

# THE EMERGING-STATE OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: EXPLORING THE ROOTS

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## Abstract

This paper reviews some of the effects of Nigeria's system of education on the society, and theoretically explores the origin and the roots. Many children are out of school; hawking goods, pursuing moving vehicles and engaging in diverse delinquent behaviours. Even those children at school generally prefer to cheat in order to pass their examinations. In addition, misplaced societal values, confused and unstable leadership, incompetent teachers among others form the order of the day. All these emanate from the type of education imbibed, and hinder development. The paper also highlights some remedial steps being taken, and then suggests some ways of tackling these problems.

## Introduction

Examination malpractice is the order of the day. Egbo (2006), emphasized that students who cheat in the examinations are liabilities to the nation, the society and a disgrace to the university that awarded the certificate. What is usually observed in the conduct of elections to various offices and leadership positions is a reflection of the quality of education received by some Nigerians. Typical is the just concluded 2007 elections where University graduates were utilized for various categories of election malpractices. These youths would not hesitate to blame their roles on joblessness. Joblessness pervades the nation as a result of the type of education children are exposed to. The education is no longer geared towards self-reliance and hence the products are generally not self-reliant. Both the successful school leavers and school dropouts roam about the street. The dropouts have no regrets since the successful ones cannot boast of gainful jobs.

Any good observer will agree that many children are out of school, hawking goods,

pursuing moving vehicles, and engaging in diverse delinquent behaviour. Again, people who watch and listen to televised news must have observed the display of marketed fake drugs. The activities of people who market fake drugs and those who pursue the person or groups of individuals who control the quality of drugs, indicate poor quality education. That was why Usman (1991), quoted by Egbo (2006), attributed the moral decadence in the society to the prevailing examination malpractice. He stated that, it is a reflection of the morally decadent society and it has perverted the value system. According to him, one wonders what would be expected in a country like Nigeria where robbers, smugglers and drug barons are glorified because of their ill-gotten wealth, through the award of different academic honors.

The activities are crude, wicked, and to some extent, show lack of civilization and concern for human life. Some youths and even adults who migrate to other countries extend these crude behaviours to these foreign countries and this forms the bane of Nigeria's image outside. When they place order for goods and devices for use in Nigeria, they request for inferior quality and yet sell them as good quality materials. This situation is a total reflection of what Nigeria has in her education system. Wokocha, (1994), observed that, this situation is as a result of total loss of faith in the dignity of labour and hardwork because a system that seems unfair invites unfairness. This does not urge well for the growth and development of this country.

The high incidence of examination malpractice in the nation's education system is attributable to the emphasis placed on Certificates instead of emphasis on Application and Creativity. The heralded 'special centres' are

now the order of the day. There are 'famous' special centres for WAEC, NECO, and JAMB Examinations. Students register at these centres at cut-throat prices inform of fees. In fact, at the end they emerge with very good grades of passes even in subjects they never studied. Some of these children cannot even correctly spell their names let alone defend their certificates. They become admitted into tertiary institutions where they continue to perpetrate these malpractices. Some manage to succeed and emerge to outerworld as graduates. If our country is to meet up with the developed countries of the world, this issue should be addressed, for good education according to Thompson (1981) quoted by Nwani (2006) is the most important tool for improving the quality of the most vital resources of a nation for development. It is said that any nation that tries to develop without education, even with the richest natural resource endowment will be attempting that which has never been and will never be.

These people do not even possess the 'knowledge' let alone the 'application' for self-reliance. The task that is seriously facing Nigeria's education sector and researchers, is to explore and revisit the 'origin' or 'roots' of Nigerian educational problems, implications and way forward.

## **Education**

The word education is derived from the Latin word: *educio*, -are, -avi, -atum, which means: 'to bring up'. According to the New Websters Dictionary (2000), education means instruction or training by which people (generally young) learn to develop and use their mental, moral and physical powers. Furthermore, Longmann's Dictionary (1995), defines education as the process by which one's mind develops through learning at a school, college, or University; or, the knowledge and skill you gain from being taught, or, the general area of work or study connected with teaching. These definitions hinge on the learner who acquires the knowledge through exposure to training. In addition, the

knowledge acquired is a two-way sword and may be improving to the receiver, or, harmful as the case may be. This is a pointer to the fact that 'Education deserves to be jealously guarded and controlled, to prevent the 'harmful' aspect-from dominating.

