

NIGERIAN SCHOOLS AND THE INORDINATE QUEST FOR MONEY: AN EVALUATION

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Abstract

The primary aims of schools include the education of the students, promotion of skill acquisition and development, inculcation of good moral and civic responsibilities among others. Today, some of our Nigerian schools especially the private ones no longer care for the good of the students nor the future of the society. Their quest is monetary acquisition ranging from nursery/primary to tertiary institutions. Pupils and students are required to buy textbooks, workbooks and handouts regardless of their relevance to their area of studies. Students pay through the nose without getting proper equivalent value. Many tertiary institutions 'sell' certificates and do all kinds of things in a bid to get money. Miracle centres abound not to equip students with knowledge but to enrich the owners of the centres. There are many ugly situations in this regard. The pertinent questions now are: What is the major aim for establishing an institution of learning? What is the role of Educational Authorities in forestalling the incessant pursuit of wealth and profit over quality, standard and best practices? Therefore, employing the philosophical method of phenomenology, this study observes that there is a misplacement of priority in the way and manner most Nigerian schools pursue the accumulation of money. The study recommends, among other things, that education should be seen as a human institution meant for the development of the human person and not primarily as a profitmaking venture. It further calls on all concerned government agencies to intensify efforts towards regulating the incessant quest for money by the school administrators and proprietors. The paper therefore concludes that education should be seen as a priceless value that MUST not be sacrificed at the altar of profit.

Keywords: Education, Nigerian Schools, Money, Private Institutions

Introduction

In the ancient history of Greek philosophy, there existed some philosophers known as the Sophists. These philosophers were a group of itinerant teachers that moved from place to place teaching the youth about the value of knowledge. It was on record that they taught not only philosophy but also grammar and rhetoric (Omoregbe, 2002, p. 25). One peculiar thing that distinguished the sophists from other philosophers of the ancient period was that while other philosophers did not demand for money for imparting knowledge to the youth, the sophists made the collection of money a *conditio sine qua non* for their teaching encounter with the youth. Stumpf and Fieser (2003) observed that this attitude of “charging fees for their teaching prompted Plato to disparage them [the sophists] as ‘shopkeepers with spiritual wares’” (p. 32). This was the case in the early history of Greek philosophy. However, the attitudes of many school administrators, managers and proprietors in Nigeria today can easily prompt one to describe them as ‘shopkeepers with spiritual wares’. The sophists actually imparted knowledge to their disciples/students though they demanded for money for their services. But it has been observed recently that many Nigerian schools extort money from students for services they did not render or services they rendered meagerly.

Today, there is a serious shift from the quest to impart knowledge to the quest to amass wealth through establishment of schools. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the ways and manners schools in Nigeria demand for money or its equivalent from pupils and students. The paper begins with a brief understanding of the general notion of education. It also takes a look at some of the manifestations of a good educational system and thereafter focuses on the incessant quest for money in Nigerian schools today. Finally, it ends with some recommendations and conclusion.

What Is Education?

Education is the process of learning from cradle to the grave. This implies that education is an on-going process. Etymologically, the

concept education can be said to be derived from two different Latin words: *educere* and *educare*. *Educere* means to lead out. This means that education serves as a means to bring into actuality that which is in potency. Put differently, education is a catalyst that brings out the naturally endowed knowledge in a person. This understanding entails that “the learner has innate ideas which only need to be squeezed out or pulled out and expanded” (Nwabuisi, 1992, p. 4). In this regard, the role of the educationist is simply to midwife knowledge as Socrates would put it. Looking at the understanding of education from *educare* perspective, it means ‘to train’. This understanding presupposes that the learner has nothing in his mind, and as such, he needs to be properly trained or formed. Various educationists and philosophers of education have defined education in varied ways. Okafor (1988) as cited in Iorva and Adejoh (2002) sees education in the broad sense as “all those experiences of the individual through which knowledge is acquired, the intellect enlightened or the will strengthened” (p. 13). In the words of Cremin (1977), education is “a deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and sensibilities” (p. viii).

Education can be seen as any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels or acts. It can take place in formal or informal settings. The informal education has to do with the unstructured ways and means of knowledge acquisition. This is not the main concern of this paper. The concern of this paper is on formal education which has to do with well-structured ways of imparting knowledge to the inexperienced – pupils and students. In this regard, education is divided into such stages as preschool or kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and then college, university, or apprenticeship. Education is one of the fundamental rights of the human person. In some regions of the world, education is compulsory and free up to a certain age. This is premised on the fact that the educational system of a state goes a long way to determine the level of growth and development in that state. So, having taken a brief look at the general notion of

education, the next subtopic that follows shall focus on the appraisal of a good educational system.

What Makes A Good Educational System?

