APPRAISING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW

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Abstract

The paper attempted to provide an assessment of the value of quality education in Nigeria's education. It also attempted to philosophically analyze the concept of quality education. Under this, meaning of the concept of quality has been explored despite the fact that it has been perceived as an elusive and indescribable concept. The paper trashed out why as administrators of educational institutions, curriculum planners or policy makers quality is needed and why worries about it in our education system because you may be having aforementioned questions in your mind. The rationale behind analyzing the concept of quality education has also been justified. The paper went further to explore the issues and challenges that are militating against the provision of the quality education. Also, issues and challenges that brought about the need for quality education in Nigeria have been identified. Lastly, the paper found out that education is under-funded, quality teachers and quality educational facilities are inadequate. Therefore, the researcher recommends that 26% or above of National annual budgetary allocation should be allocated to education sector. Adequate professional and qualified teachers should be recruited and employed, adequate quality educational facilities should be provided as precisely stated in NPE to enhance its provision theoretically and practically.

Introduction

A well-rounded quality education is a key for intellectual enjoyment. People can also learn about critical thinking skills through effective education and enlightenment which help them study things and make rational decisions. There is a global consensus by scholars that access to quality education is the major prerequisite for freedom, socio-political, economic and technological advancement, progress and development. Also, the relationship between quality education and nation building is well established such that it is a key index of development. It has been documented that quality education improves productivity, reduces negative features of life, integrate the people as well as bringing empowerment. It is no doubt that Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument for social, political and technological development. This means nothing could be achieved without quality education. But unfortunately, providing quality education at all levels of our schools has been one of the major challenges facing our education system.

Philosophical Analysis of the Concept Quality Education

The concept of quality is difficult to define and is an elusive concept. Oxford dictionary of philosophy (1994)[1] defined quality education as a general term applicable to any attributes or characteristic whether individuals or objects belong to one or many things at the time. This implies that, the word quality, is an essential attribute and may be used to describe a type of species and character to peculiar things or classes which they belong. It has been described as 'a slippery concept' by some scholars. It is slippery because it has such a variety of meanings and the word implies different things to different people. While everyone is in favor of providing quality education, the arguments start when the concept attempted to be defined. A possible reason for the enigmatic nature of the concept of quality is that it is a dynamic idea.

The emotional and moral force that quality possesses makes it difficult to be defined accurately.

According to Peters,[2] quality is the basic and indispensable feature of a thing which differentiates it from other things. The presence of the characteristic to high degree implies that the thing has high quality. The British Standard Institution (2001) defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs." Under this, five different approaches have been identified by Green and Harvey (1998)[3], these are;

In terms of exceptional;
In terms of consistency;
As fitness for purpose;
As transformative:

Quality has a few central ideas around which the whole concept revolved: These are; quality as absolute, quality as relative, quality as process and quality as culture. 'Quality as a process' suggests that in order to achieve quality of a product or service, it must undergo certain processes and conform to the procedural requirement. Thus, quality is the outcome of system and procedures laid down for the purpose. In educational institutions, we are particularly concerned with the latter, though all other ideas of quality too have their respective places, but in this paper, the researcher's concern is on the first two notions.

So, why worry about quality in education? And why quality is needed in our educational system? As administrators of educational institutions, curriculum planners or policy makers you may be having aforementioned questions in your mind. Quality should be bottom-up approach and everyone should be conscious of why we should worry about quality of our teaching and learning process, school programmes and institutions themselves. Some of these reasons are;

Maintaining standards: As educational institutions, we are always concerned about setting our own standard and maintaining it continuously year after year. We should consciously make efforts to improve quality of our educational transactions.

Accountability: Each and every institution is accountable to its stakeholders in terms of funds used on it. Concern for quality will ensure accountability of the funds utilized and inform the stakeholders about taking appropriate decisions therefore quality can be considered as monitoring mechanism.

Credibility, prestige and status: If we are concern about quality, continuously not at once in a while, it will bring in credibility to each and every individuals product and to our educational institutions.

To improve employee morale and motivation: Concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. If quality system is in place, the internal processes will be systematic making every department complementing each other service domain and helping of developing internal satisfaction.

Satisfaction: Students, parents or sponsoring agencies of the educational institutions are now highly conscious of their rights or getting value for their money, time spent and to acquire employable skills to the need of our labour market.

