



Education is at the Heart of Every Human Settlement

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Integral development, education, ethics of the character

Abstract

Against those who question that ethical character should be considered as a convincing factor of the human constitution based on empirical reasons, Obiora F. Ike gives good arguments, based on the agenda of the human development and education across the planet, to reaffirm some truth about character formation. There should be no question that simplifications, related to some sort of skepticism over the moral character, are at best purely theoretical fanciness, at worst irresponsible. Passivity in a world made of urgent challenges around education and economic inequalities is not acceptable. Our need to believe, to trust and to act in the real world, lead us to praise some dogmatism on the ground assumption that we act accordingly to our [moral] character. Education has shown us the value of developing moral character. Cross-situational consistency of integrity needs to be shared across cultures, against the impression that it opens a room for abuses, as integrity is also a social construct.

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1. The role of the educator is to promote human potentials

Education for the 21st century must assist and lead the student to learn how to be truly and fully human, how to use the rare gift of freedom balanced with responsibility to think critically, innovate, create and decide his or her own destiny. The teacher has the duty to guide the student to know how to acquire knowledge that is not mere information but a knowledge that is reflected, offering essential insights needed for effective living. Such knowledge bears the ingredients of Ethics – which is the discipline, process and action of thinking the right thing, of doing the right thing and of living rightly. This shift in orientation belongs to the domain of ETHICS¹.

2. “Sow a character and reap a destiny”

Educators are at the forefront of every development and education is at the centre of every human settlement². Ethics education and values orientation are necessary for character formation for the young, who need guiding

¹ For the meaning of the acronym ETHICS as Globethics.net Mission, see: Ethics in Higher Education. A Key Driver for Recovery in a World Living with COVID-19. A Globethics.net Discussion Paper, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2022, ISBN 978-2-88931-440-9, 11-12. This article is an adapted version, with permission from the author, of the book chap.: Ike, O. F. Postface, in: Peter Eshioke Egielewa / Blessed Frederick Ngonso (Eds.): *Ethics, Media, Theology and Development in Africa: A Festschrift in Honour of Msgr Prof. Dr Obiora Francis Ike*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 598pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-484-3, 575-87. (Note of the Editors.)

² “Sow a thought and reap an act. Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character, Sow a character and reap a destiny”. (African and universal wisdom) This article is a republished version, with permission from the author, of the book chap.: Ike, O. F. Postface, in: Peter Eshioke Egielewa / Blessed Frederick Ngonso (Eds.): *Ethics, Media, Theology and Development in Africa: A Festschrift in Honour of Msgr Prof. Dr Obiora Francis Ike*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 598pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-484-3, 575-87.

principles to preserve and understand the world around them as they grow, wonder and find their own answers. Through education in ethics, the realization of meaning and purpose in society are enabled and beneficiaries are empowered to gain more access to opportunities, resources and power. The evidences experienced in the way humanity is driving the global train has made the assertion necessary that the future of humanity rests on some critical point which is that there can be no sustainable development universally if there are no ethical values integrated across sectors and built within the education industry at all levels. There is no inhibition to integrate our ability to translate powerful motives into action, through the tool and knowledge of ethics for through the learning and living of ethics as a way of life, society retains their original power for realization of their full potentials.

3. Knowledge and virtue as wings of successful education

Whereas education was designed to serve the pursuit of wisdom, the moulding of human character, the cultivation of virtues and beauty, taking to the examples of Socrates and the wise sages of history in all cultures and civilizations through time, the reality is quite different in the 21st century. What has become an unfortunate conclusion across nations is that the current education systems, which ordinarily would be useful tools for the change all of us envisage, has failed globally due to conflicts of interest in the last thirty years because education has shifted from pedagogically-based academic values to market-based values. C.S. Lewis made the point quite succinctly that “*education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make humans more clever devils*”³. The reality as is commonly expressed in

