

**HARVESTS** FROM THE  
**GOWN**  
VOLUME 2




**FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF**  
**PROFESSOR COMFORT M. EKPO**

Printed in Nigeria by  
FlyPapers Printing House  
27 Udotung Ubo Street, Uyo  
08064053215

ISBN 978 978 625 436-2

Copyright © 2014 University of Uyo

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form of, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.



# CERTIFICATION AND OVERSCHOOLING IN NIGERIA: A CRIMINOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS

BROWN, ANIEKAN S.  
UMOH, UBONG E.

## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed at criminologically evaluating the socio-economic dynamics of certification and over-schooling in Nigeria. Acknowledging certification and over-schooling as discussable concepts in the economics of education lexicon, the study was pivoted by structural functionalism of Robert Merton as a theoretical framework. It adopted the survey method and followed the qualitative tradition as guide in data analysis. Emerging data reveal that certification is factorial to over-schooling, and both are driven by economic, socio-cultural, and punitive measures. There was also a revelation that certification and over-schooling have been institutionalized and run the risk of increasing in rate. This induces crimogenic tendencies. To stem the tide, certification should be played down by the polity, and infrastructure inconsistencies should be checked in the education sector, and policies should be evolved to engender an education system that enhances employment.*

# INTRODUCTION

**I**n simple terms, criminology is the study of crime: its perpetrators, causes, consequences, prevention, deterrence, as well as treatment and punishment of offenders (Gordon, 1998). Its interest covers the distribution, techniques, and organization of crimes, as well as explanations to criminal behaviour. These qualities make criminology an interested party in the socio-economic dynamics and institutions of a society. The issues of certification, over-schooling and, generally, education are here in focus.

In Nigeria, as in other countries, the labour market relies on the educational institutions for service hands and, understandably, emphasis is placed on expertise. Sadly, however, expertise is commonly defined as in terms of certificates. Worse still, there is paucity of jobs and employment opportunities, and the few available jobs are given out on the basis of certificates and credentials. Sequel to the above scenario, there has been a growing crave for higher qualifications and credentials. Thus, what used to pass for success in school, namely: securing a school certificate, university degrees, and much more, does not guarantee jobs these days. Yet, a few with certificates and degrees who are lucky to secure jobs become bosses to those who had been on the job with long periods of tangible experience. This reality explains the crave for certificates; hence, the problem of certification. A lot of people, many of whom do not possess the requisite aptitude and attitude for higher education, therefore scramble for the rather limited opportunities in the institutions of higher learning.

Consequently, queries are raised against the various curricular of the educational institution and the quality of the input and output, as well as the structures, actors/key players, and systems in the education sector. In the circumstance, there exists a discouraging relationship between the demand and supply of education in the society, with effects on the crimogenic texture of the society. This is informed by the person, time, and situation-centred factors. Here lies the impetus for embarking on this study.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Education**

Education practically has to do with the acquisition of talents and skills by an individual through the process of apprenticeship; the result of which is a fortune, not

only to the individual but also to the society which he or she belongs (Anyebe, 2001). In this light, Brown (2007) noted that education is the key to unlocking the locked potentials, imaginations, thoughts, and dreams in people's hearts and minds. This process comes in formal, informal and non-formal forms and systems.

There is something epochal about education. For instance, in Nigeria, during the pre-colonial era, education was basically informal. However, during the colonial era, the Nigerian society was given to grammar schools in order to meet the communication needs of the society. Over time, emphasis shifted from grammar to commercial and professional fields, thus enunciating a tangible vacuum in the areas of science and technology. The poor figures that accrue to science-based interests have been expressed in the various campaigns for the promotion of interest in science-based fields. Inspired by the imaginary gains, many more Nigerians now strive to secure admissions into university to read such courses. This, in the main, is often without regard to their capabilities and capacities. In spite of this, Ekong (2003) rightly opines that education functions to: transmit culture from one generation to another; train people for specialized adult roles; enhance social change and development through the modification of cultural heritage; and consequentially differentiate people and validate their statuses on the one hand, and provide setting for social interactions, on the other hand.

