REDEFINING STUDENT LEADERSHIP FOR POSITIVE IMPACTS THROUGH EDUCATION.

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Student Leadership in Nigeria serve as mediums through which the voices of students studying in various tertiary institutions are heard. These leadership include those of the Student Union Government (SUG), College or Faculty Associations and also departmental associations across the numerous universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The main purpose of student leadership is to promote the welfare and defend the interest of her members. Decades ago, student associations and unions were highly respected by the government and university managements. This was because their leaders had positive ideologies and had their students at heart. Ugwunali (2022) noted that the present day student leadership are far different from what existed few decades ago. Today, it could be noticed that the leadership of various student associations and unions no longer represent the sole interest of their members. It could be deducted that student leaders now go into positions for their personal interests while neglecting the reasons why they were elected. Thus, this has almost formed a general definition or perspective of student leaderships as being driven by personal interests and not the common goals of the associations or unions they represent. However, there is need to change this narrative by training and imparting leaders who will make positive impacts wherever they find themselves. This could be achieved through various strategies which include most importantly positive reorientation towards leadership among others.

For clearer understanding, it is important to briefly define key concepts associated with the study. Basically, a student is an individual undertaking a course of study in an institution of learning. Leadership is the ability of an individual or group of people to affect, impact or influence the members of an organisation or group. It is a process of motivating a group of people towards achieving a common goal. Therefore, a person who successfully controls, manages, motivates or influences a group of people to achieve certain goal is a leader. Student leadership could then be seen as a process whereby a student or set of students impact, motivate or influence other

students with the sole aim of achieving their common goals. It therefore involves students leading their fellow students towards achieving their stated goals. Thus, student leadership involves three key elements; the student, the ability to influence, impact or motivate and the common goals to be achieved. Positive impacts are services rendered with the purpose of solving identified problems. In student leadership, positive impacts are those actions, activities or achievements carried out by student leaders in order to solve the problems faced by their fellow students. These are the various ways through which student leaders improve the general conditions of their members.

Conceptually, "redefining" means to "consider again especially with the possibility of change or reversal" (Merriam Webster, 2023). Redefining means giving something a new meaning. It involves slightly or totally changing the meaning of a particular concept or situation. It also means making people think about something in a new or different way.

Education is a process by which individuals are trained to develop their abilities and other positive values so as to be useful to their society. It involves developing an individual in **"character"** and **"learning"**. Character here involves those individual values, attributes or qualities that differentiates or distinguishes an individual from the other. These include the moral and social aspects of the individual. However, learning in this context refers to the intellectual, mental, psychological and physical aspects which fall under the three domains; cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

Furthermore, it is necessary to change the narrative of student leadership in Nigerian Institutions. It is important to make our students, lecturers, parents and entire society have a different perspective or overview of student leadership. ***Renewing this impression is attainable if student leaders are focused towards making positive impacts in whatever capacities they find themselves.*** Definitely, this could be attained through education. Specifically, this education could be through leadership education, seminars, conferences, symposia, summits, specialized leadership training sessions, etc. ***This is because not every individual possesses the skills to lead, motivate or influence others whereas those who might have these skills might not know how, where and when to use them in leading others.***

Redefining Student Leadership for Positive Impacts

Student Leadership could be redefined and positive impacts achieved in various student associations and unions if their leaders are proactive. Proactive student leadership is made up of selfless student leaders who have a common aim of serving the students diligently, ensuring their general welfare and getting the right things done on time to achieve overall success and goals of the association. These group of leaders do not wait for things to happen, but instead they make positive things happen and prevent negative ones from happening within their limits. Hence, student leadership could be redefined for positive impacts through the following ways;

1. Positive Reorientation Towards Leadership: Nigerian students especially student leaders should understand that they are trained in both "**character" and "learning"** and leadership is encompassed in **both.** They are trained not only for the future but also for the present to make positive contributions to the society by providing solutions to various problems. Therefore, leadership summits, seminars, trainings are very critical for building the next generation of proactive leaders.

2. Inculcating the Spirit of Selfless Service: Student leaders and those aspiring to be leaders should cultivate the spirit of selfless service because true leadership is all about selfless service and a call to leadership is a call to serve. They should understand that through creativity, innovation, and exchange of positive ideas, a proactive student leadership can be achieved. Leaders should avoid all attributes of selfishness and self-centeredness but instead focus on the general interest of the students.

3. Ensure Students Welfare: The basic welfare of the students should be the utmost priority of student leaders. Student Leaders should come together and find possible solutions to the numerous problems of students especially academic and related welfare issues. They should also promote social and sporting activities to engage their members in various meaningful ways because "all work and no play makes jack a dull boy."

4. Ensure Strong and Healthy Relationship Between Students and the Management: A responsible student leadership should develop strategies in creating or establishing a long lasting cordial relationship between her members and the management including staff. This will enable a better mindset in the staff and management while handling

certain student matters. The leaders should build bridges instead of walls thereby easing communication and collaboration between both parties. In this case, student leaders should stand as corporate intercessors or mediators on behalf of their members, not in their personal interests but for the general interest of the students.

5. Contribution to Infrastructural Development and Basic Social Amenities: Within their own boundaries or limits, student leaders should contribute to the institution's infrastructural development and provide basic social amenities to support their institutions, various colleges and departments no matter how little especially as these things affect their students.

6. Proper and Timely Dissemination of Information: Student leaders should through proper and timely information guide and direct their members to avoid mistakes. Examples are orientation programmes and tours while awareness could be created through online platforms, notice boards, banners, handbooks, etc.

7. Ensure Transparency in Leadership: Student leaders should be transparent in their leadership. A transparent leadership builds more trust in her members. The leaders should be honest and uphold their integrity. Through transparency in leadership, a sense of belonging is felt by their members, thus encouraging a healthy student-student relations. This could be achieved by leaders listening to their students while addressing their complains and issues diplomatically. They should learn how to tolerate, curtail and avoid hate speech, accommodate public opinion through proper investigation of reports and discussing issues extensively before drawing conclusions. Student leaders should also collaborate with other student associations and unions to enhance and facilitate the cross-fertilization of ideas, encourage solidarity and strengthen ties between them.

Conclusion

Student leadership in Nigeria has been characterized by various challenges that often make them deviate from the main mandate for which they were constituted. Student leaders are expected to be responsible, experienced and mature students with attributes of selfless service towards their followers. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case as the leadership of various student associations in the country have been carried away by frivolities, politics of self-interest and have allowed social vices to eat deep within them. Therefore, there is urgent need to redefine student leadership for positive

impacts. There is need for leadership reorientation and positive leadership mindset in student leaders so as to make positive impacts wherever they find themselves. This would then promote the moulding of responsible leaders for nation building, human capital development and to prepare them to take their rightful positions in the society.

References

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