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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Philosophical Excursion into Mass Quest for University Education in Nigeria

The Sacrifice of Quality for Quantity

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ABSTRACT

Education in whatever shade or form it takes is a part way to both individual and societal development and wellbeing. The modus operandi to achieve it differs at every level of its pursue. It is a means to an end and not an end in itself. In view of this, it should be pursued with all amount of decorum and decency. This calls for the conscious realization that, at whatever level an individual will stop, it is still useful. Therefore, one level should not be sacrificed for another one for whatsoever reason. Unfortunately, this seen to be the practice in Nigeria where those who have no business in the university are found there. This has become a cause of concern to many educationist. Invariably, it gave impetus to this work titled: Philosophical excursion into mass quest for university education in Nigeria: the sacrifice of quality for quantity. To effectively undertake the study, it was done under the following sub-heads: introduction, conceptual framework, philosophical excursion, causes of mass quest for university education, the way forward and conclusion.

Keywords: Philosophical excursion; mass quest; quality for quantity

INTRODUCTION

Education, whichever form or shade it may assume or take, is essential to man's life, as well as society at large. Societies throughout the ages have had one form of education or the other which has been of tremendous benefits to society and the citizens. Thus, education is very important to the well-being of both citizens and the whole society. This is because it involves all facets of both societal and individual lives. It is the basis for human development, advancement and civilization. Its major objectives have been to bring a positive change to the recipient. Especially, it is a human skill production industry (Tabotndip, 2004). Without mincing words, it's the mother of all other industries and the father of all professions known to man (Tabotndip, 2010).

The term education has not lent itself to any strict consensual definition as it depends on the perspective from which one views it. In this sense, it can be considered as the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude, interest, abilities, competence and cultural norms of a society, transmitted from one generation to another in order to enhance the perpetual development of that society. Consequently, concerted efforts are made to sustain it process. In view of this, both financial, material and human resources are put in place by individuals, corporate bodies as well as government to enable its continuity. Nigeria is not left out in the gigantuous efforts to sustain education. Hence, it was eloquently stated in the fourth National Plan as expressed in the National

Policy on Education with many editions, that the Nigerian government has realized the importance of education and has thus, adopted it as an instrument par excellence for effective national development. This is in consonance with the fact that the development of any nation in all ramifications is dependent upon the knowledge base of its citizens (Ategwu 2007).

With all this in view, the worrisome question is, is it good to toy with the process of education? As important as education is, is it all levels of it that citizens should aspire to attain? These and other unanswered questions have given rise to the choice of this study tagged the "Philosophical excursion into the mass quest for university education in Nigeria: - the sacrifice of quality for quantity".

This study is to be undertaken under the following sub-headings: -

- Introduction
- Conceptual framework
- Philosophical excursion
- Causes of mass quest for university Education in Nigeria
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Quest: According to oxford language dictionary, quest refers to a long or arduous search for something". Etymologically, the concept is coined from latin root "quaerere" which means to "ask or seek". This is why literally; the concept refers to "search for or seek out". Its French equivalent is "quest or quester". All these points to the act or instance of seeking, pursuit or search. Put in a different form as presented by Cambridge dictionary, it is "a long search for something that is difficult to find or an attempt to achieve something difficult". This explication is in tandem with this work because university education by nature is an uphill task and not an all-comer affair.

