

EDUCATION AS CHARACTER FORMATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses education as character formation. Some people view education as simply knowledge acquisition. However, experience has shown that there are many supposed educated men and women who are morally depraved. This explains why this study argues that mere knowledge acquisition is not enough to say that one is educated. Employing the philosophical methods of analysis and phenomenology, this paper discovers that there is a huge difference between going to school and being educated. It submits that education is not all about mere acquisition of knowledge. It argues that any knowledge acquisition that does not affect positively the character of an individual can best be described as pseudo-education. It strongly maintains that the goal of true and meaningful education is character formation. A person who is truly educated must have two wings in order to glide very well, namely, intellectual formation and moral formation. In the understanding of this paper, a person that has intellectual formation but lacks moral (character) formation can simply be referred to as an educated illiterate. Therefore, it concludes that for education to worth its true name, it must be rooted in character formation.

Keywords: Education, Character Formation, Intellectual Formation, Illiteracy, Moral Depravity.

Introduction

Varied scholars have varied views about the understanding of education. Every scholar sees the notion of education from his /her own vantage point. But one thing that is certain is that education is fundamental to the being and sustenance of any human person. To be properly educated borders on the human person and the environment. It is only one who is properly educated that can relate very well with his/her environment. In this regard, one can say that there is a nexus between education and the sense of right and wrong. No wonder Socrates said that knowledge is virtue. However, it has been observed that there are some people who claim to be educated and yet are morally depraved. This brings to question the place of education in character formation. The thrust of this chapter, therefore, is that any education that does not affect positively the character of the particular individual is a pseudo-education. This paper argues strongly that one of the major goals of education is character formation. More so, this paper submits in line with Plato that there is a huge difference between education and training (Plato, as cited in Okolo, 1989, p. 47). Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to examine education as a character formation but before we go into the detailed discussion, it is important that we examine briefly the general notion of education.

The Notion of Education

Whenever there is a discussion on the notion of education, there are two Latin words that usually come to mind: *educere* and *educare*. *Educere* simply means to lead out. This implies that education serves as a means of bringing people out of ignorance into the world of knowledge. In this sense, Ndubisi (2018) sees education as “a catalyst that brings out the naturally endowed knowledge in a person” (p. 27). The implication here is that the individual has the capacity for knowledge but needs proper direction. Education serves as a compass to properly direct the moral, cognitive, emotive and

psycho-social pathways of an individual. A look at the second Latin word, *educare*, depicts education as a form of training. In this understanding of education, the learner does not know anything and needs to be trained. It is all about the acquisition of skills, art, values, beliefs, etc. One thing that is certain is that no one can claim to have been saturated with knowledge. This is why it is said that education is “the process of learning that begins at birth and terminates in death” (Ndubisi, 2018, p. 27).

In the view of Okafor as cited in Iorvaa and Adejoh (2002), the notion of education can be viewed from two different perspectives: the broad sense and the strict sense. In the broad sense, education has to do with “all those experiences of the individual through which knowledge is acquired, the intellect enlightened or the will strengthened” (p.13). This understanding is that any form of knowledge acquisition can be classified as education. On the other hand, the strict sense of education connotes planned and systematic form of learning process. This is what is obtainable in our schools. In a general sense, Okolo (1989) understands education as “whatever one learns through experience, from oneself, or others to help one survive and master one’s social milieu” (p.13). One important thing to note here is that the process of education includes oneself; it means that one can learn from oneself. L. A. Cremin’s notion of education is worthy to be mentioned here. He sees education as “a deliberate, systematic and sustained effect to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and sensibilities” (Cremin, 1977, p. viii). Ezeani (2013) submits that education “is an act and experience which has a formative or shaping effect on the learner” (p.13). The understanding of Cremin (1977) and Ezeani (2013), in the context of this paper, provides a wholistic notion of education. However, the concern here is not to present a detailed discussion on the concept of education but simply to highlight the general understanding of education as a background towards a better comprehension of this paper. Therefore, having given a brief exposé of education, the next subtopic that follows shall focus briefly on character formation.

