

## Overschooling in Nigeria: Positive or Negative?

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**Key words:** Over-schooling, negative and positive, Nigeria

**Abstract:** Nigeria has become a country where paper qualifications, credentials and certificates have become the order of the day. Nigerians no longer attend educational institutions (lower basic education level schools-primary 1-3, middle basic education level schools-primary 4-6, upper basic education level schools-JSS 1-3, senior secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics and universities) for the sake of learning how to read and write, to become knowledgeable and be updated with trends and happenings in the society, but to acquire one credential or certificate or the other. Thus the Nigerian institutions of learning have become all-comers institutions. Individuals that are not educable strive to acquire some qualifications because of the values placed on qualifications by the Nigerian government and the Nigerian people. The issue of certificate craze in Nigeria has crippled the emphasis on experience, knowledge and intellectual ability cum technical knowhow. The uneducated elites use their finances and connections to buy credentials in order to fit into the Nigerian society of certificate owners. This has devalued the quality of Nigerian graduates in such a way that even individuals with credentials do not have the ability to defend themselves and even the credentials they have acquired. Every individual has become a culprit thus the concept of 'certificate verification' in Nigerian schools. Every Nigerian irrespective of status, family background, economic background, gender, age, marital status, tribe, ethnic nationality religious affiliation and even gender orientation have become victims of this situation. This is why the concept of over-schooling has surfaced and in a way has become a challenge to the Nigerian people and the Nigerian government. The challenge is that no one can strongly opine on the issue of whether over-schooling is negative or positive. This paper wants to unravel the mystery behind over-schooling and buttress whether or not over-schooling is positive or negative.

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of over-schooling is gradually becoming a concept of concern to so many Nigerian scholars, authors, writers and educationists. It is unfortunate that over the years, Nigerians have suffered the tarnishing influence of over-schooling without realizing how terrible the impact of over-schooling has gradually destroyed the good intentions of the Nigerian government and the Nigerian people on emphasis on certificate/credentials acquisition. Van der Meer<sup>[1]</sup> noted thus “although over-schooling is regarded as the result of imperfect allocation in the labour market, hardly any attention has been given to the influence of another imperfection, unemployment. Several researchers report about an increasing incidence of over-schooling in the...‘Nigeria’”.

This is overwhelming because Nigerians are just realizing if at all they have realized that there is no positive impact of over-schooling on the Nigerian people and the Nigerian economy. Over the years, Nigerians keep acquiring credentials and certificates even from foreign countries without having the opportunities to practice whatever they have learnt in the process. This is an abysmal failure on the part of the Nigerian government. The concept of over-schooling must have been conceived out of the failure of the Nigerian government to create adequate employment for the overwhelming graduates churned out on yearly basis from Nigerian universities and so on.

It is possible for an individual to be over-schooled and remain undereducated. The concept of over-schooling means different things to different individuals. Udoh *et al.*<sup>[2]</sup> stated that “to the average person, no one could possibly over-school. This reasons ranging from the well-known fact that no knowledge acquired is waste to the truism that learning is a continuum”. But acquiring knowledge is one aspect of life, putting what you have learnt into practice, is another. It becomes difficult to understand why there are no opportunities for one to practicalize what he or she has learnt and one continues learning. Udoh *et al.*<sup>[2]</sup> further pinpointed that “the issue of over-schooling however is not just a mere notion shared by scholars in labour economics and education but a reality. Besides, if one can invoke common sense, one could conjecture that insofar as under-schooling is real, over-schooling is equally existent”.

It is difficult to tackle over-schooling in the Nigerian society if at all it is a negative phenomenon. This is because Nigerians and the Nigerian government believe that the more certificate/qualifications/credentials you acquire or possess, the more knowledgeable and intelligent you are or become. This might not be true but is real in the Nigerian context. This paper is then interested in unearthing the mystery behind over-schooling in Nigeria, whether positive or negative.

## TERMINOLOGIES

It is important to expose the meaning of every concept that makes up a write-up to its numerous readers. This will enable the readers to understand the viewpoint of the writer(s). Thus Mezieobi and Isiozor averred that “defining the concepts that make up a write up is very vital because it puts the writer(s) and the readers(s) on the same understanding level”. Mezieobi pinpointed that “clarifying every concept that make up every write-up is a must-do by every writer for easy understanding of the write-up by its readers”. On the above notes, three concepts need brief explanations. They are over-schooling, positive and negative.