³ Ike, O. F. Why Ethics Remains the Constant Basic Need for Society: Postscript, in: Deivit Montealegre/María Eugenia Barroso (Eds.), *Ethics in Higher Education, a Transversal Dimension: Challenges for Latin America. Ética en educación superior, una dimensión transversal: Desafíos para América Latina*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2020, 133. Quotation is adapted from: Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*, Québec: Samizdat Univ. Press, 1943, 38-9.

many places, using the strong words of the Founder of the Globalization for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI), is that “education is being designed, controlled and implemented by political and business elites, indulged in a reckless ideology of neoliberalism that advances market forces and market values even in the field of education where access is lacking for many” (Ike, 2020, 134, also about Kamran Mofid).

4. Why ethics and values?

With ethics and values, the potential to respect and promote LIFE in everything, by doing Right in Thought and Action, which Socrates, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas with Nelson Mandela called the GOOD, assumes practical effect. ETHICS brings in principles to serve the common good of all, promotes values of respect for human dignity and human rights, the integrity of creation, inclusion, justice, fairness, quality first, cooperation, competence, sustainability, holistic approach and need for a united global effort to channel the forces of science and technology positively and govern the peaceful evolution of human society. It is in ethics, with ethics and through ethics that the rapidly rising expectations to solve problems that have increased frustrations and tensions that threaten the fabric of global society can find sustainable solutions. Ethics and values remain central and at the heart of quality education in the past and into the future. Currently the noticeable gaps in errant behaviour of educated people points to this missing link. We must rise and truly reflect on these three pertinent questions that T. S. Eliot has asked us: *"Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"*

5. Covid 19 global health intrusion as chance and challenge

Following the tragic Covid 19 pandemic and its consequences on all spheres of society, humanity is at a new and irreversible dawn. This is indeed a great chance to reverse negative trends in the ways things were done and to

allow space for the vision to more effectively direct our intellectual, moral and scientific capabilities for world peace, global security, human dignity and social justice. Today the world needs evolutionary ideas that can spur our collective progress without the wake of destructive violence that threatens to undermine the huge but fragile political, social, financial and ecological infrastructures on which we depend and strive to build a better world. We all recognise the urgent need for leadership in thought and action, a radical rethink in order to protect the environment, advance cultures, progress history and preserve our humanity and our ecosystem – body, mind, soul and planet.

6. Ethics education as basis for sustainable development

The founders of Globethics.net were motivated by a deep emotional commitment and sense of responsibility to bring into the forum of global conversations, the topic of ETHICS as a basis for sustainable development and the benchmark for a values-based education. Such education promotes the betterment of all humankind. Until recently, history has recorded the acts of creative individual thinkers and dynamic leaders who altered the path of human progress and left a lasting mark on society. In recent centuries the world has been propelled by the battle cry of revolutionary ideas—freedom, equality, fraternity, universal education, including paroles such as “workers of the world unite”. Such revolutions in the past have always brought vast upheavals and destructions in their wake, unimaginable in their ability for tumultuous and violent changes that torn societies asunder and precipitated devastating wars.

Unprecedented material and technological achievements co-exist with unconscionable and in some cases increasing poverty, inequality and injustice. Advances in science have unleashed remarkable powers, yet these very powers as presently wielded threaten to undermine the very future of our planet. In order to solve the grave global problems we face some of which include – climate change, population growth, environmental

degradation, extinction of species, war, acts of terrorism, inequality, intolerance, racism, refugees, xenophobia, building walls between nations and peoples, and the rest – we need governments to act appropriately. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world with the numbers of its clients pulled from every country and generation beyond cultures, religions and ideologies. What skills, resources and content are available for these clients, not only in knowledge acquisition, but also the application of basic ethical values and principles in the training of the youth, towards overall transformation?

