

AN EDUCATIONAL EXORCISM TO EXHUME HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Education is a very popular concept. Therefore, no energy should be exerted on explaining such a familiar item, more so at a special conclave of a coterie of outstanding educated minds. By that caveat, I stand on the terms of Joseph Addison (1672-1719) a forensic English poet who in a panegyric prose fetes:

Education is a companion which no misfortune can alienate and no disposition can enslave. At home, a friend, abroad an introduction, in solitude a solace, and in society an ornament. It chastens vice, guides virtue, it gives, at once, grace and government to geniuses. Without it what is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage.

It is of little wonder therefore why article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Right specifically states that “everyone has the right to education”. Education is not merely a right. All things considered, Education is a pathfinder, the fountain, foundation, significant and strategic tool for development. What is said of the individual also applies to the society. To relegate and marginalize education in the totem pole of values in peace time (even in war time), is a monumental negative psychology, the prelude to the extermination of the human family. The defining prefatory note on the concept of Education is the essential precursor to snow-ball us into the matrix of my discourse, entitled; “An educational exorcism to exhume higher education in Nigeria”.

To start with, Nigeria educational system is segmented into three stages, namely: primary, secondary and tertiary education. Tertiary education is also christened, higher education. Higher education is the last stage of formal educational pursuit in

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Nigeria. Higher education, according to the Guinness Encyclopedia (1995), is that educational endeavour undertaken after the compulsory stage. More clearly, it posits:

Once the compulsory years of education are over, those who wish to continue learning can choose either to teach themselves: learn in their workplace, or attend an institution of further or higher education. Colleges of further education usually provide a wide range of courses for people wanting to study either part or full time. Most of these courses are below degree level, often leading to a professional or technical qualification.

The definition has elaborately explained what higher education is in other climes. This is because in western world, a lot of competent technicians are produced by technical colleges and craft centers after their successful completion of compulsory basic or elementary education, without necessarily attending polytechnics and universities. Attending elementary and intermediate schools are the only prerequisites to obtaining such certificates in developed nations, especially in Europe and U.S.A. With the above, senior secondary school in Nigeria could go for higher education, since it comes after the basic and compulsory education. But in Nigeria, almost every junior secondary school “graduate” desires and clamours to proceed to senior secondary level of education. Besides, the educational system on its own cannot confine “poor or average” students to seeking admission only into technical colleges and trade acquisition centres on the grounds of being vacuous. Rather, they all proceed to senior secondary school and subsequently to tertiary institutions for higher learning.

Again, Muraina (2010) defines tertiary education “as the education given after secondary education in universities, polytechnics and colleges...” The recent document on the nation's education, National Policy on Education (2004) lent credence to the above definition by expatiating higher education, in section 5, subsection 80 as;

Tertiary Education is the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-Universities Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IELs), and Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics,

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and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institute.

Although the above definition and provisions in the National Policy on Education succinctly agree with the meaning of higher institution as proffered by the Guinness Encyclopedia, in Nigeria, basic education begins with nursery and ends at junior secondary school. In addition, the end of junior secondary school does not signal the enrolment for a further education in any university or college of education in Nigeria. An authentic enrolment into a university or polytechnic or college of education is with the possession of West African Senior Secondary School Certificate (WASSSC) or National Examination Council Certificate (NECO) or General Certificate in Education (GCE). These certificates are not acquired after basic education in Nigeria. Instead, they are earned after a rigorous pursuit of a senior secondary education programme, which is distinct and distant from a basic form of education in the country. So far, a number of issues have been straightened, these are:

- Nigeria higher education is not after a basic or compulsory education as postulated by the Guinness Encyclopedia.
- higher education in Nigeria is acquired after a secondary level of education higher education include reading for higher certificates in the universities, polytechnic, colleges of education or their equivalent; and
- higher education, going by its widely acclaimed roles, is also known as tertiary education in Nigeria.

Concise History of Higher Education in Nigeria

Higher education did not just burp up in Nigeria like the idiomatic bolt from the blues. It came like a child of necessity whose arrival was long expected to fill a long vacuum. This level of education was established to achieve certain goals and objectives. Most certainly, a brief history of that sector of education will unveil some of the objectives it set out to achieve.

The general need for higher education in Nigeria was to satisfy the growing higher man-power need of the country other than “mere education of peasant Nigerians” as envisaged by the colonial administration and pursued by missionary schools in pre-independent era. This gave rise to the establishment of School of Survey

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in Lagos (later moved to Oyo) in 1908. Yaba College of Technology followed in 1932, (Ogunu, 1990).

