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## **Systematic Approach to the Improving Standard of Nigeria Educational System**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the root cause of the falling standard of the Nigeria educational system and the rightful solution to these problems. Education is the bedrock of development, but unfortunately, education in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. These include: poor funding and thus poor educational infrastructures, inadequate classrooms and teaching aids (projectors, Computers, Laboratories and libraries), paucity of quality teachers and poor/polluted learning environment. In addition to these inadequacies, our school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as*

*examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption. For meaningful development to take place in the educational sector, government needs to re-address the issue of funding. Private educational investors, teachers, parents/guidance and students/pupils need a reorientation towards achieving the goals of education. Also, education must be made affordable for all. The current monolithic approach to knowledge acquisition must be changed. Technical education and innovation/adaptation centres must be encouraged and well funded, if this nation must move out of this present technological and scientific dependence, government and the organized private sector must as well fund research programmes, inventions and mass production of invented products.*

**Key words:** Education, Systematic Approach, Standards, and Development

### **Introduction**

It was with much enthusiasm that the founding fathers of Nigeria fought for and won her independence from the British rule on October 1, 1960. There were hopes that under self-rule, the country would fare better and implement policies that would ensure the growth and personal development of citizens in all areas which would in turn translate to national development. But today, when the issue of Nigeria educational system is raised, the first sets of thoughts that come to mind are: decline in standard, deterioration of facilities, examination malpractices, mass promotion syndrome and the like before any other thing else. Since independence, there have been 44 Education Ministers working to actualise the policies of 14 civilian Presidents and military Heads of States. Many of these policies were laudable. However, faulty implementation has often aborted goal fulfilment. In addition, frequent changes in government, especially during the military rule, led to lack of continuation of programmes by successive administrations. Progress made in various areas were not necessarily consolidated and in the five decades of independence, there have been highs and lows – the lows representing years of

neglect, misappropriation of funds and poor implementation which have undermined the investments made in various aspects of the sector. Elementary Education: The Universal Primary Education/Universal Basic Education Schemes. This calls for an in-depth study and analysis aimed at tutoring each and every stakeholders in the education system on how their actions and inactions have individually and collectively contributed to the collapsing state of education in Nigeria. In any case, knowledge and skill acquisition which education is all about cannot be over emphasized. According to the World Bank (1999: 25), “successful development entails more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gap in capital. It also entails acquiring and using knowledge as well as closing the gaps in knowledge”. Thus, to successfully confront the challenges of development, a developing country must undertake three major tasks:

- Acquired and adapt global knowledge and create knowledge locally.
- Invest in human capital to increase the ability to absorb and use knowledge; and
- Invest in technologies to facilitate both acquisition and the absorption of knowledge. Similarly, Fafunwa (1979:26) defines education as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives, that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.”Going by these explanation as to what education is, in relation to the state of education and its process in the country today as well as the attitude of its providers-Government at all levels and private investors; one with interest will be compelled to ask such questions as what has actually gone wrong considering the enormity of its effect on the output from the system in the

area of productivity and the degree of acceptance in the labour market and educational institutions, especially outside the country. Response however, will be its militating factors stemming from the incidence of examination malpractice – poor facilities –indiscriminate mass promotion syndrome in schools. The causes of these could be traced to

1. Government insensitivity to education needs
2. Government and private institutions open encouragement of low productivity and
3. The lack of the spirit of hard-work among growing number of students. Attempts will be made in this paper to examine the aforementioned problems and mitigations suggested.

