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CREDENTIALING PROCESS IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Education, whether formal or informal, as we know is a priceless gift to any individual and any nation, having it brings enormous benefits which words might not be adequate enough to express and not having it, is "dead among the living". The importance of education in the enhancement

of political, social and economic empowerment of an individual or a nation can not be over emphasized, this is why the National Policy of Education in Nigeria agrees that it contributes to national development through high level relevant manpower training, develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society, it is a good tool for acquiring both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society thus education is the foundation and pillars of the individual and nation. This paper's focus is on formal education. In an attempt to review the process of credentialling in the Nigerian education system in general and the university in specific some factors which included examination, facilities, leadership, accountability, value system, qualitative and quantitative education etc. were discussed to put across the idea of the paper and of cause conclusion was reached.

Introduction

Education as we know is a tool for national development, a tool to enlighten citizens of a nation and bring them to the awareness of facts. Education is the practical instrument for generating and transmitting the appropriate value system to all citizens and for establishing a cultural identity. The importance of education in the enhancement of political, social and economic empowerment of an individual cannot be over emphasized. Education broadens the horizon of the beneficiaries, which creates the enabling environment under which such beneficiaries could take advantage of numerous opportunities that life offers.

The lack of education invariably delimits the ability of the individual for taking advantage of opportunities and hence reduces self-actualization and self-assertion. The Beijing declaration and platform for action 1995 describes education as an essential tool for achieving the goals of full equality, development and peace (Akande 1995). Education also increases the beneficiaries' opportunity to earn higher income. This paper talks about university education.

One of the processes of acquiring education is through certification. After fulfilling all the requirements of a course of study, a certificate is presented to the candidate as a mark of completion of the course. This certificate is a credential.

Credential is defined by Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 6th edition as "the qualities, training or experience that makes you suitable to do something, documents such as letters that prove that you are who you claim to be and can therefore be trusted to examine somebody's credentials". From the definition above it is clear that credential means qualification, it is presented to someone that has the required knowledge of the particular course of study.

This paper will maintain its write-up with focus on the credentialling process of the university education in Nigeria. The Nigeria University, like its counterpart anywhere in the world is a complex Organisation. Every complex Organisation is characterized by multiple goals and objectives. The Nigeria university has to contend with numerous and often conflicting goals and objectives (Sanda A.O 1992).

Its functions of teaching, research and public service are often pursued with a view to satisfying the goals of manpower development for the wider society, skill development for its individual students and production of cultured individuals with survival value orientations as well as an objective view of society, these are the purposes of the wide programs and courses. The socio-economic development needs of contemporary Nigerian society puts more pressure on goals

attainment. However, in order to actualize the stated goals the Nigerian university must raise its head above the stormy waters. It must first survive within the Nigerian context, notwithstanding the complexity of the university goals and objectives. The Nigerian university also has to cope with complex structures of formal and informal groups as well as vertical and horizontal internal differentiations. On the one hand, the council, senate, colleges, faculties and departments have to be functionally differentiated in terms of appropriate powers, authority and areas of competence. On the other hand, the exchange, interactions and interdependence between academic, administrative and students' sub-systems must be functionally coordinated and geared towards the attainment of the ultimate purpose of the university. Indeed, every complex organization has its peculiar problems so does the Nigerian university, with its many groups which are coagulated around diverse interests. the Nigerian university also provide a fertile ground for conflicts, indeed, conflict is normal, confrontation is frequent and crisis is endemic to the university (Sanda, 1992). Seemingly simple issues of admission of undergraduates, examination irregularity, inadequate laboratory space, housing, vehicle loan, abuse of the committee system or of the university's democratic process, recruitment, promotion as well as volatile issues like arrears of salary, sexual harassment, retrenchment, appointment of heads of departments, election of Deans of faculties and Vice Chancellors, state policy, students' discipline etc, all provide perceived or necessary and sufficient conditions for organised protests, conflicts and even major crises in the Nigerian University.

The goals of tertiary education according to the National Policy of Education (NPE 1998) states that

- a. It shall contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society
- c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society.
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- f. Forge and cement national unity
- g. Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

FACTORS WHICH AFFECT THE CREDENTIALLING PROCESS OF THE FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The paper is concerned with goals a, b, c and d, to be able to actualize these goals some factors need to be examined for proper credentialling of manpower production by the university.

These factors include

1. Examination
2. Facilities
3. Leadership
4. Accountability
5. Value system
6. Qualitative and quantitative education
7. Conclusion

These factors will now be examined one after the other to drive home the idea of this paper.

Examination

In Nigeria, credentials can be gotten through various means for example it can be gotten genuinely through the right way, it can be gotten through cheating, it can be gotten through impersonation, it can be gotten through buying it, the list is endless.

However, for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the right way of acquiring certificate, which is also a credential. The right way of acquiring a certificate whether in primary, secondary or tertiary institutions is going through the four walls of the schools where children and adults are taught and groomed for the future. In the process of going through schooling, a lot of anomalies take place such as examination malpractice, this can take place before, during and after examination, this disease is a cankerworm which have eaten deep into the fabrics of our educational system, this consequently affect the authenticity of the certificate issued.

