

Research Article

Staff and Students' Perception of Higher Education as Agent of Values Orientation and Character Development

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ABSTRACT: *Value-based education which is essential for moral, ethical, spiritual and socio-cultural development and which forms the basis of character and personality development is crucial in higher education. There is obviously need to examine the extent to which higher education in Nigeria serve as agent of value orientation and character development. This study investigated the perception of values orientation and character development by staff and students in three higher institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study sample consisted of 200 staff and students, randomly selected from a population of 125 staff and 500 students. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire titled Perception of Values and Character Education Questionnaire (PVCEQ). The instrument was a four-point Likert-type questionnaire. The test-retest reliability estimate of the instrument was done to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. The overall reliability co-efficient of 0.80 was obtained, showing that the instrument was reliable. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses respectively. The findings of the study revealed that both staff and students agreed to a great extent that higher education serve as agent of values orientation and that high education equally exhibit features that result in positive character development. However, areas of weaknesses in higher education meeting the above responsibilities were equally identified. Additionally, no significant differences existed in the opinion of staff and students with respect to the two hypotheses tested. The findings of the study were discussed and recommendations made among others that teachers should not only model positive behavior but also build caring and supportive relationships.*

Keywords: *Value orientation, character development, higher education, staff perception and students' perception.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Value is the worth, merit or esteem of something, a person, or object or an idea. The value given to something or somebody differs in quality and also degree. Objects that are of value hold attraction for us and we desire to possess them. Value related issues are of great importance in education because we educate in and for society. Values must be inculcated into an individual. This process is referred to as valuing. Values are inculcated through the development of the person's conscience into active control of behaviour. Education is the agent of this gradual process of value inculcation [1]; [2] and [3]. The inculcation of a sense of values is a social process that can best be achieved in a highly organized environment such as higher educational environment where education serves as a refining, clarifying and orienting agent [4] Aspirants of higher education usually enter the

campuses with some diverse personal desires, aspirations and expectations. As a result while some aspire to strive for success through hard work and personal commitment, others adopt diverse fraudulent means to achieve it. Yet some others attach laissez-faire attitude to the work ahead of them. All these traits unfortunately to some extent are results of home upbringing and interaction with various peer groups.

The curriculum of higher institutions contains set values expected to be transmitted to the younger generation through the instructional system. Paradoxically, some of the values that promote honesty, transparency, tolerance and peaceful co-existence have no set method of transmission [5]. The best way to transmit such values according to these writers is through enlightenment and interpretation of what the values stand for and that is orientation. Orientation is the best method of teaching such values as peace, security, tolerance, sanctity of lives and peaceful coexistence. Discussing essentiality of value orientation in higher education, [6] opined that value orientation should be a national priority because of growing destructive attitudes. Nowadays divided families are facing the problem of impacting values due to unavailability of time and changed lifestyles. Value orientation helps in developing character, good conduct, moral integrity, self discipline, compassion, love for all living beings, responsibility etc, and many other positive qualities in students. Above all, it makes students feel better about themselves. Their academic performance goes up and they are able to spend more time on learning. With respect to character, to some, having character simply means following the rules. This certainly is relevant but is far from being sufficient. As presented by [7], character refers to a much broader constellation of attitudes, behaviours, motivations and skills. It is more than simply avoiding involvement in socially undesirable behaviours. Character includes attitudes such as the desire to do one's best and being concerned about the welfare of others, intellectual capacity such as critical thinking and moral reasoning, behaviours such as being honest and responsible and standing up for moral principles in the face of injustice; interpersonal and emotional skills that enable us to interact effectively with others in a variety of circumstances; and the commitment to contribute to one's community and society. Stated simply, character is the realization of one's positive development as a person-intellectually, socially, emotionally and ethically. Character education is the deliberate use of dimensions of school life to foster optimum character development. This comprehensive approach to character education utilizes every aspect of schooling – the content of the curriculum, the process of instruction, the quality of relationships, the handling of discipline, the conduct of co-curricular activities and the ethos of total school environment – to foster good character in all institution members. The primary role parents play in the character development of their children should be recognized while schools essentially affirm the roles they must play in promoting students' character development and preparing students for effective citizenship. The goals of character education according to [8] are thus essentially the goals of raising good children who understand, care about and act upon the core ethical values (such as diligence, compassion, integrity and fairness) that make for productive, just and democratic society. As students grow in character, they grow in their capacity and commitment to do their best, do the right thing, and lead lives of purpose.

Effective character education involves creating the kinds of classroom and school environment that enable all students, without exception, realize their potentials to achieve these vital goals. While in higher institutions students are guided by rules and regulations which moderate the way they behave. Experience show that the society values to a large extent influence the behavioural patterns of most students in that what they see their parents, teachers and other highly placed individuals do or demand from them dictate their conduct [9] and [10]. The question then is what the society at large has proffered as principles or norms that can impact on students in institutions. Most students in institutions exhibit characteristics which suggest that character which is a major index for an all round education that will make for active citizenship is given a backbench in the scheme of learning endeavours [11].

