

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATE SYNDROME IN NIGERIA: AN IMPLICATION ON THE QUALITY OF NIGERIAN GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian education sector has witnessed tremendous transformation over the years from small-scale missionary venture to post colonial enterprises. The policy changed from 7-5-4 in the 70's to 6-3-3-4 in the 80's and now 9-3-4 system. Today, education institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary) could be found in every nooks and crannies of the country. In the early 80's some higher institutions in Nigeria had distinguished themselves at international standard. The quality of education was high and employers used to troop into campuses to recruit work force for their workforce. When the society became materialistic in the 90s coupled with outright neglect of the sector, the value orientation change from acquisition of knowledge to certification as a meal ticket, the various achievements disappeared. The current situation is such that the employers of labour believe that Nigerian graduates are poorly trained and unfit for the job demand. The country is producing fewer leaders, managers, teachers and other professionals but mass-production of miscreants, soma, the disaffected and the rejected; the misdirected, the unlearned, the wrong and the hopeless. The paper recommended that unless there is value re-orientation of all and sundry in the sector, achieving vision 2020 through the instrumentality of education is a mere illusion.

Key words: *Education; Certificate Syndrome; Acquisition of knowledge; Manpower; Employment; Graduates*

INTRODUCTION

It is an axiomatic fact that education is the only long-term solution to complex social problems. It is indispensable for building and sustenance of nation states. It prepares and enlightened citizens capable of communicating among themselves intelligently. Education is infact, a necessary ingredient for national unity, stability and development. For it not only prepares an individuals citizens for living a personal fulfillment but also makes it possible for him to contribute effectively for development of his community and the nation in general (Yabani;1991). No wonder most countries devote substantial part of their resources to the education of its citizens using it as an instrument for national unity and development.

However, Nigerian national policy on education was launched in 1976; it was reshaped in 1977 and 1979 respectively. As at then service to humanity was the main theme. By 1980s some higher institutions had distinguished themselves in a number of disciplines at international reputation. The quality of education was high and employers troop in to university campuses to recruit manpower for their work force. (Ugwu; 2006)

In the early 90s as the society became materialistic couple with wanton neglect of the sector, the system started to dysfunction at all levels. Hence the drive for certificates as

meal ticket became the ultimate goal of the recipient the recorded achievements in the 70s disappeared. The present situation is such that employers of labour believe that Nigerian graduates are poorly trained and unfit for the job demand and are delinquent in both writing and technical skills (First Bank Chief; 2005). Consequently, the system is producing less foresight Leaders, Managers, Administrators and Teachers but mass – exodus of miscreants, the disaffected, the rejected, agitated and the hopeless (Ezekwesili; 2006).

The above entails that 49 years after independence achieving some national objectives through the instrumentality of education such as a just and egalitarian society, a great and dynamic economy; a land of bright future opportunities for all remains largely elusive as certificate acquisition against knowledge becomes the ultimate goal. It is in the light of this pristine condition and mindless grinding of the sector that this paper examines the aims and philosophy of education, the transformation of the sector over the years, certification as well as its implication on the quality of Nigerian graduates.

Aims and Philosophy of Education

The greatest aim of education is not (only) Knowledge but action (Herbert Spencer).

In all known human societies good and evil are universal concepts irrespective of colour, race or heterogeneity. Education teaches responsibility to society to differentiate good from bad, and to identify the best part of human kind. Through education the society learned how to contribute positively to societal development (Towe; 1991).

School is the only archetypal place where process of being civilized is thought day after day in every country. The central theme of education is knowledge which must not stop at passing information and examination alone since it can be gleaned from text books, computers, video and libraries without adequately producing qualitative and qualified manpower. Society must ensure that the end product of the educational system is both practically relevant and philosophically competent. It must foster personal autonomy, responsibility and train an individual to regard dishonesty, injustice and cruelty as morally wrong. It must inculcate moral excellence to the recipients which is compatible with socio – economic and political realities of a given environment and the method does not have to be doctrinaire. The fundamental question is why has our present approach to education failed to encourage these principles [knowledge] but certificate as a meal ticket?

EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

Education in Nigeria has witnessed tremendous transformation over the years cutting across all the various tiers. From small scale missionary ventures to gigantic enterprises in the post colonial era, today schools could be found in every nooks and crannies of the country. In the late 60s the system of education varied slightly from one region to another. Thus we had 7-5-4 which represents 7 years of primary, five years of secondary and four years of tertiary education. While in some region it was 6-5-4. By 1976 the system was 7-5-4 in all the regions respectively. In the late 80s the system change to 6-3-

3-4 that is 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary school 3 years at senior secondary school and four years at tertiary institution. The different is additional one year at the senior class. (Ayodele & Charles; 2008)

However, the importance of this reform is to introduce students at junior tiers to vocational and technical education so that at the end of the first tier they are separate based on their ability. The basic students go through senior secondary school and latter to university while the rest would pursue vocational and technical education. Winter (2000) reported that the 6-3-3-4 system had not really failed but was not well implemented. Equipment meant to prosecute the JSS tier was not fully installed for lack of basic amenities such as space, power and corruption. The former state minister of education Ezekwesili reported that the 6-3-3-4 system failed partly due to inadequate physical infrastructure and the 5% available ones are not in good condition.

The current system is 9-3-4. This system combines 6 years primary education with 3 years of junior secondary school education to a single individual tier of free and compulsory basic education. The aim is to give adequate preparation to recipients and allow them to choose area of specialization at senior level, whereas, the philosophy of tertiary institution remains the same.

Currently there are two basic reforms in the education sector. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) that concerns both primary and junior secondary schools and the higher education reform that converts schools of technology, polytechnic and colleges of education into degree awarding universities which is a wake- up call towards fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP;2000).This is followed by what federal government tagged "WE CAN" which stands for, we educate our character, aptitude and needs (Abari;2006).The main objectives of this programme include the New basic Education Curriculum,(NBEC) Tracking Asset Progress (TAP), Operation Reach All Secondary Schools (ORASS) in service training of 145,000 teachers to cope with the scheme and the training of 40,000 unemployed National Certificate Of Education degree holders. As at 2006 the Federal Executive Secretary of he NUC reported that the state of Nigerian universities in all tiers was this:

No. of universities 76, No students enrolment 750,765, No. of teachers 35,595 students ratio 21:1 funding N53, 682, 343, 757 (Special Focus, 2006).

In the 1990/1991 accreditation exercise, 212 of the 830 academic programmes had full accreditation while as at 1999-2000 exercise 11%, of the 1,195 had full accreditation that is 131courses got full accreditation. In 2005 42.25% got accreditation. This is partly due to poor funding and inadequate staffing as Nigeria spends between 5% to 8% of the budget as compare to countries like US which spends more than 35% of budget and our African counterpart Ghana 30% (Omogoh; 2006)

However, the Nigerian universities have the primary mandate of producing high – level of manpower and development which is central to the creation of intellectual capacity on which knowledge production and utilization depend and the promotion of long – life

learning practices that are required for upgrading knowledge and skills (Okebukola; 2006).

CERTIFICATE SYNDROME IN NIGERIA:

Education is a fundamental instrument for construction of knowledge, economy and the society of all nations (William; 2003). He identified knowledge as the most important factor for overall development in the 21st century.

Moral and Coales (1983), in one of their proposals to developing commonwealth countries asserted that the growth rate of any economy depends on the level of industrial production which in turn depends on the number and quality of manpower especially engineering and technology.

However, Nigerian system of education is in shamble as the acquisition of certificate is literally perceived as the ultimate goal of the recipients. Most undergraduates now see their certificates as meal ticket. The pleasure of acquiring knowledge is abandoned in favour of material gains (Ali; 1999). The present society has devoted its time to worshipping of gold rather than God the almighty. In such circumstances, the teachers who are also a parent and the recipients of our education cannot be isolated from the wider society. In all ramifications there is falling standard of education all over the federation as noted by (Ali; 2001)

*We must not forget that at the moment,
there is hardly any standard left standing.
All standards have fallen.*

Some times one wonders if Nigerian education is fostering desirable disposition to our youths. Surely the proliferations of secret cults in Nigerian university campuses, the new culture of rape and the spawning of homo – sexual and desperate level of examination malpractice are not desirable for our own level of education. Infact, the societal attributes and behavioral pattern inform our education. The present crops of Nigerian undergraduates have been brought up under distorted and dysfunctional system to such an extent that the value of the education is not fully recognized. Nigerian education somersault from bad to worst, to desperate defying all ailments. In this part the world an individual disposition is measured by the certificate he bagged. No body cares how, when and the process of acquisition. A society where even morons acquire the highest certificate to manned sensitive places.

Several institutions award certificates which do not tally with the holder's natural aptitude. The quantitative expansion of educational institutions is not accompanied by quality as the graduates are described half- backed, the rejected and the hopeless.

