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Assessment of Ethical Issues in Assessing Higher Education Standard in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper sought to find out a rediscovery of ethical issues in accessing higher quality education. The researchers adopted logical deduction and model statement in carrying out this work. The development of higher education in Nigeria was found impactful upon a range of stakeholders in both home and host countries. Many of the arguments against higher education in Nigeria were based on ethical issues, such as lack of academic freedom and civil liberties. Ignoring ethical issues may deny institutions the achievement of legitimacy, development, which can result in financial losses and reputable damage. Thus, the researchers recommended that there should be quality education which reemphasis on essential knowledge, inculcating positive values and mastering useful skills that will increasingly make life meaningful to all and sundry. On the issues of academic freedom, government needs to tolerate and encourage the holding of diverse and differing views on any issues as it is the hallmark of 'Academic Freedom'. The researchers concluded that all hands should be on deck for the development of higher education in Nigeria, having in minds the current ethical issues lacking in the higher education.

Keywords: Ethical issues, Higher, Education, Standard and Access

Introduction

In today's goal driven society, a lot of ethical issues in higher education has called for urgent discourse so that the vices of the ethical conduct will not affect the educational development. Education is an on-going process. We are always receiving and passing it on, adding something in the process, sometimes even taking certain things, impertinent from time to time, away from it while passing it on further. However, in higher education, there should be a requiring well defined ethics and values, well bound in visible legal outlines to regulate its exchange and administration. Since many people are directly involved in the ethical issues in higher education: students, faculty members, administrators, staff members and trustees. There are also people outside the higher education who have important roles in its operation: legislators, officials of granting agencies, endowers and parents of students. Authors will give a brief overview of the ethical issue in higher education in Nigeria.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are a problem or situation that requires a person or organization to choose between alternatives that must be evaluated as right (ethical) or wrong (unethical). Peng and Meyer¹ avers that "ethics" refers to the principles, standards and norms of conduct that govern individual and organizational behaviour. Ethical issues are a challenging task for any organization that operates nationally, because different stakeholders hold different views on what is, or is not, ethical: and what is ethical in one state may be unethical elsewhere. For example, in Nasarawa State University, Keffi, students, lecturers and governments might welcome the establishment of Ruga settlement in the campus, while home campus students and lecturers might oppose and consider it undemocratic or a threat to students' lives.

Types of Ethical Issues in higher Education

There is a long list of ethical issues in access to higher education according to Sadlak² but the following three seem to be particularly valid also in the context of academic values and ethical considerations at the policy development as well as institutional governance and management:

1. The challenges of universal access:
2. The role, organization and cost of research activities and
3. The institutional diversity and expansion of higher education providers.

The Challenges of Universal Access

Ojerinde³ observed that considering the access to higher education, in the late 1970s it was order to grow, a society needed to assure that at least 20 percent of typical college-bound age group (those of 18-23 year olds) should have access to higher education. It is now being argued that those numbers should now be at least doubled when looking at those countries which are leading in all kinds of competitiveness tests, it is easy to note that they enjoy participation rate of not less than 45 – 50 percent of the traditional higher education-bound age-group [and some of leading countries are approaching 70 percent]. To these numbers must be added rapidly growing number of part-time students who are coming to improve their skills and update their professional competences. If we can argue about numerical taxonomy we are entering into the era of universal higher education which main characteristics is high participation rate and in which there is a combination, or even merger, of traditional forms of study and those provided in response to lifelong learning needs. Without assuming any monopoly, it is nevertheless true

that only higher education institutions can produce such varied employees/citizens in large numbers.

