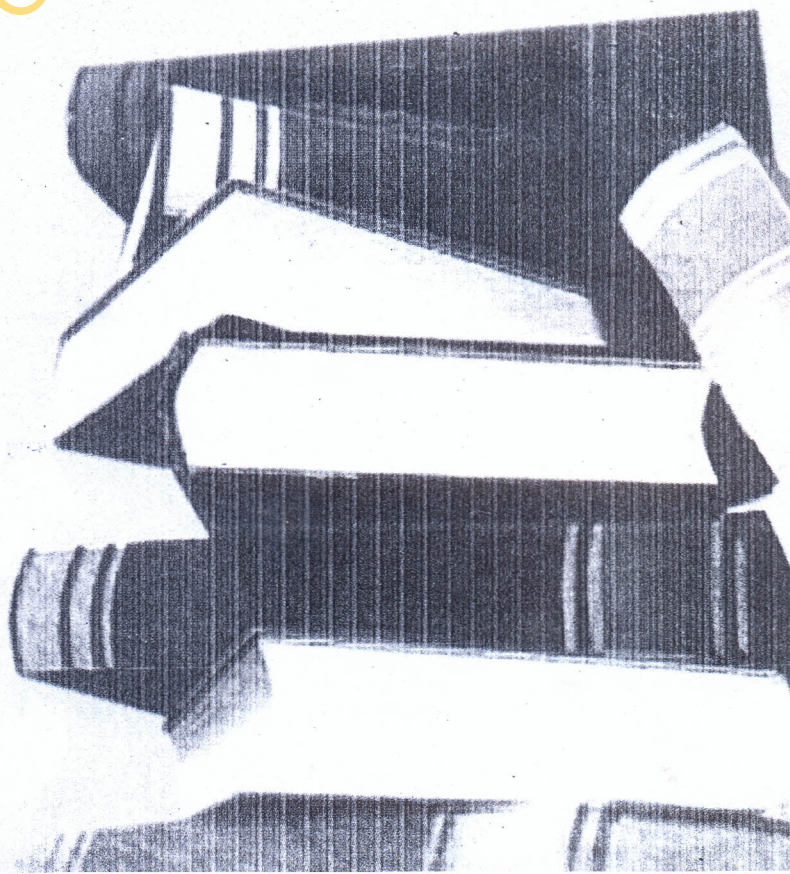


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Nigerian Students' Perceived Challenges in the Provision of Qualitative Secondary Education in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Education is a vehicle for effecting socio-political and economic change. As such, there is need to employ cost-effective and efficient measures in its implementation process to ensure quality provision. The present study examined the provision of education from the perspective of undergraduate students using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method, and qualitative analysis to present issues raised at the interactive sessions. The subjects were drawn from four basic faculties (Basic Science, Education, Social Sciences and Arts) of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the average Nigerian undergraduate would want to see the provision of a comprehensive secondary education that seeks to develop the cognitive, affective and skill development in the individual. Such provision of education has implication for proper training and retraining of teachers, who are well groomed in the art of pedagogy, child psychology and counselling. The role of government, school managers and parents, as well as other stakeholders in this process of providing qualitative education in the country were well highlighted in the study.

Key words: Nigerian students, perceived challenges, qualitative secondary education, 21st century, undergraduates

Introduction

Education is conceived to be the most important instrument for effecting social change and social mobility in people (Obemeata, 1995). Education is equally known to be the only vehicle for acquiring knowledge and skills. This is the reason why the quest for qualitative education by students at all levels of our educational system in this country has been on the increase since the last two decades. This would seem to be the case

whether in the free education zone of the South West, or in the East where females are the predominant recipient or in the North where the nomadic youths are being lured to the four walls of the classroom with several enticing government packages, such as provision of free uniforms and mid-day meals.

