



Nigerian University and Falling Standards: Who's Responsibility?



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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the falling standard of Nigerian universities by discussing whose responsibility is it for the failure to meet standards. The paper was not designed to criticize any officers' roles or duties but intends to investigate who should be responsible for maintaining adequate standards within universities. The paper started by elucidating from the extant literature issues relating to quality and how it has been perceived in the Nigeria university context. The paper uses a qualitative approach with the interview as the main research instrument. The study uses a purposive sampling method to selected 9 universities located in different part of Southwest area in Nigeria, 3 of each from the 3 main owners (federal, state, private). The findings reveal that responsibility for the failing standard of university education in Nigeria is no-one's responsibility but everyone's business.

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1. Introduction

Problems of educational standards can easily be traced back to neglect, which the tertiary education sector in Nigeria suffered in the last two decades. This period, which many scholars have recorded to have arisen gradually, led to the erosion of the system. Among the problems contributing to the fall in educational standard in Nigeria, university sector are inadequacies of funding, lack of teaching tools and modern classrooms and the acute shortage of qualified teachers. It was shocking that Okebukola (2002) asserted that, in terms of quality and quantity of teaching, learning and research produced, Nigerian universities outperformed other Sub-Saharan African countries from the 1960s to the late 1980s. However, this trend has changed for the worse, requiring a combined effort of all stakeholders to mark a new dawn through improvement in the funding of university education. Nevertheless, if the funding environment improves, yet the sector fails to acknowledge who is responsible for particular roles, the inevitable outcome is that the government will need pump funds to the sector and a decade down the line, universities may return to their current, poor situation.

Likewise, dwindling funding of university education in Nigeria has affected the quality of university education in terms of students' performance and staff motivation for teaching and research. The inability of the government to fund university education has undermined the overall goal of teaching and learning in the university. Arong and

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Ogbadu (2010) and Duze (2011) have argued that the expansion in the Nigerian Universities System is not commensurate with increases in the level of funding to create an environment conducive to learning. This assertion is having effects on the programs taught at universities and invariably the graduates. In an account by Adetunji (2016) on why the hero fails, it is argued that funding is a major issue but not the only issue that affects the operation of a university. Duze (2011) mentioned that inadequate staffing, poor management, enrolment explosion, and inadequate physical facilities are also responsible for the problems experienced by universities. However, this paper leaves some gaps unexplored, calling the attention of researchers with whom the responsibility for, and ownership of, the causes of failing standards lies. This paper attempts to fill this gap by studying academic responsibility with the intention of understanding what quality means in terms of standards and how it relates to Nigeria University.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research

In education, there is broad agreement on a number of issues that define quality, ranging from fitness for purpose, getting it right the first time and conformity with external standards (Veiga *et al.*, 2012). This definition was also simplified to meeting or exceeding customer needs, value for money, or compliance with specifications (Juran, 2003; Oakland, 2003; Harvey and William, 2010; Ndirangu and Udoto, 2011). Likewise, Adetunji (2014) also explains that achieving quality should include setting higher academic standards, rigorous curricula, provision of skilled and experienced teachers, updated textbooks, state of the art laboratories and computing facilities, small class sizes, modern buildings and an environment conducive to learning, strict discipline and involving parents, among others. Akinpelu (2002) argued that education without quality could even be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value. Ekong (2006) added that quality education builds knowledge and life skills while simultaneously shaping perspectives, attitudes, and values. When the quality of education delivered is high enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work. When quality is low, performance cannot meet the expected, set standard. Hence one can say that the quality of education has declined below this set standard. Quality in education, therefore, means the relevance and appropriateness of the education programmer to the needs of the community for which it is provided.

In another debate, expounded by Odukoya (2009), quality is defined as the set standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things similar to it: how good or bad something is, that is, to be of poor/good/top quality. That which constitutes quality education is associated with improvement in the livelihoods of individuals and higher productivity and thus the economic performance of a nation. In this context, it is associated with the 'monitoring and evaluation component of education' which assesses whether the outcome is favorable, for example meeting the intended standard. However, poor quality education, according to Shah and Mayekar (2013), has created many problems including sexual harassment, abuse, violence, and unemployment. A study by Ho and Crowley (2003) at an academic library found that students become discouraged when they cannot find reference materials on the shelves when they are shown to be available on the library catalog, raising their stress levels. This means that everyone has a role to play in ensuring quality within the university. This is very similar to the assertion made by Ishikawa (1985) that quality is everybody's business including the customer; the student in this context. One of the key building blocks of quality in education is the development of minimum standards with respect to qualification of teachers, the quality of teaching in institutions, expected educational achievement of students and the development of a more rigorous management process for education so that the entire sector might develop stronger operating policies and procedures which are well documented and adhered to.

