

## **THE PATH TO ATTITUDE CHANGE IN NIGERIA IS THROUGH THE SCHOOL**

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### **Abstract**

Stakeholders in Nigerian socio-political economy have continued to call for attitude change in the way of life of the people. This call is necessitated by the fact that the level of corruption in Nigeria has reached a very critical stage. The situation seems to be defying solutions. Of recent however, researchers have been making suggestions on ways to bring about attitude change. Some of these suggestions are based on age-long popular social science theories. In this paper, it is argued that attitude change of a people can be achieved through the channel of school education. This position is canvassed after a critical examination of some theories on attitude and attitude change. Based on this, the study adduced evidence using secondary data sourced from text books, journals and internet materials to support the position. The paper concludes by suggesting some classroom activities and techniques derivable from the attitude theories and pedagogy which have proved effective in facilitating the teaching of attitudes in schools.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Change, theories, education, pedagogy, school

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Durkheim (1951: 372-373), was skeptical about the idea of using education as a force for transforming society and resolving social ills. He maintained instead that education could be reformed only if society itself is reformed. For him education “is only the image and reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter...it does not create it” The implication of Durkheim’s stand is that a society has the school system it deserves.

Other philosophers however, have disputed Durkheim’s stand. Horace Mann- the champion of American public education movement was of the opinion that the success of a country depended on the “intelligence and virtue in the masses of the people.” He argued that, “If we do not prepare children to become good citizens...then our republic must go down to destruction” (The New York Times, 1953)

Nigerian researchers (Suleiman, 2009, Okenyi, 2009) seem to share Mann’s view. According to Suleiman “it is an indisputable fact that education can be used to effect changes in the society, and that social anomalies can be corrected via education in schools” In the Federal Government of Nigerian (FGN) National Policy on Education(2004) it is stated that the national education goals contained in the philosophy of Nigerian education can be achieved through “the inculcation of the type of values and attitudes for the survival of individual and the Nigerian society.”

Freire (1970; 1995) tacitly in support of the latter position above had gone on further to suggest how to use classroom activities to achieve it. According to him all classroom teaching should focus on stimulating students to become “agents of curiosity” in a “quest for...the ‘why’ of

things,” He believes that education provides possibility and hope for the future of society, and that this can be achieved when students are engaged in explicitly critiquing social injustice and actively organizing to challenge oppression. For Freire, education is a process of continuous group discussion that enables people to acquire collective knowledge they can use to change society. The role of the teacher includes asking questions that help students identify problems facing their community, working with students to discover ideas or create symbols that explain their life experiences, and encouraging analysis of prior experiences and of society as the basis for new academic understanding and social action (Shor, 1987).

### **1.1 Need For Attitude Change in Nigeria**

Prominent Nigerian leaders currently have called for attitude change in the social life of the people. “The Vanguard”, a frontline newspaper in Nigeria, reported in its March 10<sup>th</sup> 2015 edition that the former leader of Nigeria, President Goodluck Jonathan had “stressed the need for attitudinal change among Nigerians for things to work and the country make progress.” Adams Oshiomhole, the governor of Edo state (one of the 36 states of Nigeria) urged politicians in the country to change their attitude and work for the good of the country. Mr. Oshiomhole said that it was imperative for the political class to adopt better attitude in their activities. According to him, “We must change the face of our politics and we must rebuild the future by laying good foundation” (Premium Times, Nigeria, March, 10 2015).

Other Nigerians in different sectors of the economy have also harped on the need for attitudinal change. According to Igbaji (2014) “what Nigeria needs today is not just development but sustainable and long lasting development. That is why attitude change is imperative. Until our attitude changes, our hope of becoming a developed nation remains an unrealistic dream.” He

maintains that “when a society is properly oriented, organized and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural wealth.” He notes that the bane of Nigeria’s development is attitude problem. .

