

THE QUEST FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONCEPT OF QUOTA SYSTEM IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: A CRITIQUE

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Abstract

The basic objective of human development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives. It has mostly been argued by scholars that in order to advance, human development growth ought to be participatory, distributive and sustainable. The purpose of development is to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities, and opportunities can be enlarged for both present and future generations. It is believed that Nigeria as a nation, in the quest to achieve human development has adopted the concept of quota system. Quota system in the tertiary education ensures that all the federating units that make up Nigeria are represented in the admission process. This is necessitated by the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the country. Good as it may sound; the quota system has raised series of questions which include: is the effort geared towards uniting the nation or dividing the nation? To what extent has quota system shown us our unity or our differences? Is sustainable human development achievable through quota system? Going by the view of justice as fairness, to what extent can we say that quota system in the tertiary education is fair to all concerned? Is it possible for quota system to create healthy educational competitiveness amongst the students? This research explores these questions, and concludes that quota system, thoughtful as it may look, is counterproductive within educational system. For, instead of encouraging students towards hard work, it has created laziness and led to mass production of mediocre. Though, it may be a good option, in other sectors, it is only but an avoidable option in the education sector, especially; the tertiary level.

Keywords: Quota system, Human Development, Education, Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Introduction

The need for human development cannot be overemphasized. Human development has been at the core of every human enterprise. Man had hitherto devised various means of sustaining himself in existence; these means are seen as development. Humanity had consistently evolved, starting from the primitive age to the present contemporary age. The difference between, the primitive era and the contemporary era is simply development. The development is social, political, economic and technological. The consistent and sustainable nature of this development is the base of human civilization. Fathi Osman affirms this position when he posits that civilization means: “the comprehensive development of the human potential in all its dimensions: physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral and psychological¹”.

There is an inherent desire in man for improvement. Man always strives to improve; this is what has led to various developmental changes in history. Hegelian dialectics gives us a clue on the process of change, the conflict of opposite; the thesis cum antithesis struggle which will eventually lead to synthesis. The synthesis stands as an improved version of both the thesis and the antithesis. Marx following Hegelian dialectics has also argued that such struggle will lead to a better socio-economic state. The fact is that man has always and will always strive to improve his existential lot. When one considers Thomas Hobbes’ *The Leviathan*, especially on the origin of the civil society, one can argue that the state was so horrible that human beings naturally seek

peace, and the best way to achieve peace is to construct the Leviathan through social contract. Hobbes thus posits: “To this war of every man against every man, thus also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no justice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues².”

Our argument is that civil society came into being as a result of man’s need for progression. On this note, it suffices to argue that, the essence of government is to better the lots of its citizenry. It is against this background, that we want to argue that the introduction of quota system in Nigeria should be seen as an act done in good faith. The quota system formula was geared towards the improvement and development of all the federating units of the country. It emphasizes on even participation of all the federating units in all sectors of the economy. Quota system has been introduced in all the facets of Nigerian society including the educational sector. Quota system may have succeeded or is still succeeding in other sectors of the society, but its introduction in the educational sector amounts to contradiction. It negates the developmental essence of education. It is the intention of this research to explore from a philosophical perspective the place of quota system in tertiary education.

Human Development

Human development is a concept that was popularized by the arguments and counter arguments on what should constitute the perimeters for measuring development. This is as a result of the perceived downfall in GDP yardstick for measuring a country’s development. There have been questions on how the economic growth of a nation has facilitated the transformation of people’s lives; that is, how has the increase in a nation’s GDP help in enriching the people’s wellbeing? The inability of some countries to positively answer this question has led to a shift in the perimeters for measuring a country’s development. This ‘shift’ is the human person; that is, a country is said to be developed if the wellbeing of the populace is being taken into consideration. The human person is now considered as the center for and of development. In this new direction, economic growth is considered as a means to an end and not an end in itself. Outreach captures this: “the human development approach focuses on improving the lives people lead rather than assuming that economic growth will lead, automatically, to greater opportunities for all. Income growth is an important means to development, rather than an end in itself.”³ To this end, human development involves capacity building; that is, developing the capacities for positive utilization of a nation’s resources in people.

