santiago de Chile, indicates that "Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school and one of world's worst education systems due to a combination of corruption, conflict and lack of investment". Omowumi earlier cited observes that there are over 10 million out-of-children and another 27 million children in school are performing very poorly. He further adds that Millions of Nigerians are half-educated, and over 60 million – or 30%- are illiterate. Apart from the above challenges listed, many Nigerian students who are eligible and qualified to get admission can't gain admission into Nigerian universities. Either they are children of the poor or that they don't have powerful people (elites) that will help them to secure admission. That is why many youths today believed that education is a scam in Nigeria. Many undergraduate students in the tertiary institutions have navigated another reality, some due to incessant strikes; have dropped out of school to find other alternatives to success. These alternative routes they have followed are; internet robbery, kidnapping, prostitution and occultism. Examination malpractice has become a norm in almost the secondary schools in Nigeria. This is as a result of government's inability to invest in education and encourage the youths to innovate.

## **The Effects of Bad Leadership on Education Sector in Nigeria**

The duties of government are numerous. Apart from protection of lives and properties of her citizens which are the primary functions of the government, it is also the duty and responsibility of any government to provide quality education, social amenities, jobs, and as well as cater for the basic needs of her citizens. Edeh (2021:no page) adds that the respect for the rights of the citizens is the hallmark of a responsible government, for it is only a government that respects and values the lives of her citizens that performs the duties expected of her. But, this is not the case in Nigeria; the country has been faced with successive regimes of bad leadership which is the bane of Nigeria.

Obviously, leadership failure has caused a lot of damages in education sector that is why most Nigerian youths still insist that "education is a scam." The quality and standard of education in Nigeria is very poor because it has not been paid adequate attention by the government. In fact, from what is going on in the country's political institutions, it is obvious that education is not the leader's main priority. Government at all levels is more concerned about issues that are not as important as education and this is affecting the sector seriously. The Nigerian leaders make politics their number one priority, neglecting the basic sectors like education and health sectors which are the engines that pave way for sustained development. The reason for doing such is because they have

access to send their children to developed countries for studies and provisions for employment have already been made for them. The children of the poor masses are the ones suffering most.

Many Nigerian youths do not have access to education. Some who have managed to graduate are jobless and some who are in the tertiary institutions have spent more than eight years in the university because of the incessant and endless and protracted strikes by the Academic staff union of universities (ASUU). These selfish leaders not minding the negative implications of keeping young student idle at home still have one hundred million naira each to purchase nomination forms for presidential election. But the country has no money to meet with ASUU demands. This shows that the crop of leaders we have does not care for their masses. Today, the poor students are on the streets protesting, demanding for their rights, whereas, their own children are comfortably studying abroad with tax payers money. The failure of these leaders to invest on youths and education has resulted to high level of illiteracy, dropouts, indiscipline, drug abuse, prostitution, illegal migration as well as insecurity that is ravaging the entire country. No wonder Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that as institutions influence behavior and incentives in real life, they forge the success or failure of nations. For the duo, individual talent matters at every level of society, but even that needs an institutional framework to transform it into a positive force. There can never be a sustained development in the country if the government fails to invest in education and creates incentives for their citizens. All these advanced and developed societies we look up to make education their number one priority. Some of these legendary figures we hear their names, like Bill gates, Steve Jobs etc, came from poor homes. Because they have responsible leaders, their schooling system helped them to acquire skills to complement their talents. Not only that, their economic system enabled them to start companies with ease by financing them, and not extracting from them as we see in Nigeria today. Finally, their governments ensured security, stability and continuity. So, from the beginning, these men were confident that their dreams will be actualized because they have promise keeping leaders who make their needs and education their number one priority.

### **Philosophy as a Panacea for Building Responsible Leadership that will Strengthen Nigeria's Education Sector**

On a serious note, philosophy plays a vital role in human society. It helps the human person to change some fundamental beliefs as well as brings out new direction towards enhancing the quality of human condition. Any nation without philosophy is bound to produce poor leadership. This brings us to Plato's assertion (1987:209) that:

The society can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands...

Thus, the above view clearly points to the fact that there are some who are naturally fitted for political leadership. These are men who love to see the truth. Socrates exemplified this when he was permitted to run away from the prison by some Athenians. He rather insists to remain in prison, knowing that unexamined life is not worth living.

Bertrand Russell in Ejeh (2021:196) makes us to understand without doubt, that the under-development and poor education bedeviling Nigerian nation since her independence till date is as a result of the utter neglect of philosophy in the country. Russell in Ejeh (2021:196) further laments that:

A man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reasons.

The above expression clearly explains why Nigeria has continued to record leadership failures. Nigerian leaders lack the philosophic ideals and qualities needed for leadership. In the words of Ejeh earlier cited, a dose of philosophy is not only necessary but quite expedient to enable Nigerian leaders appreciate our political heritage. Enumerating the qualities, purpose and disposition of an ideal ruler or philosopher, T.U. in Martin (2006:340) asserts;

Unless one has that characteristic of philosophers, which include the desire or love for knowledge pursued in a conscious and critical but unbiased non-dogmatic manner, with openness of mind and readiness to go where the argument leads, he cannot claim to be a genuine philosopher. Surely one could be a philosopher without having a systematic training in philosophy.

