

EXPLOSION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Aside its benefits to the individual person, education functions in any nation as a lubricant for the engine of development. It builds up human capital which is a core determinant of a nation's prosperity. Hence, lacking the necessary means to cater for the tertiary education of her teeming number of youths, Nigeria introduced private higher education bill through an amendment decree in 1993. The bill permitted individuals and private bodies to erect tertiary institutions as supplement to the government's efforts in the sector. The concomitant of this is the unbridled proliferation of private institutions at the expense of excellence. Thus, the paper aims at investigating the implications of this sacrifice of quality for quantity. Using the method of analysis, it examines critically how these mushroom educational institutions have impacted the quality of education rendered to the students and the overall development of Nigeria. In the light of the purpose of education as a means of preparing and empowering the young for developmental roles, it explores the depressing state of tertiary education in Nigeria. It reveals that the system is rightly a Second Generation Model (GSM) with its products lacking employable skills. This study recommends as following; an abrogation of the bill that enabled such unchecked explosion; proper supervision of primary and secondary schools where occurs the foundational learning which tertiary institutions consolidate; serious punishment for examination malpractice; review of curriculum; and digitalization of learning.

Keywords: Educational Institutions, Nigeria, Quality, government, private

Introduction

The former Harvard President Derek Bok once said: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."ⁱ This statement has been so widely cited and treated sometimes as having the status of an absolute truth, i.e. an indubitable truth with an eternal value. Education empowers man and as Francis Bacons says: "knowledge is power"ⁱⁱ, it makes a man unfit to be a slave. For these and other myriads of reasons, it is not surprising that the quest for education in Nigeria is experiencing a meteoric rise. The pursuit for education, especially higher education in Nigeria today might be said to have expanded beyond what the system can actually cope with. This is evidenced by the large number of students who seek for higher education annually and the universities' yearly intake of merely 20% of them who pass the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board Examinations. Few others doggedly fight after failing to secure admission into university and thus enter into polytechnics and colleges of education. But, the rest who are in hundreds of thousands are thrown back into the society to face again the umpteen task of trying their chances the following year amidst yet other hundreds of thousand school leavers who sit for the examination each year.

Unable to fulfil this basic demand of providing educational opportunity to her citizens despite desiring to ameliorate their sufferings, Nigeria introduced private higher education bill through an amendment decree in 1993. This bill seemed like a time bomb for private individuals, religious bodies and groups of persons who took the advantage to establish their own higher educational institutions. In the face of this bill, the Nigerian universities rose, according to Moti, from five (5) as in 1962 to 104 institutions in 2010. Between 2010 and 2012 the number increased to 124 outside Polytechnics, colleges of education and other forms of tertiary education, yet without reducing the problem of access to the universities.ⁱⁱⁱ Evidently, one of the reasons for this quest is the social benefits of education; we are in a society where the social mobility and economic status depend largely on the level of education acquired. But our major concern here is: How would these institutions of learning be able to meet up the requirements for quality education and thus contribute in achieving national growth and development?

Given the present characteristics of most of these institutions which are noted for poor, obsolete and inadequate infrastructure, insufficient and inexperienced academic members of staff, high tuition fees and other forms of financial exploitation of students, poor monitoring of universities and incessant indiscipline among students, how could the quality of education here be guaranteed? The implications of these factors on quality education, national growth and development as well as how to improve the situation are the matters of concern for this write up.

Definition

Education as a concept has received a wide range of definition but we take a few to stand for what education in general means. In its everyday sense, it is applied to formal training that is given in schools and institutions, i.e. the acquisition of the ability to read and write and calculate. It could also mean the specialized training that is given on the job. In its broadest sense, “education is any process by which an individual gains knowledge or insight, or develops attitudes or skill”^{iv} The same idea is fairly expressed by the ‘Manpower Services Commission’ which defined it as “activities which aim at developing the knowledge, skills, moral values and understanding required in all aspects of life rather than a knowledge and skill relating to only a limited field of activity”.^v

Plato sees education as that process by which we “ensure that the habit and aspirations of the old generation are transmitted to the younger- and then presumably to the next one after that.”^{vi} But John Dewey sees education as enlarging ‘experience’. He was not particularly enthused by Plato’s understanding of education as also aimed at preparing children or people for the future life as leaders, soldiers and civil servants. Nonetheless, Dewey’s definition of education as mediating experience agrees in general terms with what Plato had earlier surmised. In his work, ‘Democracy and Education’, Dewey spoke of education as that instrument through which the continuity of human experience is assured. He writes: “The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. Every one of the constituent elements of a social group, in a modern city as in a savage tribe, is born immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on”.^{vii} It is only education that spans the gap.

