

Overemphasis on Certificates than Competence: An Indicator of Failed Educational Standard in Nigeria

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Abstract

*This paper Titled **Overemphasis on Certificates than Competence: An Indicator of failed Educational Standard in Nigeria**, reviewed articles related to falling standard of education in Nigeria. Several factors were identified but not limited to; governmental cause, parents' lousiness, students' apathy, societal mutations of values and ethics, teachers' ineptitudes and teachers' poor knowledge of content areas. The paper unveiled the ugly roles played by the employers of labour, the role of overemphasis and demands of academic high profiled certificates than competence among other factors of culprits to the saga. Recommendations were made on the possible ways of alleviating the country from this menace. Corruption was not left out of scene, the implications of alliterates to the society was discussed and the paper concluded that certificates are not guarantee of academic excellence in Nigeria rather a grave bed to the generations yet on born.*

Keywords: Education; Falling Standard; Nigeria, Alliterate; Certificates; Overemphasis; Teaching; Learning; Misconception; NECO; WAEC; System.

Introduction

The issue of falling standards of education in Nigeria has remained on the top burner among contemporary problems in the Country. The decline in the quality of education has become too conspicuous and disturbing within the last 20 years till date, to the degree that the issue can no longer be treated with levity having known the input and role of education as an instrument of social transformation and development in any society.

Several arguments have emerged seeking to know the actual group or sector responsible for the deteriorating standard of education that is menacing approximately all sectors in the country. Whilst educationists indulged in accusing the government of being hypocritical towards the educational sector pinpointing on poor funding by the government and employment of unqualified teachers and non-educationists to manage the educational sector, the government officials also allege that the government has been contributing more than enough towards the educational development over the years, the government blame teachers, accusing them of poor commitment in the discharge of their primary duties. According to some government officials, most teachers lack the rightful feelings and passions to work.

Teachers on their own part argues that the government's dishonest attitude impedes their zeal in discharging their duties satisfactorily due to poor working condition, unsustainable wage and inadequate teaching time, lack of learning/teaching aids, including students apathy to learn.

Poor parents also blame the economic strata, claiming that the crude capitalist system operated in Nigeria has created a yawning gap between the rich and the poor as the main

rationale behind the downfall of the educational standards in the country. According to this group, the children of the rich have access to quality education abroad while their children have limited educational opportunity hence they cannot afford to pay very expensive fees to private schools since the government has failed to adequately fund the public school sector.

Abdulyassar (2018), postulates that even though it is true that the government and the teachers should share the blame of educational failure, the social media is not left out of place because the hours the *lucky generation* spend reading their books, doing assignments or winding their brains are replaced by cyber space these days. He explained that a larger percentage of students have no interest for reading at every level of education. Abdulyassar lamented that the dwindling interest in reading culture or reading habit among the youths is deplorable, maintaining that social media has taken over the hours students are expected to spend in studying, doing assignments or reading story books that could have helped to boost their academic status. He acclimated that the excessive chatting on Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype, etc, by the students directly affects their ability to spell words correctly.

Whoever to be blamed, the solutions to this menace is of paramount concern. Apart from the factors enumerated as the points of argument, a more challenging factor has emerged. Currently in Nigeria, more emphasis is laid to certificates than competence, this emphasis has attracted over 80% of the so called educated class in Nigeria to be carrying about certificates they cannot defend neither utilize. How this trend contributes to the falling standards of education in Nigeria shall be the purview of this study.

Traditional Education in Nigeria

Traditional education is referred to a type of education that is not properly organized or transmitted in a formal setting. Before the presence of the missionaries in Nigeria in the year 1804, Nigerians were so energetic, hard working, knowledgeable, acculturating, intelligent and economically independent. Before the coming of the foreigners, the mode of education has been through storytelling, folktales, folklores, celebrations, herbal medicines, incantations, initiations, marketing and trading, counting through native languages, farming, craft activities, building of houses, canoe, fishing, traps, sowing of clothes, hunting tools and war gadgets etc and Nigerians were so sharp and clever to replicate whatever that have been learnt into practice. But since the presence of the westerners in 1804, Nigerians started witnessing change in culture, beliefs, mode of worships, selection of activities and types of work to do. One can easily say that the absorption of western cultures weakens the zeal of Nigerians to sustain knowledge.

However, between 1804 to 1843 when western education was introduced Nigerians made competitive strides in literary education and science which was later established between 1861 and 1897 when rudiments of science were developing into full science courses and at this period western education has gained ground fully, and Nigerians passed various stages of substantive learning.