### **Certification**

Certification, otherwise known as negative credentialism, is the process of acquiring education-oriented certificates without the necessary complementary and expected skills. It plays out in the dubious hell-bents behavioural disposition that people display in their bid to secure promotions/admissions for further studies. Brown (2012) notes that to such people, the attendant skills are secondary, while what really matters are the certificates as status symbols. In such circumstances, they merely want to be certificated but not certified.

### **Over-schooling**

Over-schooling, according to Joshua (2012) has not yet been fully understood and explained in the education literature, in spite of research investments in the advanced world. This explains why, in an opinion survey by Brown (2011), over-schooling was seen in multiple perspectives, including: the man/infrastructure ration, aptitude/school level ratio, and impropriety of the quality of people with certificates in the employment market. It is, therefore, common place to have an overbearing human pressure on the infrastructures which are inadequate and insufficient.

In spite of the above eclectic attempt, scholars are agreed that over-schooling is an economic coinage and a negative notion in the education sector (Leuven and Oosterbeek, 2011; Meer, 2002; and Ibe-Bassey, 2012), which results from the

imperfect allocation in the labour market. The worker's education level exceeding of his or her work is also an instance (Dekker, deGrip, and Heijke, 2002). Simply put, it is the difference between a worker's attained or completed level of schooling and the level of schooling required for the job the worker holds. Thus, Etuk & Akpan (2012) submit that over-schooling is a condition whereby a worker occupies a job position, which is lower in rank than what is expected of the individual based on his or her educational qualification and training. All these are coloured with certain socio-economic indices (Gladwell, 2008; and Hulbert, 2010) which have criminogenic connotations and representations. This is the very crux of this study.

### **THEORETICAL SPACE**

This work is driven by the influence of the social structure on processes and behaviour, hence the adoption of Robert Merton's structural functionalism theory. This is generally informed by his hypothetical promptings of functions, non-functions, dysfunctions, and net-functions (Merton, 1968). While Parsons (1957) presented a taxonomic device of functional prerequisites, namely: Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latent Pattern Maintenance (A.G.I.L.) for the survival of any society, Merton (1968) argue that the bodies created for the purposes of functioning for the overall good of the society may not always be functional (Ritzer, 2000).

Merton posits that even performing the desired roles and recording the intended functions may also record some unintended functions which breed unintended consequences which ultimately risk becoming negatively functional (dysfunctional) to the society and infringe on its survival strategies, all of which can translate into a crime indicator. Simply put, crime is any human conduct in violation of the criminal laws of a state, the federal government, or a local jurisdiction that has the power to make such laws (Schmalleger, 1995), provided such violation is punishable by a competent arm of the platform upon which the law was made.

To Robert Merton, crime emerges from the disjunction between socially approved means to success and legitimate goals. In other words, it is the strain between goals and means which breeds crime. Put differently, the widely acceptable means to attaining goals, including education, hardwork, financial capacity, etc are not evenly or equally available to all members of the society. It follows that as unemployment rate rises and the society raises the stake for employment opportunities (predicating it on educational qualifications), the crave for educational attainment (higher and multiple) becomes more evident and the residual effects would include: emphasis on certificates which breeds social vices such as faking of certificates and forgery, examination-related offences and crimes, decimation of the quality of education, and moral laxity on the part of vulnerable stakeholders.

## METHODS AND DATA

Interest in this work was cultivated in 2011 during the National Conference on Education, organized by the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo with the theme: Overschooling. The lead author in this work participated in the said conference (October 10 – 14, 2011) and became inspired to embark on this work for the auspicious medium of a festschrift in honour of a distinguished name in the education sector.

The survey method, driven by a multi-stage sampling derive, was adopted for the study. Thus, **purposive sampling was adopted** to identify some members of the civil and public services who may have contributed to, and experienced over-schooling. Clustered sampling was also adopted to have a fair enough spread as to the ministries, departments, and agencies of government. Stratified sampling method was used for the enhancement of the spread across the various strata in the services as well as to achieve gender balance.

