

Harnessing the Gains of Public and Private Cooperation in Education Delivery in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT There is no gainsaying the fact that private and public sectors cooperation in education delivery in any nation is not only necessary, but also, equally desirable because education is a social service that a nation ought to render its citizen. When both sectors harmonize their contributions to the education of the learners, the results are enormous. This paper therefore sought ways of harnessing such gains. It also affirmed the fact that both sectors have been cooperating in education sub sector in Nigeria. When this cooperation was disrupted, a number of challenges set into the education industry. The paper further provided means for the consolidation of the gains of the renewed education cooperation in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Virtually in every nation of the world, education is considered a social service. In other words, it is one of the services that a government of a state ought to provide for its citizens in order to equip them with the necessary skills that will enable them to function properly as good and responsible citizens in future. Through education, a nation expects that her manpower needs will be produced so that square pegs will be fitted into square holes and round pegs will be shaped into round holes. Through education, future leaders of a nation will be well prepared for leadership roles, and future followers will equally be taught the art of followership. Ultimately, therefore, through education, good governance will be guaranteed and sustained from one generation to another. Hence, how successful a particular nation achieves these lofty educational outcomes depend solely on its educational delivery system. This is why, each nation from time to time reviews her educational system in order to consolidate her gains and improve on areas she had experienced failure. This notwithstanding, there are times when the type and kind of education a nation makes available for its citizens is depended on the needs of that nation and /or just mere assumptions. When that happens, the consequence especially in the developing nations had always been instability in the educational system.

Nigeria for instance, has experienced changes

in her system of education. At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited the 8-5-2-3 education system, which makes the school child to spend eight years in the primary school, five years in the secondary school, two years in the higher school and three years in the university. In an attempt to ensure that the Nigerian child benefits fully from her country's educational system, the Nigerian government reviewed her system of education, which was primarily aimed at shaking off the influence of colonialism. Thus, the 6-5-2-3 system of education was adopted. With the adoption of the 6-5-2-3 system of education, the Nigerian child then underwent six years of primary school, five years of secondary school, two years of higher school and three years of university education. With the adoption of the 6-5-2-3-system, the number of years it takes for the Nigerian school child to become a university graduate was reduced from eighteen to sixteen years.

The attempt to make the Nigerian education system a truly vocational-oriented one, made the educational planners and curriculum developers to reshuffle the sixteen years of schooling into 6-3-3-4 system of education. The current 6-3-3-4 system of education implies six years of primary school, three years each of junior and senior secondary school and four years of university education. Recently, it done on the same planners that the number of years students spend in either a college of education or the polytechnic are not included in this 6-3-3-4 educational system. This is why, Nigeria education planners are thinking

of 6-3-3-3-3 system of education for the nation (Abdullahi and Osanyintolu, 2002).

Apart from the aforementioned changes in our school system, the school year has changed repeatedly over the last few years (Abdullahi and Osanyintolu, 2002). At first, we had a school academic year, which begins in January and ends in December the same year. In 1973, that school calendar changed to the current one, which runs from September of a given year till June the following year. As at today, there is no guarantee that this academic calendar year would not be reverted to the previous one or changed into a different one entirely. Thus, frequent changes of these nature in our educational system are capable of disrupting the academic planning of youths, their vocational needs and plans, since these changes in our school system are often mingled with human factors of indiscipline and incessant strikes in our institutions of learning (Abdullahi and Osanyintolu, 2002).

A third major area where changes had occurred in our school system is that of school ownership. Like in the case of changes in schools' academic calendar, ownership of school has also changed over time. Even though this paper deals with how to enhance the gains of public and private cooperation in educational delivery in Nigeria, it is also appropriate to give an overview of both private and public participation in education in Nigeria.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COOPERATION IN NIGERIA

Education as a means of social, moral, and intellectual development of the individual and the entire community has existed right from the organization of the various communities in Nigeria. That was centuries before the arrival of foreign missions in the country that established their forms of education along side their religion. This earliest form of education known as traditional system of education was a cooperative type of education. In fact, every member of "the various communities saw it as a collective responsibility to train the younger ones the way they should be trained" (Omozeghian, 2002:207). Since the traditional system of education vested the responsibilities of imparting knowledge on everyone who was old enough to train the younger members of their communities the way they should go, there were no designated places

like schools for rendering such a free service. Hence, the system of education was not compartmentalized, but the various curricula of the individual communities were broad enough to include all spheres of life - acrobatic dances, moral education, acquisition of skills, cultivation, running errands and many other human activities necessary for the youngster to be well adjusted in life (Omozeghian, 2002).

