

Higher Education Teaching, Risks and Ethical Basis For Resilience In Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT : *The paper argues the thesis that the tertiary education teacher in a developing country owes the society an ethical obligation, which constitutes a fundamental basis for resilience in the face of the risks/dangers he/ she faces in the course of discharging his/her duties. His calling and orientation demand not only that he should make a success of his teaching career, but also that his efforts should have an impact on society to liberate such a society from educational, socio-economic, political, scientific and technological awkwardness. Teaching is regarded as one of the least hazardous jobs. This is because the teacher is not exposed to the type of hazards his industrial counterparts are prone to. However, while it is true that the teacher is not exposed to exactly the same hazards his counterpart in the industry is exposed to, he/she is prone to other forms of risks which threaten his or her career. These risks emanate from students, school authorities, government, and society at large. The propensity of these risks is higher in tertiary institutions where the students are already adults, and the interaction between the town and the gown is pronounced. Despite these risks, the tertiary education teacher ought to be exemplary in the discharge of his duties. It is only through this that he/she can develop in-built machinery for resilience. The paper is an exposition of the risks involved in tertiary education teaching in developing countries and how to overcome them through commitment to ethical practices.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education teaching, though not prone to the same hazards which other professions are prone to, has its own peculiar types of hazards or risks. These risks threaten the career of the higher education teacher and teaching as much as the hazards in other professions threaten the careers of his counterparts in those professions. This paper is an exposition of the hazards or risks the higher education teacher and teaching are exposed to. The aim of the study is to encourage resilience on the part of higher education teachers especially in developing countries with peculiar problems. An analysis of these risks will not only show their nature and scope, but will also guide the teacher in either forestalling those risks that could be forestalled or facing squarely those that should be faced. The awareness of these risks, in our thinking constitutes a basis for the need to prepare for them and tackle them if and when they confront the tertiary education teacher. The paper presents the empirical experiences of the higher education teacher in an expository manner, using experiences drawn largely from, but not limited to the Nigeria. The work is divided into five parts, each dovetailing into the other to make a complete work. Part one, the current part summarizes the content of the work. The second part examines what this work refers to as higher education and its teaching. The third part examines the risks involved in higher education teaching while part four takes a look at ethical commitment as the basis of resilience on the part of the higher education teacher. Part five, the final part, is the conclusion.

II. HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING

This part of the work takes a look at what constitutes higher education teaching. To do this, a glimpse into the key concepts: education and higher education teaching is essential. The word *education* is coined from the Latin word *educare*- meaning to rear or “bring up the child mentally, physically, socially and otherwise, to a state of maturity and self dependence” (Edeh & Ogbu: 2002:8). However, there is no universally acceptable definition for it as various scholars define it in various ways.

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 6th edition defines education in the following ways:

- [1] A process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills.
- [2] A particular kind of teaching or training.
- [3] The subject of study that deals with how to teach.
- [4] An interesting experience that teaches us something
- [5] The institutions or people involved in teaching and training.

The above attempts at defining education are not only descriptive, but also limit the scope of education. The first definition, for example almost limits education to school/college or formal education. We do know that there is more to education than classroom teaching and learning.

There are sages who never went through formal education. If five definitions could emanate from only one source, then, we should be prepared for the plethora of definitions by different scholars. Now, let us consider some individual scholars' definitions. R. S. Peters has defined education as a systematic training and instruction geared towards the development of ability, character, physical and mental powers of the individual, through the careful dissemination of knowledge (1980:1). G. F. Kneller defines education as the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage, i.e., its accumulated knowledge, values, skills, from one generation to another (1964:20). G. E. Azenabor (1996:160) defines education as an attempt to make one a cultural member of a society by developing his or her intellectual capacities. Azenabor's definition is evidently in agreement with that of Kneller.

Imelda Wallace, in his work, *Family Life Education* defines education as a process of personal improvement, something which helps develop the innate characteristics of a person. Such a process could be formal or informal. Whichever of the above definitions one subscribes to, it is vital to bear in mind that education is a process. Not only this, "this education process embraces the human person in all of his aspects; it involves the development of a person's freedom and his capacity for love. Freedom is a basic characteristic of the person and love is essentially what makes a person tick" (Ede & Ogbu: 7). The point we try to make here is that whatever training or learning is aimed at achieving pure economic gain, on its own does not constitute education. Education aims at developing the human person, not only for his/her own benefit, out also for the benefit of the society in which he chooses to live, and mankind as a whole. This emphasis on the social significance of education informed the foray of philosophy into education; the emergence of philosophy of education. Philosophy of education deals with the general theories, character, fundamental questions, problems and the pre-suppositions in the discipline of education. The philosophical input into education is contained in the philosophers' conceptions of what both education and its aims should be. This we shall treat presently. Beyond occupational training, education seeks to produce human beings who are truly worthy of being called human. Some of the aims of education have been identified as follows:

