

# THE FALLING STANDARD OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

*Alhaji Aliyu Tanko*

## **Abstract**

The concept “falling standard of Education” is a relative term. This is because there are no well defined instruments to measure it with utmost reliability and validity. That is why scholars' views on the concept vary. These scholars view it from different perspectives depending on the angle each of them is looking at it. This paper therefore, highlights and explains in details the causes of falling standard of education in Nigeria and finally, suggests the way forward in order to improve the educational system in the country.

The concept “falling standard of Education" is a relative term because there is no well defined instruments to measure it with utmost reliability and validity. That is why scholars' views on the concept vary. These scholars view it from different perspectives. Jalingo, (2010) sees the concept from admission of Nigerian University products in developed countries universities. That the first six Nigerian Universities (University of Ibadan, Ile Ife, Lagos, Benin, Nsukka and Zaria) had their products competing favourably with products of any other University in the world as their products were sought for by University of Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and London for admission into their post-graduate courses. These students with record breaking performances when they graduate, are employed by the best multi-national companies and corporate bodies globally unlike today where no Nigerian University is among the top 6,000 Universities of the world. Ochuba, (2008) he sees standard from how universities contribute to knowledge and solving problems besetting mankind. According to “Gateway to the Nation” (2010), University of Ibadan is ranked 6,340th University in the world. In Africa, University of Ibadan is ranked 57th, OAU 69th and South African Universities are leading the way in Africa. He also used written and spoken English as a yardstick for measuring standard of education which University of London conducted a research in West Africa and the result showed that teachers trained by colonial masters were better off than those trained by indigenous teachers. He also used staffing, funding, foundation, origin and students as standard of education. And standard of education to Dike, (2003) is how education contributes to the public health or sociopolitical and economic development of a Nation. Standard of education to either passing or failing of external examinations like WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, JAMB, (NOW UTME) among others. Teachers Without Borders (2006) looked at educational standard from how the products of schools can be measured in terms of outcome. That is how school leavers contribute to the society in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor. For the purpose of this write up students were used to refer to both students and pupils and equally, head teacher was used to refer to both principal and headmaster. Whichever way one may views standard of education, in order to conclude whether the standard is falling or not, one must takes into consideration all the aforementioned variables including achieving educational goals. Equally, for justice to be done while measuring these standards, one has to look at reliability where all the schools to be measured must have the same infrastructure, teaching materials, quality of teachers, level and degree of learners, condition within which learning takes place, some methods of assessment and some types of contribution to the society among others.

## **Employment Laws in Nigeria**

Mixed reactions have continued to trail the recent passing into law, a legislation which seeks to address the discrimination against Nigerian graduates with pass and third class in the labour market, allowing only those with at least second class lower divisions, of the opportunity of gaining employment into the Federal Civil Service. The legislature took the bull by the horn when it repealed the act that allowed only those with higher grade the privilege of gaining federal government job, an action the supporters of the bill described as discrimination against educated Nigerians who have the mettle to contribute to the development of the nation. The new law now mandates all employers of

labour to desist from discriminating against people with lower qualifications, arguing that the likes of Late Gani Fawehinmi and Prof. Wole Soyinka were third class graduates yet, they were best in their chosen fields. It is also note worthy that their footprint will remain indelible in the sands of time. Following the development, some people who are opposed to the bill have said the action of the legislature is capable of discouraging students from being serious with their studies since grade no longer counts in employment, stressing that students will hence forth, imbibe a lackadaisical attitude toward studies. The protagonist of the bill are of the opinion that the law will go a long way in addressing the philosophy of mediocrity already existing in the system as a result of the stereotype occasioned by the use of paper qualification instead of assessing candidate based on their abilities which encourage meritocracy, efficiency of service and fruitful result in the nation's civil service.

### **The Ugly Situation of the Educational System**

In the face of all these, strong arguments and counter arguments over who gets what through what grade or qualification have continued to generate debate but one fact remains obvious that is the fact that the educational system at all levels in Nigeria is on a speedy and continuous decline. For instance, it is an established fact that those that finished standard six during the colonial era can confidently oust a Nigerian graduate of the present system in an intellectual contest. In the past when Nigerian universities used to train graduates that were morally and intellectually sound, with the ability to compete with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Even though all stakeholders in the educational sector are not exonerated from the blames that have contributed to the continued downward slope of the educational system, government still takes the largest portion of the blame. For instance, government pay nonchalant attitude toward the welfare of the teachers together with poor attention to good and learning environment.