However, it is not without its downside as it creates enormous pressure on the infrastructure of higher education establishment, brings new dimensions in governance, management and administration of staff and students, requires very different arrangements with regard to pedagogy and study evaluation. The sheer dimension of these issues does bring about not only changes in the physical and organizational façade of higher education but inadvertently enters into the very nature of the university as a societal institution, including its academic values and practices. Higher education institutions still are confronted with discrepancies between traditional and other forms of study. For example, even if there are no differences with regard to content of the given study programme and graduation requirements, there are perceptible difference between awarded diplomas for traditional and part-time or extramural forms of study offered by the same institution. Consequently, potential employers receive confusing signals about the academic standing of various forms of studies.

The role, organization and cost of research activities

The higher institution and its academic staff must be free to pursue whatever lines of research they deem fit. In its research activities also, its academics staff must be as objectives and scientific as is humanly possible. It must work against prejudice of all kinds, searching always for the truth. The fruits of the research and the knowledge generated should spread through publication of books and journals papers and by other suitable means. This can take place in an atmosphere of freedom where members of the higher institution can feel secure in their positions while they seek and communicate knowledge with vigor, total objective and candor. Adequate research facilities must be provides with a corresponded availability of funds to conduct meaningful researches. The second but not less important challenge relates to changes in the role and organization of research in higher education.

Kalusi⁴ observed that at least since the mid-19th century, research has been at the heart of the traditional university or equivalent to it other higher education institutions. It is in this context that academic community could reinforce its argument for the two pillars of its collective and individual existence, institutional autonomy and academic freedom. This claim came not from a clear cut monopoly on production of knowledge, but due to the need confirmation of those freedoms, both for the teacher/researchers and students, in order to assure an organic and mutually reinforcing mechanism of free circulation of knowledge between research and teaching.

The Concept of Higher Education

Sharma⁵ avers that World Declaration on Higher Education adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education (1998) higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training and research guidance at education institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities. It includes all the activities a given country deems to be higher education - not only those that take place within ordinary universities and graduate schools, but shorter term education and training courses (polytechnics, junior colleges, and various forms of technical specialty schools) that are 2-3 years in length, and even

correspondence courses that make use of information technology and are targeted at a broad population of students.

A Review of Ethical Issues in Accessing Higher Education

The most common moral, legal and ethical issues in higher education that are most often faced by the givers and receivers of education, along with the education institutes, management thereof and, sometimes, parents and guardians of the students are:

i. The Integral Moral Incompatibility

Some moral dilemmas arise from the varied goals and functions of academic institutions. For example, students may have moral concerns in choosing courses and fields of study, in choosing between the informal social education of college life and formal education and the study that colleges provide and sometimes in choosing between learning and for the acquisition of credentials, which are the ticket to jobs further education and opportunities.

ii. Ethical Issues on Educational Quality

Ali, Anselm and Zangshida⁶ say that "quality" is a most difficult concept to grasp. That is to say, virtually everybody recognizes it when it is seen but scarcely, anyone can specify its components or features with any degree of precision or confidence. But scholars seem to know what they are talking about; they regard quality education as having essential knowledge, inculcating positive values and mastering useful skills that will increasingly make life meaningful to an individual and his society. It is a process that will produce the kind of citizens needed by a country at any given time.

Quality education can also be defined as formal learning in schools, polytechnics and universities squarely related to individual well-being, competence, rights, duties, obligation, aspirations and national goals, a kind of integrated and holistic development of the individual and the society. Absence of quality education makes nonsense the ideal of individuals and society's developments leading most often than not to violence, poverty, unemployment, corruption, graft, unaccountability and political instability.

The cause and course are historically and vertically decipherable and horizontally clear and reducible. The dramatic fall in the quality of education is not an idea, not a myth but a reality which is a subject of contemporary history and sociological anthropology. We live by it and we live in it but paradoxically most of us pretend not to be aware while pointing accusing fingers to their next neighbors. The historical and the anthropological nature of the phenomenon which calls for a synthetic a priori surgery, objective and sensible analysis is simply a reminder of the myopic, narrow minded straight jacket and suicide driven complexity of western capitalism which, though is being strenuously combated by the inventors, the western and U.S.A governments, is irresponsibly and unaccountably being used or allowed to inflict unbounded mortal injuries on Nigeria and African countries.