The federal government of Nigeria through its National Policy on Education [12] recognized the importance of values orientation and character development in its broad goals of education which include among others:

- (i) Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity;
- (ii) Development of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world.

To achieve these goals, the NPE prescribes that the quality of instruction should inculcate basic values among which are:

- Moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations;
- Shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
- Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children
- Acquisition of functional skills and competences necessary for self-reliance.

Invariably, the requirements outlined above are basic tenets that arise from personal values. But how far are staff and students in higher institutions well aware of these goals and their implementation parameters to be able to appreciate their achievement. Against these backdrops, it is therefore necessary to ascertain if higher education is effectively serving as agents of value orientation and character development in Nigeria.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the opinion of staff and students on the extent to which higher education serve as agent of values orientation in students. Also the study assessed the extent higher education exhibit features that result in positive character development in students.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two research questions guided the study. The first was in regard to higher education serving as agent of values orientation. That is, to what extent is higher education serving as agents of values orientation in students? Second was with regards to higher education exhibiting features that result in positive character development. That is, to what extent is higher education exhibiting features that result in positive character development in students?

2.1 Hypotheses

Two hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to guide the study as follows:

1. H_{10} : There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of staff and students on the extent to which higher education serve as agent of values orientation in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

Vs

H_{11} : There is significant difference in the mean ratings of staff and students on the extent to which higher education serve as agent of values orientation in tertiary institutions in Enugu State

2. H_{20} : There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of staff and students on the extent to which higher education exhibit features that result in positive character development in students of tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

Vs

H_{21} : There is significant difference in the mean ratings of staff and students on the extent to which higher education exhibit features that result in positive character development in students of tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

III. METHODS

This study is a descriptive survey undertaken in three higher institutions. Descriptive survey was deemed appropriate for the study because the study involved use of representative sample from the population and the drawing of conclusions based on the analysis of available data [13]. Purposive and stratified random samplings were used in selecting samples for the study. The researcher purposely selected three tertiary institutions based in Enugu, the capital of Enugu State. The institutions are Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) and Enugu State College of Education, Technical

(ESCET). One department each of these institutions were selected by random sampling and used for the study. In these departments, four hundred level students were used for the study because they were considered matured enough to respond accurately to the questionnaire items. Simple random sampling with replacement technique was used to select fifty students from each department. The technique was used in order to ensure that every member of the population had equal and independent chance of being selected. Hence, from a population of five hundred 400 level students in the departments, one hundred and fifty students were selected. The same technique was used to select fifty members of staff involved in instructing the students. This fifty staff with the 150 students formed the sample of 200 respondents used for the study. The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled Perception of Values and Character Education Questionnaire (PVCEQ). The instrument was developed by the researcher. Both staff and students responded to the questionnaire which has two parts. Part one of the instrument sought demographic data such as whether the respondent is a staff or a student, year of study for students and their departments. Part two was a four-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of two clusters. Both clusters A and B comprised of ten items each. Items in cluster A assessed extent to which higher education serve as agent of value orientation while those in cluster B measured extent to which higher education exhibited features that resulted in positive character development. The instrument for the study was administered to the respondents by the researcher and two coordinated Research Assistants in a class setting. Out of the two hundred copies of questionnaires administrated, 190 were correctly filled and considered fit for use in the study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested with t-test statistics.

IV. RESULTS

The staff and students involved in this study were made to respond to the questionnaire items with respect to the two research questions of the study. In presenting the data, the assumption is that mean value of 2.50 and above were regarded as great extent while mean values less than 2.50 were regarded as low extent.

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the Extent Higher Education Serve as Agent of Value Orientation

S/N	Items	Students (n=142)			Staff (n=48)		
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
	Higher education does the following:						
1	Adequately helps students develop positive values	2.70	1.43	GE	2.78	1.26	GE
2	Equips students with specific valuable skills	2.44	1.14	LE	2.41	1.39	LE

3	Is value-based in that it strengthens students' self esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfillment.	2.79	1.29	GE	2.76	1.56	GE
4	Has explicit goal of promoting moral and ethical values that lead to recognition of diversity in individuals.	2.51	1.28	GE	3.17	1.18	GE
5	Articulates and makes explicit the values of the school and the community in which it is situated.	3.23	1.68	GE	3.12	1.49	GE
6	Occur in partnership with staff, families and the school community as part of a whole person approach to educating students.	3.45	1.41	GE	3.08	1.52	GE
7	Are presented in a safe and supportive environment in which students are encouraged to explore their own values	2.31	1.23	LE	2.41	1.39	LE
8	Are presented in a developmentally appropriate curriculum that meet individual value needs of students	3.13	1.61	LE	3.43	1.68	GE
9	Address clearly defined outcomes and use evaluation to monitor valuable outcomes and decisions	3.55	1.65	GE	3.08	1.43	GE
10	Are delivered by trained, value oriented lecturers who by their work serve as role models	3.23	1.68	LE	3.50	1.63	GE
	Grand mean	2.89	1.44	GE	2.97	1.45	GE

Key: VGE = Very great extent, GE = great extent LE = Low extent, VLE = very low extent.