To meet the challenges of the upsurge in school enrollment, various governments at all levels have taken seriously the task of funding education in the country by increased allocation to the education sector. However, there is the contention that these efforts are still much below the World Bank stipulated minimum. Furthermore, Ajetomobi and Ayanwale (2005) in their analysis observed that funding of education has been fluctuating especially between the oil crisis period 1970 to 2004, while Adewale and Enikanoselu (2008) in Babalola, Popoola, Onuka, Oni, Olatokun and Agbolahor (2008) observed disparities between actual allocations and disbursement of education funds to institutions between the periods of 1995 – 2004. In spite of the supposed huge expenses on education as claimed by various governments, Nigeria is still one of the E-9 Countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterates (Obanya, 2002) and a large majority of this number consists of youths one can obviously call the wealth of the nation. However, unlike their counterparts in other parts of the world where the benefits of the various International initiatives signed by their countries, especially on Education For All (EFA) initiative, have started to be reaped by countries in East Asia, Pacific, Latin America etc (Tahir, 2003), the youths of this country seem to be disadvantaged as the country is still being faced in this era of globalisation with the pressure of large number of youths who are unskilled, high school drop outs, high incidences of illiteracy and unemployment (Obanya, 2002). Even the Executive Secretary of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) attested to the enormity of the problem of tackling it (Tahir, 2003).

The problem of provision of education in this country as highlighted above can be partly traced to the pitiable situations in most of our schools, particularly with respect to the effectiveness of educational delivery. Educators agree on what constitute indices of quality education. These measures, though not exhaustively discussed here, are identified by Obemeata (1995, pp. 15-28), Obanya (2002, pp. 38-40) and Okwilagwe (2005, pp. 125-138) as provision of quality infrastructures and facilities, conducive learning environment, provision of adequate learning materials, quality teachers, training and retraining of teachers, improved curriculum delivery, improved teacher-learner ratio, parental and community involvement, increased and improved monitoring and supervision by school administrators and quality output. In essence, quality education embraces all measures put into the educational system in terms of input variables, the efficient and effective use of these inputs. These include the strategies adopted in the delivery process, referred to as process variables and the resultant effects of these processes on the learners including the multiple effects on the larger society, termed the output variables. To find a lasting solution to the problem of quality education provision, the issues at stake should be addressed from all angles and solutions approached from varied sources.

Hence, this study approached the problem of education delivery in this country from the perspectives of students who are the beneficiaries of such education.

For some decades now, students have made significant contributions to the education they receive by making valuable evaluation of vital school and teacher statistics and the learning that take place there. These facts emerged from such studies as Frazer (1986), Frazer and Walberg (1991) cited in Frazer (1993), Paulsen and Feldman (1995), Felder and Brent (2004) and Okwilagwe & Samuel, (2011). In spite of the contention of some educators on the validity of such students' evaluation, it has now been established that students' rating are stable both in the short and long term period (Overall & Marsh, 1980, Marsh and Overall, 1979 cited in Onocha, 1996; Frazer, 1993; Theall & Franklin, 2001; Felder & Brent 2004).

In the light of the encouraging results on the validity of students' evaluation highlighted above, this research has examined the quality of education provided at the secondary school level in this country taking a micro view from students' perspectives on the issue, with a view to identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in the system of educational delivery in Nigeria with a view to providing possible solutions. This procedure is appropriate because the students are the direct beneficiaries of the education. It also became necessary to feel the pulse from other group of respondents different from the older educators, stakeholders and opinion leaders on the issue, who have become the main medium through which educational improvement and reforms in this nation have been sources for decision making in this nation for so long.

In view of the seemingly grave consequences of the inability of government and the school to provide effective education delivery system, a situation that has resulted in high rate of wastages in the education system, it is pertinent that this group of youths have a say on issues affecting their education. These students have acquired adequate knowledge and skills and are in a position to make reasonable contributions that could improve learning and education at this level. It is then that government would be seen to be performing one of its obligations to the youths of the nation. Specifically, this study set out to examine the views of students on their secondary school experiences in terms of what they liked and disliked about the education provided in their schools and the changes they would like to see with a view to charting a better course for future education provision and delivery in this country.

Methodology

Research Type: The study was a qualitative one, adopting the focus group discussion (FGD) approach and the setting was the various students lecture halls.