7. Integrating ethics

At a time of complexity of issues, rather than offering narrow responses, what is called for requires interdisciplinary approaches. Universities must move from being the Ivory Towers of the past to become spaces for balance, inclusivity, and access. Higher education institutions are bearers and catalysts for integral development, which provides opportunities for many – prepares women and men, privileged and underprivileged – to address the complex issues of society with broad values founded on ETHICS – here an acronym for: *Empowerment, Transformation, Holistic, Integrity, Competence* and *Sustainability*.⁴

Part of the many problems institutions of higher education face in ethics education, particularly in developing countries, is not a lack of awareness of the need for ethics, but rather the lack of adequate and required resources, skills and content towards integrating the discipline of ethics into university governance and management and in the classroom. In today's world, more and more attention is given to the critical role of higher education institutions in fostering students to not only be well educated but also to be values-driven, as citizens and as leaders. As such, higher education institutions and business schools are challenged to ensure that they abide by the highest ethical standards and that they build an ethos on their campus,

⁴ As shown above, the author refers to Globethics.net Mission, see footnote 2.

among teachers, students and administrators that inspires trust, credibility and hard work.

- Strengthen the ethical reputation of higher education institutions by supporting efforts to integrate values-based decisions in governance, management and in the daily practices of staff, management and board.
- Promote professional ethical awareness and provide support to teachers so that they are adequately equipped to teach.
- Support students with tools and resources to think and act according to values.
- Integrate ethical reflection and action in research, ensuring that research goals and methods are beneficial and not harmful; and
- Raise awareness of policy makers on the need to integrate values-based policies in education and research.

By making education a tool for profit maximization, consequences have signalled not only a change in the fundamentals of education philosophy in tertiary education but also presented us, using the words of Emiliano Bosio “with a real-world crisis of economic irresponsibility, displacement, exclusion, division, and inequality”. Nelson Mandela is once quoted as saying that

“ destroying any nation does not require the use of atomic bombs or long range missiles. It only requires lowering the quality of education and allowing unethical practices to flourish.

Such unethical practices are the abuse of power, cheating, sexual harassment, indiscipline, and corruption. People die at the hands of a doctor who bought the medical degree, thereby bringing the profession into disrepute. Buildings collapse at corruption, at the hands of an engineer who paid for another person to sit their exams. Money is lost at the hands of economists and accountants who do not abide by the rules and standards of their trade. Humanity is divided due to the hate teachings of bigots –

political, religious or racist – who do not understand the healing power of dialogue, listening and reconciliation. And justice is lost at the hands of police officers, security agents and judges and magistrates who receive bribes. And lives are lost at the hands of all those involved in the food and health sector who produce fake medicines and fake food to make profit.

We experience and witness vulnerabilities, which arise from instabilities caused by such vices as greed, lust for power and control, egomaniac tendencies and selfishness, unethical practices and outright corruption. Not that these vices are new under the sun, but the current global environment of populations anywhere between 7 to 8 billion people, constantly under mobility propelled by science, technology and socio-economic interconnectedness makes the point blunt. There is a generalized crisis which cries for solutions.

The banking sectors, credit and markets are laden with volatility. Climatic changes of recent bring with it environmental and ecological consequences including unknown heat waves, a scorched earth, dying trees, mammals and fauna and ocean levels roaring for vengeance with massive scales of natural destruction, floods and winds. The housing crisis and the mega trends in big cities question the sustainability of cities planned for less than ten million people are now housing the double populations. Indifference is not an answer. Fake news complicates the situation. The spiritual and moral crisis all of us face is another way of saying that the greatest disability in life is a bad character, for people cannot climb beyond the limitation of their character.

