

## **DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF CERTIFICATION OVER TALENTS/SKILLS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

By

**ABIOLA SODIQ ADEKUNLE**

Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan Nigeria

and

**OLUWATOSIN F. ALUKO**

Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan Nigeria

### **Abstract**

The development of any nation is essentially hinged on the level of its productive activities; however, it is believed that such activities are dependent on the abundance and optimum utilisation of available talents/skills. Previous researches have identified that Africa possess inexhaustible human and material resources, which due to poor management, have remained hidden, untapped and mismanaged. This has been demonstrated by the fact that when exposed to nurturing climate in advanced territories of Asia, Europe and America, Africans have continued to thrive. This paper argued that the Nigerian society has continued to experience underdevelopment in some sectors due to poor management of available resources. A core factor identified for this pathetic situation is the exclusive emphasis on certificate as a measure of competence and excellence in most establishments over talents and skills. It is quite appalling that individuals with formal education degrees are usually given priority over those with demonstrable talents even when such outshine their educated peers upon proper evaluation; thus, many talents have been made to waste away since they have no ‘white paper’ to tender. This paper recommended that talents and skills should be placed on equal pedestal as necessary tools for development, local talents/skills should be sought, nurtured, empowered and granted opportunities and bias towards talented people without formal education should be controlled. The research adopted a combination of methods; the analytic method helped clarify key concepts; descriptive method provided details on identifiable phenomena while the prescriptive method provided measures for improving the situation.

**Keywords:** Debunking, Myth, Certification, Talent/skills, Sustainable Development

### **Introduction**

African countries have continued to experience surge in the rate of underdevelopment over the years and this is traceable to factors such as lack of proper leadership, poor education standard, poor infrastructures, bribery and corruption, porous security system, exclusive dependence on foreign nations amongst others. However, this paper argued that Africa possesses more than enough resources needed for it to rise above challenges and grow to a world worthy of emulation if they are properly managed. Against this backdrop, it identified that several talents in Africa remained untapped and left to waste due to the elitist behaviour adopted in many African countries. Using Nigeria as a benchmark, it is argued that the emphasis placed on certificate as a measure of competence has adversely affected talented but uneducated individuals. Put differently, a lot of individuals with exceptional talents in different fields but

who have not had the opportunity to undergo western education have been sidelined from contributing to the development of their community. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this paper is not aimed at condemning formal education, however, the argument is that it is not always a measure of intelligence and creativity. Thus, this paper argued that equal opportunity should be provided for educated individuals as well as uneducated but talented ones if Nigeria really aims at promoting sustainability. It is believed that when opportunities are provided to develop and promote local talents, the nation would achieve rapid development compared to concentrating all resources to solely promoting certificated knowledge.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is hinged on the theoretical paradigm of post-modernism, a philosophical idea traceable to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. From structural analysis, the term is a compound of the words 'post' meaning 'after' or 'against' and 'modernism' which denotes 'modern or updated ideas'. Simply put, post-modernism denotes a shift of knowledge claims from or beyond what is obtained in the modern period. It is a philosophical position which rejects all attempts at modernism or modern elements of knowledge. It is a movement in the arts and literature which emerged as a reaction/rejection of the dogma, principles, or practices of established modernism.<sup>1</sup> Considering its historical antecedents, postmodernism is traceable to the end of World War II and featured the birth of human rights as well as emergence of philosophies such as existentialism, absurdism and nihilism. Carter<sup>2</sup> identified that postmodernism appeared firstly in the field of painting, architecture and civil engineering, before moving to philosophy, literature, art, technology and the rest of humanities. Today, the theory has invaded disciplines such as education, sociology, anthropology, science, economics, politics and culture. In recent times, it is reflected via a lot of social movements which has emerged demanding for the end of ideologies and exit of all standard measurement to create new sources of power in society.

