

STIFLING CREATIVITY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE INSTITUTIONAL FACTOR

Mgboro C. U. Ph.D & Eke N. A.

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Abstract

The paper focused on stifling creativity among Secondary School Students: the institutional factor. It posits that the crisis witnessed in education industry is a reflection of the crisis within the societal institutions. It is the Political/ Economic institutions which determine the educational structures the people go through and how the education process operates. The institutions shape the incentives to be educated, to invest ones time in the future, to innovate and adapt new technologies. It provides the level playing ground for education through provision of fund, facilities, training of teachers and encouraging positive classroom environment to acquire creative skills. The inability of the institutions to provide the above leads to crisis in education. The paper discussed among other things why crisis exist in education, and influence of institutional factors and classroom environment on creative development. It recommends the adoption of inclusive institutions and planning for policies before implementation.

Introduction

Education is a social process of constructing and reconstructing the society. Because of this there is a codified body of knowledge - the curriculum - to be taught by teachers to enable students impact on their society. Because the society and its institutions are subject to constant change the educational process (teaching-learning) which acts as the engine of change ought to be dynamic to reflect the aspirations and expectations of the members of the society.

However, in recent times there have been much cries about the fallen standard of education as revealed by students performance in school examination and inability of the grandaunts to be useful to the society. Ikechukwu and Ezekwe (2015) attributed the problem to student non-challant attitude to school work. Alumode (2007) blamed it on inadequate number of teachers as revealed by students/teacher ratio which exceeds the minimum standard while Ajayi (2007) noted that the organizational climate significantly influences students- teacher performance. The education system has therefore been criticized for “being colonial, inappropriate, too literary, devoid of technology” (Ocho, 2005:10).

Judging the mass failure of students in NECO, WAEC and internal examinations including the inability of the grandaunts to function in their different places of endeavour one might think that the schools appear to be the breeding grounds of schooled illiterates (Ajibola, 2010). The picture painted above is a pointer to the existence of some crises within the education sector. It is politics and political/economic institutions that determine the extent crises exist in the education

sector. Acemoglu and Robinson (2010) rightly noted that political/economic institutions shape incentive to be educated, to invest ones time in the future, to innovate and adopt new technologies. They concluded that the political/economic process determines the educational structures the people go through and how the education process operates.

Consequent on the above structure, students' creativity is either stifled or enhanced. Where the institutions appear not to give students the freedom to pursue vocations that suit their talents nor provide a level playing ground that give students opportunity to do so, the skills, competencies and the know-how of the work force might not be transmitted to students. The education industry is focused on developing creative skills that lead to scientific knowledge upon which creative progress is built and that enables the adaptation and adoption of technologies in diverse areas of the society. Nigeria has many Bill Gates, Thomas Edisons, and may be a few Albert Eiensteins who might now be working as poor uneducated farmers who are coerced to work against their wish or drafted into the Police or Army because they lack opportunity to develop their creativity.

Myriads of policies and educational reforms have been made with the hope of helping the citizens to be equipped with the skills to enable them face the challenges of the society. Notwithstanding the policies, everything appears to fall apart. Teachers seem uncommitted to their work, some lack the necessary skills, the classrooms are overcrowded at all levels, some facilities (space, laboratory equipment, teaching aids and library) are in short supply, corruption appears to threaten all levels of education. These are some of the crises witnessed in the education sector. The paper posits that the crises witnessed in education is a mirrow or reflection of the crises in societal institutions.

Acknowledging the crises in education as a reflection of the crises inherent in the political/economic institutions of the society would help one to understand better why crises exist, the institutional factors that shape the crises, the relationship between the institutional factors and classroom environment, the influence of the institutional factors and classroom environment on creative development of the students. The above issues are examined hereunder.

Why crisis exist in education

Why is it that irrespective of the policies made to address the crises there appears to be more confusion in the system? Ocho (2005) observed that the leaders who make the polices and implement the policies appear more interested in using education to serve their personal interests.

Education industry and goals are political agents that either help to preserve the status quo or enhance change depending on how it is organized, who organized it and the need to be achieved (Ikechukwu & Ezekwe 2015). Before independence education was used by the missions as an instrument of evangelization while Nigerians saw education as a means of getting paid employment. There appeared to be no relationship with school education and African way of life. It is the culture of

the people (way of life) that should give the school the root for continued existence as determinant of their life and future. The reverse was however the case.

At the time of independence, there were not enough teachers or accommodation; not enough planning about what to do with the products of free education introduced at that time. Ocho (2005) further observed that education at this time arose from the desire of the Western and Eastern regions to upstage one another and not on a genuine belief on social improvement of the masses. However, Ocho noted that each of the regions provided about 40% of their annual budget on education, a trend, he observed, could have led to giant strides in education, agriculture and industry if continued.

