

Declining Quality of Intellectual Output in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions of Learning: the Underlining Existential Factors.

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Abstract:

The paper has pointed out that the quality of intellectual output in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning has continued to decline. It has identified economic, social and political factors as the lacking existential factors causing the decline. The paper has thus recommended that education in Nigeria be adequately funded and that managers of institutions of higher learning should devise mechanisms to ensure proper management of the funds. Political interference in the running of institutions of higher learning should be discouraged while parents should inculcate in their children the values of hard work and honesty.

Key words: Declining quality; intellectual output; tertiary institutions; existential factors.

Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Nigerian educational system has retrogressed greatly today as compared to the 1960s and 1970s. Particularly, there is a general outcry that the quality of intellectual output from Nigeria's tertiary education is declining. Due to this decline, blames have been traded. While some people accuse the teachers of not being dedicated and therefore responsible for the woes, the teachers on the other hand blame the government for not making teaching attractive.

But education in any society is the bedrock of development. Education, especially tertiary education, provides the think tank for development. It is through education that people are able to navigate their way through the world (Arong and Ogbadu, 2010). This important role of tertiary education is captured in the national policy on education (NPE). The NPE (2004:36) highlights the goals of tertiary education as including (a) to contribute to national development through manpower training. This goal desires graduates of our tertiary institutions to contribute to national development after acquiring high level manpower training; (b) to develop the intellectual Capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments; (c) to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.

These goals are laudable and indeed important and relevant to the needs of our society. But how can these goals be realized looking at the low quality of graduates that are produced by our institutions of higher learning? How can these low quality graduates contribute meaningfully to national development? Many of the graduates can hardly write formal letters. If we accept that graduates of our tertiary institutions are half-baked then, what factors are responsible for this ugly situation? Why is academic excellence no longer a characteristic of Nigeria's academy? Is learning no longer taking place in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning? These questions form the basis for this paper. The paper first locates the declining quality of intellectual enterprise in Nigeria within the framework of the deepening crisis in the Nigerian state and finally pin-points specific existential factors facilitating the decline

Educational System in Nigeria

The Nigerian educational system is made up of three sectors namely; primary, secondary/technical and tertiary. The programmes of all these sectors are geared towards the objectives of National Policy on Education (NPE). The NPE is a documented evidence of what Nigeria wants her educational system to achieve for her. The tertiary education is provided by polytechnics, colleges of education and universities.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities and their sister institutions was rated among the best in the world (Ajayi, 2002; Yaqub, 2002). In fact 1960s and 1970s were characterized by academic excellence (Erinosho, 2004; Olukoju, 2002). The Nigerian academy during this time exhibited the best of academic tradition and culture (Omotola, 2007). But from the 1980s, the quality of graduates from Nigeria's institutions of higher learning began to decline. Today, there is no doubt that the quality of graduates from the country's institutions of higher learning has indeed fallen. This unfortunate situation has continued to generate growing concern about the relevance of higher education to Nigeria's development quest. The question is what has befallen the Nigeria's educational system?

It is important to note that all the sectors of Nigeria's education system are plagued by a myriad of complex problems. And it is also equally important to understand that these problems are a reflection of the deepening crises in the Nigerian state (Omotola, 2007). Nigeria has a history of prolonged internal political instability and operates within a hostile international economic environment. For example, from the 1980s, Nigeria began to experience excruciating economic recession. This affected all the sectors of the Nigerian

economy. To curb this ugly situation thus prompted the Nigerian government to adopt the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP) and implemented its harsh conditionalities. The adoption of SAP and the implementation of its harsh conditionalities further brought about severe distortions and disarticulations in the country's domestic political economy in forms of rising inflation, unemployment, inequalities and dependency. The cost of living also became generally high (Badejo, 1990). To survive, Nigeria and Nigerians devised alternatives coping strategies. This struggle for survival by Nigeria and Nigerians had serious consequences for the university and the sister institutions and consequently weakened their capacity for the generation of knowledge

The Existential Factors Affecting Education in Nigeria

There is a general notion that the quality of intellectual output in Nigeria's educational enterprise is declining. Obviously, there is something wrong about the quality of education; the critical existential factors are lacking. These factors are economic, political and social. Let us see how these existential factors are affecting the quality of intellectual output in the country's educational enterprise.