Dewey obviously comes into conflict with Plato in the role he assigned to experience, when he emphatically maintained that every individual whether born in the city or savage tribe is born without belief, ideas, language except what the experience brings into effect in him. According to Plato, education is not what some professors declare it to be, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into a blind eye. No, education is a matter of conversion, i.e. a complete turnaround from the world of appearances to the world of the reality. ‘The conversion of the souls’, says Plato, “is not to put the power of sight in the soul’s eye, which already has it, but to insure that, instead of looking in the wrong direction, it is turned the way it ought to be”.^{viii} In other words, the power and capacity to learn exist in the soul already; all that needs to be done is to turn the soul from the world of becoming into that of being which is achieved in degrees through education. We land here into the dispute between the empiricists and rationalists, but suffice it to say that the competing ideas have their own respective values, the problem comes only through claims of positional exclusivity.

Aims and Importance of Education

Based on certain ideas peddled by scholars on the notion of education, they have also supplied varied understanding of the aim and purpose of education. For some, the purpose of education is to provide the conditions essential to young people and adults to develop an understanding of the traditions and ideas influencing the society in which they live and to enable them to make a contribution to it. It involves the study of their own cultures, the laws of nature as well as the acquisition of linguistic and other skills which are basic to learning, personal development, creativity and communication.^{ix} Much as this understanding expressed by Manpower Service Commission suggests personal development and contributions to the social life of the community, it over-emphasized the passage of the social behaviour to other groups, and paid no attention at all to knowledge for its own sake.

Dewey situates the purpose of education exclusively on ensuring the survival of the social life of the community. For him, education aims at transmitting by means of communication the “ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it.”^x Without this transmission, he said, “social life could not survive”. He maintained: “If the members who compose a society lived on continuously, they might educate the new-born members, but it would be a task directed by personal interest rather than social need”.^{xi}

Although education facilitates the passage of culture, traditions and other aspects of the social life of the people to subsequent generations, many scholars maintain that education does actually more than that; indeed, it is aimed at equipping people against the challenges of the future and development both personal and collective. For Chikelue, education should enable a boy or girl to make his/her living; to equip him/her to play his/her part as citizen and to enable him/her to develop all the latent powers and faculties of his/her nature and so enjoy a good life. Ali enumerates the importance in the following ways: ‘Education develops the human resources mentally, emotionally and socially, giving them a sense of self-esteem, a sense of worth and self-respect, necessary to free them from the grip of poverty’.^{xii} The world press always cite as reason for the insecurity in Nigeria the high degree of poverty in the North, which is due to the little percentage of literacy in Northern Nigeria. Poverty often deprives a person of spirit and virtue. Actually, it is difficult to make a man or a woman stand upright without education. Education therefore, is a vital tool for empowerment and it facilitates its possessor to contribute meaningfully to society. Olagunju observes how particularly important education is to the almajiris especially as politicians, religious fanatics and terrorist groups exploit their vulnerability now and again. Thus children, who ordinarily should be useful members of society, have become great security threats to the corporate existence of Nigeria.^{xiii} He claimed that this may actually have informed the Federal Government of Nigeria’s recent efforts to build special schools for the almajiri children.

As part of the process of development, education creates a conducive environment for people to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith maintained that education is future oriented; it is all about development and growth. The task of education is to address the human development concerns. Indeed, it is a general agreement in development literature that human capital development is one of the critical causes of economic development.^{xiv} The other drivers of economic development commonly cited are foreign trade, technology transfer, resource allocation, structural transformation, savings and investment. One could add here the human capital as a catalyst to all these drivers. Todaro defines human capital development as “the productive investments in humans, including their skills and health that are the outcome of education, health care, and on-the-job training”.^{xv}

In making her points about education, Janaki insisted that education is aimed at development which includes the individual development leading to developmental changes in the society achieved through the contributions of the individual members of the society, each according to his or her potential. In a broader sense, she defined *development* as a process of structural change in the economic, political, social and cultural domains of individuals, communities and nations. Thus, education is a crucial aspect of development.^{xvi} The example of Japan with a population of 127 million, occupying a land area of 377,835 sq. km., with very insignificant earth resources but with a GDP of US \$ 4.22 trillion, teaches us how conclusive it is that a developed Human Resource is primary to all efforts of transformation and development.