Postmodernism is traceable to the works of scholars like Jean Baudrillard (who developed the idea of floating truth), Jacques Derrida (who invented Deconstructionism), German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (who declared the death of God), French intellectual Jean-Francis Lyotard (who proclaimed the impossibility of absolute truth) and Michael Foucault (who projected the liberation of man from power and the institutional power of the state).<sup>3</sup> It aims to undermine elements of Western metaphysics and the central arguments that dominated ancient and modern Western thoughts (such as language, identity, origin, and mind) by advocating a philosophy of anarchy, nihilism, disassembly, and disorder. It also aims to abandon traditional concepts and tools in the analysis of society and state relations (such as social class, ethnic/cultural conflict, party representation and associations between citizens and respective state institutions and their access to civil rights). Similarly, it is characterised by denial of all assumptions of modernism such as the pursuit of the ultimate truth and knowledge; advocates of post-modernism argue that the pursuit of truth is the largest human error committed in the course of scientific and practical goal. They also rejected the idea of

---

<sup>1</sup>Dictionary.com. *Postmodernism*. Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/postmodernism>, 2016

<sup>2</sup>D. Carter, *Literary theory*. USA: Oldcastle Books. 2012

<sup>3</sup> A. Elaati, *Postmodernism Theory*, 2016.

representation of one class by others especially in politics because of the differences in each individual as well as in their culture and orientation.<sup>4</sup> Related to this research, it is believed that the Nigerian society should adopt a postmodern orientation by detaching itself from the generally held view that possession of certificate indicates the real test of individual's competence and ability. It is argued that the contemporary Nigerian society should transcend the common norm of promoting certification over talents or skills of individuals if it really aims at attaining sustainability. This is premised on the assumption that there are lots of individuals who possess abundant talents which remain untapped because they are considered not properly certificated. Thus, it is argued that emphasis should be placed more on discovering and nurturing such talents alongside their certificated counterparts in order to provide a path for improved creativity in all sectors of the country and facilitate sustainable development.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Debunking**

The term is derived from the combination of prefix 'de' meaning 'remove' and 'bunk' meaning 'nonsense'. To debunk something therefore means to take the bunk out of it or prove that it has been exaggerated too much to be true. Basically, debunking can be conceived as an attempt to remove nonsense from something or to show that an idea/belief is not as good as people think. It can also be viewed as the attempt to show that an idea is less important or true than it has been made to appear.

#### **Myth**

This refers to stories from ancient times which aim to explain natural events or state the causes of things. They are well-known stories which were made up in the past to explain natural events or to justify religious beliefs or social customs. Such stories basically lack truth-value but are conjured in order to at least give explanations to unknown causes of things. Popular examples include Greek and African mythologies on creation of the world.

#### **Certification**

The term is derived from the word "certificate" and could be conceived both as a process and as an object. In the first sense, it refers to the act of certifying or giving certificates/documents to a person to demonstrate completion of a course/programme of education and prove his/her competence. It also refers to the process of giving someone or something an official document that says they are allowed to do a certain job or that something is of good quality. In the second sense, it refers to designated credentials earned by an individual to verify their legitimacy and competence to perform a job. Such credentials usually feature the personal details of the holder, type and duration of training as well as demographic information about the issuer. It is usually awarded only after the holder has passed the proper assessments administered by the recognised institution issuing it. Such credentials are important because they promote competitive advantage for the holder, demonstrate their efficiency, define their professional credibility, equips them with earning ability and provide avenue to expand their knowledge and skills.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. pp.3-4

<sup>5</sup>Indeed Editorial. *What Are Certifications? Definition, Benefits, Types and Examples*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-certifications>

## **Talent**

This basically refers to the natural ability or special endowment to do something well above others. It also refers to an individual endowment, skills or aptitude which makes him/her capable of performing exceptionally at a task better than others. Such capabilities are usually meant to be identified and developed in people who possess them in order to ensure that they reach their full potentials. They are usually demonstrated through several creative activities such as writing, singing, dancing, painting, sports etc.

## **Sustainable Development**

The term can be properly delineated by analysing the terms ‘sustainable’ and ‘development’. Sustainable denotes something that is used in a way that does not harm the environment and made available for future generations. Development refers to the advancement in the ways of doing things or operating a society. Sustainable development refers to the situation in which a society is properly developed to take care of its citizens and promote the welfare of the present and future generations. According to International Institute of Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup>, sustainable development is a form of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The term was introduced by Harlem Brundtland at the first Earth Summit known as the “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development” which was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (June 3–14, 1992). The conference was aimed at reconciling worldwide economic development with protection of the environment by promoting the use of nonrenewable resources.<sup>7</sup> Plausibly, in order to promote sustainable development, the United Nations Organisation in 2015 spelt out 17 key Development Goals which nations of the world are expected to pursue if they really aim to promote sustainable development. These include poverty eradication; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals. The SDGs are designed to promote social, political, economic, health and educational development as well as gender equality.<sup>8</sup>

