Leadership Education through Extracurricular Activities in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The intendment of this paper was to explore the concept of leadership education and the role extracurricular activities can play in getting the youths imbued with leadership qualities. The paper was necessitated by the unending call for quality leadership in our private and public national life, and the search for alternative media for imparting leadership education to the youths. The paper advocates extracurricular activities as platforms for inculcating leadership education in the youths. The concept of extracurricular activities and its importance as complementary avenue for imparting leadership values, skills and dispositions is discussed. Political, cultural, economic, social, and sporting activities are identified as extracurricular activities frequently participated in by youths in tertiary institutions. These activities enhance intellectual development, as well as the development of personal and interpersonal skills that enhance effectual leadership. The paper posits that extracurricular activities are veritable media for inculcating in the youths, leadership skills and dispositions; and equipping them with the necessary competence, and also prepare them for their future leadership roles.

Keywords: Leadership education, extracurricular activities, tertiary institutions

INTRODUCTION

The obvious dearth of visionary leaders and the consistently increasing calls for effectual and purpose driven leadership in both our private and public national life has made it imperative to groom, prime, prepare, coach and mentor the youths so that they shall be adequately equipped to provide the much yearned leadership; since leadership has been described as a set of skills and attitudes that can be learned and practiced (Van Linden and Fertman, 1998). Leadership fosters social change and most of our cultural, social and economic progress is the result of leadership (Spindler, 2013). The youths today; we say are tomorrow's leaders. It will therefore not be wasted investment, if they are properly trained and adequately equipped to function effectively when they assume their roles as leaders. Perceptibly, Leadership Education is one avenue that must be exploited in this enterprise of preparing the youths for their future leadership roles.

As the choices of extracurricular activities increase and compete for youth's time, creativity and energy, it has become more essential for educationists and other stakeholders to explore ways of maximizing the potential of these activities as means of inculcating leadership skills and attitudes in the youths. Leadership education and youths participation in leadership activities and special interest groups has been positively related to student academic achievement, school engagement, and life aspirations (Lamborn et al., 1992). Youths that participate in constructive, organized activities, combined with relatively little participation in passive, unstructured activities are known to exhibit healthy lifestyles and better leadership

disposition such as personal responsibility and positive decision-making (Arnold et. al., 2005; Garst and Bruce, 2003).

The primary mission of institutions of tertiary education is the creation and dissemination of knowledge, moulding of character and development of intellect. However, students in higher institutions participate in a wide gamut of activities ranging from curricular to extracurricular. Whereas the curricular activities mostly tend toward academic and intellectual development, the extracurricular activities tend toward social and character development of the students. Students' have been known to be actively involved in sundry activities: from the positive and productive to the negative and destructive. However, this paper shall focus on the positive and productive, and how to utilize them for leadership education.

LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

Leadership is a concept that has defied uniformity of ideas in its definition. It has attracted as much definitions as there are commentators willing to enter a discourse on leadership. MacGregor (1978) defined it as the reciprocal process of mobilizing by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political and other resources in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both the leaders and the followers. It is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (Rost, 1991). To Astin and Leland (1991), leadership is a process by which members of a group are empowered to work together synergistically toward a common goal or vision that will create change, transform institutions and improve the quality of life.

Effective leadership requires a high degree of imagination, pragmatism, and trust. It requires creative skills and dispositions to come up with ideas, academic skills and dispositions to decide if the ideas are good, practical skills and dispositions to make the ideas work and convince others of the value of the ideas and wisdom-based skills and dispositions to ensure that the ideas are in the service of the common good, rather than just the good of the leader or perhaps some clique of family members or followers (Sternberg, 2007).

Education on the other hand is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply through auto didacticism (Dewey, 1916). Education occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. Education can also be seen as the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.

Leadership education can therefore be conceptualized as the process of imparting and acquiring general leadership knowledge, developing powers of reasoning and judgement in leading and preparing oneself and others for effective functioning in leadership roles. Leadership education can be said to have occurred when individuals and groups are adequately informed and equipped to provide leadership in any sphere of influence they find themselves. In this context, emphasis is on roles (formal or informal) that require people to conceive ideas that are valuable, have the required knowledge to bring the substance of the ideas to fruition and be able to convince others to buy into such ideas.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Extracurricular activities are those voluntary non-paying, social, and philanthropic activities that fall outside the realm of the normal school curriculum; engaged in and organized by the students under the sponsorship or guidance of the school. Extracurricular activities are found

in all levels of our schools in many different forms. They can be sports, clubs, debate, drama, school publications, student council, and other social events (Massoni, 2011). Extracurricular activities made their entry into the school system in the nineteen century, and their entry complimented the curriculum in some measures and also subverted it in some degrees, as students found in them, an avenue for practical and vocational interest.

