



**ISSUES, CHALLENGES  
AND PROSPECTS  
OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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## ***Chapter Fourteen***

### **ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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#### **Introduction**

The attitude of some of our students towards learning in the higher institutions in different parts of Nigeria serves as a compelling necessity to ascertain as what would have been responsible for this very poor and nonchalant attitude on the part of these students. Learning is supposed to be a self drive towards an existing goal. It is this unpleasant attitude displayed by some of these learners in some of our institutions of higher learning that made the educational standard call for barrage of questions today. A cursory investigation reveals that this questioning acquiescence on the part of the students of the higher institution started from the secondary schools. What we are experiencing is its manifestation in virtually all facets of human endeavour. In the past, students who graduated from the higher institution, graduated both in character and learning. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case in contemporary Nigerian society. More often than not the institution from which such students would have supposedly graduated from call for a lot of questioning and doubts. This is because the education the students acquired from that institution should be able to mould the student and acquaint him with better principles of good behavioural conduct. As aptly noted by Gordon(1966)' schooling can help people develop their innate capacities to live and work in better ways'. Corroborating the above, Ukeje(1966)observed that in whatever direction we look at education we find that education is a powerful means of social

progress and anyone working with it, does so with probably the most powerful instrument man has yet devised for his own improvement. It is against this background the Chapter of this book is set to interrogate some of the issues and challenges that are responsible for the poor and low standard of education, in specifically in higher institutions, and possibly come up with prospects on how effective learning can be sustained. The idea is to promote a harmonious environment devoid of "yahooism", bandits and other terrible vices that serve as unfavourable outcome of some of the higher institutions. However, before delving into the main topic of the chapter of the book there is need to acquaint ourselves with the Aims of higher education.

### **Aims of Higher Education**

Before delving into the main ideas of the chapter, there is one basic question every higher education student needs to ask himself in the pursuit of education that is comparatively higher to when he or she was in the secondary school; Why should the student not stop at the secondary level? Why the need for further studies in the higher institution? This brings us to the aims of higher education in Nigeria;

(a) One of such aims is the ability to acquire learning that would ultimately place the graduating student as an independent being. In other words, with acquisition of education both in character and learning, he is expected to develop himself with the relevant skill acquired.

(b) Again, the higher education acquired could provide him the needed potential required and others who may be looking up to him.

(c) He will emerge as an entrepreneur which will make him an employer of labour. Consequently, such business outfit would even make him to be seen by his contemporaries as nation builder. For instance, the likes of Dangote of Nigeria, Bill Gate of United States of America, just to mention a few.

Evident in the whole discourse are some of the aims of higher education in Nigeria as postulated below by Itedjere(1977)

(a) The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper

value orientation for the survival of the individual and society.

(b) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments;

(c) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community.

(d) The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environment, (NPE, 1981; 22)

So, when the individual who has decided to embark on a long journey of acquiring higher education in institutions where learning, and research would be carried out as basic necessities to actualize the aforementioned aims, he or she must be conscious of the task that is ahead of him. The idea is not just to acquire the certificate but how he can use the certificate that justified the required skill to develop himself and the society in general. Unfortunately, the caliber of graduates we have from the institutions of higher learning leaves much to be desired. Based on the foregoing we now turn to the issues and challenges of higher education of Nigeria.

### **Issues of Higher Education in Nigeria**

Issues are relatively problems that mitigate the learning process for students both at the secondary and higher levels. However, it is more noticeable at the higher institutions. This is obviously because of the high degree of autonomy enjoy by the students themselves while some are created by the school curriculum, parents and lecturers. The latter may impose certain issues that may turn out to be problems later on. Consequently, this may compel the students to discontinue with the programme when it becomes inevitable for the students to cope. The opinion of this chapter is to examine some of these issues in order to adequately pave way for better and sustainable learning and more importantly to live to the aims of pursuing higher education in Nigeria. Below are some of the issues that hinder students' ambition in the pursuit of higher education.

**The learning habit of some of the students:** Learning entails the ability of the students to be fully prepared to assimilate all that would be taught by the lecturer in the school. It is supposed to be a two way traffic. That is, the lecturer and the student. Learning requires the active participation of the students in class activities in order to produce a desired result. Simply put, learning involves the various processes through which animals and man acquire knowledge (Onwuegbu & Okobia, 2003). According to Etchie and Igwebuike(1993),the learner is the centre of all learning activities. He carries all the experiential activities that will lead to change in behavior.

