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## SANITY IN THE BUSINESS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined sanity in the business of university education in Nigeria. The paper adopted qualitative approach (position paper). The study reviewed secondary data of textbooks, journals, internet online sources, magazines, newspaper to arrive at the trending issues as it regards sanity in the Nigerian educational system. The paper basically viewed sanity in line with handling techniques adopted by the university system. Dimensions of the global trends enumerated in this paper included alternative assessment, character in education, collaboration, conflict resolution/mediation, critical thinking and distance education as emerging trends in the educational system.

**Keywords:** Sanity, Business Environment, University, Trends, Global, Alternative Assessment, Character in Education, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Conflict Resolution, Mediation,

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### INTRODUCTION

The role of education in the development of society and the pathetic stories about Nigerian university education has been vastly documented in academic journals and this paper does not intend to revisit that. It suffices to note here that the state of education is one of the crucial indicators of the seriousness of a society in its quest for national development because the quality of education in a society determines the quality of its leaders and the pace of social development. Universities (higher institutions) in advanced and well-organized societies are the center of social activities and the environment provides good settings for research, teaching and learning. But, the culture of corruption has prevented Nigeria from providing good quality education to the youth to prepare them for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

Nevertheless, the nation's educational system has transitioned from the indigenous system where mature men instructed the youths in personal up keeping and resource management, good citizenship and community responsibilities, to the formal Western education brought by the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1960s, schools were properly administered and discipline was enforced. The quality of graduates was high and certificates awarded by the schools were equal to those awarded by schools in the West. Demand for higher education in Nigeria increased during the oil boom of the 1970s and the number of students increased without commensurate funding. However, things went really sour in the late 1980s, and education was neglected; and the quality of graduates has since been compromised, affecting every facet of the society. In the 1990s, some of the loans from the World Bank for education were used to purchase irrelevant books and expensive equipment that could not be maintained.

Funding in education has not been commensurate with the demand of the education sector. Reportedly, the percentage of federal budgetary allocation to education has been dwindling. It was 7.2% in 1995 and 4.5% in 2004. The condition becomes more pathetic when Nigeria's Gross National Product (GNP) allocation to education is compared with those of less affluent African nations that allocate greater percentage: Cote d' Ivoria allocates 5% of its GNP to education, Kenya 6.5% and Nigeria 0.76%. Lack of teaching tools and poor remuneration has contributed to acute shortage of qualified teachers that leads to the falling standard of university education. More revealing is the 2006 ranking of African universities in which Nigerian universities, that were once highly rated, were behind universities in poorer countries.

Good education is the best way to prepare a nation for excellence. Without good education and proper skill how would the people grow, develop and compete effectively in the rapidly changing global economy? The failure of the government to implement its agreement with university teachers prompted the 2003 ASUU strike that lasted for about six months. This exacerbated the mass exodus ('brain-drain') of experienced Professors to countries with better working conditions; not much has changed because ASUU is still warming up for more strike actions. How would the nation ensure a sustainable growth development without investing in the educational sector? How would the society train the critical and creative minds to manage her democratic process without investing copiously on human capital development? How would the youth compete effectively in the global market place without giving the citizens the skills and knowledge to produce high quality goods and services?

The major trends in the university system are the computer and the internet's evolution. These past few years have been staggeringly fast. Most of the popular forms of media like TV, radio, and print are slowly being nudged from their pedestal by the internet. Everything seems to have changed drastically these couple of years, and this includes the university education system.

Fortunately, educators are starting to change with the times. The trend in university education these days is that learning institutions should try their best to keep up with the recent advances in technology to better teach their students and staff (Ololube, 2018).

## **BACKGROUND**

Education is the cornerstone of a nation; something is obviously wrong with any society that does not take its educational institutions seriously. Corruption and mismanagement of funds should be checked in the university system; a corrupt society begets corrupt students and sordid educational institutions. The neglect of the sector has created many problems in the society, including cultism and cheating in examinations, poor quality graduates, unemployment and

poverty. Rising moral laxity and gross in-discipline in schools are others. With all these the students are not making maximum use of the available resources, as they are chasing the dollar instead of studying. Parents provide the primary education and support to their children in early life; thus they should help in redirecting their attention to education and should be made to understand education should be their priority, if they expect to compete effectively in the emerging computerized global economy.

