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BY

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Abstract

Nigeria’s educational system, for now, can be described as a glorious past and a murky present. Scholars have embarked on academic exercises through different routes and yet arriving at the same destination – a demystification of the National Policy on Education in realization to workable and achievable terms. With the same motif in mind, we attempt here, a critique of the various criticism and analysis by Bloom, Woodhouse and Hatt. It is revealed that their criticism is an idiosyncratic approach and has serious shortcomings in that it chops the total curriculum into pieces offering momentary convenience but results that are rarely consistent from one setting to another and seldom congruent with each other.

Introduction

In the grain and chaff of criticism and analysis that have followed the positions of Bloom, Woodhouse and Hatt (1988) on the policy and practice of Nigerian higher education, are several, new and compelling healthy issues. Bound from the fabric of the current larger society, and by their importance and complexity, they take on the qualities of healthy exposure of the sector embodying higher institutions with a moral responsibility as disseminators of knowledge to faster proper values and ethical thinking in its students for the well-being of society. Issues facing higher education, such as use of concept, cultural advertisement, racism, sexism, homophobia, substance abuse, and academic dishonesty, argue for the pursuit of an ethical environment that consistently asserts the importance of human dignity, nourishes growth and achievement, and insists on respect in interpersonal communication and relations. According to Lijadu (1992), development and learning are synonymous in traditional African education and are embedded in the cultural and educational values of African people. The community, extended family, and a strong family life with children as top priority, play important roles in traditional education. Family education based on the people’s culture and traditions, with the mothers as the teachers and primary carriers of culture, is common among African nations. Story telling is used for building character and to transmit knowledge and cultural values. These stories, folklore, and songs are regarded as the unwritten syllabus of the traditional education while nature provide children with learning experiences and help prepare them for adult life blended with technological advancements of the recent times.

Whereas Bloom and Woodhouse (1988) urges the demystification of the objectives of the National Policy on Education (1977 and 1981) arguing that universities in Nigeria are sadly lacking in openness and dialogue necessary for critical inquiry and enhancing objectivity and tolerance, and for developing the moral virtues of public-spiritedness, honesty, and self-reliance overtaken by authoritarianism that impedes learning and inquiry, a profound neglect for science and technology, a corruption that mirrors the overall society, and a lack of commitment to national unity and identity; Hatt (1988) sees the discourse as an enrocentric outlook borne out of subsequent events. Spurred by the Nigerian government’s concern about transition rates into the three-year junior secondary segment of the nation’s new 6-3-3-4 educational system, reviews of literature (Enaohwo 1987) examines transition rates in 22 states, and concludes that most states have fallen below the 70 percent projected national transition rates during 1979-1984. Cobern and Junaid (1985) observed failure of the Nigerian educational policy of developmentalism, which states that centralized educational reform is the quickest and surest way to bring about modernization and an improved standard of living. However, while Nigerian school facilities and
teacher training methods are often poor, they must not bear the full blame. Early mission schools and traditional Islamic schools had poor facilities and ill-trained teachers, yet they succeeded in providing effective basic education. Reasons for these more recent failures include the application of factory or industrial plant improvement strategies to education and the use of purely quantitative (utilitarian) measures of success. Barriers to change (Cunliff 1993) within and outside the institution had to be overcome.

**The argument in Bloom and Woodhouse’s discourse**

In order to encourage the freedom to think in novel and innovative ways, Bloom and Woodhouse recommend a cultural revolution consciously aimed at changing the authoritarian milieu of higher education in Nigeria. This is a call or a revisit on the National Policy on Education drawn-up by mostly teachers/lecturers, education planners and such specialist personnel. The liberal ideal of self-development, self-realization and personal autonomy inherent in the policy is absent, practically. Freedom is limited by the overall move towards producing a strong, unified and self-reliant Nigeria. It creates latent conflict because where only one world is conceived, there can only be one acceptable way of thinking – a conformist way.

Under close scrutiny, the National Policy on Education did not create the manner in which democratic decision-making bodies could develop in Nigeria. Currently, in Nigeria, textbooks and handouts are forced upon independent students, resulting in narrow-mindedness instead of striving towards diversity as the basis of civilization. Viewed as such, there are more grains than chaffs in their discourse.

**Literature in support of Bloom and Woodhouse**

Wilcox and Ebbs (1992) affirm that collegiate ethos, the practices and customs of the institution, are important in fostering responsibility for individual and social welfare. The scholar’s role is crucial because of his or her power to define reality for and exercise control over society in general and students in particular. Often, an ethical problem exits due to the competing needs of the various roles inherent in the scholar, involving teaching, discovery, application, and integration. To assist in dealing with these problems, the institution itself must take a leadership role by properly formulating mission statements based on ethical practices and concerns; fostering collaboration among all faculty, administrator, staff, and students to work with the values necessary for institutional effectiveness and overall integrity; and employing the use of models of ethical decision-making. The academic environment must foster the importance of human dignity, nourishment of growth and achievement, and respect for others. Such an environment is defined as a learning community.