The various Nigerian communities were contented with this form of education because it was a means through which the people's cultural heritage were preserved, transmitted and even standardized as the communities became enlarged. It was a very unique system of education, which was no fee paying; yet everyone who passed through it was adequately tutored and gainfully employed at graduation. As Aluede (1992: 88) notes, "it never left any body in the labour market in the various communities".

At that early time of the history of various communities in Nigeria, the survival of such ethnic grouping was paramount in the minds of the educators. And traditional form of education was an instrument par excellence for achieving that purpose. But as the various communities became enlarged and influenced by other more developed and powerful cultures, the traditional system of education in Nigeria became relegated to the background and even almost abandoned in many communities.

IMPACT OF RELIGION ON EDUCATION DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

The trans-Sahara traders through whom the Islamic religion came to Nigeria via the Sudan didn't necessarily come to Nigeria to educate the people. They were essentially businessmen who came mainly to transact business. But, since the Islamic religion was part and parcel of their lives, they came along with it. And since the Islamic religion was revealed in Arabic language and the Muslims believed that it is a sacred language, they also felt that the worship of the Supreme Being, 'Allah' must be conducted in that language. In other words, true worshippers of 'Allah' must do so in Arabic language. This meant that new converts must be taught the prayers and some selected verses in the Holy Qur'an in Arabic. This is how the Islamic religion and Arabic language came to be associated together.

The spread of Islamic religion through the 1804 Jihad led by Usman Dan Fodio according to Aluede (1992), equally marked the beginning of the establishment of Arabic schools in places they conquered. With the establishment of such schools known, as 'morkarata', children of the converts were automatic pupils. The Islamic teacher or Imam normally holds classes either inside or outside the mosque or even in his residence at an agreed time. During the lesson, the pupils sit on mats, in a semi-cycle around him. As he recites the Arabic alphabets and verses in the Holy Qur'an, the children repeat after him. Each pupil graduates at its own time depending on how proficient he is on what he had been taught (Aluede, 1992).

As the Islamic religion and Arabic system of education were booming mainly in the northern part of Nigeria, Christian missionaries and western system of education were gaining grounds in the coastal area of the southern part of Nigeria. The situation was such that the Christian missionaries established their type of school in order to train personnel who could serve as catechists, interpreters and /or preachers of the Gospel. There is no gainsaying the fact that converts to the Christian faith and their children/wards were the immediate beneficiaries of these mission schools education. What this meant was that for the Christian missionaries, education was a means of evangelization, which they used efficiently and effectively. Since a good number of the coastal regions of the country were very receptive to the Christian faith, they benefited immensely from the Christian education made available by the missionaries.

However, while the Muslim missionaries were evangelizing the northern part of the country and educating the people in the Arabic way, the inhabitants of the coastal region were being exposed to both Christian religion and education. However, the interior was without any influence at all (either of the Muslims or the Christians). This development prompted the colonial masters to establish schools in the interior that were with neither Christian nor Muslim system of education, so that the children of non-converts could be educated. A second reason was that the colonial masters needed clerks, messengers and sales personnel whom they could use to achieve some level of governance. And unless these natives were educated it could be difficult to interact with them. The establishment of such schools along

side the Muslim and Christian schools marked the beginning of organized school system with a central body supervising the entire education industry (Aluede, 1992). The aim was to ensure that standards were maintained even though there were then three types of school— unassisted mission schools, government schools and private schools aided by the government. On attainment of independence in 1960, the new administration in the country inherited these three types of school and administered them until 1973 when both mission and private schools were taken over by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. The thinking then was that education more than anything else, shapes people's lives and consequently trains the leaders of each society. Since mission schools were dominating the Nigerian educational sub sector at that time, the fear that missionaries would in the near future, not only produce her future leaders but also determine the country's policies led the Federal Military Government of Nigeria to decree the takeover of all educational institutions in Nigeria without taking into consideration the implications of the takeover on the proprietors of such schools, the learners and the country at large. The immediate consequence of that takeover of schools was that the standard of education nosedived to the lowest level within a few years.

