

## FALLING STANDARD OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *The educational sector in Nigeria, in the last one and half decades, has witnessed a sharp decline in its rating to the point that a standard seven certificate holder of 1960s can stand shoulder high with a university first degree holder of today on a level playing ground. Some years back, Nigerian certificates were being rejected abroad. No thanks to incessant industrial action embarked upon by lecturers in the Nigerian universities. That certainly, is responsible for the turnout of half-baked graduates who find it difficult to construct a correct simple sentence in the English Language. To worsen the situation, these half-baked graduates are employed to teach in both private and public schools. Budgetary allocation to the education sector continues to dwindle. 26 per cent budget allocations to education as recommended by UNESCO remain a hard nut to crack. Teachers are in no way motivated, just to mention but few. A survey of five categories of people 100 each per group were sampled to find out which among the eight identified factors contribute most to the falling standard of education in Nigeria. The bar chart clearly identifies under funding and poor remuneration of teachers as some of the major factors contributing to the falling standard of education in Nigeria. The analysis of the data using analysis of variance (ANOVA), table II, indicated that the contributions of these factors to the falling standard of education in Nigeria, varies from one factor to another. The paper recommended that, as a matter of necessity, government in its reformation agenda must include total overhauling of the education sector in order to redress the rot in the sector.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The search for the best way out of our educational mist is no longer in doubt. (Duze, 2011). Observed, most Nigerian high school graduates are no longer able to write or read letters, let alone read and understand newspapers. The university graduates have become a reserve army of the unemployable. Yet federal and state governments have continued to flood Nigeria with colleges and universities that will fabricate and mass-produce students for non-existing jobs.

Dike, (2003), maintained, the notion that the standard of education in Nigeria is falling is a relative term because there is no well-defined instrument to measure it with utmost reliability and

validity. Abdulrahman, (2006), observed, it is a wrong perception and assessment, nothing is wrong with the standards, but the quality of Nigeria education that is fast decaying below standard. It is a well-known fact that education is the instrument for economic empowerment and development of sustainable economy. No wonder, one of the national educational goals is “the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society”, FRN, (2004).

There has been constant public outcry on the continuous decline in the quality of education in the country especially as indicated in most public examinations and performance of education outputs that are inadequate for employment. Reports have it that an average of 13.8% and 20.7% of candidates who sat for West African Senior School certificate examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) between 2000 and 2006 had five credits (including mathematics and English Language) respectively leaving about 86.2% and 79.3% as failures since this result cannot earn them admission into any tertiary institution.

A number of factors are responsible for the low quality of Nigerian education. Ochuba (2008) suggested that, goals of education can only be achieved with well-organized school system that would ensure that all aspects of school life are well articulated and effectively coordinated. The earlier these problems are identified and tackled holistically the better for this country and generations yet unborn.

### **THE PROBLEMS IN OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

The research has observed, that our education problems Centre among others the following

- i. Lack of continuity in policies.
- ii. The funding problems inherent in our educational system.
- iii. Politicizing education
- iv. Quest for paper qualification
- v. Shortage of qualified teachers
- vi. The problems and challenges of the pupils, students and parents
- vii. Discipline
- viii. Poor remuneration/motivation of Teachers

### **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

The research design for this study was the survey method using the questionnaire. As the variables are not under the control of the investigator, the survey is non-experimental.

The subjects were 500 adults made up of males and females randomly selected from their areas of specialization in Plateau State of Nigeria in 2010/2011.

The questionnaires were used to generate the data. The questionnaire was given to each person in the five different groups and each group consists of 100 people. The summary of the data collected is as shown in **table I**.

**Table I (responses from the five different areas of specialization in plateau state)**

Category/Factors	STUDENTS	PARENTS	POLICY MAKERS	POLITICIANS	TEACHERS	Total
Discipline	10	5	15	2	0	32
Politicizing Education	25	15	20	10	15	85
Under Funding	20	30	30	30	22	132
Poor Remunerations	12	25	15	17	26	95
Quest for Paper Qualification	10	15	4	5	5	39
Shortage of qualified Teachers	11	5	1	23	20	60
Challenges of the pupils, students and parents	5	1	8	10	2	26
Lack of continuity in policies	7	4	7	3	10	31