The Nigerian value systems have lost its relevance in the area of education. Parents, students, teachers and government officials have made acquisition of certificate as a means to an end. Parents give money to their children with the tag "follow up" allowance, female students exchange sex, the hardened ones get involved in examination malpractice all in the name of certificates. In spite of the quantitative expansion of certificate holders

that joined the economy from 1975 to date it is still unfortunately true to contend that the nation is not producing all the needed man power required by the economy. This scenario has created a bad image of the country as a safe place for knowledge acquisition. Why Nigerians have all the certificates yet, deficient in manpower? Which country in the world that has all the opportunities for education yet, most of their graduates are unlearned? Which nation has abundant resources but does not have good plans for education? Which country certificate forgery is rampant even among academia? Welcome to Nigeria!!

IMPLICATION ON THE QUALITY OF NIGERIAN GRADUATES

In organized educational systems the level and type of education acquired by an individual generally determines the nature of his job and his place in the society. Competition is thus intense for educational opportunities on the basis of individual natural aptitude and certificates awarded on the basis of performance. In Nigeria, the certificate syndrome has become a Pandora box which has poisoned some institutions to award certificate on the basis of Nigerian factor. Cases are so rampant. For instance as at 2007 a youth corper was posted to class in Gombe State as her place of primary assignment. To Nigerians greatest dismay, she neither speaks English nor writes in English. That incidence captured all the media head lines and glimpses of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) the greatest net work in Africa. What a sacrilege to our educational system?

The present situation is such that university graduates are poorly trained and unfit for the job demand. They are delinquent in both oral and written communication as well as applied technical skills. Arising from the consolidation exercise, the banks reforms of 2005, Nigerian banks shop for skilled personnel abroad (Ugwu;2006). Certificate syndrome is an enigma that make a mockery of the entire education process as most of the qualified dons in the institution who have moral standard lost to over-sea countries and Africa for improved condition of service and proper funding of educational research and development resulting in the 'Brain Drain Syndrome; 'another syndrome which has teleological effect on the quality of Nigerian graduate.

Today some, parents prepared overseas institution for their children because Nigerian schools are staffed with teachers who are product of a system that is delinquent academically and morally. In a university of Ghana for instance, 40% of the students' population are Nigerians and the same application of other African nation particularly South Africa (Soyombo; 2007)

Unlike the real Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids) which startled the world but allow the brain to function on the contrary, certificate syndrome has affected the brain, the thinking and the morale and made caricature of the Nigerian institutions in the comity of nations.

Comparably, our situation is similar to producing microbiologically sterile being and throwing him to live and survive in the gutter. Days have gone when society held graduates in higher esteem and admiration. In essences this reminds me of my late Indian secondary school teacher in the 80s who as at then used economic terminology when ever he asked questions without response that "there is diminishing return in the

quality of Nigerian education". 22 years after this assertion our situation defies this theory. Here we are with fixed education system and numerous variable factors; increase in numbers of institutions, population explosion; electronic means of knowledge e.g. internet etc) yet there is no return left to diminished.

In any case, and to some extent proliferation and dignification of certificate have rendered our educational system ineffective. A mere institution that sells and train indolence, unfit and the hopeless.

CONCLUSION

When the issue of Nigeria educational system today is raised, the first sets of thoughts that come to mind are: decline in standard, deterioration of facilities, examination malpractices, mass promotion syndrome and the likes before any other thing followed. This thought calls for an in-depth study and analysis aimed at tutoring each and every stakeholder in the education system on how their actions and inactions have individually and collectively contributed to the collapsing state of Education in Nigeria. In any case, knowledge and Skills acquisition which education is all about is not the concern for many stake holders.

In this regard, conscious effort is needed by all the stakeholders in the educational sector-Government at all level, school heads and teachers, parents and students to bring this observed abnormalities to normalcy – poor education breeds indiscipline and indiscipline is the bane of the Nigerian society today and calls for restoration of a proper academic culture in Nigeria . Stake holders must be fully involved in designing education programmed devoid of exigency of certificate acquisition, capable of fostering unity and solving societal problem now and the future. Unless Nigerians rise up to these challenges, the future is bleak and precarious. Education is too a serious issue to be left for acquisition of certificate alone.

RECOMMENDATION

-There should be war against indiscipline in the educational sector .A war for all against all which must be launched and directed at changing the minds of all and sundry towards orderliness in the system.

-Government should intensified effort toward proper funding of educational institutions to include, good salary package and conducive atmosphere for learning; partnership between industries and the academia for skills acquisition. The business of producing good future leaders should be the ultimate goal. The current under funding is a clear indication of lack of foresight and plans for the future of the nation.

-Forgery is the greatest threat to national development, and Nigerian government should intensified efforts towards its eradication. The government can do this by establishing a special agency, just like the EFCC and ICPC, charged with the responsibility of waging war against forged and other related offences

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