

## **Privatization and the 'international schools': the need to maintain standard**

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*Abstract:* Western education was introduced into Nigeria in 1842 through private initiative of Christian Missionaries who were fully in charge until 1882 when the first Education Ordinance was promulgated to improve the education system. The huge investment involved in the provision of education makes the government to allow continual participation of private individuals and institutions. However, there is a trend of event in the private participation that calls for urgent attention; substandard schools that are not even supposed to exist are being approved as 'International Schools' or 'Group of Schools' and this does not augur well for our system. The researcher visited some of these schools and discovered that, there is no standard put in place or enforced by the approving authorities at all. It is therefore recommended among others that government should put in place a standard as a matter of urgency to prevent further rot in the education system.

*Key Words:* Education, International School, Privatization and Standard

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## **Introduction**

Education has been adopted all over the world as 'an instrument par excellence' for effecting national development. Experts hardly disagree on the crucial role that education plays in fighting underdevelopment. Education does this through the development of appropriate manpower for services in political, social and economic sectors. It determines to a large extent the level of participation of citizens in developmental activities within their nation. ActionAid (2008, p.11) opines that "Education builds up both the individual and the society; it imbibes in a person the required skills to play an enhanced role in a modern society". This is why Ojerinde (2011, p.87), sees education as "an investment which cannot be stolen." This huge investment in various nations must be properly managed to get the commensurate outcomes.

Western education started in Nigeria as a private enterprise, the Missionary who brought Christian religion realised they could not do much unless the people could speak English, hence, the need to establish schools. The colonial government did not see the need to interfere in this missionary enterprise until it was becoming glaring that the product of these schools were not capable of filling available vacancies due to lack of relevant education. Their first intervention was in the form of grants, and later on several Education Ordinances were promulgated which established Board of Education with the aim of regularising missionary activities in the area of education. The government, according to Ojerinde (2011), seeing education as a social obligation to its people, soon joined hands with the Missionaries to boost the education industry. As the demand for education in the country increased, more private participation became inevitable. Therefore, private corporations and communities were encouraged to participate in the provision of education especially in places where the demand for schools were not met.

However, it is very sad to note that there is a trend in the private participation that needs to be curbed immediately – mushroom schools being named international schools with nothing of standard to show for the names - with a standard put in place, if at the end of the day, education acquired by children will be worthwhile.

This paper therefore, will focus its discussion on the following:

- The beginning of western education – A Private Enterprise.
- Government intervention in education – Colonial and post-independence periods.
- School take-over by government.
- Private participation in recent time and the 'international schools'.
- Prototype of a Standard School.
- The Need to maintain Standard.

### **The Beginning of Western Education: A Private Enterprise**

The private agencies' participation in education in Nigeria has a history as old as that of education itself. It was the private sector that blazed the trail in the education enterprise when in 1842, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission led by the Revd. Thomas Birch Freeman opened the first school in Nigeria at Badagry, named *Nursery of the Infant Church* (Fafunwa, 1974). The Church Missionary Society (CMS) also arrived in December 1842 and moved to Abeokuta in 1846 where they founded two schools, one for boys and the other for girls under the supervision of Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his wife. Crowther also opened the first school in Onitsha in December 1858 for girls between 6 and 10 years old. Missionary effort in Western Nigeria was soon followed by enterprises in the Niger Delta and Eastern Nigeria. In 1847, the United Free Church of Scotland started work in Calabar, in 1887 the Qua Iboe Mission in the Eket and Uyo districts, also the Primitive Methodists in Calabar and Owerri provinces in 1894 (Otoni, 1965).

According to Taiwo (1980), education between 1842 and 1882 was purely a missionary affair and curricula and other elements were largely determined by each denomination to suit its needs. The schools often the same buildings as the churches were ill-equipped. Blackboards, chalks and slates were in short supply and the primers were largely religious tracts or information unrelated to local background. The traders were critical of the narrow, shallow and extremely religious education given by the missions. The government was equally critical of small denominational schools whose

pupils were not fit to become clerks who were much needed for the growing administration and expanding commercial activities. The Africans were critical of the denationalising tendencies of mission education.

Apart from all the above observations by various stakeholders, the absence of an education policy, according to Fafunwa (1974, p. 93), resulted in lack of:

- (1) a common syllabus, standard textbooks, regular school hours, etc;
- (2) adequate supervision of schools – buildings, teachers, pupils, etc;
- (3) a central examination system;
- (4) uniformity in the condition of service of teachers; and
- (5) adequate financial support and control.

All these made the colonial government to intervene so as to improve the standard of education.

### **Government Intervention in Education: Colonial and Post Independence Periods**

The first government intervention as recorded by Osokoya (1989) was in 1872 when the colonial government made available the sum of 30 pounds to each of three missionary societies involved in educational activities in Lagos – the C.M.S, the Wesleyan Methodist and the Catholic – as grants-in-aid to support their educational activities, which was increased in 1877 to 200 pounds per year. However, a major intervention in the provision and management of primary education came through the 1882 Education Ordinance, which applied to all of British West Africa. This Ordinance provided for a General Board of Education and Local Boards of Education, classification of schools into government and assisted schools, freedom of parents to choose religious instruction for their children and wards, grants for buildings and teachers' salaries, conditions of grants-in-aid to private schools, appointment of inspectors, special grants to industrial schools, admission of indigent children into government and assisted schools, and grants to training colleges and institutions for teachers, among others. It also provided guidelines for examination of pupils and the certification of teachers. Other ordinances were also promulgated in 1887 and 1926.