## **History of Certification in Nigerian Education System**

Nigerian education history is comprised of three stages namely; pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. The pre-colonial era was comprised of indigenous education and extended to Islamic education. The indigenous form of education existed in Nigeria before the 1840s and was taught without fixed curriculum contents or location. Children were taught practical skills that were necessary depending on the needs of the local community and general society. Children embarked on this form of education in tender years starting from two to three years

---

<sup>6</sup>International Institute of Sustainable Development. *Sustainable Development*. 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development>

<sup>7</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica. *Sustainable Development*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sustainable-development>

<sup>8</sup>United Nations Development Programme. *Sustainable Development Goals*. 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>

and were expected to belong to an age group through which specific duties could be assigned to them such as clearing brush or sweeping lanes. As they grew older, they were given specific tasks depending on their sex; boys were taught farming or more specialised tasks, (such as drumming and wood carving) while girls were taught domestic skills and trades. The boys would also enter into apprentice-style relationships with master craftsmen, and continued learning for lengthy years until they were deemed qualified enough to become independent upon exposure to ranges of tests and challenges.<sup>9</sup> However, it could be established that indigenous education offered no form of certification to signify completion of learning experiences.

Proceeding to Islamic education which was much prominent in the northern parts of Nigeria, children were taught purely Islamic religious education before the British arrival in the 1840s. Each Muslim community had a Mallam who taught children as early as 5 years old the teachings of the Qur'an and the Arabic alphabet at elementary level. In larger cities, communities set up schools that also taught science and Mathematics. Upon the complete memorisation and mastery of the Koran by students, special celebration known as "Walimat Ceremony" was conducted to mark the end of basic education. At the secondary school level, students were introduced to variety of subjects like Arabic Grammar, Hadith, Literature, Poetry, Rhetoric, Islamic Law and commentaries on the Koran. At this level, students were taught by many Mallams and are prepared for acquisition of higher Islamic knowledge. At the post-secondary stage, students were taught by more knowledgeable Islamic scholars, Imams and Alakalis are exposed to courses like Grammar, Syntax, Theology and interpretation of Islamic Laws (Shariah). Upon completion of this stage, it was identified that students were presented with certificate or license known as "Ijaza" which enables him to practice either as a teacher, Imam or Alakali. Therefore, it could be identified that there was provision for certification in Islamic education.<sup>10</sup>

Moving to the colonial era, education in Nigeria proceeded with the coming of the British and American missionaries in the 1840s. British missionaries introduced the first form of western education to Nigeria when they started the first primary school in 1842 and 9 years later, the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School was opened by Christian Missionaries in Lagos, becoming the first secondary school to open in Nigeria. The earliest form of education was mainly focused on teaching Christian doctrines in conjunction with the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). However, upon complaint by the people and demand for a better form of education, vocational subjects such as Carpentry, Brick-making, Printing and Masonry were introduced. Subsequently, the demand for tertiary education by the educated elites led to the establishment of a Teacher-Training College (St. Andrews College of Education, Oyo) in 1896, a vocational centre in Abeokuta in 1856 and the first Nigerian university (University of Ibadan) in 1948. At the same time as the public schools and universities were being formed, many private schools were founded and built to provide a

---

<sup>9</sup>E. Andrew, *History of Education in Nigeria*.2022. Retrieved from <https://www.unicaf.org/history-of-education-in-nigeria/>

<sup>10</sup>G. Akanbi, *Historical Development of Education in Nigeria: An Introduction*. Nigeria: Odumatt Press, 2010,Pp.27-28

multitude of choices for the different social classes in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, it could be established that the colonial form of education made provision for certification of students upon the completion of each level of education. This can be justified with the provision for certification of teachers identified in the Education Ordinance of 1887 and registration of teachers in the Education Ordinance of 1926 and 1948. Another justification is the evidence from the 6-3-3-4 system of education which was adopted where progression to the next stage is allowed.<sup>12</sup>

