

# FROM THE MAKING OF A SCHOLAR TO A VIRTUOUS PERSON: A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

*Geoffrey Mmaduabuchi Okafor*

Masters Research Student, Department of Philosophy, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

kfrgeoffery@gmail.com

&

*Michael Maduazuchi Uzomah*

St. Albert Institute, Fayit, Fadan-Kagoma, an Affiliate of University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

drmmuzomah@gmail.com

## **Abstract:**

The most salient questions that constitute the problem of this study include:- is there a dichotomy between “being learned” and “being educated”? Is it possible for an individual's intellectual powers to be developed, yet his moral powers remained undeveloped and uncultured? Is it possible for an individual to be exceptionally erudite, yet morally bankrupt? In view of these questions, the study interrogates the Nigerian system of education which apparently breeds more great minds with questionable characters. The central object of this paper is to use John Locke's educational theory to demonstrate that virtue education is the cornerstone and essence of education. Locke emphatically stressed that the aim of education should be to instil “the principle of virtue”, namely the ability to subvert one's immediate appetites to the dictates of reason. Premised on this tokenism, the paper argues and recommends that to counteract the moral sleaze prevalent in the Nigerian polis, it is expedient that the Nigerian educational system considers a paradigm shift from the making of scholars to the making of virtuous human persons. The expository and hermeneutical methods are adopted in this discourse.

**Keywords:** Moral Formation, Been Education, Been Learned, Education, Hermeneutics, Virtuous Person.

## **Preamble: The Backdrop**

Every human society has its unique way of life. The constituents of this system of living are often regarded as the social values of the society. This includes the ethics, the moral principles and codes of conduct, the customs and the norms among others. These are attributes of the society and people live by them. This way of life becomes their identity and it is passed on from one generation to the next. Education is the veritable means by which this identity is been passed on. In its philosophical underpinning, education is an essential tool for the transformation of society to adapt to the unavoidable social changes and development by forming the character and the intellect of the citizens to embrace the transformation that might occur. It has a vital role to play in the society as it transforms it and helps to form the character of the citizens for their own benefit and as well, for the benefit of society. The benefits one gets from being educated cannot be overemphasized.

During the award of certificate after graduation, we do hear such statements as ‘...having been found worthy in character and learning, you are hereby conferred the Diploma, Degree (NCE/HND/BA/BSC/MA e.t.c) certificates. This means that education is not solely an academic endeavour but it includes discipline, character and maturity. The fact remains that if one is excellent in academics but is deficient in the area of self-discipline, good conduct or character; such a fellow ought not to be awarded a certificate. One can learn to read and write (literacy) yet the person ought not to be termed educated because he or she may be more interested in reading or learning things leading to bad attitude or anti-social behaviours which are not education. Education is always used to imply a positive state and cannot be negative (Ibekwe 77).

John H. Newman, in the bid to distinguish between being learned and being educated, made a clear distinction between what he called, 'ideal education' and 'elite education'. He asserts: "the goal of education and by extension, University education, is not necessarily to produce 'super minds' the ultra-high elite of today who are the result of a system of elite education that sends of minds that are smart, talented and driven, yet anxious, timid and lost with a stunted sense of purpose, perhaps; great at what they do with little or no consideration for human values (cited in Isaac Ukpokolo 99). Newman is not in the least against education producing brilliant and exceptional intellectual giants; rather he implicitly advocates that such individuals must be morally sound and should have excellent disposition towards moral values and virtues. They ought most importantly to be genial and humane. If one should interview Nigerian students on why they go to school, one might not be surprised to have ninety nine percent (99%) of them revealing that their aim of taking to the herculean task of schooling is to be trained as professionals in their different carriers, with no mention made about being formed to be good people of high moral probity and rectitude (Uzomah and Isanbor 2-3). Being educated necessarily includes a transformation of the total self and being civilized.

Nigeria as a society in its educational system seems to have forgotten the fact that education has two cardinal points which are intellectual and character formation. Like many other countries in the world, Nigeria is undergoing a period of political, social, security, economic and religious uncertainties. The fundamental cause of these predicaments include fraud, bad and incompetent governance, corruption, ritual killings, inter-ethnic and religious rivalries etc. Discipline is at a very low ebb in our institutions of learning; where we see things like cultism, prostitution, arm robbery, indecent dressing, sexual pervasions, the neological *yahoo plus ritual killings*, etc., in our higher institutions of learning. Can it be said that moral education is no longer in the curriculum of the country or is not been taken seriously by the students? Or are teachers afraid to correct students either because they are part of the problem, or are they simply indifferent?