Beautiful as the above scholarly postulations may seem, higher institution undergraduates vis a vis graduates do not adhere to some of these principles. This is because of the poor learning habit and culture. No matter how ready the lecturer may be, if the students (learners) are not genuinely and fully prepared nothing may be assimilated. One is not saying that all the students are like that. The facts remain that an overwhelming number of them are in this category. Consequently, this makes learning uninteresting and boring to the lecturer in particular. In those days students challenged lecturers to be hardworking, by doing thorough research before coming to class. Unfortunately, the caliber of students we have in the higher institution is such that discourages one from engaging in serious research before coming to class. The reading culture has reached such an abysmal depth that you literally have to slap some people in the face with a book to get their attention and threaten them with some more to actually read it(Ukah, 2007).

Another issue is the *excessive use of mobile phones by the students*: This is one of the most serious impediments in the higher institution .Students' interest on mobiles phones are more than the real academic work they have been sent to school for. The mobile phone may be a source of academic information through browsing but the abuse of it is my worry. In the good old days when the use the phones was not in vogue the hours spent in studying through the

burning of the midnight candle generated results. In recent times, the use of mobile phones has changed the mind set of students from reading. Things that are not academic minded are the things that demand their attention. Pornography and other social matters, just to mention a few capture their interest. To add salt to injury they even use it to cheat during examinations. This is a very unhealthy practice that discourages learning and consequently make the system unworkable.

**Poor Attitude of Teaching by Some Lecturers:** The lecturer is the motivator. He directs through his teaching method and his pattern of teaching drives the students into consciousness. But once these qualities are missing in him as it is the case in some higher institutions of learning, the spirit of learning in some students may die. This is because he gives instruction. He is the Counsellor, an adviser among others. Very unfortunately, the penchant for money by some of the lecturers have retarded the speed of education on the part of the learners. A good number of the lecturers have strong desires for other things of interest outside the job. If government carries out investigation into the teaching schedule of some of the lecturers, it will shock government to know that some of them are worse than politicians. This is because some of them receive salaries they never worked for. According to Egbule(2000), "these days teachers are disillusioned and one wonders how we can get the best from them to effectively manage the teaching learning process. This dissatisfied state stems from poor pay, lack of promotion, lack of recognition etc".

**Drug addiction and violent behavior:** I had earlier mentioned that this unpleasant behavior cuts across both secondary schools and higher institutions of learning. However, it is more glaring in the latter. This is obviously because certain degree of autonomy is in favour of the student in the higher institutions with little or no parental monitoring. Both the males and female students indulge in unholy and dastardly activities in the higher institutions. Students take to drugs and alcohol as normal practice. When a habit of this nature goes unchecked for a long period of time, the overwhelming effect is catastrophic and dehumanizing. More regrettably, academic

activities suffer. Unwanted pregnancy, hooliganism and other such vices that are contrary to human dignity become a norm in the school environment. According to Okoh(2000) cited in Egbule(2000) "there is a general indiscipline in the school system. Violence among youths is on the increase, teenage pregnancy has assumed a geometric rate, extortion of money youths from younger students has taken a wider dimension". Truancy is escalating. The standard of education is assumed to be falling because of these varied problems facing the educational system and practitioners in it. Drug abuse has taken great dimension. If the above statement is correct, then it will not be hyperbolic to say that the higher institutions where higher education is pursued require total overhauling. According to traditional African values, it will be unmannered, uncultured and a sign of parental irresponsibility for a typical Black African child to use alcohol or other drugs (Maher & Daly, 2000).

**Secret Cult Membership:** Another conspicuous issue working against the progress of students in the higher education is membership of secret cults which some of the students belong. This occult group gets into their heads as they see nothing wrong in being a member. As a matter of fact, apart from not coming to classes, they see themselves first and foremost as above everybody including the administrator of the school and their lecturers. So, when it is time for examination, they expect to pass as they may want to threaten the lecturer with their occult behavior. Examination is the final test that shows a student record whether he is serious or not. More often seen than not, they do not excel. The results of the examinations reflect their naughty behaviour. Money (2013), sees examination as a predictor of students performance in school. In line with Money and Egbule (2002) acknowledged that examination is only possible if you can measure the learning that has taken place in the individual. The point to note is the examination which is the final basis for assessing the student, give a poor reflection of the student as he is often seen behaving like a tout rather than a student. In most cases, such student do not even graduate. If he ever graduates, he is a bad product to his family and constitutes nuisance to the society he

belongs.

**Blocking;** Blocking is a term in the higher institution that is refer to as bribe. It is the exchange of money, items in form of gifts between some of the students and lecturers primarily to obtain unmerited marks from the lecturer. In most cases, this unholy attitude is carried out by the dull and highly recalcitrant students. Even some of the intelligent ones have equally joined the bandwagon for fear of victimization by some of the desperate and wicked lecturers whose penchant for money is equally very high. Blocking is another form of examination malpractice. In some schools where the rules are enforceable, the perpetrators of such crime are severely punished. Some lecturers even loss their jobs, because it is a condemnable practice and the school's policy frowns at it. As aptly captured by Olayika (1995), examination malpractice is any act from which examination is programmed to derive illicit advantage over and above other candidates in respect of some given task or examination. Nsima(2006) sees it as an act of omission or commission which establishes rules and regulations on the conduct of examination to the extent of undermining the validity and reliability of the testand ultimately the integrity of the certificates.

