

# EQUALITY, QUALITY AND AUTONOMY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

By

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## 1. Protocol

## 2. Proem

It is an honour and indeed a privilege for me to be invited to this important academic event as a Keynote Address presenter. I must thank the organizers for assembling a cross section of philosophers, educationists, educators, stakeholders and leaders in the tertiary sphere of our education system to appreciate a topic so apt with the title: *Equality, Quality and Autonomy of Nigerian Tertiary Education*. The organizers, indeed, deserve a stoutest ovation. Their effort is even more commendable when one considers the undoubted fact that currently in Nigeria our tertiary education system is under very serious directional threat. The dearth of recognizable targets, objectives and policies in the system is challenging. The need to fashion out a structure and function that would depoliticize the governance and economics of tertiary education for the purpose of engendering nation-building could not, therefore, be overemphasized (Brown, 2012). Hence, the importance and significance of this topic.

May I inform you that I am neither an *Educationist* nor a *Philosopher* by certification (Etuk, 2000). At best I am a Criminologist by education, qualification, certification and profession; though in my journey as an Academic I have done quite some work in the area of education. You may, therefore, have to take me the way I am as I hope that I have solved a possible identity crisis.

By way of delineation, the aim of this paper is to possibly set the tone for the necessary attempt at unbundling the conundrum inherent in the *equality-quality-autonomy-of tertiary education interact*; with the view to galvanizing governance structures and processes that would be socially responsible and sustainably responsive to the needs of the people, with the utilization of raised ethical and accountability standards for nation-building. This, it must be noted, is not predicated on a system or kind of government; but on the cultural reorientation of the major players in the polity and education sector, as well as, deployment of legislative and judicial realities. Worthy of note is the fact that these must be built on sound philosophies – hence - the value of this gathering made possible by the Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN). In order to achieve the task of this paper, emphasis will be placed on the following: conceptualizations, the main issue, points of emphasis, and conclusion.

## 3. Conceptualizations

### • Education

To Ekong (2003), education like other social institutions is a system of social practices evolved around a valued function of the society. It is also an activity for the transmission and

acquisition of socially approved and desirable aspects of cultural heritage. In the contemporary western view, it is epitomized by the formal organization known as school (Gordner, 2018). The functions include:

- the transmission of culture from one generation to another;
- training of people for specialized adult roles;
- drives social change; consequentially
- differentiates people in the society and validates social statuses; and
- Provides settings for social interaction.

Put summarily, education is the very ingredient for a guaranteed future – the key to unlocking the locked potentials, imaginations, aspirations, thoughts and dreams in people’s minds and hearts (Brown, 2007 and 2019).

### • **Tertiary Education**

This is the third-level, third-stage, or post-secondary education. The World Bank grants a definitive guide to include: universities, colleges of education and technology, Polytechnics and Monotechnics. They provide platforms for training people in all spheres of life including arts, humanities, science and technology; with the view to driving development.

This stage of education in Nigeria is bedeviled by not a few concerns, including: poor quality of education at the feeder levels, ownership structure, funding, the economics of education, quality of service delivery, infrastructure, public-private interface, to mention but a few. Yet, the expectations are high.

### • **Quality of (Tertiary) Education**

Simply put, quality points to peculiar and essential character, inherent feature, and in this case, degree of excellence. The quality of tertiary education will raise queries on the content, teacher and teaching methods, learning environment, management and governance concerns, funding and organization, as well as, pre-conditions for students.

This is complemented by what Parinos, et al (2014) in their contribution in *Education for Global Development* advanced as the Six A’s of Quality Education, including:

- Assessment,
- Autonomy,
- Accountability,
- Attention to teachers,
- Attention to Upbringing, and
- Attention to culture.

Attending to the Six A’s above would undoubtedly answer the posers from the Sustainable Development Goal (4) which aim at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This serves as the mission statement.

### • **Autonomy**

This is an on-going thorny issue between governments and various workers unions in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. By occidental drift, it refers to the ability to take control of one's own learning, independently or in collaboration with others. Here, the learner is expected to take greater responsibility in his or her learning process. There is, therefore, a suggestion of freedom and independence with less interference from governmental quarters.

On the other hand, oriental classics sees it as the continuous funding of education by government but less responsibility on the governance of the institutions.

A quagmire is a consequence. Participants here will have to place the two views side-by-side and think through for what is best for our nation, bearing in mind the concerns of quality, equality, and inclusivity in a developing economy as ours.

- **Nigeria**

A geo-political sovereign entity on the west coast of Africa. Projected to be about 218 million people and with the highest percentage of out of school children in the world, it is a developing country in dire need of support from its producers of middle and higher-level service hands (Brown, 2012). Arguably, the national psyche is suffering from the problem of certification (Brown and Umoh, 2014), where people just crave to be certificated; not necessarily certified.

#### **4. The Main Issue**

The extant situation is grotesque and calls for a rethinking. Doing a rethink in the context of *Equality, Quality and Autonomy of Nigerian Tertiary Education*, aptly calls for emphasis to be placed on the major concepts, namely: equality, quality, and autonomy within the Nigerian space.

- In dealing with the challenge of equality, the basic questions are: is equality even achievable? Could there be geographic, economic, gender (Brown and Umoh, 2009), security, physical and otherwise challenges, special needs, language, political, and cultural equality?

- The issue of quality brings to mind the realities of the National Policy on Education. How qualitatively advantageous is the policy to the country and its pressing needs? What is the relationship between our quality of education and our standard of education? Of what use is our political mechanisms engendering quality? (Brown and Umoh, 2014). How do we manage the entry of CCMAS into the university arena? How did CCMAS emerge? Of what good is CCMAS to the contemporary Nigerian? Whose interest is CCMAS intended to serve? A dispassionate probe into these questions will open a new vista into the realities of quality of education.

- The nagging issue of autonomy requires a dispassionate appraisal in the context of our dear nation as a struggling and developing country in dire need of a delicate balance with respect to the role of government and the challenges of equality and inclusion. The Student Loans Scheme takes off in January 2024, what could this conference do to help prepare the grounds so as to avoid the kind of bumps and hiccups experienced in the evolution of new policies? The Naira Redesign and Subsidy Removal policies of government, and the aftermath of their promulgation are handy illustrations.

## 5. Points of Emphasis

Thoughts should be given to the role of: law, administration, social justice, infrastructure, finance and funding, geography (in the context of the possible terrorism of geography and the geography of terrorism), business and investments, technology and ICT, language and pedagogy, special education and meeting the needs of those with special needs, statistics, politics and security concerns (Brown, forthcoming).

## 6. Conclusion

I feel safe to submit that it is difficult to rejig the system. Yet, Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN) have taken a bold step to help stem the tide; which calls for support. If we must succeed in our bid to make good the Equality-Quality-Autonomy equation in our tertiary institutions for national rebirth and development, then there has to be a tangible element of intentionality, to which PEAN has ventured. No doubt, this event is an expression of a bold step taken by our hosts to declare its intention. I pray for sustainability which is motivated by a drift to carve delicate balance for the common good.

From the heights of this place; to the end of this era and beyond, may we intentionally and consciously be determined to galvanize a tertiary education system that scores high in the Sustainable Development Goals index by ensuring equality, quality, and worthy autonomy in Nigeria. While wishing you all the very rewarding conference, thank you very immensely for holding your patience and hearing me through.

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