As we swim through this turbulent ocean of search, cognition, apperception and rediscovery of our cultural destiny anthropological re-definition of history is one solution to lack of quality

education and another is the synchronic or structural analysis of the way out of the accumulated deposits of history, bourgeois elitism and satanic technology, or rather western monotheism, absolutism and imperialism. One monumental cause of disabled education in Nigeria is the failure of our successive governments to capture the price or negative side effects of western civilizations, and cushion them, as the originators have been doing, in the management of our educational and development policies.

If Nigerian governments received or followed western styled systems discriminatively, Nigeria would have benefited qualitatively from western civilizations, just as they did with our African Egyptian civilizations, and achieved a synthesis of the African and western to become one of the bastions of glowing and expanding cultures. There is a challenge between raising and maintaining quality education for the benefit of the people who work in the institution of learning and the public at large which is sought by the evaluation process for the wellbeing and happiness of all and sundry.

The function of higher education is to create human beings who are creative and therefore intelligent. We may take degrees and be mechanically efficient without being intelligent. Ali, Anselm and Zangshida⁷ posits that intelligence is not mere information; it is not derived from books nor does it consist of clever self-defensive responses and aggressive assertion. That is to say an effective managed higher institution enriches its recipient intelligence. Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, what is; and to awaken innate capacities. The authors are of the opinion that higher education should help us to discover lasting values so that we do not totally depend on others; it should help us to break down our national and social barriers instead of emphasizing them, for they breed hatred between man and man. Regrettably, the present higher education system in Nigeria is making learners docile and deeply thoughtless; though it awakens learners intellectually, inwardly it leaves learners incomplete, stultified and uncreative.

i. Ethical issues on institutional autonomy

According to Ali⁸, autonomy implies freedom granted to each university to manage its internal affairs without undue interference from outside bodies, persons or most especially, from government that in most parts of Africa sustains it financially. This entails the right of the institutions to govern itself insulated from the day to day interference of the state and the interplay of both civilian and military politicians.

The idea of institutional and university autonomy granted to institutional heads is so enormous that they can hire lecturers and professor without due process as seen in some universities where appointment letters are issued are only to people that are very close to Vice Chancellor without any advert or they will give appointment letters and then put an advert when already those vacancies are filled up, which critics says is lacking in international content in most universities in Nigeria.

Perhaps, the issue of institutional and university autonomy need to be revisited. This is the critical and dialectics juncture where most Vice Chancellors or Professors and those employed for lecturing without due process are found to be least qualified because those

who go for equity must go with clean hands. The deontological ethical problem of Higher Education in Nigeria is, therefore, that the fingers of the managements are dripping with filths and cankerworms totally devoid of equity, honesty and justice of knowledge power.

ii. Ethical Issues on Academic Freedom and Liberties

Academic freedom according to Gbari⁹ is the rivers of the intellectuals. It refers to the freedom of masters and scholars to conduct research, advance the frontiers of knowledge and disseminate the results of their research without hindrance. The right to hold any opinion no matter how unpopular, to express it freely and the tradition of not only tolerating but also encouraging the holding of diverse and differing views on any issues is the hallmark of 'Academic Freedom'.

In Ali¹⁰, moral conflicts are exacerbated when an institution faces difficult decision on how funds and benefit are to be allocated and which area of study will receive support are constrained by financial considerations. There are many challenges as loan and scholarship is difficult to access, unemployment is in the increase and temptation to cut corner violate ethical principles.