Everybody in Nigeria today:politicians, scholars and the market women seem to believe that the most credible approach to solving the present high level of corruption in Nigeria is through attitude change. Problem however, is that nobody seems to have an answer as to how to get about it, hence the need for this paper. The position taken in this paper is that the school could serve as a medium for bringing about attitude change in the society. This can be done through the inculcation of the right and desirable attitudes on the students.

In the paper, “school” and “education” will be used interchangeably. However,” school” will be used to mean an institution designed for the teaching of students (or “pupils”) under the direction of teachers(Wikipedia). Education will be used in its general sense to mean a form of learning in which knowledge, skills,values, habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through story telling, discussion, teaching, training or research. (Wikipedia)

## **1.2 Corruption in Nigeria**

The latest Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 showed that out of 174 countries evaluated, Nigeria placed 136<sup>th</sup> along Russia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Cameroon and Lebanon, as the least transparent(Abuja. Premium Times, 14/3/2015). That means the 6 countries, Nigeria inclusive, are the most corrupt in the world. Nigeria was 14<sup>th</sup> most corrupt in 2013.(Abuja. Premium Times, 14/3/2015)

Based on the CPI, a poor score is likely a sign of widespread bribery, lack of punishment for corruption and public institutions that do not respond to citizens' need. This is particularly true of Nigeria where several public institutions are a cesspool of fraudulent activities as proven by multiple investigations and reports.

Explaining the link between poverty and corruption in Nigeria Awosika(1999) pointed out that

*People are poor because they are being denied access to opportunities. People steal because they are hungry and destitute. People are hungry and destitute because they cannot earn wages. They have no wages because they have no work. They have no work because they have been retrenched. They have been retrenched because industries cannot cope with their wage bills. Industries can not cope with their wage bills because production costs have increased. Production costs have increased because our infrastructures have died. [The infrastructures have died because the funds meant for their upgrading, repairs, maintenance and installations of others meant for the common good end (up) in private pockets]*  
(The Guardian, June 17, 1999).

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Attitudes**

Attitudes refer to the general and relatively enduring evaluations people have of other people, objects, or ideas. These overall evaluations can be positive, negative, or neutral, and can vary in their extremity(Cross, 1974). They can be explicit or implicit. Explicit attitudes are conscious beliefs that can guide decisions and behavior. Implicit attitudes are unconscious beliefs that can still influence decisions and behaviour(Briñol, Petty, & Wheeler, 2006). Attitudes can include up to three components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. Individuals can hold attitudes about very broad or abstract constructs (e.g., religion) as well as very concrete and specific things (e.g., a particular brand of cell phone).

### **2.2 Attitude Change**

Attitude change refers to a modification of an individual's general evaluative perceptions of a stimulus or a set of stimuli. In this context, changes for any reason in a person's general and enduring favourable or unfavourable regard for some person, object or issue fall under the rubric of change of attitude (Briñol, & Petty, 2011). This however, does not include changes in knowledge or skill, or changes in behaviour which requires another's surveillance or sanctions (i.e. compliance). Innate predilections to approach or withdraw-such as reflexes or fixed action patterns – and irreversible changes in parameters of approach or withdrawal-such as diminished response vigor due to aging- may be related to attitude change, but are not in themselves considered instances of attitude change. Attitude change, therefore, represents a specific form of self-control and social control that does not rely on coercion (Briñol, & Petty, 2011).

In essence, attitude change is a psychological thing; it has to do with a detachment from traditional ways of doing things and embracing modern or more socially acceptable ways. Okigbo (2006) stated that the most important requirement for change to occur in any given society is for the people themselves to accept to change. Okunna (2002) added “for Africa to develop, people have to change their attitude and ways. To achieve this, they need information and persuasion. A country can not develop beyond her level of attitude “.