Western Education in Nigeria

Western education is referred to formal education brought in alongside religious tenets by the missionaries. This education was firstly established as religious doctrines; mainly the teaching of church activities but later the missionaries saw the need to educate some few individuals who should gain knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic. This group of persons was trained to help the missionaries as clerk, cattiest, interpreters and other forms of servants to the missionaries. By the year 1843 formal schools were established and the

elementary level was called **standard level**. Only few Nigerians had access to this level of education, those who were able to pass through standard one to six can comparatively compete with NCE holders of today. Later the system was changed to elementary to accommodate more and better educational features like science which gained popularity by the year 1926. (Aliyu, 1984). The primary education in Nigeria has faced series of changes and modification to the present 9-3-4 system of UBE.

Before 1889 the first secondary school was established and the secondary schools were well planned to accommodate Vocational, Technical, commercial, and grammar schools, later comprehensive schools and Teachers training colleges were equally established, the interesting point is that the products of the ancient schools were very productive, sound, competitive at home and abroad.

In the year 1934 post Secondary institutions were established due to pressure by some nationalists who studied abroad. The first of its kind was Yaba Higher College; it was aimed at provision of intermediate manpower in Medicine, Agriculture, Survey, Engineering and teachers to teach basic science subjects in secondary schools to help change our perceptions from white collar jobs which were among the curriculum domiciled by the missionaries. Later very few universities were established. With independence in 1960, foreign technical aids started coming into the country. In 1962 Ahmadu Bello University was established, we also have University of Nigeria Nsuka, and much later university of Benin, Calabar, etc came on board, these Universities was well known and ranked for her educational excellence.

The West African Examination Council took over from Cambridge the School Certificate Examination in 1950. From that period changes were introduced to reflect the need to indigenize the content and scope of education in Nigeria's secondary schools. This examination body was the sole examination board that regulates the entry level and certification into the higher institutions in Nigeria till 1999 when the National Examination Council was established in April by former Head of State General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Accounts of Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria

Ede (2005), provides a convincing representation of the extent of decay and decline in the quality of education in Nigeria. He identifies the poor performances of students in the senior school certificate examination as an indicator of the falling standards in the nation's education. Ede asserts that the inability of most school leavers to communicate effectively in written and spoken English Language is an apparent precursor of decline in the quality of education. He maintained that the Nigerian schools have continuously failed to prepare the youths for effective and productive living and contribution to the Nigerian society as school leavers fall below the acceptable level in measures of creativity and problem-solving abilities.

Accordingly, it can be concluded to a large extent that the quality of secondary education and certificates issued to our youths is questionable. The assertions of Ede, is in consonance with public commentaries on the declining quality of education in the country. Ede explained that investigations have also shown that employers' rating of the creative abilities of school leavers and graduates is rather low. He narrates the present day experience of a number of employers in the private sector giving preference to applicants holding a Second Class Honors (Upper Division) Degree as a minimum qualification for employment, even with these high profiled certificates additional orientation and on-the-job training is subjected to the applicants to help them develop the appropriate skills and competencies related to the job because it is assumed that the schools no longer equip them adequately enough to fit into employment. Ede maintained that even with the decline in the quality of education, the contents of education has

not been watered down, maintaining that it is the quality of instruction that has been generally low due to inadequacies and irregularities in the school system.

Ede lamented that Nigerian schools system in the last 20 years has been overtaken by immense crises which include; endless closure of schools due to workers strike actions and students' restiveness; unqualified staffing, unsustainable wages, and lack of motivation to teachers; inadequate instructional materials and facilities; lack of basic infrastructural support; examination malpractice; and under funding of education by the government.

(Akindele 1999, in Ede 2005) stated that:

'if we are thinking of how to make our educational system to be qualitative, let us first, find out or think of what has made the system to lose the quality it once had and turn the table around by re-introducing and re-emphasizing those missing variables for the needed results.'

It is important to note that the quality of education output required in equipping school leavers with the essential acquaintance, skills, values and attitudes that will enable them function effectively and productively as individuals and members of the society is mainly dependent on the quality of the education input. The inputs comprises of standard quality of teachers, meaningful workers living wage, modern teaching/learning aids, and learner friendly environment.

Chinelo (2011), believes that the falling standard of education in Nigeria is linked to the lost glories of traditional education which inculcates among other things the very important values of hard-work, diligence, integrity, and high productivity. He maintained that by the time these meaningful attributes are lacking in any production system, education inclusive, the results are often devastating leading especially to poor quality output and wastage which in themselves undermine capacity building and sustainable development. He stated that the tertiary level produces the much desired human capital that propels nations from backwardness to modernization but has to be fed from the lower levels. He postulated that:

A "mal-nourished" primary level would breed a "kwashiokored" secondary level that culminates into a "masrasmused" tertiary level.