Furthermore, Michaelowa (2007) contended that the quality of education, especially at higher levels, is influenced by factors such as the selection procedure (admission) and the knowledge and the attitude of individuals entering the university. It follows that the quality of education at lower levels (primary and secondary) has an impact on the quality of education at higher levels. In a supporting statement by DuBrin (1997), quality is described as a desirable attribute of a product or service that differentiates it for the person pursuing the attribute (p.3). Nevertheless, DuBrin (1997) maintained that good quality should encompass the characteristics of conformance to expectation, conformance to requirement and conformance to loss avoidance.

2.2 Methodology

This study uses a case study approach utilizing interviews to explore the quality of education. Three universities were selected as the case studies using a purposive sampling method. The selection was based on ownership: federal, state and private. The three universities selected were located in the southwest of Nigeria. Easton (2010) posits that case study methods enable the development of in-depth understanding and depicting the complexity of the issues under investigation. Creative interviews were carried out where interviewees were willing to share their feelings and deepest thoughts. Three faculties were selected within each university; that is sciences (SCI), management science (MGS) and agricultural science (AGR) (see numbering system in Table 1). Three participants from each faculty (senior academia) were selected using their position of authority as the criterion for selection (Dean (A), Head of Department (HoD, B), Senior Lecturer (C) – see Table 1). Twenty-seven participants were identified for the purposes of the study, but only twenty participants were interviewed. The participants who took part in the study were honest and they revealed the issues that had caused the declining standard of universities' educational quality.

3. Results and Discussions

Table 1
Participant's grid

University type	Faculties	PARTICIPANTS		
		Dean (A)	HoD (B)	Senior Lecturer (C)
Federal	SCI (1)	*	-	*
	MGS (2)	*	*	-
	AGR (3)	*	-	*
State	SCI (4)	*	*	-
	MGS (5)	*	*	*
	AGR (6)	*	-	*
Private	SCI (7)	*	*	-
	MGS (8)	*	*	*
	AGR (9)	-	*	*

Who is responsible?

Data collection started by asking the participants to give a comprehensive account of whom they think is responsible for the falling standards in Nigerian university education. Many of the interviewee's share a common interest but in diverse ways; many of their opinions were shared, helping to identify key areas discussed in this paper. Several participants agreed with the general statement put forward by the author that 'an investment in knowledge pays the best interest', but those who were indifferent said they can only agree with the statement 'if only we can all try a bit harder' (A1, A5, B4, B7, C8, C9). The author questioned further 'what do you mean by if only 'We'? Who is this 'we' referring to?' The majority of participants mentioned that success in any organization is not achieved by one group of people alone; rather, it is a collective effort. Three of the informants pointed out that 'doing it together' is the main process of the university system (A1, C3, and D8). One respondent explained that the watchword in the university sector should be trusted,

I mean everyone is expected to do something meaningful to contribute to the teaching and learning of the students. If they do it at the right time then the thread of trust is fostered. If otherwise [sic] then you give room for falling standards (C3).

Four other participants expressed that it is not good to simply trace why the standard had been failing, but also healthy to know who is responsible. However, they all claimed, through different examples, to have contributed their own part to the said decline but yet they blamed one unit or the other for not fulfilling their responsibilities (A1, B5, C8, and C9). Another point raised here is that universities are institutions of learning; trust should be part of the learning toolkit, however, due to the nature of our society, trust is not fostered and one can easily manipulate the system without obstacle. This was the first thing identified to have caused the gradual decline of university academic. One of the interviewees explained that when the lecturers stop seeing themselves as figures of authority, the problem of declining university quality is initiated (C1). One of the informants stressed that,

I tell you what, when I was in school when my lecturer talks that is the final. We fear the lecturer more than our parent, but due to many parents' involvement in the university process the discipline is fading out of the university have it had faded out of some of the homes [sic] (C8).