Any good education must involve ethical values. Peters (1974), opined that education has notions such as improvement, betterment, and, the passing on of what is worthwhile, built into it. Again, Odukoya (1995), stated that a complete education programme will ensure that its recipients not only understand the principles of life but will also ensure that they are able to rightly apply such knowledge in solving the never-ending problems of life. A nation can never be self-reliant if the youths are not educated to be self-reliant. Furthermore, Balonwu (2005), stated that denial of education harms the cause of democracy, school progress, and by extension, international peace and security. Nigerian education system has been influenced by many factors like Tradition, History, Geography, Slave trade, Language among others as will be seen under subsequent sections.

## **History of Education in Nigeria**

Missionaries started arriving at the area of the River Niger to convert the people to Christianity about 1841. The Methodist Mission was the first to establish a school in Badagry in 1843. Other Missionary Agencies and the colonial government also established their own schools.

These different bodies have different objectives for establishing their schools and these govern their expectations and fulfillment. They independently emphasized 'Reading', 'Writing', and 'Arithmetic'. There were little or no programme of Science and Technology. This, really emphasized 'Knowledge' and not 'Doing' or 'Activity'. This is the 'bane' of Nigeria's education system. The difficulty of shedding off this system is what the society is suffering from today. The missionaries and the colonial

government gave us the education programme that suited their respective needs. The missionaries were mainly interested in producing church teachers and winning souls for God, whereas, the colonial government was interested in producing clerks and interpreters. Nigeria inherited this and gradually continued to expand the curriculum to include Science and Technology. The 1977 document titled the National Policy of Education is an off-spring of this expansion. The next sub-heading presents a brief exploration of the Root of Nigeria's Educational Problems.

### **The Root of Nigeria's Educational Problems**

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has about two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups. The three largest ethnic groups, Hausa in the North, Yoruba in the West and Igbo in the East are fairly balanced in terms of population. Because of their geographical location, Nigeria seems to stand on a tripod. This makes governance very difficult because of the ethnic diversity and balance. Differences also occur in religious beliefs. The Hausas are predominantly Muslims. The Igbos are Christians and Traditional. The Yorubas are in between and evenly distributed between Christianity and Islamism. These differences also affect the behaviour of the groups. The Yorubas and Igbos are more amenable to Western education, hence, they form the manpower base. In addition, cultural differences also exist and these introduce differences in ethics and morals as well.

The early Nigerian formal education programme adopted European curricula in schools. The curricula did not emphasize practical work and creativity or "learning by doing". Liberal Arts were emphasized because of the needs of the agencies and government that established the schools. Even after Nigerian independence of October 1960, a meaningful change was not easy to attain. Politicians prepare manifestos for election campaign and as soon as they are voted into office, they never implement

the proposal. They rise above the citizens and do not account to them. They mortgage their consciences. Continuity has no place in general planning and execution of affairs of educational programme. In addition, Nigeria's educational programme lacks facilities for regular evaluation. There is also no proper provision for research and review of the programme in relation to the environmental factors. Emphasis here is on certificates, hence scholars struggle to obtain certificates by any means culminating in the famous 'examination malpractice' as will be discussed in the next heading.

### **Brief History of Examination Malpractice**

As far back as 1901, examination malpractice was already in existence in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the recorded incidence of cheating both in scope and form were relatively few and much less frequent when compared with the dimension in the present day (Okabah, 2002). Cheating then was limited to simple 'syng' or "giraffing", passing papers secretly between candidates, or, to merely wispering answers or solutions to neighbouring candidates. Leakages limited or wide spread were then unknown. As a matter of fact, cheating candidate kept his intentions to himself with the hope of not being caught in the act. Adeyebe (1994), observed that in the year 1914, there was an incidence of leakage of the Cambridge school certificate Examinations in Nigeria. Examination malpractice continued to exist at low ebb and in simple and unsophisticated forms right up to the 1950s trans and very early 1960s. This situation remained relatively unchanged until 1963, when there was leakage of two public examination papers. These were the papers for the first school leaving certificate and the School Certificate Examinations of the year. In the same vein in 1967, two major occurrences culminating in examination irregularities were recorded. One was the leakage of the school certificate examination question papers which was traced to the printing press, while the other was linked to the improper packaging of question papers.

