

QUOTA SYSTEM AND QUALITY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: *THE CONTRADICTIONS*

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Abstract

This work, titled, “Quota System and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education: ‘‘The Contradiction’’, is concerned with the issue of Quota System of admission and the issue of Quota System of admission and qualitative education. The paper posits the Quota System of admission is an anathema to quality education. It presents an opinion based on the fact that, the twin issues are a contradiction, because, one cannot be concerned with Educational inequality and at the same time be striving to achieve quality education. The paper explicated the concept of Quota System and Quality education, after it discussed the issue of Quota System, the contradictions of the two and conclusion which calls for an overhaul of the country education system.

Introduction

This paper reviews the issues of Quota System and the quality education in Nigeria. Given the fact that quality education remains a major call on the lips of most Nigerians even after more than forty years of implementation of the quota system of admission in Nigeria educational sector, one wonders if the quota system of admission has been a catalyst or a hindrance to quality education. Accordingly, the rider is the contradiction, as there is no way you can have quota system of admission and want to also pursue quality education, it is like quantity versus quality.

Thus when quality becomes an end in itself. This undermines any possible accruable benefits in such system. A country may not likely develop when a sub-standard education is provided at any level. The position of this paper is that quality education and quota system of admission are incompatible, rather this can be achievable through gradual expansion of opportunities to match resources.

Concept Explication

In this section an attempt is made to explicate the concepts of Quota System and Quality Education. This will provide an in-depth understanding of this paper discourse.

QUOTA

The word “quota” is explained by *Encarta dictionary* as proportional share of something that somebody should contribute or receive”. This according to Ubong¹ implies, first that there is a group or at least more than one person involved in a sharing situation and that there is something for the group or those involved to share. In addition to that, it implies that, the sharing should be proportional, which the same source refers to as having the correct relationship of size, quantity or degree to something else or remaining the same relationship when things change. The question which is often ask here is, if the sharing formula or approach has the correct relationship and if the relationship should remain the same in the face of changes and of course, whether the sharing formula can meet the important criterion of justice for all those concern.

The quota system according to Wokocha² and Bamaisaiye³ refers to the policy of federal character as applied to the distribution of educational services to the people. Quota admissions are based on merit per state, that is geo-policy, instead on academic merit. Quotas on admissions in schools could be legislated or silent, whichever approach is used or step taken, it is to put some persons or groups in advantageous position and conversely put others at a disadvantaged even if such intent is well meant originally.

Quality Education

As soon as the concept or the word quality of education is mention, many interpretations will begin to cross one’s mind. For the purpose of this paper, few of such meanings will be advanced for an in-depth understanding of the issue. Quality education has to do with the quality in educational input in its entirety. The quality of educational system according to Akinyemi⁴ 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 programmes meet the national objectives. Quality education in Nwanna’s⁵ views quality in education as the scale of input in the form of funds, equipment facilities, teacher and pupils 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.

In the words of Maduewesi⁶ it 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.

Philosophically, Dewey⁷ opined that quality education is one which hinges on the extent in which knowledge acquired in school is put into effective use at once but in an endless way. For him, quality education is one which is aimed at developing critical thinking and problem solving skills, as equipment to cope with unforeseen problems which a perpetually charging world offers. This section will end up by stating that quality education is based in learners ability to raised far above their original levels, which Paulo-Friere sarcastically referred to as banking education, because learners serve as receptacles of teachers pre-digested materials. The idea of quality education hinging on knowledge acquired in schools when put into effective use, not once, but in an endless way will be the reference point of this paper⁸.

Arguably, Enoh⁹ uphold that, if quality is measured immediately after a certain cycle of education, one very easily confuse it with performance. No doubt such evaluation may be faulty in view of several factors that may affect outcome. However, when one delay such an evaluation to some future time, one is more likely to get a more realistic assessment. This view of quality education viewed what is acquired in school as tools and the extent to which the grandaunts are able to carry out with it, becomes a good measure of the quality of education, they have received. Thus Dewey¹⁰ remarked that, *“The criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact.”*

Issue of Quota System

The Quota system can be located in Aristotle’s theory of Distributive¹¹ justice. The sage opined that “it is unjust to treat equals unequally and unequal people equally”. The idea of streamline is based on a large extent on the principle as for instance, putting gifted children in a separate class from autistic ones. It is not right to have children with learning difficulty in the same class with gifted ones.

Distributive justice can be extended in the case of admission into Institutions of higher education. Thus, Ubong¹⁰ is of the view that, bulk of the Nigerian Youths applying for University places are excessively limited by law to be equal, irrespective of tribe or tongue or economic means. However, the question in the minds of people is it fair to allow a child/children from areas considered to be educationally disadvantaged to compete on equal positions with those from the educationally advantaged areas. Conversely, in a statutory framework of equality of opportunity, the law is just to legislate that such children from educationally disadvantaged areas are denied access to education. The issue of quality education comes into contradiction with Quota System of Admission which tend to encourage mediocrity.

One may argue that children who got admission, on the ticket of educationally disadvantaged areas, with low marks scored in examination, becomes top administrators and security personnel at the expense of those who were intellectual qualified during admission but were denied such opportunities. This explains perhaps why we have mediocrity in our country. This quota system of admission entrenches inequality which affects quality education in Nigeria. This rather produces people with wrong or unrequired skills. The Universities have produced people with *elitist* orientation based on quantity of education which has not made the nation better. They have merely join the bandwagon of pen pushers or the unemployed.