Five of the informants pointed out that you cannot just talk about who is responsible but identifying which phenomena are responsible is also important. They all mentioned that discipline is responsible for the falling standard. They mentioned that every activity of the university is subject to indiscipline, one way or the other (A5, A6, C8, C5, C6). Three participants commented that more staff in universities today are themselves in disciplined, they work as if they do not have morals, and their behavior is very disappointing to the organization they work for. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to: sexual harassment of students, non-involvement in other university activities, non-patriotism and lack of coordination (A4, C8, C9). Two others expressed that students are highly in disciplined, that university has become a place used by students to practice different types of anti-social behavior with the support of their parents (B9, C5). One respondent explained,

I don't know when an apprentice becomes the master? Students now tell lecturers what they can do and what they cannot do, the world of education is changing and I am afraid this will be difficult to correct unless action is taken to top these bad practices [sic] (C5).

Another respondent (B8) was quick to highlight that 'The Holy book says that we should train a child in the way he should go so that when he grows up, he will not depart from it'. These days,

I wonder if we still value that as a truth of life because whether you believe in the Bible or not, this is an undisputed truth. If we fail in training a child from an early age, it will be even harder to succeed when the child is older (B8).

Similar words were raised by another respondent:

I can say and say this again and again that 'A child you did not build with knowledge will sell the house you built with money'. I cannot but make an emphasis to this point, students are in the university to acquire knowledge not to display anti-social behavior (C6).

Another respondent lamented that so much is going wrong in the society and that,

I for one believe that it is mostly because we have failed as a nation, as individuals, as parents, as relatives, as neighbors, as caregivers, as government, and as teachers (A8).

Six participants commonly shared that the foundation of university education in the country is no longer built to withstand the pressures of life. Because we are neglecting our duties and delegating them to the next person, playing the blame game, without accountability (A7, A8, A2, B7, C6, and C9). Two similar example was given by interviewees who explained that sometimes the father says it is the duty of the mother, the mother delegates to the house help, the house help to the teacher...the teacher blames the management, the management blames the government, and so on and so forth (A7, C9). Three participants claim that 'you know what, when two elephants tussle, the grass bears the brunt. But we know that all of us should be involved in seeing that our future does not go to decay, that our children become the best they can be given the right opportunities' (A5, A6, B7).

However, from the discussion put forward in this paper by interviewees, one can understand that a different group of individuals has contributed to the decline of educational standards through little involvement. Therefore this paper, in search of originality of knowledge of how to correct these wrongs, uses another approach critical to the contribution made by this study. Sayer (2000) pointed out that critical realist study tend to ask for the reason for something is to review "what makes it happen", what "produces", "creates" "determines" or "generates" it, or, more faintly, what "leads to" or "enables" it (Smith & Elger, 2012). The approach is critical realism because realist belief issues need to be unraveled to understand how and why thing happen in a particular way. Mixing approaches within the study are allowed and acceptable, especially when the research is in search of what must be true about a particular event. In order to achieve this, four agents have previously been identified - lecturer, parent, community, and government - as to who should be responsible for these falling standards. Each of the agents will be examined in turn using the knowledge and experience of the participants to develop a more holistic approach to the study.

3.1 Lecturers

Five of the informants expressed their concern in defense of the lecturers that lecturers cannot perform miracles without the necessary teaching aids (tools) to teach in the classroom. These teaching aids are to be supplied by the government and when they are not present, ‘*what can we do as lecturers?*’ (B4, B8, C1, C6, C8). Two informants from the private university also recorded a similar issue that, on several occasion, we have to improvise for simple tools. For example, no funds to support teaching aids such as you need to buy cardboard, papers, markers etc. for class demonstration, to talk about laboratory equipments. What can you do as a staff? (C6, C8) Three other interviewees consolidate this view by said primary and secondary schools, which are the foundation of education, should be properly built, funded and adequately staffed to support the knowledge of students and to prepare them for the task ahead (B4, B8, C6). One of the participants expressed that

I can tell you point blank that, it is a healthy learning environment, which also aids the teaching, and learning interaction, without a better environment for learning, learners will be frustrated and will not do what they should be doing [sic](C6).