University: Etymologically, the concept "university" is derived from many sources. For instant, in the middle English, it was coined from the phrase "universite". While in the drylo-french, it is universite. In medieval Latin, it was known as "universitact" or "universitus". The university therefore is an institution of higher education, usually comprising a college of liberal arts and sciences. A university differs from college in that it is usually larger, has a broader curriculum and offers degrees to both undergraduate and postgraduates. The university also seems to have taken its origin from the

word "universac", which means "of many or all skills, or branches of learning" (Mkpakan 2013). The sole aim of university education is to train specialized man-power capable of sustaining the development of their environments. Obot (2015), attested to this, when he wrote that universities "trained specialists for the country. That is to say, the people who will be our engineers, architects, technologists, and so on: all of which we need in order that our society can move on". Thus, graduates of the university are equipped with skills that enable them, upon graduation, to initiate entrepreneurial activities that create jobs and employment, thereby helping the government to solve unemployment problems. In keeping with this, the Nigerian government says that "university education shall make optimal contributions to national development" (NPE, 2014). This being the case, the university system should therefore admit qualified and competent students who will be able to withstand the academic and skill acquisition rigour of the university system.

Sadly, this has not been the case judging from my experience for the past twenty-two years as a teacher in a tertiary institution (university). I have come across students who have no business to be in the university. So, the question is, why admit such students into the highest citadel of learning? As averred by Archibong and Okey (2006:73).

The higher educational institutions, in particular universities of any country, are the vehicles on which the nation's quest for economic growth, social development and increased competitiveness hinges; the unique position occupied by higher educational institutions (universities) lays the responsibilities on them. This implies that universities can only achieve the set national objectives if the products are of high quality.

In order to achieve this, since the university itself is not a magic wand that can transform the student overnight, the right caliber of students should be admitted. More so, this is very necessary now as Archibong and Okey (2006:73) observed that "unfortunately, Nigerian universities seem to have failed to adapt the training of graduates to meet the demands of the society, particularly, those of the world of work". The quality of graduates from Nigerian universities has steadily declined over the past 15 years. In the support of Archibong and Okey is the assertion of Ajayi and Bolupe (2007) who wrote that the scenario in the Nigerian University

system is so precarious and indicates that there is crisis in Nigerian universities when viewed against different reports and commentaries. The pact of the indicated that employer of labour is complaining that without the quality of graduates from the universities and the university degree is no longer a guarantee for technical and competent skills. As if this is not the current report by Agu (2024) it shows that the situation is still the same, if not worse. This is a sad remark and must be addressed in order to meet the demands of the global market. Examination of the concept of “quality”, therefore is of great importance here.

Quality: Quality investment in education will amount to a colossal waste if adequate measures are not put in place to enhance optimal realization of the set goals. The goals so outlined amount to quality. Thus, quality denotes the degree of goodness or perfection or the actual worth of perfection or the actual worth of an entity. It depicts general excellence or distinguishing features of a thing, act or event (Ogbu, 2009). For Maduewesi (2005), quality is the degree of excellence of a product. And in most cases, it is considered against a per-set objective or bench-mark. In view of this, the British standard institution (1991:10) defines quality as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears in its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs”. Applied to education as per the sense in which it is used in this work, quality refers to issues of relevance, validity, functionalism and efficacy of an educational system. Okebukola (2002) defines quality as fitness for purpose. The implication of this definition is that quality in education could be regarded as the ability of an educational institution to fulfil its mission or put forth criteria that will ensure that only qualified candidates are admitted into the system. Supporting this assertion, Williams and Anekwe (2010) wrote that to achieve quality education in Nigeria and to ensure quality products, the Nigerian university system has a great role to play.

Nzerem (2000) opined that education is a lifelong process which enabled an individual to develop its potentials in order to give service not only to himself, but to the community at large. It is therefore pertinent that any educational system should be fashioned in such a way that the beneficiaries will live up to the expectations of society. The question here therefore is whether the Nigerian Universities are in tune with these lofty ideas, or it is a matter of quantity instead of quality. Quantity: the concept of quantity has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars. For the purpose

of brevity, a few samples are presented here.

