

Satirising Nigeria Education Sector Through Cartoons: A Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This paper analysed some cartoons connected with Nigeria education with a view to identifying the way verbal and non-verbal meaning is communicated through them. Data for the study comprises nine cartoons which are related to Nigeria's education sector. The data collected were analysed from the purview of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics Theory, a model of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which developed from Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics, to uncover the ideology behind choosing various verbal and non-verbal resources in political and educational related cartoons, to know the extent the portrayal in the cartoons reflect or unveil some realities about the state of the Nigerian educational sector, and to know how the Nigerian educational sector is portrayed through the selected cartoons. The analysis shows that the cartoons were used to satirise the government negligence in handling security among the students and their teachers, poor funding of educational sector, terrorism challenges, kidnapping of school children and their teachers, and poverty. It is obvious that the security challenges in Nigeria's educational sector are not only criticised by cartoonists but serve as means to better restructure the education sector for effective learning to take place. The study observed that the cartoons are not just independent texts or images, but that they are products of the Nigerian social condition, and that understanding them requires a level of familiarity with their contexts of production. It also revealed that, as a means of visual communication, the cartoons exposed the realities in the country and refused to be relegated to simply satirical images of issues and events in the country's education.

Keywords: Satire, Linguistics, Semiotics, Nigeria Education, Cartoons

Introduction

Satire is concerned with the correction of abnormalities in society. It is the use of ridicule, sarcasm or irony to criticise something or someone to expose his weaknesses or shortcomings (Bal et al., 2009). Its use is to safeguard normative boundaries of society by denouncing societal follies and promoting standard of social norms and values of a given society. According to Townsend et al (2008), political cartoon is recognised as one of the earliest forms of political satire. Cartoons are forms of multimodal pictures used in humorous ways to portray what is happening in the society. Educational cartoons are forms of political cartoons that are

entertaining visuals that comment on political events in the society through the use of irony, metaphor, caricature, etc. In the words of Huhn (2009), cartoons are not haphazard texts but products of synoptic or sequential selection, ordering, structuring, positioning, segmenting, and communication of happenings in the society. These cartoons feature both linguistic and nonlinguistic devices to reflect social practices. Educational cartoons allow the public to participate in debate about an issue or issues in the society. Educational cartoons uncover the reality of events in society. Through educational cartoons, people are able to express their thoughts and ideas concerning an issue in a humorous way. Cartoons 'reduce the complexity of its reference domain to the carrying capacity of its medium and to the processing capacity of its senders and receivers' (Meister and Schonert, 2009, p. 11). In an attempt to satirise the abnormalities in the society, educational cartoonists employ various icons which according to Jimoh (2010), represent a single moment; a slice of able life put in mid-pose, much like a photograph. Educational cartoons as a form of political cartoons, portray political events with symbols that have wide and life deep meanings (Darwawan and Pilang, 2015). They also add that political cartoons embody the thoughts of the cartoonists through visual shapes; the message of which is full of criticism. In Nigeria's educational sector, the use of cartoons, especially online, allows Nigerians to portray the decadence in their educational systems. Those cartoons were used to satirise educational matters in the country. In Nigeria, cartoons have become a social signal medium that is utilised to rebuke, correct and satirise political actors and social glitches (Asiru & Bello, 2021). The cartoons used in satirising decadence in Nigeria educational systems offer subtle or direct criticism which include humour and a blend of both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources. These cartoons create humorous effects on the readers through the use of a wide range of semiotic resources to construct meaning. This paper, therefore, analyses some online cartoons connected with the Nigerian educational sector with a view to unpacking their verbal and non-verbal meanings. It draws insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) Social Semiotics Theory and Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Research Questions

1. How is the Nigerian educational sector portrayed through the selected cartoons?
2. To what extent did the portrayal in the cartoons reflect or unveil some realities about the state of the Nigerian educational sector?
3. What linguistic tools are utilised to create humour and satire in the selected cartoons?