In today's world, people are faced daily with situations that demand change of attitudes that had been previously formed about persons, ideas or things. Advertisement, indoctrination, propaganda, etc., are often designed to persuade people to change attitudes negatively or positively toward political parties, people, things, issues or ideas. It is a positive change in attitude, for example, when people who have developed apathy to elections start identifying with a particular political party with the intention of voting for candidates that belong to that party

during elections. Sometimes the amount of attitude change is extreme. The mass media have often dramatized such extreme attitude change when they induce people to change their attitudes. The role played by mass media during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, the frequent gruesome killings by the Boko Haram sect also in Nigeria, the genocide in Rwanda, the brainwashing of American soldiers captured during the Korean War are a few examples of such extremes of coercive attitude change strategies.

Inclusive in the objectives of this study is to examine relevant theories researchers have formulated on attitude change. The intention after examination is to recommend those that can be adopted in Nigerian schools with the ultimate aim of inculcating in the schooling population a more desirable behaviour in their socio-political lives.

### **2.3 Attitude change theories**

Researchers have proposed three theories to account for attitude change: Learning, Dissonance, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theories. Efforts will be made to examine them briefly below. The aim is to highlight aspects of the theories relevant to the discussion of this paper.

#### **2.3(a) Attitude Learning Theory**

Attitude Learning theorists posit that attitudes can be formed and changed through the use of learning principles such as classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning. Classical conditioning, originally initiated by a Russian scientist: Ivan Pavlov (Pavlov, 1927), is learning through an association process involving pairing of stimuli. According to Baron (1996), “when one stimulus regularly precedes another, the one that occurs first may soon

become a signal for the one that occurs second". This mechanism lends itself to use in attitude formation and change. Based on its application, objects, people, or events when associated with pleasant experiences, for example, bring about favourable attitudes in people's mind, while those associated with unpleasant experiences generate unfavourable attitudes. This method is widely used by image makers, public relation experts and advertisers who pair a product with catchy music, soothing colors, or attractive people to influence pleasurable attitude to the product or person whose appeal to the public they wish to improve.

### **2.3 (b) Operant conditioning.**

This method popularized by Skinner. (1953) utilizes rewards to bring about attitude formation and change. This is usually employed by parents, teachers and very often by public relation experts. This method is based on the fact that if someone gets a positive response from others when they express an attitude, that attitude will be reinforced and will tend to get stronger. On the other hand, if they get a negative response from others, that attitude tends to get weaker.

Attitudes are also formed through direct experience. It is known, in fact, that the more exposure one has toward a given object, whether it is a song, clothing style, beverage, or politician, the more positive one's attitude is likely to be (Baron, 1996).

### **2.3(c) Observational learning.**

Seeing others display a particular attitude and watching people being reinforced for expressing a particular attitude can make someone adopt those attitudes. This is the basis of the Observational learning theory popularized by Bandura (1986). This theory focuses on the characteristics of the

major factors involved in the process of Observation. According to Kohn (1999) these include: the source, the message and the receiver.

On the side of the *Source* such characteristics as the credibility, attractiveness and trustworthiness of the source will impact the acceptability or otherwise of the change (Chaiken, 1980). On the *message* itself certain factors increase the effectiveness of the content of a message. Some of these factors include: suggestion and appeal to fear (Chaiken & Eagly 1976). Based on suggestion factor, for example, advertisers design their messages in form of making a suggestion from an expert (eg a medical doctor) or a famous person in the hope that people will accept a belief, form an attitude, or become incited to action by the strength of their message, without requiring facts. In the same vein, public speakers often link themselves (by quoting from speeches made by such persons) e.g. Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln, J.F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo to promote their ideas. Also, to instill a negative attitude against a specific target, an advertiser, for example, may use an element of fear in persuading people to adopt or change their attitude. Such slogans like 'AIDS kills', 'Speed kills', 'Smoking is dangerous to your health', 'Vote candidate A! Invite Boko Haram' (in Nigeria) etc., have been used frequently to change people's attitudes to the target product or practice.

On the receiver of the message, Chaiken, (1980) listed influenceability (how is the receiver easily influenced?), selective attention and interpretation (how selectively attentive is the receiver? or how does he interpret the message? etc.)