Management experts have continued to lay emphasis on the important role motivation plays in the managerial process, government should therefore learn from this management principle by paying special attention to remuneration of teachers in order to boost their morale and restore their faith in the onerous task of imparting knowledge. Poor remuneration of teachers in the country has turned the teaching profession that used to be the envy of all, to a profession of mockery which youth are now skeptical of going into. Students no longer fancy education as a course. Public schools are poorly funded, a situation that impact negatively on the smooth running of the schools. Committees on Education in the Federal and State Houses of Assembly are also doing little or nothing in relation to their oversight function especially as it affects the education sector. Away from the government lapses, the teachers also have their own blame. There is this popular saying that "no one can give what he does not have." This saying clearly explains what is happening in schools nationwide as most of the teachers and lecturers are in themselves product of this present deteriorating educational system who lacks the requisite intellectual abilities to educate sound and reputable graduates that will stand the test of time. Examination malpractice has become a standing tradition in the educational system in Nigeria. It is daunting and surprising to notice how examination misconduct has inundated the system to the extent that pupils at lower levels of education are already familiar with such unhealthy practices. Parents on their part are not helping matters as most of them go the extra mile looking out for special centers for their children where they pay heavily in a bid to facilitate examination fraud. Special centres also exist as tutorial centres where students, who are preparing for examinations like SSCE, NECO and UTME, go to register in an attempt to foster fraud during the examination. Students in a bid not to write the examination twice pressurise their parents or guardians to pay three times the exam fees to proprietors who in turn, ensure that the students that registered under them pass all their papers at a seating. To ensure that, they normally collaborate with some faceless employees of the examination bodies that sneak exam questions to them in exchange of money before the scheduled time of the exam (usually 24 hours ahead of the time) so as to allow them the opportunity of solving the questions for the students before the examination date. Security agents and external invigilators are also partners in this crime as they equally aid and abet the fraud going on in the system by compromising their integrity through their usual collection of gratification. The aforementioned corroborate the popular corrupt saying in Nigeria, "grease my palm and I will grease yours", forgetting that it is better to "teach a child how to catch fish than giving him fish always". It is better to teach the student to write exam for himself than writing for him in the name of 'runs' as it is fondly called, forgetting the words of Abraham Lincoln in his letter to his son teachers where he said that "it

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is more honourable to fail in examination than to cheat". The holy book also admonishes parents to teach their children the way they should go so that when they grow old they will not depart from it. Can the blame of this ill practice of enthroning mediocrity in the educational system on the colonial masters? Far from it for they produced world class intellectuals during their time in most of the African nations. Nigerians cannot exonerate themselves from this evil practice that is threatening the foundation of the nation as the higher institutions are also faced with multiple problem of exam fraud ranging from cheating during the examination by students through the use of text books and jutting of possible answers popularly known as "omo krikri" in the west and "yan wanki" in the north to post examination fraud also known as sorting. In this era of examination fraud, lecturers are largely involved in the process due to the fact that they trade grade like tomatoes and crayfish in the foodstuff market. The lecturers in a bid to live exuberant and flamboyant life style on campus, they go the extra mile of recruiting students in their classes who serve as middlemen between them and the students. The middle men move round after every examination to inform their course mates that sorting of a particular course is in progress, the interested members will then give their registration number and the specified amount for the grades they want. The era when students are graded on the basis of their intellectual abilities has been committed to the trash bin of history as lecturers now charge between N10, 000 for A and N7, 000 "B" while "C" is traded for N2, 000. Some lecturers equally turn attractive female students in their classes to sex partners with threat to fail anyone who proves stubborn to their advances. Female students are also known to offer themselves freely to the lecturers in order to get good grade during exams with the notion that they are using what they have to get what they want. Another cankerworm is cultism. It is contributing immensely to lower the standard of education in the country. Members of this group usually relegate academic activities as secondary as they primarily attend to their group activities first, which is the more reason why some of them spend ten to eleven years in school for a course of four or five years. They take delight in drinking, killing and maiming instead of developing their moral, skills and intellectual abilities which is the primary aim of education.