- [1] To provide men and women with a minimum of the skills necessary to them to (a) take their place in the society (b) seek further knowledge.
- [2] To provide them with a vocational training that will enable them to be self-supporting.
- [3] To awaken an interest in them and a taste for knowledge.
- [4] To make them critical.
- [5] To put them in touch with, and train them to appreciate the cultural and moral achievements of mankind (O'Connor: 1967:2)

Plato's aim of education is to produce virtuous men and women who shall ensure justice in the society. Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Socrates, Plato subscribes to the dictum "knowledge is virtue". Citizens must be trained to know the good so that they would be guided by the good in their actions towards their fellow citizens and the society. Education therefore aims at education of virtues: an education which should aim at purging unnecessary desires. Aristotle sees the aim of education as one which enables a person to form reasonable judgments of goodness or badness. He shares Plato's view that justice is essential in society and that "justice and human well-being require systematic educational efforts to make citizens virtuous and to create social unity" (Curren R: 1998:224). For St. Augustine, the aims of education are: (1) to enable men and women know God and (2) to guide their conduct. Martin Luther followed up Augustine's aims of education by translating the scriptures and promoting universal, publicly funded elementary education so that the common people might have access to education. Descartes sees universal wisdom as the greatest good and proper aim of education. Locke, on his part, insists that the fundamental and humanizing goal of education is the development of rational abilities and the habits of doubt, reflection and foresight required to form children into adults who will judge and act according to the dictates of reason. Rousseau locates the aim of education in the preservation of human nature, i.e., freedom and goodness. John Dewey's aim of education follows his pragmatist philosophy. Education should aim at maximizing the growth and harmony of society. With the above insight into what education and its aims are, we may now look at higher education and its teaching.

In conventional parlance, higher education refers to post secondary school education. However, this conventional view of higher education is too limited for the purpose of this paper. This is because of our observation that at some levels of post secondary education, education recipients are neither purged of childish desires nor are they fully prepared for the responsibilities conferred on them by their education. It is in this regard that we adopt the philosophical conception of higher education. In Protagoras, Plato advocates that men and women should take charge of their souls rather than entrust same into anybody's hands. To take charge of one's own soul goes beyond occupational education.

There is a distinction between habitual virtue of good or obedient citizens and true virtue which involves intellectual insight and sound judgment. Here, that education which teaches virtue of good or obedient citizens represents basic education while that which involves intellectual insight and sound judgments represents higher education. Plato's follow-up to *The Republic*, *Laws* says this much. According to Randell R. Curren (1998:224). Plato's *Laws* describe a city which resembles that of the Republic in aiming at the virtue and happiness of all citizens, but is quite unlike it in being a constitutional rule of law grounded in reason and informed consent. An education regarding a constitutional rule of law grounded in reason and informed consent is quite advanced to the one which teaches letters, music and gymnastics. Before Plato, the Sophists had brought higher education to Athens by offering political leadership training to those who aspired to political offices. This type of higher education was branded *arête* (the goodness, excellence or virtue required for success). For the purpose of this paper, we take higher education as a symbiosis of the conventional and the philosophical conceptions.

Higher education, therefore, is post secondary education which prepares the recipient with appropriate skills and virtues required for his/her success and that of the society.

Teaching at such level of education requires that those who are trusted with moulding the students must be masters of themselves before they can be masters of others. Academic prowess, profundity alone do not suffice for teaching at such a level. There must be other considerations: the teacher must become a philosopher king, an epitome of morality for there to be justice in higher education. This is because there are lots of risks involved in higher education teaching which are not present in teaching at the lower level. In what follows, we examine those risks.

III. RISKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING

This part of the paper deals with practical experiences in higher education teaching which constitutes risks or hazards to the teacher. Examples of such risks are drawn largely from Nigeria, West Africa not because they are limited to that part of the world, but to generate responses and compare notes with colleagues from other parts of the world. Thematically speaking, these risks include: corruptibility, school authority high handedness, and resultant effects of undemocratic regimes/absence of good governance, among others. We begin with the risks posed to higher education teaching by corruption. Corruption has been variously defined. The World Bank sees it as follows: "Corruption involves behaviour on the part of officials in the sector, whether politicians or civil servants in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them by the misuse of the public power entrusted to them" (Arreshidze: 2003). This definition is not all encompassing because it views corruption from the top. Corruption occurs at all levels of the hierarchy of society. This position is in agreement with C.S. Momoh's assertion that:

The first individual involved in a corrupt practice is the one who accepts something in the form of cash, presents, gifts or bodily pleasures in order to perform an act... The second individual is the one who gives something in the form of cash, presents, gifts or bodily pleasures in order to induce the performance of an act (1991:115)

Momoh's definition or description takes into cognizance that corruption exists at all strata of society. Not only this, it shows clearly that corruption often, but not always, involves two or more parties. In view of the above, we define corruption as "inducement or soliciting to be induced to perform or omit to perform a lawful obligation and a conversion of appreciation to cash, material or bodily pleasures or favour" (Jegede S. B.:113). This definition would enable us to view corruption both from top and from bottom. This way, we would be able to see clearly how corruption constitutes a risk to the higher education teacher and teaching. Developing countries, sometimes referred to as underdeveloped countries, are so called because of the lack or absence of some basic necessities and infrastructure. We shall limit our discussion, here, to the lack in the education sector which has the resultant effect of corruption.