**Sexual Harassment:** This is another terrible vice ravaging most higher education of learning. Some lecturers are mostly guilty of this. Many have gone to jail and consequently lost their jobs in course of soliciting for sex in exchange for unmerited marks. The case of professor Richard Akinyele and Monica Odewinge both of Obafemi Awolowo University(OAU), lecturer and student sex for marks saga that happened sometime in 2018is a vivid example of such unholy and bizarre practice in the higher institution. The Professor was found culpable by the school authority and sent packing. The law enforcement agent came after him and was sentenced to about six years imprisonment. These are some of the glaring issues that work against the interest of students in the higher institution. The case of the professor is just one out of the many occurrences that takes place in some other Universities. The implication of this is that integrity is eroded. Similarly, intellectual integrity has been absent from



contemporary Nigerian academic research/inquiry,(Ojimba,2014). cited in Cojer, (2014).

**The Penchant to Make Quick Money:** Students desire to make quick money while in school is a serious threat to their academics. No doubt, this may be tied to their economic foundation. But the reality on ground is that they are not the first set of people that started training themselves in school. As a matter of fact, task like this should be seen as a yardstick for good academic results. The reverse is the case as many are seen devising all various strategies to eke a living while in school, with poor result to show for it sometime. In most cases because of their unbridled level of quest for money, many of them do not attend classes. You see them in large numbers when examination time-table has been released. Some of them enter the examination hall unprepared and unkept. The quality of good student is completely absent in them. You could conclude at glance that some of them are wasting their time and limited resources in the quest for education. Jinna and Goyit (2011) affirmed that, "the ugly development has also been attributed to at least in part, to the escalating level of poverty which prevents the common man from patronizing bookshops and compels the middle class to buy only prescribed textbooks for their children at the start of every school session. However, the fact that even rich people are not known to be avid readers seems to implicate other factors that hinder the development of good reading habit"(cited in Kojgest,2011).

**Peer Group Influence:** The Influence of peer-group in the pursuit of higher education endangers the chances of graduating in the higher institution. Many of these students with bright expectations from home miss the mark when they identify with the wrong people as peer group. He that worketh with the wise men shall be wise; but compromised of fools shall be destroyed (Olukoya, 2007). This wrong company has destroyed the academic endeavour of many bright and intelligent students. Unfortunately, some of the affected students are from a well to do family. It is even worst with the category of persons sent abroad. Some may end up as smokers, drug addicts, womanizers and other such social whirligig that may make

them appear as deviants and social misfit in the society. Consequently, their educational carrier is lost and they end up being dependants to their parents and neighbours.

**Deadline over School Fees Payment:** The deadline of school fees payment by some school administrators has created terrible havoc in the school. Sometime, if not well managed could lead to riot of unprecedented magnitude. The point to note is that, the increase in payment of school fees in recent time is a very discouraging issue. It becomes an additional challenge to observe that while some of the students are contending on how to pay the money, the school authorities in a bid to make more money may impose additional fee tagged "defaulter" fee or late registration fee, which consequently leads to the closure of porter if students are unable to pay thereafter. This action created a terrible riot at the University of Port-Harcourt some years ago when a student of Management Sciences lost his life as a result of violent that involved the police. So, these are some of the serious issues that hinder learning of students in the pursuit of higher education in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of them that are unable to meet up with the deadline may end up carrying some of the courses over to the next semester as carry over. For those in final year, it becomes an extension.

### **Challenges of Higher Education in Nigeria**

There are plethoras of challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria. The following are some of them;

**Inadequate Staff:** Most higher institutions of higher learning are faced with shortage of personnel. More often than not, both lecturers and non-academic staff are in short supply. Consequently, student are faced with the challenge of not having enough lecturers in their subject areas. Besides, when it comes to the supervision of their project, the lecturer for the subject area may not be found. Even when found, the attitude of the supervisor towards the official job he or she is assign to, leaves much to be desired. There are instances where a supervisor may just go on sabbatical leave without even informing the supervisee. This has led to the abandonment of programmes by

the students. Another instance is when students who have graduated may not get their result on time before proceeding to National youth service corp (NYSC). Either a particular result is missing, or the non-academic staff whose presence required the endorsement of the student result may not be found in his or her office for close to a week or more and there is nobody to deputize for him or her.