The post-colonial era of Nigerian education inherited the 6-3-3-4 system and operated it until 2008 when the 9-3-4 policy was developed. This system consists of 9 years of basic education, 3 years of secondary school education and 4 years of tertiary education. The 9-year basic curriculum consists of lower basic education, primary 1-3 and junior secondary classes 1-3. When a student completes primary education, they receive a Primary School Leaving Certificate, and students that pass the entrance exam to gain entry to secondary school are awarded a Basic Education Certificate. Secondary School students are able to choose from formal and vocational education options and exposed to core subjects like Mathematics, English, Civic Studies and Entrepreneurial Studies as well as departmental subjects across different areas of study such as science, arts and business. Vocational education offers the students option to gain skills in areas other than those of the formal education curriculum, such as hair styling, crafting and fashion designing where certificates are issued upon completion. Likewise, upon completion of secondary school, students need to pass the senior school examination, which is prepared by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) or the National Examination Council (NECO) as well as the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) to gain admission into Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, it is to be noted that the goals of each aspect of tertiary education was quite different from the other; while the university was structured to ensure that the students are prepared to contribute towards national development and promote entrepreneurial spirit in students, Colleges of Education are aimed towards developing students who want to become competent teachers; also, Polytechnics were structured to provide exclusive hands-on approach to teaching students who want to acquire proper skills in aspects of Engineering, Industrialisation or Economics.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the contemporary Nigerian system has continued to witness crises resulting from the failure to fully implement the provisions of contemporary educational policy that each child should be placed into educational institutions according to their abilities. This is evident in the continuous desire by all to pursue tertiary education and get certificated in order to gain access to the competitive employment opportunities available. The impacts of this would be discussed in the next section.

### **The Impacts of Excessive Emphasis on Certification on Nigerian Development**

The Nigerian society has continued to experience a huge slide in several aspects of its development plans due to excessive emphasis on the quality of certificates. This has manifested in several ways and need to be addressed before the situation gets uncontrollable. A

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. Pp. 32-35

<sup>12</sup>G. Akanbi, *Historical Development of Education in Nigeria: An Introduction*. Nigeria: Odumatt Press, 2010. p.36

<sup>13</sup>E. Andrew, *History of Education in Nigeria*. 2022.

fundamental effect of this menace is the continuous surge in the rate of examination malpractice. It could be argued that the desire for certificate over skills is one of the reasons behind the increased rate of examination malpractice and other vices in Nigerian educational institutions. Since the contemporary Nigerian society places premium on the grades of degrees as a measure of intelligence and competence, average students resort to engage in examination malpractice as levelers to achieve excellent grades required to make them employable and compete with other brilliant students upon completion of their studies. It is alarming that the menace of examination malpractice has gone beyond tertiary educational institutions and has become more prevalent in secondary schools especially during external examinations. Unlike in the past when students tended to hide the acts, now they advertise them with pride and even with assistance from their parents, teachers, school administrators and examination officials. Prevalent acts of malpractice include impersonation, leakage of questions, tampering with results and bribing of invigilators and security personnel charged with supervising examinations. Providing factual evidence, it could be identified that the West African Examination Council (WAEC) published the names of schools who were evidently involved in examination malpractice in the May/June 2022 examination diet throughout the country and sanctioned them accordingly. Precisely, 61 schools were reportedly sanctioned in Kogi state<sup>14</sup>, 50 schools in Oyo state<sup>15</sup>, 35 schools in Rivers State<sup>16</sup> and 46 schools in Lagos State<sup>17</sup>.

Similarly, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) recently provided evidence of alleged falsification of results by some students who took the 2023 examination. According to Premium Times News<sup>18</sup>, the incidence of falsification of JAMB results has gone on for years, however, they have not stirred up much public outcry like the recent controversy between the admission board and a candidate, Miss Mmesoma Ejikeme (a student of Anglican Girls Secondary School (AGSS) Nnewi, Anambra State) who was alleged to have inflated her examination scores from 249 to 362 and declared herself as the highest scoring candidates to claim unmerited favours from influential citizens and government officials before she was apprehended. The report also identified that several students were involved in the act in 2019; it was identified that five students were caught and reprimanded; Ifesinachi John inflated his scores from 265 to 380, Kingsley Unekwe from 201 to 269, Ada Eche from 153 to 290, Cletus Kokowa, from 162 to 206 and Rejoice Mordifrom 164 to 264. These incidents are confirmed to have been carried out in collaboration with the candidates' parents or with private examination agents who normally charge substantial fees for their services.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>A. Omole, *WAEC Sanctions 61 Secondary Schools Over Examination Malpractices In Kogi*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://leadership.ng/waec-sanctions-61-secondary-schools-over-examination-malpractices-in-kogi/>

<sup>15</sup>W. Adebayo, *WAEC Delists 50 Secondary Schools Over Examination Malpractices In Oyo*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://leadership.ng/waec-delists-50-secondary-schools-over-examination-malpractices-in-oyo>