The transition from the confines of the home to higher institutions means a different dimension of life for most students (Agu, et al, 2010). These students crave for support and care from the new community or the school family to which they now belong. Students' perception of this condition leads to their desire to connect with the school environment and also to partake in school activities. This connection that students crave for, and their subsequent involvement in extracurricular activities is very important for the reduction of deviant behaviour, increase in learning oriented behaviour (Agu, et al, 2010) as well as the inculcation of leadership qualities.

Every institution of higher education in the world encourages extracurricular activities. These activities offer opportunities for students to learn the value of team work, individual and group responsibility, physical strength and endurance, competition, diversity and a sense of community (IES, 1995). They also provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context and are thus considered part of a well-rounded education (Hameed and Amjad, 2011).

Advocates of student empowerment suggest that provision of resources and guidance support enhances students' achievement and development. Also, the opportunity to participate in student governance, leadership training, cultural events, sports and a wide array of diverse students' organisations coupled with academic excellence enable students to become world citizens, able to effect positive change (Mutsotso and Abenga, 2010).

Based on observation in tertiary institutions, this paper discusses the following activities as those frequently and commonly associated with students in tertiary academic institutions.

1. Political Activities
2. Religious Activities
3. Social Activities
4. Cultural Activities
5. Economic Activities
6. Sporting Activities

Extracurricular Activities as Avenues for Leadership Education

Leadership and leading involve social processes; therefore, the interaction between young adults and adolescents in extracurricular activities is important (Van Linden and Fertman, 1998). Learning occurs not only in formal settings, but also in informal settings; and often, learning experiences gained from informal settings stick longer and contribute more to the life of an individual; being practical oriented. Because extracurricular activities offer youths the opportunity of doing and being, they can be exploited to teach or reinforce leadership qualities such as:

I. Individual and collective responsibility
II. Team spirit
III. Accountability
IV. Prudence in resource allocation
V. Decisiveness

VI.   Accommodativeness

VII.   Communication skills; etc.

Political Activities

Politics usually describes the processes by which people and institutions exercise and resist power. It is the process of influencing other people on a civic or individual level, and seeks to achieve and exercise positions of control of over human community. Political activities include a range of activities from being a candidate in an election to engaging in activities to support or oppose a political candidate or group. Students in tertiary institutions frequently get involved in political activities because of the various benefits it offers students in terms of political consciousness, exposure and social affiliations. When the institution administration monitors and provides mentorship to students' political activities, students learn a lot and acquire skills in political leadership and followership which are consequently transferred to the wider society as they graduate from the university. Specifically students in campus politics are guided to play by the rules such as desisting from campaign of calumny and election rigging, respecting the wishes of the electorate and to accept defeat without bitterness and victory with humility.

Religious Activities

Religion is viewed as an important issue in human life in general and is considered as one of the essential elements in the life of man. Religion is a moral code believed to have a sacred or supernatural basis (Thien, 2004). Various religious groups exist in tertiary institutions just as there are in the society each bound by its peculiar beliefs and ideals. Student religious activities in tertiary institutions often involve civic work, services and social functions, with emphasis on instilling and perpetuating the religious concepts, ideals, and beliefs held by each group. This sets of activities help to encourage the growth and development of life values and spiritual awareness in the individual. Religious activities commonly associated with students on campus include worship, prayer meeting, crusades, seminars, etc.

Social Activities

There is always a lot to do and see before and after curricular activities in the school environment, and students enjoy very active social lives; courtesy of various social activities frequently organised. For many students, the transition to University is a major rite of passage to adulthood (Astin, 1977; Boyer, 1987).

Socialization or social activities provides critical insight into the academic performance of student and also gives an insight into the possible future inclination of students. Also, students' social activities have been instrumental to the effective functioning and social status attained by some persons in the society; as some persons discover themselves and etch their space in life through their participation in social activities in school. Social activities commonly identified with youths in tertiary institutions are partying, beauty contests, inductions, fresher's reception, picnics, etc. In each of these activities students organize themselves through leaders selected by them from among themselves as groups such as course mates, hostel mates, cultural associations and social clubs such as Erudite Club, Rotaract Clubs, Club 49 etc.