Capacity building involves creating an enabling environment for people to thrive, education and acquisition of skills etc. According to the Wikipedia, “The most basic capabilities for human development are: to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable (e.g., to be educated), to have access to the resources and social services needed for a decent standard of living, and to be able to participate in the life of the community. Without these, many choices are simply not available, and many opportunities in life remain inaccessible.”⁴ An abstract illustration of how investing on the people is very important is a bicycle:

.... A bicycle itself is a resource- a mode of transportation. If the person who owns the bicycle is unable to ride it (due to a lack of balance or knowledge), the bicycle is useless to that person as transportation and loses its functioning. If, however, a person both owns a bicycle and has the ability to ride a bicycle, they now have the capability of riding to a friend's house, a local store, or a great number of other places. This capability would (presumably) increase their value

of life and expand their choices. A person, therefore, needs both the resources and the ability to use them in order to pursue their capabilities. This is one example of how different resources and/or skills can contribute to human capability.⁵

From foregoing, we can deduce that education is a key in the human development. This is because; every other components of human development revolve around education. For example, one has to be knowledgeable of the opportunities available and how to explore them before he/she can take up such opportunities. Education can be said to be the bedrock for capacity building in human development. Owing to this fact, the processes of educating the human person matter since such may mar or facilitate the goal of human development. The resultant effects of a bad process to educating the human person could be mediocrity, marginalization, laxity etc which in turn is counterproductive to human development. A country that gets it right in her educational processes has paved way to a qualitative human development. Educational processes here could mean: trained teachers, adequate facilities, admission procedures etc.

The paper is more interested on the admission procedures to a qualitative education in Nigeria. The embodiment of the admission procedures in Nigeria is what is called quota system. The paper examines how this (quota system) will facilitate the achievement of human development in the country. Before going into this, we will now examine what quota system in Nigeria entails.

Quota System

The concept of quota system is associated with other related concepts like; federal character system, zoning, and catchment area within Nigerian context. The aim of these concepts is to ensure even distribution of social benefits to all the federating units of the Nigerian society. The position has always been that there is a wide educational gap between the South and the North. Segun Joshua et al state that, “The south is educationally advantaged and the north is disadvantaged.”⁶ This gives the South an edge over the North. Quota system, coming into play tries to ensure that, the disadvantaged sector is not totally eliminated. While the quota system came into being prior to Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the federal character principle became officially recognized in the 1979 constitution⁷. These policies (quota system, federal character principle, zoning, catchment area) were aimed at addressing the issue of ethnic representation in the public sector, especially in the issues of admission, recruitment, promotion and appointment. According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online, quota system is “a method of setting a limit on how much of something a country or company is allowed to have, produce, import etc.”⁸ It is “any hiring or admissions policy requiring that a specified number or percentage of minority group members be hired or admitted.”

Quota system formula cuts across all the facets of Nigerian society. Our focus in this research is quota system in education, its effect on development. Just as we have pointed out earlier, quota system may have been a success in other sectors of Nigeria public life, but our focus is strictly on its implementation in the tertiary education. According to Segun et al, the university admission quota system breakdown in Nigeria is as follow: Merit 45%, Locality 35%, educationally less developed 20%. The implication of this breakdown is that, 45% of the admission will be based on merit, while the remaining 55% will be influenced by other factors other than merit.

Quota System in the Light of Human Development

The main focus of quota system is to ensure that all the federating units are properly represented. The quality of such representation is never put into consideration. Through education the purest of man's culture and civilization is preserved and also developed. Education has been the main anchor of human development. The competitiveness of education has led to several breakthroughs in science and technology. The introduction of quota system in the admission process implies that, the best brains are not always admitted into the university, while, some below average brains are given admission in the name of ethnic or regional representation.

