

**A KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON -**  
**“HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL FOR**  
**GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS”.**

The idea of developing a nation without educating its people is not too realistic. For any community to be transformed, the education of its residents is essential because it possesses transformative power. This grain of truth is consolidated by:

*“By education I do not mean simply learning, I mean training the head, hand and heart. Training in mind and, in morals and in hand that helps make one socially efficient”. Nnamdi Azikwe*

*“Education is the most powerful tool, which can be used to change the world”. Nelson Mandela*

*“A desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of Mankind; and every human being whose mind is not debauched will be willing to give all that he has to get knowledge”. Samuel Johnson*

Therefore, ‘Quality Higher education’ has a direct link to excellent **Human Capital Development**.

They are indeed interwoven and synonymous with each other. In the past two decades, Nigeria kick-started a new educational policy by adopting the ‘6-3-3-4’ system. The recipients would spend six years in primary **school**, three years in **junior secondary school**, three years in senior secondary **school**, and four years in **tertiary** institution. Specifically, this was introduced in 1998. This model has not lived out its criticisms, in which it is feared that the Government has not articulated its own part well enough. There are acute traces of unemployment and underemployments under this umbrella.

The non-fusion of proper skills has made our educational results very pedestrian, and the youths in their innumerable numbers are better described as loiters. It is still fresh on our minds how we have fared so far. We can immediately deal with the results using existing operative statistics under the purview of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National University Commission (NUC).

Empirical evidence is exhibiting lopsidedness, just as the tilt is on the Federal ownership; except for the Polytechnic Institutions.

We have canvassed a transition from the 6-3-3-4; to the 9-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria. The hype is on the burners again; on the assessment of the future implementation on Technology subjects, just as we had it on the 6-3-3-4 system. The 9-3-4 System claims that there shall be the merger of the former 6years primary education and the three years of junior secondary education of which the rationale is yet to be explained. Meanwhile, let us try to evaluate the existing records of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Category	Total	Number on Private Ownership	Number on State Ownership	Number on Federal Ownership
<b>Monotechnics</b>				
➤ Agriculture	26	-	9	17
➤ Health	6	-	2	4
➤ Specialized	15	-	3	12
<b>Polytechnics</b>	113	44	41	28
<b>Universities</b>	162	74	44	44

- ⇒ With the preponderance of the **Federal** presence or holdings on the **Monotechnics** undertakings; are we fulfilled in the areas of **Human Capital Development**?
- ⇒ Agreed that we aimed to produce technically-sufficient personnel, going by the number of Polytechnics in the Private and States controls; what is the national budgetary and financial support into our general educational systems - to the States and Private hands, in terms of subventions?
- ⇒ Who drives the implementation and overseership of the various subventions?
- ⇒ The universities appear to be spread out by their management holdings. What are the argument supporting the existence of Private Universities? Can we vouch for its focuses, that the Government is supporting their existence?

⇒ Is it right to opine that several privileged people now run to the schools abroad because of the seeming decay in the Nigerian educational system? What are the results?

Permit me to remind that upon the realizations of the faint impact on the quality of **Human Capital Development**, Nigeria sent Youths abroad for more quality facilitations in the 70/80s; to Europe, USA, Russia, Asia and West Africa too. Less than 30% of this grouping returned to Nigeria after trainings. What could have been the reason for the non return of the 70%?

I figure there was apathy to Nigeria's needs, accentuated by wrong and demented educational environment which constitutes the first levels of our brains drain. What were the attractions abroad that we could not tap into?

Today, the Steel Rolling mill in Ajaokuta is lying comatose. Our aircraft fleet are drained and bereft of technical support. Most step-down transformers in the nation's grids are not maintained, after all the technical impartations from our foreign friends and local Universities, Polytechnics and Monotechnics alike. Who says that we are perfectly sure to maintain farming implements here in Nigeria; but why?