Scarce resources put pressure on academic institutions to find additional sources of funding. Aggressive fund raising can create moral problems such as misrepresentation of the potential benefits of contributions, investment in corporations or countries that offer high yields but whose products or policies may be morally reprehensible, acceptance of contribution that carry conditions either overtly or in form of secret agreements, and research contracts with corporations and government agencies that involves violation of principles of the higher institution would uphold.

iii. Ethical Issues on Competition

Some institutions of higher education compete with each other for the best students, whereas others compete for enough students to meet budgetary demands. As a result, that may exaggerate their strengths and benefits of incoming students. For example, they may mislead prospective students about their scholarship opportunities, and their educational resources. To this end, Robinson as cited in Ali¹¹ avers that most academic institutions are devoted both to passing on knowledge-the aim of teaching- and to the creation of new knowledge-the aim of research.

iv. Ethical Issues on the Appointment and Promotion

According to Ali¹² the appointment and promotion of teachers from the primary schools through the secondary schools to the universities has been drastically compromised since 1980s, in addition, Stake-holders of education in Nigeria have alleged that people from nowhere are lifted out of social or pecuniary interests and appointed lecturers whose primary contribution is to become professors and Head of institutions the way they were appointed. In the same vein, Kola¹³ observed that the traditional and excellence yardstick of "epistemic and cognitive endowment" decipherable from undergraduate school continuous assessment and final year results has been shortchanged by extraneous considerations and impunity. Strange category of "conversion" of administrative staff,

primary and secondary school teachers, staff relations and wards and so on and so forth into academic positions in the universities has drastically jettisoned the irreducible minimum for academic appointments. This, he added that “conversion absurdity” has impetuously and pathologically dissipated the rigorous intellectualization of the fetus of Higher Education in Nigeria.

Universities and other higher institutions are the ideal places for recognition of intellectual powers, creativity and pedagogy. Accordingly, George¹⁴ stated that the opposite is the case in Nigeria as battle-cry trails appointments in the universities and so merits are relegated to background. Quota and favoured appointments and professorship are most often the gifted for the battle-cry for positions.

Moreover, increasing population and expansion of number of universities are not being managed to correspond in geometrical proportions to the quality of education instead it has brought a rapidly alarming rate of educational corruption; as Babalola¹⁵ confirmed that the following phenomenon are some of the problems especially as it relates to accessing quality higher education in Nigeria:

- 1) Using of unqualified and untrained personnel in the inspectorate services which result in poor quality control and management.
- 2) Shortage of manpower in the inspectorate division.
- 3) Lack of adequate statistical compilation in the school system.
- 4) Inadequate funds and resources for inspection.
- 5) Political instability and frequent policy change.

From the above submission, it is glaring that if adequate measures are not taking to address these malaises then it will be impossible for Nigeria to sustain quality higher education as there will be half bake graduates with lack of innovative ideas by translating their wealth of knowledge into world of work by transforming Nigerian higher institutions to an enviable position.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a growing attention being accorded to discussions about assessment of ethical issues in accessing higher quality education in Nigeria. The discussion about ethical issues in accessing higher quality education is important as globalization implies that countries and their institutions bind themselves into a formal body but also into a network of laws and obligations which interact not only on basis of rules and regulations but also within certain set of values since it will influence the life-long decisions in higher education. but we also need to recognize that these typical developments have not only pushed higher institutions to assume more direct functions in the economic and social life of society, but have a profound impact on societal institution.

Recommendations

1. There should be quality education which should reemphasise on essential knowledge, inculcating positive values and mastering useful skills that will increasingly make life meaningful to all and sundry.
2. On the issues of academic freedom, government needs to tolerate and encourage the holding of diverse and differing views on any issues as it is the hallmark of 'Academic Freedom'.
3. Government should redouble their effort by providing adequate research facilities with a corresponded availability of funds to conduct meaningful researches.
4. Critical relevant stakeholders in educational sector in Nigeria need to reassess all forms of appointment and promotion of teachers in the universities whether or not it is based on merits. In addition, those saddled with the responsibility of appointment and promotion should be monitored by external bodies in order to sanitise the system of corrupt elements as fighting corruption is one of the agenda of Nigerian government.

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