

REPOSITIONING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

To educate means to suggest a proposal, hut the proposal must be in response to a lived question or else it will simply be a load dumped on one's shoulders"

Luigi Giussani

In the above quotation Giussani, (2001:108) lucidly expresses the increasing dysfunctionality in contemporary Nigerian education. Many Nigerian educationist and indeed, non-educationists have since come to the conclusion that the Nigerian education system is not addressing the relevant issues of our national life, it has thus become imperative that the system needs to be repositioned to deal with the realities that so glaringly stare us in the face. The primary aim of this paper is to shift attention, at least momentarily, from the issue of underfunding as the perceived dominant pathology of education in Nigeria, to an equally critical issue of contemporary relevance herein perceived as even more challenging than the already know chronic underfund.

It is our intention to argue that even if the funding of education is increased to infinity but education system is not addressing the core issues of unemployment, is not positioned towards the total eradication of illiteracy, all forms of examination malpractice and cultism, and is not providing a sustainable value orientation for ail Nigerians, the funds will be as good as wasted. By repositioning therefore, we refer to a realization that our educational system is no longer performing its intended functions and must of necessity by redirected towards new redefined objectives and delivery strategies. We hasten to add the caveat that we recognize that there are three education systems operating in Nigeria Viz. the indigenous system, the Quaranic Muslim system and the European / Modern / Formal system. However, the analysis here is focused on the European - style formal education system. This is not to underrate the importance of the other two in achieving our national educational objectives. The choice is strictly arbitrary and in recognition of the dominant role which the modern or formal education system plays in our attempt to adapt to a new global environment.

How it Started

. " It is important to provide a brief historical perspective on education in Nigeria not only for the holistic profile it will offer, but also to reveal the historical moments when the system derailed and how it happened. That will equally provide an insight into how to reposition the education system for the task ahead. Internet library sources on "Education In Nigeria "provide the following useful information;

Western - style education came to Nigeria with the missionaries in the mid nineteenth century. Although the first mission school was founded in 1843 by Methodists, it was the Anglican Church Missionary Society that pushed forward in the early 1850s to found a chain of" missions and schools, followed quickly in the late 1850s by the Roman Catholics.

We are equally informed that:

In 1887 in what is now Southern Nigeria, an education department was founded that began setting curricula! requirements and administered grants lo the mission societies. By 1914. when North and South were united into one colony, there were fifty-nine government and the missions ran ninety-one mission primary schools, except king's College in Lagos. The missions got a foot hold in the middle belt; a missions school for the sons of Chiefs was opened in Zaria in 1907 but lasted only two years. In 1909. Hans Viseher, an ex-Anglican missionary, was asked to organize the education system of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Schools were set up and grants given to missions in the middle belt.

The report provides some highly comparative data on enrolment across the country. For instance,

- In 1914 there were 1,100 primary school pupils in the North, compared with 35,70 in the South; the north had no secondary schools, compared with eleven in south. By the 1920s, the pressure for school places in the south led to increased numbers of independent schools financed by local efforts and to the sending of favorite sons overseas for more advanced training.

At this early colonial period, the education system had two notable features. The first was the predominantly religious context with which the system operated thereby ensuring the inculcation of religious values and yet retaining the secular principles and discipline of a modern school system. The second was that assessment was strongly biased in favour of written or oral examination as against practical skills accomplishments. It was used to judge intelligence, promotions and rather, qualification for jobs in both private and public sectors.

Prior to 1948, only the two tiers of primary and secondary education operated in the country. The establishment of the Yaba Higher College in 1932 and the University of Ibadan as a college of the University of London in 1948 marked the beginning of the third tier of higher education. As Esu and Junaid (n.d) put it, "By 1950, the country had developed a three-tiered system of primary, secondary, and higher education based on the British model of wide participation at the bottom, sorting into academic and vocational training at the secondary level, and higher education for a small elite destined for leadership." From that moment onwards, Nigeria witnessed a phenomenal growth in educational institutions and output, it is on record (ibid) that

On the eve of independence in the late 1950s, Nigeria had gone through a decade of exceptional educational growth leading to a movement for universal primary school enrollments went from 66,000 in 1947 to 206,000 in 1957; in the west (mostly Yoruba areas) from 240,000 to 1,209,000 Secondary level enrollments went from 10,000 for the country as a whole in 1947 to 36,000 in 1957. 90 percent of these however, were in the south.

It is thus understandable that in later years, education was to become the largest social programme of all the governments in the country, "absorbing as much as 40 percent of the budgets of some state government" By the mid 1980s, 13 million pupils had attended about 35,000 primary schools; 3.7 million students had attended 6,500 secondary level schools and about 125,000 students had been through 35 higher education institutions. Current figures are even more revealing. In the case of tertiary education, for instance, most of the existing universities, particularly the State universities were established mainly as matters of political expediency. This is partly the origin of the current underfunding of education in the Country. The consequences have been far reaching and traumatic and are threatening the entire education sector with collapse. As I argued elsewhere (Anikpo, 1996:36), "the problem of education in Nigeria is certainly not of a quantitative nature, it is essentially qualities and however defined, quality is largely a function funds" Largely? yes, but not entirely. This is the point being stressed in this paper. While the document impact of underfunding must not be seen in their distinctiveness and not be underemphasized in a fund-induced teleological holism. We must search further through the myriad of education pathologies to identify those aspects that can be isolated, diagnosed and distinctly treated without fund should be able to reconceptualize and reposition the education curricula, the methodologies and the research priorities to reflect contemporary realities before the search for funds.