Students are no more serious with their school work because they believe that they can buy their way through. In the higher institutions nowadays most students don't believe in reading anymore because over the years they have seen that it is the certificate that matters, how they get it does not matter and nobody's business, they have seen fellow students who bought their way through and getting higher grades than they that read, so now they do not bother to read but plan to cheat. This attitude is a threat to the certification of a graduate. The implication of this is that, students might get certified but do not have the necessary skills and knowledge of the course and when they get to the job market they can not perform.

Examination according to Oxford advanced learners dictionary is "a formal written, spoken or practical test, especially at school to see how much you know about a subject or what you can do". Examination is one of the important process you pass through in order to be qualified for a certificate at the completion of the course requirements.

Nigerian university has been experiencing abuse of the examination through the years by academic staff, students and even administrative staff. Examination malpractice has become a gigantic problem that seem to defile solution, according to Ukusare (2002), the greatest threat to the validity of an examination is the malpractice of it. Examination malpractice can remove dignity and integrity from the culprits, the school where it happened and the society at large. Certificates given under this condition can not be said to be valid and can not be used in other countries of the world. The recipient can not perform and unless something urgent is done to arrest this menace, the university can not claim to be producing skilled manpower for national development, the nation will continue to import expatriates to handle our internal affairs.

Facilities

Adequacy of facilities is very vital to the successful training and certification of graduates, the lack of it will produce incompetent graduates that will eventually be certified. Facilities such as adequate infrastructural, instructional, and human resources are necessary for the successful training of needed manpower for the economy. Infrastructures such as quantity and quality of students' hostels, the quality of staff offices, lecture theatres, studios, laboratories, libraries equipment, general management of space, conducive environment, electricity e.t.c., the instructional materials which include the chalk, chalkboard, mega phones, current textbooks, projectors, audio-visual equipment, computers etc. and human resources includes adequate and competent lecturers in their various fields, students and administrative staff from the lower cadre to the high cadre etc.

These and more of these facilities are needed for the proper credentialling of a graduate in the Nigerian education system. The absence of these basic needs renders the credentialling process faulty. Yakubu (2000) states that "The economic advances of any nation does not necessarily

depend on its natural resources endowment but increasingly on the level of technological innovations, capabilities and that this is only achievable through a sound and well-grounded education and training system and how can this laudable concepts be actualized except through the provision of adequate human material resources.

Leadership

Leadership is usually regarded as the moving force behind goal achievement in any organization. A dynamic leader does not only effectively motivate followers to conform to organizational objectives, but also creates a conducive environment to which everyone is proud to belong. Leadership is the ability to plan, control, direct, coordinate and organize the activities of the school, employing both the human and material resources, for the achievement of organizational goals. (Gulick and Urwick 2001).

A leader in any organization especially in school is a very-important personality to look up to for instruction and guidance for the actualization of set goals, but a leader who is hardly around like the Laissez-faire leader and put his subordinate in jeopardy and suspense can hardly actualize the set goals, an autocratic leader who is too harsh and uses threats to actualize his set goals may actualize the set goals but may soon discover that he is alone. The democratic manipulator is a leader who may be able to get away with his tricks of making people believe he is a democratic leader when he is indeed an autocratic leader. This leader may actualize the set goals through his under cover, but God bless his soul if one or more of the committee member(s) fall out with him. The democratic leader seeks counsel from every body. He craves for contribution in decision making, carries everybody along and decision is taken by all. A leader of this sort is likely going to achieve more because he/she makes everybody important and everybody would also want to help him actualize the set goals. This leader can place strategies on ground and delegate authority to individuals to follow-up these strategies for the actualization of set goals. All hands will be on deck because they want to see him/her succeed. Leadership matters a lot in the control, management and eventual graduation and certification of the students.

Accountability

Accountability is an important instrument to reach the set goals of an organization like the school. Accountability according to Hostrop (1975) is an acceptance of personal responsibility for the achievement of predetermined measurable objectives, on the other hand Lessinger and Tuttle (1985) says accountability is a subset of evaluation and refers to the act of ascertaining who or what system is responsible for what is done or not done for a client or client group. System accountability reflects the promises in return for the resources provided. Well-structured evaluation focussed on measuring the achievement of specific programme objectives in local institutions is in the essence of educational accountability (Toby 1997).

Accountability as recommended by Lessinger (1970) requires that the school take three steps:

1. Frame performance criteria for each programme
2. Obtain an independent education accomplishment audit to measure the actual performance against these criteria
3. Provide for the auditor to make a public report of his findings

Accountability do not only apply to funds but schools should ensure that the learner is able to ultimately demonstrate a concrete achievement following his educational experience. Schools

should be accountable for educational products (students) they should ensure that children do indeed learn. Teachers have the responsibility for what might be called achievement accountability.

School authorities must be held accountable for the achievement of the school products, which are graduated and certified fit for employment. It is the school administrators that are ultimately accountable for the students' progress so that their certificate will indeed qualify them to work. If the school managers are not held accountable, they will slack in their responsibility to the products, and this will invariably affect the authenticity of their credential.