Another two participants also mentioned that in order to ensure that learning environments are of a set standard, the United Nations set a benchmark for all countries to put at least 26% of their annual budgets into education (B2, B7). One dean lamented that we knew this law, it is written black and white but no Nigerian government has ever put more than a disappointing 10% of their annual budget into university education in their budget (A6). Another respondent, when asked about the allocation of government funds to education in general, expressed that,

I think we better do talk about this because education was not even listed in the president Buhari’s agenda for 2016 to talk of allocating money for education [sic](C8).

Three other interviewees point out that lecturer’s lack of dedication to duty and punctuality has contributed to a fall in the standard of education. They also expressed that lecturers sometimes show divided loyalty to the teaching job; most teachers pay lip-service to their job, spending more time and energy in other businesses and less time in the classroom (A7, A8, A2). Another four informants shared that another reason why the standard of education is falling in Nigeria is a lack of adequate commitment by those who are charged with the responsibility of teaching (A1, B9, C6, C8). One respondent commented that,

I think some lecturers do the job with the mindset of if they teach or not and if a student gets what they are teaching or not, so far they sign their attendance they would be paid for the jobs and me believe that’s lack of adequate commitment on their part [sic] (B9).

One respondent posits that,

I think teachers who are the foundation promoting education at all levels of the nation’s educational system were shirking their responsibilities towards providing and maintaining a good standard of education [sic] (C8).

One HoD traced the performance of the schools to their lack of commitment to the provision of qualitative and contemporary education for adolescents. She added, ‘*Our earnest drive towards radical re-engineering in the education sector affords us the unique opportunity to deliver and motivate adolescents to reach greater heights academically, socially and morally. That is why I will not but blame the lecturer for not doing their best to keep the university as the highest institute of learning because professional bodies are not taking over the role of the university [sic] ’* (B2). Another respondent added that ‘*you may be surprised to hear this but it is true that the professional bodies in Nigeria now condemned that university education produced in the country of its own residence why they have failed to do something to correct the wrong [sic]’* (C9).

3.2 Parents

Several interviewees agreed that parents also share in the blame; they claimed that most parents simply do not care about their children’s education. Three of the informants explain that many parents tend to put all their attention towards money-making, leaving the children’s guidance and motivation to the housemaids and drivers (A1, B5, and B7). Some other interviewees added that, as a result of parents passing the care of their children to their staff, the

children's projects and homework will not be done, nor will they be reminded to study at home, especially during the holiday. One of the Hoods claims that all you will see some students doing at home is watching films till midnight as their parent is sleeping. This has led to some students being derailed, ending up dropping out due to a failure to manage the workload (B8). One of the interviewees expanded that,

I think some parents' behavior is nothing to talk about, they abuse the children when they are at home, abuse their mother etc. all this have an effect on the student behavior and learning because when they return back to school such student tend to bully others or been bully the more [sic] (A8).

Another respondent expressed that,

I have experienced parents coming to school to fight with teachers for disciplining their child for wrongdoing... what do you do about this and how do you think the standard will still be the same [sic]? (C5)

One more participant said,

I tell you what you may not know, university education has been turning to something else especially with the new introduction of the private university where the rich parent can easily manipulate things for their own advantages [sic] (B4).

One dean shared that, 'without a doubt, parents are the ones these students live with, they only spend 4 to 5 years of their life with us at the university, the period which they were supposed to be a complete person and not a spoon-fed person. The time they were supposed to develop a way of life with sound personality and character. But their parent's intervention and over-pampering usually mislead them [sic]' (A8). Two interviewees who supported this statement mentioned that parents sometimes cause a lot of confusion with the operation of the university system, an approach which had gradually eroded discipline in the university system, leading to falling standards (B5, B7).

Five other respondents also added parents of this generation are unfathomable and you keep asking what they want to achieve from what they are doing, such as trying to cover for their children's misbehavior (A4, B9, B9, C1, and C3). One of the informants pointed out that

I think it will be very hard to see a parent that ask their child what they are taught in school and to reverse what they had been taught in school with them especially those in the university [sic](C3).