Though not entirely in support of the extreme involving the accelerated output, of candidates from any given level of education, selection of candidates through the quota system favours a more even distribution of school places through the adoption of such measures. In defence of the quota system, Jibril Amimu¹¹ that in matters of admission, some issues remain unsettled, if this his views are implemented as they seemed to be at the moment. In the words of Enoh¹² the first has to do with achieving the goal of national integration while second is connected with the prospects of achieving expected balance between so called advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

The very fact that quota system of selection discriminates between groups shows that, it is not a full solution to higher education in Nigeria, rather, it aggravates the problem or succeeds in reversing directions of such discrimination from disadvantaged groups to advantaged ones. In essence, however the problem remains it in this sense that Akinpelu¹³ opined that, reverse discrimination or quota system is bad. As long as this measure is adopted, feelings of injustice by those presently deprived will surely undermined a sense of quality education in Nigeria.

The prospects of achieving quality education through quota system of admission appears dubious without agreement on a possible date of halting the process. For it induces the feelings of complacency and mediocrity in candidates from deprived areas based on the likely thinking that easier channels will always be created to see them through. Quality may therefore be neglected or sacrifice on the altar of quota, to the extent that only very few get through to the higher levels where the various instruments of balancing are applied. This is what the application of quota system in-advently has brought about to Nigerian higher education.

One thing must not however be lost sight of, is the issue of quality Nigerian higher education. This is, as it is experienced, that to achieve quota system admission more universities are being established. Undoubtedly, the aim of extending education to a wider segment of the population, quality is bound to drop since those with less abilities will increasingly find their way into schools. What is urgently needed is the will to select from among these, those who can benefit from higher education and keep its quality as high as it ought to be. But is not to suggest that, to some extent, quality cannot be controlled, even at the Primary Level¹⁴.

In order to achieve quality education right from Primary School, the degree of access has to be looked into as well. Free Education at all levels need to be looked at beyond its political consideration. The degree to which education achieves the purpose depends more on its quality. However, when quantity becomes an end in itself, it undermines any possible, advantages accruable from its implementation which breeds poor quality education. When higher levels become so affected, all the space of overall declining quality becomes accelerated due to the effect of what has been described as extension of the aesthetic electorate in which Low quality of the reading public progressively lowers the quality of literary output.

A country does not develop when the entire budget is spent on education while other sectors of the economy stagnate. It does not also do so when sub-standard education is provided at any level. What is considered is objective consideration of all factors and apportioning appropriate resources to each. This means the amount of education any country can provide her citizens should always be related to availability of funds, and not the filling of classrooms, but the assurance that those in it are sufficiently trained for maximum returns.

The Contradiction between Quota System and Quality Education in Nigeria

Quota System Education cannot be practised in a system which advocates quality education. This is a contradiction because quota system is emotive rather than being qualitative. Quota System is not based on academic merit. Therefore, practising quota system of admission in

Nigeria, is like treating the symptoms rather than the main ailment, while trying to address an anomaly, a new anomaly bordering on quality education emerges.

Quota System of admission entrenches inequality thereby affecting quality of education in the country which causes the country to produced half-baked graduates in some cases. For the prospects or chances of achieving quality education appears dubious and therefore a contradiction. One cannot be pursuing a policy of quota system and yet expect to achieve quality education, quality education is one which is aimed at developing critical thinking and problem solving skills, as equipment to cope with unforeseen problems, which a nation like Nigeria needs. With the introduction of quota system, the country seemed to have lost sight of a high qualitative education. Rather, it has introduced what Dore¹⁶ referred to as “certificate spiral and education inflation” which amount to qualification disease. For quota system of admission came to apply, as higher educational attainments came to achieve what very margined education previously could not. Quality Education has not received much attention as observed in the current Nigeria higher education, because it has been sacrificed on the altar of quota system of admission.

The National Policy on Education provides a clue to the type of quality education preferred. It rejects memorization and regurgitation of facts and preferring instead practical, exploratory and experimental methods, the imaginative model is seen to be better.

Conclusion

The fundamental sources of crisis in Nigerian tertiary education have to do with either the failure to appreciate and therefore come to grips with the truth that education is the indispensable key to sustainable development, human capital being the most crucial factor of production. Surprisingly, there was a consensus on the introduction of the quota system in admissions. This was required to move the country forward, but it appears it has instead move the country to brink of virtual educational collapse and a way from accompanying and associated abyss of despair. Quality education in Nigerian tertiary education need an overhaul of the entire system. It is the obvious to state categorically that, the abuse of application of the twin issue of quota system and quality education has caused the riot in Nigerian educational system.

More importantly, perhaps, is the recognition of what needs to be done and where to begin the overhauling exercise. There is no doubt that, overhauling the decaying system created by the introduction of quota system on the alter of quality education is urgently needed. What needs to be done is, to frontally address the problem of qualitative education, particularly higher education in Nigeria in this century. As to where to begin to tackle what needs to be done in order to overhaul the decaying and dilapidating educational edifice in Nigeria, needs competing propositions position which are advanced thus:

First, the assault should begin at primary level of education. This position is eloquently canvassed. This position is eloquently canvassed with the participation of private individuals in the establishment of Nursery/Primary School, it has contributed to the overhauling of education sector. The second propositions is that in order to avert the imminent collapse of the

educational system in Nigeria, the overhauling exercise must begin at the base of the educational pyramid which is the primary and basic sub-system. One cannot talk of quality education without quality of input and output. Quota System of admission is therefore anathema to quality education, thus the contradiction.

Conclusively, while government aimed at providing education to a wider segment of the population through quota system of admission, quality is bound to drop, since those with less abilities will increasingly find their way into schools. What is urgently need, is the will to select from among these, those who can benefit from higher education and keep its quality as high as it ought to be. But this is not to suggest that, to some extent, quality cannot be controlled, even at the Primary level.

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