## **Problems of education in Nigeria**

### **1. Poor preparation and malpractices**

Experts in the education sector have been able to identify examination malpractices with poor preparation of students for an examination, and lack of self confidence. In view of the rising costs of education (school fees, enrolment fees, cost of books and other materials) students and even their parents will not ordinarily want to be held back by any form of deficit or failure in any of the required subjects hence will go to any length to ensure success. In some cases, some teachers at the secondary school level are involved by way of encouraging students to contribute money (cooperation fees) in order to secure the needed assistance during such examinations because they, the teachers are left with no other alternative considering the fact that they are aware of the inadequate preparation of their students as well as the lack of facilities to get them properly prepared before examination. Interview with 50 school heads in Benin City, reveals that more than 50% of our secondary school students on annual basis choose to enrol and write their final year external examination in schools in the interior and some private schools where they are very sure of success at the end of the day. In 1996, the military government

in Edo State sent home secondary school teachers that have served 28 years and above as well as those that were recruited in 1991 and after, few weeks before final year examination. Some schools were left with one teacher and a security man. And a near replication of same happened in the year 2000, this time for those that have served 28years and above. This is how the government indirectly legitimized irregularities in schools that is today unabated. Today the paucity of teachers in our secondary and primary schools, indicate that the state is yet to fully recover from this shock (Omofonmwan, 2001).

Between 1999 and the year 2000, the Bauchi State Government terminated the services of teachers who were non-indigene from its teaching services, a situation which resulted in acute shortage of teachers in virtually all schools in the state without a prior provision for replacement. Same practices have also been observed in some other states of the federation.

In a similar vein, Zamfara State government in the year 2004 imposed fees on students that are not only religious and indigene-ship bias, but also gender discriminatory, such discriminatory educational policy hampers the quest for goal attainment in both educational and national development. Efforts of state government like Rivers, Bayelsa and Ebonyi, towards overhauling and speedy transformation of its educational system from the primary to the tertiary level as well as sponsorship of its indigenes for overseas educational programmes and payment of students examination enrolment fees should be recognized, applauded and emulated by others.

## **2. Exploitation and educational standard**

A close assessment of activities in schools have revealed that, students are made to suffer undue amount of exploitation by school head sat both private and public schools in the name of enrolment fees and assurance of success in their examination and this they do in collaboration with the ministry officials who are suppose to inspect and monitor activities in schools to ensure standard compliance. Despite the fact that most of the schools lack basic learning facilities

and a complete set of teachers, in some cases, a school with the services of an English Language teacher will lack that of a Mathematics teacher. This is the more reason why one may not have the gut to quarry the mass promotion syndrome been practice in schools because the system itself is not balanced.

In like manner, students are being surcharged in a number of ways in tertiary institutions either in the name of dues that are not accounted for, force purchase of reading and other learning materials at exorbitant rate or on services of which staff are being paid for as assigned responsibility and official provision made by the respective institution. All these lead to lowering of the academic ability of students.

### **3. Orientation and educational standard**

In view of the prevalence of examination malpractices and other related irregularities in schools at all levels this day, the interest and habit of reading, procurement of books and other skills development materials have drastically dwindled among students. Interviewing 50 secondary school principals of both public and private schools, sampled from Oredo and Uhunmwode Local government areas of Edo State; 30 senior faculty members from five universities namely the University of Benin, Ambrose Ali Univerisity (AAU), Delta State University (DELSU), Universities of Lagos and Abuja; a study of 500 students randomly sampled from 50 secondary schools in Benin City and 300 students from 3 universities reveal that the two areas of main interest to growing number of students now are: fashion and influencing of examination results “Blocking”, thus, portraying the educational system as more of glamour to real learning and skill acquisition by prospective students. This trend is also observed to have close relationship with rising sexual promiscuity among students.

### **4. Poor Parenting/Guardance**

Parenting entails caring, protection, guardance, provision of basic needs for child upkeep in order for him or her to be properly equipped

to meet with the challenges of life, in accordance with the laws of the land. In desperation, many parents have decided to bring in additional innovation by way of not only involving in encouraging of their wards, but also finance activities in and around examination venues to effect malpractices in order to brighten the chances of their children or wards in qualifying examination to higher institutions and some even progress on this act through the tertiary level of education.

Interview with two sets of university students from different departments engaged in clustered group discussion revealed that their parents' influence over their choice of course of study has negative effect on their level of performance.