The problems with university education in Nigeria are many. The process of restoring sanity to higher education should start with motivating the educators to increase their level of psychological satisfaction to enable them to perform well because poor working condition is dissuading talented individuals from entering the teaching profession. A good quality education could refine and strengthen a person's innate ability. Great schools train great minds; and great teachers mean great schools! Teachers should not be over burdened with classes - some lecturers in Nigerian universities are said to teach up to six courses per semester. That's a lot of course load. However, teachers are not expected to perform miracles without the necessary teaching tools. Schools need functional libraries and current book and modern laboratories and classrooms need modern instructional technologies and computers connected to the Internet, projectors, audio-visual and video conferencing equipment, etc.

University administrators and the government should develop the political will to restore sanity in the sector and motivate the students by providing them a healthy learning environment (modern classrooms and living quarters) and assist the needy with affordable loans and grants to finance their education. To improve the quality of graduates', university admissions should be strictly on merit; and schools should offer courses that meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Higher institutions should be granted full autonomy and allowed unfettered hands to source funds through private sector partnership. As this writer has noted elsewhere, higher education should not be free; Nigerian students should pay tuition and other fees. One could rightly complain about the quality of education (or any other service) if one pays for the service. The restoration of higher institutions should be holistic by properly funding and staffing the primary and secondary schools that are the foundations of higher education.

Higher institutions should be allowed to conduct their private admission exams and screen the new intake within a standard set by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board. For instance, in the United States, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for new entrants into the university are conducted at individual high schools during the final year (twelfth grade) of school and the universities are allowed to pick up students according to their scores. Any student that aspires to attend the top-ranking schools must have to struggle to have a high SAT score. Academic competition would enable the institutions to attract better quality teachers, improve the quality of university graduates and thus rebuild a culture of scholarship that has been neglected in the society. Without taking care of the student's needs, violence and cultism on the campuses will continue. The society could tackle the vices by redefining Nigeria's value system and attending to the needs of the students; providing the student with enough recreational activities, attend to their medical and psychological needs, and provide adequate security on campuses, etc. The institutions should reduce student/instructor ratio (control the number of students enrolled in particular class) to give the instructors/students opportunity to interact and know each other. This would afford the students the opportunity to appraise the effectiveness of the instructors at the end of every course; this process helps the instructors to improve their teaching method and classroom management technique. The method of teaching in the university

should shift from the traditional (theory-based) to progressive and pragmatic education (in-built practical application).

Learning and teaching strategies differ in the academic level of learners. When a teacher applies a wrong teaching strategy he/she gets a wrong outcome. As Shi (2017) has pointed out, the learning environment for adult scholars are different from that of the younger ones. Adult learners prefer those who respect and teach adults as adults (andragogy) and not as kids (pedagogy). Andragogy theory is the art and science of helping adults learn, while pedagogy is the art and science of teaching of children (Knowles, 1980). Adult learners prefer a classroom climate that is supportive, non-threatening, informal and relaxed—a non-threatening atmosphere is particularly important. Therefore, adult instructors should recognize this and apply appropriate teaching method to improve the learners' performances (Knowles, 1980, 1990, 1995).

Adult learners prefer experts in their fields with first-hand job experience in the subject—those who are well-organized with a well-planned course, a week-by-week schedule of class activities, and well-planned class meetings with a clear agenda (Kelly, n.d). Such instructors would demonstrate how the scholars would apply the new information to their personal and professional lives and prevents an instructor would not waste the learners' time 'by driving all over the road.'

Sanity in the sense portrayed in this paper would mean the handling strategies of the various trends in the educational (university) system in Nigeria. Business environment refers to the university system of education, the trending conditions inherent in the education system. Global trends are contemporary technological dimensions taking place in the university education world over.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Alternative Assessment**

Byrman (2008) defined alternative assessment as a form of student performance grading that allows for a more holistic approach to student assessment. The traditional form of student assessment involves the average grading of a cumulative set of work for a given time period. With alternative assessments, students are enabled to provide their own responses rather than simply selecting from a given list of options. Alternative assessment can also encompass a portfolio of work to represent an entire use of concepts, similar to the way a traditional final examination is intended to be a cumulative demonstration of material learned over a given time period.

In alternative assessment applications, students are responsible for actually creating a response to an assignment or examination. With traditional assessments that are largely multiple choice based, students select a response from a list. This can include true or false responses, matching or any other form where the student's thought process revolves around eliminating options or attempting to find the best possible selection based on the criteria provided (Bryan, 2008).