When the military took over the thrust of the policy was to use education as instrument of national integration. There was uniform academic standards to achieve national objectives. Most educational policies at this era appeared to be focused on achieving unified national objectives. For instance, government take over of schools, establishment of Unity schools, the Universal Primary Education (UPE), Decree No 1 of 1974 which established the National Universities Commission (NUC), Decree No 7 of 1987 established National Primary Education Commission and Decree No 17 of 1991 which established the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non Formal Education. The idea of minimum standard in establishment of schools, admission requirement, etc was introduced, a policy that appear to encourage mediocrity and stifle creativity and excellence.

The civilian government that took over power from the military inherited the crises arising from the long rule of military regime. The crises of inadequate teaching staff, and infrastructural facilities, over population of students due to the introduction of Universal Basic Education, inadequate allocation of fund contrary to the UNESCO standard of 26% of the annual budget to education appear to overwhelm the government. The civilian government appears to be focusing on value orientation of the citizens as the most pressing need for education by establishing the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 1999, in addition to National Orientation Agency (NOA) which was inherited from the military. This was because the prolonged military rule led to negative values and attitudinal practices which need to be reversed if progress would be made (NEPAD 2010). The psyche of the leaders, attitudes and actions however, appear greatly dominated and directed by military spirit while the education sector is expected to drive the wind of change in a democratic setting. It is based on the above premise, perhaps, that Ajibola (2010:2) noted, "Why we have perennially found it difficult to hit the mark... have been as a result of gradual but consistent erosion of social and cultural values, a confounding subjugation of what is right to what is palpably wrong ..."

The civilian government established the UBE in 1999 to help the poor and socially marginalized to develop their full potentials. This will be achieved through promoting knowledge management, deploying relevant technologies and skills and infusion of entrepreneurial skills in different subjects (Obioma 2012). What Obioma meant appear to be that the former 6, 3, 3, 4 curriculum which would be replaced by

9, 3, 4 curriculum could not achieve the entrepreneurial and other skills because the curriculum content was out of date with modern challenges (Obioma, 2007). This is yet another policy shift among myriads of policies made which Ocho (2005) noted were never analyzed before being enforced for implementation, hence the existence of crises. It appears the government lacks the political will towards educating self-reliant, socially efficient and functional individuals by providing adequate fund; training for teachers, adequate classrooms and other infrastructural facilities. It is government thinking of how education sector should be conducted that drive the crises in education sector.

Institutional factors that shape the educational crisis

Countries differ in their educational success due to their different political/economic institutions. Political/economic institutions include the constitution, and the extent of democratic principle in the country, power and capacity of the state to regulate and govern the society, factors that determine how political power is distributed in the society, ability of different groups to collectively pursue their objectives or stop others from pursuing theirs (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). According to them institutions force the success or failure of education by influencing the behaviours individuals adopt and the incentives they attract through education. It follows that the desire for national unity and development of value orientation for the citizens need an institutional framework to transform the above desires into a positive force.

Acemoglu and Robinson further noted that Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer, Steve Jobs among others had immense talents and ambitions which were complimented by the school system but it was the political/economic institutions that enabled them to finance their projects, ensured stability and continuity and made sure no risk existed for a dictator to take over power and change the rules of the game- expropriating their wealth, imprisoning them or threatening their lives and livelihood.

Countries with less educational crises (Ghana, Togo, USA South Korea) appear to have institutions that provide services- health care, law and order, including education; their citizens vote in elections and have some voice in the political/economic direction taken by the country. Such countries have what Acemoglu and Robinson described as inclusive institutions.

According to them inclusive institutions, in addition to the above characteristics, encourage and allow individuals to make their choice; they also provide unbiased legal system. The opposite of inclusive institution is extractive institution. Such institutions extract wealth and income from the subset of the society to benefit a different and few subset.

In line with extractive institutions NEPAD Nigeria (2010) noted that government control of developmental process favours elite participation and elite interest, it is overly top down. Extractive institutions base the society on exploitation of people and creation of monopolies; it blocks economic incentives and creativity of the great mass of population. There is a serious erosion of democratic values which are social environment for releasing creative skills. The Elite Theory (Dye 1972) had

opined that policies are the preferences and values of the elites –political leaders. It is not surprising therefore that there appears to be absence of long term investment, absence of security; the law of the state does not shield people from constant conflicts, there seems to be no or little incentives that encourage people to exert effort and excel in their chosen vocations.

