

“HEY MR. TEACHER MY CHILD MUST PASS THIS EXAMINATION AT ALL COST!” ON THE CHEATING CULTURE AND AFRICA’S POST-COLONIAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Examination is one of the assessment criteria in the process of knowledge production and reproduction in any society. However, what happens if this process is compromised by cheating and similar malpractices? Put otherwise, what is the consequence of allowing mass cheating leading to cases where grades that do not capture the intelligence of pupils are attained? What is the implication initiated by the cankerworm of cheating in Africa’s post-colonial knowledge production? This study employs the method of logical analysis in examining these posers. It patents contrary to popular opinion that Africa remains underdeveloped not because of the experience of colonization, imperialism and exploitation of her resources, but through the miscarriage of her educational system. This study thereby takes another approach to disinter how the educational system in contemporary Africa has waned consequent to the circumvention of proper assessment of knowledge. It is the conjecture of this work that this is primarily one of the many reasons why Africa remains underdeveloped after over half a century of political independence. When knowledge production is compromised through cheating in examinations, poor minds will soon surface. From these antecedents, these minds will stumble upon sensitive positions in the social hierarchy. The mind that cheated to pass will further widen the gap between theory and practice through ignorance of state of affairs. These are the minds that will wreck an economy that was built in decades overnight. In the end, this study submits plausible recommendations toward an authentic knowledge production that will engender development for the African peoples.

Keywords: Examination, Education, Cheating Culture, Africa, Post-colonial Education.

Introduction

Several reasons have been adduced for the spate of the plummet in Africa’s agenda toward development. Whereas it has become commonplace to endorse the paragon that colonialism and imperialism are prime causes among other factors, this study takes another approach. For when most African countries attained independence over half a century ago, the standards left by the so called ‘colonial interlopers’ have waned drastically. One of the sectors that has not only suffered but metamorphosed into the proper breeding ground for

underdevelopment in many African states is the education sector. Cases of examination malpractices and cheating have become the norm that even parents put a lot of energy and finance to see that their children pass with distinction

Consequently, these children have become motivated to entertain the thoughts of examination malpractices for several reasons. It needs to be understood as well that in recent times, it is not an uncommon occurrence for African parents to put pressure on school authorities to make sure their children pass examinations. Conversely, these schools and similar educational institutions have the mandate to either deliver the much needed 'result' or face low enrolment as parents withdraw their children to places where the hunger may be assuaged almost effortlessly. But, what is the long term consequence of this attitude toward education? What will happen to students who cheat when they get to the workplace? One study has chronicled that "students who cheat on tests are more likely to engage in dishonest activities in workplace than those who do not. Furthermore, such activities may harm not only their colleagues, particularly those in high-risk professions such as engineers, doctors, nurses and so on, but also the organization in which they work" (Graves, 2008:17). It is solely for this reason that "employers nowadays demand competent graduates who are ethical in order "to cope with the pressures and complexities of working in a rapidly changing, competitive environment" (Zahran, 1997:124). In Nigeria, for instance, it is common to encounter cases of quack doctors and nurses. The reality of structures that collapse claiming lives are not new. It is therefore not untrue, the outlook that once the education of a country has been compromised the enemy does not need a nuke to wipe off that country from the face of the planet.

Given this reality, it is not an error to ask: Is it not the case that cheating and examination malpractices do more harm both immediately and remotely? What kinds of minds will emerge from the culture of examination malpractices? These posers open avenue for further quandaries: Will these kinds of minds that were sponsored by cheating sustain the much needed rigour in places of employment? Will they possess the capacity to deliver services on the principles of transparency and equity based on merit?

This essay tinkers on the foregoing posers. It will be argued herein that knowledge production in Africa's post-colonial situation has been compromised by Africans themselves. It is the conjecture of this study that Africa remains underdeveloped because of a very porous educational system. This system has been compromised through mass cheating and examination malpractices where the results displayed do not correspond to the minds that parade them. Furthermore, it is almost likely that these are the minds that will stumble on very sensitive and key sectors of the economy. One needs no appointment with a seer to be able to decipher the cadre of maladministration and misappropriation of policies that will ensue from this fickle mind who did not undergo proper education. In the face of these critical issues that affect knowledge production and reproduction in Africa's post-colonial education, what is to be done? Through the method of critical reasoning and analysis, this study provides plausible recommendations after a proper and critical exposure to some of the key reasons that motivate the pressure on educational institutions in the first place. Before exposing these panaceas, it is important to give a brief but critical recapitulation of the sorry state of Africa's post-colonial situation.