Cartoons as Visual and Verbal Signs

Cartoons feature both verbal and visual signs which present humorous and satirical happenings in the society. Cartoons also serve as a means of informing, criticising, evaluating the abnormalities in the society with the aim of evoking reaction and corrections. Cartoon makes use of symbols and visual metaphors which serve as essential ingredients of visual communication (Asuri & Bello, 2021). In the interpretation of cartoons, cartoonists use simple signs that will help the interpretation of complex social and political ideas. Again, proper production and interpretation of cartoons require shared socio-cultural knowledge between the cartoonists and the readers. Here, context plays a vital role in the interpretation of the signs or messages. Whatever signs the cartoonists used, the signs need to be contextualised by the readers. The signs used in cartoons also explain how signs are common in them, which explain why they need to be understood in relation to their context of usage. The sign components of cartoons can conveniently fit into the concept of social semiotics (including language) that involves using signs to transmit social signals (Halliday, 1978). In Nigeria context, cartoons are also used to correct negative impressions, reveal the country's falling standard of education, and expose the level of poverty, corruption, and the reality of the nation's insecurity.

Cartoons make use of captions, texts, and, at times, even dialogue, making their meaning even more explicit. This therefore prompts readers to come to terms with both the signs/visuals and captions/dialogue embedded in cartoons; this will allow them to examine implicit and explicit meanings, and identify the intended audience.

Studies on Educational cartoons as Form of Political Cartoons

There is a plethora of research on educational cartoons as forms of political cartoons which have received considerable attention in academic research. Some of these works are Adejuwon and Alimi, 2011; Afida and Abdullah, 2012a; Sani, Mardziah, Afida and Abdullah, 2012b; Mari'n-Arrese, 2008; Medubi, 2003.

Adejuwon and Alimi's study centres on the analysis of political cartoons from Nigerian dailies which explore how they illustrate socio-political and economic issues. Their findings reveal that the cartoon as a visual communication genre played a prominent role during the struggle against colonialism in Nigeria. Though their research is carried out from the perspective of political science but lacks linguistic features in terms of data analysis. Sani, Mardziah, Afida and Abdullah's (2012a) investigate the role of humour in the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons, drawing their data from two newspapers – Vanguard and Daily Trust. Their findings reveal that cartoonists use humour in cartoons to relieve their readers of stressful situations and persuade them to make opinions on contemporary issues in society, and also used deliberately to construct criticisms against political leaders and comment on current socio-political matters so as to “initiate social reforms.” Their content analysis of political cartoons failed to unpack the non-verbal meanings of the cartoon texts and they neglect their ideological undertones.

In addition, Sani, Mardziah, Afida and Abdullah (2012b) also investigate linguistic analysis on the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons from the purviews of Perceptual Theory of Satire (a communication theory) and Critical Discourse Analysis (a linguistic analytical framework). The findings reveal that linguistic and non-linguistic elements are used in Nigerian political cartoons to initiate positive social and political reforms in the country. In terms of theoretical framework, they adopt multimodal discourse analysis which is similar to the present study. Similarly, Mari'n-Arrese (2008) carried out intercultural pragmatics research and analysed cognition and culture in political cartoons. The study therefore reveals that humour is used as a weapon to criticise the dominant ideology of the French political elite and to attack, especially in the Spanish press, and the government. The study differs from the present study because it pays little or no attention to unpacking the cartoons' non-verbal messages.

From the purview of Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Integration Theory, Medubi's (2003) examines the interrelationship between language and ideology in Nigerian political cartoons that deal with the underlying tension in the country's multi-ethnic environment to see how verbal cues and imageries interact in the cartoons to present a nation lacking a distinctly defined ideology but manifesting group ideologies. The findings reveal that the emerging "stereotype of Nigerian leader is that of a callous, deceptive and self-serving individual while the populace is portrayed as helpless and pseudo- stoic" (Medubi, 2003, pp. 159-169).

Medubi's (2003) study is similar to the present study in terms of data and it pays attention to unpacking both verbal and non-verbal messages of the cartoons.