From all intent and purposes, Plato had already championed this way of thinking about education, of being preparatory for life which citizens would lead in the city state either as future leaders, as those that assist the leaders in protecting the land and getting citizens obey the law, or as future civil servants in the state –the workers. He specified in details how this education is to be imparted on the students in order to reap the desired fruits. This idea does not of course exclude the fact that he recognised also the highest goal of education to be the knowledge of Good; to nurture a man to be better human being by means of which flows all other things good and pleasant –happiness and success (eudaionia). Although

Socrates' concept of *eudaimonia* assumed sometimes a paradoxical air, it states that 'it is not from possessions that excellence comes to men but by excellence possessions and all the rest come to be good for men'.^{xvii}

Plato's philosophy of education aims therefore mainly at preparing learners for future life. This preparation for the future life is often rejected by modern educational philosophers like Rousseau and Dewey. But this rejection of the aim to prepare children for future life does not in any sense divest Plato's thought of its significance even in the 21st century. Heidegger in his essay 'On Plato's Doctrine of Truth' clearly established this relevance of Plato's thought for the 20th century, and those remarks apply so well also in the 21st century.

Poor State of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Today, there is a great exodus of Nigerians moving to Europe and other neighbouring West African states in search of quality education. No Nigerian university for instance is ranked among the best 1000 universities in the world. In the on-going strike action by the ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities), their agitations were that education had been so long neglected by the government and that a better attention is necessary and deserving. Of the entire sample countries across continents and divides they surveyed, Nigeria came last in terms of university funding. Whereas countries like Botswana, Cyprus, Ghana, Denmark, Jamaica etc. devote more than 7% of their total GDP each year to education, Nigeria gives less than 1% of its GDP to education. Even Togo with 4.5%, Burkina Faso 3.2% and Niger with 4.3% are all above Nigeria.^{xviii}

This poor state of funding shows clearly in the dilapidation of the basic infrastructures or even the evident lack of them in various Nigerian universities. The private universities which had sprung up in mass, thanks to the bill establishing them, had not even helped out matters. Seen like commercial enterprises, tertiary institutions are now owned and run by businessmen. They have sprung up as fast as the market could allow. Indeed, some writers fear "we may currently be reaching the point of saturation".^{xix} But that is not the issue; the problem is that these institutions lack the standard to function as institutions of higher learning. Like state owned institutions, many of them lack basic infrastructural amenities; in addition, some use rented residential buildings within the community or co-habit structures belonging to public primary schools. The admissions into these schools of learning are no way through the organised Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) nor are the required credits in subject combinations for courses respected. In these institutions, the students' population is better understood in term 'explosive', for they open up practically to all those who had been rejected as unqualified through the normal competitive channels of admission into universities. The reason for this is not far-fetched: It is profit oriented, the more the number of students' enrolment, the greater the revenue that accrue to the proprietors. The students are solicited to come so long as they could pay their exorbitant fees. There is neither a control on numbers vis-à-vis the infrastructure nor are there checks for quality. Worse still, if the commission for such control mechanism exists, it is only a channel of corruptly enriching the members of that commission who are always bribed by the proprietors.

Again, there is a dearth of academic staff in these private universities. Egwe noted that over 30% of academic staff of private universities are "ad-hoc"^{xx}. They are either retired lecturers or young job-seekers who do not have cognate experience nor possess the recommended minimum of PhD degree demanded by the National Universities Commission to be eligible to teach in the universities. From the research carried out by Varghese, it is also found that there exists as common feature in these private universities, part-time academic staff who comprise usually of lecturers on sabbatical or those partially employed as adjuncts because being fully employed in the public universities, they cannot take another full time job.^{xxi} This leaves the regular staff of the Private Nigerian universities to be composed mostly of lecturers without the required level of experience. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria "no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers."^{xxii} In other words, there is no way one may expect the quality of education to grow or any meaningful development to take place if these inadequacies are not addressed.

According to the Federal Ministry of Education, quality assurance is the product of infrastructure; teacher quality, curriculum relevance and learner support services.^{xxiii} These products are elusive in these established institutions. Most of them grossly lack the basic infrastructural amenities such as lecture rooms, hostel accommodations, provisions for sports and games, as well as equipped laboratories and school libraries that are cardinal to effective operations. The private universities are utterly affected but they are not alone in the want of these irreducible minimums to effective and productive education. In their report on the menace of underfunding in Nigeria universities, the ASUU showed with stunning data and images the deplorable condition of public higher institutions in Nigeria where many lectures are held at open air pavilions and broken floors; in chemistry laboratories kitchen stoves are used in place of Bunsen burners. Given these problems, how can good results be guaranteed from such laboratory tests? How can the products of these established institutions have the capacity to drive the engine of development and social reforms required from the nation's educational system?