Cultural Activities

Culture is a complex system of behaviour, values, beliefs, traditions and artefacts which is transmitted through generations. It is a learned pattern of behaviour, and is a way in which a person lives his life. It is an integral part of every society, and creates a feeling of belongingness and togetherness among the people of that society. Culture encompasses

various aspects of communication, attitude, etiquette, beliefs, values, customs, norms, food, art, jewellery, clothing styles, etc. Every society has a different culture, which gives it an identity and uniqueness.

Cultural activities on campus provide students with opportunities to conserve their culture; learn more about it and also learn about other peoples' cultures. Students in tertiary institutions often engage in activities aimed at promoting the cultural heritage of the varied ethnic groups in the country and seeking ways of engendering cooperation and co-existence among the different tribes. Such activities have included cultural dances, singing and drumming, dressing, traditional wrestling, masquerade displays, painting and sculpting, poetry etc. These activities are usually organized by the students with guidance from the advisers usually assigned to them by the institution's administration.

Economic Activities

An economic activity may be defined as any effort made by an individual or group; mental or physical, with the intention to earn something in return. Economic activities involve the use of scarce resources in the provision of goods and services to satisfy unlimited wants. They include activities such as buying, selling, investing, borrowing, lending, mortgage, loans etc. The goal of economic activities is to provide gains to individuals for what they have or can produce; distribute wealth among all the segments of the society and help in providing all individuals with basic necessities of life.

There may be differences in nature between one source of livelihood and another but the underlying similarity in all spheres of economic activities is that work is performed against wage, remuneration or profit. Economic activities in tertiary institutions include petty trading, cafeterias, business centres etc., and students get involved in both the buying and selling that go on in the campus.

Sporting Activities

Sports are any physical or mental activity that is governed by a set of rules or customs and often engaged in competitively. Sports are generally recognized as activities based in physical athleticism and dexterity. They are usually governed by rules to ensure fair competition and consistent adjudication of winners. The competition element in sports along with the aesthetic appeal of some sports result in the popularity and spectatorship of sporting activities. There seems to be a consensus regarding relationship between sports and leadership (Spindler, 2013). Students' involvement in sports helps to curb anti-social activities and promotes fair play, partnership/teamwork, and respect which are essential ingredients for leadership.

Beside academic activities, the single most important activity that gets the most attention both from the student community and school authority is sporting activity. Sporting activities are treasured in all institutions of higher learning so much so that, special sporting events are organized yearly for institutions to compete (an example is the Nigerian University Games [NUGA] games). In some tertiary institutions, candidates with great sporting prowess are given concessions in the school's admission process. The most popular sporting activities in in Nigerian tertiary institutions include; Soccer, Handball, Volleyball, Swimming, Boxing, Judo, Weight lifting, Athletics, Tennis, Wrestling and chess.

CONCLUSION

The development of an individual is measured not only in terms of intellectual capacity but also in character and social skills. To allow for an all-round development of the youths to fit into leadership roles therefore means that they should be encouraged and properly guided in

all of their activities (curricular and extracurricular). Productive extracurricular activities that do not undermine the academic performance of youths must be encouraged and utilized as avenues to teach the qualities of ethical leadership. The aim of every training programme is to produce individuals who can become functional members of the society, and provide effective leadership for that society. However, achieving this aim cannot be tied solely to curricular activities in the academic system as extracurricular activities can also be used as media for imparting leadership skills and attitudes.

Youths' participation in extracurricular activities while in school is very important and beneficial in equipping the youth for future leadership responsibilities. Participation in these activities provide hands-on practical experiences and also inculcate in the youths, the value of leadership, teamwork, organization, analytical thinking, problem solving, time management, learning to juggle many tasks at once and also allows them to discover their talents (Massoni, 2011). The benefits of extracurricular activities are numerous, and using them as an avenue for leadership education is just one; but one that must be taken seriously. Leadership has been described as a set of skills and attitudes that can be learned and practiced (Van Linden and Fertman, 1998), it is not surprising that adolescence is a critical time for leadership development. Through structured in-school and out-of-school clubs, sports, and community service activities, young people can be taught how to explore their strengths and learning how they can make a difference.

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