The in-depth interview method was adopted with a view to eliciting information on the concept, reality, consequences, and possible remedies, of overschooling. This was in the context of curbing crime. Data raised in the process was appreciated in the qualitative tradition.

## FINDINGS

Emerging data revealed the following facts which are presented in thematic form.

### **Certification has been factorial to over-schooling:**

The crave for higher and multiple certificates in Nigeria today is a tangible reality. This has been played out in many more people opting for higher education. Some do not aim at higher positions in work places, but just a proof of attainment. A retired staff of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) said:

*I am a retired staff of the Central Bank of Nigeria ... I only came for this degree (Ph.D) just for the records. I won't use it to search for work. It is just for the records, my CV (curriculum vitae), and biography.*

The above scenario adds to what Joshua (2012) refers to over-credentialing everywhere. Certification is thus factorial to over-schooling.

### **Certification is Economy-Driven**

In the context of the over-schooling lexicon in economics of education, certification is instigated also by the economic situation as presented by the rate of unemployment and the inherent opportunities for vertical and horizontal mobility in workplaces. In which case a self-employed respondent lamented:

*"I strived to acquire a first degree with the hope for formal employment. However,*

*the market proved saturated for first degree holders. I then opted for a Masters' Degree. Now I have completed the programme, but still running this business centre. People have advised me to further ... by registering for a Ph.D programme. A formal employment would have facilitated that.*

Another respondent who is currently employed in the State Civil Service also regrettably retorted:

*"... I joined this service in 1994 and with a view to securing promotion to higher offices (with accompanying high pay), I enrolled for a degree programme. Ten (10) years after graduation, that degree is yet to be acknowledged by the service and I am still a junior staff in the service.*

### **The Polity Has also Enhanced Certification**

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides an inducement for certification. Many elected and appointed positions in government are dependent on educational qualifications. To this end, a political gladiator with an ambition for a high office stated:

*"I only enrolled for the Ph.D programme in order to position myself well enough for election or appointment into a national office (the National Assembly and/or Ministerial appointment in view). You must be well located for such. It is all about preparation".*

This agrees with Merton's idea of unequal availability of opportunities for everyone in the society.

### **Psychological and Religious Realities also Constitute a Colouration for Certification**

People consider it a psychological edge and advantage to be more educated than others. It is more or less a status symbol (Ekong, 2003). For instance, a co-wife revealed:

*I decided to further my education in order to outclass my husband's other wife. I can at least have an edge over her.*

Another respondent went into the realm of religion:

*I was told in church that the family heritage had posited mystically that no one in the family would prosper educationally. I then ventured into pursuing the degree programme to break the curse. I bless God for enabling me to break the negative covenant and tradition.*

In this case, certification has encouraged over-schooling in the cultural context. People's psyche and faith, therefore, account for over-schooling.



### **Certification is Institutionalized**

According to Ekong (2003), institutions refer to the standards or conventional patterns in which similar groups behave in a given society. They are also established forms or organized systems of social relationships which embody certain norms and procedures, and meet certain needs of the society. When the above occurs, a form of behaviour could be said to have been institutionalized. Institutionalization is evident in the requirements for employment, and the struggles people get into in a bid to acquire certificates for greater propensity for employment. Sadly, many certificates today do not ensure employability as many of today's Nigerian graduates have been adjudged to be "not employable". This is because of the sickening value of certificates over competence. As a result, many institutions and establishments have opted for professional and intellectual aptitude tests before consideration. Yet, certificates are the benchmarks.

### **Certification varies from Perspectives and People's Backgrounds**

Uyanga (2012) and Joshua (2012) both posit that over-schooling has perspectives. It is also motivated by the backgrounds of people. For instance, two respondents variously responded as follows:

*"All members of our immediate family had secured a first degree; but I was the only one without it. So, I decided to enroll for it, though I do not intend to use it for anything".*

In a twist, another responded:

*No woman has ever graduated in our family. So I decided to break the jinx".*

For various reasons, people would afford to further their studies with reference to their backgrounds.