Nnamdi (2007), equally wrote that the quality of education in Nigeria has dropped to an alarming rate and that it portend great danger for the future of our country. He regretted that in the past decades teachers has the repository of knowledge due to the fact that information was not evenly distributed, and today the information is at our finger tips, yet the colonial education products are better than today's graduates. Nnamdi asserts that our fathers who passed through it were able to write, and speak boldly in the public at the elementary school stage and that it will take a good effort of today's graduate to outsmart them as their sentences do not deviate from the syntactic and grammatical norms of contemporary English at the elementary school level.

Most painful thing today is that most graduates need help to write formal letters; this is evident in the promotion exams conducted by Kaduna State ministry of education where over 90% of the teachers failed primary three examination test, what a shame!

Misconception about Education

Most Nigerians are misconceiving education to mere attending of school, the government's conception is that once school structures are built either poorly or moderately and a few teachers hired, a school has been established and children can be pushed to school

just to be certificated without considering the factors that can produce a sound educated citizen capable of transforming the society. At the end children leave school certificated but not educated. This is an indicator for having graduates from Nigerian universities who can neither express themselves well in English language, nor demonstrate reasonable mastery of their subject matters.

The educational system in Nigeria is so bastardized that the quality of learners admitted to different levels of education is not checkmated. The promotion exercise is so liberalized that student's quality and performance is undermined for next level promotions. No longer regard for value of excellence and merit before admitting students into the universities, class influence, political and economic powers have taken preeminence rather than merit. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) that is expected to moderate and ensure compliance to admission regulations are left with no option than to bow to corruption and power. It indicates therefore, that such students find it difficult to cope with their studies. Based on the fact that the selection process is faulty, those that are not meant for university education are been admitted and they graduate empty headed. The cancellation of selection system in our primary and secondary schools have made it so difficult to ascertain learners competence and specific areas of fitness either into the technical, vocational or otherwise creating more learning ineffectiveness and difficulties.

Ede (2005), explained that secondary education in Nigeria has become a routine activity to the extent that people are more interested in attendance than learning outcomes. He stated that in the past, entrance into primary and secondary schools were expected to meet certain qualification requirements and that pupils were promoted to the next higher classes if they were found qualified while the weak ones were asked to repeat their classes, maintaining that there are no strict conditions that guide admission and promotion as students are admitted or promoted if the parents have the money to pay.

Among several factors the increase in unregulated private owned primary and secondary schools including corruption among school heads have complicated this quandary. No matter the reforms by schools if the issues of students' selection are not addressed, it will become efforts in futility. Sometimes one can think that the negation of selection in the nation's schools seems to have some political undertone in order to achieve the interest and policy of a quota system that is meant to equalize education opportunities for the citizens based on ethnic nationality, without the consideration of academic achievement and quality of the graduates, this is highly regrettable.

Over Emphasis on Paper Qualification than Competence

The recent trend of demands on paper qualification rather than performance is worrisome, in Nigeria job seekers are placed under intense pressure of qualification by employers. Several adverts reads; the applicant must possess first class honor degree and a minimum of second class upper, distinction in HND etc. The question here is, how many persons graduated with second class lower talk of first class?, where would those with third class and pass degree fit in?. The pressure would have better been what job can you do? What trade and skill do you possess?, based on this pressures, students are left with no option than to resort into examination malpractices, sorting of lecturers, buying of degrees to have first class and second class degrees.

Prior to the present day trend, university education was not meant for all, some ended in technical and vocational schools, while others attended commercial school, and they were self reliant in automobile, electrical, welding, building, baking, sowing, shoes making, hair barbing and braiding, secretarial typing, agriculture, plumbing and other skills, few of those whom

attended grammar schools and comprehensive schools gained admission into institutions of higher learning while others picked interest in teachers' college. By this era, employers were employing based on competence, only few had trade test certificates and cities and guides of London while university and diploma graduates were treated as aristocrats with high societal prestige and honor. Before certificate qualification era, Nigeria's economy and manpower was well strengthened, but what actually went wrong and at what point? Remains a question unanswered.

Today, almost 80% of Nigerians are WAEC and SSCE certificate holders, 70% are NCE and OND while about 65% are HND and first degree graduates. The worst of it all is that about 60% are master degree holders while about 45 to 55% are striving for PhD certificates. The irony here is the facts that over 90% of the first degree graduates and masters holders can't even defend the certificates talk more of working with it. The question remains of what value is the certificate to the holders? One will wonder that with these wide and long certificates Nigerians can't even manufacture ordinary kerosene lantern, everybody is struggling for white collar job, rushing to politics and demanding for royalties from oil companies. No one is ready to put into practice that which was learnt in the school. It is going to be a very big challenge with generations to come when almost everybody will become PhD holders and alliterates parading certificates without contents.