Why the concept of 'quality education' need to be analyzed? Why quality is needed in our education system? So, let us examine the first question which says why we need to analyze the concept 'quality education.' Philosophical analysis is provided to concepts, issue or problem in order to bring clarification for better knowledge or proper understanding. So, the concept of quality education needs to be analyzed in order to remove conceptual confusion and to purge or remove ambiguity so as the concept would be clearly understood. The concept quality needs to be analyzed because under the title of conceptual analysis has been described as 'second order' activities which is usually concerned with language, the medium through which first order statements and questions about practice and policy are expressed, rather than first order statements and questions themselves. Under the language usage, the term quality education has been used by numerous scholars and educationists. Also, quality education needed to be analyzed for the purpose of elucidating and defining the concept, criticizing and examining it just like any other related concept, problems or issues in education[4]. The concept quality education needs to be analyzed for better understanding of its nature and discrete facts, if you are doing analysis you are breaking concepts or issues into pieces and trying to understand things in their discrete parts. This analysis is concerned with establishing distinction between concept and ideas by showing what is unique in it, it ends up by providing criteria which set a given concept apart from another.

So, why quality education is needed? Quality education is needed because it has to do with the quality in the educational input in its entirety. The quality of educational system can be assessed by how adequate and accessible the facilities and materials needed for effective teaching and learning are available in order to ensure that educational programs meet the national objectives[5]. Also, quality in education is considered as the baseline standard in education which can be measured on a scale of preference; hence quality is an expression of standard or the means by which a certain set of standards in education can be achieved[6].

What does quality means in the context of education? There are many definitions of quality education made by scholars and educationists testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept, but for the purpose of this study, few of such definitions will be stated. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality sometime have often been used synonymously. Quality education is the type of education designed to enable people to become the determiners of their own destiny and fortune in life[7]. Through such education, people's capacities are strengthened through exposure to and acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and appropriate social attitudes[8]. If a society expects quality manpower for rapid development and transformation, quality education is a must do affair because it can be used to address critical issues like the dignity of labor, quality leadership and committed citizenship, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, self-reliance and security[9]. Akinpelu[10] opined that education without quality can even be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value. Quality education according to UNICEF[11] includes:

Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported by their families and communities;
Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;

Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the area of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;

Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;

Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitude, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Learners who are healthy and well-nourished, as well known improved nutrition has been a key goal of all modern societies. Sound nutrition frees a society and its people to pursue goals that improve their condition. A healthy and well-nourished learner is more productive and able to focus his energy on the provision of goods and services associated with education in every highly well meaning society. Adequate nutrition is critical for normal brain development in the early years, and early detection and intervention for disabilities can give children the best chances for healthy development. Prevention of infection, disease and injury prior to school enrolment are also critical to the early development of a quality learner.

Learners will be ready to participate and learn with the full support by their families, communities and government. Parents' level of education, for example, has a multifaceted impact on children's ability to learn in school[12]. Parental education influences parent-child interactions related to learning. Parents with little formal education may also be less familiar with the language used in the school, limiting their ability to support their children's learning and participation in school-related activities. Environment that is healthy, safe and protective simply refers to well secured and conducive environment which is free from any dangers or hazards that will promote and facilitate educational activities in the teaching and learning process. Because the quality of any learning environment is strongly correlated with learners' performances in all school subjects accredited within the school system as opined by Jeanette and Miski[13]. Governments, Non-governmental organizations and the society itself should provide good and adequate resources and facilities that will enhance and facilitate the provision of quality education.

Quality in education refers to the scale of input in the form of funds, equipment facilities, teacher and learners alike and to the fact that the transaction and output of institutions in the form of their product are acceptable, desirable, beneficial, efficient and effective from the point of view of the government, society, private agencies and stakeholders[14]. Quality education is the one that is deliberately planned to ensure the social, political, economic and scientific progress of the country. This includes forming and integrating ideas to be directed towards achieving national unity and aimed at solving political problems or for the general development of the country. This education will help in developing learners' critical faculty and protecting him against sensationalism. It is education that will give some insight into moral, aesthetics and religious values and helps the learners to discriminate between values.

What are the Issues and Challenges that Brought about the Need for Quality Education in Nigeria?

Overcrowded classrooms: A classroom is said to be overcrowded in which the number of students exceed the optimum level such that it causes hindrance in the teaching- learning processes. Most of our classrooms are overcrowded. Focusing on the effect of this very serious problem prevailing in our country, one thing is very clear that teaching in such an environment, where the number of students exceeded the acceptable limit, effective teaching and learning may not be possible. It was found that overcrowded classes could have direct negative impact on students' performances[15]. The negative impacts were not only on students and their performance, but the teachers had to face different problems such as indiscipline, behavioral problems, health problems, and stress on teachers and increased in drop-out rate of students.