There are several types of alternative assessments including essay responses, oral presentations, portfolios of compiled work, short answer questions and demonstrations of a concept/strategy. Alternative assessments can be used at given intervals for grading or they can be used as a final assessment at critical intervals such as final examinations or for the overall

promotion to the next grade. Often because of class size or as a method for saving timing in grading, traditional testing has been utilized. Alternative assessment gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate the depth and scope of what they have learned rather than being limited to just a few responses on a traditional test or exam. The compression of an entire semester of work into a single hour of testing that can account for a major portion of a grade can often be a misrepresentation of the efforts of students (Den, 2007).

## **Character in Education**

Character in education is a teaching method which fosters the development of ethical and responsible individuals by teaching them about the good values that people should have. It teaches the students the values of caring about other people, honesty, responsibility, and other important traits that make for an upstanding citizen (Grint, 2007).

FioL and House (2009) asserted that parents want nothing more than for their children to grow up into well-mannered individuals and give the proper respect to other people. Character education is an important part in their studies, because success in life does not always rely on academics. It is true that the main reason that you enroll your children to a school is to learn about academic subjects like math, history, science, and so on, but these are not the only things that children need to learn if they ever want to become successful in the real world. Character education gives them the necessary tools that they will be using more often than those that they learn from the other subjects.

The parents are not the only ones that need to be concerned in developing a student's character, the school and community should also have a role in this. These days, with most families, the children are often left alone with no one to guide them. This is why schools need to implement character education so that the students know the correct path they should walk on.

## **Need for Character in Education**

The need for character education lies in the fact that a sustained process of teaching, being shown examples of good character, and constant by practicing what they learned is the things needed to instill good character traits in students. And since students spend most of their time at school, it is the perfect place to instill moral values in them.

The reason for teaching good character is to help prepare the students to face the many opportunities and unknown dangers that are in today's society. Character education gives the students the knowledge they need to know what these dangers in society are and deal with them properly (Jones & DeFillippi, 2012). Young people these days gets exposed to literally thousands of negative influences through the media and their peers every day, add to this the sad fact that parents are spending less time with their children. Students in the university need to know how to handle these pressures and character education will give them the tools that they need through the character and positive influence of the university handlers.

Character in education can greatly help students with their academic subjects as well. Diligence and a sense of responsibility are some of the main core values taught in character education. With these students will learn how to focus on their studies, and more importantly they will have the drive that will make them want to do well in their academic subjects. Building character also helps them to interact properly with their lecturers and fellow students, turning their classroom into a better learning environment (Keegan & Turner, 2013). Research done on

the subject found out that schools that employ character education have fewer incidences of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and truancy. The positive environment that it brought to schools also increased attendance and has also brought about a significant improvement in academic performance of the students. What students learn from character education will be useful to them as they engage and interact with other people in society.

For them to become upstanding members of their communities, they need to know the proper way to treat other people, and these are the things that they learn and understand through character education (Podskoff, 2008).

## **Collaboration**

Schalwyk (2005) defined collaboration as a learning system in which two or more people cooperate in a learning experience to share and contribute to each member's understanding of a topic and to complete a given task. Collaborative learning continues to be an increasingly popular option in our culture, as our school systems have recognized that American students can be overly competitive at times, causing difficulties for these students when they enter the workplace, especially in positions that require collaboration.

Collaboration is a natural part of life and should be included in the curriculum. Collaborative learning is designed to help students "play well with others," as many of us learned about in kindergarten. While this is highly valued by our school system, now, with collaborative learning, it can be a part of the curriculum. Lesson plans for collaborative learning vary greatly. Sometimes lecturers will build a lesson designed specifically to teach collaborative learning and teamwork. There are many teambuilding games and activities that can be done in a classroom that force students to work together to complete a task. For example, students might be broken up into teams and be required to build a structure out of note cards with the highest note card structure winning a prize. This can be fun while teaching important teambuilding skills (Yukl, 2010).

Other collaborative learning exercises are designed around a particular school subject. For instance, in a speech class, a lecturer might break students up into teams and have them work together to make a presentation on a subject together. In this scenario, students can learn just as much as if they were developing a presentation on their own, but they get the added benefit of learning how to collaborate.

## **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is paramount to the development of students and should be the goal of all teachers no matter what subject they teach. Teachers should consider building critical thinking skills in all the rubrics and lesson plans they use in their classrooms. Critical thinking skills can be taught in any classroom and any subject with a little creativity. Check out the following tips for improving critical thinking in students. Yukl (2010) enumerated dimensions of critical thinking in a university system to include:

- Deep analysis - Take something that students see often and take for granted, and have them analyze it more deeply. For example, if a class says the pledge of allegiance every morning, one day have them spend some time answering some questions about what it means and why we say it.