#### **2.4 Theory of cognitive dissonance**

Psychologists (Bandura(1986) maintain that behaviour does not always conform to a person's feelings and beliefs. Behavior which reflects a given attitude may be suppressed because of a competing attitude, or in deference to the views of others who disagree with it. A classic theory that addresses inconsistencies in behavior and attitudes is Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonanceFestinger,. (1957)., which is based on the principle that people prefer their cognitions, or beliefs, to be consistent with each other and with their own behavior. Inconsistency, or dissonance, among their own ideas makes people uneasy enough to alter these ideas so that they will agree with each other. For example, smokers forced to deal with the opposing thoughts "I smoke" and "smoking is dangerous", for example, are likely to alter one of them by deciding to quit smoking, discount the evidence of its dangers, or adopt the view that smoking will not harm them personally.

An alternative explanation of attitude change is provided by Bem(1972) self-perception theory which asserts that people adjust their attitudes to match their own previous behavior.

#### **2.4.1 Theory of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM); (Petty & Briñol, 2011; Petty & Wegener, 1994) is a theory about the processes responsible for attitude change and the strength of the attitudes that result from those processes. A key construct in the ELM is the Elaboration Likelihood Model is continuum. This continuum is defined by how motivated and able people are to assess the central merits of an issue or a position. The more motivated and able people are to assess the central merits of an issue or position, the more likely they are to effortfully scrutinize all available issue-relevant information. Thus, when the elaboration likelihood is high, people will assess issue-relevant information in relation to knowledge that they already possess,

and arrive at a reasoned (though not necessarily unbiased) attitude that is well articulated and bolstered by supporting information (central route). When the elaboration likelihood is low, however, then information scrutiny is reduced and attitude change can result from a number of less resource demanding processes that do not require as much effortful evaluation of the issue-relevant information (peripheral route). Attitudes that are changed by low effort processes are postulated to be weaker (e.g., not as impactful on behavior) than attitudes that are changed the same extent by high effort processes (Petty & Wegener, 1994). Briefly put, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) holds that attitude change is more permanent if the elaborate and thought-provoking persuasive messages are used to change attitude. If one can provide a thorough, thought-provoking persuasive message to change an attitude, he is more likely to succeed than if he provides a neutral or shallow persuasive message.

### **3.0 TEACHING TO CHANGE ATTITUDES**

There is need to state here that there are no guaranteed methods of teaching to change attitudes. In fact scholars (Durkheim 1951). have questioned the idea of teaching “attitudes” in the classroom. Teachers however, are aware that all of the experiences that students have in their classroom interactions may change the students’ attitudes. But no single experience can be certain of having a specific effect on all students. Abbatt (2010) outlined five general methods that can be used in teaching to effect attitude change. A critical examination of some of these methods shows that they are formulated based on the integration of the principles of classical and operant conditioning, social learning, direct experience, cognitive dissonance, and even ELM as discussed above. The following are five general pedagogical strategies which teachers can use:

- a. providing Discussion

- b. providing examples or models
- c. using role-playing exercises
- d. Providing information to shape attitudes
- e. providing experience

### **3.1 Providing Discussion**

Abbatt (1992) suggests that discussion in small groups is generally more effective in shaping students' attitudes. For example, pre-service students of Education will find it helpful to describe and discuss the experiences that they have had with their pupils during field experience (teaching practice). During the discussion, opportunities are provided so that they can share experiences, so that a desirable experience that one student may have had may influence all the other members of the group.

Another important feature of the discussion is the way in which the students' attitudes change when they talk about their own opinions. The process of putting their ideas into words and seeing the reaction of the other students can be a powerful way of changing attitudes. For this to happen, the group size must be small enough to give every student a chance to talk. A group of 7 or 8 students is best and 15 the maximum number for this technique to be effective (Abatt. 1992). Note that it is not what the teacher says that is important, but what each student says. Teachers should speak very little in these small-group sessions. They may encourage the quieter students to give their opinions and have to stop the talkative students from talking too much. But only in exceptional situations (for example, when the group runs out of ideas) should teachers give their own opinions or take an active part in the discussion.