Changes in education policies, for instance, from UPE to UBE, government take over schools and now return of schools to their original owners, Decree 16 of 1985 which led to closure of about 25 private universities, now private universities are encouraged; government hand over to the State of the provision of infrastructure and instructional materials to primary schools (Ocho 2005), stem from the crises witnessed in the political/economic institutions which when they occur threaten the system while the elites acting on the basis of enlightened self interest institute policies and reforms to preserve the system and their position in it. The crisis permeates the entire structure of education because the policy makers use the education to drive their military mentality which stifles creativity.

The Relationship between Institutional Factors and Classroom Environment

The stability of the education system as noted by Ikechukwu and Ezekwe (2015) is rooted in a conscious, deliberate design of the political class to nurture and promote educational ideals. Relative absence of crises in education depends on the presence of well grounded democratic culture (Ajibola 2010). Furthermore, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) observed that the law and pattern of production especially in agriculture and industry reveals the willingness of the government to invest time and labour in long term venture like education.

The political elites make laws that protect them and help them gain from their own militarized dominance of politics. Their interest seem to extract income and sustain their power. Such extractive institutions, Acemoglu and Robinson continued, enable the elites controlling power to choose institutions, for instance EFCC and ICPC, with few constraints or opposing force. Those institutions further enable the elites to structure further political institutions, and how they evolve; it further enriches the elites, and their wealth and power help them consolidate their political dominance. The laws made by such extractive powers do not encourage private property; do not uphold contracts entered by proceeding government; do not create a level playing ground, and do not support the entry of new businesses that lead to new technologies in life.

Acemoglu and Robinson further observed that the way agriculture is organized and the technologies applied either shape positively or negatively the way students and teachers think about investment and the future. Agricultural products, yam, maize, cassava, beans are planted and harvested once in a year – an indication of technological weakness.

What the above analysis reveal is that the absence of democratic laws, and technological improvements are related to absence of long term investment in education. This appears to be revealed by government's inability to provide technological equipment for teaching and learning in schools. Kiyosaki (2013) had

noted that the education industry has a very long lag time of 50 years (a lag time is the time of delay between a new ideal being proposed and its adoption). It implies that policies made for the education industry might not be realized several years after the makers, and those who were students at the time the policies were made might have left the stage. Such changes lead to creative destruction – a process of economic growth and inclusive institutions which replace the old ideas with new ones. Perhaps it is because of fear of this creative destruction that political/ economic institutions in Nigeria pay lip service to creative developments of the students and why the education system does not have the environment for encouraging creativity (Mgboro, 2007). The classroom environment should encourage vision, experimentation, collaboration, divergent thinking, examination of alternatives different from the traditionally accepted ones. However the institutional structures appear to stifle the above skills.

Influence of the institutional factors and classroom environment on creative development of the students

Political/economic institutions appear not to induce parents to send their children to school; it does not build, finance or support schools and the wishes of the parents and children, consequently the nascent talents (creativity) that abound are not mobilized. It is true that Nigeria and Nigerians showcase the best of Africa in originality, enterprise, and spirituality (NEPAD 2010), however the “ineffective implementation of policies and laws, as well as policy reversals pose serious challenges ---“(NEPAD 2010:9).

The civilian government appears to have provided an environment for democratic principle but power appears to be too concentrated on the federal, states and local government executives. They tend to use their powers to subordinate others thereby rendering ineffective the psyche of the citizens towards responding to the demands of the society. Funds meant for education programmes are unlawfully diverted, the electoral processes and outcomes create an environment of doubt and no confidence in the elections; individual rights, though respected to some extent, are not allowed to be exercised. It seems that the institutions do not give people the freedom to pursue vocations that suit their talents, nor do they provide a level playing ground that gives opportunity to do so. It was not such institutions that enabled Thomas Edison, Bill Gates, James Watt, to mention a few, to achieve the technological break through which we celebrate today (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013).

Imagine a country where greater population of her citizens are not educated, or has no means of attending schools, or where, if they manage to go to schools, the quality of education received is very lamentable; where there are not enough teachers to teach the few available children, where some teachers do not show up for work, and even if they go to work there may not be books and other instructional materials to help them impart knowledge; where policies are made without proper planning and even if they are planned there is constant reversals due to changes in leadership, how could the nascent creative talents be developed?

