

POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN EXTERNAL EXAMINATIONS: A HYDRA-HEADED PROBLEM

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Abstract

Life in all its categories spins on education. This concept, education is as good as the vehicle through which knowledge in all its forms are impacted on people. While the impact of knowledge directly influences positive change in man, it indirectly uses the civilized man to make positive changes in the world. This impact of education affects every man irrespective of age, and moulds the society irrespective of region. However, education in Nigeria seems not to be pointing towards the realization of this or attaining the goal of education as can be seen from the indices of the dwindling academic performance of Nigerian students in West African Examination Council. This therefore becomes an awesome problem that poses a serious challenge to Nigeria and Nigerians. But what remains unclear is whether the government and the citizens are aware of the enormity of this problem, and if they are, what is the extent of this awareness for the problem of education in primary and secondary school level. The aim of this paper is to look into some of the reasons for deficiencies in academic performances of Nigerian students especially in the above mentioned levels of education and give some possible suggestions for the way forward.

1.0 Introduction

Surely, education means something. But the extent that, every person, group of people or government recognizes this and promotes it or otherwise shows how it is treasured among the people. And this consequently points to how it will benefit the person or people in question. But for all intents and purposes, it should simply be understood that “education is the bedrock of development and modern civilization” (36:2013). As this article will show, rather than be seen as the bedrock of every endeavour in Nigeria, education has continued to be yoyoed. The effort here is not to praise the government and the citizens for making much effort they seem to be making but to lament that the people and government seem

not to be making the much effort that education demands of them. Starting from nursery school to university level, much is always desired but only little is done.

Actually the level of education that calls for this article is the secondary school. But that does not mean that the article treats the secondary school level of education in isolation to other levels, because what happens to one affects the other. This article carefully looks at some of the West African School Certificate Examination Council results. And while it bemoans the poor performances of Nigerian students in WASSCE, it appreciates some of the reasons for the poor performances and proffers some solutions that if religiously applied, will help to redirect the problems associated with education in Nigerian society.

2.0 The need to philosophize education

To work towards the need to philosophize education, one must look at education as the major driver of life in general. As Agbanusi (2011) observes, philosophy is a discipline which deals with critical and rigorous investigations into human existence. Its major branches, which are epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, logic, aesthetics, gear towards the improvement of the human person both intellectually and morally, with a view to enhancing human co-existence and social cohesion. If philosophy is able to achieve the above stated objectives, education must categorize philosophy to meet every need of human life and the world. But it is possible to philosophize education or to educate philosophy since the two have similar objectives. It is not possible that the two will totally tally in aims and objectives. It is not possible that the two will totally tally in aims and objectives. The objective of education may never be the same with those of philosophy. But whatever the objective, the government must always embrace it, people must work towards attaining it and the individual must always allow it to be realized in him and through him so that it can be said that one has passed through education and that education has passed through him. Derived from *National Policy on Education*: 8, the philosophy of education should aim at:

- a. Inculcation of national consciousness and national unity
- b. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- c. The training of the mind in understanding for the world around; and

- d. The acquisition of the appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Whether the government of Nigeria is working towards attaining these objectives or not is another thing. But all things being equal, the government has it as a duty to work towards attaining it by the use of all available resources and to maintain it *mutatis mutandis*. As it stands with poor performances of Nigerian students in Senior West African School Certificate Education, either the government knows as in the observation of Epictetus that, “only the educated are free” (2010:v), and is working towards making people realize this freedom through education, or it is not working towards this freedom and thereby allowing “...people to die because of lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). Each of these poles is a pointer to either freedom or slavery.

When announcing the result of 2014 WAEC, The Head of National Office, WAEC, Eguridu (2004) discloses that, “...when this year’s result id compared to the 2012/2013 May/June WASSEC diets, there was marginal decline in the performance of candidates as 38.81 percent was recorded in 2012 and 36.57 percent in 2013”. With these results, it is as good as the situation of bad, worse, worst. And who knows what next if this progression will continue this way.

The breakdown of the performance of Nigerian students in WASSCE of 2014 can be analyzed thus:

Quota	Description	Percentage
529, 795	Five credits and above (+ English and Maths)	31.28%
145, 425	Withheld	8.61%
1,017, 215	Below 5 credit (- English and Maths)	60.11%
1,692, 435	Total number that sat for the exams	100%

As to who (or rather, what is the main reasons) is to blame for the poor academic performance of Nigerian students in WAEC, the answer lingers as parents, teachers, the government, and students themselves have themselves an appropriate share of blame proper to each. But the locale of this problem is handy

and clear. First, the problem of poor performance in WAEC by Nigerian students does not show that the government is doing much; rather it tries to show that government has a greater quota of blame just as it takes greater quota from annual national budget.

3.0 Factors for students' poor performance

Some other reasons that are considered as the causes of students' poor performance include the necessary and unnecessary distractions of the modern society. Among the distractions are:

3.1 Poor educational foundation

In the past, people use the forum of informal education to instruct and guide their young ones. But these days parents, guardians, relatives and every other group of people who should ordinarily see to impart knowledge to younger ones no longer take time to think, reason and or act in that direction. Udechukwu (2011:812) believes that in those days, (2012:812) the methods that were used in making this is through folklores, pieces of advice and storytelling. Udechukwu (2011:812) further adds that, "All over the world, people in every society take pains, devote time and attention to educate the young ones to be functional adults. In most cases, these pains, devotion of time and attention to the rearing of the young ones are geared towards the young ones fit well into the social and physical environment of the society in which they live."