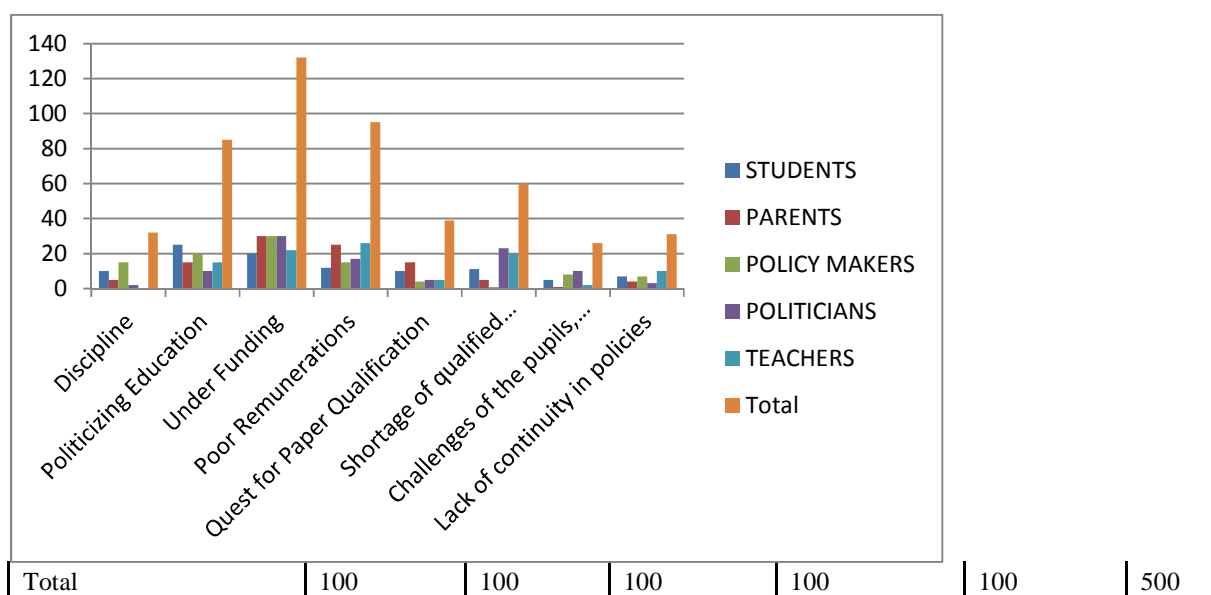


Fig. 1 showing the bar chart of Table I.

**RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

In order to use the prevailing factors affecting education in the country, the following hypothesis were formulated:-

$H_0$ : The factors mentioned above affects the standard of education in equal degree.  $H_1$ : The factors mentioned above affects the standard of education in different degree.

**TABLE II (Analysis of variance of the responses from the five different areas of specialization in plateau state)**

Sources of variation	Degree of freedom	Sum of squares SS	Mean squares $M_s$	$F_{cal}$
Factors affecting Edu. In Nigeria.	7	$SS_t = 2041.2$	$MS_t = 291.6$	$F_{cal} = 8.76$
Error	32	$SS_e = 1064.8$	$MS_e = 33.28$	
Total	39	$SS_T = 3106$		

$F_{tab}(7, 32)_{\alpha=0.05} = 2.25$ . Hence  $F_{cal} > F_{tab}$

## DISCUSSION:

Fig. 1 shows the bar chart of the data in *Table I*. The bar chart clearly indicated that the falling standard of education is mostly due to poor remunerations of teachers, politicizing and the underfunding of education, while other factors contribute little or nothing as can be observed from the bar chart. On the other hand the analysis of variance at  $\alpha = 0.05$ , shows that  $H_{cal} > H_{tab}$ , indicating that rejecting  $H_0$  and accepting  $H_1$  suggests that the factors militating against education in Nigeria are of varying degree.

### I. LACK OF CONTINUITY IN POLICIES.

Lack of continuity in our educational policies is itself a factor that causes the falling standard of education. However, change that is not well thought out, change that is done just for the sake of it or to pursue some narrow, self-centered and parochial interests, is both wasteful and destructive. But in Nigeria we have continuously done what is highly detrimental to our educational system through constant change of policies. Many people, even the so-called educationists can hardly and confidently say enough is enough because of the non-Char lent attitude of government towards education in Nigeria. This is not just wasteful in every sense of the word but clearly shows a nation without an agenda and one that is totally confused, going everywhere and eventually heading nowhere!