Deceived by the oil boom of the 1970s, the leadership of the nation thought it could adequately finance education, believing that once education is properly financed, the system would be improved upon. But as the years rolled by, the expected impact of the financial cost of educating Nigerians by the Federal Government of Nigeria was not felt anywhere. Policies change became the rule instead of the exception. This was why it was necessary to revisit the issue of private participation in the education industry, since the provision of education to the growing population of Nigerians had become a burden too heavy for the Government alone to bear.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA SCHOOLS

Both the individual learners and the nation have encountered a number of challenges in the educational sub sector. Such challenges range from instability in the academic calendar to indiscipline on the part of the learners and education providers and managers. It is embarrassing

to note, that in spite of the fact that the three tiers of Government in Nigeria spend more on education than the private proprietors and cooperate bodies put together; yet public schools do not only lack basic amenities, but also, the performance of their students/pupils in external examinations when compared with those in private schools is most appalling and does not justify government huge investment in education. While private schools are self-sustaining, no government school is self-sustaining. While private proprietors and managers of schools are able to manage their human and material resources for optimum yield, public school administrators are in no way close to successful handling of their resources. To many assessors, therefore, the challenges of public schools' administrators are enormous and can be traced to indiscipline and instability in our school system.

The causes of indiscipline that often lead to unstable school system in Nigeria according to Omengala (2002) could be summarized as follows:-

- (1) The required teaching aids are almost absent in public schools. And in school where such teaching materials are available, they are often badly handled. In addition, when poor teaching method on the part of the teachers is added to this, the result is catastrophic i.e. as the learners might be bored and in no time redirect their energy and attention to non-academic activities.
- (2) Irrelevant and undetailed course content, and one-sided workload on the part of the learner are also implicated as causes of indiscipline in our public schools, especially as learners' interests are never sustained for too long.
- (3) In an attempt to implement educational policies put in place by those who may not have been involved in school administration, some public school managers adopt the autocratic type of leadership. The impact of this type of leadership on the learners is better imagined than experienced.
- (4) Once autocratic type of administration is put in place, rules and regulation are enacted with impunity. The result is that those who are subjected to such rules on regular basis tend to develop instincts for rebellion. So, wherever they allow their instincts to determine their actions and/or reaction, the end results are break down of law and order.
- (5) Conflict of interests among school personnel is never ruled out in most public schools. Such conflict of interests normally lead to in-house fighting and unhealthy competition amongst staff who ought to work in harmony to achieve a common goal – that of educating the learners who study under them.
- (6) At various times, the government had announced free education for the Nigerian learners. But often times, such a declaration is in principle than in actual practice. Under the pretence that funds meant for the running of the school are not forth coming, public school heads have conspired among themselves to introduce levies in their schools. A situation which if not properly handled often encourages rebellion by the students.
- (7) Public school proprietors and managers are aware that the total education of the learners begins from the classroom, but it does not end in the classroom. The learners ought to also be engaged in some cultural, social and sporting activities in order to enhance his overall educational development. But the required equipment for such activities are hardly available in the schools. This lack of equipment creates yearning lacuna in the educational development of the individual learners.
- (8) Employees of any organization normally use strike or work – to – rule as a means of drawing the attention of their employers to meet their demands. Whenever members of staff of an organization embark on strike or work-to – rule, the organizational climate is often disrupted. Due to the insensitivity to the plight of the employees by some employers of labour in Nigeria, such disruption of work climate may last for months leading to loss of several working hours. On the realization of the negative cost of strikes to the nation, the Nigerian government has introduced the principle of “no work no pay”. Needless to say that the principle has never worked; since the employees also believe in the affirmation that ‘no pays no work’.
- (9) An important factor of indiscipline and instability in our schools is parental child rearing practices. Children whose parents

reared with the laissez-faire method hardly imbibe the virtue of obedience and respect for constituted authority. When such children combine their home background experiences with negative peer influence at school, they create their own special society, which is governed by their own laws.

- (10) The creation of special societies whether hypothetically or real, is normally the beginning of membership of occultism in institution of learning in Nigeria. At a point in time, membership of occult was without exception, seen as the rule in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. The negative activities of secret society members are embarrassing to universities management and the Nigerian government, just as the drug menace is to the international communities. When therefore the Federal Government of Nigeria gave universities management three months to sanitize their campuses, the government wanted occultism to be wiped out of our tertiary institutions. Unknown to the government, members had already taken their recruitment drive to secondary schools with a long time plan to move to primary schools.

DIVIDENDS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COOPERATION IN EDUCATION DELIVERY

Education is a major responsibility of government. Thus, no nation can advance technologically if her citizens are illiterates. The education of every citizen is a task that every nation is expected to see as a task that must be done. However, should a nation become a loner in education delivery, this task translates into a mission impossible. This was the situation in Nigeria during the period when government it took over the running of schools from individuals and religious bodies in 1973.