On the question on whether the application of quota system to education sector has reminded us of our differences; the answer is yes. This is because; a student from the Southern Nigeria who having performed well but had his/her admission slot traded to a Northerner (who performed far below him) as a result of the quota system may develop a hate-relationship to the this Northerner. He only understood that the Northerner got admitted just because he is from the North and that he was denied admission simply because he was from the South.

On whether the quota system facilitates the quest for human development; we can argue that a system that sacrifices meritocracy on the altar of mediocrity will always be counter-productive to human development. Since we have been able to establish that human development has more to do with capacity building, we can as well add that the process of building these capacities matters a lot and that, capacity that was wrongly built will eventually become a specter that will hunt and destroy the country. Using the abstract illustration with bicycle in our discussion on the concept of human development above, we can argue that if the processes of learning how to ride a bicycle were not followed properly, it will definitely produce bad riders that will eventually lead to accidents which is counter-productive.

The reason for the above argument is the fact that experience has shown that the introduction of quota system has encouraged laxity and lack of commitment and seriousness among the benefiting students. This may be likened to a communist system that operates within the mantra: *from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs*. Many critics had argued that the basis for the failure of many communist systems was this mantra. This is because; the second part of the mantra has defeated the first, that is, when people are aware that they will get what they want with little or no effort of their own, they tend to be lazy and unserious knowing full well that they will eventually have their way. This does not encourage competition which is the hallmark of development. Oftentimes, students that gained admission into tertiary institutions by benefiting from this quota system continued with this mentality of putting little or no effort in their studies and will eventually graduate as dullards that may even steer the wheels of the nation in future.

Having established that a system as the Nigerian quota system that does not encourage competition in its application to educational system cannot facilitate development, we can ask whether the application of this quota system into tertiary education is a just one. In the light of what has been said so far, we can rightly say that such is not a just system. In line with this, Moti writes: "...by the quota system, a candidate in southern states, considered to be educationally advantaged, who scores 300 out of 400, may not gain admission into the university, while his or her counterpart in the north who scores less may get admission. He stated further that although it is good to encourage the educationally disadvantaged, it should not be at the detriment of others."⁹ Quota system does not create a level playing ground for everyone to compete and as a result, cannot be said to be just.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper condemns the application of quota system to the tertiary education in Nigeria. The basis of this condemnation is the fact that it (the quota system) goes contrary to the rudiments of human development having in mind that human development is the primary concern of education. The standard for educating people all over the world is based on merit and since education is the process of bringing out the best out of a person, using a system like the quota system that encourages laxity and mediocrity will definitely defeat this purpose. Government in scraping the quota system from the tertiary education should make sure that all the factors that will facilitate and encourage qualitative education are put in place in these 'less educationally developed areas'. These factors may include: qualified teachers, good infrastructure and facilities, free tuition for the indigent students etc. in doing all these, government as a matter of importance should note peculiarities of a people; for example, a person from the southern or western part of Nigeria has the tendency to embrace western education than someone from the northern part of the country who may rather prefer Arabic studies. Having this in mind, there is a need for proper sensitization on the side of the government about the need for secular schooling; this sensitization can be done through the Islamic clerics and other relevant parties (since the average Muslim believes more on what he/she was taught by a cleric) thereby inculcating in them the need for secular schooling.

The mere introduction of the quota system to tertiary education as a way of curbing the high rate of illiteracy has the tendency of producing illiterates as graduates thereby defeating its purpose. Therefore, in order to ensure a qualitative education that serves as a catalyst for human development, there is an urgent need for government to create a level playing ground for students to compete for admission which happens to be the standard all over the world. And the high rate of illiteracy in some parts of the country can be curbed by taking into consideration those factors that are peculiar to the people that inhabit these parts and then put in place some of the recommendations made above rather than introducing the quota system that is not in consonance with the educational culture and standard.

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