What Really Went Wrong?

Let us for a start however attempt an interpretation of what really happened. Most of the analysis here are drawn from my 1996 inaugural lecture titled *Hegemonic Legacies: issues in the Sociology of Nigeria's Underdevelopment*, I had contended in that lecture that education, among "other things, was pivotal to a nations ultimate development so much so that any nation that ignores" education clearly does so at its own peril. Yet, in Nigeria, we have allowed our education system to-, becrippled. The obvious question would be to ask what really happened.

In *False Start In Africa*, Rene-Dumont pointed out the distorted legacy of colonial education. on

African countries. Colonial education was not intended to prepare Nigerians for independence and nationhood/self-reliance. It had two clear objectives. The first was to provide manpower for the colonial economy. The second was to indoctrinate the people through missionary, evangelism/education to live virtuous lives devoid of complaints about exploitation or other absurdities of colonialism.

Before independence, the white man was to the Nigerian, the symbol of great success. The ingredients of this success comprised high education, large income, luxurious houses full of domestics servants, leisure time and little or no manual work. After independence, this culture of indulgence was not corrected. The education Nigerian socialized in and accepted that culture the consequence of which was that education removed people from productive activities in industry and agriculture even if they obtained a degree in engineering or agriculture. Education removed manpower from the more practical productive sectors of the economy and channeled every educated man/woman to either pen-pushing white collar jobs or the unproductive arena of politics. Ironically, the more unproductive sectors of the economy up of the educated elite, was made the most economically rewarding either genuinely or fraudulently. Indeed, in Nigeria this pattern has crystallized very visibly: the more unproductive the job, the more economically rewarding it becomes. .

This point was also made by E. Manuwike (1981) when he wrote that educated Nigerians "had been taught by European expels that educated people should not get their hands dirty.... The Europeans in Africa employed servants to do what they could normally do for themselves in Europe" Unfortunately, this attitude has been passed on to later generations of Nigerians. As a result, the more Nigerians that become educated the more they became unproductive, and therefore the more hungry we become.

Two other distortions of the education system were also noteworthy. They include the emergence of examinations, and the later emergence of malpractice (cheating) including teacher immorality and cultism in the education institution. When considered as facts in themselves, these two phenomena represent the tremendous challenge towards repositioning education in Nigeria. In the first instance, the total reliance on written examinations for assessment had given rise, as competitions intensify, to desperate efforts to cut corners gain competitive advantage. It has sacrificed the acquisition of practical or entrepreneurial skills which should help products of the school system to become self employed rather than skill-less employment seekers. As soon as it became obvious that success in an examination is all the certification one needed for success in Nigerian society some not-so morally upright individuals began to abuse the system through all forms of malpractice. Nothing much was done to nip this habit in the bud. as more people got away with it, it blossomed further until it became a national crisis. Today in Nigeria, cheating in examinations especially public examinations such as GCE or JAMB has become the norm. Those who cheat pass and those who do not cheat are forced to fail through the antics of crooked invigilators. Since people can University degrees through cheating, very Nigerian now wants to answer graduate and through pressure, the tertiary schools are populated beyond their carrying capacities.

Again in the tertiary schools, "economic hardship among teaching staffs produces increased engagement in non-academic moon-lighting activities." Some of those who could not augment their income through consultancies, contracts or even trading, invented the 'handout' syndrome. As the institutions reacted vehemently to this totally despicable practice, the 'handouts' metamorphosed into 'books' supposedly 'published' by companies that exist only in name. Students were compelled to buy (not read) these so called 'book' as a sine qua non for passing examinations. Most teachers, did not teach and most students did not learn. Secondary school products could neither speak nor. write English Language which is the medium of communication. Those who cheat their way into the University also cheat themselves out of it as illiterate as they were at the beginning. An unnamed researcher (internet information) had lamented that

By 1990, the crisis in education was such that it was predicted that by the end of the decade, there would be insufficient personnel to run essential service of the country, it was hoped that the publication of critical works and international attention to this crisis might reverse the situation before Nigeria lost an entire generation or more of its skilled labour force.

The phenomenon of examination malpractice reached its ultimate in depravity with the emergence of what is now referred to as 'sorting/ Stories about sorting state that it may have progressed from material gifts to some lectures to the on-going scandal about sexual gratifications for high grades.