Locke is convinced that moral education is more important than any other kind of education. More particularly, the aim of education is to instill what Locke calls the principle of virtue, namely, the ability to subvert one's immediate appetites and desires to the dictates of reason. Against this backdrop, this paper considers Locke's principles of education as the panacea to restore the fallen quality in the Nigerian Educational system. Locke's central thesis is that education should serve as the principle of virtue. This is against the visible background in Nigeria where some educated men and women instead of upholding virtue as their principle, uphold the opposite. Hence, this paper attempts to argue that inculcation of virtue and morality should be taken seriously in Nigerian schools so as to be a guiding principle in the lives of every Nigerian scholar and graduate. In other words, it calls for a paradigm shift from scholarly oriented education to virtuous-based education.

### **Education Defined**

To ascertain who an educated person it suffices to first and foremost establish what education is. Educationists and Educational Philosophers have not agreed on a definition of the concept. As a consequence, there are numerous and varying definitions of education. According to John Milton whose definition of education once became a fast complete and generous definition of the term, education is that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously in all offices, both private and public, of peace and war. John Stuart Mill contended that the core of education is the culture which each generation purposely gives to those who are to be its successors, in order to qualify them for at least keeping up and if possible for raising the level of improvement which has been attained (21-27). In an article in the Catholic position paper No 69 of 1979, Hoz defined Education as "the deliberate cultivation of the specific faculties proper to men" (2).

Etymologically, to trace the roots of the word Education, one needs to go to the two opposing and conflicting schools of thought in philosophy. The schools namely, idealism and realism, were opposed as to how and where knowledge should come or go to (Ojih 22). These two schools of thought in philosophy have always opposed each other; while realists argue that reason rules and it is the source of all knowledge, idealists argue that ideas rule and it is through them that knowledge is gotten.

For the school of idealism by Plato, education is derived from the Latin word “educare” which means “to lead forth”, “drag out or pull out” ideas which are believed to be innate from childhood. Since these ideas which are believed to be innate, stimulation helps to hasten them out. So education for the idealist school of thought involves leading out, or helping the innate abilities of an individual to grow and blossom into original thought and wisdom (Ojih 22). For the school of realism led by Locke, the infinite verb “to educate” is derived from the Latin word “educere” which involves 'sending in' or putting in' ideas into the mind of a child which is believed to be blank or empty at birth (Ojih 22). Education here involves forming or training the individual with experiences which are acquired through the senses. These senses provide the mind with impressions and information.

Peters defined education as a process of the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it, be it children or adults; education is regarded as a product when it is defined as the end results or the outcome of learning. In this regard, education becomes the anticipated consequences of the process (45). In other words, if the product of education derives from the process of education viewed as a product then, education could be seen as synonymous with acquired knowledge, attitudes and skills; such knowledge would either help man function positively or negatively. Hence, Ukeje B. O in Ojih emphasized that:

As a very powerful instrument, education can be used for man's destruction or for his transformation and reconstruction of his environment. As a discipline, education is seen as an organized body of knowledge of taught in schools. This body of knowledge studied and can be divided into sub disciplines such as when we talk about foundations of education, vocational education, physical and health education and administration and so on (24).

A short definition that may be drawn from the various definitions of education that have been given and what some educationists and educational philosophers believe to be the content of education is that it is the development of the whole man. It follows from this that education embraces the whole of man's activity: physical, intellectual, moral and even spiritual.

The great philosophers of the Ancient time were not left out in attempting to reveal what education consists of. Plato, like Socrates, opined that virtue is knowledge, ignorance is the vice. He sees education as a drug that heals the sickness of ignorance in man. Education for him changes the life of an individual. The progress of a man comes through acquiring education and that education should be controlled by the state—that is the government. Plato is convinced that “the root of the vice that abounds in the state lay chiefly in ignorance, and only by proper education can one be converted into a virtuous man” (Punja no. p.). Aristotle on the other hand, sees the aim of education as not only the attainment of happiness or goodness in life. He believed that virtue lies in the attainment of goodness. He has goodness into categories: goodness of intellect and goodness of character. The former can be produced and increased by teaching and is the product of training and experience; the latter is the result of habit, and it can be attained by the formation of good habits. Aristotle's definition of education is the same as that of his teacher, Plato; that is, the creation of a sound mind in a sound body. Thus, to him, the aim of education was for the

welfare of the individuals so as to bring happiness in their lives (Ibekwe 34). By implication, the goal of education for Aristotle is purposeful, and this purpose is to attain happiness which is a virtue. It is the significant role of the government for Aristotle, to provide its citizens with standard education, and when this is done, virtuous men will be produced by that state.

