

A philosophical analysis of educational decline in Nigeria

Olu Marius Olorunmota*

Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

*Corresponding author, email: babamota016@gmail.com

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Abstract

One of the challenges that face the education industry in Nigeria seems to be the understanding that the standard of education is falling on daily basis. Reasons given may not be outside the fact that products of Nigerian educational institutions cannot measure up with those of their counterparts in other places of the world. An examination of some of the factors noted to be leading to the wrong misconception reveal that the standard of education may not in the real sense be taken to be falling but that some other factors need to be put in place before one could actually conclude in the affirmative that the standard is actually falling. It is recommended among things that values in Nigeria should be upheld; corruption should be avoided to pave way for adequate supply of educational materials; teachers should be further encouraged and continue in the understanding of values for proper control, and co-ordination; government should make funds available; while the family, the school, and other stakeholders should continue to play their roles in a way to give the education picture positive while equally positively contributing to the overall factors necessary to further promote and continue to maintain the standard which is bringing Nigeria's name into recognition in all facets and in all parts of the world.

1. Introduction

Sound and qualitative education are necessary for the survival of any nation like Nigeria. Education is seen as a process of leading out the in-born powers and potentialities of individuals in the society therefore it is a necessity for self-realization and for coping with life's problems. Nigeria, like any other nations of the world places emphasis on high education standard. Nigeria government has therefore been doing everything possible that the standard of education in the country does not fall. No wonder in the FME (2013:2), the goal of education is to ensure the quality of education at all levels; because it is an instrument for national development and social change (FME 2013:1).

But education in Nigeria has been regarded as producing less and less leaders of tomorrow like the "managers, entrepreneurial class, the leaders, doctors, law enforcement officers, policy makers" (Ojudu (2012). Also instead, it is noted that there is the danger in mass producing miscreants, the disaffected, the angry, the wronged, agitated and the hopeless (Lijadu, 2009:18). What has equally been observed is that corruption, non-implementation of policies, inadequate funding, delapidated facilities, declining academic standards, low admission capacity and a lack of commitment on the part of ministry staff (Lijadu, 2009:18) might also have contributed to the problems associated with education. Whatever it is, the question posed is: Is the standard of education failing in Nigeria.

2. The Concept "Education"

Education has been defined in various ways as follow: Whether informal or formal education remains the process by which every individual develops knowledge, skills and attitude of positive value to the environment in which he finds himself (Oyekan, 2004:4 citing Fafunwa; Alao 1997:1). It embodies all forms of activities that have taken place as a result of an individual taking part in learning experiences (Oyinloye, Emoruwa and Ogunsanmi, 2004:1). If it is obtained rightly, it has an influence that is significant on the individual that receives it inasmuch as it occurs in the person once he or she goes through the process and allow him or herself to be its product (Olorunmota, 2024). It entails training and acquisition of special skills, knowledge and attitudes and values needed by an individual to be responsible and which would give him room to contribute his own quota, to the growth of the society of which he is a member (Adeyinka and Adetoro, 1992).

Education involves the exposure of learners to a system of relevant ideas, skills and habits that could refine them for their future roles (Oyekan, 2000:3). The roles of education in the process of development occupies central place (Elechi, 2007:1 citing Okeke, 2007). An educated population contributes to the socio-economic development of the society as a whole as well as the well-being of the individual, within the society (Elechi, 2007:1 citing Schultz, 1980). Whatever it is, whichever way it has been defined, the product of education, rather than the process or the discipline, which Bamisaiye (1990:9) noted should promote the intellectual as well as

personality development of beneficiaries of the education system. Even as a process, education is considered to initiate the learner into what is worthwhile (Peters, 1967). This paper intends to address the misconception of people that the standard of education is falling in Nigeria.

3. Meaning of Standard

A standard is “a level of quality or achievement, especially a level that is thought to be acceptable” (BBC Dictionary, 1992; Hornby, 6th Edition); or “something that you use in order to judge the quality of something else” (BBC Dictionary, 1992). “Standard” can also be used to describe things which are usual and normal (BBC Dictionary, 1992) for a particular person in a particular situation (Hornby, 6th Edition). It can further be taken to mean “a unit of measurement that is officially used” or “an official rule when producing something” (Hornby, 6th Edition).