The Sample: The sample consisted of one hundred and forty-five (145) 200 level undergraduates from four (4) faculties in the University of Ibadan. These were 68 males and 57 females from the College of Medicine, Basic Sciences; Social Science and Arts. Students from Education Faculty were not isolated directly in the selection of the sample

because many of them take courses that are cognate to their subject areas of specialisation. All the sampled students must have completed between one to three semesters of tertiary education course work and would seem more capable of relating their secondary school's experiences *vis-a-vis* their tertiary institution's experiences. The sample was heterogeneous as much as possible as it consisted of tribal spread and type of schools attended.

Instrument: Unstructured questions were used to elicit discussions on what students liked or disliked during their secondary school days and what suggestions they have to offer for improvement.

Procedure: Permission was duly taken from the respective course lecturers and an assistant was on hand who helped as secretary in putting down views raised by the students while the researcher acted as a facilitator.

Analysis: The students responses were aggregated into clusters and reported qualitatively as findings.

Results and Discussion

The findings are presented under four sub-sections:

(a) *Things liked most by students during their secondary school days*

The students indicated varied number of things they liked. These were grouped into major aspects relating to: academic, academic support, relationship building, character building, socials, sports, talent hunt, school environment/school climate, health, leisure and religious activities.

- (i) **Academic:** For some of the students, the interest for quality academic was paramount. This interest was expressed in, on the 'basis of the way their teachers handled subjects such as "Mathematics", "Physics", "Chemistry" (particularly "the practical classes"). Other subjects were "English", "Literature", "Agricultural Sciences", "Government", "Food and Nutrition" and "Yoruba". "Teachers were said to have put life into their lessons", "taught with practical examples" and "applied content to everyday living". Some students cherished "having adequate teachers for all subjects" whom they described as "wonderful", "friendly and smartly dressed" even though they were "strict".

A few students said they particularly liked "foreign Asian teachers who were more dedicated to duty than their local counterparts and would want them back in Nigerian schools". Besides the teaching they received, many students said they "worked hard by studying their books". They, "attend classes and made good use of the school libraries", but "read novels as past time".

“Punctuality” was the “soul of business” for many of such students. Some students expressed the “joy of having art related subjects in the school curriculum instead of an all mathematics/sciences dominated syllabus”. A few, loved the “exposure received through an extensive school syllabuses”.

- (ii) **Academic Support:** Some students expressed the “pride of having had well-equipped laboratories”, “libraries in their schools” and “participated in literary and debating activities” organized for them. Other academic related activities they liked and took part in were “Junior Engineers, Technicians and Scientists Club (JETS)”, “quiz competition” and “Press Club activities”. These afforded them with the “opportunity of interacting with other students”. Students who went to boarding schools said that “facilities were excellent”. “Excursion to various places” was not left out.
- (iii) **Relationship Building:** Most students cherished the “access to teachers” they had and the “cordial relationship that existed between them”. Others enjoyed “good principal/student relationship”. A student actually reported that he was “taught to be self-reliant by his principal”. Other relationships cherished were: “making friends with classmates”, “with friends who discussed intelligently”, “interacting and socializing with classmates”. “Students who attended boarding schools loved the ‘communal life they were exposed to’”.
- (iv) **Character Building:** Majority of students said “character building” was a good aspect of things they enjoyed during their school days. Character building was ensured through “high discipline” and “counselling given by teachers”. Some adored the “respect accorded them by their juniors”.
- (v) **Social Activities:** For all round development some students liked the social activities provided by their schools. Such activities included: “cultural shows”, “social club meetings”, “monitored inter-school social visits” (particularly liked by female students) and “film shows”.
- (vi) **Sports:** This was liked by the majority of male students. Sporting activities included “inter-class or inter-house sports and games”, “Playing football”, “swimming” and “in-door games like *Taekwondo*”.
- (vii) **Talent Hunt:** This included such activities as “speech and prize giving day”, “rewarding the three best and three bad students” and “gift donations” to encourage students. “Grooming in the act of Public speaking” was adored by a few students. The nightingales “sang all the daylong and cherished music lessons”.
- (viii) **School Environment/Climate:** Many of the students testified to the fact that they “liked their schools because of their urban location”. The love of “their school uniform”, “morning devotion” was also expressed. “Better accommodation” and “ensuring that equal boys and girls were distributed

into classes”, was greatly cherished. Students who were “less privileged were assisted to go through their education”. Such kind deeds were not forgotten by them. The school and classroom atmosphere, were described as “conducive for learning”.