Obviously, in Nigeria, there are men and women who have what it takes to move this country forward, but our major problem is the “elites” in control. These elites have refused to give chance for these men with philosophic ideals to lead the country to the promise land. Their mission and vision are not to salvage the country, but rather to keep extracting the resources meant for improving education and development of the country for their own egoistic interests. These elites keep increasing the cost for running for political positions, so that those who are willing to address the country’s challenges will not afford the cost. This, Agbo (2021:218) adds that “Nigeria of today benefits a minute number and burdens a whole colossal majority, it is; gain to a few and pain to many”. He maintains that there are those who are reaping all forms of blackmail, intimidation, slogans, media blitz, cajoling, seduction, manipulation, psychological defeatism and fugitive notion of patriotism to ensure that nothing will change.

However, there is a saying that ideas rule the world, Nigerian politicians need philosophy in order to be truly rational in all their dealings. The questions remain; how many Nigerian philosophers are ready to imitate our ancient philosophers in bringing justice and orderliness in the country? How many of Nigerian philosophers will like to be treated unjustly than to engage in an unjust acts? Nigerian philosophers need to be



equipped and trained properly in order to help construct policies that will help institute responsible leadership that will help transform the nation's educational sector. In the words of Dike (2012:3), to restructure the education system, Nigeria needs leaders who are transformative in orientation that will help retool the education system and arm the workers with appropriate skills.

### **Recommendations on how to improve the education sector in Nigeria**

**Re-writing the 1999 Constitution:** There are a lot of pitfalls in the 1999 Constitution. In his book *Sinking Structures on Faulty Foundations* (2021:207), Agbo pinpoints some of the pitfalls of the 1999 constitution especially the ones that make any kind of amendment by any government impossible. He observes that the constitution appears to have declared itself as a forgery when it tells a lie about its authorship: "WE THE PEOPLE..."! The question remains, when and how did "we, the people" make the said constitution? Secondly, he highlights that the 68-item Exclusive Legislative list and another 30-item concurrent Legislative list make the Federal Government to practically "play God" over the destinies of the nationalities within her geographical territory. He also points out that Sections 91-92 and 121-122, practically hands over the federal and state governments to the president and governors, respectively-a blank cheque that allows them to spend money for 6 months without legislative approval, attempts to reduce it to 3 months by the 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly did not see the light of the day. Finally, he points out that in chapter 4 of the 1999 constitution, there are Fundamental Human Rights copiously listed. But unfortunately, while the leaders enjoy unfitted access to the commonwealth, these so called "Rights" were rendered non-justifiable by section 6, sub section 6c of the same constitution. In other words, if the governor fails to provide education to the Governed, the governed cannot seek legal redress. This shows that we have a constitution whose sanctions apply only to the poor, "a constitution that plays games with corruption, because it is born in corruption, promulgated by force (decree no.24 of 1999) and sustained by a combination of deceit and deception".

**Making Funding for Schools and Increasing Funding for Teachers a Priority:** The leaders should focus not only on funding for building new schools and renovating old ones, but also increasing funding for teachers. Teachers should be supported and encouraged to improve on their skills in order to meet the current global teaching standards. The Nigerian government should also provide competent teachers to facilitate the teaching and learning in a more effective way.

**Creating Incentives for Students:** To improve the education sector in Nigeria, it is important to make education the number one priority, and while doing so, indigent children, the ones who have the maximum risk of being left out from receiving education should be targeted. Importantly, government should equally create incentives for the best students. This will go a long way to ginger other students to imbibe the culture of reading. Those with innovative ideas should be encouraged by creating an enabling field for them to innovate and also ensures that there is provision for employment.

**Proper Monitoring and Supervision:** Government must ensure that the monitoring team plays their role of supervising the schools regularly. This will help to checkmate if the teachers are productive and adhere to their roles strictly. Also the supervisory team will ensure that the rate of examination malpractice and other bad behaviours found among the students are drastically reduced.

**Stop Incessant Strikes:** Government must ensure that they do everything possible to put to an end to these incessant strikes by the Academic Staff Union of the Universities. There have been strikes almost two to three times every year, frustrating the students as well disrupting the school calendar. The government should ensure they prioritized the welfare of all staff, from teachers to lecturers. This is the only way the strikes will end. However, if these priorities are successfully implemented, Nigeria's education system will improve.

### **Concluding Reflections**

From what has been discussed so far, education is one of the engines of development. We can see that improving education in Nigeria can help the economic growth of the country, and as well help the citizens to rise out of illiteracy and poverty. When children have access to education, they develop the skills and knowledge that can help them secure well-paying jobs and also be creative and innovative. But when they are denied the right for education, they will turn out to become irresponsible and nuisance to the country as we are already witnessing. To achieve this aim, Nigerian philosophers must take enough time to make changes by the use of ideas. This is because; philosophy is all about ideas and change. Importantly, our leaders from all positions should try and emulate the good works of the leaders of the progressive countries like Singapore etc. They must ensure that they are grounded in philosophy and know what politics is all about as well as the needs of the masses before delving into politics. Finally, the task is urgent, Nigerian philosophers should wake up and make their philosophic intelligence available for building strong education. As it stands, all hands must be on deck to vote out all these bad eggs at the corridor of power that do not value education and vote in those with philosophic ideas that will address the challenges confronting education in Nigeria. Unless this is done, education in Nigeria will remain poor.

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