Causes of Falling Standards of Education in Nigeria

Grace (2018), highlighted some factors as contributors of falling standards of education in Nigeria, she maintained that students churned out from the school system are not literate graduates because they are poorly performed. She noted that this problem does not begin at the tertiary level of learning but from the primary school, which is the introductory level. Grace listed those responsible for this squalid state of affairs to include: pupils/students, parent, teachers, government, and society as a whole. She specifically identified that by assessing the cognitive performance of our educational standard, it has obviously fallen. Grace stated that some students fail to attend lectures because of peer group influence, that majority of students do not have time for their studies but would instead play games, watch cartoons and films at the expense of their studies, while at the tertiary level, some students engage in cultism. She lamented that the falling standard of education in the tertiary institutions are more questioning due to students making wrong choice of academic specialization which they cannot marry their competence alongside their choice of discipline as they do not possess the natural endowment demanded by such course of study and also fail to contact a counselor who will guide them in choice of course.

Grace explained that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society which encourages students to cheat in examinations, where some schools have become miracle canters, as students are assisted to pass in examinations by proxy. She asserted that the inquisitiveness of Nigerian youths to acquire paper qualification at all costs is another reason for the falling standard of education in the country, maintaining that some desperate youths pay huge sums of money to be awarded degrees by unaccredited educational institutions.

Grace accused parents for not taking good care of their children's education, believing that the pursuit of riches is more important than the success of their children, while others blame poverty for exposing their children into hawking at the expense of their education.

She equally blame the teachers, noting that teachers are smug and have divided loyalty as they engage in businesses other than teaching, thus leaving their students marooned. Grace stressed that the government jettisons merit during recruitment of teachers thereby negating the quality of teaching/learning. She maintained that the government's free education

campaign is deceitful thus there are no basic infrastructures for effective teaching and learning. She acclimated mostly on the over-reliance on paper qualification by our youths as co-contributor to the falling standard of education, stressing that in the past, merit was the main determinant for employment but today nepotism and god-fatherism hold sway, thus discouraging hard work, as students no longer face their studies squarely since those regarded as brilliant and maharishi find it difficult to secure jobs after graduation in spite of their excellent performances.

Abdulkarim (2010), enumerated the following bullets point as factors responsible for the falling standard of education in Nigeria:

(1) Indiscipline: he noted that schools no longer see discipline as ethics, failed students are not asked to repeat class rather they are promoted to the next class, while late comers are pampered without punishment and students with devious characters are retained due to parental influence.

(2) Quest for paper qualification: Abdulkarim explained that Nigerians respect paper qualification above performance in the fields, thereby politicizing education at the expense of merit.

(3) Policy problem: he opined that some of the policies government make on education adversely affects its output, maintaining that teachers which are supposed to be part of the examination bodies are not been carried along.

(4) Accessibility of Schools: he noted the problem of population boom; hence the issue of carrying capacity is overridden.

(5) Shortage of qualified teachers: he lamented that some schools in the rural areas only have the headmaster as government employee while the rest are secondary school dropouts employed as temporary staff.

(6) Constant Strikes: This is an impediment to smooth covering of syllabus.

(7) Long rule of the military: he noted that during the military rule education was not properly funded, as there was backlogs of non- payment of pensions and gratuities of retired university staff, poor remuneration of university staff, dilapidating buildings of schools, libraries with outdated books, obsolete laboratory equipments, bad campus roads, inadequate water and power supply among others.

(8) Lack of trained teachers: he stated that teachers are not trained up to date on modern pedagogies.

(9) Corruption: Abdulkarim maintained that some leaders of the schools and Government officials either connive to buy equipments that cannot be of any use to the school or take such money for personal use.

(10) Poor budgetary allocation to education: Abdulkarim quoted a research work of 2001 that showed how Nigeria allocated 20% of its budget to education and ended up spending less than 0.76% of the said allocation while other African countries increased theirs in the following order; Uganda 2.6%, Tanzania 3.4%, Mozambique 4.1%, Angola 4.9%, Ivory Coast 5% Kenya 6.5% and South Africa 7.9% among others.