Gender equity: Gender equity is a serious challenge among the issues that brought about the need for quality education. Gender equity is ensuring an equal enrolment ratio of girls and boys and is the first step towards the fifth Education for All (EFA) goal. The full goal of gender equity also demands appropriate schooling environments, practices free of discrimination, and equal opportunities for boys and girls to realize their potential. Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities[16].

Education for All (EFA): Education for All (EFA) is a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015[1]. UNESCO has been mandated to lead the movement and coordinate the international efforts to reach Education for All. Governments, development agencies, civil societies, NGOs and the media are but some of the partners working toward reaching these goals. The EFA goals also contribute to the global pursuit of the eight MDGs especially MDG 2 on universal primary education and MDG 3 on gender equality in education. The Fast Track Initiative was set up to implement the EFA movement, aiming at accelerating progress towards quality universal primary education. Other issues and challenges that brought about the need for quality education in Nigeria include the teachers' condition, standard facilities, funds, assessment, etc.

Factors Militating Against the Provision of Quality Education in Nigeria

Several factors posed as challenges of quality education especially higher education in Nigeria. These factors are:

Inadequate Funding: Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of quality education in Nigeria. The problem of inadequate funding of education has been a bane to educational development in the country. The

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[1]. UNESCO, "World Declaration for Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs." At *World Conference on Education for All Meeting Basic Learning Needs.* Jomtien, Thailand. (1990): 9.

major constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian schools especially universities is financial constraints which made many academics and non academics to be working under difficult circumstances[17]. Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria were unable to build lecture halls, students' hostels, equip laboratories and workshops and payment of staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills[18].

Dearth of Teachers: Another big challenge to the attainment of quality education in Nigeria is lack of adequate qualified academic staff. Teachers are the hub of any educational system[19]. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. As rightly pointed out by Ukeje (2007)[20], without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of a changing world. Ajayi (1994)[21] seems to concur with the above when he noted that good teachers are needed for good education which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development. Despite the importance of teachers in the attainment of good education, our primary schools, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are short of lecturers to adequately handle teaching and learning activities.

Poor Policy Implementation: This is another challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor quality delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice. Our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers[22]. However, several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Such factors as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies, Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts, Deans of Faculty, Heads of department etc. when funds meant to deliver quality education is misappropriated or embezzled, the education which learners receive becomes worthless. Money that government votes for running the institution does not get to the institutions and the little that gets there is normally wasted by education managers[23].

Inadequate Infrastructure: Quality education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. For good quality delivery, these facilities must meet the minimum standard specified by the NUC, NBTE, NCCE, UBEC, SUBEB, etc. For quality teaching and learning, the class size must be small for effective students/teacher interaction. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures. Besides, the libraries in most institutions of higher learning in the country are stocked with obsolete text books, with current journals and text books lacking. For an institution to be strong academically, it must have a formidable library put in place.

Conclusion

Conclusively, quality education needs to be philosophically analyzed to educational administrators, curriculum planners or policy makers in order to maintaining standards, accountability, credibility, prestige and status of educational institutions and its products. It will also improve employee morale, motivation and satisfaction to our students, parents or sponsoring agencies of the educational institutions to provide employable skills to our labour market. As earlier pointed out, philosophical analysis is provided to concepts, policy, issue or problem in order to bring clarification for better knowledge or proper understanding. So, the concept of quality education needs to be analyzed in order to remove conceptual confusion and to purge or remove ambiguity so as the concept would be clearly understood. Under the language usage, the term quality education has been used by numerous scholars and educationists. Also, quality education needed to be analyzed for the purpose of elucidating and defining the concept, criticizing and examining it just like any other related concept, problems or issues in education[24]. The concept quality education needs to be analyzed for better understanding of its nature and discrete facts. As earlier mentioned, if you are doing analysis you are breaking concepts or issues into pieces and trying to understand things in their discrete parts. This analysis is concerned with establishing distinction between concept and ideas by showing what is unique in it.

Recommendations

Therefore, the paper recommends the following:

To genuinely address the issue of under-funding, government should allocate 26% or above of National annual budgetary allocation should be allocated to education sector as prescribed by United Nations under UNESCO.
Adequate professional and qualified teachers should be recruited through rigorous exercise and employment should be best on credibility and merit.
Adequate quality educational facilities should be provided as precisely stated in NPE to enhance its provision theoretically and practically.
Government should provide adequate, well-trained and qualified personnel in inspectorate services in primary and secondary schools in order to enhance good quality delivery.
School-based Management Committee (SBMC) should be incorporated in the supervision exercises.

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