Understanding Character Formation

Most psychologists, sociologists and social philosophers are generally of the view that the human personality is made up of nature and nurture. Nature has to do with characters inherited from one’s parents. This explains why children from the same parents resemble each other in some respects. But nurture has to do with environmental factors. All the experiences of an individual person constitute nurture. It has been argued that nurture plays a very vital role in personality formation and development of an individual. Experience has shown of identical twins, though of similar nature, but they behave differently because of the simple fact that they were brought up in different locations by different people. This understanding will help us to appreciate the notion of character formation. Character formation is all about nurture.

Simply put, character has to do with the aggregate of the features that distinguish an individual person. It points to the quality of individual’s personality. Character is the sum total of those traits in a person that sets him / her apart from others. It is a unique mark of personal identity. In this sense, one can talk of good character or bad character. Character formation, therefore, is a kind of education that is focused on the behavioural and moral development of an individual. It is also called character education. Character formation has to do with all the environmental factors that are geared towards making an individual a moral agent. It is a kind of learning experience that helps to make an individual to be responsible. It is that wholistic teaching and learning experience that will help people “develop variously as moral, civic, good, mannered, behaved, non-bullying, healthy, critical, successful, traditional, compliant, or socially acceptable beings” (Wikipedia, 2018). It is a wholistic form of education. In sum, character formation focuses on the moral nature of the human person irrespective of individual’s race, tribe, religion, status, political affiliation, etc. It is the learning process that truly brings out the true humanity of the human person.

Factors for Character Formation

It is very difficult to outline all the factors that influence character formation. The simple fact is that there are many factors and this paper cannot claim to discuss all of them within the limited space. Below are some of the factors responsible for character formation of an individual:

1. **Nature:** Science has confirmed that the genetic formation of an individual can go a long way to determine how he/she perceives the world around him/her. It has been ascertained that our temperaments affect the way we accept or react to issues around us. Our genetic make-up constitutes the basic structure for character formation.
2. **Parents:** Parents play a vital role in the moral formation of their children. Children learn by observation and imitation; and as such, they learn to be honest, sincere, brave, neat, etc. from their parents. It has been observed that most of the values we cherish are learnt from our parents. Abraham Lincoln is quoted to have said: "God bless my mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her." This statement of Lincoln speaks volume about the role of parents in character formation.
3. **Teachers / Guardians:** Teachers and guardians are the molders of character. The ways and manners pupils and students behave can be traceable to their teachers and guardians. Sometimes children tend to believe their teachers more than their parents.
4. **Role Models:** A role model is an individual whose life inspires others. Generally, people tend to imitate or behave in the same way as their role models. More so, some people tend to accept or reject whatever their role model accepts or rejects as moral or immoral. Role modelling plays an essential role in character formation especially among the adolescents.
5. **Religion:** This is a powerful force for character formation. Most adherents of religion tend to believe whatever their religious leaders tell them. This explains why some people can go at any length to defend their religious beliefs. Religion is such a force that cannot be toyed with as far as character formation is concerned.
6. **The Mass Media:** Today, there is a kind of revolution in the information and communication technology sector. The mass media has become a major factor for character formation in our contemporary society. In Nigeria today, some of our youths depend on the mass media, especially the social media, for their personality development.

One thing to note is that there are many factors, known and unknown, that can influence the character formation of an individual. It will be very difficult to actually pin down the persons and situations that influence the personality of an individual. However, the point being made here is that certain factors are responsible for a person's character formation, growth and development.

Education as Character Formation

It is pertinent to begin this section by reechoing the general notion that "education is seen as anything that has to do with knowledge acquisition" (Ndubisi, 2018, p. 27). On the other hand, it is very important to note that mere knowledge acquisition does not make one to be educated. This means that mere possession of a particular knowledge is not education. Okolo (1989) argues:

To saturate one's head with facts about nature and even beyond has no more use than a dictionary, better still, an encyclopedia in one's library. Education is indeed not a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books or other people which those who can read from books usually do (p. 45).

Mere acquisition of knowledge can best be described as pseudo-education; it is not a true picture of education. This is because of the simple fact that the ultimate goal of education is character formation. "Education", Okolo posits, "must be related to life" (Okolo, 1989, p. 45). This presupposes that education, to worth its name, must relate to the practical life of the individual. The hallmark of education is the development of positive values that can help the individual to understand himself / herself and also enable the person to relate with others as a social being.