Peter Schulz, the former executive of the Porsche car-making industry, once said: “*Hire character –Train Skills*”. And the famous literature guru of all times, William Shakespeare, captured it succinctly when he wrote: “*The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves*”. My life’s experience has taught me that honesty is the best policy. It is the medicine for good health and old age. A clear conscience fears no accusation. It is unbelievable to watch how people for the satisfaction of greed and ambition pretend to be what they are not! And such spend their entire life trying to cover up the obvious. In lacking character, they lack virtue, and therefore ethical

grounding and basic respect both to themselves and others. This is one of the causes of high blood pressure among youth. It is pitiable how people self-sabotage themselves by seeking solutions outside for character and integrity deficiency syndromes. They look around at everybody as suspects for their predicaments when their real and greatest demons lurk within them – their character. People with great visions and dreams are always very sensitive to their character and the character of people around them. And someone says:

“ They can’t kill your dreams, so they assassinate your character, thus the easiest way to assassinate your dreams is to surround yourself with people of questionable character.

What we often call our destiny is actually our character. And since we can manage to build up habits to crystallise into character that can change, destiny can be also changed. Character is destiny. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States of America once said that nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

Over the past half century, the role of pioneering individuals is increasingly being replaced by that of new and progressive organizations, including the international organizations of the UN system and NGOs such as the Club of Rome, Pugwash and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. These organizations stand out because they are inspired by high values and committed to the achievement of practical, but far-reaching goals.

Today circumstances are more conducive, the international environment is more developed. No single organization can by itself harness the motive force needed to change the world, but a group of like-minded organizations founded with such powerful intentions can become a magnet and focal point to project creative ideas that possess the inherent dynamism for self-fulfilment.

8. Conclusion

One of the most impressive architectural feats and the military defence project in history is the Great China Wall⁵. In 1987, UNESCO designated this Great Wall a World Heritage site, and a popular controversial claim that emerged in the 20th century holds that it is the only man-made structure that is visible from space.

Originally conceived by Emperor Qin Shi Huang (c 259 -210 BC) in the 3rd century as a means of preventing incursions from Mongolians and other barbarian nomads into the Chinese Empire, the wall is one of the most extensive constructions projects ever completed. History has it that when the ancient Chinese decided to live in peace, they made the Great Wall of China. They thought no one could climb it due to its height. During the hundred years of its existence, the Chinese were invaded three times and each time, the hordes of enemy infantry had no need of penetrating or climbing over the Wall because they bribed the guards at the entrance gate and these opened the gates of China to the enemy – without a big fight or resistance.

The Chinese built the wall, but at that time forgot to build the character of the wall guards. Though the Great Wall has over the years become a powerful symbol of the country's enduring strength and spirit, it has actually been a good reminder to the Chinese of the superiority of human character. Much later it was realised that the best defence against the enemy is not a fortified wall outside, but a fortified character inside. The building of human character comes before the building of anything else. Our dreams can withstand any form of assault, but not a defective character. Hence the greatest killer of dreams is not the enemy outside, but our character inside.

Character and integrity are becoming endangered species in the world. In organisations, liabilities increase with staff constantly nagging and having integrity deficiencies and character defects through absenteeism, loitering

⁵ This whole section is slightly adapted and shortened from original section in the book. Note by the Editors.

during work, and disruptive behaviours that undermine their institutions with constant claims for more rights and freedoms, but with less desire to fulfill required duties and responsibilities.

Virtually all the fraud and redundancy perpetrated are done due to lack of character. How do we explain that funds allocated to fight malaria and other diseases end up in people’s private pockets – and the children die in millions? And who explains how pharmaceuticals and health-related providers, including insurance companies, governments, lobbyists and the like offer sacrifice of millions of deaths for monetary gain?

Character is the ingredient upon which that famous word is built - trust: As the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once said: “a man’s character is his fate”. And character is built through education founded on values. Mark the words – greed, egoism, vanity and ambition! When ethics becomes a lifestyle, education achieves its *raison d’être*!

9. Bibliography

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10. Short Biography

Obiora F. Ike is the Executive Director of Globethics.net. He has held several academic posts, most recently as Professor of Ethics and Intercultural Studies at Godfrey Okoye University. He is President of the *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022)

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Club of Rome (Nigeria Chapter) and chairs the government of Enugu State Economic Advisory Committee.