Permit me to further deal with several research questions:

- ⇒ What will make Nigerian people competitive, now and in the future?
- ⇒ What is our expectation from individuals for global competitiveness?
- ⇒ Will it be unreasonable to say that our trained professionals are not ripe enough for global competitiveness; but why?
- ⇒ Can the quality of our professional trainings play out on the world marketplace?
- ⇒ Do we have a place in the global market, in relation to our level of skills?
- ⇒ Why would global recognition continue to elude us?
- ⇒ To what extent has our higher educational system produced acceptable professionalism?
- ⇒ There are dotted professionals of Nigerian origin making waves in their areas of specializations. What are the reasons for their non retention in our country?

The thought of the educational policy in the country readily comes to mind. I marvel at the styles of the policy makers of our educational system because their actions are intriguing. The question of 'why education is considered dispensable', in certain quarters remains a myth.

The stakeholders, that are the researchers, teachers, lecturers, are left with no option than to manage the resources at their disposal for grooming the nation's scholars or students. The acceptable norms for giving the best to our students, is at best questionable. The quality of our students rests on the aphorism; what we garbage in, is what we garbage out.

⇒ Where are the research grants?

⇒ Where are the educational endowment funds? Which universities are receiving them?

The government is pushing an illusion. The ill-wind shall blow no one any good. In fact, we can be said to be completely off point, derailed or even deluded, to imagine that we could develop our **Human Capitals** locally, for global competitiveness without first discovering why our standards are not recognized internationally.

There is human flight, or brain drains out of our continent, Africa. My consideration is that the few privileged Africans, and in our case Nigeria, who are opportune to harness quality education abroad have been brought up with the foreign temperamental undertone. Permit me to caress the point that those trainings are tinted for capital development in their region without ingrains or the infusion of African mentality.

⇒ Is it a surprise that they take 'flight' sooner than they returned to Africa or even remain where they were trained for as long as they deem fit?

Let us take a critical assessment of the training of Pilots in foreign grounds or airfields. I am aware that upon arrival to nativity, the Pilots are coerced to convert the flying systems, using simulators; into certain aspect of their training, especially, the weather or atmospheric conditions. This dose of retraining redirects them and typifies their flying acumen in an operative environment.

⇒ Is that information not relevant or akin to the linkage between transferring, transforming and playing down on the acquired foreign mentality?

Couldn't we apply our crucially designed General Studies, as a tool to assist returnees, in about 3 months of stratified study, to douse the foreign brands, taken from abroad? Isn't it just a matter of national policy that those who acquire degrees from foreign countries be made to undergo 3 to 6 months of general studies from designated universities in Nigeria.

- ⇒ If we consider that trainings from foreign places are very palatable, why has the government left out their infusion and application into our unfolding curriculum?
- ⇒ Is it difficult to copy or import the Harvard's Higher education brand for our general transformation?
- ⇒ Why are we not instituting budgets for enhancing Manpower development? Instead, we are more concerned with the creation of free fields in the nation, which are grassed by a multitude of 'government approved' institutions of knowledge, yet the signs of proper education, for human development are missing.

Our 30 medical colleges can at best admit about 180 students (Highest intake) 30 students are as the lowest admissions today.

- ⇒ How many Universities are accredited and equipped to run the pre-clinical and subsequent courses?
- ⇒ What is the expected average number to be harvested in 20 years times?
- ⇒ How many are expected to stay in the country, given the suicidal drain of manpower to the tune of about 80%?

In summary, the **World Health Organization** (WHO), prescribed and recommends the usage of one (1) Medical Doctor for every 400 people. With our explosion in population, at present, Nigeria may not boast of one (1) Medical Doctor to 2000 patients; consequent upon the rate of brain drain happening today. Soon, we shall start to examine why they enjoy operating abroad and forecast means for cubing the menace. If we are the best out there, why are we unable to have the environment here to perform or receive outsource patients.

Engineering is the livewire of innovative and productive ideas. How many universities offer them? It is just a handful, maybe 21. Lately, the Federal

government made compulsory moves to help entrench the motives, but failed to support the ventures.