- “a great amount or number” (Collins Dictionary)
- “a particular or indefinite amount of anything”
- “the property of magnitude involving comparability with other magnitude”
- “That amount, degree, etc. in terms of which another is greater or lesser”

From the foregoing, the concept of quantity connotes a greater number or amount of anything measurable. Therefore, as used in this work, quantity implies that the Nigerian Educational System has an unnecessary number of candidates, Nwaka (2013) in Uyanga, Nkereuwem & Nwaka (2013) “the Dilemma of education in Nigeria” are of the opinion that greater number of unqualified candidates into the university is part of the dilemma in the Nigerian educational system. This is to the detriment of the quality of the product.

This too, the writer is of the opinion that it is a misnormal. Lending credence to this Nwaka (2013:1) wrote that.

Education in Nigeria has continually been in dilemma over the years, and recently it has caught not only national but global attention. This difficult situation in education has degenerated in an alarming rate that almost everybody in the whole world questions the relevance of going to school in Nigeria. Thus, the anxiety inducing question among the government and education stakeholders in Nigeria is how to best plan, implement and maintain standard in the education systems (especially the universities).

The worrisome issue is where did the policy makers and implementers go wrong that today, everyone, “Tom”, “Dick” and “Harry” wants to go to the university in Nigeria? Does this not tatanmount to the sacrifice of quality for quantity?

PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSION

The concept of philosophy has been variously explained or defined by different scholars. From whichever perspective that it is looked at or viewed from, it involves a great number of human activities. It is the bedrock on which human ideologies revolve. It gives direction to human enterprise and provides a pivotal platform for the take-off of successful ventures. This is why among education philosophers, there existed different views on the provision of education, levels of education, age to go to school, type of education for each category of learners. Here, we will

examine a few of them and their interrelatedness to this study.

Plato (427-340BC) conscious of the fact that education has to be categorized in relation to the different categories of the members of the society asserted in his famous work titled "The Republic" that education should not be an all-comers affair. For him, different type of education should be given to different classes of people. Learners should be taught according to their intellectual dispositions, years of maternity and interest. According to Nwafor (2002) Plato classified the society into the philosopher-kings, the guardians, the soldier, and others. He suggested what should be taught to each group and the stages of development in the curriculum for each. Thus, Plato was not in support of mass education. Education should be according to an individual's capability, potentials and disposition, was his opinion. This runs contrary to the mass quest for any level of education. In summary, Plato introduced the idea of education in accordance with the needs, capacity and functions of the individuals (individualized instruction).

Comenius (1592-1670). He was a German Pastor. He is sometimes called or referred to as the father of modern pedagogy. To him, education is the right of all citizens but should be organized in such a way that all will benefit according to age and ability. He advocated different type of education for different category of learners based on intellectual capability, and mental disposition. Each child is unique and should be exposed to any type of education suitable to the child.

On his part, Bruner Jerome (1915 - 2016) an American educationist, postulated that teaching strategy should reflect the developmental state, mental ability and the interest of the learners before introducing them to any subject or courses. This will enable them to make rational choice of what they want to study. This call for proper guidance and counselling. He further proposed that Learners construct their own knowledge and do this by organizing and categorizing information by using a coding system. This in essence, implies a segmentation in the educative process or arrangement.

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher, a co-founder of the school of thought known as pragmatism. In his most celebrated book titled "Education and Democracy" He expressed his strong belief in the role of learning by doing. To him, experience counts much, if a child is to learn, he must go through certain processes. He was opposed to the American system of education that does not make its

products self-sufficient or self-reliance. He also advocated that education should be learner-centered-aside from his principle of individuation, which is against mass education.

From the foregoing, though education is a necessity of life, different people should fit into different categories of education. Each learner should be placed in the category beneficial to the learner and the society at large. No single section or level of the education sector should be viewed as more important than the other. Thus, so far seen, most of the philosophers of education see every level of education as important. Its acquisition should be relative to the learner's disposition. Unnecessary quest for one level at variance to the learner's capability not necessary. The principle of individuation should be adhered to. They are against the unnecessary quest for any level of education, especially at the university level. In the words of Plato, philosophical and scientific education should be left at the age of comparative maturity. If these are the views of philosophers concerning education, why unnecessary quest for university education in Nigeria? There must be a missing link between the stand of these philosophers and educational practitioners in Nigeria. What then is this missing link?