Another respondent with a similar view said,

I don't think there is a need to get parents involved in the university management system and more since they cannot even evaluate their own children learning with them. Therefore, I think the government needs to deregulate parental involvement in higher education learning [sic] (B9).

Another participant argued that it would be unfair on the parents to support their learning because they are too busy with their own businesses.

I think most parents come home late and as a matter of fact, they no longer have time for the kids. So how can they even ask what their kids have learned in school? (C1).

Another interviewee shared that,

I know you will be surprised to hear this, when student is at home parent do not have a say about their life, they go out when they like and come back when they like [sic] (B9).

Their liberty is so much that their parents are nothing to them. These high levels of indiscipline have been transferred to the university, causing the downfall of Nigerian universities (D8).

3.3 Society

The falling standard of university education in Nigeria can also be aligned with the society where the university is located. They people who work within the system are the same set of people who live in the society and therefore

their involvement has direct or indirect influence on the university's effectiveness. Three of the participants were of a similar view, that to gauge the seriousness of a society, especially its seriousness about attaining national development goals, we need to appraise the nation's educational system (A5, A8, B2). Two interviewees also agreed that the critical/creative minds necessary to manage the democratic process of a nation are human capital development (A2, B8). One of them lamented, if we do not develop sound human capital, then you know what will happen,

I tell you the community will not develop, I give you an example: there is a town wherein a household at least you will find a professor, go and check their living standards. Likewise, check another town where hardly you see people going to school check their development; you will agree with me that there is different [sic] (B8).

With regard to competing in the globalized world of the twentieth century; if a nation does not face its educational development seriously, then there is a lot that is wrong with such a society (A1). Four of the interviewees indicated that to revive the educational sector, systems must help in building the individuals to be able to assist the process of developing the society (B5, B7, C1). Two other informants also established that government should make sure our schools are equipped with functional facilities such as libraries and laboratories (B7, C1). Another three interviewees pointed out that there is a pronounced need for government and all stakeholders involved in the development of education to make sure classrooms have modern instructional technologies; computers connected to the internet, projectors, audio-visual and video conferencing equipment, alongside other tools to facilitate learning (A3, A6, B8).

3.4 Government

Six of the interviewees shared that the government should take the largest responsibility for the falling standard of education in Nigeria (A3, A6, B2, B5, C8, C9). One dean asserted that government should be responsible for falling standard because they change policies concerning education so frequently, leaving both teachers and students confused (A1). Three interviewees were of a similar view as they explain that government does not equip classrooms and laboratories appropriately to make for effective learning (B2, B4, C5). Two other respondents was quick to respond to why the educational standard is falling; they contended that corrupt officers who misuse institutions' money/funds go unpunished (A1, B4). One of the deans explained that,

I believe government has failed to punish anyone catch is-disbursing the university funding [sic] (A1).

Two the interviewees indicate that the government has not tackled exam malpractices in an appropriate manner, which is one of the major causes of falling educational standards (A2, A3). Four others suggested that if the government provides or educates its citizens through functional education then the people will take their rightful places in the social, political, economic spheres (B4, B9, C8, and C9). Another respondent expressed that,

In my own opinion, I will blame poor attitude of government towards proper funding of education as one of the reasons for the decay in the sector [sic] (C8).

Three other interviewees ascribed the falling standard to the lack of commitment and concentration by lecturers in the universities' educational activities, due to government's failure to play its part (B2, C3, and C9). One respondent stated that,

I will blame the government for producing of half-baked graduates, from the primary to the tertiary level (B2).

Finally, two of the participants were of the view that nothing can beat the establishment of a school borne out of divine instruction and passion for university education (B4, B5), another opined that,

I think it high time private sector start partnering with the government by investing in qualitative education, because, according to him, government alone cannot adequately fund education (A2).

4. Conclusion

The responsibility for the failing standard of university education in Nigeria is no-one's responsibility but everyone's business. If we take it as one's responsibility then we will continue to make the same mistakes, but it is everyone's business because we all gain from high-quality university education one way or the other. Again, in as much as every internal and external agent is involved, students also need to take responsibility for their own learning because the main reason why they have enrolled in the university is to learn.

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Statement of authorship

The author(s) have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author(s) have approved the final article.

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