- (ix) **Health Services:** Students who attended boarding schools sang the praise of the “health care facilities provided for them”. Some schools went to the extent of providing “special health centres for epileptic and asthmatic students”.
- (x) **Leisure:** Many students loved the leisure they “enjoyed during the long break period” described as ‘short’ and so did not miss it.
- (xi) **Religious Activities:** Included “instruction in moral education”, “reading the bible or Koran” and “attending Christian fellowships” or “Moslem students’ society”. These were loved by both sexes.

(b) Aspects of Secondary School Experiences Hated by Students

Again, the suggestions offered were a myriad of dislikes. These were clustered into major sub-headings such as: academic, academic support, school leadership, evaluation of student learning, location/physical environment, disciplinary measures, socials, other school routines.

- (i) **Academics:** Some of the students hated subjects such as “Mathematics”, “Biology” “Physics”, “Introductory Technology”, “Chemistry”, “Geography” and “Agriculture”.

The “hatred for Mathematics and Chemistry” among the listed school subjects was more intense for students who were art and social science inclined”. The finding that some students liked mathematics and science subjects, while others hated them like bile was not absurd. Making mathematics and some science subjects tagged “difficult” to be compulsory, regardless of whether students had the ability for them or not”, was murderous of policy makers to say the least. Hence, such students “hated examination periods”. The “hatred for these and other core subjects was not for the sake of the subject *per se*, rather it was teacher induced, as portrayed by the pressed hatred for “inefficient teaching of the subjects”, and the “personality of the teachers” of these subjects. The “after-school lessons imposed on students for a fee” in some schools, equally contributed to the ineffective teaching during the school hours.

Other academic related matters disliked by the students in their school days, were: “the poor staffing or lack of qualified teachers”, “inarticulate teachers who were poor in communicative ability in the English language” and “irregular attendance at school” and “at classes”. Disliked, also, were “incessant strikes” and “non-adherence to the school timetable”.

- (ii) **Academic Support:** Some students were not so lucky as to have had all they needed in a school system. For some of these students, “libraries were

- poorly equipped”, and there was a “general lack of facilities and laboratory and equipments”. The students picked on the government for “poor funding of secondary education” and “poor-payment of teachers’ salaries”.
- (ii) **School/Teacher Leadership Quality:** Students attributed some secondary school experiences they hated to the problem of “poor leadership qualities of some principals”. Such experiences as “teacher irregular school/class attendance”, “selling of wares in the classroom by teachers” and “sexual harassment and friendship with female students by male teachers” they opined could have been avoided. Other poor leadership qualities disliked by students were the: “use of hard drugs by teachers and indulging students in them”, “extortion of money from “and “pilfering students’ property” and “discouragement”.
- (iv) **Evaluation of students’ Learning:** In students’ views, it was “shameful for students to see teachers stooping down low to accepting bribes in order to give students high marks”. So, also, was the “art of engaging in examination malpractices by students.”
- (v) **School Location/Physical Environment:** Some students, obviously, did not like “the rural location of their schools”. “Hatred for the school uniform” was re-echoed more than 50% of the time (a case of one man’s meat is another man’s poison). “Dirty school environment” and “toilets” “regardless of the constant cleaning given”, nauseated some students.
- (vi) **Disciplinary measures:** Issues of excessive discipline did not go down well with some students. To them, “canning or corporal punishment” (either with a “cane” or “horse whip as was the case in military schools”), being “sent out of school/class for late payment of school fees”, “maltreatment”, “use of foul languages on students” were nothing but “brutality on the part of their teachers”. Other disciplinary measure disliked were “irritability of teachers”, “cutting the grass” “mass punishment” and “restriction on what to wear by female students”. On the views of the students to “student discipline”, they said as “juniors they hated the brutality of” and “extortion of money by their seniors”.
- (vii) **Socials:** A few students complained they “had not enough social activities where they could rub minds with students from other schools”.
- (viii) **Other School Routine:** A few students “detested waking up early”, “going for early morning cross country race”, “long and boring morning devotion” and “manual labour with its characteristic blisters causing nature”, (was abhorred by both sex). Students who went to boarding schools hated the

“poor quality of food served” (‘corn’, ‘ghaza’ and ‘pap’) irrespective of the high school fees paid”.