Adebanjo, (2012), observed, the importance of education to human beings cannot be over emphasized. He argued, education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. He maintained, education is an important factor in every individual(s) life; it is a key to better future. He argued further, the problem of education emerged from the neglect which the sector suffered from the 1980's leading to the gradual

erosion of the system. He observed, change of policies concerning education frequently, and leave both teachers and students confused.

Presently, the planners are definitely confused, the managers lost in the wilderness as travelers without a compass or bearing, and so the pupils and students become disillusioned, not knowing what the whole thing is. So, what standard can survive this level of confusion?

Educational system should have a minimum time period or cycle to run to be able to assess them objectively. Sometimes, the frequent changes of policies by our policy-makers and managers bring along with it serious problems, too. We must ensure that only capable and qualified people are appointed to take care of our education at every level.

## II. THE CHALLENGES OF FUNDING AND POVERTY

The challenges of funding and poverty are very critical issues. We have a situation in the nation where many parents are very poor and good schools very expensive; they cannot afford the needed funds to sponsor their children's educational pursuits in such schools. Such children are obviously left at the mercies of public schools which are unfortunately, hardly anything but playground for pupils of all ages and grades.

Olatoye, (2010), observed, the problem of underfunding brings about so many other challenges facing the education sector. He maintained that, if education is properly funded, incessant teachers strike will be absent in the system, if teachers and professors are well taken care of, the problem of brain drain will not be there. The facilities in our institutions are too poor to be compared with other societies of the world. Low esteem of teachers bedeviled their contribution. Psychologically they are not giving what is required in the classroom. These entire problems are tied around underfunding. It is totally disheartening that for the past ten or so years, the Federal Government fiscal budget allocation to education has never exceeded 13% as against the UNESCO standard/threshold of 26%.

**Table III: (Showing the budgetary allocation to the education sector from 1999 - 2010)**

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Billion(#)	23.0	44.2	39.9	100.2	64.8	72.2	92.6	166.6	137.5	210.0	183.4	249.1
Percent (%)	11.2	8.3	7.0	5.1	11.8	7.8	8.3	8.7	6.1	13.0	7.2	6.4

**Source; Federal office of statistics, Abuja**

With this unserious attitude by government, education, still has a long way to go if anything good will eventually happens.

Jimoh, (2009), suggested, that the education sector in Nigeria is grossly underfunded. The inadequate funding of the public school system is the cause of other problems that have undermined quality in the sector. Nigeria's funding efforts of education is low, and its budgetary

priority for the education sector is even lower. In 2003, out of a national budget of 765.1 billion naira, only 13.9 billion was allocated to education, representing, 11.83% (Post Express, 2003) as against UNESCO's 26% recommendation.

Odia and Omofonmwan, (2007), also observed that there was gross underfunding of the educational sector in the country in general and the neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities. Instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of these schools, classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards. They suggested that attention must be focused on these areas too if these educational institution are to get out of the woods and this is only possible through adequate funding. They maintained, since 1986 when the federal military government introduced the structural adjustment programme SAP, allocation of financial resource started to fall coupled with the consistent decline in the value of local currency till date. This has also consistently affected the procurement of imported technical and scientific equipment, books, journals and other instructional needs in the education sector. The World Bank (1994) noted that education system in Nigeria, needs a total overhauling and restructuring, this reform is required to improve the performance of higher education in the country, as the nation entered the 21st century insufficiently prepared to cope or compete in the global economy, where growth will be based even more heavily on technical and scientific knowledge.

Better funding provides better teaching and teaching aids, as well as help in recruiting, maintaining and retaining quality personnel. When these are in place, obviously the quality of education will be high or be improved.

Dike, (2005), noted that, if the Nigeria's budget allocation to education is compared with that of other less affluent societies in Africa, the picture becomes more discouraging (see table IV).

**Table IV (GDP of some African Countries)**

Country	% GDP
Angola	4.90
Cote D'ivoria	5.00
Ghana	4.40
Kenya	6.50
Malawi	5.40
Mozambique	4.10
Nigeria	0.76
South Africa	7.90
Tanzania	3.40
Uganda	2.60

**Source extract from, The African Dept; Reported by Jubilee 2000; Alifa Daniel: Intrigues in FG-ASSU face- off; see The Guardian on line, June 17, 2001.**

The other problem with funding is that it may not be in the large amount of funds but the judicious usage of the funds. Transparency and accountability must be part of our education. Education will improve and the individual and the nation will be better.