What can be deduced from the above definitions is that “standard” can either be taken as an acceptable level of quality or achievement; or something that can be used to judge another thing’s quality or something that can be used to adequately describe another thing; or something officially employed or officially regarded as a “must” or “must not be done” in a particular situation. The question is: Going by the different definitions and meanings, can the vices in educational institutions in Nigeria be regarded as what can measure standard?

4. Social Vices in Educational Institutions in Nigeria

Education requires high level of manpower production to feed the industrial, economic, security, legal education and political sectors for sustainable development. In view of this, the need arises for the academic standard for rapid socio-economic growth of the country, capacity building of individual and global competence of both individual in Nigeria in particular and the nation as a whole. To this end, the most basic function of education at the Ivory-Tower is the transmission of knowledge, skills and cultural values (Ajere and Olorunmota, 2009:44). But what is observed is that certain factors and social vices seem to be occurring in educational institutions in Nigeria even up to the university level of education, and these portray education in Nigeria as having falling standard. Among many factors which had been adduced to the claim that the standard of education had been falling Nigeria include: low level of qualitative research, inadequate funding, absence of capacity building due to lack of skill acquisition in the area of technology; obsolete facilities and equipments, poor reading culture, non-compliance with ICT application (Ajere and Olorunmota, 2009:2933); bad implementation of the curriculum (Osaat, 2009:95) : among many others.

5. Possible Reasons for Misconceptions over the Standard of Education in Nigeria

A number of reasons which may misguide people to have misconception over the standard of education in Nigeria and regarding it as being falling may include any or more than of the following:

The Challenge of History: The historical legacy of colonial rule creates some challenges for nation building in Nigeria (Adegbeye, 2013:152). Colonial rule divided Nigeria into North and South with different systems put in place like different land tenure systems, local government administration, education systems and judicial systems (Adegbeye, 2013:152). Only shared currency and transportation systems held them together (Adegbeye, 2013:152). Also, during the period of decolonization struggle, Nigerian nationalists from different regions fought each other (Adegbeye, 2013:152). Today, the nationalists have succeeded in sending their colonial master away. A way of retaliating, by these masters, whose countries have become developed nations, is to join in labelling Nigeria as a nation whose standard of education is falling. Proofs are on ground of Nigerian indigenes performing excellently in different countries of the world academically. Records of those observed who are academically sound even in the country are equally known, some of which include a University of Lagos, Nigeria first class candidate, male, with cumulative Grade Point Average of 5.00 (Saturday Punch, 2016); and another, a female graduate of Osun State University, Nigeria with a cumulative Grade Point Average 4.45 (Sunday Punch, 2015).

The Challenge of Socio-Economic Inequalities: The economic situations in every family can easily lead to academic frustration of students from such families. Today, there is an economic melt-down in Nigeria, which affects students in different dimensions. When the long-run effect bores down on education especially the lack of facilities and materials for study generally, will this not be tagged “the falling standard of education”?

Different Values of Life: An important aspect of life is the value people attach to it. People’s views concerning education may affect their attitudes generally to it. Those who may be intelligent and sound, because of the perception they have towards education may lead them to handling their educational life carelessly. A student who is a first-class instrument may end up having second class lower grade because of the value he or she has towards education. Thus, he or she may study less, play more, fail to go for lectures and at times skip some examinations with the intention to take them later. The final results of such a candidate, when compared

to the result of his or her first year in school, will lead to rating the standard of education as being failing if those in his or her category are many or rather above half of the learners.

Absence of Motivation: The Government of Nigeria has a role to play in the motivation of its citizens who are in school. Gone were the days when the number of students who received awards and bursaries as well as sponsorships were many. In the present-day Nigeria, students strive hard to sponsor themselves when they have no sponsors. Rather than assisting those in the category, students are exposed to various challenges in campuses like engaging in businesses, or activities that could fetch them money that would take care of their immediate needs, and in some cases their school fees--- some of which affect their cumulative performance at graduation. However, this does not alter the standard of academic performances in them if they have all the time to study.