3.2 Negative effects of technology

No one will be too slow to believe that the advent of technology has caused some manifest positive changes in the present generation, especially the youth. If it is computer, it is a gateway into which other things like television, radio, internet, musical instruments, handset anchor and take their revolution from. While negatively, technology bewitches the immature minds and guides them into ruining themselves; positively it acts as a saint that guides the matured minds into the realization of their full potentials.

3.3 The negative effects of home movies

The revolution of home movies in 2000s has not helped matters as ever well meaning individual will testify. Home movies have both positive and negative side effects. While it positively creates the awareness to the ills of the society and to some extent gives clue to how one can avoid them, it serves as an instrument of indoctrination to people who tend not to be focused in life especially among the youth. As such, some young minds have taken their contents as the ideal and quasi norm to lean on. Far reaching negative effect of this is that it makes the students very curious to identify themselves with the actors and their actions and leaves them with the suspense of '*and what next*' these are up to. Thus the time that students would have spent in their book and studies is then being unconsciously and unguardedly stolen by this generational devil and academic enemy called home movies. And this unconscious craves for home movies has thwarted the principle is something by which people abide by no matter what: a 'person of principle is to swayed; a principle account is one which holds up in the face of even serious objections and so on.

3.4 Music and home movies' CD stores have replaced bookshops

Before now, it was not uncommon to see every type of bookshops in very strategic locations of every city, but recently, music and movies' CDs began to take the place of bookshops. And since the environment influences the inhabitants, students began to incline more to the available music and home movies CDs than to text books and novels. Perhaps that is why it is easier these days to come across a student who can stand on one foot and give at least the name of about fifteen Nollywood stars than mention a novel and its author. This is quite different from what it used to be in the days of yore when it used to be a thing of pride for a student to tell the stories in the novels he read and what impact it has made in him or her.

3.4 Poor economy

In the past, parents take home pay used to pay for them through the month. And the result of this is the hunt for money and the quest for survival was very minimal. And the spare time that parents had was enough for them to use for other activities. And so it was possible for parents to have to share experiences and knowledge with their children. Some parents even had the hobby of looking into the school bags and academic books of their children to blame them, to praise them, to teach them, but to make them know that life and knowledge is a serious

issue. But these days, father and mother and sometimes even students seem to compete in hustling, just to make ends meet because it has come to be seen that it is only those in politics, petroleum business, church business, and phone industry that are still finding their feet above the economic hardship of the nation.

3.5 The government poor attention to the welfare of education

Nigerian leadership does not seem to know the value of education, and so only provide little fund to that sector. It is quite unfortunate that teachers are the slaves of the nation somehow. For some unions in the teaching industry in Nigeria to have some upward review in their salaries or attract some amenities in their schools, they must have to embark on strike. And if they win so be it, but the winning never comes so easy as there is always threats of sacks from the government. As if to extricate herself from the blames of poor academic performance by students beyond WASSCE. Freeman, (2004) observes that,

...the government of President Gooluck Jonathan last year allocated four hundred and twenty six billion, five hundred and twenty million naira (~~₦~~426.52b) to education, making the sector the top most priority, representing about 8.6% of the total budget of four trillion 92 billion naira (4.92t) about (\$32 billion). It was received with awesome ovation, with the expectations that if deployed into the sector it would make positive impact. Alas, one year after, our education went into the doldrums the more. Many Nigerians left for Ghana for higher educate.

Though the above measure was mentioned to have been taken, only God can tell the extent the so called money was appropriated and the method of application that was used. The fact remains that money is not the only problem of Nigerian education. Like a leprous finger, in Nigeria, education has the problem of the teachers, the problem of the students, the problem of fund, the problem of management, perhaps except the problem of policy, to contend with.

4.0 Towards a solution

The solution to the problem of education is so vast that it needs all and sundry to have hands on deck for solution. The government, the parents, the teachers and the students have each something to do, if something is meant to be achieved.

The government should be sincere and committed in funding education. Along with the funding of education, the government should uplift the status of her teachers, motivate them and give teaching a pride of place so that the teachers will see teaching more as hobby than task and labour with poor pay.

Since technology, home movies and music revolution have come to be, it is the parents and not the teachers and the government that can regulate their children about them. Besides, if parents are not comfortable with the academic performances of their children, they are the ones that should begin early to guide their children educationally because charity begins at home.

This paper has already given a clean slate to education policy, but the implementation, like the implementation of many other policies in Nigeria has been lame legged.

It seems the teachers and the students are always the major takers of the blames of poor academic performances in Nigeria, despite the best they have been putting in teaching and learning. But as Anameze (2000:33) suggests, teachers should also begin to look into the students "...sensory defects, emotional problems, low academic achievement, motivation, examination anxiety, loss of sleep, values disorientation, distractions, distractions, forgetting and defective entry behaviours...". He suggested that while the teacher counselor should explain the meaning of these factors and how they affect students, the student themselves should try to avoid them. But a very big question still hangs on what is seen as guidance counselor and their roles in Nigerian educational system.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

The problem of poor academic performance is a very serious problem that depicts the status of Nigerian society. Certificates from Nigerian institutions are often questionable outside Nigeria. It is regrettable. And many a time, Nigeria claims to be giant of Africa without showing some *giant* examples. The problem of

education is one like that of epileptic power problem that seems to defy every solution. But like the power problem among others of its kind, apart from few suggestions mentioned here in this paper, all that is required for good output from education in Nigeria is all available in Nigeria, only that the stakeholders especially the government has not decided to be sincere about that.

Refernces

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