In early 1998, during the 45th meeting of the National Education Council (NEC) held in Kastina, the then Minister of Education in an address stated that the summit was to allow stakeholders in the education sub-sector and those who do not know then the extent of the rot in the sector to sit and parley with them in order to understand what has gone wrong with education in Nigeria. He further stated that it was his belief that if Nigerians who matter know exactly the trouble which education is passing through, they would be shocked to their marrow because Nigeria's education has reached a level, which deserves the declaration of a state of emergency (Birma,1998).

In this regard, conscious effort is needed by all the stakeholders in the educational sector-Government at all level, school heads and teachers, parents and students to bring this observed abnormalities to normalcy – poor education breeds indiscipline and indiscipline is the bane of the Nigerian society today and calls for restoration of a proper academic culture in Nigeria.

## **5. Poverty and fall in standard**

Acquisition of Education knowledge is supposed to help us fight against-poverty, ignorance and disease. The process of acquiring this well desired knowledge has gradually turned money spinning venture for many of those in dire need of the knowledge and skill. It is now a

source of exploitation from the service seekers with little or no consideration for quality of service rendered and facilities on ground, and made an offer for the highest bidder, a trend which has cut across all levels of education, from nursery school to tertiary institutions.

The concept, “poverty”, refers to a situation and process of serious deprivation or lack of resources and materials necessary for living within a minimum standard conducive for human dignity and well being (NEST, 1992:16). Admission and being in school today is merely an ability to pay what is demanded in monetary terms by school operators and not on what could be offered academically. And this in essence widens the scope of poverty prevalence as well as the gap between the rich and the poor which education is designed to bridge. Little wonder the graduates from many of the institutions exhibit ignorance towards societal realities and lack creativity due to the inadequacies associated with the learning and training process which is also observed to be partly because many of those that offer this service do so with greed.

### **Prospects of education in Nigeria**

#### **The need for research development**

Everyone who cherish genuine growth and sustainable development Government, private and corporate organization, non-governmental organization and individuals should as a matter of due responsibility encourage and finance research programmes, inventions and mass production of invented products as a way of discouraging prospective students from indulging in any form of academic irregularities, who may not have seen anything good or meaningful on the part of those who have be hardworking and creative, research and invention wise in terms of reward for their effort. Currently research interest by the government at all levels and corporate organization is nothing to write home about.

Many who have distinguished themselves in this area of human endeavour got frustrated and discouraged due to lack of assistance and

encouragement resulting in brain drain to other parts of the world, where such innovations are well recognized and encouraged.

Despite the amount of knowledge and experience claimed to have been acquired or possessed by some scholars, occupying some prestigious and sensitive units as heads still try to thwart the effort of fellow scholars and that of upcoming ones as a way of perpetuating mediocrity with low productivity and underdevelopment of the society as its resultant effect. Suffice to say, that these sets of scholars have thrown modesty and excellence (they are supposed to hold on to jealousy) to the wind. According to Professor L. Erinsho “There is no doubt that universities have a pivotal role to play because they, as institutions, bear a part of the responsibility for the collapse of the academia. There are a number of challenges facing universities in Nigeria today, the first of which is to tackle declining standards which, as was previously observed, is being orchestrated by scholars”.

This research sub-sector that is grossly neglected in Nigeria and played upon indiscriminately is the basis for the socio-economic, political, scientific and technological advancement of our most admired developed nations of the world today. Therefore, conscious effort towards qualitative and durable educational systems needs to be put in place for posterity in Nigeria. (Its land, mineral resources etc) and the numbers of its people, their level of skills, attitudes to work and desire for self-improvement (NEST, 1992:8)

Considering these observed inadequacies therefore, one may not be wrong to say that there is no good and favourable market for researchers in Nigeria.

### **Funding /Constraints**

There is a gross underfunding of the educational sector in the country in general and neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities. Instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of these schools; classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, all leading to decline in academic standards. Attention

must be focused on these areas too if these educational institutions are to get out of the woods and this is only possible through adequate funding.

Since 1986, when the federal military government introduced the structural adjustment programme SAP, allocation of financial resource started to fall coupled with the consistent decline in the value of local currency till date, which have also consistently affected the procurement of imported technical and scientific equipments, books, journals and other instructional needs in the educational system.

