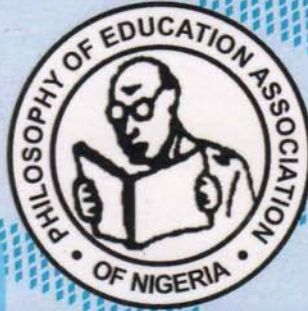


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**Evolution of Nigerian
Philosophy of Education**

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KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY OF NIGERIAN GRADUATES

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Abstract

This paper accentuates the fact and reality that there are many qualified graduates in Nigeria without jobs. Although governments, institutions of learning and organisations are responding to this social problem in myriad of ways, there is need to ask why the proposed solutions seem not to be producing the expected results. An argument that this position holds is that human capacity building has enormous power to solve the problem of unemployment when individual talents are allowed to be expressed rather than put prospective workers on the guise that some courses are more professional and profitable than others. The non-formal education possibilities, therefore, portend a more realistic solution to the problem of unemployment by collective appreciation of human being for who they are rather than make them serve as materials and machine for consumption only.

Keywords: knowledge, education, employability, lifelong education.

Introduction

Paper qualification suggests that it is possible for someone who has graduated from school not to be able to perform the task that the certificate says s/he can perform. This is because certificates can be acquired through fraudulent means of cash and kind to gain some sort of reward. It is also possible to acquire certificates legitimately without the capacity to perform tasks that are regarded as basic to the profession of the certificate or the degree holder. Evidences of this anomaly abound in Nigerian society. The reality of this problem is that there are auto mechanical engineers who cannot service their cars, and electrical engineers who cannot do the wiring of their rooms. University education in Nigeria has been attacked for producing graduates who are not employable, self employed or become employers of labour. In its bid to mend the lacuna between theory and practice, University education has included in its curricula, industrial training for undergraduates especially in professions that require practicals. Whether the time allotted is adequate and whether undergraduate pay appropriate attention to such training are other issues.

There are lots of agitations in Nigeria about the kind of education that the country needs for development. Technical and vocational training have been suggested as the panacea to the problem of graduates' unemployment and technological development.

Knowledge: Specialised or Generalised

While Gilbert Ryle's explanation of 'knowing how and knowing that' seemed to resolve the dualism between practical and theoretical knowledge, experiences with those who can perform tasks as artisans and craftsmen show that they lack theoretical knowledge to explain their performance. One of the features of progressive education that is gradually replacing liberal education is its emphasis on practical knowledge. University education in Nigeria following the tradition of British educational system was built on the belief that pure academic is superior to technical instruction. Traditional Universities in Britain opposed utilitarian and vocational oriented curricular to meet the demands of industries.ⁱ This interpretation of the educational system was what the policy of education sought to address. In spite of this, government has been blamed for adopting an adulterated British curriculum that is limited in scope, bookish and for examinationⁱⁱ

The need for a more functional education in Nigeria, on the whole, led to a total transformation and jettisoning of European liberal form of education which existed in Nigerian grammar schools in the first half of the 21st century.ⁱⁱⁱ Nigerian governments have made several efforts to promote science, technical and vocational education as a solution to the problem of unemployment. Some of these efforts are increasing the percentage of admission to Sciences, sponsorship of Science and Technology courses in foreign Universities through Education Trust Fund. Introduction of entrepreneurship courses in Universities, establishment of technical, vocational and skill acquisition centres by political office holders and international donor agencies as complementary to University education, intervention of National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP). University graduates have been encouraged by governments to register for skill acquisition and training programmes for employability but then 'these programmes are executed by limiting what should properly constitute the content of the activities of teaching and learning to narrow ends. Education, properly conceived, involves theoretical foundation on which skills are based'^{iv}

Since our society has become highly monetised and materialistic, *Think and Grow Rich*^v will be one of the most sought books sold by hawkers on the street. The writer avers that:

General knowledge, no matter how great it is in quantity or variety it may be, is of little use in accumulation of money. Despite the faculties that great universities have, most of their professors have but little money. They specialise in teaching knowledge, but they do not specialise in the organisation or the use of knowledge.

The missing link in all systems of education is the failure of educational institutions to teach their students how to organise and use knowledge after they acquire it.^{vi}

The missing link cannot be blamed on the educational institutions but on individuals' failure to continue learning. Perhaps he realised this when he said 'successful people, in all callings never stop acquiring specialised knowledge related to their major purpose, business, or profession. Those who are not successful usually make the mistake of believing that the knowledge acquiring period ends when one finishes school. The truth is that schooling does but little more than to put one in the way of learning how to acquire practical knowledge.'^{vii} Specialisation, no doubt, is the order of the day but the question is: how would people acquire this specialisation? Nigerian government and some people are attempting to make people specialists by narrowing the scope of higher education to make it professional without acquiring general education that University education specially advocates.