CAUSES

The Nigerian educational system ab initio was the hallmark of excellence. Sadly enough, it is now a shadow of its former self as evident in some literatures. The problem is more compounded with the caliber of products that the system is producing today. The Nigerian Educational System today is dysfunctional, seems to lack purpose and direction. Its products are not the same as what they used to obtain before now. This is why Ezeana (2005) suggested that education policy makers should re-examine the school curriculum with a view to making it more functional and pragmatic so that the product can be self-reliance. There are so many factors responsible for the abysmal down-turn in Nigeria educational system paving way for the sacrifice of quality for quantity. As deemed fit by this writer, few of such causes will be examined here.

Section Process of Candidates

Every student admitted into the university must pass through a selection process. The body responsible for this is the National University Commission (NUC) whose sub-set is the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). In those days, universities were given the task of setting their examinations and selecting their

students directly. But with the establishment of JAMB, this process was jettisoned. JAMB is saddled therefore with the responsibility of conducting entrance examination for all students to be admitted into the various universities. One would have thought that the status quo of maintaining quality should continue as the cut-off point was high. But sadly enough, the cut-off point has been reduced to as low as 120 to pave way for more candidates to gain admission into the university. A sacrifice of quality for quantity. This view is supported by Archibong and Okey (2006:74) when they wrote.

Admission of unqualified students is one of the inputs that have greatly affected graduate quality. Admission of candidates into the universities to pursue various courses of studies should be discreet, based on the candidate's ability to meet the required entry criteria of excellence. Unfortunately, admissions into our universities are sometime based on considerations (such as mass admission, quantity to general revenue). This has led to the admission of students who have no business in the universities.

This scenario is unfortunate and is dealing a deadly blow on the caliber of products from the university. The selection process should be rigorous. I know of some universities who do online screening of students without a face-to-face testing of the candidate. Those days, aptitude test were conducted where candidates are tested, but that process or system has been abandoned. Once a candidate scored up to 120 and above, whether the candidate wrote the qualifying examination himself or herself, he or she is good to go (admitted). Adesina (2000) lamented that the quality of students that are admitted into the university system leaves much to be desired in term of their educational background.

Too Much Emphasis on Certificate

Another hydra-headed issue in the Nigeria educational system that give a leeway for quantity instead of quality is the idea of too much emphasis on paper certificate instead of competence. Too much emphasis is laid on paper certificate instead of what an individual can offer. Yes, paper certificate is good, but it should not be emphasized to the detriment of potentials. Every individual in any institution has three domains as Benjamin Bloom an American psychologist put forward in his taxonomy (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). These domains should be harness to the advantage of

the candidate. A candidate with a psychomotor proficient should be encouraged to pursue trade related courses to his ability, likewise, someone with cognitive proficiency. In the words of Agu (2024), the lack of entrepreneurial related courses in most of academic certificate is the bane of our development. Universities ought not to be an all-comers affair, but an enterprise for conscious and serious-minded individuals. Adding impetus to this, Ajibade (2024) is of the opinion that university education in the developed countries is an expensive enterprise which a few fractions of the population can have or afford. Most people need to learn other skills, trade etc. He lamented that, it is only in Nigeria that everybody wants a paper certificate from the university. Outside Nigeria, certificate is not the guarantee for good employment opportunities. What counts is the capability of an individual in aiding production output.

The Nigerian educational policy recognizes this functional aspect of education when the 6-3-3-4 of education was adopted. Here, it was that a product of the junior secondary school should be able to acquire skills that can take him or her all through life if eventually the person drops out of school. This is the very essence of functional education. Williams and Anekwe (2010:71) supported this view by stating that: "functional university education is expected to lead to the realization of the potentials of an individual". The way to go from here is proper counselling of those looking for admission into the university as Nwachukwu (2007) is of the view that counselling is an intervention process that facilitates meaningful understanding of self and in the establishment and/or clarification of goals and values for future behavior.