Before the Federal Military Government take-over of schools in 1973, we had three types of schools, namely Government schools, Mission schools and Private schools at the primary and secondary levels. Although each of these schools had its own defined aims and objectives their proprietors had a common focus, namely the education of the Nigerian child, who would be properly trained so that he can be useful to himself, his parents, immediate community and

the country at large. Based on this common interest, there was a healthy competition among these schools in order to attract patronage from parents. Parents on their part could decide on the type of school they send their children to. Whenever they feel unsatisfied with the services provided by any of these schools they could withdraw their children from such schools.

Service providers within the educational sub sector would like to attract parents to their schools by putting personal touch to the service they render. In doing so, they would like to recruit good and dedicated teachers. Motivate them so that such staff put in their best. The teaching and learning conditions of such schools are made not only attractive, but also, conducive for serious academic enterprise. What this means is that school size, class size, instructional materials, physical facilities and student/teacher ratio are pre-determined.

With everyone trying to follow the rules of the game, high standards and discipline are maintained in each school. Once standards are regularly maintained, high level of scholastic achievement is guaranteed. Jeffery and Lackney, 1999 (as cited in Salisu, 2004), say such optimal level of student performance can easily be achieved in small sized school when compared to large sized schools. Other advantages according to Salisu (2004) include: lower incident crime, less serious student misconducts, higher discipline in school, higher level of student responsiveness, higher level of student satisfaction and students having more positive self-image

CONSOLIDATING THE GAINS OF EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

There is no nation that can develop beyond the quality of education of her citizens. For this reason, many nations strive to provide quality education to her learners. The Nigerian government recognizes the fact that education is an expressive social service, which it must render to her citizens. After the government had acknowledged the various contributions made by private individuals and non-governmental organizations in the country, she declared that the nation will welcome and encourage the active participation of private individuals/bodies in the provision of educational delivery to Nigerian citizens (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

This call by the Nigerian government on non-government agencies like the local communities,

private individuals, corporate bodies and/ or organizations to actively participate, in education delivery in Nigeria is long over due, especially as education being a social service, is seriously competing with other sectors of the economy. Also given the desire of the Nigerian government to make quality education available to the Nigerian child, may at present not be fully realized, because learners' population in most public schools triple available facilities. This has led to a situation where public school facilities are over-stressed, leading to low academic standards. This has often times led private schools to come to the rescue of public schools. With small school size, they provide facilities according to learners' population. Staff are recruited and retained based on skills acquired and exercised, competency and productivity (Dyikuk and Zwalchir, 2005).

Dyikuk and Zwalchir (2005) carried out a comparative study of public and private secondary schools. Their findings reveal that each type of school has its own merit. According to them, private secondary schools are better funded, equipped, staffed, supervised and inspected than public secondary schools. Staff in private schools are more committed to duty and their schools perform better in external examinations than public schools. Public school on the other hand perform better than private schools in the provision of welfare scheme for their staff, availability of infrastructures, recruitment of skilled manpower and concern for the supply of facilities by the Ministry of Education. What these findings by Dyikuk and Zwalchir (2005) indicate are that both private and public schools compliment each other in education delivery in Nigeria and should be encouraged to continue to do so as a way of ensuring efficient and effective secondary school delivery system.

Over the years, education has been considered a great force for national development and positive change. Both the government and non-government agencies' participation in education delivery had been based on the principle of expectancy, namely, greater returns for their investment. This is why anywhere private initiatives thrive well, the public sector contribution to education degenerates and vice versa (Akpa, 2005). The way forward in the impasse is for both the public and private sectors to consider education as a unique value and commodity with a high level of externality (Azelama et al., 2004)

CONCLUSION

As a matter of deliberate policy, the public sector political will and financial strength must be harmonized with the private sector educational interest and zeal. Government's control of education in Nigeria should not be restricted to inspection of facilities in private schools. It should go beyond ensuring that private schools meet the minimum required standard, to actually granting financial assistance to such schools. After all, the pupils and students being trained in the private schools are Nigerians who are being educated for manpower needs of the nation. Moreover, it is when funds are made available to non-governmental agencies participating in education delivery, that public sector investment in education will be whole and complete.

Finally, such financial assistance to the private sector that is educationally inclined will make government control of education more meaningful to all stakeholders in the education industry

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