Economic factors: In Nigeria, there is wide spread poverty. Poverty has debilitating and psychological effect. It affects teachers and makes teaching less qualitative. Many teachers are involved in running small businesses because their take home pay can no longer take them home. This coping strategy takes most of the teachers' time and does not allow teachers to engage in research so as to understand the changes that are taking place. Poverty also affects students. It is difficult for a hungry student to sit down and listen to lectures. Poverty does not allow students to buy text books.

A fundamental economic factor is funding. UNESCO bench mark for funding of education is 26% of national budgets. In Nigeria however, budgetary attention to education has always been below the UNESCO bench mark. For instance in 2009,2010,2011,2012,2013, 6.45%, 5.49%,10.13%, 8.43%, 8.67% respectively was allocated to education sector (Oseni, 2012). This low budgetary allocation clearly shows that our leaders are not yet ready to address the issues of poverty, hunger and disease. Due to poor funding, teaching and learning are no longer interesting to teachers and learners. Because of poor funding, classrooms and instructional materials are generally lacking, libraries are poorly equipped. Poor funding has always led to campus instability and a marked decline in academic quality and performance (Omotola, 2007). In most of the Nigerian universities, office accommodation is lacking. In many of the universities, as many as 3 lecturers share a small office accommodation. Many lecturers therefore keep away from office because the offices are not attractive. The frequent strikes in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning is also because of delayed or nonpayment of salaries and other allowances due to poor funding

Lack of adequate funding affects facilities and the ability and capacity of lecturers to carry out research. But the pride of any university lies in the level of teaching and research that goes on within the university (Okunamiri, 2004). This is why the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) insists that universities should be properly funded. It is this insistence for proper funding that makes ASUU to be seen as a militant union. But generally, the struggle for survival by Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education is affecting academic quality and performance.

Related to the economic factor is globalization. Globalization emphasizes free market economy including the area of ideas. It is a process that breaks down barriers of all sorts between countries. It is characterized by the victory of capitalism. Thus, anti-capitalist ideas, even when such ideas are useful, do not survive. This global process favours capitalist ideas and eliminates critical thinking through the process of buying over (or co-optation) critical thinkers into the global thinking pattern. This is increasingly reducing the element of thinking critically. Co-optation is closely linked to the economic factor. For instance, if a university wants to carry out a research and such a university cannot fund the research and the World Bank, for instance provides funds for the research, it is the World Bank that will determine the aims of the research and the direction the research should take. Due to co-optation, the best brains hardly stay in the university. The people that stay in the university are doing so because they have no other alternatives. This is greatly affecting the quality of education.

Political Factor: Political factors such as the militarization of society accompanied by repression of ideas and the demobilization of the civil society especially unionism and free speech affects critical thinking. In the process of coming out with ideas there is always the fear of censorship. In Nigeria, the militarization of society greatly affected state-university relations. The military particularly paid deaf ears to the issue of university autonomy. But in most civilized societies, universities and other tertiary institutions serve as guardians of public conscience. They also critique government policies. In Nigeria however, universities and the other sister institutions could not perform this role because they did not have the freedom to teach freely and research freely. Much of the ideas generated by lecturers were subjected to censorship. The intolerance of independent critical minds by the military and the repressive nature of the military rule meant that the military were anti-intellectuals (Omotola, 2007). This was clearly demonstrated by the way academics were dismissed in many Nigerian universities (Awusosi, 2004). The militarization of society thus had serious consequences for the universities especially the

quality of ideas propagated and ultimately the quality of output.

Another political consideration is that of recruitment. Recruitment in most of the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has been heavily politicized. It is now based on connection or what is commonly known in Nigeria as man-know-man. This man-know-man” system usually ignores competence and the capability of the person to deliver. Recruitment in most institutions of higher learning today is based on considerations regarding identity especially ethnicity, religion and other political factors (Omofa, 2005). The consequence of this is that the best brains are left to roam the streets because they are not properly connected to the powers that be.