- Compare and contrast - Have students compare and contrast similar concepts or object to begin to understand the differences between them. Using the flag as an example, have them explain the elements of the Nigerian and that of Cameroun.
- Open-ended questions - Make students answer tough questions without pre-determined choices. This will force them to come up with the answer on their own.
- Evaluation - Give the students a concept and allow them to evaluate its merit, giving supporting reasons why they think it is good or bad. This makes students think beyond what someone has told them or what they feel to the logic of an argument. This can even be done in a group if it is too difficult for the students to come up with several reasons on their own.
- Synthesis - give students two or more articles on a topic, and have them put the information together in a summary. This exercise forces students to truly comprehend the material in an article instead of simply memorizing it.
- Higher-order comparison - have students complete a task similar to the "compare and contrast" activity, but this time, have them evaluate which object or concept is better and why it is better. This makes the students analyze the reasons why something is better and the higher-order rules that define its superiority.
- Application - give students a worksheet with the directions on how to complete a task, and then have them apply this knowledge by actually completing that task. Make sure that the directions are clear.
- Debate - give students a topic (something as non-controversial as possible to start) and have one group of students debate one side of the argument and another debate the opposite. Make sure that there are some strict guidelines in order to avoid the degradation of the debate into a heated fight.
- Paraphrase - give students a passage of a book or article and have them explain it in their own words. This is similar to synthesis in that it forces students to understand the passage rather than memorizing it. Critique - give students a paper arguing for a particular position on an issue and have them point out the weak points in the argument. Make sure it is a concept they can understand (Yukl, 2010).

### **Conflict Resolution and Mediation**

Schools in the United States have already employed mediators to help out in settling difficult conversations among young adult and adult students. Originally the post of a guidance counselor, a mediator acts both as a bridge and a balance to facilitate peaceful coexistence in an academic institution.

A strong mediator must first be calm and composed. Most of the time, the two parties who approach the mediator for the first time are in acute conflict, therefore they may be verbally or even physically attacking one another. A good mediator will remain composed for the rest of the session, and will not be driven by the emotions of both parties. Because a mediator is supposed to bring in resolution, he or she must not be a source of verbal triggers which will cause the students to recoil more. A mediator then must be a good communicator - possessing skills of a listener and speaker. The mediator should be active in listening to be able to pick out relevant cues (and screen the irrelevant ones). He or she must then deliver the message to the students in a proper manner, with the correct tone, but with certain firmness (Yammarino, 2009).

The third characteristic of a strong mediator is that he or she must have an encompassing knowledge in legal terms and federal law. The conflicts of young adults and adults alike in an academic institution are already bound by the laws of a state in one way or another. The cases more or less have bearings with legal terms, and so the mediator must be able to present articles to the opposing parties and explain it well. This brings us to the fourth characteristic, which is credibility. Usually, school mediators are lawyers, or those who have been accredited or certified. A credible mediator, under the professional regulations of a state, would be able to present his or her credentials when put into question. The characteristic of credibility is not a choice, but a requirement to be a mediator.

School mediators must be neutral, too. They must not be affiliated with any of the opposing parties. Their decisions must not be biased, whether it is pro or against any of the conflicting sides, or any other grouping such as sex, race, culture or religion. To be neutral is also to have facilitative leadership as the sixth characteristic (Burns, 2008; Burner, 2012). To be able to facilitate difficult conversations, the mediator should be able to control the flow of the forum. The term mediator means someone who is at the center. Thus, the mediator becomes the channel to which opposing parties send their messages across. A good facilitator will be able to channel out urges to prevent the forum from allowing physical assaults in between the opposing parties (Yammarino, 2009).

Jones (2012) advocated a strong mediator must also be a good counselor. Before and after forums, a mediator usually speaks to the opposing parties separately. The meeting before a forum is usually dedicated to try to resolve the issue within a party itself. Along with facilitation, counseling helps a party to generate solutions for themselves from available options. If the mediator succeeds in doing so, then there will be less stress on each party's side. Lastly, a strong mediator must be a critical thinker, who will not just accept arguments without making sure they are solid and proved to be true. A critical thinker does not easily jump into conclusions after hearing one side of the story. The mediator should look into all perspectives of the story; from the opposing parties, from the outside view and into his or her own mind as he or she looks into the issue. Strong mediators in schools do not possess all these characteristics, but it is important to note as these may be helpful.

## **Youth Peer Mediation**

Youth peer mediation is becoming very common in schools all across the world. As we know, conflicts happen anywhere. They can happen at home, in the office, on the streets, and having conflicts in school is no exemption. Conflicts in school are something that is common and there are certain degrees of these conflicts among students where peer mediation should come in handy.