In the absence of more viable alternatives, examinations have continued to constitute major yardstick for fulfilling the need for individual assessment. With the increasing demand for formal education, the number of candidates writing public or competitive examinations now outstrips the number of candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions. The examining bodies are expected to effectively contend with the constantly increasing number of candidates all of whom would want to succeed. Consequently, examination malpractice assumed a higher dimension during the periods spanning from 1970s-80s.

The depreciation in the value of local currency and poor remuneration of teachers who comprise the bulk of invigilators and supervisors of public examinations made them more vulnerable and easy prey to monetary and other forms of materials inducements. Hence the frequent incidence of widespread leakage and other forms of irregularities in public examination in 1973, 1974, 1977, 1981 and 1987 was publicly reported. This obnoxious act became more sophisticated both in form and scope. Supervisors and invigilators began to collaborate with candidates who themselves devised and adopted more dubious, creative and ingenious means. Every candidate who writes an examination no matter how well or ill-prepared wishes to be successful at the end. Every candidate who writes an examination strives either by acceptable or non-acceptable means to avoid being labeled or stigmatized as a failure. Apart from the fear of failure, other factors that tend to predispose candidates to cheating are poor educational foundation, inadequate preparation, lack of confidence in one's academic ability, unrealistic self, parental expectations, poor influence, social influence and inadequate facilities in schools. (Okobah, 2002).

### **Way Forward**

A lot of scholarly research and studies are done in Nigeria. The executors and managers

of education programmes should make use of research findings. Research results provide feedback for improvement, and their non-usage tend to stagnate the education system in Nigeria. The launching of Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a positive stride. The UBE seeks to provide 9-year free, basic and compulsory education for all children of primary and junior secondary school age. It also provides punishment for parents who fail to comply (Balanwu 2005). From the age of six, these children are supposed to be gradually and progressively exposed to learning experiences in line with the current technological demands. The children for instance, are supposed to learn computer technology. Some of them, however, operate computer and go for information from internet network. They do basic mathematical-computations using computers. On political and diplomatic parameter, the children are exposed to a wide range of studies which include diplomatic languages like English and French.

Similarly, some philanthropists, singly, "-or collectively have attempted to contribute to'-the betterment of Education of Nigerian children, (Ajaero, 2006). There is a clarion call for all" Nigerians to sit up and redress the country's image as indicated below under the conclusion' and recommendations.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

People shout that the standard of education in Nigeria has fallen. This is not the position. Rather, the issue is variation in the standard of education. In addition, the products of Nigerian education system generally are not self-reliant. Only negligible few are interested in putting their "knowledge" into "doing". Again the implementation of education programmes is not uniform in all the schools. The following points are hereby suggested as possible panacea for the ugly monster in our educational system in Nigeria:

1. The entire Nigerian society needs attitudinal re-orientation. Everybody should be

educated towards the part of patriotism, truth, honesty, hardwork and transparency. Nigerian people need to be reminded that good name is better than silver and gold. Traditional rulers in different villages and towns should not confer chieftaincy titles to dubious, criminally minded and unscrupulous elements in their locality. Parents should always question the source of their children's wealth. Universities should only award honorary doctorate degrees to men and women of impeccable personalities who have contributed immensely towards national development. Teachers should be committed to their duties. Government functionaries should pay teacher their salaries and allowances as and when due. Radio, jingles, television, folklores, idioms, religious bodies and parents should be used to mount public enlightenment programme against examination malpractice. We need to be reminded that mere acquisition of certificate is not education.

2. The guidance and counseling unit of our schools should be strengthened to help students recognize their abilities and choose relevant subjects they can cope with, without resorting to examination malpractice.

3. Schools should be provided with adequate teaching and learning resources including books, libraries, laboratories and above all qualified and dedicated teachers, so that students can be properly prepared for examinations.

In that case, Nigerian Government should stop treating education sector with levity. Government should properly fund the education sector.

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