### **Disciplinary Concerns and Punishment**

Some people have unintentionally over-schooled. This is exemplified in the punitive measures adopted by some institutions. For instance, there are staff members of a university who actually furthered their education with a view to enhancing their careers, only for the institution to either discountenance their certificates, or place them on some punitive measures for daring to further their studies without proper documentation and approval from the institution. As a result, such people remain over-schooled on the work schedule in spite of higher qualifications and skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are advanced to stem the tide:

We should realize that ours is a developing country and, as such, budgetary allocation to the education sector by government should consciously be on the increase. This will check the man: infrastructure inconsistencies;

A conscious effort should be made towards playing down on the crave for certificates. This will place skill and competence above certification-coated ineptitude;

The input devices to institutions of higher learning should be strengthened and made less-sentimental;

The remuneration of the pivotal elements in the education sector should be favourable in relation to those in other sectors. This will enhance dignity which will undoubtedly impact positively on the entire system and beyond; and

Emphasis should be placed on basic education. This will enhance the needful selection process into the higher levels of education.

## CONCLUSION

The over-emphasis on certification, the resultant crave for higher certificates and the insincerity of the various governments in Nigeria have combined to locate Nigeria among the over-schooled countries. Over-schooling is bound to increase. This is not healthy for the country. The grotesque development is government-inspired, and it takes government's unalloyed commitment to stem the tide.

## REFERENCES

- Anyebe, A. A. (2001) "Education and Manpower Development in Nigeria". Journal of Business Administration 1 (2) 134 – 140.
- Brown, A. S. (2007) "For the UBE to Answer the Question in Nigeria: A Sociological Comment". E. N. Etuk, I. M. Udofot, S. A. E. Udosen (eds.) Education in Nigeria in the 21st Century: Focus and Imperatives. Uyo: Abaam.
- Brown, A. S. (2011) "Certification and Overschooling in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal" An unpublished paper, during the National Conference on Overschooling in Uyo (October 10 - 14).
- Dekker, R., A. deGrip, & H. Heijke (2002) "The Effects of Training and Overeducation on Career Mobility in a Segmented Labour Market" International Journal of Manpower, 23 (2) 105 – 125.
- Ekong, E. E. (2003) An Introduction to Rural Sociology. Uyo: Dove Educational.
- Etuk, G. K. & E. G. Akpan (2012) "Tertiary Overschooling in Nigeria: Theoretical Perspectives and Cases" Journal of Education (September). Vol. 5, No.1
- Gordon, M. (1998) Concise Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford: University Press.
- Hulbert, A. (2010) Hyper-Parenting and Overschooling: The Mother Approach. Retrieved from [tes.co.uk/article](http://tes.co.uk/article). Summerschool on October 02, 2014.
- Ibe-Bassey, G. S (2012) "Overschooling and the Nigerian Educational System". Journal of Education (September) Vol. 5, No.1
- Joshua, M. T. (2012) "Overschooling: Concept and Reflections on the Nigerian Context". Journal of Education (September) Vol. 5, No.1.
- Leuven, E. & H. Oosterbeek (2011) "Overschooling and Mismatch in the Labour Market". Research Report – 1ZA Discussion Paper No.5523 (Retrieved from <http://www.politiquessociales.net>) october 02, 2014.
- Meer, Van der, P. H. (2002) "Overschooling and Unemployment" Economics of Education Review (2), 1 – 26.
- Merton, R. K. (1968) Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: Free Press.
- Parsons, T. (1957) The Social System. New York: Free Press.
- Ritzer, G. (2000) Modern Sociological Theory. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Schmallegger, F. (1995) Criminology Today: An Integrative Introduction. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Unyanga, R. E. (2012) "Overschooling in Adult and Non-Formal Education, Science and Technology" Journal of Education (September) Vol. 5, No. 1.