On Development and Africa's Post-Colonial Situation

It needs no repetition that Africa is affected by the reality of colonialism and cultural subjugation. It also needs to be reiterated that Africans are not the only peoples on the planet to have experienced the horrors of colonialism and cultural subjugation. Hence, when other places with similar terrible experiences have moved on, Africa seems to have stayed put. Why is the case?

Firstly, it needs to be established that Africa is a continent naturally endowed with all the resources it needs for development. Adversely, it is the worst hit by hunger, starvation, armed conflicts, instability, displacement and abject poverty. Politicians, jockeying for the little resources left by the capitalist class, display the politics of hide-and-seek, repression and oppression. This is mainly because of the system which encourages capital accumulation and profit-seeking. The cumulative effect is flagrant corruption, deprivation, wastage and impoverishment which intensify underdevelopment.

Here, we shall evince the claim that Africa is a continent very far from developing. Of course, the schema used to decide whether or not a country could be termed developing or not comes from Western scholarship and it has been restricted mainly to the economic sense. Hence, Ikenna Nzimiro is quite right to have expounded that "the modern functionalist school of thought in sociology, economics and anthropology, which define what development and underdevelopment mean, are victims of evolutionary theory. For example, development has been seeing only in economic terms." (Nzimiro, 1977:17). The following indicators are usually employed: gross national product, average per capita income, Standard of living index, calories intake, level of education or literacy, proportion of population in urban centres, etc. Against this paragon, underdeveloped countries are characterized by low income: high population density: high rate of illiteracy: low capital savings: lack of skilled manpower; short life expectancy among others. Whereas when one looks at matters critically, we discover that the developed nations experience more environmental pollution than their Third World counterparts; they have more people per square mile than their counterparts as a result of their sky-scraping buildings and experience more population density than Third World people. Philosophically, this model for deciding who is developed and underdeveloped is necessary but not sufficient. For instance in Nigeria, one cannot compare the per capita income of Aliko Dangote with the ordinary cobbler on a street at Oshodi in Lagos State. This schema for development is problematic and it stems from the ideological foundation of the discipline of economics.

Africa is continent with vast natural resources that have not helped the people grow. It is an open secret that colonialism truncated the development of Africa. Colonialism brought capitalism which penetrates any market to shape the productive forces mainly for the benefit of profits. Hence, the continent became a battle ground among countries of the West for resources and cheap labour culminating into the Berlin Conference of 1884 which legalized the partitioning of Africa. Claude Ake (1981:83) reacting to this idea retorts that:

... more emphasis was placed on the justification of colonialism as a service to the colonized people. What service? Essentially the service of civilizing them. That is why colonialism was 'popularly' referred to by colonizers as a civilizing mission. According to the theory, the civilization of the native, includes among

other things, bringing them Western Education, the benefits of Western technology, bringing them into the stream of human history, getting them to discard their 'barbaric culture' and generally redeeming a way of life captive to ignorance, poverty and disease.

The above observation from Claude Ake reveals the deep-seated feature implied in globalization as conceived today. What we have in the above excerpt is internationalism. We shall soon make efforts to expatiate on this later. To put in another way, the foreigners may put a claim thus: "we have helped a barbaric people realize their potentials and have initiated them into our quest to making the world a global village". But, as is well known that colonization of a people usually involve a brutal process: the military expedition to liquidate dissident indigenes and sometimes whole villages. The colonial process disarticulates a people's culture, makes use of force to make people toil under inhumane conditions sometimes leading to their death, the devastation of the environment as is the case with the Niger Delta where oil spillages causes crop failure and cessation of aquatic biomes. Is this the civilization that they purport to have brought to Africa? How does the foreigner perceive human lives in Africa? Is elitism as expressed in the writings of Friedrich Hegel and Adolf Hitler not in praxis here with the Africans?

There is no doubt that some of the issues raised in the foregoing paragraphs bedevil the African continent. However, the aim of this research is to reveal them from the angle of political economy which has always been the problem. Most people always blame the colonizers for the woes that the continent faces. However, this study takes a twist to maintain that Africa's present predicament is mainly inaugurated by Africans themselves, by paying close attention to the education sector.

It has already been established by some more critical scholars of African descent such as Chinua Achebe that leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. A call for a focus on leadership and governance is timely, important and no doubt topical, reflecting the worldwide thrust toward political and economic liberalization. As critical as the problem of leadership seems, it has been taken for granted of what kind of education the supposed leader had.