Further more, there has been unregulated expansion in student numbers based on political reasons. This unregulated expansion in student numbers is usually to utter disregard to the quality and quantity of available structures and facilities on our campuses. This has greatly brought about decay in the existing structures and competition over services that were originally meant for smaller populations. Many of the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are now coping with the expansion in student numbers and have therefore come under severe strain (Nwaka, undated). In spite of the obvious effect of the expansion in student numbers, there is hardly any appreciable addition to the universities’ infrastructures and this has continued to affect quality teaching and learning.

Social Factors: Social factors such as the decline in moral values have continued to encourage examination malpractice. Generally, the culture of a society in which an individual lives determines the behaviour of such an individual. If the culture of the society is full of corruption, the individuals will certainly imbibe such values. One cannot but agree with Camara (1995) that the values of the Nigerian society are lowered values. Indeed, in Nigeria today, many people trade their integrity so as to satisfy their selfish desires. For example, many Nigerians today go to any level just to ensure that they procure unwholesome “assistances” so that their children pass examinations. These unwholesome assistances could be in form of verbally encouraging them or providing financial assistance. This attitude of parents is discouraging hard work.

Pathetically, the decline in moral values makes it difficult to accept any certificate as real. The social and economic factors feed themselves here. Education in Nigeria is no longer for itself but for what it can offer. In the contemporary Nigerian society, academic certificates have become, unconsciously though, the most authentic and valid key to so many rights and privileges. Academic certificates are seen by most Nigerians as the only ticket that can secure the means of livelihood. This certificate consciousness is affecting the quality of output in Nigeria’s education as many Nigerians are taking short-cuts through examinations malpractices to obtain the certificates.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The presentation above has shown that the quality of output from Nigeria’s tertiary institutions of learning is declining. This declining quality of intellectual output is because of the lack of economic, political and social factors. But education generally is the bedrock of development. For the lost quality of higher education to be resurrected so as to enhance meaningful development, adequate funds should be provided so that universities and their sister institutions can be more effective. Tertiary institutions of their part should seek alternative sources of generating revenue so as to augment allocations made by government to them. The provision of the funds alone will not solve the problem if the funds are not properly monitored and managed. There is therefore the need for all tertiary institutions to establish reliable accounting system that would guarantee accountability, transparency, and honesty. It is when this is done that funds allocated and generated internally could be effectively managed.

Adequate provision and proper management of funds will certainly solve the twin problem of brain-drain and decaying infrastructure. For instance, if education is well funded, the pay-package of academics regularly reviewed upward, and the general conditions of service improved, both the internal and external brain-drain phenomenon would be minimized. Also adequate funding can solve the problem of infrastructure. With adequate funding, existing and decayed infrastructures can be rehabilitated. However, it should be borne in mind that the provision of quality education the world over is no longer the responsibility of government alone. This means therefore that as the government is urged to earnestly intensify efforts in providing and maintaining more physical facilities, individuals, philanthropists, and corporate bodies should also be involved in the provision of these facilities. The joint effort will certainly enhance quality teaching and learning. But emphasis should not only be on the maintenance but also on the expansion of the facilities to meet the increasing student population.

This brings to mind the question of maintenance culture. Nigerians generally have poor maintenance culture. Managers of tertiary institutions should therefore imbibe into the system a good maintenance culture so as to reduce the rate of decay of facilities.

Political interference in the running of higher education especially in the recruitment of unqualified teaching staff and the insistence by the powers that be in the admission of unqualified candidates should be discouraged. A situation whereby appointment or recruitment of academic staff is based on tribal or ethnic

considerations should be discarded

The culture of the society in which one lives determines the kind of values one would imbibe. The values of the Nigerian society are variously classified as lowered values (see Camara, 1995; Adeyegbe, 1994; Okezie, 2001). One cannot agree more with Adeyegbe (1994) and Okezie (2001) because in contemporary Nigerian society, many parents trade their integrity for the satisfaction of selfish desires. These actions tend to discourage children from working hard and diligently. But in every society, the family is the primary agent of socialization. Parents should therefore inculcate in their children the true values of life especially the values of hard work and honesty. Also, the much emphasis placed on paper qualification at the detriment of performance should be discarded as this has continued to encourage examination malpractice in the country.

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