Although diverse school models exist, a fundamental question remains: How are we to know whether or not a school model is effective, and how can effectiveness be judged? A number of research studies focus on characteristics of effective schools. However, there is an ongoing debate over which attributes should be considered when describing successful schools. According to some researchers, students' performance should be the primary indicator of a successful school. This makes sense since the sole purpose of schools is to educate their students. Other researchers propose that students' social characteristics, such as personal growth should be included when determining effective schools. Another issue with school effectiveness research is that findings are predominantly based on research conducted in elementary schools or unique school settings in the inner city. Consequently, it is suggested that these findings cannot be generalized to all schools (Lynch, 2015, para.1).

A study describes five common characteristics that make up an effective school; these characteristics, and the theory behind them have also been described as the five-factor theory. The first factor is quality leadership. In other words, students perform better where the administrators provide strong leadership. Effective leaders are visible, able to successfully convey the school's goals and visions, collaborate with teachers to enhance their skills, and are involved in the discovery of and solutions to problems. The second factor is having high expectations of students, as well as teachers. High expectations of students have repeatedly been shown to have a positive impact on students' performance. More attention should be paid to high expectations of teachers. In other words, teachers who are expected to teach at high levels of effectiveness are able to reach the level of expectations, particularly when teacher evaluations and teacher professional development are geared towards improving instructional

quality. The third characteristic of a successful school is the ongoing screening of student performance and development. Schools should use assessment data to compare their students with others from across the country. Effective use of assessment data allows schools to identify problematic areas of learning at the classroom and school levels, so that solutions can be generated as to how to best address the problems.

The fourth characteristic of a successful school is the existence of goals and direction. Administrators should actively construct goals and then effectively communicate them to appropriate individuals (i.e., students, teachers, community-at-large). School principals must also be open and willing to incorporate innovations into goals for school processes and practices. It is important to invite input from all stakeholders in the process of developing school goals. Student's performance has been shown to improve in schools where everybody in the school community works towards the goals that are communicated and shared among all in the learning environment. The fifth and final factor of a successful school is the extent to which the school is secured and organized. For maximum learning to occur, students need to feel secured. Respect is a quality that is promoted and is a fundamental aspect of a safe school (Lynch 2015, paras.2-5). The above discussion shows that a good school is not known by the huge amount students pay as tuition fees or the generation of income into school coffers. A good school is characterized by the nature of knowledge imparted to the students which are manifested in their behaviour and contributions to the society. It is quite unfortunate that most schools in Nigeria today fall short of these five common features of a successful school.

Nigerian Schools and The Incessant Quest For Money

Schools in Nigeria are superintended by the government agency known as Ministry of Education. Local authorities take responsibility for implementing state-controlled policy regarding public education and state schools. Nigeria's central government has been dominated by instability since independence and as a result, a unified set of education policies have not yet been successfully implemented. Regional

differences in quality, curriculum, and funding characterize the education system in Nigeria. Currently, Nigeria possesses the largest population of out-of-school youth in the world (Aminu, 1990; Abdullahi and Abdullah, 2014).

Sadly, the level, quality and standard of education in Nigeria has witnessed a geometric drop in the past two decades and this unfortunate trend has made Nigeria the leading country of origin of students from Africa migrating to other parts of the world in search of quality education. This fall in standard has been attributed to a number of factors that are not unconnected to lack of core educational values and the incessant quest for money by school proprietors and administrators. Below are some of the highlights in this regard:

1. Poor Funding

School system in Nigeria has always suffered inappropriate funding which has led to poor infrastructure, absence of good teaching aids, and nonpayment of teachers' allowances as observed in most public schools. The worst experience is in the private schools. School owners do not have interest in providing infrastructures that will aid learning process. Most times they will extort money from students but will not use it to fund knowledge acquisition in the school. This is a clear sign of inordinate quest for money.

2. Unavailability of Qualified Teachers

In Nigeria, the poor working condition, poor remuneration and allowances teachers are subjected to have discouraged capable and qualified teachers from taking up teaching jobs. Some qualified teachers would rather choose to apply for other better paying jobs than teaching, while the few teachers who have taken up the teaching profession did so due to lack of better jobs, hence, their low level of dedication as they are always on the lookout for greener pastures. This directly affects output as the quality of education is drastically reduced by this menace. Most private schools in Nigeria lack qualified teachers. There are

instances where students pay huge amount as tuition fee but still the school management will not employ capable hands as teachers. They would always look for the less-qualified teachers whom they will pay peanuts. This is a clear manifestation that their interest is not in the impartation of knowledge to the students but in profitmaking.