Education system in Nigeria today, needs a total overhauling and restructuring; this reform is required to improve the performance of higher education in the country. The nation entered the 21st century insufficiently prepared to cope or compete in the global economy, where growth will be based even more heavily on technical and scientific knowledge (World Bank 1994). It is also a well known fact that the inadequacies always observed among many undergraduates and graduates alike is as a result of the inadequacies associated with the primary and the secondary education system in Nigeria.

It is however pertinent for the government of the day to design a suitable guidelines for funding education. For instance, UNESCO has recommended that 26% of the total budget of a nation should be allocated to education. But Longe Commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of recurrent budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has never exceeded 10%. Though, the system is expensive to keep afloat, quality however in any form is partly a function of the total fund made available to the system and judiciously utilized for the purpose to which it is meant for. Funds are required and necessary to maintain both the human and material resources of the system in order to achieve desired goals. Also there is the need for an effective monitoring of the management of fund presently being allocated to the sector, as effort should be intensified to improve on what is currently being allocated to the system.

## **Organizational influence on educational standard**

Many viewers have observed that, most corporate organizations today in the country are fond of employing series of measures which are in effect bias and unproductive. They indulge in an unfair selective judgment on applicants seeking employment opportunity into their establishment, by way of using certificate grades as well as institution attended as a prerequisite for interview attendance and recruitment. In some cases, they rather prefer candidates with first class and second class grade certificate and those that attended the first generation universities at the detriment of some others with lesser grade who might be better if given equal opportunity.

This is their own way of encouraging irregularities and malpractices in the process of grade acquisition by prospective job seekers, therefore compromising standard and perpetual dependence on the services of foreign expatriates for both medium and high tech services.

## **Suggestions**

1. Government and the private sector should pull in more effort and resources towards the development of education;
2. Educating and re-orientation of teachers, parents and students on the need to discourage examination malpractice in schools;
3. More vocational and technical education centres should be established and the few existing ones properly equipped and staffed;
4. An independent inspectorate committee should be put in place to regularly monitor activities in schools as the existing inspectorate unit has ceased to function effectively;
5. Government should take over payment of enrolment fees for both primary six examination and secondary schools external examinations;
6. Qualitative and affordable education should be made available for all;
7. Schools should be properly staffed and equipped;

8. Applicants seeking job placement irrespective of grades obtained and institutions attended should be given fair and equal opportunity to compete for placement.
9. More modern learning aids such as computers, internet websites facilities, overhead projectors, firms etc should be provided in schools;
10. Online registration should be introduced now for school examination enrolment by the National Examination Body; this will reduce the exploitative tendencies by school heads.

### **Conclusion**

In some states excluding Rivers, for the past ten years, not even a single structure has been added to the existing ones nor has any significant maintenance, repairs or replacement of learning facilities and equipment been made. Rather the responsibility of school ownership and funding is being shifted while playing down on expansion of facilities to meet with the demand of increasing population.

The monopoly enjoyed by WAEC as the national examination body prior to 1999, (when NECO was introduced) coupled with its consistent broadening of examination syllabus, its overstretched facilities due to the rapidly increasing number of applicants could be said to be the basis for examination malpractices in the country. Some public secondary schools are only known to be functional during enrolment and examination period while most of the private schools lack visible structures and any equipment required for science practical and studies, but enrol students at outrageous charges.

More attention is required on the part of the government in the provision of vocational and technical education to growing number of prospective students seeking admission to the few and poorly equipped centres. The less emphasis on this aspect of education in Nigeria presently is also an observed causal factor in the decline in educational standard as it is more of a mono system of education. For an educational system to be classified as functional and effective, it

must be all encompassing and all embracing. Thus, a well focused and defined pattern of educational system that is all embracing should be fashioned out where vocational and technical education will be well developed and every child given the proper kind of education he or she desires which must be based on the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domain.

Finally, since education is seen as a sine-qua-non to national development and since no nation can develop above its educational system, it becomes not only important but also imperative to find some solutions to the problems of dwindling resource allocation to the educational sector.

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