Throughout the whole world, there has been an urgent desire among various people and government for unity, justice, peace and stability. The resurgence of this desire is not only explicable through their political policies alone; but also it is reflected in the social and economic policies (Obasola, 2002:9). In fact, most constituted governments in Africa have been undergoing serious and deepening politico-economic crisis. These problems generated by political, social and economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal and religious conflicts, which have bedevilled Africa; call our attention to the problems of leadership and governance in the continent. In other words, the staggering wave of violence, insecurity, increasing crime wave, economic recession, coupled with the breaking of law and order are the attributes to the problem of leadership and governance in Africa. Therefore, the quest for good leadership is a sine-qua-non for governance and sustainable development.

A governance approach highlights issues of state responsiveness and accountability, and the impact of these factors on political stability and economic development. For too long, social

scientists dealing with Africa's development have concentrated on economic issues, overlooking the highly important political dimension of the process (Bratton and Rothchild, 1992:263).

The use by African state elites of arbitrary and repressive measures and their inability to apply governmental regulations throughout the national territory is a sign of state weakness or "softness". Paradoxically, the independent African states consolidates power at the political centre and extracts considerable economic resources from society; yet it spends much of it obtains on itself and lack the capacity to spur the country's development as a whole. It is in light of this, that Cornwell (1995:15) summarizes the African leadership and governance crises as follows:

The driving force behind Africa's experiment with democracy came both from ideology conviction and the growing impatience of an ever bolder public consciousness, and from the related manner of the continent's prevailing economic woes. On the other hand, the politically conscious urbanized, professional and studies bodies began to rail against the continue failure of their rulers to match rhetoric and promises to economic progress, for much of Africa had experienced a steady decline in living standards through the 1970's and 1980's. On their part, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other bilateral aid donors also made it quite clear that if further financial assistance was to be forthcoming. Africa's governments had to give urgent attention to their human right's records. More specifically, they had to become politically more accountable to their people, and curb corruption

It is instructive to note that no nation has achieved meaningful development socially, politically or economically without the input of or effective leadership (Obasola, 2002:10). Thus, in contemporary discourse, the concept of leadership and governance has attracted a wider spread interest as they serves as the pivot on which social, political and economic structures rest. The numerous problems which have been bedevilling African states vis-à-vis ethnic and communal clashes, increasing crime wave, drug trafficking, advanced fee fraud etc. have been blamed on ineffective leadership. While it is true that there have been apparent leadership and governance crises in Africa, the last two decades has witnessed struggle to engender effective leadership and governance in Africa.

Despite over forty years of political independence, Africa's aspiration and hopes remain today largely unfulfilled. The leadership question has become a recurring issue in the discourse on the African project. Seteolu (2004:70) pointed out that the governing class has been target of pillory, vilification, condemnation and disdain in view of the pervasive and persistent socio-economic and political crisis. He further points out that the economic domain has been characterized by huge external debt, net capital flight, disinvestments, collapse of social infrastructure, food crisis and insecurity, over-devalued national currency, pervasive poverty, unpopular, repressive and alienating economic policies. It was recognized that Africa's failures have come about largely as a result of among other things; progressive distancing of African from the masses of the people; inadequate preparation of the leadership that assumed the responsibility to govern their countries.

African leaders have frequently come to their position with limited experience. This could be a result of improper education or poorly tutored minds. Though most of supposed leaders have battled on, confronting their awesome problems of development and nation-building essentially not only unprepared but unaided, their efforts have been at best only a qualified success. As result of the situation in most higher institutions of learning, one may be tempted to conclude that most institutions in Africa are not devoted to preparing potential leaders with a global outlook, leaders who will be able to cooperate within and across national, regional and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, it is difficult if not impossible, in many African countries to gain access to relevant and timely information on most national, regional and global issues.

Obasanjo (1993) noted that, it needs to be realized that the morass of governance in Africa emerged primarily as a result of lack of checks and balances in Africa's system of governance. In effect, for some African leaders, their nation ended up being treated as their individual personal property. In other cases, a decline in moral and discipline caused or combined with bad policies, eroded professional standards and ethics and weakened the system of governance. Poor governance became the major challenge and source of Africa's predicament and socio-economic crises. Only a few African leaders have voluntarily left office; most others were assassinated or were disposed by military coups. In the past, many African leaders would align or threaten to align with the "communist" bloc or "capitalist" bloc in exchange for the support that allowed them to stay in power. It is against these backdrops, the critical appraisals of the African crises often identify the leadership and governance as the major variables to correctly historicize the nature, character and dimensions of the African problem.