Ukeje and Aisiku (1982) submitted that, in 1946, soon after end of the Second World War, Nigeria introduced a Ten-Year Development Plan. The educational aims of the plan were to provide:

- (1) a type of education more suitable for the needs of the country;
- (2) better conditions of service for teachers employed by missions and other voluntary bodies, in order to provide a better-trained and more contented staff;
- (3) more adequate financial assistance to mission and other voluntary educational bodies;
- (4) financial assistance to native administrations to maintain an efficient staff of teachers and expand education in their areas;
- (5) controlled expansion within financial limits.

The Richard Constitution of 1946, in the view of Osokoya (1987, p. 16) started to put Nigeria firmly on the path to political independence. It was this constitution that divided Nigeria into three regional administrative units, thus the regions were faced with the challenge of providing education for the majority of the people. The Western region made the first attempt in 1955 under the leadership of late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who prioritized education as the surest way for laying solid foundation for the future, by a proclamation of a free, Universal and Compulsory Primary Education (UPE) scheme for the entire region. This was made possible by the passage of the law by the regional parliament in 1952, which allowed three years for planning and preparation. The compulsory aspect of the scheme was, however, abandoned on commencement due to a number of problems ranging from funding to accommodation. As part of the implementation of the scheme, the government reduced the duration of primary education from eight to six years and introduced an education tax to be paid by all taxable adults apparently to assist in funding the scheme.

The Eastern Regional government, as expected, under the leadership of late Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe followed suit with its own UPE scheme. The regional parliament passed the UPE legislation in 1953. This was modified in 1954 and 1955 before its implementation in 1957. Nwagwu (1993) observed that the implementation of the scheme in the East was so fraught with challenges that it was modified in 1958 and was later virtually

abandoned. Problems arose mainly from inadequate planning, lack of consultation with stakeholders especially teachers and missions who owned most of the schools, and poor funding which ensured that facilities and teachers did not keep pace with enrolment.

The North only passed an education law in 1962 establishing a partnership between the government and the voluntary agencies in an attempt to develop a public system of primary education in which the government would be the leading partner with the Minister of Education having overall responsibility for the promotion of primary education.

The colonial education policy was still in use until 1977 when a Unified National Policy on Education (NPE) emerged. This was an outcome of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference and its report (*A Philosophy for Nigerian Education*) and, it was the first national effort to change the colonial orientation of the Nigerian educational system. The military takeover of voluntary agency primary schools also failed to increase and equalize educational opportunities. It was against this background that the Federal Government in 1976 singled out primary education for intervention by launching the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme. The overall purpose was to boost school enrolments throughout the country and correct educational imbalances between the different parts of the country.

According to Ukeje and Aisiku (1982), the pace of educational expansion set in motion by UPE schemes of various regions lost its momentum in the 1960s. The civil war (May 1967 to January 1970) aggravated the decline; so also was the apparent shift in emphasis from quantity to quality that led to the closure/merging of schools.

### **Schools Take Over by Government**

The dual ownership and control of schools (public/private) in Nigeria lasted till 1970 when at the end of the civil war; the East Central State government promulgated an edict and compulsorily took over all schools in the State. Some other States in southern Nigeria followed suit at various times until the Federal Military Government enacted the "Schools Take Over Validation Decree" No. 41 of 1977 which reinforced the powers of State

government to take over all schools to ensure effective implementation of the national programme on Universal Primary Education (UPE) that was launched in 1976. The decree also prohibited the courts from hearing litigations that challenged the takeover of schools by State governments. However, between the late 1970s and 1985, permission was granted to private proprietors again to establish schools alongside public schools to ease the financial burden on governments. This development has continued till now with private proprietors establishing and managing fee paying schools alongside public schools (FME, 2008).

### **Private Participation in recent time and 'International Schools'**

From the trend of events in the introduction and development of western education, some facts could be established:

- (1) right from the introduction of western education to its present level of development, education has become both public and private enterprise.
- (2) the huge investment involved in education has compelled the government to continue to allow private participation in education.

In as much as this is a welcome development, there is the need for overall quality control even, in giving names to schools. Though some owners of private schools are really trying to put a standard in place, but there are lots of 'International schools' that do not qualify as local schools. The whole scenario looks as if the proprietors are adding "international" to the name of their schools just as a kind of status symbol and not as reflection of what is going on in their various schools. This is because; taking a critical look at these 'international schools' there is nothing of international standard or quality to qualify such schools. The researcher is of the opinion that some people might have come across such schools and the question that would have probably crossed their minds is: "*what is international in this school?*" as can be seen in the various pictures presented in this article. (Fig.1, 2, 3 & 4)



Figure 1: *An International Nursery and Primary School as reflected on the sign-post.*



Figure 2: *A block of classrooms in an 'International School'*

Some proprietors would even add 'Group of schools' where they have only one or two blocks of buildings as could be seen in figure 2 below.