Re - conceptualisation of Education

The general description of education as a systematic process of knowledge, skill and attitudinal accumulation which results in positive change of behaviour and disposition would not discriminate between what is referred to in this paper as paper qualification or actual knowledge. Some other descriptions cast aspersions on equating education with schooling, indoctrination and mere instruction. These include:

'My mother said I must always be tolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people unable to go to school were more educated and more intelligent than college Professors (Maya Angelou)

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught (Oscar Wilde)

The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education (Albert Einstein)

Education is not preparation for life; it is life itself (John Dewey)

Education is what remains when what you have learnt has been forgotten (Lawson)

The above quotations are pointing us to non-formal and informal education and shielding us from formal education of schooling that most of us here are products of. Lehmann identified two misconceptions about education that threaten the quality of what is taught: 'the first is that there is a prevailing view that the more education, the more advanced a society is likely to be and the second is that education is determined by the number of hours spent in a classroom'^{viii}

Ivan Illich, in his 'deschooled society,' already said that schools are the major problems of the society. According to him schools take much of the expenditure from government to cater for very few and neglect the majority of people outside the walls of the school. For him learning needs only four channels for real learning. 'Learning webs are things; - machines, places, and events; people who serve as models for skills and values; peers who challenge and understand; an elder who exposes the learner to criticism.'^{ix} All these can exclude the wall of school. Perhaps, it was the reality that promoted the concept of lifelong learning and the statement of Alvin Toffler when he said 'the illiterates of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn unlearn and relearn'.

Diploma Disease

Diploma disease refers to the thirst for and acquisition of certificates through dubious means for job and self esteem while the individual does not have the requisite knowledge that the paper represents. *The Diploma Disease* was written by Ronald Dore in 1976. Though he has revisited some of his claims in 1980 by stating that diploma disease is not the same in all countries, some remarks have relevance to what we experience in Nigeria. He said:

The level of qualification required for any particular job tends to rise over time, because of overproduction of job-seekers (educated unemployed) and competition between professional bodies and employing organisations to 'tap the pool of talent' at the highest possible point. So there is more and more schooling (over and above the generally desirable extension of basic education) for reasons which have nothing to do with the actual knowledge acquisition necessary for *doing* jobs. Nor does it have much to do with personal development and self-fulfilment, or learning for its own sake, since a lot of the schooling is 'reluctant schooling' – the ritual acquisition of qualifications necessary to *get* jobs.

This quotation describes the situation in Nigeria. There are lots of educational activities going on but little development. Two money spinning businesses in Nigeria are founding churches and schools. Yet, these institutions have not brought about desirable changes. The lofty ideals of 'a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a great and dynamic economy; a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens'^x are the foundation for the National Policy of Education. Under the title Philosophy and Goals of Education, the policy says that 'there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.'^{xi}

Employability and the Problem with Technical Education in Nigeria

So many policies have been introduced to save the educational problems of Nigeria from its bookish curriculum but little has been achieved due to what many identify as poor implementation of the programmes. For example, the 6.3.3.4 system of education started its implementation in the late 1980s to replace the 9.3.4. Since the introduction of 6.3.3.4, there have been agitations to change to 1.6.3.3.4 and even revert to the old 9.3.4. Someone asked: is the Nigerian system of education British or American? That question is belated because policy makers as far back as 1969 curriculum conference wanted a Nigerian curriculum that can solve Nigerian problems. The question rather should be what is Nigerian in the new curriculum? Nigerian curricula have become eclectic in ideology but conflicting in conceptualisation of what the actual Nigerian idea of education should be.

This system leaves students confused by the time they are enrolling for University education. Technical and vocational education was meant for students who could not proceed to the senior secondary school and later University. Is it not possible for intellectually competent students to be technically inclined? Since, no student or parent wants to accept that failure at the early stage of life, they have been doing everything to get to senior secondary school and pass Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination for university education. Most Nigerian undergraduates students go to University just to have University education especially when they cannot get admitted for the courses of their choice.

In desperation to acquire a very good certificate or results some candidates in collaboration with their parents or guardians or invigilators or examiners are involved in various kinds of malpractices.

Employability and Learning to do

In a publication titled "Learning to be, the world of education today and tomorrow" UNESCO laid emphasis on lifelong education by defining it as:

the continuous and never complete development, changes, and adaptation in human consciousness that occur partly through deliberated action but even more as a result of the business of living, where learning may be intentional or unintentional that includes acquiring greater understanding of other people and the world at large based on four pillars of learning: learning to live together, learning to know, **learning to do** and learning to be.^{xiii}

The demand of technology is such that in a rapidly changing technology based world, initial education is insufficient to fit an individual for a lifetime's work especially in nations with inadequate skilled work force.^{xiii} Today the proportion of people continuing their education after the phase of compulsory schooling has grown enormously and this has changed the core curriculum in content and purpose.^{xiv} The changes in curriculum content and purpose have created two innovations:

First, a high proportion of today's University students are doing vocational courses. Second, the distinctions between vocational curricula and between the last years of Secondary School, the Colleges, the University for Industry and the real Universities are increasingly blurred. A good example of this is the courses that various IT companies run to train people for employment as users, operators or installers of their hardware or software. There is no question that those who complete these programmes are very employable. In the USA, they earn more than people with a B. Sc in computing.^{xv}

Knowledge economy emphasises application of knowledge. There is a movement from general knowledge to specialised knowledge. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe quoted by Alia Sabur (who three days before her 19th birthday, officially became the youngest Professor in the world) said that "Knowing is not enough, we must apply". In the application of knowledge those who are not competent, who only hold paper qualification cannot survive.