Socrates maintains that there is a serious nexus between education and character formation. In fact, he sees the goal of education as character formation. For him, “knowledge [Education] is virtue” (Socrates as cited in Omoregbe, 2002, p. 334). Socrates argues that it is practically impossible for one to be educated and still continue to do wrong things. He is of the view that ignorance is the root cause of wrong doing in our society. In this regard, proper education brings about proper character formation. If people are properly educated, then there will be less evil in the society. In discussing the view of Socrates, Omoregbe (2002) relates: “Wickedness is due to ignorance; if a man knows what is right he would do it, and if he knows what is evil he would refrain from it, for no one ever does evil knowingly. Virtue and good actions follow from knowledge, while wrong doing is the result of ignorance” (Pp. 34 – 35).

It is important to reiterate here that any form of knowledge acquisition that does not influence the character of an individual is dead. Aristotle maintains that the goal of education is moral and intellectual development of an individual. He laid more emphasis on the moral development (character formation) as the basis of education. Philosophers of education such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau place virtue (character formation) above mere intellectual learning. They are of the view that the goal of education is more of moral development than intellectual development (Iorvaa & Adejoh (2002). *Cit.*, Pp. 55 – 59.

We must also note that there is a huge difference between a learned person and an educated person. One can be learned without truly being educated. Education is value-laden; it is geared towards personality formation, growth and development of an individual. Education brings about all-rounded personality. In this regard, Akam (1995) argues that “wisdom is mental in acquisition and practical in application” (p. 135). It follows to say that one cannot claim to be knowledgeable when such claimed knowledge cannot be put to practice. A medical doctor whose major duty is to save and protect human life but indulges in abortion at will cannot be said to be properly educated; a civil engineer that uses inferior materials in place of superior materials in building houses can only boast of pseudo-education; a lecturer that engages in examination malpractice or sex for marks is very far from being educated. The argument here is that no one can claim to be educated without good character formation. Education removes the veil of ignorance from our eyes. One who is properly educated “is capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, taking the right decision most of the time and averting dangerous situations” (Akam, 1995, p. 1370).

True education is a human need. It makes one to be selfless, patriotic and humanitarian. Proper education makes one to be virtuous. It is very sad to note at this point that Nigeria is such a place where a person can claim to be educated and yet indulge in corrupt practices, tribalism, bribery, examination malpractice, misappropriation of public funds, and the likes. The worst of all is a scenario where the makers of laws are the breakers of laws.

Conclusion

So far, we have been able to highlight the general notions of education and character formation. We have also argued strongly in this chapter that the major goal of education is character formation. We cannot remove morality from education. Most of the problems we have today stem from the attempt to remove morality as the essential part of our educational system. It is important to note here that there is a difference between moral education and religious education (Kanu and Ndubisi, 2017, Pp. 79 – 84; Ndubisi, 2014, Pp. 212 – 242; Ndubisi, 2018, Pp. 105 – 119). The emphasis in this paper is on moral education and not religious education.

For one to claim to be properly educated, one must be formed in character. It is very sad to observe that today some Nigerian Universities no longer emphasize character formation. Character and learning are the basic requirements for the award of degrees. However, experience has shown situations where cultists and prostitutes were awarded First Class Honours. No one cares any more

about character formation. It is high time we began to retrace our steps in this regard. More so, teachers, lecturers and school administrators should be people of moral integrity, since no one can give what he/she does not have.

In sum, this paper submits that education is not all about mere acquisition of knowledge. Any knowledge acquisition that does not affect positively the character of an individual can best be described as pseudo-education. The goal of true and meaningful education is character formation. Finally, it is pertinent to recall the difference between an educated person and a learned person. While the later has to do with simple acquisition of knowledge that is not rooted in character formation, the former has both the acquired knowledge and good character formation. A person who is truly educated must have two wings in order to glide very well, namely, intellectual formation and moral formation. In the understanding of this paper, a person that has intellectual formation but lacks moral formation can simply be referred to as an educated illiterate. Education, to worth its name, must be rooted in character formation.

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