**Bureaucratic bottleneck:** There is overzealousness of the staff towards the job. The air of arrogance displayed by some of the staff because of the relationship with either the head of the school or a notable politician is a challenge to students. This is obviously because they do the work at their convenient time without minding the distance and meager resources that is left at the disposal of students. Students have been made to spend a month pursuing their result because of the attitude of some of the overzealous staff. It is a different matter entirely if such staff is reported to the immediate head. The immediate head may not be able to address the matter because of the existing relationship between the junior staff and the head of the school. It is a very serious challenge that threatens the peaceful co-existence of higher education in Nigeria.

**Ill-equipped library and laboratories:** In some higher institutions, the state of the libraries and laboratories discourage learning. Most libraries and laboratories in higher institution leave much to be desired. A functional higher educational institution should be able to have a decent library and a functioning laboratory to carry out experiment for science, vocational and technical students. Credit must be given to TEDFund for their interventionist roles towards helping to fund some of these institution that appears weak to carry out some of the aforementioned duties. The intervention of the tertiary educational trustfund has helped in this direction. But even at that, the corrupt attitude of some of these school administrators in connivance with their loyalists has adversely affected the effort of TETFund in recent time.

**Parents' Interferences;** Some students' innate desire is to study the desired course in the pursuit of higher education. But, the unnecessary and frequent interference of their parents pose as

defend themselves when it comes to issues that required a test of their discipline, not to talk of national issues and to profound solution borne of altruistic motives.

**Unemployable Graduates:** Some graduates from some of our higher institutions today cannot carry out their functions in a working organization when given the opportunity to do so. There are cases of medical doctors that cannot efficiently carry out a successful medical operation on a patient. This may not be the fault of the student but the failure on the part of the higher institution that is unable to provide a functional library and laboratory system.

**Terrorists;** A critical examination of some of these youths that are involved in kidnapping today reveals that some of them are graduates. Although, not thoroughly bread but they confess that the frustration from their basic school arising from inability to meet the deadline of school fees payment push them into crimes to raise money and possibly buy books they could not get from the library, among others.

### **The Prospects of Higher Education in Nigeria**

The higher education in Nigeria that has been constrained by issues and challenges can still be improved upon through the following means;

Functional libraries/laboratories that will encourage learning and development are needed. When students learning is encouraged through the aforementioned means, a prospect of graduation and being independent are guaranteed. Thus, he has generated the basic skills through a functional library and laboratories.

Again, considering the problem of unemployment in Nigeria after graduation, most institution of higher learning have decided to include vocational skills in their curriculum. The idea is for the graduates to be independent once they graduate since the government jobs are not easy to come by. UNESCO (2009), recognized that revitalizing this factor is among the ways to improve economics opportunity for women and youths.

Lecturers should go beyond just teaching. In the course of

teaching, they should devote extra time to go into moral instruction or lesson that could help to motivate the students. And to disabuse their minds from engaging in naughty issues that may prevent them from graduating.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this chapter is that issues and challenges arising from higher education are anchored on multi-dimensional factors. Some of which have been exhaustively discussed in this paper. Again, the aim of students such as the ability to acquire learning will make him to be independent. Besides, he or she will emerge as an entrepreneur who will assist in the employment of labour seeking individuals among others. However, prospects of how to enhance the dilapidating and poor standard of higher education in Nigeria were equally considered. So, some of the issues and challenges that bother on poor learning habit of students, drug abuse and so many others were equally discussed exhaustively. It is left for parents and school administrators to keep advising and frowning at odious bargains that are contrary to human dignity. By so doing, the standard of learning will be enhanced. It is interesting to note that developed countries of the world are known for their rapid pace of development as a result of their level of education and exposure. Therefore, it is expected that when lecturers are engaging their students with existing examples of scholars, individuals that have helped to galvanize their nations into enviable position must be mentioned to encourage them in their fields of endeavour.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been advanced to ameliorate the issues and challenges arising from the pursuit of higher education in Nigeria;

It is a good thing to note that although, most higher institutions have included in their curriculum vocational and technical skills, effort must be made by government to empower graduates with reasonable amount of money as take-off grants in

their various fields of endeavour.

Students that are recklessly involved in drug abuse must be severely punished to serve as deterrent to others. This is because, more often than not some of the students caught in this reckless act are over pampered by their parents. So when they are caught by school authorities or security agents parents of these students quickly beg for their release and granted pardon.

Again, deadline for school fees payment by school authorities should be such that will give enough breathing space for students to pay the money, since the economy in recent time is biting hard on both the rich and the poor.

As much as possible government should see the need to always employ those graduating from higher institutions as part of their agenda. By so doing, it will help to reduce the rate of desperation for the pursuit of wealth by some of our youth and graduates.

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should assist graduates who would have suffered terribly to train themselves in the higher institutions. Such endeavour should be seen as a collective efforts since the consequence of not having something to do affects all and not one person in society.

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