Colleges and universities are custodians of knowledge. Because the possession of knowledge is the source of power, understood here as the ability to influence decisions in contemporary society, these institutions are also the gateway to power, significantly affecting the quality of economic and social life throughout the world. Thus, insofar as colleges and universities create and disseminate knowledge within a particular society, they are institutions with moral responsibilities to maintain the well-being of that society. This is why the role of the higher education professionals should be looked at the means of ethical analysis more broadly conceived than scrutinizing campus ethical dilemmas under the microscope of ethical theories. Of cardinal importance is the impact of ethos-customs, practices and institutional contexts on the quality of life and on the ability to sustain a connected view of things characterized by loyalty, commitment, and love (Kuh and Whitt 1988; Palmer 1987). With a focus on the ethos of higher education, any normative discussion of ethics and of values take place within the broader contexts of organizational structure and society.

Students are vulnerable before and unequal to the scholar; trust must characterize faculty-student relationships. Ultimately, however, professional knowledge is not proprietary but communal, dedicated to the welfare of society through the transmission and extension of knowledge application, (1990). Han curriculum is one setting for construction of good and a degrees in any conventions of the certifiand ratified affirms that a univerheight and so, we do longer what activities internation 1990:282 - the right knowledge or no supe
knowledge. The role of the scholar can be conceived in four phases: teaching, discovery, application, and integration, each of which has its own ethical assumptions and problems (Boyer, 1990). Hatt’s idiosyncratic approach has serious shortcomings in that it chops the total curriculum into pieces offering momentary convenience but results that are rarely consistent from one setting to another and seldom congruent with each other (emphasis mine).

Faculty participation in college or university decision making is accepted as intrinsically good and as having positive effects on institutional functioning, but it is reflected in varying degrees in actual practice. The rationale for faculty participation is related to increased employee satisfaction and performance; faculty also tend to afford legitimacy and to fully cooperate in the implementation of only those policies they have been helped to formulate (Floyd, 1986; Toombs and Tieney 1992). This way, suspicion among many lecturers that university autonomy in the form of academic freedom as a commodity all too rare and barely, if at all, protected, would be removed. Administrators can focus energies on four elements: strengthening collegial foundations of decision making; shaping the consultative framework; increasing the availability of information; and facilitating group deliberation. Coordinated efforts of administrators and faculty are necessary to increase the extrinsic rewards for constructive institutional the extrinsic rewards for constructive institutional participation.

A perceived flaw in Bloom and Woodhouse discourse

Out of the thirty-eight (38) references by Bloom and Woodhouse, an attempt at verifying one revealed to the contrary as referenced. That “Professor Otanti Nduka emphasizes the appropriateness of citing Russel. (Nduka, 1964, p. 123)”. Attached as appendix 1 is a photocopy of page 123, same edition and material of the said Nduka’s (1964) work. This page does not make reference directly or indirectly to Bertrand Russell’s three theories of philosophy of reform.

Perceived points in Hatt’s discourse

Hatt’s response (written in five sections), it would appear did not discuss inherent in the National Policy in Education as posited by Bloom and Woodhouse. Silence on these issues extol the points therein. Hatt battles with the concept used but to be reminded that the objectives of the Nigerian university system are themselves western in character. Hatt forgot that it is part of the conventional wisdom to “do like the Romans when in Rome”. Hatt would wear a different view in the face of current happenings. Fafunwa (1997) affirms that we are sitting on a time bomb unless something urgent is done to arrest the decay and rot in our educational system. The bomb will explode and its impact on the social fabric may be more than the notorious Lagos bombs. Or a situation where some lecturers drew the attention (Omole 1998) to the implication of the issuance of the certification declaring the class of grades to students before the completion of examination and ratification of results by senate. Worst, still, Fafunwa in “Education in Shackles” (1998) affirms that in Nigeria, you may even become a professor without passing through the four walls of a university. Higher education in the land has since been pulled down from its ivory tower height and in its ruins, scholars infested structure littering the whole land with educated illiterates, erected to perform the same functions as the ivory towers (Solomon, 1998). Obe (1998) regrets that the sector is balancing delicately on one leg instead of three, which is indeed a sad commentary. To Jubril (1998), just as we have fake products in drugs, even in currency, kerosine; so, we do have fake educational service providers. Clearly, the school tone and environment are no longer what they used to be (Ero, 1998). The argument of Bloom and Woodhouse is trite since activities in one’s country will be judged in relation to what happens in other countries in terms of international standards, and not for the purpose of copying from one another (Enaohwo, 1990:282). “Thus, academic freedom is a prerequisite for meaningful inquiries, while autonomy is the right to control one’s affairs, in order to enhance the profession of truth and the search for knowledge. These activities demand adequate independence of thought and action, with minimal or no supervision from outside agencies”.
References