Above all, for a clear sense of who truly is an educated person, this paper adopts Locke's definition of education which is that education is the welfare and prosperity of the nation. Education for him provides the character formation necessary for becoming a person and being a responsible citizen. His educational philosophy is an effort to show how democratic constitutional monarchy might be preserved and improved (Yolton 3). This research looks at education not solely as a process geared towards intellectual formation but it includes discipline, character and maturity. The fact remains that if one is excellent in academics but is deficient in the area of self-discipline, good conduct or character, such person ought not to be awarded the required certificate and can even be expelled from the school. The underlying fact amounts that a scholar is one whose intellectual quotient defines his moral reasoning and action. It therefore becomes a natural negation so to say, for an 'educated' person to be found wanting in upright discipline and character exhibition.

### **John Locke's Virtue-Based Theory of Education**

Locke's philosophy of education is contained in his works, "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" and "Some Thoughts Concerning Education". For over a century, these works were the most important philosophical works on education in England. "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" was translated into almost all of the major written European languages during the eighteenth century, and nearly every European writer on education after Locke, including Jean Jacques Rousseau, acknowledged its influence. Locke seems to have deliberately attempted to popularize several strands of seventeenth-century educational reform at the same time as introducing his own ideas.

These two works played a defining role in the eighteenth-century educational theory. Locke maintained that education makes the man. Locke writes at the opening of "Essay Concerning Human Understanding":

I think I may say that of all men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education." (Tarcov 108).

In making this claim, Locke was arguing against both the Augustinian view of man, which grounds its conception of humanity in original sin, and the Cartesian position, which holds that man innately, knows logical propositions (Ezell 140).

Locke was convinced that moral education is more important than other kinds of education. The goal of education in his view is not to create a scholar, but to create a virtuous man. More particularly, the aim of education is to instill what Locke calls the Principle of Virtue, namely the ability to subvert one's immediate appetites and desires to the dictate of reason. The goal of education is to guard against any vices to which a child is predisposed. By tailoring children's education to their characters, teachers not only obtain more effective results, but they also make the experience enjoyable (Locke 194).

Given that Locke is one of the great minds of the last few centuries, we might expect him to put a high value on intellectual development. Actually, though, the strongest message of Locke's thoughts on education is exactly the opposite: a child's bodily health and the soundness of his character are far more important, in Locke's view, than the state of his intellect. The primary goal of Locke's educational plan is to create a virtuous, well-bred, and wise young man, and not to create a scholar.

The optimal time to implant this capacity, Locke tells us, is in early childhood, while the mind is still tender and malleable. To do this, parents need to make sure that their children's natural instinct, which is, to tell them to indulge. If you coddle and indulge your baby, Locke warns, that your child will learn that his desires ought to always be satisfied and he will find himself incapable of self-denial. If, instead, you maintained a stern authority over your child, and not indulge his whims, then your child will grow accustomed to subverting his or her immediate desires to the dictates of reason. Hence, for the time being, of course, it is your reason that he is yielding to, but this is setting a pattern that will serve him well when his own reason begins to develop; he will then be able to subvert his immediate desires to the dictates of his own reason.

Locke dedicated the bulk of “Some Thoughts Concerning Education” to explaining how to inculcate virtue in children. He defines virtue as a combination of self-denial and rationality: “that a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follow what reason directs as best, though the appetite lean the other way (Locke 25). Future virtuous adults must be able not only to practice self-denial but also to see their rational path. Locke was convinced that children could reason early in life and that parents should, above all, attempt to create a “habit” of thinking rationally in their children (Locke 25).

Moreover, in order for this principle of virtue to take hold, Newman indicates that the authority of the parents must be absolute and based in fear and awe. Under no circumstances should the child be beaten for doing wrong, but he also cannot be rewarded with toys or sweets for doing right. These sorts of motivations, Locke points out, just reinforce what we are trying to root out: they make immediate physical desires of the objects of all actions. Instead of physical motivations, Locke suggests that parents use mental motivations. When the child does wrong he must be met with cold disapproval, and when he does right, he must be commended and treated warmly. The child thus, comes to be motivated by the desire to be in his parents' good graces; he wants to avoid disgrace and warrant esteem (Newman 78). Likewise, this sort of motivation will later develop into a desire to warrant his own esteem- that is, to always follow his conscience.