One of the characteristics of underdeveloped countries is the struggle for scarce resources. Higher education is underfunded in most third world countries. The consequences of this include (1) inadequate number of higher institutions (2) inadequacy of facilities in existing institutions. The inadequacy in the number of higher institutions in developing countries is well represented in the case of Nigeria. Nigeria, with a population of over one hundred and forty million has only about one hundred and nine universities, half of which are owned by private interests. In a country where most people survive on less than two dollars a day, a vast majority of Nigerians cannot afford to send their children to the private universities which charge between two thousand and three thousand dollars per student per session. With this situation, millions of eligible candidates are left at the mercy of the

Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board, authorities of the few institutions, and the government. The situation is worse in the Polytechnics and Colleges of Education as they have received minimal private interest and investment. With this situation, prospective students, and sometimes their parents, resort to all manners of approach, first, to gain admission and then, to sustain themselves in the institution. They employ all means possible to induce anybody whom they imagine could help their ambition. In my own University, most of the visitors I have are those who come to me during the admission process; I receive the highest number of phone calls during the same period. Parents offer all sorts of things because they believe I could influence the admission process. Unfortunately, the African hospitality does not allow one to shut his /her door in their faces!

The developing countries place emphasis on certificates. Therefore, for a student to have any hope of gainful employment after his/her higher education, he/she must be seen to have recorded good grades in school, even if he/she did not earn same. Consequently, some students, male and female, resort to inducing the teacher for unearned marks. While the male do this through offers including gifts such as money, clothing materials and car tyres, their female counterparts seek to get what they want, using what they have. High handedness on the part of school- departmental, faculty/ college and central- authorities is another source of danger for higher education teaching. Not only are some of these officials high handed, they sometimes display nepotism and unleash vendetta on the teacher. The situation is worse in societies polarized by ethnicity and religion.

Government intolerance is another headache for higher education teaching. In

most developing countries where good governance is lacking and opposition is silenced, the higher institutions become some of the vital rallying points for discussions on national issues. As a result of this, many higher education teachers, who, by virtue of their enlightenment, are not expected to keep quiet in the face of poor governance, become victims of government intolerance. Under this circumstance, both the teacher and higher education teaching suffer the dire consequences, since these people are products of long periods of training, often at the expense of the tax payer. The lingering case of the University of Ilorin lecturers in Nigeria is a reference point. The forty-nine lecturers were sacked in year 2001 for participating in a nationwide industrial strike called by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU). All pleas for the reinstatement of these lecturers fell on deaf ears. Reprieve only came their way on June 12, 2009 when the Supreme Court ruled that they were unlawfully sacked and should therefore, be reinstated and paid their entitlements to date. Even after the Supreme Court judgment, the matter still lingers.

IV. ETHICAL COMMITMENT AS THE BASIS OF RESILIENCE

In the light of the aforementioned risks, what then is the basis for the teacher's resilience? Is it to be located in patriotism, religion or pity? Our answer is No. No, not because there are no grounds for the consideration of any or a combination of these, but because there is a better alternative which encompasses all these and more. This alternative is ethical commitment to society. One who is committed to ethical practices does not have to be blindly patriotic, religious or give in to sentiments. The higher education teacher cannot attain his position in isolation of other people and the institutions of society. Moreover, having crossed the bridge to the other side, it is morally wrong for him to deny others access to it by throwing in the towel simply because of obstacles which he can overcome by being morally upright.

J.I. Omoregbe (2006:26) examines why man should live a moral life and concludes that:

- [1] You must live a moral life because God has commanded you to do so.
- [2] You must live a moral life because you are a social being.
- [3] You must live a moral life because you are a rational being.
- [4] It is path to happiness.
- [5] The law of nemesis demands that you do so.
- [6] It is the way of nature.

An examination of these reasons shows that they are applicable to our study, with the exception of the first one, i.e. that you must live a moral life because God has commanded you to do so. This we have already rejected elsewhere in this paper

V. CONCLUSION

Higher education teaching, like all professions, has its hazards which threaten, not only the career of the teacher, but also higher education itself. These hazards or risks stem from corruption, high handedness on the part of school authorities and government intolerance in developing countries. The teacher must be resilient in the face of these because he/she owes society the ethical obligation of leading the youths out of darkness. Ethical commitment to his job and society forms the bedrock of resilience in higher education teaching in developing countries.

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