Lack of Infrastructures and Inadequate Supply of Electricity: Good buildings that are well equipped, furnished, and having water supply as well as having functional electricity aid students' success. When students are academically successful, the world tends to agree that the standard of education in such students' countries is high. In Nigeria today, the state of infrastructures and amenities as well as the supply of electricity in the campuses is nothing to write home about. One cannot therefore unequivocally and unilaterally conclude that the standard of education is falling based on these factors.

Teacher's Methods: The cumulative methods that the teacher uses to teach and assess his or her students also stand as factors that affect the overall products of our educational institutions. It may not be totally denied that certain teachers take delight in bringing down the scores of their students which in the long run affects the students' cumulative Grade Point Average. This however does not put an end to the kind of person the student is or at most could discourage him or her; yet if well counselled could overcome such a challenge. The case of Professor Wole Soyinka, a world academic figure, had a more promising class of degree aboard whereas his class of degree when he attended and graduated in a Nigerian University was less encouraging. Does this make Soyinka a contributor to the "falling" standard of education during this period in history?

The Leadership Challenge: The absence of the collective qualities of common vision, focus, and desire for the growth and development of individuals in Nigeria as well as Nigeria itself is a factor that may lead to referring to Nigerian education as being failing. Students in the educational Institutions possess good academic qualities but the roles played by the leaders and stakeholders cannot be ignored. While learners are ready to go to school as evidenced in the large crowd seeking admission every year, the stakeholders in the education industry are not simultaneously craving for the provision of the opportunity for at least 75% of those scrambling to enter into the next stage of their education. Rather, less than one third of this population eventually become lucky in gaining admission at the end of the admission processes, even when such processes are not objective enough to the extent that the most qualified are selected.

Lack of White-Collar Job: Gone were the days when graduates of tertiary educational institutions get job after graduation. Students of nowadays no longer show their standard when examination is used as a yardstick. This is because of the fear of the fact that whether they have the best grade or not, getting a good job is doubtful. How then can one measure the standard of their education, if they are used as the yardstick for measuring the standard of education in Nigeria?

Ethnic Crises/Insurgency: The Niger Delta Militants attacks on Education (Rolf, 2012), the Fulani herdsmen's clashes with various Communities; The Boko Hraam attack on education (Ogunfunmilakin, 2014:51; Shetima, 2013); the Ikale/Ijaw Communal clashes; the Ife/Modekeke crisis among many others in history have their own effects on the situations surrounding the kind of education in Nigeria. The question is asked: How can the standard of anything, education inclusive, be measured where there is no peace? Can one say therefore that the standard of education in Nigeria could be measured based on the few areas not clouded with crises. The answer usually should be "No".

6. Conclusion

Nigeria is a big country with multi ethnic groups and different educational ideas. The complex nature of the country and the people cum the big population make it difficult for them to come together to totally agree, which cause crises in some parts of the country. There are talented and academically sound students that have graduated from school, are graduating and will continue to graduate from different educational institutions in Nigeria, even in the face of different challenges to the formal education. The pre-primary school and primary school pupils are equally not found wanting as their inquisitive natures concerning educational issues and their levels of Information Technological literacy cannot be under-rated.

Much as it is observed therefore that there are cases of examination malpractices; academic fraud; academic sabotage, fabrication and academic dishonesties; cultism; cases of teachers or lecturers cheating students over what they score, sexual immorality as compensation for good grades among others; it cannot be

totally asserted, confidently confirmed or absolutely concluded that the standard of education in Nigeria is falling. Other things may need to be further observed or other factors noted. What again should be said is that all stakeholders in education government; parents; religious, social and political institutions should wake up to their tasks and take good positions in addressing the needs of the pupils and students generally, while not ignoring those of their teachers and monitoring the students towards continuously achieving and maintaining the high academic standard on ground; and inculcating moral values required of them to keep the mission and vision of Nigeria on-going.