Evidently, Locke argues that a child's character should be formed before his intellect. He is not at all affirming that intellectual formation is not important but that the character of the child should first be considered. He therefore opined that “education should not end up making man a scholar but should make him a virtuous man”. To properly inculcate virtue into the child, the process of education should be made in such a way that it would be fun, so that the child will find learning not as a task or duty but to love it as he loves playing. Also, he emphasized habit over rule. He suggests teaching by habit and examples. By this, he recognizes that every person has their own unique temperament, and that this temperament needs to be taken account of in education. In what academic learning should be, he did not dedicate much space to give a specific curriculum; he is more concerned about affirming virtue-based education. For him, it was important to take great care in educating the young. He recognized that habits and prejudices formed in youth could be very hard to break in life. Thus, much of his work on “Some Thoughts Concerning Education” focuses on morality and the best ways to inculcate Virtue and industry. Hence, he rejected authoritarian approaches. Instead, he favoured methods that would help children to understand the difference between right and wrong and to cultivate a moral sense of their own. In the light of the above, how can Locke's educational principles be an antibiotic to remedy the malaria of moral decadence found among some educated persons in our country? Obviously, it appears that we have numerous celebrated scholars of which very few can also be celebrated as men and women of moral repute.

### **Virtue and Moral Decadence among Nigerian Educated Men and Women**

No doubt, our country Nigeria every year and time proudly graduates a teeming number of her citizens from both public and private higher institutions of learning. We can indeed boast of many educated persons both at home and in the diaspora. Despite this, notwithstanding, one of the most critical challenges facing Nigeria today is the need to strengthen the ethical or moral standards of our youths. The moral fabric of our society has weakened. Sadly, the Nigerian educational policy has one of its aims as the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. Logically, an educated person is one who is supposed to have benefited from the merits of formal education. Therefore, to be educated presupposes that one must have been adequately brought up from infancy in such manner that the positive powers of his or her cultural education is not limited to the ability to read and write.

The educated is made to be elite. By being elite he is supposed to be a shining light within his immediate and distant environment, someone who is among the best at a certain task. Even when we interpret the educated to be the one who has the privilege of going to school, there are still certain qualities that are expected of such a person. For instance, an educated person is expected to live above all his or her undertakings. He is expected to show the right way while others follow. It is the high premium attached to education that causes the society to frown when the educated is involved in or supports any untoward activity. Given this high standard that the educated is set with the standard of being the first while others follow, associating the educated with any element of corruption could be said to be directly opposite.

How then should the educated become afflicted with the scourges of corruption in Nigeria? What is wrong with our own educational system? Locke considers education to be the principle of virtue. There is a very bad seed fighting against virtue in our dear country Nigeria, the bad seed today known as 419- a life that thrives on deceit. We have examination 419, Election 419 and material 419. What are we to do about the wasted energies in cultism, drug abuse, child -trafficking, kidnapping, irrational approaches toward agitation for freedom and adulterate half-baked doctors, teachers, Professors, engineers, Lawyers, dishonest leadership and even false pastors in the churches? We are challenged to examine the root of all these lack of virtue among Nigerian educated men and women.

Apparently, whoever that is learned and is not morally sound cannot be said to be educated. This is why Locke insisted that the final end of education is not the acquisition of certificate like Diplomas Degrees both in Master's and Doctorate but the building up of a good character. Taking education as a Principle of virtue would help us acquire the human values, of truth, right action, love, peace, mercy and non-violence. The person who lives the truth in words, thought and deed performs the right action. With the right action all around us, peace is born. Peace with God and with man is love. Love leads to mercy and non-violence with this type of education; we can achieve unity in diversity and live in peace in our country Nigeria.

Any right thinking Nigerian would accept the fact that we have a problem in our educational system. Our educational institutions are producing young people who are more specialized in all kinds of vices than they are specialized in virtue. Some students injure and kill fellow students because of cultic activities. Many lives have been lost because of cultism and the recent vice of 'Yahoo plus ritual killings'. Some Nigerian students and graduates are in one secret cult or the other; they believe that they cannot make it without dining with one cultic group or the other, sometimes even Lecturers in our Universities who are supposed to be tutors of morality and virtue to the students involve themselves in these acts of cultism. During political campaigns, we hear of the

kidnapping of children and even adults for the purpose of ritual killings aimed at fortifying politicians and perpetuating them in positions and for abundant wealth. Recently, killings and wasting of lives have been the order of the day by a group known as the “unknown gunmen”. Today, competency is not the bedrock of leadership and governance in the country but rather self-interest and 'it is my turn' mentality to rule. The educated during elections are the returning officers of the votes casted, notwithstanding, do the votes of the citizens truly count? One can go on and on to list the vices seen among Nigerian educated men and women but the question is, if education was made to form virtuous men and women, then, what is wrong with the Nigerian educational system? The simple answer to this question would be that the Nigerian educational system seems not to be virtue-based.