When there are very large numbers of students, it may be impossible to have one teacher for every group of ten or so students. One solution is to let the students meet without a teacher. This is possible because the teacher's role is only to help the students to talk.

A critical examination of this model for teaching attitudes will show that it combines ideas from many of the theories( Learning, dissonance, ELM etc.). It is also in perfect conformity with Freire (1970; 1995).

Depending on the level of education and experience of the students, discussion could be based on a field trip and discussion generated from current socio-political, health and religious issues. The ultimate aim is that the participants come out of these discussions re-examining their previous attitudes, a talkative type for example, which do not seem to agree with the group norm.

### **3.2 Providing examples or models**

This strategy also corresponds with the Classical conditioning model and also Bandura's(1971) social learning model. A common technique is to show an "ideal person" students will like to behave like, or associate with in a given society. This technique is generally very effective. Classroom experience shows that for many students their teacher is a very powerful model. Students often copy the way teacher behave and handle teaching equipment. If teachers are considerate to the people they work with, then their students are likely to behave in a similar way. The reverse will be the case if they behave otherwise.

Other people will also influence the students' attitudes. Both student leaders and school authorities, leaders of the society etc., provide models for the students to copy. What the general

society will turn out to be in future starts from the attitudes and examples of these significant members of the students' immediate environment.

### **3.3 Using Role-playing Exercises**

People tend to internalize roles they play, changing their attitudes to fit the roles. Petty & Cacioppo (1986) reported an experiment carried out in the 1970s by a psychologist, Philip Zimbardo. In the experiment, it was shown how roles influence people. Zimbardo assigned one group of college student volunteers to play the role of prison guards in a simulated prison environment. He provided these students with uniforms, clubs, and whistles and told them to enforce a set of rules in the prison. He assigned another group of students to play the role of prisoners. Zimbardo found that as time went on, some of the "guard" students became increasingly harsh and domineering. The "prisoner" students also internalized their role. Some broke down, while others rebelled or became passively resigned to the situation. The internalization of roles by the two groups of students was so extreme that Zimbardo had to terminate the study after only six days. Role-playing in teaching can be used at all levels of education especially in some parts of Nigeria where drama is part of life.

Attitudes are very important in communications with people. One way of teaching attitudes is to give the students some experience of what it is like to be in the position of the character they will role-play: a victim, a perpetrator, a prominent politician, a dictator, or a teacher who thinks that the Head of Department is unreasonable. In role-playing exercise the students act the parts of different people and so begin to experience some of the feelings of these people.

The strength of role playing in teaching attitude lies in the fact that the information that people self-generate might seem particularly compelling to the generator because of the enhanced effort involved in generation over passive exposure (Festinger, 1957). Or, the arguments might seem more compelling simply because they are associated with the self (i.e., an “ownness bias” (Perloff & Brock, 1980). People might also have more confidence in the thoughts that they generate leading them to be more impactful than arguments received by others (Briñol & Petty, 2011). Role playing technique derives a lot from the social learning theory of Bandura (1971).

### **3.4 Providing information to shape attitudes**

Mere giving information as teachers often do is not always enough to change people's attitudes but it may help. For example, the relationship between unprotected sex and the risks of HIV/AIDS or that between smoking and the risks of cancer and heart diseases, is well known by many people. For some people this information has been enough to persuade them to change their attitude to sex and smoking and to give up the habit or to adopt it. For many other people, the information has not been enough. A more effective classroom technique is to present information about attitudes in many ways. These may include lectures accompanied with video strips or films. Video strips and films are often more effective because they can also be used to show examples of the correct attitudes. Depending on the teacher's background and approach, this method derives a lot from the principles of the social learning theories. The important point is to show how the facts are relevant to the attitude.