They are also different in many ways: the political cartoons constituting Medubi's (2003) data which deal with the underlying tension in the country's multi-ethnic society is drawn from hardcopy of newspapers while the ones constituting the data of the present study are cartoons gathered from Facebook, dealing with the Nigeria's educational sector; while Medubi's (2003) study adopts Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Integration Theory as its theoretical framework,

the present study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics Theory and Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Political Cartoons and Multimodality

Educational cartoons, as used in this study, do not refer to animations produced for the specific purpose of fostering learning but as political cartoons used to challenge the ineptitude in Nigeria educational systems. According to Lemke (1997, p. 3), political cartoons are "enormously rich in the complexity of their evaluative meanings, and verbal and visual resources are mobilised and deployed to construct these meanings" Here, the verbal and visual components of the cartoons provide the viewers appropriate interpretations. The visual and verbal components also convey 'cognitive effects intended to be captured by the readers so that they can grasp the whole meaning of the communicative act' (Rivas-Carmona, 2014). In the words of Kress (2000), there are combinations of different modes to make meaning. Therefore, without paying attention to non-verbal aspects of discourse cannot be adequately studied (Kress, 2010). Educational (political) cartoons are said to be multimodal if the texts "represent different semiotic components." In cartoons relating to education, semiotic resources are presented by illustrations designed to convey a social or political message. Educational/political cartoons "are characterised by the use of visual metaphors and caricatures to portray political situations and politicians and by use of humorous or emotional pictures for current events" (Kulikova & Detinko, 2014). The analysis of educational cartoons takes into cognisance the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication, which is known as multimodal discourse analysis. According to Baldry & Thibault (2006) ; Liu (2013), the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both co-deployed and co-contextualised in the making of a text-specific meaning are referred to as multimodality.

Multimodality centres on description of the grammar of visual communication used by image designers. It is concerned with the rules and principles which allow readers/viewers to understand the meaning potential of relative placement of elements, framing, salience, proximity, colour saturations, styles of typeface, and so on (Machin, 2007).

Multimodal discourse analysis, therefore, examines how several or all of the different semiotic modes intertwine to produce a unified text or communicative event. In multimodal analysis, "textual structure is realised, not [only] by linguistic means, but visually, through layout, colour, and typography both at the level of the clause and at the level of discourse" (Liu, 2013, p. 1260).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) Social Semiotics Theory, a model of MDA within the purview of Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics, as put forward by O'Halloran (2008). The systemic functional approach to multimodal discourse analysis is concerned with "the theory and practice of analysing meaning arising from the use of multiple semiotic resources in discourses which range from written, printed and electronic texts to material lived-in-reality" (O'Halloran (2008, p. 443). Systemic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis (hereafter, SF- MDA) was coined by O'Halloran in 2008. SF-MDA is appropriate in this study because: (1) it is capable of exploring the meaning arising through the use of language and visual imagery in printed texts, and (2) it has the meta-functional principle embedded in it. This meta- functional principle allows the Systemic-Functional-Linguistics principle to provide an integrating ground for theorising the process by which semiotic resources interrelate to create meaning.

One other crucial function performed by this principle is that it gives room for semiotic resources to simultaneously provide the tools for constructing ideational/experiential meaning and for enacting social relations and these metafunctions, according to O'Halloran (2008, p. 445), "are enabled through the organisation of the discourse, which is the textual metafunction of semiosis."

Methodology

The data for this study 'purposively' selected nine cartoons sourced from the Facebook pages of Nigerians. In this context, the selected cartoons reflect the Nigeria situation, and the Nigerian educational sector. These cartoons relate to issues that surround the ineptitude in the Nigerian educational context, as well as bedeviling issues such as kidnapping, poverty, terrorism, ASUU strike, corruption and skepticism on the part of the populace.

The nine purposively selected cartoons were published on different Nigerian Facebook pages. This makes them gain publicity and a larger audience. Asiru and Bello (2021) argue that "what many cartoonists in Africa do in recent times is to 'engage in symbolic space shifting' where critical comments about issues and phenomena relating to the society and its leaders are 'deterritorialised or transferred from real space to cyberspace.'" Therefore, cartoons feature more concrete images that are related to the Nigerian educational sector. These cartoons depict issues relating to kidnapping, poor funding of educational sector, terrorism, skepticism and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). They were meant for the Nigerian audience, hence their appropriateness for this study. The data for this study are grouped as Figures 1 - 9 for ease of analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Context of the Message

The below cartoon (Figure 1) depicts how students nowadays are not ready to go to school but ready to attain a better position in the country. Two groups are represented in the cartoon: the first group represents a student; while the second one is represented by the mother.



