

The Nigerian Learner: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract Education has been variously defined as the process of acquiring knowledge and skill. Basically teaching and learning constitute education which has existed in one form or another since man existed. For learning to be successful, the learner should be interested and committed to the subject matter, and the teacher experienced and effective, and learning environment appropriate. Our British colonial masters alongside the early Christian Missionaries bequeathed Nigeria with a formal education system in mid 19th century that was so rich and solid as opposed to the present day mockery. Gratefully the colonial legacy of formal education came along with strict enforcement of moral discipline that ushered in a new dawn of self-consciousness and good conduct. Those learners were solidly baked in good character and in learning. But with the departure of the British in 1960 making way for Nigerian independence, education plummeted from that peak to this awful depth owing to several sinister factors ranging from endemic corruption, greed, hypocrisy and nonchalance, etc. Today's reluctant learners, parents, education managers and relevant government agencies are equally guilty of crippling education. The paper therefore sets out to do a comparative review of the past and present educational achievements and prospects for future revival.

Introduction

Education may be defined as a sustained process of developing the human mind, potentials and behaviour through continuous teaching and learning processes presumably in appropriate environments. Likewise Fafunwa (1970) believes that education holds the key to human development. While learning is the process of acquiring education or skill, it is the teacher that makes both available to the willing and dedicated learner. According to Adeniran (1991) the teacher's professional ability is crucial in the educational development of the student.

The Past

There is no solid evidence or authentic records yet to confirm the existence of any formal education system in what was pre-colonial Nigeria i.e. before the advent of early Europeans. But it is a living truth that our British colonial masters introduced their former colonies including Nigeria to formal education that was so sound, rich in content and ever dynamic, embracing every aspect of human life. Western education as it is called in time-tested for high quality with recorded breath-taking achievements in the fields of science and technology, etc. as proofs of this fact. With the establishment of colonial government in Nigeria in late 19th century came in its trail the introduction of Western Education pioneered by the missionaries who built mission schools and colleges alongside their churches. These white missionaries that ran these pioneer schools were so dedicated, disciplined and committed to their duty, with little or no pay, but yet handed down to their Nigerian learners such incredibly high standard education and moral discipline. The products of those schools and colleges were truly solid in learning in every aspect, and in character. They became the society's role models, and expectedly the nucleus of Nigerian pre-and post-independent administrations. These colonial educators with indigenous support team inculcated in their students and staff so much discipline, good behaviour and deep sense of commitment to which in turn impacted high moral values on the Nigerian society of those good old days when crime was an abomination, and crookedness a taboo. The colonial era was surely the golden age of education in Nigeria; the beneficiaries of that incredibly high quality education will continue to hold their heads high forever. The colonial educators instilled in their learners the spirit of competitive learning and dogged reading habit and the mandatory discipline that actually activated the latent potentials in their

scholars. The colonial standard six school learning certificate for instance can compare favourably with present-day Bachelors Degree, while the revered Senior Cambridge University School Certificate has no parity with today's levels. Learners then were forced to study and absorb, digest and assimilate their lessons.

Fortunately parents in colonial times played a booster role in the huge success of education in Nigeria as they, though generally illiterate, encouraged the teachers by approving those strict and punitive measures applied on the learners as part of the learning process. Surprisingly too the illiterate parents and guardians appreciated the illuminating role education play in the development of their children/wards and society backed up by strict parental discipline imposed on their children. Onyejiaka (1992) stressed the role of the family as being primary both in shaping the child's personality and conduct, providing his basic socialization traits, skills and ideas.

The Present

No sooner the British authorities handed over the reins of power to Nigerians in 1960 than education started fading away like the rainbow into oblivion. Oluyede and Daramola (1993) observed that the fears of not gaining employment or admission into the University immediately after the Nigerian civil war in 1970 engendered large scale indiscipline in schools. Infact the real plunge of education actually commenced in 1970 as the Nigerian civil war ended, resulting from a catalogue of failures on the part of Nigerian political leadership and society at large as listed below:

(1) Greed and selfishness distracted the focus and set goals of the corrupt Nigerian pioneer political leaders. As a result these leader resorted to falsehood and deceit while sector budgets could hardly be implemented.

(2) The obnoxious wind of corruption being a legacy of Nigerian pioneer leaders that rapidly swept across the land, soaking up all and sundry also dealt a devastating blow to education among other sectors of the economy. Ayi (2011) maintained that corruption is inimical to any development, and that it has become pandemic in Nigeria. Learning environment are not yet made conducive for both the teacher and the learner as funds allocated to educational institutions for infrastructural development, etc are regularly misappropriated, and related records falsified. Most heads of tertiary institutions rather resort to providing sub-standard infrastructure that cannot meet the growing need of improving educational facilities. The deadly fume of corruption is also seriously choking the Nigerian learner with a variety of extortions within the campuses, including primary and secondary schools. Cumbersome financial demands including frequent increases in all manner of fees and unapproved arbitrary levies have increasingly frustrated the learner and dampened his spirit. It has become customary to pay thousands of naira worth of bribe to gain admission into elementary and secondary schools, and universities as well.