### **3.5 Providing experience to shape attitudes**

It must be pointed out that throughout the students' schooling experience; they must have had experiences which would shape their attitudes. They must have noticed that some colleagues may have been found guilty of various forms of examination malpractices which earned them suspension or outright expulsion as the case may be. This direct experience of seeing the students suffer the sanctions will have far more impact on shaping students' attitudes than a whole gamut of facts about the need to avoid such experiences.

The teacher should provide students with examples of such direct experience as possible. In some schools the students carry out a lot of volunteer services. Others grow all the vegetables that they eat and look after animals themselves. This experience will help them to have more positive attitudes to doing the work themselves. In these situations teachers also join in with various form of life-saving experience, or the digging and cultivation so that students learn that volunteer work or manual work is not undignified. It is always a good idea to discuss these experiences with the students so that the teacher can make clear the kinds of attitudes that he wants them to learn.

### **3.6 Other Approaches**

Other researchers (Bizer, G. Y., Larsen, J. T., & Petty, R. E. (2011) and psychologists (Briñol, P., & Petty, R. E. (2011) have suggested other methods of using classroom platform to promote attitude change and formation. These approaches prefer the use of aspects of learning or attitude forming/changing theories as basis for teaching attitudes.

#### **3.6.1 Teaching attitude formation or change based on instrumental conditioning.**

The basic principle in instrumental conditioning is that when a particular behaviour is rewarded, the reward increases the chances of the specific behavior being repeated under similar circumstances. Attitude formation and change follow the same pattern. When a student expresses a particular attitude (e.g. orderliness in presentation of a class assignment, consistency in contributing to class discussions, cleanliness in appearance, etc.) and the teacher provides positive reinforcement (by nodding, smiling or expressing approval) the particular attitude exhibited by the student is likely to be strengthened. On the other hand, if the teacher provides punishment (by frowning, disagreeing or expressing disapproval) the attitude is likely to be weakened.

### **3.6.2 Attitude formation or change based on cognitive theory.**

Formation and change of attitudes can also take place through a process of cognition. Students have the ability to think, they may have formed their attitudes about certain things. Whatever other information they get on such things in the school are processed through the repertoire of their former experiences. Their attitudes to such things or information would be informed by such a cognitive processing. The implication for teachers is to provide a democratic, threat-free environment that will allow productive thinking. When a student disagrees with a teacher, he/she should not be condemned, and rather such a disagreement should be seen as a product of healthy cognitive processing. It is the duty of the teacher to take a critical view of such a student's point of view before rejecting or accepting it.

### **3.6.3 Application of attitude formation or change through cognitive dissonance to classroom situation**

In accordance with the principle of cognitive dissonance, the teacher should realize that a simple observation of one action of his/her student does not provide sufficient information to judge whether the student has acquired a particular attitude. The teacher should look out for a consistent pattern of action over time as evidence that a student has acquired a desired attitude, for example, a positive attitude about school, a specific subject or social issue.

It is to be noted that notwithstanding the employment of all the methods discussed above, the teacher must be aware that students' attitudes may be shaped by events which they have no control over. For example, students will read books, talk to people outside the school, and spend time with their families. The students will also have formed many of their attitudes before they start schooling. It is important therefore that one tries to influence the students' attitudes as much as possible and that he does so correctly.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Stakeholders in Nigerian are calling for a sustainable change in attitude in the sociopolitical lives of the citizens. The call is necessitated by the fact that the level of corruption in Nigeria currently has gone beyond all tolerable limits. Relying on contemporary history, many Nigerian researchers and educationists are agreed that education obtained through the schools could serve as a powerful medium for changing the attitude of Nigerians. Effort was made in this study to examine relevant theories of attitudes and attitude change with the aim of selecting aspects of these that are amenable to pedagogical purposes. The result of this effort is the recommendation of some pedagogical approaches that can be used to teach attitude and attitude change at different levels of schooling.

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