



Managing Education Towards Enhancing Understanding: Top management perspectives

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ABSTRACT: Administrators have accepted education as a bridge to a better life. It is not yet nirvana for the Nigerian nation despite a century of attempts to refocus education to its traditional purposes. The sight of expatriates managing construction sites for mundane structures as culverts is an irksome common occurrence. Yet the local extant literature is mute on the situation. This paper empirically though perfunctorily proffers an advocacy for management options towards enhancing understanding as the driver to the achievement of schools attendance purposes; as has been settled elsewhere on the globe. This, it is hoped, would reawaken scholarly interests on achieving schooling purpose. The commentary method of analysis was employed and it surmised that constant tinkering with educational policies to accommodate political agenda as the bane of accurate educational purpose in Nigeria. It is a major tool of abridging the present with a future. It is therefore recommended for a fresher and narrower refocusing of educational policies and objectives of educational administrators.

Keywords: Management, Schooling purpose, Understanding, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education's main aim, as concluded by many a scholar, is to prepare children for the future. Its conceptualisation, the very first purview of management, may, however, differ according to differing perspectives often dictated by points of view and changing needs. In the United States, as an example of changing Governmental (as top management) perspective, the 'no child left behind' policy replaced the 'nation at risk' act which in turn had replaced the 'educational reform' act of the 1960s (Bounds and Holifield, 2011). In Nigeria, the changes were of much deeper essence from the pre-independence clamour for education and self-realisation enshrined in the educational ordinance of 1948 through the development quest of the 1976 national Universal Primary Education (UPE) to the present Universal Basic Education (UBE) that aims for inclusion and reduction of poverty levels (Valentine202.com, 2016). In the perspectives of schools administrators, the aims of education include a gamut of or any of the items listed by Bounds and Holifield (2011). Graham, Van Bergen and Sweller (2015), while on the perspective of schools administration, conclude the purpose of education as the production of smart citizens. Biggs (1999) concludes the purpose of schooling from the perspective of students to be either self-realisation or obtaining a certificate for securing a future job. The perspective of the community as a whole is an ever-increasing expectation for schools to assume more responsibility in raising children (Bounds and Holifield, 2011). These are bridges of the present with a future, the quality of which resolves expectations, from a proper understanding of purpose.

In Nigeria, with over a century of schooling (valentine202.com, 2016) and 141 universities (myschoolgist.com, 2016), one should expect a nation of excellence and self-reliance (According to naij.com (2016) eight additional universities have been granted approval) from the achievement of any or all the envisaged purposes of education. To the



contrary, it is a common and irksome sight to see expatriates managing construction sites for something as mundane as culverts. This is particularly worrisome in consideration of the cry for employment from a very high proportion of the estimated one hundred and seventy million Nigerians. In addition, the truism of the cliché 'educated illiterate' is incontestable when you meet a *Nigerian University* certified engineer that cannot tighten a bolt or a doctor of human resource management that failed at managing a twelve-man academic department. More so, for a Department of Business Administration and Management to tout a motto that says 'Managers are born not made'. These and other similar aberrations give emphasis to the question of an understanding of the purpose of schooling from a Nigerian perspective. A diligent search for an interest in such situations did not yield any result in the Nigerian extant literature not necessarily from lack of existence. Elsewhere, a number of scholars such as Fieldman, 2005, Goodfriend, 2016, and Garlikov, n. d., have concluded the question and unanimously advocated for learning by understanding. Their accomplishment has been theoretical, this paper follows suit though empirically albeit perfunctorily but in the context of Nigeria. We aim at ascertaining the *right* purpose of education or at least awake an interest for its rightful determination. This, we hope, should trigger visible academic endeavours towards enhancing learning by understanding and schooling purpose in Nigeria. We seek to attain this in two phases; from the perspective of top management and from the perspective of the Teacher and the Students. This paper addresses the first perspective. To achieve this, the paper is structured as follows; an expose on the perspectives of educational administrators is followed by an explanation of the methodology adopted, the findings and recommendations in that order.