Data on TABLE 1 above revealed a grand mean of 2.89 for the students with standard deviation of 1.44 which showed that students accepted to a high extent that higher education serve as agent of value orientation in tertiary institutions in Enugu State. The staff recorded a grand mean of 2.97 with standard deviation of 1.45 which also showed they were equally positive about higher education serving as agent of value orientation of students.

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the Extent Higher Education Exhibit Features that Result in Positive Character Development in Students

S/N	Items	Students (n=142)			Staff (n=48)		
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
	To what extent does higher education:						
1	Promote core ethical values as basis for character development	2.27	1.42	LE	2.60	1.47	GE
2	Define character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling and behaviour	3.13	1.51	GE	3.43	1.61	GE
3	Use a comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach in character development	2.31	1.28	LE	2.44	1.14	LE
4	Create a caring, orderly and friendly school environment	3.23	1.78	GE	3.55	1.74	GE
5	Provide opportunity for students to be involved in genuine religious and moral activities	3.08	1.52	GE	3.12	1.49	GE
6	Provide meaningful and challenging curriculum that help all students to succeed	3.46	1.66	GE	3.56	1.67	GE
7	Foster in students motivation to learn and be good people	2.83	1.27	GE	2.78	1.23	GE
8	Engage staff as professional in a learning and moral community actually practicing shared values	2.98	1.28	GE	2.83	1.27	GE
9	Engage families and communities as partners in character education	2.13	1.69	LE	2.44	1.33	LE
10	Evaluate character of the school, its staff and its students to inform the character education efforts.	2.18	1.43	LE	2.45	1.33	LE
	Grand mean	2.76	1.48	GE	2.92	1.42	GE

Key: VGE = Very great extent, GE = Great extent, LE = Low extent, VLE = Very low extent

Data in TABLE 2 showed mean of 2.76 with standard deviation of 1.48 and 2.92 with standard deviation of 1.42 for both students and staff respectively. This indicated that both groups agreed to a great extent that higher education in Enugu State exhibits features that result in positive character development in students.

Table 3: T-Test Analysis of Staff and Students on Extent Higher Education Serve as Agent of Value Orientation

Respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig	Decision
Students	142	2.89	.392	-0.177	188	.864	NS
Staff	48	2.97	.396				

Table 3 showed no significant difference between the mean rating of staff and students on the extent higher education serve as agent for value orientation in students. The hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

Table 4: T-Test Analysis of Staff and Students on the Extent Higher Education Exhibit Features that Result in Positive Character Development in Students

Respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig	Decision
Students	142	2.76	.356	0.648	188	.535	NS
Staff	48	2.92	.306	-0.648			

TABLE 4 showed that there is no significant difference in mean rating of staff and students on the extent higher education exhibit features that result in positive character development in students.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that higher education to a great extent is serving as agent for value orientation in students. This finding is in line with the view of [4] that higher education is the gradual process of inculcating the sense of values and that such can best be achieved in a highly organized environment such as higher educational environment. Both students and teachers however agreed that higher education does not equip students with enough specific valuable skills necessary for employment after leaving schools and that higher education is not presented in enough safe and supportive environments in which students are encouraged to explore their own values. This aspect of the finding lends credence to the work of [10] and [9] who called for re-orientation of values of higher education undergraduates based on the identified fact that poor societal emphasis and support for education as well as goal ambiguity are major factors that influence students' value orientation. [14] writing on the need for values re-orientation called on the present government to provide enough supportive and safe learning environments for tertiary education in order not only to use education to re-oriented students' values but also encourage the inculcation of functional skills for self employment. In this study, while staff and students agreed generally to a great extent that higher education is exhibiting features that

result in positive character development, both groups opined that higher education does not use comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach to character development. This in essence is why the curriculum even within the General Studies component does not provide specific courses in character education. Furthermore students are not recognized so much in for instance, at convocation ceremonies for good character as they are in academics. Again both staff and students agreed that families and communities do not partner enough with institutions in character education. This finding coordinates the finding of [11] that schools in Nigeria lack proper collaborations with the home as are the case in developed countries. The school and the home should work co-operatively in developing students' character.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study calls for a step on the part of higher education to ensure proper implementation of the provisions of the nation policy on education with respect to values orientation and character development in order that higher education be effectively used to eradicate societal ills, especially corruption and their likes which many agree have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Again, the quality of instruction in higher education must indicate basic values specified in the National Policy on Education [12]; especially moral and spiritual principles and acquisition of functional skills and competences necessary for self-reliance. Recommendations were made that teachers should not only model positive behaviour in their dealings with students but also should build caring and supportive relationships in the classroom and throughout the school. Furthermore, opportunities should be created for students to be actively and meaningfully involved in the life of the classroom and school. Equally important is that teachers should teach essentials of social skills; involve students in moral discourse and make learning tasks meaningful and relevant to students' lives. Obviously teachers' jobs are facilitated when government at all levels transform schools under their care to reflect comfortable and safe learning environment.

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