Despite the attraction of specialised knowledge, one wonders whether, in this age of economic meltdown, occasioned by increasing spending of government and individuals with its resultant outsourcing, excessive privatisation of public sector, and right sizing; it is specialised knowledge or generalised knowledge that could save Nigeria from diploma disease and unemployment. Of course, every country that will attain development needs both, but what is the principle that should guide individual choices? While suggesting increasing vocational, entrepreneurial, technical, agricultural, business biases in the pursuit of education, Ladipo captured the dilemma that students face.

In my opinion, functional education is what our Universities are with very debatable degree of success trying to achieve by placing less emphasis on the general discipline which are actually basic to all specialisations and running all manner of specialist or professional courses as well as entrepreneurship studies in response to market demands. I fail to understand why an accountant should not be able to have a good grounding in Economics first or a journalist have a basic degree in any language or discipline before specialising, or worst still a teacher acquiring a degree in what to teach before learning how to teach.^{xvi}

The then Bisi Akande led administration in Osun State, Nigeria sacked all Arts subject teachers for History, Yoruba, and Religious studies in his effort to promote Sciences. Parents have bought into this incentive to encourage their children and wards to offer science subjects. Despite all these efforts, most of our goods in Nigeria are imported. This makes one to wonder if these are the right ways of fixing the problem of employability. Another pointer to resolving the problem of access to University education and making courses marketable can be seen in the courses offered by private Universities. Nigerian society is made to see the choice of some courses as conscripting graduates to poverty after graduation.

'The failure of our society is that it cannot reason beyond its materially trapped mind that robs it of the dynamism of human intellect that promotes a knowledge-driven society.'^{xvii} The choice courses are referred to as professional meant to make graduates have immediate employment. Nigerians can answer the question of whether the rate of employability has improved since after the inception of private Universities in Nigeria. How many private Universities offer courses in Humanities such as education, classics and philosophy?

In some private Universities, there are increasing rate of first class and second class upper degrees because lecturers are made to remark their scripts to ensure that the students come out with good grades that they cannot defend after graduation. The way some of them go about their recruitment drive is even more worrisome. The agreement they have with financial organisations is that they should employ or accelerate their graduates' employment if those organisations will continue to enjoy their patronage. We all know that most of the private Universities are owned by our political office holders and corporate churches that wield much influence in the business world. The consequence of this is that our society, in a bid to solve the problem of unemployment, may be creating another problem of underperformance of workers.

Conclusion

If successful businessmen are not only those who studied business administration in school, successful leaders or politicians are not only those who read political science, successful musicians are not only those who studied music, great footballers are not only those who studied in soccer academy, then it is not only professionalising disciplines in higher education that would solve problems of unemployment.

In the non-formal sector, paper qualifications like degrees or diplomas are not required. Performance is the only requirement for patronage. The missing link is that education should not be confined to time and space. Education should trigger in us the curiosity for knowledge of self, others and society in which we are. Who says education or knowledge cannot be for its sake?

Nigerian society would be friendlier for would be workers and workers when performances on the job and community services are rewarded instead of certificate, title and position only. The widening gap between the rich and the poor especially in accessing quality education is disturbing. Equality and egalitarianism are written in Nigerian constitution and National Policy of Education but the reality is that Nigeria is far from being socially and economically integrated by the present educational system. It could be the disintegration that extends to qualification, actual knowledge and employability. Merit is sacrificed for place of birth and parochial associations of various degrees.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made to solve the problem with the gap between, knowledge, education and employability in Nigeria:

- a. The non-formal sector of apprenticeship and learning by acquaintance and learning any skill we desire are veritable means of solving unemployment problems;
- b. Identification of individuals' talents and ability is more important than just highlighting occupations that are marketable. This should start from home. Part of the dignity we should give to human person is that we should respect the job they do, no matter how menial;
- c. Every individual needs to acquire one form of technical skill or another. It is not meant only for those who cannot do well in school. Technical skills are life skills that help us to sustain livelihood;

Governments, non-government organisations and indeed all members of Nigerian society should truly provide enabling environment where business can thrive. The business pattern we observe in our communities is such that people do the same kind of business or run other people's business down. Access to initial capital should be given to all those who are interested in starting business by exchanging their valuables such as certificates and letters of recommendation with the capital. We hope that our basic amenities of water and electricity will be improved upon and made affordable to everyone.

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