Figure 1 (curled from Facebook)

The young student sits comfortably in front of his mother. As part of their conversation, we have the following excerpts:

Student: Mum, I'll be Nigeria president someday (pointing at his mother)

Mother: Then, you must read hard to earn a good certificate

Student: No need mum, I'll swear an affidavit when the time comes.

From the conversation above, exaggeration is used to depict Nigeria political office as a position one can take without any formal education. The student reference to sworn affidavit in lieu of

certificate portrays the decadence in Nigeria educational sector. This is as a result of the ways the educational system is being run by the government. The image satirises the action of Nigeria government towards education with the intention of ridiculing their negligence. Ideologically, we can say that government ineptitude in the educational sector has made students believe that with certificate or no certificate one will surely achieve what one wishes through obnoxious ways.

Context of the Message

The image in Figure 2 depicts a woman who sits on a stool with her jaw resting on her left hand. In front of this woman is a mortar and pestle. There is another hand stretching out towards a bowl placed on a burning fire. The hand that stretches out to pour something that looks like ororo has an inscription 'poor funding' and the bowl placed on the fire has 'Nigerian educational system' written on it. 'If education is expensive... try corruption!' is also written below the cartoon.

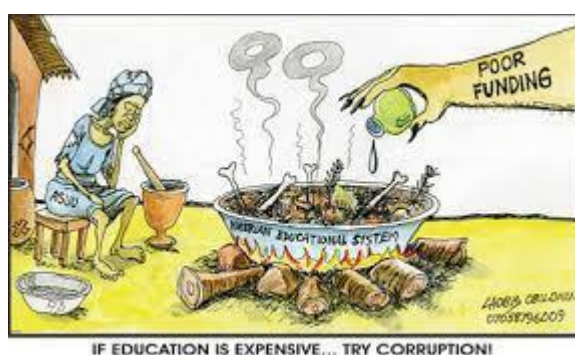


Figure 2 (Curled from Facebook)

All the symbols used in this cartoon show that Nigeria education is dead through poor funding by the government. It is also obvious that the Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASUU) in their attempt to fight for quality university education embarks on a nationwide strike to challenge this poor funding but the more they try this the more the government makes things worse. The picture of the woman with ASUU inscription shows that ASUU is desperate to continue with the strike. Another component of this cartoon that further satirises Nigeria's educational sector is the inscription ('If education is expensive... try corruption!'). This is a pointer to the fact that the little fund budgeted for education is being embezzled by some government officials. The images in this cartoon create both satire and humour in the politician's utterance in Nigeria context has in fact become a norm that is socio-culturally shared by cartoonists and audience of the cartoons.

Context of the Message

This cartoon (Figure 3) is similar to Figure 2. The cartoonist uses the pictures of two particular students with students who are reading news updates on ASUU strike.



Figure 3 (Curled from Facebook)

While reading the Vanguard headline (ASUU/FG RIFT WORSENS) on the status of ASUU strike, these two parents were surprised that instead of having good news about the strike, all they could read was that there was no trace of calling off the strike. This is evident when one of these parents exclaims: 'Chineke God!... So this is how our children will stay at home and become grandmothers?'

In the context of the above excerpt, we can say that the cartoonist has questioned Nigeria government's lackadaisical attitude towards education in the country. This is obvious from the socio- cultural beliefs of Nigerians that if the ASUU strike continues indefinitely there's a tendency for the school children to get unwanted pregnancy. We can argue at this point that most students that become mothers today did so unconsciously just because the government is not doing the right thing to improve the standard of education in the country.

Context of the Message

The image in Figure 4 depicts the horse-like image of a graduate and other two people. This is an implied metaphorical representation of half-baked graduates produced by Nigerian higher institutions of learning as a result of poor funding. This is supported by the caption: 'I'm shocked that graduates cannot fill forms.' Figure 4 appropriately satirises what happens in Nigeria education today.