Individuals who are wealthy and philanthropic at heart must see the need to help indigent pupils; students and families in one way or the other in the education of their children and wards, especially in funding their academic pursuits. This will help raise our standard of education in one way or the other.

### III. POLITICIZING EDUCATION.

Olatoye, (2010), discovered that, politicizing our educational system is another problem bedeviling the sector, in an attempt to catch up with their counter-parts, many states in Nigeria particularly the new ones, indulge in the opening and running of many educational institutions even when they are least prepared to do so, these thereby results in lowering of standards and various educational project collapsing mid-way.

Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu, (2001), were of the opinion that, nation building is not a simple process. History has demonstrated the difficult, complex, and varied development needed to unite a people under a government and create among them a stable cultural, economic, political, and social community. The problem has been especially strenuous where the people to be united have included diverse, large groups distinguished by their own customs, or separate identity. It was also observed, in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, several of the nation's that achieved independence during the decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s have continued to be beset by problems of integrating ethnic groups within the nations as illustrated by the experience of the federal republic of Nigeria in west Africa.

After independence, Nigeria's peoples for the most part had not yet come to think of themselves as Nigerians. Ethnic loyalty is taking precedence over national identity. The nation's people identified themselves primarily as Hausa-Fulani, Ibo, or Yoruba, for example. This identity as Nigerians lay in the shadow of their tribal and parochial allegiances. Merit is no longer regarded, and it is now who you know and not what you can deliver. Instead mediocre are given the positions that has to do with education at the expense of well experience educationists who know where and what the problems of education are and how these problems can be solved. At times, even when qualified hands are given these positions, they end up frustrating their efforts by not allowing them the free hand to operate.

### IV. QUEST FOR PAPER QUALIFICATION.

While other countries are busy building their future generations by given them sound education, which is all about the positive ways to train the mind and character of an individual in order to enable them fit well into the society and its challenges, Nigeria educational system seems to be simply limiting itself to the production of literate people.

Olatoye, (2010), also noted that, Nigeria as a country produces thousands of poor quality graduates every year and the problem of producing poor graduates every year is evident in the Nigerian education sector. It is usually ugly and shameful at times when you see graduates that cannot prove to the world that they have been to the citadel of learning in Nigeria. This he maintained is because the system is operating a meal ticket syndrome. "Meal ticket syndrome is a problem where society emphasizes too much on certification". He further pointed out that there is too much emphasis on certification rather than what one can really offer. According to him, the major cause of this pathetic condition is the poor welfare package of the teachers and lecturers and because they are hungry, "they are ready to water down principles". If they water down principles, if the water down teaching ethics, what good can we see, if not checked we will continue to spell doom for the educational sector.

In Nigeria, we have diverted, in the recent past, to limit education to getting or acquiring some forms of certification or paper qualification even without having the requisite knowledge, application or experience.

No wonder, Nigerians regard paper qualification above performance in the field. Hence, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are supposed to be measured in the field. Few think nothing serious about home-based education that is essential in the intellectual and spiritual or moral development of the individual. Today, we have people who, because of such disjointed or narrow thinking, think that if someone is not a medical personnel, an engineer, a science student or one of such highly-stereotyped and comparatively overvalued field, he is not intellectual enough or not employed after graduating from school. Even governments and their agencies promote such flawed thinking by giving special attention and consideration to certain field, which is not a good orientation and should be discouraged henceforth.

## **V. SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS.**

It is disturbing that while we talk of standards of education and being concerned that they are falling, we ignore the fact that there must be a high standard set for the educators themselves. There must be a minimum standard set for all the personnel of schools or institutions to ensure that both the academic and non-academic or support-personnel, contribute very well and optimally to the development of our education. They must be trainable and re-trainable. There must be clearly defined and laid down policies and programmes to ensure that personnel training and development is entrenched in all the planning of the institutions' schedules. All staff must understand the policies and objectives, as well as, be able to interpret them and impart or implement them; or, at least, be seen to be part of the implementation process in their big or title ways. Without a doubt, qualified teachers, at all levels should be adequately and appropriately remunerated and motivated. But now unqualified people or quacks who have no business in this industry are left as those to educate our young ones. But no one can give what he does not have.