Lack of Proper Guidance and Counselling:

It is expected that in every education process, there should be transition from the home to the school and a transformation from the school to the home. One of the ways to achieve this is to provide a proper counselling service to the child. The child comes from the home as a tabula rasa; the school will leave impression in the mind of the child. The school environment is a place with a mixed multitude, the place of guidance counselling is of uttermost importance. According to Ejue and Iyaji (2017:94),

Guidance and Counselling is a systematic and organized educational helping service, professionally given by professionally trained counsellor or therapist to a learner of any age, within or outside the school walls at an

appropriate level. The essence is to assist him understand himself, situation and environment, discover his interests, potentialities and opportunities in life and learn how to effectively utilize his assets as well as minimize his weaknesses, to live a maximum productive life.

Guidance and counselling are a specialized assisting profession which constitutes an integral aspect of any educational system (Nkiru, 2006). Hence, the Federal Ministry of Education through the National Policy on Education (2014) recognized its importance and made it one of the educational services to help young learners in their career choices. On the part of Anagbogu (2002), guidance and counselling assist students to discover their talents, overcome emotional pains that may come as a result of wrong choices and also provide information for wise decision making.

Unfortunately, some of our secondary school and university sectors have no guidance counselling services. As a result of this, most candidates do not know adequately their potentials and which kind of school they should go to after completion of their secondary education. In view of this, all their attention will be at the university education in order to belong to the circle of graduates. Meanwhile, it is not only with university education that one can have a meaningful life. This is the misplacement in the Nigerian educational system. True education is a process that can help a person to perform his duty in the world justly, skilfully and Magnanimously (Olaewaju 2004).

The greatest form of disability in life is not knowing one's ability. Winning edge in life is not the degree one has acquired or the certificate one possesses, but one ability to solve problems. In the words of Aremic (2019), whenever he is interviewing graduate for employment, it is not based on their qualifications, but on their special skills; experiences and their required approached to problem solving, paper certificate is out of it. Education is not about going to school and getting a degree, is about widening one's knowledge, thinking creatively and absorbing the truth about life. We must see our education beyond our certificates. These and many more are the advice that our candidates need and the people to do this are guidance counselors, which unfortunately our education system is lacking. Most schools just have one or two, while some do not have at all. Ascribing to this, Obot (2020) wrote that one of the evil bedevilling our educational system is lack of proper guidance and counselling services. An informed person is a transformed person. On the other hand, an

uninformed person is a deformed person. Information transforms a man. Candidate should be properly guided in the choice of courses in tertiary institutions and which of them is best suited to their mental ability or maturity. This is the very essence of guidance and counselling.

Unemployment

Recently, a multinational consulting firm, KPMC had stated that the Nigerian unemployment rate had increased to 37.7 percent and will further rise to 40 percent. KPMC said this was because of the continuing inflow of job seekers into the job market. In order to ameliorate this situation, most of the unemployed youth at the middle or intermediary level feel that the better way out is to go to university. This has forced many of them to seek for admission into the university, feeling that after graduation they will stand a better chance of getting employed.

The attendance implication is that the university system has become a mixed multitude where the good, the bad and the ugly, who have no business to be in the universities are found. Some of these persons in order to gain admission into the university go to the extent of commissioning people to write examination for them.

From practical experience, I have come across some students who are unable to write their names correctly but are in university. I came across one who said he had not gone to any former school before, he was trained as a tailor and because there is no customer, he had to pay somebody to write NECO for him and also for JAMB luckily for him, he was offered admission into the university.

There are some still who are supposed to go to either colleges of education or polytechnics, but who feels that with a higher certificate, they will stand the chance of getting a job quicker. This is not healthy enough for the university system in Nigeria. Today, quacks abound even in some professional courses or trade.