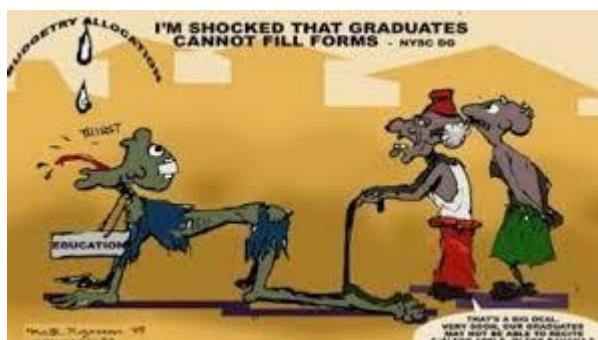


Figure 4 (Curled from Facebook)

We all believe that before one becomes a graduate, one must have passed through different stages of education, that is, primary to tertiary levels, but it is ironic that what obtains in Nigeria education today is nothing to write home about.

Satirically, it is quite unfortunate that the Nigerian government, who refuses to fund the educational sector, now produces half-baked graduates that cannot fill in a form.

Context of the Message

Figure 5 presents the image of a Boko Haram member who is masked and carries a rifle pointing towards a student carrying a book with an inscription: 'Western education.' Above the Boko Haram member's head is a caption 'drop your weapon!'



Figure 5: (Curled from Facebook)

From the above cartoon, we can see that Boko Haram, which in English means 'Western education is forbidden,' frowns at Western education being included in Nigeria educational curriculum. This cartoon is politically oriented. While Nigeria's educational sector is facing poor funding, there are also other cabals that do not want Nigerian citizens to receive it formally. We can say, at this juncture that, Nigerian educational sector is not only faced with the challenge of poor funding but terrorism which is also supported by faction of the government.

Context of the Message

Similar to Figures 2 and 3 is Figure 6, which displays three images - an academic who dresses in academic gown; the second one is a picture showing two hands holding a book with a knife. On this book is an inscription 'FG' & 'Education', the third image is the picture of a student who places his two hands on his head.



Figure 6 (Curled from Facebook)

The mission of the cartoonist in Figure 6 is to satirise the destruction caused by the Federal Government (FG) and ASUU. In an ASUU's attempt to fight poor funding of university education, they ironically add to the challenges in the educational sector. The cartoon further shows the ironic situation Nigeria's educational sector finds itself in. This is evident when a knife is used to cut the book. The cutting of the book therefore is a symbol of destruction caused by the Federal government. We can link the fight between the Federal Government and ASUU to a popular saying that 'where two elephants fight the grass will suffer.' The grass that suffers in the context of this cartoon is students. This is evident of a student standing helpless in the cartoon.

Context of the Message

Figure 7 contains images of two parents who are speaking about their wards or children's school fees. The cartoon has the following conversations:

Parent 1: My child has not gone back to school because I'm broke and can't pay her school fees.

Parent 2: Well, my story is different. I have money to pay school fees (Replying).

Parent 1: Then let your child go back to school immediately (Replying).

Parent 2: I can't! (Insisting).

Parent 1: I don't have money to pay a hefty ransom!

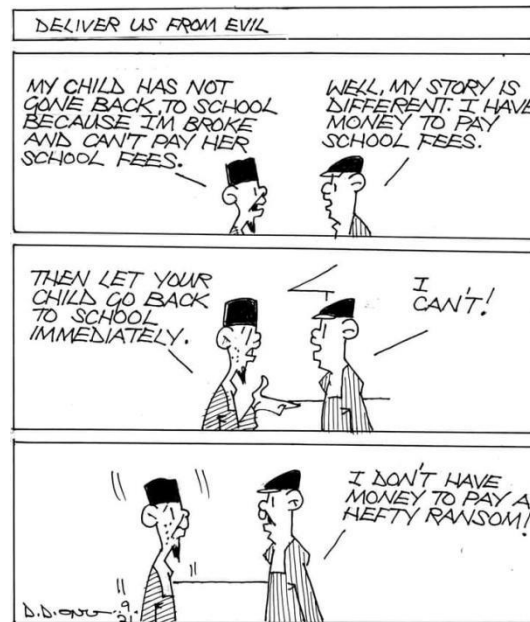


Figure 7: (Curled from Facebook)

Figure 7 is produced by the cartoonist to challenge the insecurity in the country. The cartoon satirises the negligence of Nigeria government towards insecurity. From the conversations above, it implies that why some parents are struggling to pay their children's tuition fee, some have the money but the fear of kidnappers makes them stop their children from going to school. It's obvious that insecurity has got to a level where the safety of school children is not guaranteed. The target of the kidnappers is to kidnap school children, whom they think will fetch them hefty ransom. This is evident when parent 1 said that he didn't have money for hefty ransom. The cartoon, therefore, is an attempt made by the cartoonist to satirise Nigeria government negligence towards education and its aim s to sanitise the educational sector. We all believe that where there is insecurity, both learning and teaching cannot take place.