Some schools in the rural areas only have the headmaster as government employee while the rest that may be secondary school drop outs as PTA staff. The same scenario is found in most secondary schools in Nigeria where the Principal and few staff are government employee and rest are drop outs from either colleges of education or polytechnics who always claim that they have finished but are awaiting their originals of their certificates which they hardly produce for verification. In this scenario, what miracles can these staff perform? Dike (2006) observes that only 23% out of the then 400,000 primary schools in Nigeria have grade II even when NCE is now the minimum qualification for teachers at primary and junior secondary schools.

## **VI. THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PARENTS, PUPILS AND STUDENTS**

We cannot talk of improved quality of education without bringing into fore the roles of pupils, students and their parents.

Nwadiani, (2005), stated that, parents' moral and social lifestyle must be such that they are investing in their children's educational pursuits is absolutely necessary, whether such investments are in kind or cash. Their ward's educational development must be seen as paramount, no matter what else they have in mind (for them). Parents must inculcate in their children such virtues as honesty and hard work. In contrast they encourage them and, in some cases, help them to cheat or cut corners in order to "make -it". Parents should guide their children but avoid the temptation of forcing them against their will to study courses that they don't like. Where parents want to use their children to make up for their educational failures or shortcomings of the past or just to maintain a "family name", or tradition of some sort, academic excellence may never really be achieved creditably, in many instances.

The pupils or students on their part must value excellence and the pursuit of same. They must see themselves as the managers or leaders of tomorrow and must see the world as their constituency, they must be as good as, or better than their contemporaries elsewhere globally, mediocrity must be avoided. Then, and only then, will they see themselves as contributing to the development of the human race, and so go ahead and pursue their dreams and fulfill, destiny. Someone with this mindset will not settle for anything less than the highest educational attainment possible where there is healthy competition, standards can only go higher, all other things being equal. The point here is that our standards must be of international standards for them to mean anything in today's world. The case where no Nigerian university makes it to the top rank of worlds' university is a big cause for concern and it is a shameful thing that our leaders are not touched by this painful situation.

## VII. DISCIPLINE.

Discipline is one of the outstanding attributes of sound and qualitative education when it is rightly observed.

Jimoh, (2009), maintained the social vices bedeviling the society has permeated the entire segments of the education sector. The manifestations are moral decadence, loss of family values, cultism and examination malpractice that has become endemic in the education system of the country. The societal emphasis on success-goals, irrespective of the means employed in achieving these goals, has pressurized some participants in the education industry to strain toward anomie. Such participants have resorted to the use of illegitimate procedures in achieving success in examinations. The disjunction between culturally acclaimed goals and the institutionalized means of achieving these goals coupled with the cultural context of great emphasis on success-goals without equivalent emphasis upon institutional means of attaining these goals have created an environment that predisposes some students, teachers, parents and others to examination malpractice. Students are involved because they want to achieve success; parents are involved because they want good grades for their wards; teachers and others are involved because of the financial, material and other intangible gains derivable from involvement in examination malpractice.

Dike, (2005), lamented that, if Nigeria cannot give adequate and quality education to students at the elementary and secondary levels, the tertiary institutions would continue to be populated by those who are least prepared to face the rigors of university education. And “cultism,” “intimidation of professors and other categories of lecturers into better grades” and other vices will continue to blossom on the campuses across the nation.

Aminu, (2006), was of the view that, capitalism has eroded the moral values of the Nigerian society. Social, economic, political, religious and educational vices are celebrated and rewarded in the country while virtue is punished. How can students, teachers and others shun examination malpractice when they “see criminals being set free through legalisms and court room gymnastics or worse, through wretched and criminal influence peddling?”

Closely related to the moral decadence in the society is the greed for money. The monetary rewards accruing to participants of all forms educational malpractice is enormous and unimaginable. If the police can openly accept bribe on the highways, why would those involved in the conduct of examinations, heads of section and heads of schools not accept monetary incentives to subvert their integrity? Parents and guardians are ready to give encouragement and pay any amount because they desperately want their children and wards to acquire certificates.

Adebanjo, (2012), noted that, falling educational standards will continue as long as corrupt officers who misused institutions funds go unpunished.