Governmental Perspective

The first school in Nigeria, the St Thomas' Anglican Nursery and Primary School, Badagry, was founded in 1843 followed by the second in 1859, the CMS Grammar School Bariga, both from the Lagos area, as narrated in Wikipedia (n. d.). The purpose of schooling then was to produce clergymen and interpreters for the colonists. This purpose persisted up until the 1940s when agitations for self-reliance culminated in the promulgation of the National Educational Ordinance, 1948, and the creation of the first National University in Ibadan during the same year. Incidentally, according to myschoolgist.com (2016), there are now up to 141 universities in this country made up of 40 Federal Universities, 40 State-owned and 61 private universities. The purpose enshrined in that ordinance was achieved by 1960 and 16 years later, the focus of education was shifted to national development through the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. A similar shift of focus occurred again through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, this time for an envisaged poverty eradication (Valentine202.com, 2016).

Perhaps this tinkering with educational policies, and there were many more but these were the landmark ordinances, emanates from a deep understanding of the potency of education – if properly focused all objectives of education are achievable – and, as asserted by Fabunmi (2005), a quest for a truly nationalistic educational policy. Proper focus and nationalistic intentions then become suspect when national boards abolish lower degrees and universities send away students unceremoniously for minor



misdemeanours. The solution, as proposed by Robinson (2007, 2013), lies in accommodating every child in the system rather than cause a problem to the society that will cost more to mop up. It only entails locating the acumen of the child, nurturing it and she shall flourish. This lies in flexibility and not conformity to some rigid rules, He adds. Perhaps, this is what is sought for in the Islamic form of schooling where every pupil in front of a teacher is in a class of his own, though in major categories. This system grants the highest flexibility, to phases of learning in order to accommodate diversity and a higher spread in areas of learning, the higher you go to engage a more maturing mind. The western education may not achieve that much flexibility but there is a serious drive towards it in what is referred to as Professional Learning Centres (PLCs) (Dufour, 2015). According to Dufour, PLCs strive to increase performance and not just grades; it is not enough to get a 'curve' but ask why and improve. The human capacity is enormous; do not cap its performance. Moreover, the inputs of such PLCs should prove invaluable as inputs to educational policies where available. Finland's schooling system, reports Robinson, practice an exemplary flexible western education and as a result, has no drop out issues. This, he opined, is replicable even in the United States and we hasten to add, in this country too.

There are implied precepts of educational policies all over the world and Robinson (2013) posits two of such precepts to be that taught subjects can be arranged in a hierarchy of importance and that all levels of education are for the ultimate purpose of producing University Professors. The first precept, as implied by educational policies, is that Mathematics and Languages occupy top positions while Humanities and Arts and Culture come last on the scheme of importance. This is far from it. What projections do you have of the future that informs you of its determinants of critical thinking and better life? Besides, there are many examples of people that have decided the way of school was not it and have consequently made a mark in history. The second precept, also implied by our educational systems, that include the 8-5-2-3, 7-5-2-3 and now 6-3-3-4 (Valentine.com, 2016), is that lower schools prepare you for the University; not the Polytechnics; not the Colleges and in fact *nothing else* in life. These precepts are reinforced in all aspects of our lives and the Bwanas that be are there to ensure compliance. For instance, your first choice of admissions on the Joint Matriculation Scheme, in Nigeria, has to be a University, then a Polytechnic and a college. Secondly, there is a career progression ceiling for graduates of the Polytechnics beyond which they cannot pass without conversion even in the services of a polytechnic. The ultimate achievement is then to become a professor – a disjointed abstract person - in the opinion of Robinson. The situation leaves much to be desired. Since the old system has failed, give new ones a chance and in fact, we posit our educational policy ripe for another overhaul this time for proper alignment with a properly articulated vision. Therefore, in line with the National Educational ordinance, 2004, as reported by Valentine202.com (2016) and contrary to Fabunmi (2005), we uphold a nationalistic vision of self-reliance and not of accommodating ethnic groups. This has to be driven by a well-articulated vision of the future and not some hazy plan of '60% university admission into sciences, 40% into humanities' as contained in the 2004 ordinance. There is also the more vague STEM plan (A plan of sponsoring only Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



candidates to foreign schools as explained by Adamu, 2016) of the present administration. Besides, on what basis do you suppose that the more scientists you have in a nation the more warranted its development? Certainly, the duration we have had universities or even full pledged faculties of engineering cannot be it or the pure number of scientists versus the 'Humanists'. Rather, it should be a fresher look at the purpose of schooling that should bridge the yawning gap between our situation and desired future. If we cannot construct our own culverts or manufacture the needed pencils in our primary schools nor adequately put medicines in the hospital, what is the benefit of the over-a-century schooling we have had? The bottom line, children must be prepared for the future, which, at the very least, is going to be more competitive as globalisation gets tighter. Moreover, it is their future; we have a limited view of it.