(c) Suggestions on How Secondary Education can be Improved for Life

The host of suggestions offered by students seems to indict mainly the home and the school. Some emphasis was, however, laid on government participation.

- (i) **The Home:** Most of the students sampled strongly feel that many parents are not alive to their responsibilities. These students would want to see a situation where “parents inculcate in their children of both sex, the right values, based on their own experiences in life” “instruct them on morals”, and “how to interact/relate with the opposite sex without cheapening themselves”. Furthermore, they expressed the need for youths to be taught “how to manage their time” and “handle responsibilities”. Parents should equally “counsel” “their children on the dangers of illicit sex”, “cultism” and other vices. “Opportunities should be given to youths to express themselves freely at home”, “be independent” while “too young children (9 years old) should not be sent to secondary schools”.
- (ii) **The School:** From their suggestions, the students say that a comprehensive secondary education should be provided for youths. “Secondary education is seen by students as a crucial stage of an adolescent”. To provide such a comprehensive education, it is their views that “academic subjects should be effectively taught by qualified teachers” (preferably “graduate teachers”). With respect to the building of enviable characters, “students should be counselled on a number of issues relating to the realities of life”. “Morals should be taught through the introduction of sex education in school”. Both male and female students think this is pertinent “in order to avoid costly mistakes some of them have had to contend with”. “Avenues for healthy interaction among students should be created by teachers”, “understood” and “not to be discouraged. “Experts should be invited from time to time to give talks on pertinent issues of life” while the “students should be exposed to experiences outside their immediate environment by organizing excursions”. For introverted students, “special means should be devised to reach out to them even when they shy away”.
- They suggested the “introduction of survival skills which should be made compulsory for every child since not every student will pursue a higher education”. Self-sufficient/reliant trades such as carpentry, mechanic (vocational training) should be provided by the schools for all”. “Competitive sports”, “enough social activities” and “training in the art of public speaking” are to be provided and taught to the youths. It is a strong feeling among some of the students that “schools be handed over to their missionary owners”. Also, “religious knowledge should be made compulsory for all students”. “Provision should be made for awareness programmes”, while “martial art

e.g. (*Taekwondo*)” should be introduced to secondary schools for the purpose of self defence (especially among females).

- (iii) **Government Participation:** Students feel strongly, that, “parents should hands off schools while the government should take over schools completely”. Government should provide “free and compulsory education for every child up to the senior secondary level”. The “means for doing this they said is available” and “subvention made to defence should be drastically reduced and diverted to education”. This way “students from poor background will benefit from education and be self-reliant”.

(d) **Suggestions on How Secondary Education can prepare Youths for Tertiary Education**

Here, students’ suggestions were, again, predominantly four folds, - the school and government, the home, training and retraining of teachers (in that order of intensity of indictment).

- (i) **The School:** To prepare adolescents for tertiary education, the students said that the government and schools should play important roles by ensuring that: “qualified graduate teachers are employed”. That, “teachers prepare well for their lessons” while the necessary “equipments, facilities are provided”, and “laboratories and libraries are adequately stocked”. These they say, will “eradicate cramming of notes which is not ideal in tertiary education”. They wanted the school to encourage “students to develop good study habits” and “be introduced to independent studies”. These, and “the giving of enough assignments”, they said, “will prepared them for the demands of independent research in tertiary institutions”. Similarly, teachers were advised “to discontinue with the attitude of giving notes to students teach them how to form notes on their own”. “The effective use of English as the language for communication and writing should be improved since it is the only way students can excel in tertiary institutions”. The “scope of the secondary school curriculum should be increased” and “taught in-depth up to (A’ Levels) for greater exposure. Such improved curriculum, they feel, “should also incorporate skills on financial management”.