The effects of such conflicts may disrupt the study skills to learn what they should be learning, and could even be a nuisance for their social life. To be more specific, student conflicts may not necessarily be of physical or psychological in manner and restricted to just school grounds; they may even be rooted from the students own home. When these situations occur, it is best that peer mediation steps in to play. Peer mediation among the youth does not necessarily mean that the teachers and faculty are the ones that mediate issues and conflicts. To be honest, everyone around the students should take a major role in helping those that are in need of help, regardless of what conflict the students are in. This means that fellow students and parents are also involved in peer mediation. To answer the demand for better and more efficient peer



mediation, there are a number of schools that already have programs that help train students, faculty, and parents alike in peer mediation. This kind of program has been proven to be a very helpful way to keep conflict from further spreading and helping the student in need in ways that are unimaginable (Yammarino, 2009).

Yammarino (2009) affirmed that parents are also entitled to attend peer mediation courses where they are taught to approach their children and mediate their conflicts the right way. Since there is a possibility of gap between student and parent, this program helps in closing that gap and fixing conflict that is generally rampant at home. There are peer mediation programs also for teachers themselves. This program is aimed to help the teachers understand the students in a more personal way. By doing so, they make it a lot easier for the students to cope up with their study skills regardless if the student is experiencing conflict or not. For the students, it is a good thing to know that the teachers know how to handle them. Remember that the youth are usually misunderstood in so many ways. It is hard enough for students alike to get along with each other and having the grown-ups handle their conflicts in ways that they will never understand could mean terrible results for the student himself.

## **Distance Learning**

Presently, most universities have the options to either allowing their students to undergo a standard education or allow stay at home and make them study online. The choice is actually yours. However, you have to make sure that you weigh the pros and cons of these two options so you will be able to pick the best kind of education for your child (Schalwyk, 2005).

Online education has now become a popular choice for Americans because of their hectic and stressful lifestyles. There are actually a lot of reasons why you need to consider enrolling your child to an online school. The first is that it is more convenient than that of standard education. This is perfect not only for kids but also for busy adults who want to learn something more. If you are a part of these adults, then expect to completely eliminate all of the stress linked to going to a classroom because you can study at the comforts of your own home. The best thing about this is that you can learn at your own pace. If you are a single parent who has a hectic schedule because you are trying to support the needs of your family, then expect online education to be perfect for your students (Schalwyk, 2005).

Online schools are also proven to be cost-effective. In comparison to standard school programs, online education is proven to be cheaper. You will be required to pay cheaper tuition fees. Aside from that, you can also expect to save a substantial amount of money since the learning materials that you need are downloadable. You will no longer be required to purchase printed reference books. The fact that you will no longer travel just to send yourself or your kids to school is also considered to be great as you do not need to set aside a budget for transportation.

Another advantage of online schooling is that it allows students to attend their online classes wherever they are so long as there is internet connection. This means that online schools can be easily accessed without any interruption. If you allow yourself or your kids to enroll in this school, then you are given the option to choose your study place. It could either be your room, a library or an internet cafe. The good thing about this is that online students can actually study without being interfered by surrounding noise and this makes the process of learning easier for them.

However, there are also disadvantages to online schools especially when compared to that of a standard education. Unlike standard education which requires its students to be in their classrooms, online schools have less social interaction. Most of the time, online students only communicate to their instructors and peers through chat, email, forum and text. There are also times when webcams are used for video communication. Because of this, you can expect to have the least amount of physical classroom interactions. This will allow you or your kids to have weak social interaction skills since online students are not trained to interact with others unlike when enrolled in a physical classroom.

Online students in the university can also experience limited support. The support can never be expected to be provided in an instant. This results to you having to take your own initiative when it comes to completing certain projects, reports and assignments. The worst part about this is that online students do not have anybody to push them in meeting their deadlines. If you or your kid needs support from the online school, then you will be required to either post your questions at the school's message board or send email messages to your instructors. You will need to wait for their response and this is considered to be extremely unfavorable for you. This is the main reason why others still choose to go for a standard education (Schalwyk, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed some contemporary trends in global university system. Trends such as alternative assessment, character in education, collaboration, conflict resolution/mediation, critical thinking and distance education are prevalent in today educational system, especially in the university system. There are however other trends such as research, constructivism among others but this paper limited itself to the aforementioned.

## Suggestions

From the reviewed literature, it is suggested that university system should adopt the best international practices in domesticating the global trends in the tertiary system in our educational system.

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