As if enough shock has not been inflicted on the educational system, cultism was added to the obnoxious list of education pathologies in Nigeria. Many interpretations have been given to the emergence and consequences of this scourge on the education system. In the later 1970s the nation watched helplessly as harmless students' organizations metamorphosed into murderous gangs of disenchanted youth who see violence or machismo as a source of power, fame and wealth. One is tempted to agree with those who argue that the emergence of student's cults in tertiary institutions is a reflection of what is going on in the wider Nigerian society. The brutalization of the national psche by mindless military regimes through their organs of repression gave legitimacy to violence as a means of sustaining themselves in power. The agents of violence found willing recruits in some students of tertiary institutions. As the first initiates unleashed terror on fellow students and got away with it, some of the victims formed their own groups for retaliation. There are today more than 20 cult gangs (male and female) competing for supremacy in Nigerian tertiary and secondary schools. They steal, main , kill and terrorize at will. When they are arrested and sent to the police, they are released because, until very recently, the police had no law (or so they say) against which such cultists could be charged. When they are rusticated by University authorities, the then education system. The purpose was to propose more relevant set of national goals. From 1969 to 1976. other efforts, both national and sectoral, were also made to reposition the education system for the better.

In 1976 for instance, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced as the answer to mass illiteracy, mass poverty and national under-development. Insincerity on the part of policy formulators, political manipulations and inexperience in such matters led to the premature collapse of the programme before it had any positive impact. The most celebrated of all the implementation failures that destroyed the UPE programme was the recruitment of "half-educated" jobless boys and girls known as auxiliary teachers into the education system. The enduring legacy of this educational misadventure is the sharp decline in educational standards, especially in the use of English Language. as a communication medium, in Nigerian schools, it has continued till today.

In 1977, a new national policy on education was formulated. It was anchored on four philosophical value viz.

- (i) the inculcation of national consciousness and unity;
- (ii) the inculcation of the right type of attitude for the survival of the individual in society; (iii) the training of the mind in understanding of the world around, and
- (iv). the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical to equip the individual to live and contribute to the development of society.

Apart from spelling out the philosophy of education in Nigeria, the policy made provisions-for various layers and sectors of education which included pre-primary education, primary education, secondary education, teacher education, higher education, adult education, special education,, educational services, educational administration and educational financing.

Events in the education system eventually revealed the inadequacies inherent in the system. It did not make provisions for equal and adequate access to education by boys and girls. In different parts of the country and for a variety of reasons, cultural, economic, literacy, etc, specific segments of the school age population dropped out of school. Economic hardships in the wider society also revealed how inadequate the education system had become in providing employment, entrepreneurial skills and discipline for the youth in particular. Despite reviews in 1981 and 200 (change to UBE) and the interventions by international organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) etc, the Nigerian education system developed all the pathologies mentioned earlier at the beginning of this presentation. Consequently, we are here once again lamenting the crisis in our education system and calling for a repositioning of the system. It is hoped that this conference will take a very, wide and total look at the Nigerian education system, identify all the inadequacies of the system and come out with more enduring recommendations to salvage whatever can still be salvaged.

Recommendations For Repositioning The System (i)

- **De-emphasize school**

In 1971, Ivan Illich startled the world with his book: *Deschooling Society*. He insisted that schooling is not necessary the same thing as education. Schools had developed hidden curricula which had become inimical to learning, he conceived of education without schools as now exist. In his opinion,

A good educational system should have three purposes: It should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn from them; and finally, furnish all who present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Such a system would require the application of constitutional guarantees to education. Learners should not be forced to submit to an obligatory curriculum, or to discrimination based on whether they possess a certificate or a diploma.

As already noted, schools have become arenas for anti-social/immoral activities. They have largely ceased to be centres for effective learning. Whatever learning still goes on is irrelevant to dealing with existing societal problems. Time has come revisits the Ivan Illich proposal. We must de-emphasize school in our new education system.

f ii) Introduce Direct Funding of Education

Nigerian governments have hitherto demonstrated an unwillingness or incapacity to fund schools adequately. They can neither provide a teaching nor a learning environment. They indeed encourage indiscipline in the education system. The new education system must be funded directly. That is to say, an adequate percentage of the nation's GNP should be set aside by law for purposes of funding education.

(iii) Abolish all Public Examinations

Public examinations in Nigeria have become a sham and a major disincentive for hard work. New guidelines for assessment should be formulated. Such guidelines should contain measures to detect fraud and test practical knowledge.

(iv) Provide Ideological Framework

Nigerians must spell out clearly what type of society they want and design the type of education system necessary to create such a society. One would argue that under our present circumstances, nothing outside the framework of an egalitarian society should be our goal. In such a society, education is not only a birth right, it must be provided, it should be provided at site and on any field of endeavour where it can be most effectively utilized practically. Examples include the migrant fishermen's educational programme or the nomadic educational programme. Farmers can also be educated on their farms. So also will be artisans of all trades. The system will operate within the general context of human rights protection. Children should be taught their rights from home and in Churches or even playgrounds,

Education is too important to be ignored. Everything should be done to formulate a functional education system. Wherever the existing system becomes inadequate, it must be reviewed and repositioned for better efficiency and utility. The present Nigerian educational system needs such review and repositioning. The opportunity is now and should not be missed.

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