<sup>16</sup>O. Ofiebor, "Examination Malpractices: WAEC Bans 35 Schools in Rivers (full list)" *PM News 21 March. 2022* Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/pmnewsnigeria.com/2022/03/21/examination-malpractices-waec-bans-35-schools-in-rivers-full-list/%3famp=1>

<sup>17</sup>Ngschoolz, *WAEC Sanctions 60 Schools In Lagos Over Exam Malpractice*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.ngschoolz.net/waec-sanctions-60-schools-in-lagos-over-exam-malpractice/>

<sup>18</sup>*Premium Times News*, 5 July, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/608129-flashback-five-times-jamb-caught-candidates-who-falsified-their-utme-results.html>

<sup>19</sup>Q. Suleiman, "Flashback: Five times JAMB Caught Candidates Who Falsified their UTME Results", 2023.

Another problem resulting from excessive emphasis on certificate over skills in Nigeria is the prevalent rise in the rate of certificate forgery. This has allowed crooks and unqualified individuals to earn undeserved favours using fake qualifications. On multiple occasions, reports about certificate forgery by top government officials and important dignitaries appear in the news. Notable examples include Salisu Buhari (Speaker of the House of Representatives in Nigeria from 1999 to 2000) who was impeached on the grounds of falsifying his age and educational qualifications; Kemi Adeosun (former Minister of Finance) who was forced to resign after she was detected to have forged her NYSC exemption certificate in 2012, Christian Abah (member of the House of Representatives representing from Ado/Okpoku/Ogbadigbo Federal Constituency in Benue State) who was forced to step down in March, 2017 after being detected to have submitted a forged academic certificate to INEC and Peter Mbah (Enugu State Governor-elect) whose NYSC certificate submitted to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was confirmed not to have been issued by the Director General of the NYSC.<sup>20</sup> It is argued that such issues have had devastating effects on the educational sector as the rate of confidence in the country's certificate has dwindled down to the international scene. This spells out the reason why Nigerian students are usually subjected to rigorous examinations upon migration to developed nations in order to decide their level of competency and prove whether or not they can defend the certificates they hold.

Similarly, it could be identified that excessive emphasis on certification has resulted into under-utilisation of available talents and increased rate of unemployment and underdevelopment. It could be argued that several talented and competent people have been denied the opportunity to contribute their quota to the development of the country due to the perception that they are 'uncertificated' and thus 'unsuitable' to fill in available job position. However, at several instances, it has been proven that even many 'certificated graduates' lack the skills for coping with the rigours of the professional world. This problem is observable in both public and private sectors of the economy. For example, it could be demonstrated that a lot of certified graduates of Mechanical Engineering struggle to cope with job puzzles which a public perceived 'Uneducated Mechanic' who has never had formal training in the engineering field would easily unravel. Similarly, in the field of creative arts, several talented individuals have proven that being certificated is not essentially the sole measure of excellent performances. The Nigerian entertainment industry could boast of a lot of people who had no professional experience in fields where they have excelled or even perform better than most people who are professionally trained in such fields. This appears enough to demonstrate the need to deviate from excessive emphasis on certification in such fields before granting opportunities to people. In addition, the excessive emphasis on certificate has resulted to the denial of the political rights of some citizens who possibly could have blessed the nation with their remarkable ideas. The Nigerian constitution requires that the minimum qualifications needed for holding most political positions is Secondary School Leaving Certificate. This implies that certain

---

<sup>20</sup>F. Ugwu, "Top Politicians in the Web of alleged Certificate Scandal" *Daily Post News*, May 24, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/dailypost.ng/2023/05/24/top-politicians-in-the-web-of-alleged-certificate-scandal/%3famp=1>



individuals who even though may be very intelligent and possess political charisma would be denied chances to hold positions due to lack of academic qualifications.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the emphasis on certificate during recruitment processes in government and private organisations have rendered people less productive and certificate-centred. This is because most students have been conditioned to focus only on cognitive contents in order to graduate with exceptional grades or certificates which is required to acquire lucrative jobs rather than look inwards to developing their talents or skills. Hence a lot of talents which could have promoted sustainable development have been allowed to be buried away. According to Kong-Kol<sup>21</sup> in spite of all the human and material resources available, Nigeria has not fully utilised them for its development compared to developed nations in Europe and Asia. This is because it is overpopulated with a larger percentage of unproductive and unskilled people as ‘most youths already have the mentality that all they need to succeed in life is a certificate, not the skills and technical know-how of doing things.’ Aririah<sup>22</sup> identified that the exclusive emphasis on certificate explains why Nigerian graduates lack employability skills which are needed to survive in the labour world as most students already have excessive confidence in certificates they hold and do not consider entrepreneurship skills as worth having even though implemented in the school curriculum. He also noted that most students only read to just pass their examination and come out with a high CGPA without being equipped practically or exposed to the reality of life situations. Even graduate students consider it degrading to learn skills or take up a skill-oriented jobs simply because ‘they are graduates’; a notion which is untenable in developed countries of the world where possessing a skill or trade before graduation is compulsory. In addition, he identified that most recruiters in Nigeria request that applicants must possess some level of work experience with some years of practice without giving room for fresh graduates to even learn the ropes of the job before perfecting in the job roles and this has worsened the situation. Based on this, it is pertinent to identify some strategies which could help curtail the situation and improve on the status quo.