### THE CONCEPT: OVER-SCHOOLING

Defining over-schooling has become a heinous task and very demanding because of its ambiguity. Udoh *et al.*<sup>[2]</sup> pinpointed that “in defining over-schooling, existing professional literature usually draws on these three criteria:

- A decline in the economic position of educated individuals relative to historically higher levels
- Under fulfilled expectations of the educated with respect to their occupational attainments
- The possession by workers of greater educational skills than their jobs require

It is true that one can be referred to as over-schooled yet uneducated. An over-schooled individual is one that occupies a position or an office that requires lesser credentials or qualifications than what he or she possesses. On this note, over-schooling is the process of occupying a position or holding a post that is not upto one’s standard of education. Example is an individual with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) credential working in a bank as a cleaner and so on. This is usually caused by the inability of an individual to get jobs or employments that are up to his or her over possessed credential or qualifications.

**The term: positive:** In this paper, positive will mean ‘good’, ‘outstanding’, ‘excellent’ and possessing distinguishing ‘characteristics’.

**The word: Negative:** The word negative in this paper will mean ‘bad’, ‘absurd’, ‘portraying failure’ or ‘contradicting the positive’.

**Misunderstanding the concept of Over-schooling In Nigeria:** The beginning of the problem In Nigeria, many individuals including scholars, authors, writers and educationists misunderstand the meaning of over-

schooling thus the ignoring of the term. Not so much have been written or said about over-schooling in Nigeria. This is the reason why Okoro and Udoh<sup>[3]</sup> noted that over-schooling is a situation “whereby individuals operate occupationally below their level of acquired education or completed schooling with concomitant wage penalty is spawned by a handful of psychological, social and economic variables”. These variables affect the concept of over-schooling tremendously and also impact on people’s perception of over-schooling at all times.

The understanding of what over-schooling means differ from individual to individual depending on experiences, level of exposure, educational background, family background, career prospects, economic status, peer-influence and so on. Usoro and Essien<sup>[4]</sup> have noted that the reason for the misunderstanding of the term over-schooling is born out of the fact “as economic, social and technology changes gather momentum, people everywhere develop their knowledge and skills by schooling so as to work and live meaningful in the knowledge of society”, thus the over-schooling concept. The Nigerian society as a society that advocates credentials, certificates and qualifications has made Nigerians certificate-crazy and certificate-overzealous. Even individuals that are not educable force themselves to acquire certificates and credentials. It is believed that the more credentials and certificates one acquires, the better jobs and life experiences one get. But unfortunately, this is not the case, thus the existence of the term ‘over-schooling’. Edesi<sup>[5]</sup> in his paper titled ‘Visual Art Education in Nigeria: over-schooling and paper qualifications’ tried to dissuade academics from becoming so qualification conscious noted that “.... posits that the academia in visual art should not lay too much emphasis on schooling and paper qualification, to the detriment of the practical results as it bears on the dynamic society”.

The misunderstanding of the concept of over-schooling has continued over the years. People keep acquiring credentials without having opportunities to use those credentials, especially in Nigeria. This has become a tough problem because of the impending questions of ‘is it over-schooling or under-schooling? ‘which one is best in the context of Nigeria?’.

### **THE REASONS FOR OVER-SCHOOLING**

There are several reasons why over-schooling has come to exist in the Nigerian context. For Edesi<sup>[5]</sup>, “many crave to go to school and continue schooling, not because they want to achieve a special skill to develop the society or themselves as regards their profession but just to get a certificate/degree to enable them secure a job, especially teaching of what they themselves are not master of”. Egonwa and Odihoh supported the above when they noted that “many desire and crave to have higher degrees just to

gain promotion and retain their jobs as lecturers in the tertiary institution and most time they want it anyhow, anywhere, any means”.

Furthermore, over-schooling came into existence due to peer-influence. An individual can be motivated to further his or her education and acquire more credentials, qualifications and certificates if his or her peers are doing same.

Also, ego-centrism can also be another reason for over-schooling. Individuals can continue acquiring certificates especially to a doctoral degree level or professional courses in order to answer one title or the other. In the Nigerian situation, if an individual for example encounters the police force or military mal-handling or rascality, he or she can decide to enroll for a law programme in one tertiary institution or the other in order to defend him or herself in the future.