(3) The latent tribal and ethnic fervour that is so genetic in Nigerians is also taking its disgusting toll on the willing learner through ill-motivated admission hurdles and constraints designed to accord undue preferences and favour to fellow kinsmen to the detriment of the more credible candidates. Today's learners are so scared of learning, believing only in pleasure hoping that manner must come from hook or crook, and not from committed studies. Manical (1984) pointed that student's interest is an important factor that makes the student perform well since interest is a stimulant.

(4) Moral decadence as the collapse of discipline steadily engulfed this nation as soon as the colonial masters left the shores of Nigeria as confirmed by Ayi (2001). The strict traditional discipline that was in vogue in pre-colonial era rapidly waned to today's abysmal level. This ill wind seriously impacted negatively on the teacher, but much more on the learner. Our young learners are totally devoid of that competitive and enquiring spirit of learning, repulsive to good advice, impervious to discipline, and scornful of hard work. This present generation of Nigerian learners are indolent and loathful of reading as they strongly believe in achieving some result through various available methods of examination malpractices as was also observed by Oluyede and Daramola (1993). Inorder to enforce this hideous alternative to hard work of reading, this

indolent learners get involved in cultism and other violent practices to have their way. Odunze (1986) rightly pointed out that our education is steadily decaying because our young people prefer getting their certificates and degrees through clandestine means.

(5) Societal worship of materialism in Nigeria is chiefly responsible for the total erosion of discipline, moral and educational standards, collapse of social justice, prevalence of corruption and a catalogue of other social vices as confirmed by Ayi (2011), all of which contributed to the demise of education.

(6) Parents are also culpable in more ways than one in the demolition of education as stressed by Onyejiaka (1992):

(i) Affluent parents being usually arrogant and ostentatious over-pamper their kids thus compromising home discipline.

(ii) They bully on the kids' teachers thus demoralizing committed teachers as they feel the loss of respect from the kids of the little lords.

(iii) With their unlimited wealth they finance all manner of exam malpractices for their children thus, encouraging and introducing their young ones to the tradition of corrupt practices from the cradle. It is only the private elementary and secondary schools that hold out hope for the revival of education in Nigeria as several of them strive to achieve commendable standard which has made them so attractive to middle and high class parents who could afford their astronomically high fees. Public schools are now shadows of their former selves.

The Future

There will be light at the end of the dark tunnel of Nigeria education if only certain imperatives for the resurrection of education are conscientiously applied. These include parental obligation to enforce strict home discipline in their children/wards as of old, and seriously discourage every act of crookedness.

Education administrators will have to endeavour to expose the realities of this phenomenon rather than paying lip service to such dysfunction for obvious interests. The federal and state governments will be compelled by the deteriorating state of education to take a critical and frank review of the entire education system maybe along the lines of the Japanese, South Korean, etc whose socio-economic advancement is powered by high quality education. Unless education is restored to the colonial standard, education will continue to diminish to the ridiculous point where Nigerians would not want to be identified with "empty" certificates. The propensity to proliferate Universities in Nigeria is not the solution to the present education paralysis, but will further aggregate its dilution. If this piteous trend is not reversed public school system will crash while private schools will explode in number and patronage to the detriment of majority low class parents/family. This has the tendency of polarizing the present and future generations of learners.

Conclusion

Putting the crisis in the education sector in perspective, it is only honest effort and dedication on the part of Nigerian governments, education managers and administrators, politicians and parents alike that can restore the quality and dignity of education. Nigerians must not ignore the solid fact that present day degrees and certificates do not necessarily reflect expertise, experience or knowledge hence the need for emphasis on experience and expertise in the placement of teachers. Now is the time to reset the desired education standard, and the learner be compelled to meet it.

Recommendation

In the light of the perceived demise of education in Nigeria orchestrated by the various factors already highlighted, the following recommendations are proposed as panacea for its resurrection:

- (i) Parental home discipline of children must be re-emphasized, and parents should not meddle in the school disciplinary procedure/measures, or intimidate teachers, but rather co-operate.
- (ii) School authorities must live up to the occasion and exterminate ethnic and nepotic influences in the appointment and promotion of teachers, and should be able to rout the indiscipline, indolence, inefficiency and corrupt practices associated with most teachers. Teachers must be proved to be professional in their respective reflect subject areas.
- (iii) Educational establishments are long overdue for thorough sanitization by governments to rid these institutions of the despicable practices that have crippled education in Nigeria, and made nonsense of the credible government investments in education in recent years.
- (iv) Given the malaise of endemic corruption governments may have to employ credible private sector agency to monitor and audit the activities of educational establishments in order to enforce operational ethics, financial propriety and strict staff discipline.
- (v) New and realistic standard has to be set for the learner now, and he/she will be forced to embrace it as soon as compromise for failure becomes non-existent just as it was in colonial times.
- (vi) Government must also bring private schools of all levels under close scrutiny to ensure high standard, modifying their exorbitant charges, and deregister the sub-standard ones.

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