### **The Way Forward: Paradigm Shift from the Making of a Scholar to a Virtuous Person**

From the foregoing discourses, it is plausibly to hold that, learning is all about the knowledge the student is able to grasp and put into action at the end of the studies. It is what the student does. The teacher's work is to provide learning materials and activities for the student through teaching and demonstration. The student's duty is to grasp these experiences of the teacher, personalize them and make them working tools in life (Igwenagu 38). This implies that if education has character formation as one of its cardinal point, its products are expected to be men and women of high moral standard. Based on this established fact, it is significant to agree with Uzomah and Isanbor, that for an individual to be considered educated he or she must have developed the three most sublime powers of man; physical, intellectual and moral faculties. This means that being educated, it is expected to include more than merely being learned and being able to use one's knowledge. It necessarily extends to being able to behave in a morally acceptable way (Uzomah and Isanbor 5).

Hence, from the brief scholarly exposition of Locke's virtue educational principle, this paper strongly argues that, it is undeniable that one of the most critical challenges facing the Nigerian society today is the need to strengthen the ethical or moral standards of the youths and indeed all citizens of every age and social strata. Locke affirms that education should serve as a principle of virtue. Since it is believed that youths of today are leaders of tomorrow, the role of education in salvaging our sickly moral values is of critical significance. Heads of schools and their teachers need to work together in their various schools to reverse the decline in ethics, morals and values. Parents should also be involved in this crusade, likewise the government. Though we appear to be facing a problem of crisis in values, the schools through the efforts of committed and dedicated staff can redefine these values and use the necessary methodology to teach them since values come into education as aims, teachers through personal example should teach the students to be self-critical and strive towards excellence. They should see good name as being better than silver and gold. Students through their various schools should be made to ask themselves who am I? What do I hope for? And how do I get to what I hope for? Moreover, for Nigeria to have graduates who will uphold virtue and morality, the Nigerian schools should revisit the African old cherished values. They can inculcate values in the students by creating respect for civil virtue, moral responsibility and voluntary support of law. They can also call attention to the reasons why they should abide by the law and make responsible and ethical contributions to improve our society.

### **Conclusion**

The attainment of knowledge is necessary and very crucial both for the interest of the individual and that of the society. The goodness of education, therefore, is the goodness of intellect and that of the character. The two goods are intertwined to such a magnitude that one cannot do without the other. True scholarship, consequently, is the product of one who is both academically and morally sound. Hopefully, if the findings and

recommendations of this paper are adopted, it will not only deter moral sleaze but will also enrich the quality of life and happiness of the educated class. As it were, this paper is not proposing it as a final solution to the numerous problems in the Nigerian educational system but as a recipe or a measure towards achieving a better and quality education that gears towards the advancement of morality and virtue in Nigeria. Therefore, there is indeed the imperative of a paradigm shift from the scholar-making orientation of the Nigerian educational system to the making of humane and virtuous humans.

## Works Cited

- Ezell, M. "John Locke's Images of Childhood", *Journal of the Eighteenth Century Studies*. ( 1 7 . 2 ) , 1983, 139-155.
- Ibekwe, C. N. *Philosophy of Education, An Introduction*, Umunze: Annyco Publishers, 2008.
- Igwenagu, C. O. *War Against Examination Malpractice in Nigeria*, Awka: Demercury Bright and Publishing Co., 2014.
- Locke, J. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and the Conduct of the Human Understanding*, Eds Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co Inc., 1996.
- Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Ed. Roger Woolhouse, New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Newman, L. *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Ogu, O. C. "Education for Today", *Journal of Faculty of Education University of Calabar*, 3(2), 2003, 21-27.
- Ogunu, M. *Catholic Schools; Their Unique Characteristics and What Makes them Effective*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Benin City: Mabagun Publishers, 2005.
- Ojih, C. I. *Journey into Philosophy of Education*, Nibo: Mico Industrial Press, 1995.
- Peter, R. S. *Authority, Responsibility and Education*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1977.
- Punja, M. *Plato's Theory of Education*. accessed via yourarticle.com, 2015.
- Spark Notes Editors, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education", accessed via www.sparknotes.com. 2015.
- Tarcov, N. *Locke's Education for Liberty*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Ukpokolo, I. .E. *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy*, Ibadan: Kairos Publishing, 2015.
- Uzomah, M. M. and Isanbor, P. O. *Foundational Principles of Philosophy of Education*, Ekpoma: Emesh Printing Press, 2017.
- Yolton, J. *Locke: An Introduction*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985.