The Miscarriage of Africa's Post-Colonial Knowledge Production: Exposing the Motivations for Cheating

There is no doubt that "school examinations are a tool for measuring learners' mastery of content and instructors' effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of schooling all over the world" (Nyamwange et al. 2013). This idea has also been endorsed by Onger (2009:225) who puts that "examinations are also used for placing students in various institutions and jobs and provide feedback in the teaching and learning processes and curriculum delivery in general." In other words, examinations are conducted all over the world for the purpose of evaluation, selection, classification, et cetera. In Nigeria, examinations are conducted from nursery schools, through primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary colleges and universities. This is the case in several parts of Africa as well and as a consequence, "students are expected to be honest when taking examinations but research has shown that some students cheat in examinations (Mitukaa, 2001:15). Given this reality, it is not an error to query: why has cheating and similar examination malpractices have become rampant? What exactly is the motivation for cheating among African students who have the chance to stumble on sensitive leadership positions later in life?

Cheating in examinations is a worldwide phenomenon (Nyamwange et al., 2013). According to Anderman (2000:5-7), about 80% of high achieving high school students and 75% of college students admit having cheated, a percentage that has been rising over the past 50 years. Nearly 21% of students who say cheating is bad still engage in the behaviour (Kiogotho, 2009:15). Cheating in school examinations is on the increase among students in secondary schools and colleges in Kenya. According to Siringi (2009:23-5), over 60% of the students in

colleges and universities in Kenya admitted having cheated in examinations. This is also the case among Nigerians too. This is endorsed by Jekayinta (2006:45-8) that “when students are poor, students are tempted to cheat”. Similarly Nywamwange et al. (2013) also establish that:

Students were found to spend more time doing non-academic tasks like tilling land and domestic chores than studying. It was also established that many students do not take their studies seriously and quite a number of them absent themselves from school which means that the syllabuses would not be covered adequately. This state of affairs led to greater temptations to cheat in examinations.

Other reasons have been adduced for cheating in examinations. Another plausible motivation for cheating is “pressure to produce good grades because students have to pass before they can proceed to the next level of schooling” Nywamwange et al. (2013). It needs no elaboration that in Nigeria for instance, students face a lot of pressure to pass from parents, teachers, peers and society in general. This pressure forces a number of them to cheat so as to be seen to be working hard. Parents want their children to score high marks and join prestigious schools. Teachers want excellence in their subjects so as to get as many awards as possible during prize giving. Society expects a student to do well regardless of the methods they employ (Nywamwange, et al 2013).

In a separate research but related to the present discourse, McCabe et al. (1999) have chronicled factors that can influence cheating such as a perceived need to get high grades, parental pressures, a desire to excel, laziness, a lack of responsibility, a lack of character, poor self-image, and a lack of personal integrity. Kerkvliet and Sigmund (1999) also found that instructors or lecturers were influential since students believed that their lecturers or instructors were concerned about them and were involved actively in the learning process, and therefore these students tended to cheat less. It is not to be contested at this juncture that examination malpractices and cheating is rife in almost all parts of Africa. Furthermore, citizens who have had certifications through a shoddy intellectual atmosphere will likely stumble on sensitive positions in the country. How will these minds thrive in such sensitive positions where not grades but human lives and aspirations are at stake? It is necessary to take this key poser seriously given the finding of Graves (2008: 17) that “students who cheat on tests are more likely to engage in dishonest activities in workplace than those who do not. Furthermore, such activities may harm not only their colleagues...but also the organization in which they work”. Earnestly, is certification still a suitable barrier that mirrors competence in Africa’s post-colonial knowledge production and reproduction? This is the concern of the sections that follows.

Competence over Certification: The Recommendation

Since it has been argued validly that examinations seldom mirror the true abilities of individuals as a result of the likelihood of cheating and malpractices, the certifications that follow necessarily become circumspect. Even when the individual is not a candidate of malpractice, s/he could encounter in the workplace, those who attained their positions through cheating and malpractices from the class room to the work room. It is therefore the case that tension will ensue. This will in turn affect the quest for nation building and desire for national development by African states. The burning poser at this juncture therefore is:

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how do we make knowledge production and reproduction better than what it currently is? How shall we improve Africa's knowledge production for the benefit of Africans themselves? It is for this reason that this study recommends competence over certification. In other words, it is important to graduate from a certificate-based knowledge production system in Africa to the one of competence. What exactly is certificate-based education? How does it differ from competence-based education?