### **VIII. POOR MOTIVATION/ REMUNERATIONS OF TEACHERS**

Teacher's poor welfare is no longer news. Management experts have continued to lay emphasis on the important role motivation play in the managerial process, government should therefore learn from this management principle by paying special attention to remuneration of teachers in order to boost their moral and restore their faith.

Poor remuneration of teachers in the country has turned the teaching profession that used to be the envy of all, a profession of mockery, which youths are now skeptical of going into. Students no longer fancy education as a course.

Teachers, out of desperation have decided to turn the profession lucrative by introducing all forms of fraudulent tendencies. The lecturers in a bid to leave exuberant and flamboyant life style on campus go the extra mile of recruiting students in their classes who serve as middlemen between them and the students, the middle men move round after every examination to inform their course mate that sorting of a particular course is in progress, the interested members will then give their registration number and the specified amount for the grade they want.

The era when students are graded on the basis of their intellectual abilities has been committed to the trash bin of history as lecturers now charge between two thousand naira and ten thousand naira depending on the grade one chooses.

Some lecturers equally turn attractive female students in their classes to sex partners with threat to fail anyone who proves stubborn to their advances. Female students are also known to offer themselves freely to the lecturers in order to get good grade during exams with the notion that they are using what they have to get what they want. Another cankerworm is cultism. It is contributing immensely to lower the standard of education in the country, members of this group usually relegate academic activities as secondary as they primarily attend to their group activities first, which is the more reason why some of them spend ten to eleven years in school for a course of four or five years.

They take delight in drinking, killing and maiming instead of developing their moral, skills and intellectual abilities which is the primary aim of education.

### **CONCLUSION**

Education is a living concept that continues to grow and develop on daily basis. It is on this context, that the role of education in the development of all society has been vastly documented in academic journals, and we do not intend to revisit it here, with facts, judgment and understanding of the issues facing the nation. The paper argues that the survival of Nigeria as a viable society will depend on how well the factors identified as the major factors affecting the education system which were further supported by the analysis of variance, table II. It is a challenge for all. It must begin with me and every individual at the level he/she finds him or

herself. Governments and our political leaders, along with our educationists and educators, must lead this effort. After all, education cannot cost as much as ignorance will. In our world today, an ignorant, uneducated or indeed poorly educated people can only be the scorn of others. This must not be said of a country that is endowed and blessed both with materials and human resources. All must strive, so that this country called Nigeria goes back to the drawing board by inculcating the best education standards required by its citizens for the overall development of the country.

## RECOMMENDATION

The paper made the following recommendation:

- 0 Corruption in our educational system should be reduced if not eliminated to the barest minimum by all stakeholders while government should as a matter of urgency increase the budgetary allocation to education and sincerely implement it to improve on the current standard of education in the country as indicated by the analysis of variance table II.
- 1 Teachers should be trained so that they can meet up with any new challenges. Educational facilities should be upgraded to modern standards and educational facilities should adequately be provided.
- 2 Teachers' welfare should be given priority by government to avoid unnecessary strikes in our educational institutions while more qualified teachers should be employed to curb the present shortage of teachers in our schools. The sector can be very attractive if a good salary package is introduced, it will bring back the best brains that have run to other sectors because of poor remunerations in the sector.
- 3 Government must, as a matter of urgency, reconcile graduate turn out with manpower requirements to encourage potential young men and women to pursue qualitative education.
- 4 Our educational system should be able to prepare its beneficiaries with the orientation for self-employment.
- 5 The government, education planners and managers must consult widely and extensively with national interest in mind. They must consider the wide world view and perspective. There should be room to make adjustments in the implementation of the system but it will be foolish to abandon a system that has hardly been tried or one that appears to be falling, even when the fault may not be in or with the system itself. Then, and only then, can standards be achieved and maintained. No individual or group must be allowed to change a system just because they are in a privileged position to do so or just because they are in power or position of authority and empowered to do. It is reckless and does the nation no good.
- 6 Nigeria should try by all means to give adequate and quality education to students at the elementary and secondary levels, otherwise, the tertiary institutions would continue to be

populated by those who are least prepared to face the rigors of university education. And “cultism,” “intimidation of professors and categories of lecturers into better grades” and other vices will continue to blossom on the campuses across the nation.

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