#### **Causes of Falling Standard in Nigeria**

The second factors that constitute the falling standard of education in Nigeria are the following;

1. **Discipline:** This is one of the outstanding attributes of quality education when it is rightly observed. This is because learners who are disciplined are in most cases committed to their education. It has the following;
  - a. **Repeating a Class:** Most schools these days do not observe the obligatory regulations compelling academically weak learners who failed promotion examinations to repeat a class. They are promoted to the next class and this has contributed to the falling standard of education.
  - b. **Attendance:** The 75% of attendance which was accepted as the bases for students to sit for examination is no longer observed.
  - c. **Late coming:** Students that come to school late are no longer punished, and this has contributed to the falling standard of education because of their failure to comprehend what was taught in the class.
  - d. **Misbehaviors:** Students are no longer punished for misbehavior because of their parental influences as most of the teachers dread losing their jobs or unnecessary transfer.
  - e. **Cultism:** The micro soft Encarta Premium 2009, defined cult from which cultism is derived as "any group with a fanatical devotion to a person, movement or common interest". Members engage in ritual devotion and the idolization of a person usually under oath binding the members to a common course. They operate covertly in fulfillment of their useless objectives to the detriment of other students and the society.
2. **Quest for Paper Qualification:** Nigerians respect paper qualifications above performance in the fields. With so much attention to paper qualifications, students go the extra mile to engage in dubious activities to acquire certificates and the only way they can do that is to engage in any form of exams malpractice. This situation has led to the appointment of people not versed in educational administration and management to oversee the administration of educational matters.

3. **Politicizing Education:** Merit is no longer regarded as it is now "who you know" and not "what you can deliver".
4. **Policy Problem:** Sometimes the type of policies government makes on education adversely affects output. For instance, in Colleges of Education, there is National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), competing with JAMB for admission as the two guidelines vary. Equally, WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, JAMB (now UTME) compete with qualifying pre-requisites and regulations of entries into tertiary institutions.
5. **Teachers not Being Part of the Examination Bodies.** One wonders whether the continuous Assessment submitted by these teachers is used or not since they are not part of decision making of these examination bodies.
6. **Accessibility of Schools:** The Nigerian population boom has outnumbered the existing schools as the existing schools have to over admit. This point can be practically seen in the following areas:
  - a. Teacher / Student ratio of 1:25 is no longer observed. A typical class has 1:3900 and above teacher/student ratio.
  - b. Students / books / Journals ratio of 1:10 is no longer feasible because of the large class of students.
  - c. Politics of admission: Schools can no longer set targets for admission to conform with their facilities as powerful notes from above will force the school authorities to either over admit or find themselves in the labour market again. Yet it is people who give these notes that are supposed to build more schools or provide needed infrastructure etc. to accommodate the teeming number of prospective learners.
7. **Over-Dependent on Cognitive Domain:** Schools do not give regards to affective domain that will mould characters of the young ones. Little attention is given to psychomotor while little or no attention is given to affective domain.
8. **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** Some schools in the rural areas only have the headmaster as government employee while the rest may be secondary school drop outs who are PTA staff. What miracle can these staff perform? Dike, (2006) observed that only 23% out of the then 400,000 primary schools in Nigeria have grade II teacher certificate even when NCE is the minimum qualification for teachers at primary and Junior Secondary schools.
9. **Teacher's Welfare:** It is no longer news that teacher's welfare is not accorded the deserved attention. Unlike the politicians who do not have negotiation council to negotiate their salary increase. There is no disparity among political office holders from the federal, state and local governments and their salaries are increased at astronomical rate any time without recourse to whether the nation's economy can bear it or not. But for teachers, they must negotiate the 10 to 20% in an attempt to increase their salary with consideration of the economy of the nation. How can these teachers contribute and perform miracles when their family members are in the hospitals and the out of stock syndrome is usually written on their cards by pharmacists and unfortunately most of these teachers do not have money to buy the drugs to be able to treat themselves and their families.
10. **Constant Strikes:** This is an impediment to smooth covering of syllabus. Oefule (2009) explained that one Nigerian guest asked a question on strike at Oxford University community but the vice chancellor could not even remember about strike, only the registrar remembered it for 17 years back. This is what governance means to the people.
11. **Long Rule of the Military:** Education was not properly funded by the military regimes as according to Jalingo, (2010) Obasanjo's administration inherited many left over problems of the military such as non- payment of pensions and gratuities of retired University staff, poor remuneration of university staff, dilapidating buildings of schools, libraries with outdated books,