### **The Way Forward**

From the discussions above, it is important to provide some suggestive measures to remedy the status quo in order to ensure that the Nigerian society experiences positive transformation. Basically, it is argued that that there should be conscious effort to de-emphasise the usage of certificate only as a measure of competence and employability. This would help to prevent the reckless drive towards attaining excellent certifications without proper skills just to stand a chance in the competitive labour market. Thus, it would allow people more opportunities to develop their skills to fit better to key job responsibilities. According to Kong-Kol<sup>23</sup>:

---

<sup>21</sup> B. Kong-kol, ‘Prioritising Skills, Not Certificates Can Push Nigeria To China’s Track’ *Daily Trust News*, September 30, 2021, Available at <https://www.membership.dailytrust.com/prioritising-skills-not-certificates-can-push-nigeria-to-chinas-track/>

<sup>22</sup> C. Aririah, *10 Reasons Why Nigerian Graduates are Unemployed and Unemployable*. 2021. Available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.afterschoolafrica.com/55704/10-reasons-why-nigerian-graduates-are-unemployed-and-unemployable/amp/>

<sup>23</sup> B. Kong-kol, ‘Prioritising Skills, Not Certificates Can Push Nigeria To China’s Track’ *Daily Trust News*, September 30, 2021

In Nigeria for example, we will hear an advertisement is placed looking for degree holders in some cases upper credit. This shows that our emphasis is placed more on paper, not what the applicant could offer after employment. Times without numbers, I have come across those who are not degree holders or degree holders with lower grades who function more than those with the second class upper or even first class.

In addition, it is argued that there should be proper provision for the development of the education curriculum to fit into the needs of the immediate environment and in line with national aspirations. This would help motivate learners to focus especially on acquisition of knowledge content once they realize that it is exclusively related to their immediate environment and future aspirations. The Vanguard Newspaper (July 17, 2014) reporting the words of Engr. Babatunde Adewale Odufuwa (Chairman, Governing Council, Lagos City Polytechnic), during her eighth convocation disclosed that there is a need to resolve the disconnect between the products of tertiary education system and the skills they possess by focusing on Research and Development, manufacturing and industrial growth for exports rather than projects which are not employment-generating. He recommended that “Nigerian educational system must be home-made to reflect the needs of her environment and learn from the mistakes of developed countries.” Odufuwa<sup>24</sup> reiterated that the Nigerian education system should aim to produce teachers and artisans who are well educated in the use of their skills to serve and support the graduates of various disciplines.

Odufuwa<sup>25</sup> also reiterated that there is a need to promote entrepreneurial spirit through the re-opening of vocational training centres for artisans. This will assist in enhancing the delivery of professional skills to learners via semi-formal education and set them on the path to self-reliance. He proceeded to recommend training of semi-skilled labours by updating their education through in-service training, industrial attachment, seminars and workshops where modern techniques and knowledge will be acquired. According to him:

It is the entrepreneurs that make things happen in an economy. They are the drivers of the economy and the creators of wealth. An economy can only be as robust as its entrepreneurs. Therefore, if we must make progress in this economy, our private sector would have to play a major role. The public sector would also have to create the enabling environment.<sup>26</sup>

In agreement with the above position, it is suggested that if Nigeria aims to achieve sustainable development, the education system should be modified to promote the development of lifetime skills in students during undergraduate years rather than mere inculcation of literacy skills and decoration with academic certificates upon graduation. This would help prevent excessive focus on developing only certified graduates whose learning is focused mainly on cognitive knowledge at the detriment of the other domains; such a move would ensure an all-round education development in students. It would also ensure proper development of students into