Thereafter, at the peak of clamour and agitation for Nigeria independence, between 1940 and 1959, the colonial masters saw the need to produce indigenous administrators and managers who would take over the administration of Nigeria after them. This saw Nigeria having her first university, University College Ibadan in 1948. Closely after, the need for high powered technologists gave rise to universities of technology. And the need for high-skilled agriculturist brought about setting up of universities of agriculture. Lately and almost too late indeed, considering the ever plunging crude oil price, the need of indigenous crude oil experts, necessitated the establishment of University of Petroleum, Effurum in Delta State. With the brief history of higher education in Nigeria which indirectly tells us some of the roles, we can now look into the expected roles of higher education in Nigeria.

Expected Roles in Higher Education in Nigeria

It would be a futile effort to discuss transformation of a thing without first looking at the initial existence and failure that necessitated the transformation of such a thing. Transformation of higher education in Nigeria implies that it has fallen short of its role expectations. What then are the roles of high education, since it needs transformation? The statutory roles of higher education in Nigeria are clearly stipulated in its operational goals as conveyed by the same Nigeria education blueprint. It asserts:

The goals of Tertiary Education shall be to:

- contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians;
- provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- promote and encourage scholarships, entrepreneurship and community service;
- forge and cement national unity; and
- promote national and international understanding and interaction (NPE,2004).

Conspicuously, a good number of expected functions of higher education can be deduced from the above cited higher education goals. In Nigeria, higher education was

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established to promote service delivery needs of the nation and in addition to facilitate scientific and technological advancement, to ensure material and cultural development of the country.

Short Comings and Failure of Higher Education in Nigeria

The challenges facing Nigeria higher institutions are multifarious and complex. It is a combination of limited access, increasing cost, decreasing quality, and inflexibility in course selection. It is a common knowledge that many educated individuals have not been very useful in finding lasting solutions to the social, political, economic and cultural problems facing the country as a whole. There have been the problems of spiralling economy, outdated academic equipment and obsolete organizational structures and so on. Perhaps the most formidable task confronting higher education in Nigeria is to articulate the triple relationship between the mission of the university and the specific needs of university's political, social, economic, and cultural environment, and the characteristics of a rapidly changing world. It is commonly noted in so many quarters that schools today, higher education inclusive, are ill-equipped, teachers are poorly paid and the general standards are, though arguably, fallen. Over 80 percent of school laboratories nationwide are ill-equipped and library resource obsolete.

What Appears Like Transformation of Higher Education

Most times, we take enlargement for development, forgetting that goodness and efficiency may be absent from a bloated size. Little does one wonder why it is sarcastically said, “big for nothing, whenever one is confronted with very gigantic but unproductive projects”. In the same vein, Nigeria multiplying number of institutions of higher education should not be taken for transformation, while it is yet far from squarely fitting into its statutory role. In certain quarters, the increased number of universities is mistaken for transformation of higher education in Nigeria. Nigeria has witnessed a phenomenal growth in the number of Universities from 2 at independence in 1960, to 55 as at November 2004, to 73 in 2012, and about 181 other tertiary institutions with students enrolment of about 24 million (Jaja, 2013).

Transforming higher education in Nigeria should not be a wishful thinking but a dedicated venture. Transformation is not an easy task given the complexities and varieties of institutions as well as the high value placed on independent thought and ideas. The burden is exacerbated by the evolution of extensive bureaucracies and the myriad processes and practices tied to traditional values in Nigeria.

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The Practical Reality of Transforming Higher Education in Nigeria

This epoch making attempt by the National Association for the Advancement of Knowledge to transform higher education in Nigeria through this year's conference is indeed one bold step for NAFAK but a giant step for Nigeria education. Records available from literature consulted in the course of this paper preparation reveal that there are two practical realities to transforming higher education in Nigeria. First, is that of policy and facilities, and second, implementation and practice. The first, policy and facilities have to do with the government. The role of government in the provision of needed manpower and materials to bring about the needed transformation of higher education in Nigeria can never be over-looked. The government should not play politics with education. The government should demonstrate commitment by allocating the modestly recommended 26% of her total annual budget to education. This no doubt would facilitate the expected transformation desired in higher education in Nigeria according to UNESCO prescription. Odetunde, (2004), lamented that today students are learning in dilapidated buildings, environmentally depressing and learning disabling situations and yet some of them are still excelling. Another authority observes "the new generation of university teachers know their subjects but cannot impart knowledge because teaching is not their calling. They are just passing through and are not patient to learn lessons about teaching" (Jaja, 2013).