Family-influence; in some cases, some families will like to have one professional or the other example-medical doctor, lawyer, engineer, teacher and so on and thus, will coerce one or more of their children to enroll in such professional programme(s) against their wish. A scenario was encountered when an individual told a story of how he was interested in becoming an anatomist while his parents wanted him to become a medical doctor. In order to please his parents, he enrolled, qualified as a medical doctor, handed his parents the MBBS certificate and went back to the institution of higher learning to become an anatomist. This is one challenge people pass through that can cause over-schooling.

Personality-tussle/competition among peers, families, friends, classmates, parents and so on. An individual can be a victim of over-schooling if he or she thinks he or she is into a competition with any other person. For example, Mama Nkechi had vowed that her son will become a medical doctor or a lawyer because Mama Adaobi has a son that has just qualified as a medical doctor or lawyer.

**Unemployment:** Some individuals continue acquiring certificates because of unemployment.

**Promotion/career advancement:** So many people crave for more credentials because of promotion or career advancement.

**Self-development:** Most individuals are interested in self-development thus they enroll in programmes to advance their knowledge and be relevant to the ever dynamic society.

**Impoverishment:** People can be impoverished because of the crave for further acquisition of credentials. People that are not well paid in a bid to advance in life utilize their little or scarce resources in acquiring more credentials with the hope that something bigger will come their way in future.

**Career change:** Some many individuals fall victim of over-schooling because they want to move for one career to the other. This is the most common reason for over-schooling.

**Marital influence and commitments:** Someone that read banking and finance and becomes a banker can decide to go in and prepare and qualify as a teacher in order to give his or her children qualify parental care and attention. This is because of the belief that bankers do not have time just like teachers to take good care of their children and their spouses. Furthermore, an individual's spouse can decide he or she changes from one professional career to the other because of the stigma or stereotype attached to such career(s).

### **THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF OVER-SCHOOLING IN NIGERIA**

Over-schooling also has some negative impacts especially on the Nigerian people, the Nigerian government and the Nigerian dynamic society. Edesi<sup>[5]</sup> stated that “the inordinate crave for paper qualification and pride in plenty of academic activity without any concerted effort to utilize them practically for tangible development of the society has concomitantly produced some inimical results in the society classified under the following sub-heading”:

- Substandard output of staff and graduates
- Weak economy/technology
- Dependency
- Lukewarm academia/'other professional'
- Examination malpractice and vice...

The above outlined subheadings are some negative impact of over-schooling in Nigeria. Furthermore, over-schooling has cause the following situations:

- More graduates than available opportunities
- People doing jobs that they are not qualified to do
- Lack of technical know-how in some jobs people do
- Individuals concentrating on one particular profession, career and so on and ignoring the others. This has caused low enrolment in programmes.
- Gender disparity in choice of some careers, enrolment in programmes and so on. For example, it is believed that more women enroll to become teachers in Nigeria than men
- Individuals are forced into marriages, careers and so on they are not interested in because of over-schooling
- Brain-drain can occur due to over-schooling

Some factors to consider in the fight against over-schooling in Nigeria:

- Family background
- Individual passion
- Available opportunities
- Marital status of an individual
- An individual's career and career prospects
- Educational background, experiences and exposures
- Socialization level of an individual
- An individual's personality
- The future of the society
- Areas that lack professionals
- The Nigerian institutions of higher learning
- The quality and standard of the Nigerian education. Thus Hartog and Oosterbeek<sup>[6]</sup> pinpointed that “in the recent decade, the role of education as an instrument in promoting many desirable goals has increasingly been criticized. Once education was seen as the almost self-evident vehicle in promoting national economic growth, individual development and a more equitable distribution of income”

This is a major challenge to the Nigerian government and the Nigerian people.

### **CONCLUSION**

Over-schooling can be negative or positive depending on the context of usage. Over-schooling to many is seen as positive without understanding its negative aspects. Individuals think that when one is over-schooled, one is well-educated not knowing that some individuals that are over-schooled are uneducated or undereducated. This is according to Albert and Mactaggart<sup>[7]</sup> “due to society's failure to understand adolescent”, the people, the development process and even the society itself. From the discussion, one can deduce that over-schooling can be negative or positive depending on the angle it is looked at.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are apt for this paper to be complete:

- The concept of over-schooling should be emphasized
- Individuals should be made to understand the implications of over-schooling on the Nigerian people and society
- The government should endeavour to work on how to overcome the negative impact or influences of over-schooling
- The quality and standard of education in Nigeria should be raised and brought to international standard
- Employment opportunities should be made to tally with the number of tertiary education enrolment and graduation at all times. This is to reduce the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria
- More writings and pieces of research should be done on over-schooling

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