Implications of Falling Standards in Education

Having critically examined the state of Nigeria's educational system, it is obvious that the standards collapsed from year 2000 when NECO administered its first examination in the country. Before 1999, it was very difficult and it required a lot of hard work to pass the West African Examination Council (WAEC), but due to the presence of NECO an examination body that unilaterally awarded A and B grades just to gain students interest made WAEC to lower its standards in order to remain in the business. Prior to the emergence of NECO, it was hard to achieve five credits in one sitting of WAEC, but today both fit and unfit has nine credits in

just one sitting of both WAEC and NECO. JAMB has also followed suit, before year 2000, the cut-off marks for university entrance was 180 and above but today 100 and less can be admitted, sometimes the students gain admission without JAMB, as schools allots quota admission with V.C's list and other staff list, university admissions are no longer based on merit but influence.

Another bad implication was the autonomy given to tertiary institutions to generate revenue, this led to the universities establishing site-light campuses everywhere, at this campuses certificates are been awarded unilaterally without measures just to make money, today in Nigeria most universities are running masters programs just for 12 months without facilities, lecturers collects money to award marks, projects and thesis are been written by lecturers and other experts while the student pays money and claim writing the work. Unrecognized institutions run correspondence programs and award certificates that are dignified in Nigeria because we need certificate. Parents prefer sending their children to schools that write exams for the children just for competitiveness rather than knowledge.

Due to overemphasis on certificate, Nigerian youths are so docile that they cannot be productive neither creative. Virtually everything in this country is been imported, there are fallow lands everywhere yet people complains of unemployment, nobody is ready to go into farming, you can drive more than 1000 kilometers no vulcanizing technician to pump tires, no good automobile technicians to work on cars, so many trades remains unattended to yet our youths cries for lack of job opportunity counting on the number of certificates they have acquired, the question here is, if everyone posses the certificates who will work for the other?.

If this menace is not urgently addressed, a time will come when Nigerian certificates will not be regarded and honored within and outside the shores of Nigeria. It is high time a state of emergency be declared on educational sector otherwise before the next two decades to come, Nigeria will be hiring and importing academic manpower abroad. Our economic and political system shall soon collapse since the systems will be managed by quacks and alliterates who parade with certificates but empty brain.

Our political system has been flooded with alliterates who cannot reason neither plan economically, those who cannot function competitively in the society rush into politics just to shade their ineptitudes and failures to defend certificates they possess.

Crime is growing on daily basis because youths can't make use of their time neither do they have any skill that can sustain them on a daily survival. This is the reason why the oil and gas sector keep on importing foreign manpower to sustain their organizations technically because we lack such skills, even our technical graduates can't measure up to withstand servicing activities talk more of engineering and manufacturing of plant/machine parts, for over forty years of oil and gas exploration in Nigeria, we can't produce technical manpower that will manage the sector independently, yet we have professors in engineering and technology, what a nation full of alliterates.

Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed the following recommendations are made;

1. The federal government should as a matter of urgency declare a state of emergency across educational sectors and hire educationists to recommend curative measures to this ailing sector. The ministry of education should be decentralized and the government should also reestablish teachers colleges across the federation for the production of competent and qualified teachers than half-baked. Teachers' welfare

should be improved and the idea of combining education and other courses as single measures should be abolished in the universities.

2. Adequate facilities for learning should be provided; and the communities should see schools as part of their culture by demanding qualitative input/output, and parents should closely monitor their ward's relationship with their books than social media.
3. All stake holders, relevant ministries and agencies of government should ensure that the education reform process is actualized.
4. Legislation should protect the employees' right against high profiled certificates demand by employers and channel all efforts towards competency and skills.
5. Performance should be regarded and respected than mere paper qualification.
6. The government should device means of reducing corruption to the barest minimum with all stakeholders, urging the government to increase its budgetary allocations on education to improve the standard of education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the concept "falling standard of Education" can be said to be a relative term because there are no well defined instruments to measure it with utmost consistency and legitimacy. There has been weak and strong arguments as well counter arguments over the status of the educational system in Nigeria but the fact remains obvious that the educational system at all levels in Nigeria is on a speedy and continuous decline. The government cannot shoulder the responsibilities of education alone; therefore parents have to supplement government efforts, as well students should abide by school rules and regulations, students should pay more attention to academic achievement and competence than paper qualification. Of paramount concern is the pressures mounted by employers that is leading to this certificate sagas in Nigeria, the government should as a matter of urgency address the issue through federal legislations.

The minimum period of PhD programs should be increased to at least five years to drive out the best out of the learners considering it as a terminal degree, every course in the university alt to be attached with a skill in other to ameliorate the dependence on white collar jobs across the country.

The literatures reviewed indicated the extent to which the education system has deteriorated, possible causes has been highlighted and solutions were equally recommended. It is hereby concluded that certificates are not guarantee of academic excellence in Nigeria rather a grave bed to the generations yet on born.

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