7. Recommendation

Any reform in education in Nigeria should, rather than the misconceived "falling" standard of education, continue to produce and assist cum sponsor responsible citizens who are able to use their minds effectively comparable with anyone in knowledge-driven economies of the world; students who are value-inclined, students who actually are transformed. Reforms in education should therefore not be based on the fact that the standard of education is falling.

The management of education in Nigeria should be the one that is devoid of corruption. The Minister of Education during the President Olusegun Obasanjo's second regime affirmed that the management of education in Nigeria had become so corrupt that a survey conducted by Transparency International in 2012 revealed that the sector ranked fourth in corruption after Customs, Police and the National Electric Power Authority of Nigeria (Lijadu, 2009:18). Corruption denies students' access to educational materials which gives room for creating a bad impression about the standard of education using students to measure teachers are required to have a broad and if possible, in-exhaustive knowledge and understanding of values for proper control and coordination. Learners' attitude in the modern world may portray them as counter-productive and dangerous for the well-being of the society as Ajere and Adebayo (2014:163) had observed.

Illiteracy should be totally eradicated in Nigeria. The eradication of illiteracy should start within the categories of people in power but who are yet to be transformed. This should be done constantly through constant orientation; seminars; workshops; and constant monitoring by respected and highly placed Nigerians who may be elder-statesmen.

Teachers should be appropriately remunerated and their welfare adequately taken care of. Highly devoted and well-dedicated teachers should be highly encouraged and motivated through any means and, or method(s) government may deem fit.

The following functions of the family and roles of the school and religion as highlighted by Obasoro and Ogungbemi (2008:145) should be put to practice: The family should continue to play its roles of creation of conditions for mutual affection among its members who is dependent for a longer period of time than any other animal; the school should not relent in its efforts of constantly instilling discipline; and religion should be playing formidable roles in the life of learners for example in making the moral comprehensive and supporting social norms and values.

Notwithstanding, students should be further equipped with the tools of research; the school should be a component of reconstructionism that is action packed. Reconstructionism is a philosophical idea recognizing that the society is ill and to heal the society education is required; and doing so pre-supposes healing education so as to use education to heal the society which is ill (Bazile and Nauman, 2004:1 citing Ozmon and Graver). The teachers should continue to inculcate the values that the Nigerian students need and should become role models; democratic ideas should be given free environment to prosper while justice and fairness should reign (Olorunmota, 2009: 49/52). The curriculum should continue to make students gain more insight while adequate educational materials should be provided. Education Access Funds should be made available; while Information Technology which should constantly be provided; upgraded; should be of high esteem in continuously ensuring that it is further promoting education in its every facet in Nigeria. Also, leadership positions and political appointments should be given to tested educational experts and such appointments should be given to those with high and outstanding moral qualities and who could defend the integrity of the country at all time. There should equally be high consultation with record-keepers before highly derogatory statements should be made about the level of education in Nigeria.

Not also minding the high level in which education has reached in Nigeria although with its challenges which portray education standards as being falling, adequate and continuous efforts should further be put into the following areas of the curriculum through motivation: ability to resolve difficult tasks among pupils and students in schools should further be encouraged; more active contribution to issues that require objectivity; more active participation in mental (rational) and practical activities that are results-oriented; high interest in reading skills like getting involved in the reading of novel and public reading competition; continuous inquisitive attitude into the unknown.

Also, there should be continuous positive further attitude towards formal education in the area of readiness to go to school; readability from pre-age; long practical hours devoted to schooling in a conducive, illuminative environment, with highly-trained, devoted and committed disciplined and highly moral instructors; continuous exposure to training and re-training of instructors as well as constant discussions on career talks all being provided in an environment devoid of crisis, insecurity and poor service delivery by government.

Equally, government must continue to encourage travelling abroad so as to further encourage physically relating with students there while imbibing more academic culture in the global sense. Efforts must be made by stakeholders in the country to ensure emotional and psychological stability of educators and learners as well educational managers in Nigeria while ensuring good as well as healthy living condition of all. This will prevent creating bad impression and derogatory statements concerning education and its standard in Nigeria otherwise, what is meant by standard needs to be re-defined.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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