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Building Boys' Capacity through Science

The just concluded Science Challenge, organised by Helmbridge Study Centre, Lagos, ran for five weeks, testing participating students in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and General Knowledge.

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For 37 years, Helmbridge Study Centre, Lagos, a project of the

Educational Cooperation Society, a non-governmental organisation entrusted to Opus Dei (the Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church), has been imparting knowledge in boys from public and private secondary schools through its science challenge, which recently produced a team of winners. Funmi Ogundare reports

The importance of science in everyday life cannot be overemphasised, as is being shown yearly by Helmbridge Study Centre, a project of the Educational Cooperation Society (ECS), a non-governmental organisation entrusted to Opus Dei (the Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church).

Since 1982, it has been supporting secondary school students, specifically boys to be well grounded in the area of science and enhance their study habits, as well as careers.

The science challenge, which ran for five weeks, tested participating students in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and General Knowledge.

For participating schools, there were teams of students, comprising eight members, four each from senior secondary one and two, who were accompanied by an official and a small group of supporters.

For the 2019 edition, 20 public and private schools in Lagos participated and St. Michael's Anglican College, Coker emerged winner for the first time in its nine years of participating in the contest. The team received a trophy, a cheque of N150,000, as well as certificate for each member.

Government College, Surulere and Soliel High School, Gbaja, Surulere came second and third positions, and got trophies, a cheque of N100,000

and N50,000 respectively, as well as certificates for each of the members.

The Director of the centre, Chris Itua, who advised the students to study hard, be determined and focused, regretted that corporate organisation's prefer to sponsor entertainment and reality shows, rather than things that would enhance education and knowledge.

According to him, "it is unfortunate that organisations don't want to sponsor things that would advance education, but on reality shows. In the world today, it is easier to get sponsorship for the girl-child compared to the boys. As a matter of fact, an organisation told me that if we make the competition an all girls' affair, it will put its money on it."

While stressing the importance of taking care of the boys, he noted that their moral and physical formation in the school system is missing.

Itua said the centre, established in 1972, has the aim of complementing the academic, moral and character training, which boys receive at home and school, adding that it is equipped with facilities which can be accessed for free during weekends and holidays.

The quiz master, Mr. Obi Jude Onyekachi, who participated in the competition some years ago, said the importance of education cannot be overemphasised, adding that government has been lackadaisical about the issue.

“When you are invited for a science challenge like this, there is prestige that comes with it. If you have not been preparing before, you need to study hard because you are going to be meeting different schools and people from different backgrounds, so you are forced to study,” he said, adding that the competition

enhances one's performance in science subjects and helps one to maintain a level of seriousness.

“The fact that you prepare for the challenge, I think you can comfortably write any exam.”

A media strategist and consultant, Mr. Patrick Oke expressed concern that commitment, dedication, hard work and focus are no longer emphasised in the school system, saying that people are only interested in acquiring certificates and making quick money.

“Research has shown that 80 per cent of Nigerian graduates are not employable because everybody is looking for the paper. What everybody does is how to pass exam and anything can be done to achieve that. There is no research anymore. All those things that go into research have been de-emphasised, people are

looking for the quickest way to make money.

“Everybody’s mind should be focused on learning and solving problems, knitting together resources and be focused on things that will enable society. Everybody wants to go to school so they can make money.”

He regretted that the youths have been pressurised into getting into things that would not enable society, saying, “youths watch football all the time and look up to footballers who earn very high for playing football. What does watching football do to you and enable society? They want you to become musicians, footballers, entertainers, but when it comes to bringing up people who will have acumen to improve on society, nobody is interested.

“It is hard to get sponsorship for programmes like this, but if it is a music or football competition,

Nigerian companies will spend N600 million to sponsor Arsenal and Chelsea Football Clubs. What are these doing to the youths? They are the target because they want to put things in their heads and set agenda for them to follow, which has nothing to do with societal development.

Oke, who was a special guest at the programme, said young people are now interested in going to China and Malaysia because these countries have overtaken Europe in scientific exploration and research, adding that they see Nigeria as a country that does not have a future for them.

The media strategist, who promised to increase the prize next year to N250,000, advised youths to have a positive mind-set of rebuilding the country, rather than focusing on what they see on television and social media.

“You should organise your minds, know that you are capable of doing anything by thinking originally and know that you can be the scientists we are looking for if you set your minds on it.”

The captain of the winning school, Master Solomon Oyetunde, who got a cash prize of N20,000 as the best audience, expressed excitement about his school's success, saying that his team was motivated to win when it emerged third position last year.

“It is a good turnout for my team because we were in school during the holidays studying just to succeed in the competition.”

His science teachers, Mr. Mathew Ibiwoye and Philip Ajanaku also expressed excitement about their team's success, saying that the fact that the school has been struggling in the last nine years stimulated them to succeed.

They added that the school has a special club where science subjects are taught. “We had to increase the number of our meeting days and pick students that will represent the school based on merit. They have finally conquered based on hard work and prayers,” they said.

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