Implications for Growth and National Development

We have been trying to establish the importance of education as portent instrument for growth and national development, for fighting poverty, ignorance and disease. Our survey shows that Nigerian educational system has failed in guaranteeing its students this set-objective. The educational system turns out millions of unemployable graduates each year. Currently, there are more unemployed graduates in the country than can be imagined, who now engage in many criminal and social misdemeanour. The graduates of our higher institutions of learning (public and private) are far from being self-reliant. It is claimed that most of the students who study at private as wells as public universities get there only to obtain the certificate and exposure to university conditions, not necessarily to become better educated and be more useful to society. Indeed, it has been disclosed that 'a whooping 80 per cent of graduates in the country are unemployable'.^{xxiv} It looks ridiculous and incredible but given the alarm recently raised by the Director-General of the National Youths Service Corps, Brigadier-General Okorie Alfa, to the effect that some corps members could neither read nor write properly^{xxv}, one shudders at the hopelessness of our education and crippled growth.

This is a very sad development which is extremely worrisome, especially given the backdrop that no nation rises above the quality of its human capital. That this army of graduates after many years of academic studies spanning through primary to post-primary and university levels, could still come out half-baked, speaks volume of the decay and corruption in the nation's education sector. How these graduates could pass their various examinations graduating from universities without the system detecting their low Intelligent Quotient (IQ) which their unemployability typifies leaves one gapping at how low we have fallen and how nearly hopeless the system can be reformed. It is an unfortunate climax of the dwindling standards of education in the country which calls for immediate reversal if the nation's legacies are to be preserved and its goals and visions especially that of becoming one of the 20 strongest economies of the world before 2020 are to be actualized.

The minister of education, Dr. Sam Egwu had also decried the state of unemployability of our graduates but gives the blame only to the instructional and infrastructural facilities in the universities which he said are non-functional, obsolete or dilapidated. According to him, these factors play adverse consequences on the quality of teaching, learning and research.^{xxvi} One can agree with him, that many skills required for employability and effective careers are lacking in our students due to unavailable infrastructures in the universities to impact such skills; many schools are even nowhere technically oriented to train and develop skills on their students. In other words, it may be true as some scholars observed, that Nigeria is still running a model of university called 'Second Generation Model (SGM)', a kind of model which encourages learning for its own sake, not a learning connected to the needs of the land or entrepreneurship. They therefore suggest a shift to what is called a 'Third Generation Model' where one chooses thesis for instance, on the basis of economic and social needs of the nation, so that when one comes out and is not hired, he/she can set up his/her own firm based on the empowerment their learning had made possible to them.^{xxvii}

The Nigeria University System is expected to function to contribute to national development through “high level relevant manpower training, developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of individuals and society as well as ensuring that the intellectual capability of individuals are developed to understand and appreciate their internal and external environments.”^{xxviii} By definition, there are two clearly distinct levels of training institutions in higher education provision, namely academic full professional training and intermediary professional education and training institutions. Universities, as the highest-level of institutions dedicated to the professional and intellectual development of mankind and society in general, are expected to concentrate on research, teaching and public service or consultancy. On the other hand, intermediate institutions of higher education are devoted to human resources development for the middle and intermediate level of the occupational structure of the society, for which they concentrate on the pedagogical mission of teaching, instructing, career training and role-modelling. Regrettably, these clearly distinct lines of mission and curricula concentration have often been blurred, confused or else ignored for a long time in our country Nigeria.

Conclusion

No rational system, including the entire macro-social system, can function efficiently and effectively without a clear philosophy, a set of paradigms in context and a transparent policy to guide action and practice in pursuit of the defined goals and objectives of higher education. This applies as much to a country’s education sector in general as it does to its higher education system in particular. To get the system right, the Federal Government should make moratorium the bill which gave right to establishing private universities and concern itself with improving standard. Proliferation of institutions does not seem to solve our needs except the power of possessing certificates of passing through a tertiary institute. Secondly, as tertiary institutions can only improve or consolidate on the foundations already laid at the primary and secondary levels, the directorate of inspection and supervision of ministries of education should be reactivated with a view to improving standards at those critical levels – primary and secondary.

It is also extremely necessary to punish examination offenders. Examination is the only viable means to check qualifications and assurance of competence. Where the system is so inept that such malpractices are so neglected or rather supported, there is no how one can guarantee the survival of this nation. Undoubtedly, examination malpractice has insidiously destroyed the education system. If this menace is checked and stiff penalties meted to those who cheat in exams, including the teachers who help to corrupt the system, students would study harder to pass their exams, learn better and, in the long run, increase their competence and develop capacity for challenges ahead.

Finally, our tertiary curriculum must be reviewed as a matter of urgency, or reconstituted to take account of the third generation model required for our education. Apart from funding the education system very well, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), entrepreneurship and other technical courses should be introduced in the curricula with a view not just churning out thousands of employable graduates annually but also positioning them to create jobs themselves.

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