The Quota System or Federal Character Saga

A hydra-headed cancerous evil that is given impetus to mass quest for university education (sacrifice of quality for quantity) is the policy of quota system or federal character. This policy entails that in every situation in terms of admission, employment and representation, there will be equal and fair representation given to various components of the units and communal groups in the country's educational institutions, agencies and positions of power, status and influence (Ene 2007).

The consequent of this policy in quality assurance in the Nigerian university system and implicitly paving way for quantity instead of quality is the lowering of the entry

requirement for admission into the university especially candidates from states considered to be educationally disadvantaged.

Educational qualifications are never ascribed status, one wonders why the concept of educationally disadvantaged state. In line with this, Ene (2007:58) posited that "the quota system was introduced in an attempt to provide equal opportunity for candidates to be admitted into the university, but this has been greatly abused". This abuse has gradually paved way for the sacrifice of quality for quantity in the Nigeria university system.

This cannot be quality in a situation where admission criteria is lowered to the advantage of a section of the country and candidates from such areas are mass admitted while candidates from another section of the same country adjudged to be educationally advantaged with higher scores are denied admission in the pretence that their quota is filled. Quality or standard is tossed out just because of quota system or federal character.

Economic Factor

The planning of any formal educational system would be easier in a viable economy. A viable economy as used here implies that the production rate is greater than consumption and the national wealth is properly managed for the common welfare of its citizens. It also implies a situation whereby enough budgeting allocation is given to the educational sectors. Thus, economic viability and qualitative education system goes hand in glove. In the contrary, when the economy is not viable, the quality assurance in the educational sector is tampered with. Archibong and Okey (2006) affirmed this when they averred that one of the problems the university education in Nigeria is facing is that of lack of proper funding.

No gainsaying that education is easily planned and executed where enough fund is allocated to it. Cognisant of this, the United Nations in its charter recommended twenty-six (26%) percent of annual budget of member states to education. But sad enough, some member nations used to allocate less than this recommendation in their annual budget to education. Indeed, university education in particular has faced serious under-funding in Nigeria. The situation is so pathetic that Dada (2004) in his own assessment lamented that rather than a progressive movement towards the Minimum standard of 26% percent of annual budget that every developing country of the world should allocate to education, there have been reductions.

This scenario has also contributed to the issue of sacrificing quality for quantity. This is borne out of the strong conviction that if universities are adequately funded, management of these institutions will not fall prey to the temptation of admitting every Tom, Dick and Harry seeking for admission just to meet the running cost of the university. In short, adequate funding is the live wire in the operation of the university system. The viability of the university system is dependent upon the amount of funds allotted to it. And since most of the universities have to outsource to manage the system, the more students admitted, the better internally generated revenue they will have.

RECOMMENDATION/CONCLUSION

There is no gain saying that education is a necessity for individual and societal development. But the reality of an educational system lies in the fact that products of any educational system should be problem solvers. Graduates that cannot solve problems are liabilities. Education is not just going to school, it entails widening of knowledge, thinking creatively and being able to proffer solutions to life challenges. We must see our education beyond our certificates. Many people spend their years in school only to end up acquiring certificates and not education. In every educative process, there must be visible evidence of changes in the life of the product. In order to achieve this, there must be sanity in the selection of candidates into the universities. Those selected should show competency enough to be in the university. Employment opportunities should also be open to those with lower qualifications so that candidates will not have the mentality that until they go to the university, no employment for them. More so, there should be proper funding of the university system by the government in order to avoid the temptation of admitting any candidate seeking for admission in order to meet up with the financial burden of running the system. Guidance counselling services should be made available in all schools starting even from the primary level.

Conclusively, the university system or education should not be an all-comers affair. There should be discrete processes for the selection of candidates whom after graduation can compete favorably in the labor market. Quality should not be sacrificed for quantity.

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