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obsolete laboratory equipments, bad campus roads, inadequate water and power supply among others.

12. At the secondary and primary schools levels, schools do not even have buildings talk less` of furniture, equipments and reading materials. This is the level where the foundation of education should be laid. Any faulty foundation will lead to faulty structures.
13. **Lack of Training of Teachers:** Teachers are not trained to update their knowledge with latest discoveries based on research. How then can they give what they do not have?
14. **Poor state of Educational Teaching Facilities:** It is not longer news that educational facilities for the effective teaching and learning process are either inadequate or not provided in most of the schools. Dike, (2006) reported that research result shows that over 2015 primary schools in Nigeria do not have building but study under trees, talk less of teaching materials.
15. **Corruption:** leaders of the schools and some government officials either connive to buy equipments that cannot be of any use to the school or take such loans and do not even do anything with it.
16. **Poor Budgetary Allocation to Education:** A research work of 2001 shows that Nigeria only, allocate less than 20% to education. It further reveals that Nigeria spends 0.76% on education as against Uganda 2.6%, Tanzania 3.4%, Mozambique 4.1%, Angola 4.9%, Cote d'Ivoire 5%, Kenya 6.5% and South Africa 7.9% among others.

#### **Who is to Blame?**

This paper has tried to highlight the causes of falling standard and from these causes the paper is of the view that the following are to be blamed:

1. Government supposed to carry the lion share of the blame because all the other variables are dependent variables to it.
2. Teachers also have their shares of the blame with regards to their jobs performance.
3. Parents: The government cannot shoulder the responsibilities of education alone; therefore parents have to augment government efforts.
4. Students: students who do not abide by school rules and regulations nor pay attention to their studies also contribute to falling standard. Students who seek for paper qualification and disregard performance also participate in cult activities that derail the progress of the academy.
5. The society is not left out as it is the way it sees and respects the products of these schools that recycles back again.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is no gain saying the fact that, the falling standard of education in Nigeria has been a great concern to all the stakeholders in the education industry i.e.; government, parents, teachers, administrators, educational planners, employers of labour, students etc. In view of this therefore, this paper examined and highlighted in details the challenges and the causes of the falling standard of education in Nigeria. In addition, the way forward was suggested and recommended with hope that, the educational system would surely be improved.

#### **The Way Forward**

Based on the problems or causes identified above, the following solutions are proffered:

1. Schools should respect and restore back discipline to bring back the lost glory of the educational standard.
2. Performance should be regarded and respected more than just paper qualifications. Equally, education should not be politicized for whatever reason.
3. Policy makers should be mindful of policies that affect education .e.g. JAMB (UTME) regulation in admissions, employments etc

4. Teachers should be involved in examination activities and examination bodies should always publish examination reports and distribute it to various schools for them to hold school workshop for training of subject teachers on their areas of weaknesses observed in the students' scripts with regards to following the marking scheme.
5. More schools should be built to increase accessibility by all. Cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains should be emphasized in the assessment of students.
6. Teachers' welfare should be given priority by government to avoid unnecessary strikes in the educational sector while more qualified teachers should be employed to curb the present shortage of teachers in the schools.
7. The present civilian government should prove to the people that they are better than military governments in terms of funding the educational sector.
8. Teachers should be trained so that they can meet up with any new challenges. Educational facilities should be upgraded to modern standards while teaching facilities should be adequately provided.
9. Corruption should be eliminated to the barest minimum by all stakeholders while government should increase its budgetary allocations to education to improve the standard of education in Nigeria.

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