---

<sup>24</sup>D. Adesulu, ‘Odufuwa-We Need More Skills than Certificates in Nigeria’ *Vanguard Newspaper*. July 17, 2014 Available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2014/07/need-skills-certificates-odufuwa/amp/>

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

functional, creative and rational individuals who can contribute to the development and progress of the society and the nation at large. This can be properly restated thus:

Schools should be designed not only for learning but for thinking. Schools and colleges are being asked to produce men and women who can think, make new scientific discoveries, find adequate solutions to impending world problems, who cannot be brainwashed, men and women who can adapt to change and maintain sanity in this age of acceleration.<sup>27</sup>

Kong-Kol<sup>28</sup> also suggested a review of the educational system to ensure that the developmental framework and ideology of acquiring practical knowledge imbibed by developed nations is reflected. He noted that Nigerian youths should be developed to become creative and innovative so that they will be self-sufficient as observed in developed nations. He argued that 'It is high time for Nigeria and indeed Africa to emulate countries like England, America, Germany, Japan and China by prioritising the practical knowledge of students (what they can offer after graduation) not their certificates.' According to him:

It is good to note that the secret behind the success of the developed countries is that their educational institutions and places of work value skills more than theory and certificates in teaching and recruitment. They graduate practitioners and talented engineers but the reverse is the case in Nigeria and some African countries. We graduate mostly certificate holders and job seekers. Nigeria has not achieved much in raising people's productivity and technological advances because the system focused more on theory rather than practical. There is a need for a total overhaul to experience a change.<sup>29</sup>

In the long run, it is recommended that instead of building more universities and graduating thousands of job seekers, Nigeria needs to embark on the building of skills acquisition centres across the country so that citizens will be turned to job providers. These establishments would help to develop skills in youths rather than focus on their certificate grades in taking employment decisions. In attempt to corroborate this position, the earlier experiences of Kong-Kol demonstrates a decline in the rate of skill promotion in the Nigerian communication sector. According to him:

While growing up in my village in the late 90s, I was curious to know the criteria for one to become a journalist with the international media organisations such as the BBC, VOA and DW because I developed an interest in becoming a journalist right from my childhood. I discovered that in recruitment, these organisations are after nothing like certificates but skills as most of their staff were taken from radio stations in Nigeria. Surprisingly, I came to understand that most of them are not degree holders but skill holders. Their professionalism earned them employment.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>D. Adesulu, 'Odufuwa-We Need More Skills than Certificates in Nigeria' *Vanguard Newspaper*. July 17, 2014

<sup>28</sup> B. Kong-kol, 'Prioritising Skills, Not Certificates Can Push Nigeria To China's Track' *Daily Trust News*, September 30, 2021

<sup>29</sup>Ibid

<sup>30</sup> B. Kong-kol, 'Prioritising Skills, Not Certificates Can Push Nigeria To China's Track' *Daily Trust News*, September 30, 2021

In conclusion, it has been identified that Nigerian tertiary institutions release about 600 000 graduates each year without a corresponding provision of jobs for them. It is suggested that the Nigerian educational system should be developed in a way to accommodate different degrees of talents and skills and ensure that people are not just evaluated based on their academic competence alone. In other words, emphasis should be placed on individual's capabilities, skills and talents rather than on qualifications or certificate held alone in order to retain the best talents and foster sustainable development in the country.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the idea of certification in Nigerian educational system starting from its evolution. It has been identified that although it was nonexistent within the framework of indigenous education, the issuance of certificate is traceable to the pre-colonial period of Arabic/Islamic education when graduates were offered practicing license (Ijaza) to signify their competence. It resurfaced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the practice of Western education. However, the emphasis on certificate since the colonial era has been identified as the main reason why talents/skills are no longer given precedence in the Nigerian educational system. The excessive emphasis on certificate has resulted to the persistent rise in the rate of examination malpractice, certificate forgery, poor emphasis on development of vocational skills among youths as well as the increase rate of unemployment in contemporary world. This paper concluded that there should be a revision of the status quo if Nigeria really aimed at sustainable development.