This will lead us to ask some questions:

- (1) Who are the owners of these schools?
- (2) Who are the approving authorities?
- (3) Was there any inspection before approval?
- (4) Are there post approval inspections to these schools?

Establishing schools now is like a brisk business for all comers, there are no specific educational qualifications, and even, those who did not read education in the tertiary institutions are establishing schools. It seems as if the basic requirement is fund and land.



*Figure 3: A 'Group of Schools'*

Unfortunately, corruption has eaten deep into every sector in this nation and the 'brown envelop syndrome' will make those who are expected to

inspect before approval approve any site as a school even, uncompleted buildings. Regular and unannounced inspections of schools are no longer fashionable in this era of corruption. Some inspectors now see the period of inspection as a period of feasting – harvesting gifts from various schools and school heads preparing foods that they themselves cannot afford to eat at home. The observations made by stakeholders about private/missionary schools unfortunately are still visible in most private schools in Nigeria today. All these call for urgent attention.

### **Prototype of a Standard School**

As noted by the Presidential Task Team on Education (2011), a school is neither just a site nor a cluster of sites, nor a mere assemblage of learners and teachers. When these remain the only features of a school, that school will not be able to educate. According to the Report, for a school to become an effective agent of education, these surface features would have to be energised by being on a solid foundation of more in-depth features. For Nigerian's schools to really educate, they would need to be infused with these solid in-depth features that can be summarised as follows.

- (1) *Physical/environmental features*
  - a. *Physical space, attractive and inviting*
  - b. *Adequate space for in-class and out-of-class learning activities*
  - c. *Classroom with adequate sitting and move around spaces*
  - d. *Adequate lighting, ventilation and security of classrooms and other teaching-learning spaces*
  - e. *Classroom furniture that does not squeeze students*
- (2) *Managerial /organizational features*
  - a. *Participatory decision making*
  - b. *Teacher professional support*
  - c. *Healthy school-community relationship*
  - d. *Free information flow*
  - e. *Team spirit prevailing*
  - f. *Encouragement of creativity in teachers*

- (3) *Teaching-learning facilities*
  - a. *quantitatively adequate*
  - b. *timely/current/up-to-date*
  - c. *closely linked to curriculum*
  - d. *instigate intellectual activity in learners and teachers*
- (4) *Learner psycho-social support*
  - a. *Gender responsive practices*
  - b. *Special need support services*
  - c. *Advisory and guidance support services*
  - d. *Special attention to student learning difficulties*
  - e. *Practice of empathy (towards learners) by all teachers*
- (5) *Pedagogical features*
  - a. *General and professional education of teachers*
  - b. *Level of experience of teachers*
  - c. *Level of teacher knowledge of curriculum*
  - d. *Efforts at continuing professional development by teachers*
  - e. *Level of creativity in teachers*
  - f. *Teacher classroom interaction practices*
  - g. *Teacher's knowledge and application of assessment.*

Looking at the above submission, one doubts if some of our 'international schools' actually qualify to be called schools and, it is a big challenge for all stakeholders in education. In this era of information technology and technological development, schools should be well equipped and made more functional with qualified personnel.

### **The Need to maintain Standard**

Leading by example is necessary by the government if there is going to be revitalisation of education through private participation. A situation where government schools are nothing to write home about does not augur well for the whole system. If government cannot maintain standard, it has no moral justification to enforce standard.



Figure 4: Pupils in a public primary school in Nigeria (*Sunday Punch* 2/12/12, p. 1).

Figure 4 presented below speak volume of what government schools are like in Nigeria compared with the picture of a public primary school in Britain (figure 5).

Figure 5 looks like an ideal classroom that will allow for proper teaching and learning situation and the researcher is of the opinion that this is also attainable in Nigeria if there is political will because, we have more than enough resources to implement this standard. Quality control of educational practices is a must for the government if educational outcomes are to be worthwhile.





*Figure 5: Pupils in a public primary school in Britain (Sunday Punch 2/12/12 p.1)*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Education no doubt is a worthwhile investment by any nation, however, because of the huge financial implication involved in its provision, private participation has to be allowed, but this must be properly monitored by the government to avoid bastardisation of the sector. The government herself must lead by example through provision of standard public schools that will serve as prototype for private schools.

It is therefore recommended that the government approving agents must do a thorough job by employing varied integrated methods in carrying out their duties. For instance having different groups to see to each section of the school before approval is given. Corruption and corrupt practices are a major problem in Nigeria now, officers responsible for granting approvals

to private individuals or groups that are willing to establish schools must therefore shun corrupt practices in the process of granting approval.

Pre and post approval inspections of schools must be resuscitated as a matter of urgency and all substandard schools must be closed down without sentiment. The government should have a policy statement specifying those who are qualified to open and run schools without exception.

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