Value System

The value system of a nation matters a lot in the credentialling process of our educational system. A society that does not believe in education as the key to the prosperity of a nation and its development will be difficult to accept education, a nation who places more premium on certificate rather than competency, the real education of learning and discoveries, will soon find itself not achieving anything, a nation who believes that money is all that matters will discover that most of its youths who are leaders of tomorrow are mainly concerned about money and will do anything to get money.

It is the money consciousness of Nigerians that have led youths in schools to cheat and preferring the short cuts of getting certified rather than study hard to acquire knowledge. Nigerians believe so much in certificates even if they are not competent in the area which they have been certified. Slogans like "All I need is the certificate, I can get job anywhere I like" is a common saying with the Nigerians. A country where people are put in positions they are not qualified for, is hardly going to make a headway, a country where parents pay for their children to pass their examinations is obviously asking for trouble for their children's future.

Children who have the impression that certificate is all that matters will come to school not wanting to learn but rather constituting nuisance to the school and its authority with the mind of buying them out and if care is not taken they are able to get other children to reason like them. Value system of the citizenry matters a lot because by the time we know that acquiring knowledge helps in the advancement of an individual and the nation then the focus will be on acquiring knowledge not on credential; subsequently when the children graduate, their certificates are authentic indeed.

Qualitative and Quantitative Education

Without qualitative education, the credentials issued to a graduate is a false qualification of that graduate, it is a piece of paper given to fulfill all righteousness but does not really portray the right picture of that person, because a graduate who can not perform in the work place is as good as someone that did not go to school.

For a start what is "quality"? According to the standard desk dictionary, quality signifies a distinguishing element or characteristic excellence, accordingly qualitative education would simply point to excellence in education. Excellence in education can be referred to as a desired level of competency required of a person who has gone through a course of education.

Hammer and Champy (1993) talks about quality as "getting it right the first time" and eliminating variation in terms of substandard performance. The early quality gurus were drawn from the manufacturing sector and focussed on 100% accuracy first time. The concept have now been transferred to the service sector (education).

A study was carried out by Arikewuyo 1997 to find out the perception of lecturers, parents and students on quality education in the universities in Nigeria. The discovery of this study showed

that there were significant differences in the way they perceived the quality of the Nigerian university system but they all agreed that until certain factors are put in place before Nigeria can talk of quality education.

It is easy to say quality than to actualize quality. To achieve quality certain factors need to be put in place. This brings us to the factor "quantity". Quantity according to the standard desk dictionary is a specified or indefinite number. Quantitative education implies either that a school system may decide to enroll a definite number of students who have the attributes necessary to be able to gain from the services of the school system or that the system can decide to admit an infinite number of students who show the potentials to benefit from the educational services of the school system. Thus although the proponents of qualitative as opposed to quantitative education pay attention rather to the lowering of standard which is generally known to attend mass production, it may be argued that no basic distinction really exists between the two schools since the quality in either case relates to what the school system is able to provide.

It is important, however, in any consideration of qualitative education, to relate the input into the school system to the output of the system. The school system and its services are considered to be quasi-organization (by virtue of having both public and private characteristics) and social goods respectively. Thus the school system gets its input (money allocated to personnel, equipment, space and materials) from governments, corporations and private individuals. (Ehiamezor 2002).

Output refers to the finished products of the school system such as graduates. In the education industry, the students freshly admitted into the school system are regarded as raw materials, an input from the society. The raw materials, after due processing that takes several years, becomes the finished product. It thus becomes clear that the quality of the output depends largely on the quality of the input. Quality education need quality input, at the same time quantity output needs quality input, unless quantity output (students) is matched with quality input (money, adequate and qualified personnel, equipment, space, materials and conducive environment etc) the quality of output will not be accepted as excellent and certifying these output will amount to disrespect of the certificate.

There are several other factors that affect good quality education that subsequently lead to improper credentialling process and this include among others, frequent school closures, unscrupulous members of staff who collect money from students to pass them even when they failed. This kind of staff graduate students even where they did not attend class. Population explosion is another dangerous factor that has lowered the standard of education because there are no adequate personnel and infrastructure to cope with this explosion (Ajayi 1993).

Conclusion

Nigerians are too paper conscious that is why all the youths want the paper and not the competence. To get back to the dignity of credentials or certificates issued to graduates, the school authority must aim for good quality education, which entails several factors already discussed above, e.g. good leadership, accountability, good value system, etc.

This paper is in agreement with authors who have contended that for the school to achieve its innovative role, the involvement and commitment of teachers, with a corresponding sense of ownership and responsibility for decision-making was an essential element in agreement, many authors also believe that making school more effective that consequently lead to quality should be guided not only by the perception of researchers and policy makers but also by those of the group which are directly involved i.e. lecturers, parents, students and even the community as a whole.

Competency should be the watchword, so that the certificate issued will be valid in both content and face.

The university system of credentialling needs re-organization and restructuring to bring about sound output in intelligence and character, that will be able to cope and compete anywhere in the world of advanced technology and computerization.

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