### **Recommendations**

This paper recommended that to attain economic sustainability in Nigeria, there should be conscious effort to de-emphasise the usage of certificate as the sole measure of competence and employability. It is also recommended that skill acquisition programmes should be incorporated into the school curriculum to ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become self-reliant upon graduation. This would also enable them to value skills-acquisition as an integral part of knowledge rather than focus exclusively on intellectual development. Also, it is recommended that indigenous arts and crafts as well as vocations should be reintroduced and modernised to enable students to acquire practical knowledge about the economy of their respective societies. Similarly, it is recommended that skill acquisition centres should be established at strategic locations throughout the country and properly managed to enhance active involvement of youths in the programme, for example there should be a form of partnership between agencies like the National Youth Service Corps to ensure that youths sincerely benefit from skill acquisition and acquire the necessary competence required to survive after graduation. In addition, it is recommended that proper talent discovery and development system should be developed across all levels of the educational system to develop and nurture talented individuals so that they can use such talents for the upliftment of the nation. Also, there should be adequate infrastructures and incentives to retain such talents as they grow in order to prevent persistent brain-drain in the country. Finally, it is recommended that job requirements across all sectors of the economy should be made flexible to place more emphasis on talents/skills over certification in order to change the orientation of people towards skill acquisition as a secondary requirement for lucrative job offers. This would help develop a

generation of conscious, skilled and responsible individuals who can contribute to the development of their society and promote economic sustainability in the country.

## References

- Adebayo, W. (2023). *WAEC Delists 50 Secondary Schools Over Examination Malpractices In Oyo*. Retrieved from <https://leadership.ng/waec-delists-50-secondary-schools-over-examination-malpractices-in-oyo/>
- Adesulu, D. (2014). 'Odufuwa-We Need More Skills than Certificates in Nigeria' *Vanguard Newspaper*. July 17, 2014 Available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2014/07/need-skills-certificates-odufuwa/amp/>
- Adisa, O. (2023). "Tackling Examination Malpractice." *Punch Newspaper*, 14 February, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com/tackling-examination-malpractice/%3famp>
- Akanbi, G. O. (2010). *Historical Development of Education in Nigeria: An Introduction*. Nigeria: Odumatt Press.
- Andrew, E. (2022). *History of Education in Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicaf.org/history-of-education-in-nigeria/>
- Aririah, C. (2021). *10 Reasons Why Nigerian Graduates are Unemployed and Unemployable*. Available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.afterschoolafrica.com/55704/10-reasons-why-nigerian-graduates-are-unemployed-and-unemployable/amp/>
- Carter, D. (2012). *Literary theory*. USA: Oldcastle Books.
- Dictionary.com (2016). *Postmodernism*. Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/postmodernism>.
- Elaati, A. (2016). *Postmodernism Theory*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303812364\\_POSTMODERNISM\\_THEORY](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303812364_POSTMODERNISM_THEORY)
- Encyclopedia Britannica (2023). *Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sustainable-development>
- Federal Ministry of Education (1989). *National Policy on Education*. Nigeria: NERDC
- Indeed Editorial (2023). *What Are Certifications? Definition, Benefits, Types and Examples*. Retrieved from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-certifications>
- International Institute of Sustainable Development (2023). *Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development>
- Kong-kol, B. (2021). 'Prioritising Skills, Not Certificates Can Push Nigeria To China's Track' *Daily Trust News*, September 30, 2021, Available at <https://www.membership.dailytrust.com/prioritising-skills-not-certificates-can-push-nigeria-to-chinas-track/>
- Ngschoolz (2023). *WAEC Sanctions 60 Schools In Lagos Over Exam Malpractice*. Retrieved from <https://www.ngschoolz.net/waec-sanctions-60-schools-in-lagos-over-exam-malpractice/>
- Ofiebor O. (2022). "Examination Malpractices: WAEC Bans 35 Schools in Rivers (full list)" *PM News* 21 March, 2022 Retrieved from

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/pmnewsnigeria.com/2022/03/21/examination-malpractices-waec-bans-35-schools-in-rivers-full-list/%3famp=1>

Omole, A. (2023). *WAEC Sanctions 61 Secondary Schools Over Examination Malpractices In Kogi*. Retrieved from <https://leadership.ng/waec-sanctions-61-secondary-schools-over-examination-malpractices-in-kogi/>

Suleiman, Q. (2023). “Flashback: Five times JAMB Caught Candidates Who Falsified their UTME Results” *Premium Times News*, 5 July, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/608129-flashback-five-times-jamb-caught-candidates-who-falsified-their-utme-results.html>

Ugwu, F. (2023). “Top Politicians in the Web of alleged Certificate Scandal” *Daily Post News*, May 24, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/dailypost.ng/2023/05/24/top-politicians-in-the-web-of-alleged-certificate-scandal/%3famp=1>

United Nations Development Programme (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>