Generally speaking, a certificate is an official document that is issued to an individual to certify that the person has received specific training or education of some sort or has passed a test or series of tests. A certificate within education/academia is an official document issued by a school to a person who has successfully completed a school programme. In this case, a certificate is issued as a proof of successful completion, proof of participation, proof of attendance and proof of knowledge/competence and qualification on a particular field.

The Nigerian system of education is more of a certificate-based education in both structure and functionality than a competence-based one. It emphasizes "paper qualifications" over knowledge, skills, and technical know-how. Often times, the emphasis is on how well one passes an exams and not how well one knows a particular discipline, so most students cram just to pass an examination only to forget after the exams. Such students end up making good grades and earn wonderful certificates but are actually bereft of any knowledge necessary for a gainful employment in the future. There are also other students who go to the extent of cheating in an examination because they are merely after good grades and not the kind of knowledge that offers them the authority of competence. So, the labour market is flooded with graduates who lack the authority of competence and are equally clueless in creating jobs for themselves.

This is not calculated to condemn certificates. The point however, as Actoria (2012) claims is that certificate-based education has lost relevance in recent times. According to Roselin (2012), the duty of education is to develop in students the strategic ability to deal with practical issues of their day-to-day experiences within and outside their environment. That is to say, the learning process must be societal based as well as a means of bringing the world and the needs of the labour market into the classroom. Thus, the students should be taught how to develop inventive skills, problem solving oriented attitude, and self-developmental skills (Bentham, 2012). The fact is that, as Obemeate (1990) observes, education is much more comprehensive than the mere process of learning to read and write, acquiring certificates in one field of specialization or another. It goes much deeper; it is concerned with the growth of habits and lifestyle that makes a man what he is. Nigeria is blessed with many higher institutions of learning, but the low standard of education jeopardizes most graduate's chances of job security since they do not possess the adequate skill needed for the job and also, many employers are sceptical about the applicability of their intelligence in the work place (Eseola, 2016).

With the main thrust of certificate-based knowledge production system tersely articulated, there is no need to amplify as it is a direct rendition of what obtains in many African societies. When emphasis is placed on certification but very minimal attention on means of assessing those who parade the certificates, it is clear that knowledge production will suffer and the entire society will in turn suffer. It is for this reason why many African states boast of poorly

prepared leaders or incompetent leaders. Occupants of sensitive positions in sensitive sectors fail partly because they do not really know. It is high time we started looking inwards for the cause of under-development in Africa. This study, recommends a competence-based approach to education. It is the conjecture that this will check effectively, the lack of tandem between certification and knowledge production.

In a literal sense, the term ‘competence’ is another word for know-how or skill. This implies that competence requires the ability for an individual to know-how to or to have the skill to perform a task. According to Vincent (2008), competence is the quality or the state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, strength and skill. In the same vein, Nwanyanwu (2015), opines that competence is mainly on the ability to do something well, measured against a standard, especially ability acquired through experience and training. Competence expresses itself in knowledge, ability, know-how, skill and so on. Competence, thus, connotes knowledge and so the duo shall be used as convertible terms in this essay.

A competence-based system of education helps prepare students for labour market and self-dependency. James (2011) affirms that competence-based education helps students to develop the ability for critical analysis of world events, matching theory with practice, development of vision for new and better society, ability to explore controversial issues and offer technical solution. In short, competence-based education aims at equipping students with the ability to apply appropriate theories to practical issues in one’s work or a particular life situation.

In addition, the goal of a competence-based educational system is focused on helping students to acquire critical thinking skills, self-dependency attitude, good moral behaviour and creative thinking styles. These tools will help them individually in developing the ability to express the theoretical knowledge in the light of practical knowhow; thus contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the society (Regars, 2010).

Conclusion

This article argues that presently knowledge production in many African countries has miscarried. This is partly one of the colossal reasons why underdevelopment has become almost a way of life in Africa. Emphasis on certification when assessments have been compromised seems to be the order of the day and the national consequence of this is very grave. Indeed, the claim that to obliterate an entire race from the face of the planet does not require nukes or atomic weapons receives validation in this study. Hence, one need only allow mass cheating to be regarded as the tradition. Parents want their children to pass examinations even if this means engaging in cheating and malpractices. Grades and certificates that fail to capture the intelligence of these minds will emerge. In the long run, engineers that will put up structures that will collapse and kill people will soon emerge. Similarly, doctors and nurses that will kill patients out of medical ignorance will surface. Politicians that will loot and stash away state treasury for private means will be everywhere. Policy makers who cheated or obtained their certificates by cheating and similar malpractice will chart the road that will further leave the country under-developed. Whoever says Africa’s post-colonial knowledge production needs no revision says but the opposite of truth.

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