3. Academic Fraud

There are numerous reports of corruption and indiscipline in Nigeria's educational system, most especially in the secondary and tertiary institutions where cases of cultism in schools have been on the rise as well as bribery to pass exams. Academic fraud is endemic at all levels of education. This gross misconduct has plagued the Nigerian educational system. This has to do with examinations malpractice, falsifying academic records, paying for grades or certificates with gifts, money or sexual favours. The most disturbing issue is that school management, in a bid to enrich themselves, engage in this academic fraud. The worst is the issue of 'Miracle Centres'. The mentality of our people on miracle centres speak volumes. Some private and public schools are known today as miracle centres especially for SSCE and other related examinations. Miracle centres are places where students and candidates pay huge sum of money to pass examination and also obtain unmerited certificates. The concern of such proprietors is simply to enrich their pockets. They do not care about the impartation of knowledge to the concerned candidates.

4. Sale of Textbooks and School materials

Money is at the base when we look at the sale of books and other school materials in Nigerian schools. Almost every school nowadays customize exercise books and as such, sell them to pupils and students with a high cost. More so, students are not allowed to buy the cheaper and durable materials from the open market. This is simply because the school wants to make money from the students. In the past, a younger person can use the textbooks his/her elder sister/brother used. But today

the incessant quest for money has thrown that to the wind. A family with five children in the same school MUST buy the same textbooks five times. No one is allowed to use that of his brother – incessant quest for profit. Nowadays, everything is customized in our nursery/primary and secondary schools: school uniform, sandals, lunchbox, etc. Our schools have turned to be a marketplace. The issue of selling of textbooks, handouts and other irrelevant materials to our students in tertiary institutions leaves much to be desired. The main argument here is that most proprietors and school administrators have sacrificed quality education at the altar of money. There are many examples to continue to buttress our claim in this regard but the above shall suffice for now.

Recommendations

Following from the observations made above, this study recommends:

1. That school proprietors and managers should see Education as a human institution meant for the development of the human person and not as a profitmaking venture.
2. That government, at all levels, should properly regulate Educational activities in Nigeria via strong policies aimed at strengthening the system.
3. That high tuition fees and charges should be reduced. This can be done through government legislations and policies.
4. That private Institutions of learning particularly the tertiary institutions that have been licensed to operate and have operated successfully (meeting the minimum requirements of their regulatory bodies) for up to ten (10) years should be made to draw funds from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) to boost funding of research and learning..
5. That all illegal Educational institutions operating in Nigeria are to be blacklisted, proscribed and their proprietors prosecuted by the bodies that regulate them. In addition, frequent jingles on the media particularly in the states where such proscribed institutions are should be carried out

so that the masses in such states may have sufficient information about the illegality of their operations and the consequences of patronizing them.

6. That licensed private schools that are already in operation whose administrators aid and abet examination malpractice should be made to face the wrath of the law by the supervisory states or federal ministries or agencies. Such schools are to be blacklisted and their students reabsorbed in other schools of their choice.

Conclusion

The primary reason for establishing schools should be to develop the society via those who pass through the educational system. In America, for instance, there are schools that carry the inscription: "America's future walks through this door every day." This is apparently referring to the school doors, where students pass into the classrooms to learn.

What that shows is that America as a society attaches values to Education and believes in standard process and best practices. This is unlike Nigeria where people first see Education as a business than as a human institution meant for the development of the human person. This is because of the simple fact that school administrators and proprietors see schools as business centres. When they establish schools, they do so to simply amass profits, to get rich quick overnight; they use unqualified staff and under-pay them too. Students pay a huge amount of money as fees, without corresponding dividends nor proper utilization on the part of the Management. Little wonder, none of Nigeria's Universities, for instance, could comfortably rank among the elite Universities in the World. The proliferation of private Universities in Nigeria, only show that the coded aim could be to make billions of Naira out of the enterprise of Education while pretending to be puritan and value-based. What an inordinate quest for money in the name of education!

However, it is pertinent to note that the advent of private practitioners in education in Nigeria, no doubt, can be said to be a good one. They rejuvenated confidence of Nigerians about the decadence that is

prevalent with the public institutions, particularly the public educational sector that had suffered protracted industrial actions and dearth of infrastructures. The private owners of schools have helped tremendously by running stable academic calendars, monitor and supervise academic proceedings for quality delivery and to some extent have reduced yearly admission problems. But as commendable as are the roles that private educational institutions play in Nigeria, they are surrounded with some unhealthy practices such as charging of fees exorbitantly, widening of gaps between the rich and the poor, proliferations of illegal and substandard schools and employment of unqualified and inadequate personnel among others. These unhealthy practices need to be addressed to enhance the performance of private educational institutions that are undoubtedly beneficial to Nigeria and Nigerians.

In conclusion, education should be seen as a priceless value that should not be sacrificed at the altar of profit. Nigeria can be better if both the government and the private sectors genuinely invest in educational sector. There is no better way to develop Nigeria than through proper education.

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