The above excerpts raise the issue of teachers and teaching. We may all agree that provision of materials alone cannot single-handedly perform the magic of transforming higher education in Nigeria. Rather formators and facilitators, (men and women) who would utilize the materials and instruments are equally necessary to bring about the needed transformation. Teachers and school administrators are the facilitators of government education policies. The synergy should promote the reality of transforming higher education in Nigeria. Holmes (2015) emphasizes the indispensable ideals of teaching profession in general and higher education in particular. He asserts:

First, the role of teaching in higher education is evolving as institutions apply a new model calling for the scholarship of teaching. Second, focus on learning as the primary outcome of education is replacing emphasis on the delivery of education. Third, assessment has become a priority in classrooms and institutions as emphasis has moved to measuring student success and institutional effectiveness. Finally, developmental education is maturing in higher education and gaining higher status as institutions

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address the need both to raise the performance levels of students and to include those who previously did not pursue higher education (Holmes, 2014).

To explain the issues raised above, Holmes (2014) outlined four major concepts of teaching and learning that could transform higher education. These include: New Model of Scholarship in Teaching; Learning Made Central; Moving to Cultures of Reflection, Assessment and Accountability; and Development Education that takes on status. These shall be explained very briefly:

- **New Model of Scholarship in Teaching**

This model entails changing the learning faculty. He applied Ernest Boyer's four models that would positively change learning faculty as: (i) Effort towards advancing knowledge. The model insists that this is the foremost and the tripod upon which the other three models take their stand; (ii) Knowledge Synthesis and Integration. This involves full knowledge of concept of 'isolated facts', 'breaking them in perspectives', linking them 'across disciplines' and separating "specialties in larger context"; (iii) Applying knowledge gained to help individuals and institutions; and (iv) Representing knowledge which involves transmitting, transforming and extending knowledge gained.

- **Learning Made Central**

This is an atmosphere where colleges and universities turn "from teaching to learning". O'Banion (2015) who expanded on this finding, submits that it is "a new paradigm for undergraduate education", which emphasizes learning and the learner and not mere lecture experienced in higher education today.

- **Developmental Education Tasks on Status**

This involves giving of "courses and services provided for the purpose of helping underprepared college students attain their academic goals. It is to help them develop their cognitive and affective potentials. McCabe (2016) christened it "no one to waste" which is necessary to wake-up students who attend higher institutions unprepared. He added that the essence of this is to erase deteriorating academic proficiency among high school graduates.

- **Moving to Cultures of Reflection, Assessment and Accountability**

This is more than Students Continuous Assessment. Rather, it is an improved assessment, reflection and accountability to "think of no action that would do quite as much for the improvement of teaching and learning as to let a

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thousand classroom laboratories bloom across the nation. Their purpose would be to discover more effective teaching methods for the classroom researchers themselves, and to establish a foundation of knowledge 'about college teaching that maximizes learning". (Holmes, 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be emphatically stated that, the theme of the 18th National Association for the Advancement of Knowledge (NAFAK) Conference: Transformation of Higher Education in Nigeria: The Practical Reality, is timely, bearing in mind the present rating of universities in the world, in which Nigeria is not in the first one hundred, coupled with Nigeria's grappling bid to attain technological breakthrough without success.

Recommendations

This author advocates an aggressive drive to transform higher education in Nigeria through the following pillars:

- Adequate financing
- Manpower investment
- Dedicated reforms
- Curricular reforms
- Cutting edge infrastructure
- Philosophy of excellence
- Funding of research
- Collaborative pooling
- Consortium partnership
- Manifesto of transformation

It is instructive before the curtain is pulled, to be clear as to sort of result which we wish to achieve. The transforming higher education blue-print should be able to inculcate in the consumers:

- Knowledge - A balance intellectual slant
- Godliness - To be good hearted
- Character - To have clear conscience
- Justice - To deal fairly with people
- Patriotism - To have community spirit
- Service - Sacrificing to help others
- Leadership - Volunteers for common good
- Enterprise - Ability to fend for self

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- Freedom - Power of personal judgment
- Independence - Ability to decide on principles

In our intellectual excursion I hope we have a bird's-eye view of the province we have traversed. Information wielded by the power of reason is essential, necessary and desirable. Given two adolescents of different characters (civility and incivility), education in a transformed Nigeria higher education environment and setting, they will grow-up as adults of cultured disposition; intelligent, harmonious character and incorruptible. Lastly, let me spice this epilogue with the words of a sage, Bertrand Arthur William Russell, "Not we, but the free men and women whom we shall create", (on transforming higher education in Nigeria), "will see the new world, first in their hopes, and then at last in the full splendor of reality".

Thank you.

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