Creativity is a skill that includes generating ideas, alternatives and traits that individuals can exhibit repeatedly (Mgboro 2007). It is socially constructed hence Mgboro and Eke (2013) noted it is a societal, collective process where everybody has a role to play in order to actualize it. It follows that the ecology of creativity is an environment where the political/economic institutions permit people to freely produce, encourage long term investment and productivity; establish rule of law that protect individuals and their property and ensure relative stability and continuity. Creativity is therefore a life style, ways of living and growing in the midst of challenges (Simonton, 2000). Such life style, ways of living and growing is determined by the type of institutions controlling the society. Where the institutions are in crises- no proper planning and policy somersault- the education industry reflect the crises, consequently creativity is stifled.

The policies implemented by the education system are made by the political/economic institution (6, 3, 3, 4 or 9, 3, 4 system of education). Teachers accept the status quo of ideas/policies without expressing their views (Mgboro & Eke 2013). The above patterns are internalized by teachers and carried into the classroom. The school culture therefore favours centralized system of governance. The classroom organizational climate which ought to communicate vision and encourage experimentation, collaboration, healthy competition and examination of alternatives different from the traditionally accepted ones rather stifle the sensibility of the youths whose senses are made dull. There seems to be a resource myopia where youths are not encouraged to see their strengths and the resources at their disposal. The schools adopt routine regulations in teaching and learning while the students are expected to slavishly conform to those regulations and learning styles (Mgboro & Eke, 2013). What the above organizational climate translates into is the existence of crises in education as revealed by the inability of students to acquire the skills that would enable them function effectively in the society.

Conclusion

The crisis witnessed in education is a reflection of systemic failure and institutional crisis. Nigeria claims to practice democracy but the psyche of the people operating the institution is highly militarized. Policies are made bearing in mind the immediate gain to the makers. Such policies make nonsense of the education system. The education industry is a long investment industry which should focus on multi-generational survival skills. It is the political/economic institutions that greatly determine the crises in education by influencing the behaviours individual adopt and the incentives people attract through education. Creativity is therefore stifled because of institutional crisis.

Educational Implications

The political institutions which control the educational institutions are not structured to positively influence the educational system. It implies that the educational planners should note that the de-militarization of the psyche of the operators of educational institutions stem from restructuring of the policies,

curriculum, and programmes implemented in educational institutions. Such restructuring entails loading the curriculum with multi-generational skills needed for survival in the society.

The above situation further implies that teachers' method of instruction and examination will not just focus on encouraging students to accept the status quo of ideas rather their instructional approach will focus more on experimentation, examination of alternatives, and communication of vision to the students. The above instructional approach will influence the behaviours students adopt towards education system thereby encouraging creativity among the students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made. There should be an inclusive institutions that allow people to have incentive to invest and to work hard. The political/economic institutions should be made strong enough to avoid serving the interest of few elites. Policies to be implemented should be planned for before the execution bearing in mind that education has a very long lag time.

References

- Ajayi, K. E. (2007). Teacher job satisfaction and productivity in secondary schools. *Lagos Journal of educational Administration and planning* 3,1,75-91
- Alumode, B.E. (2007). Minimum standards in Ebonyi State secondary education. Implication for quality control and assurance. *EBSU Journal of Development Education* 1,1,36-44.
- Acemoglu D. & Robinson, J.A. (2013). *Why nations fail. The origins of power, prosperity and poverty*. U.S.A. Crown Publishers.
- Ajibola, B. (2010). Political stability and democratic imperatives in a dynamic international environment. *Nigeria Journal of policy and strategy*, 16, 1, 1-10
- Dye, T.R. (1972). *Understanding public policy*. Prentice Hall Englewood Cliff
- Ikechukwu, A.O. & Ezekwe, E.O. (2015). Implementation of function education for effective public administration in Nigeria: challenges and prospect. *Journal of Qualitative Education* 11, 1, 177-182
- Kiyosaki, R.T. (2013). *Why 'A' students work for 'C' students and 'B' students work for the government* U.S.A. Plata publishing.
- Mgboro, C.U. (2007). Developing creativity for promoting entrepreneurship in youth of Ebonyi State. *EBSU Journal of Development Education* 1,1,10-23
- Mgboro, C.U. & Eke, N.A. (2013). Stifling creativity under the Universal Basic Education: the teacher factor. *The educational psychologist* 7,1,229-233.
- New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (2010). Ibactan. Caligata Publishing
- Ocho, L.O. (2005). *Educational policy making, implementation and analysis*. Enugu. New Generation Books.

- Obioma G. (2007). *The 9 year basic education curriculum at a glance*. Abuja. NERDC
- Obioma G. (2012). Reforms in pre-tertiary education curricula in Nigeria: implications for teacher preparation. Paper presented at the International Conference of the faculty of Education, University Nigeria, Nsuka.
- Simonton, D.K. (2000). Creativity: cognitive, personal development and social aspect. *American psychologist* 53, 1,151-158