Administrative Perspective

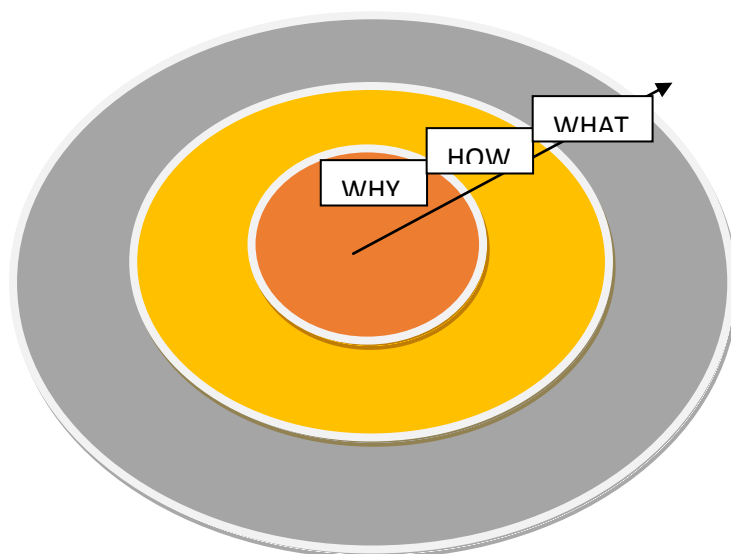
Proper articulation of objectives befalls the school's administrators to ensure a match between the objectives of a school and national education policies. Most often, education policies present objectives that are as nebulous as 'prepare children for the future'; it is the task of the school's administrators to coin how to dwell in the envisaged future. The least of the difficulties of making this match is of fathoming the future posited by Robinson (2013), no matter your level of expertise. The easy way out, administrators have taken, is to make compulsory a communication and an analytic study area on the premise that whatever the future holds, critical thinking will decipher and results communicated. Hence, the endemic credit requirement in and an overreliance on English and Mathematics. These then are disguised in subjective names (Check; business mathematics and business communication skills) with a hope of continued deliverance of educational purposes. Herein lies the function of the school's administrator at all levels of education; prepare children for a future full of uncertainties, one in which they have to relearn and ethics would be their stronghold. In practice, a motto is snuggled in the mission statement that is essentially a marching order for the matching of the present with a future. Bounds and Fieldman (2011) list such marching orders to commonly include promoting respect, academic skills, self-discovery, prepare for work, critical thinking, global citizens, removing barriers, social values, national goals, moral standards, creative endeavours and facilitating technology. The Federal University, Kashere, has chosen to pursue education for global citizenship. Any of the above represents an idealism that should be upheld by sub-systems according to their orientation; a discrepancy creates conflict. The example of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, with a motto of 'Seat of Knowledge' and its Department of Business Administration with a motto of 'To be kobo wise is to survive in the market', serves to illustrate the congruent example. Most polytechnics in this country carry the wheel of life as their emblem to signify a practical approach to learning and upholding of technology. However, an academic department of a university that believes managers cannot be created must be a misfit, even for a mono university of tourism.

The only thing all 12 items listed by Bounds and Holifield (2011) have in common is vagueness. Resourceful administrators concretise these marching orders through the formation of suitable strategies and provision of enabling environments. Sinek (2010)



proposes the golden cycle plan, as a strategy to inspire performance – the marching order, in accordance to the practice of global leaders exemplified by Apple computers, Martin Luther King and the Wright brothers. These three exemplary global leaders were unique in their approach to phenomena, which made them achieve the enormous feats they did. Customers waited for eight hours to buy an iPhone when it first came out. Mr King was able to put together a two hundred and fifty-man march, for most of them far away from home, in an era of low media and no telephones. The Wright brothers literally got humanity flying. Sinek realised that these three achievers had one common approach to phenomena and encoded it into what he refers to as the Golden cycle plan.