### **Implication**

We are promoting capital flight because of our ineptitudes, inefficiencies or little or not too encouraging performances across the board. We find solace abroad due to our resilience. Our engineers find homes in nobler environment where the professionals are in acute utility.

⇒ Don't we recoil to the outsourcing of certified personnel and by extension, use the platform to retrain our trained personnel, practically on the go?

There is the profusion of 'sectional scholarship' for studies in places that promise no real value to our technological situations and breakthroughs. Our national challenges cannot be faced with such products that attach little values to their opportunistic scholarships. The attitude presents a zero backward lacuna.

### **Critical Issue I**

Since there are no opportunities to involve or engage trained hands, engineers migrate to the banks to work where they are (under)employed. The general psychological impact is obvious; students now prefer to study humanities and arts related subjects.

⇒ Cheap payments for higher education in Nigeria is killing standards and gradually taking the shine away. 'Quality' tends to be sacrificed. Extreme low esteem now permeates the training horizon.

To worsen matters, we emphasize the acquisition of ordinary lower skills; we degrade the index of measurements on the global arena. We are thriving on reverse engineering standards. Our operational mainstay dwells in, either backward integrations or mastering the use of antiquated and obsolete equipments, far overtaken by global innovative ideas. This conundrum raises critical questions as to our aims, and focuses on what we call education.

⇒ Are we really educating or just providing avenues for acquisitions of paper religion?

Malcolm X, opined that:

**“Because you have colleges and universities does not mean you have (human development and qualitative) education”.**

Emphasis is mine!

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** gave a near definition of our schooling system.

He said, **“We are students of words, we are shut up in schools and college and recitation rooms for ten to fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words and do not know a thing.”**

All over Africa, there is frightening Capital flights into foreign lands for reasons of none practical involvements in the development of critical areas of a booming economy.

*“Innovation should deploy far-sighting and mission-critical researches, practice, the resourceful and corporative brainstorming of issues by focused minds, on critical continent’s need”*

***Prof. Gregory Ibe***

We import much scientific equipment like the wheelbarrow, motorbikes, Power generation transformers, even Tooth Picks, Tinned Fishes, Tomato ‘Puree’, Bolts and Nuts, into African nations where engineers abound. Foreigners build good roads because of our lack of competences and corruption. For me, we have only perfected exhortation of people from the pulpits, which in its self, is not regretted. We ought to do more!

Sadly, the problems of our educational sectors are numberless and associative. An array of adversity is responsible for consistently victimizing and robbing education in our institutions, of its value. Some of the major causes are poor facilities, equipment, and lack of competent/well-trained teachers and brain drains. Though the call for mass improvement in institutional facilities is well heard, yet it is cold shouldered.

The outcry grows louder, while the redundancy of our patterned and mission critical curriculum grows to gather noise of its own. Our schools have become regular venue for strikes. Corruption from manual-selling merchant lecturers, malpractices and scandals has all added to the cacophony in the system. The state of the system has

denigrated to the point that a cloud of doubt readily hangs over the future of Nigerian graduates.

⇒ To survive the perennial shortcomings in our educational system, graduates need to get educated elsewhere, abroad. Is it proper?

For the mass of graduates that cannot afford educational tourism, the other available education is given by the streets. Some have considered this a more effective and useful learning process to schooling.

⇒ The quiz for our educators is: how valid are our units of measuring educational quality for Human Resources Development?

Some ministries grade the competence of teachers solely on the performance of their students in external examinations. Then, all the teacher has to do is to ensure the students pass the examination regardless of the method. This has led some teachers to provide answers for students during examinations and to indulge in other forms of malpractices to scale high on the ministries' record.

⇒ Are these the proper solutions for Capital Development?

Also, the design and methods of our educational outlay are moving in the opposite direction from perfect.

⇒ Mentorship is becoming stranger to our schools. Provision for personal assessment of students, which is the key to understanding and providing exclusively essential materials needed for student development, is becoming difficult to trace.