It is the views of students that youths should be counselled “on the careers available to them beyond the common ones they are aware of”, “should be counselled on taking their academic work seriously”, “be hardworking and industrious”. They should also, “be motivated” and “encouraged to pay attention to science related subjects while “Elementary Mathematical Analysis” should be introduced at senior secondary level. It is their suggestion that while “entrance examination is necessary for admission to university”, nevertheless, “the monopoly of JAMB should be broken” and “malpractices in examinations be completely eradicated”. They were of the view “that the same yardstick should be used for admission” and “consideration for

disadvantaged states should be dropped". For youths to benefit maximally from tertiary education, the students said that "teachers should seek to build self confidence", "self-esteem" in students. Be "accessible to students", "understanding" and "give encouraging, instead of damaging counsels". "These will enable them withstand social pressures students are exposed to in tertiary institutions". "Science related course like Further Mathematics should be made compulsory for science students". "Low student/teacher ratio should be encouraged". "Talents should be discovered and encouraged in all aspects of life". "Secondary school students should be challenged by giving them good orientation about tertiary institutions" and "regularly plan excursions to take them on visits to these institutions". "Social and recreational activities should be provided by the schools" for all round development.

- (ii) **Government:** To students, "governments should increase subvention to education", "ensure that school equipments are maintained", "see to the establishment of more co-educational schools for security". Government was advised to "provide social amenities in rural areas in order to encourage qualified teachers to remain there to work".
- (iii) **Home:** Parents were advised to "see to the monitoring of their children especially females to avoid truancy", "teenage pregnancies and other vices in secondary schools". They should "ensure that their female children are physically and emotionally matured before proceeding for tertiary education, so as to reduce incidences of prostitution". They should equally make "provision for their children's material and financial needs". And "teach them dressing code". "Youths should be free to express themselves at home".
- (iv) **Teacher Training/Retraining:** There is implication for the training and retraining of teachers to eradicate, inefficiency and incompetence in the system due to "poor methodology of teaching", while courses in adolescent psychology/behaviour modification should be introduced and made compulsory for teacher trainees.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the focus group discussion on students school experiences would seem to have re-affirmed the claim in previous studies that undergraduate students can identify strengths and weaknesses in the education they receive (Overall & Marsh, 1980 in Onocha, 1996, Frazer, 1993, Theall & Franklin, 2001; Felder & Brent, 2004). They thus make valuable decisions and suggestions that impact on the education they would want the youths of this country to receive in order to meet the challenges of further tertiary education in the 21st century. These students are saying that a comprehensive education that seeks to develop the total man and not only the cognitive ability alone is

the ideal that should not be compromised in this era when issues on globalisation seems to be in the fore. To provide such education, it is suggested that proper training and retraining of teachers be done to enable them execute the all-important function of teaching and be thoroughly groomed in the act of child psychology and counselling.

This effort would also call for improvement on the leadership quality and teacher-headship relationship in schools. It is suggested that Principals be trained in the skills of making formative and participatory evaluation of their teachers by diagnosing teaching incompetences that should be remedied to achieve instructional effectiveness which are essential for effecting meaningful change process and growth in the school, so as to stem the tide of incompetence and wastages in our schools.

The role of government in the provision of free and compulsory education up to Senior Secondary level or else handover schools to their original voluntary owners who are willing to take up the challenges of providing quality education should be given a serious thought. Also, the resuscitation of the scrapped Higher School Certificate (HSC) education is another issue that should be given a serious thought. In addition, educational facilities and learning materials of all types should be made available adequately and put to use by teachers.

There is also the need for policy makers to review the admission regulations to Universities and take the most pragmatic position in solving the peculiar Nigerian problem. Internal structures should be put in place by various institutions and external examination bodies to arrest the hydra headed problem of examination malpractice among students in schools. It is hoped that when all these issues and suggestions are fully addressed that the country is likely to be confident that the various education initiatives she is party to can be realised.

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