Figure 1 The Golden cycle



Source: Sinek, 2010.

The commonest way run-off the mill organisations operate is to offer you ‘what’ they have, show you ‘how’ they are different from others and these, they presume should be the ‘why’ you should buy from them. Essentially, the golden cycle plan is a departure from this norm. It entails that to be successful all actions should emanate from the centre of a concentric three-layer circle. At the core is the ‘why’ of existence: you should believe in it, get your employees and customers to believe in it and let it be the sole reason for the ‘how’. This, in turn, gives birth to the ‘what’ of the organisation. The core is where differentiation of purpose is achieved. The apostle of mass production, Ford Motors, sought to ‘put a car in every home’ while General Motors opted for ‘putting the right car in every home’. These translated, as we saw in history, into lower prices from *differential rate systems* through mass productions and market segmentation from *differential pricing systems*, respectively. They were not in competition with each due to the difference in their core values. In addition, the core determines personality that for organisations is manifested as a corporate culture (Cady, Wheeler, DeWolf, & Brodke, 2011). Personalities and cultures are formed by core values because, quite simply, they state what is important to individuals or businesses (Fagiano, 1995 as cited in Cady et al., 2011). Therefore, if organizations want to maximize productivity and ensure that they are doing the “right” work, they must provide organizational members with a clear understanding of who they



are, where they are going, and how they are going to get there (Falsey, 1989 also cited in Cady et al.). This general rule pervades even the educational institutions that aspire to be effective organisations.

The provision of an enabling environment, the second function of the resourceful administrator, involves fostering organisational justice and providing appropriate motivation. According to Cropanzano, Bowen & Gilliland (2007) organisational justice - members' sense of moral propriety of how they are treated - is what sets the tone of an effective organisation. The administrator must not only be complying with the components of organisational justice (see table 1) but must be seen to be in compliance. In this vein, Alaba and Oguntimehin (2018, 7) submit that they "must not only be transparent but must be seen carrying all concerned about an issue along". It does not matter which way the scale is tipped; even the favoured employees respond unfavourably to acts of injustice in the long run (Cropanzano et al.). In compliance, the administrator achieves workplace trust and commitment, improved job performance and customer satisfaction and loyalty. Where organisational justice is espoused as a core value, the organisation gains a uniqueness that gives it a competitive advantage over its peers, which is difficult to copy, and as a result, must rise above them. In addition, compliance set a level ground from which motivation springs. At this level, motivation achieves organisational cohesion and increased performance (Cropanzano et al.). Distributive justice accounts for a high proportion of both targets though with a caveat on the spread. Equitable allocation of resources promotes cohesion but undermines performance as submitted by Pfeffer and Langton (1993) cited in Cropanzano et al. (2007). Pfeffer and Langton, in a study of an academic faculty, observed an overall drop in research productivity due to lower job satisfaction and collaboration as a result wider dispersion of wage. Most instances of wage application involve a generalised scale but fringe resource allocation is open to subjective interpretations. This often leads to a wider dispersion in resource allocation and an attendant lower collaborative effort. A cursory look at articles authorship in Nigerian journals reveals a lack of vertical collaboration except as a matter of seminal requirement for the certification of degrees.

Table 1 Components of organisational justice

1. Distributive justice: appropriateness of outcomes.
a. Equity: rewarding employees based on their contributions.
b. Equality: providing each employee with roughly the same compensation.
c. Need: providing a benefit based on one's personal requirements.
2. Procedural Justice: appropriateness of the allocation process.
a. Consistency: all employees are treated the same.
b. Lack of bias: no person or group is singled out for discrimination or ill-treatment.
c. Accuracy: decisions are based on accurate information.
d. Representation of all concerned: appropriate stakeholders have input into a decision.
e. Correction: there is an appeal process or another mechanism for fixing mistakes.
f. Ethics: the norms of professional conduct are not violated.
3. Interactional justice: appropriateness of the treatment one receives from authority figures.
a. Interpersonal justice: treating an employee with dignity, courtesy and respect.
b. Informational justice: sharing relevant information with employees.