For instance, the ratio of students to teachers in our schools is alarmingly high, high enough to threaten and extinguish the existence of student-teacher relationships. Though this scenario has become the norm in government institutions overtime, private schools have started to accept faults of this nature. It augurs well for more students to seek formal education but if educational facilities and human developmental tools do not multiply at a proportional rate, the inundation of poor facilities becomes the status quo.

The defects in the educational system deepen with the high level of career misplacement suffered by our graduates. The foundation of this problem occurs at

the point of course selection. In our institutions, the course selection pattern is usually nomadic.

⇒ For a lot of Nigerian students, it is not uncommon to crowd certain “big” courses such as Law, Medicine and Engineering. This can be partly blamed on ignorance. But the major bummer or letdown is the fact that most courses in Nigerian institutions have skeletal schemes and structures.

The path to practicing these courses is warped; this has a way of waning off the passion of the students taking the course and this tells off students naturally suited for these courses, leading them to deviate to the ‘loud’ courses. For instance, an average Nigerian student would not pick social work over Accounting, even if better suited, except the course was given to him/her by the institution in place of the overcrowded courses which must have been the initial choice. This happens because our milieu has little tolerance for courses like Social Work as a profession.

⇒ One way to correct this menace is to create an atmosphere of course equality in our institutions. This way, students get the true reflection of the prospect of each course. With this, a better pattern of career choice making can be registered. This would cure the problems of course crowding since course diversity would translate to more opportunity spacing in the society.

Conclusively, the bad face of our educational system, for human reformation should not be glossed over but thoroughly treated. Not treatment as regards the bombardment of students with theories and laws, but the use of essential elements of education to concentrate the quality of our education. Then, education can truly manifest in our country.

⇒ For what it is worth, true education is the latent energy of liberation, hence the basis for true development. Therefore, the itinerary to our promised land lies in the atlas of thorough education. Here lies the engine for both transformative and superior **Human Capital Development**.

While some believe that the answers lie somewhere in the political arena and others have propounded theories of religious intervention; the genuine cure is patently at the formative level, at the very factory of education. A native adage says that, ‘a house thrives only because the trouble child has not grown’.

⇒ Even if the nation's Moses appears on the political scene and successfully leads us to the Promised Land, the deficiencies in the education of our youths are bound to lead us back to Egypt.

Nigeria should be enthused to understand that the atmosphere in the country is in dire need of a diffusion of educational panacea.

⇒ Government's budget should reflect this attitude.

It is the responsibility of all parties – students, parents, stakeholders and educators to pursue this redemption course, for profound **Human Capital Development**, for global competitiveness; and if I generalize this argument, Africa shall be better for it.

From the foregoing, I move that you recognize the banes of our education, as it faces us to mean that, for global competitiveness: we ought to address,

⇒ States and Federal Government's non-inclination towards the course, in the national budget

⇒ Our reflection on the '6334' or '934' systems to include essences of our educational patterns and their committed application to the souls of the nation's need.

⇒ Human reformation is the product of its implication; spiritually, futuristically and necessary global impacts

⇒ For global competitiveness, we must oil our adaptation wheels of progress, towards ensuring committed standards, with faculties of native presentiments

⇒ We should underscore the revolving and innovative global sensitivities across economic facelifts, using the survival indices as our guide.

⇒ Above all, it is essential that we work our reasoning and talks, with emphasized nationalistic support.

⇒ Since students, personnel and manpower development is the subject, let us begin with grassroots 'impactive' structures

In a final note, if our educational system is not creating or awakening our consciousness to the extent that it will afford us all parents, teachers, government, policy makers the opportunity to recognize the need for us to seek to be skilled for development to enable all contribute to the producing critical mass of personnel to promote research and development which will

lead to producing innovative and practical solution to our needs, then there is danger ahead but if th3se are militated upon openness of heart and accepting to indulge no matter what, to liberate and situate our being to conquering our environment for development will open our nation for global competitiveness.

**Professor Gregory Ikechukwu Ibe** (*Ph.D, OFR, Enyi Abia*)

**Chancellor/Founder**

**Gregory University Uturu**

**Abia State.**