Context of the Message

Figure 8 is similar to Figure 7 above. The cartoon is accompanied with the following captions: 'Some gunmen took away packaged question papers from a school in Kaduna thinking they were money' & 'someone told them they will get money if they go to school'



Figure 8: (Curled from Facebook)

Going by the verbal component of the above cartoon, the question that comes out of one's mouth is: 'do we have security agencies in the country?' The focus of this cartoon is to reveal the security agencies weaknesses in tackling the kidnappers. It is very ironic and satirical that the kidnappers could not differentiate between a question paper and a stack of money. Here, the educational sector is now seen by kidnappers as a best source of getting ransom from both parents and government after the students had been kidnapped. This cartoon is now a call on the government to provide adequate security over the students and their teachers.

Context of the Message

Figure 9 presents two gunmen shooting their bullets at a box which contains books, and on the body of the box is an inscription: 'Education.'



Figure 9: (Curled from Facebook)

The cartoon above reveals the enemies of progress in the educational sector. These gunmen are either employed by the cabals or aspirants who wish to take political office by force. This cartoon therefore is a pointer to the fact that the Boko Haram sect believes that if Western education is allowed in Nigeria, most of their obnoxious practices (Boko Haram ideologies) will not gain full ground in the country. They (Boko Haram) shooting at the books shows that the standard of education in Nigeria is going down.

Conclusion

The paper has analysed 9 cartoons related to the falling standard of education in Nigeria. The images were carefully selected for their impact relevance to the topic. It revealed that the cartoonists deployed an array of comical images and relied heavily on the socio-cultural and economic knowledge shared with the Nigerian people to pass across their messages on the state of education.

As examined, the cartoons revealed the corrupt practices, kidnapping, poor funding of the educational sector, and insecurity prevalent in the Nigerian educational sector.

From the discussion, the application of multimodal discourse to the exploration of selected cartoons in Nigerians Facebook pages has further proved, beyond reasonable doubt, that visual images are linguistic tools that are rich in meaning and they could bring to fore easy interpretations and understanding that are strong and powerful, especially, when sensitive issues, such as political issues, are related and discussed. This is in line with earlier submissions of Sani et al, 2014; Lawate, 2012; 2016 that political cartoons are employed to relate messages that are important to the people and society. In addition, the paper makes reference to the use of satire in the multimodal discourse analysis, though this is against Zahid, et al, (2016) submission that most researchers overlook the use of satire in their discussion of political cartoons. Here, we consider satire as one of the strategies used by cartoonists to criticise the abnormalities in Nigeria's educational sector.

This study is relevant to multimodal discourse analysis, because it supports what scholars have previously done in the field. Few of these earlier works are Czerpa, 2017; Xiong, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008; Ariyo, 2014; Aroge, 2012. This will also serve as a springboard for further research on the application of the applied framework to cartoons in other fields. Considering the implications of this study, therefore, the findings would be in addition to literature from linguistic, and visual communication perspectives on the falling standard of education in Nigeria. It will also add to the existing literature on political cartoons in Nigeria.

Also, the study showed how humorous the cartoonists have subtly depicted the state of the nation's educational system. The findings support Obadare's (2009, p. 241) submission that humour is a means now commonly adopted by people (cartoonist inclusive) to 'deconstruct and construct meaning out of a reality that is decidedly surreal' In sum, it showed the level of contract between the government and the governed and how the public consequently responded to the falling standard of education and we hope that this study would positively benefit or impact future studies in the area it covered. We can conclude that people humorously used cartoons to express their attitudes toward the falling standard of Nigerian and also 'truths about themselves' (Bartlett, 2012).

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