Source: Cropanzano et al. (2007)

The administrator needs to top up on motivation, the second phase for the provision of an enabling environment, from what is achieved on the ground level. This phase is culture oriented. It is of utmost importance to ensure congruency between corporate culture of an organisation and the professional cultures of its human components. Organisational objectives are only achievable with the right propriety of its human components. According to Handy (1995), work-place professional cultures include the Zeus, the Apollo, the Athena and the Dionysus. An education institution administrator should avoid the club culture with its Zeus or I-God tendencies and embrace organisational justice, even in private educational institutions, to achieve educational objectives. The Apollo and Athena cultures are the most common in educational settings, practised by academicians and academics, respectively. Though Handy believes the university to exemplify the Dionysus culture, this is far from it. Of the two dominant professions, the academicians adhere to the role culture of Apollo in holding on to the same world of yesterday and tomorrow over their shoulder. Rules and procedures have to be adhered with to the latter, even in the face of misalignment with an environment-imposed shift of organisational objectives. This is often a straight jacketing factor to the academics and their task-oriented culture. The academics are about achieving the task; innovations are welcome if they warrant achieving the task at hand. Warranted, entrance and exit of professionals do not adversely affect attainment of goals but mass exits could. Hence, the university is not a perfect Dionysus. To blend professional cultures, the administrator, therefore, has to select one of the two cultures in line with what she envisages as a way of achieving the objective of the organisation while the other culture is tamed to promote congruency of corporate and organisational culture.

Achieving congruency is one part of this top-up on motivation; the other is promoting employee proprietary. A greater proportion of proprietary should have already been inculcated right from the strategy of getting employees to believe in organisational core values, what remains is maintenance. First, asserts Pink (2009), push the issues of extrinsic motivators' maintainers off the table and face the intrinsic ones. That is, clear away the issues of pay and allowances; this too should have been taken care of by proper organisation justice. Second, provide a clear progression path towards personal goals that are in consonance with organisational objectives. Leadership style and the language of workplace communication form the bedrock of intrinsic maintenance. Sharbrough (2011) believes the appropriate and the most practised leadership style for an educational setting is either the transactional or the transformational. Both leadership styles are about alignment or realignment of the individual goal to organisational objectives. Moreover, an increase in the use of the right language can increase job satisfaction proportionately.

METHODOLOGY

There are wealth of ideas out there which, if collated properly, can produce a better understanding of phenomena. More often than not simple assimilation and paraphrasing of ideas refocuses attention to hitherto unnoticed meanings and implications. This outlook is what dictated the adoption of an analytical commentary on a commonly overlooked source of great ideas – the YouTube's tedtalks. The methodology is



classifiable as heuristically simplistic which the phenomenologists depend in the words “simplicity is no barrier to effectiveness” (Richardson (1999). In this vein, meta-analysis is employed on majorly ‘Teddalks’ presentations of ‘great ideas worth sharing’ and conclusions drawn from a triangulation of the discuss.

SUMMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Proper management of the education process should lead to a better accomplishment of its purposes. Such management starts from choosing the right objective that is congruent with the yearnings and aspirations of the people in the polity. Arcane objectives, even when supported by vociferous few, are pushed aside through a justifiable process. The formation of such an objective should start from the grassroots and should pervade to the highest ruling council in order to enhance national propriety and adherence. Proper administration of educational process is necessary to achieve the set objective. This essentially entail of establishing the right organisational structure through a correct organisational justice and an appropriate organisational culture. The former is achievable through strict adherence to dictates of organisational justice and in consonance to intrinsic motivational factors. The latter is achievable by taming one of the two dominant work place cultures found in educational organisations. It also greatly helps to articulate a hierarchy of targets and objectives and allocating the right amount of authority and responsibility to achieve the allocated target or objective. We therefore wish to make the following recommendations

- I. In general, education should be established in its pride of place as supreme to all other sectors in a nation. An area of immediate concern is employment; we should educate the Nigerians according to foreseeable employment needs of the nation. This is achievable through a good development plan.
- II. The educational policy of this country should be revisited through a proper process of consultation from the grassroots to articulate the aspiration of all in the nation. The process should be open and should aim at collating opinions of the majority.
- III. The visions, missions and objectives of all educational organisations and their units should be properly aligned to national educational policy objectives with proper control measures.
- IV. Educationists and Researchers in this country should pick more interest into the process of nation building and of enhancement of the achievement of educational objectives,

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