

Short Communication

Dwindling Educational Standards and Ubiquitous Corruption: Causes, Implications and Options

Badey, Dinebari* and Eyichukwu, Kingsley

University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Accepted 24th July, 2016.

This work is an attempt to understand the seeming inability of the Nigerian nation to develop itself on a number of fronts and points to the fact that the major challenge to development in Nigeria is the dwindling standard of education. An educational system that is, to all intents and purposes, bereft of direction and focus, as it is neither culturally contextual nor relevant. Such a system can only lead to breeding corruption among the younger generation leading to greater inability to develop. Various causes are identified along with the likely implications for us as a nation.

Keywords: Educational standard, Corruption, Development.

INTRODUCTION

As early as the 5th century Bc, Greek philosophers especially Plato took special cognizance of the importance of education in the development and proper utilization of resources obtainable in any society, which is why he advocated for the rule of the commonwealth by philosophers whom he believed must be refined by the education process at the highest level.

The eminence of education is recognized in many developed countries who consider it priceless and a veritable tool for socioeconomic and political development, but pathetically, developing nations including Nigeria consider education trivial, thus neglecting its potential for attaining self-sufficiency, economically and otherwise. This has been compounded by the pervasive corruption in the country which take away much of the resources that would have been ploughed into the educational system.

Unarguably, the monster of corruption has steadily permeated all aspects of the Nigerian system and has contributed its own quota to the decline in Nigeria's educational institutions that was once highly regarded. Corruption, which has attained an unprecedented level in recent times has taken away the glamour which our educational system once paraded and also negatively impacted on economic growth and reduced public spending on education.

From a sociological perspective, French functionalist Emile Durkheim argued and rightly too that education performs three basic functions: transmission of society's norms and values, perpetuating and reinforcing homogeneity in the young generation, thus promoting social solidarity necessary for social life to proceed; Education equips individuals with the skills they require for future occupation in the larger society.

The functionalist approach also adopts a systemic analysis thus advocating the interrelatedness of the parts (institutions) which exist and work towards the maintenance of the whole social system. A change in a part also affects the other parts, triggering a change in the whole social system. Drawing from the above assertion, the political subsystem of the Nigerian social system has been rocked by impunity and lack of planning owing to mismanagement and corruption in high places of administration. This has also rubbed off on other sectors of which the educational subsystem is no exception.

From a Marxian perspective, the educational system which is located at the level of the super-structure in the society is always controlled by those who dominate the sub-structure or the economy. Following from this assertion, Marxists reject the idea that education serves the benefit of society as a whole but believe it serves the interest of the ruling class who use it to maintain the status quo.

Dwindling education in Nigeria will prove a Herculean task to analyze if we don't go back to history to ascertain what our education was like before the arrival of the colonialist. Pre-colonial education was 'largely informal though it successfully extracted from the socio-economic, political and religious developmental requirements of that period' (Ifeanacho 1998). Pre-colonial education in Nigeria helped the individual imbibe traits such as moral instruction, social studies, agriculture, trade and craft, physical and health education and intellectual training. Most importantly, it was largely pragmatic than theoretical. Modern education in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the colonial era. Anikpo (1996 c.f. Ifeanacho, 2007) argued that colonial education was not intended to prepare Nigerians for

nationhood and self-reliance. Rather what propelled colonial education was the need for provision of manpower for the colonial economy. Thus, traditional Nigerian values were replaced with those of the white men. This was followed by the infusion of economic motivation into educational pursuit. In a nutshell, colonial education constituted a false start for Nigerian's education, and the problem posed by this faulty foundation has lingered on till this day.

CAUSES

It has been over fifty years of independence and it is our belief that we cannot continue blaming colonialism for our woes in the educational subsystem. A major cause of dwindling education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Nigeria ranks among the nations that contribute the least percentage of her Gross National Product (GNP) to education (Anikpo, 1996:32). The United Nations demands that nations must invest at least 5% of their GNP to education; Nigeria invests below 2% of its GNP. The dearth of funding for education in Nigeria has continued to occur because the Nigerian elites fail to value the essence of education in the society.

According to Ifeanacho (2007), government exonerates itself from inadequate funding of education blaming instead the prevalent economic depression. Here again, government displays such unpardonable misunderstanding. Man is the master of the economy and not the other way round. Man makes the economy and should not be subject to it, equip man with necessary skills, attitude, knowledge and mental development, and he can overcome economic problems.

Closely related to lack of adequate funding is lack of facilities and infrastructures necessary for meaningful education to thrive. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in its state of the world's children report pointed out that about four million Nigerian children have no access to basic education. (Akhaine, Jan. 10 1999). And most of the existing schools in the country are in dilapidated states. Available stats shows that about 2,015 primary schools in Nigeria have no buildings and classes are held under trees.

Recently, the President of Nigeria announced the establishment of nine new Federal Universities in Ekiti, Ebonyi, Nasarawa, Katsina, Gombe, Kogi, Bayelsa and Taraba States. The establishment of these Universities was seriously questioned by analysts and critics who share our view that the problem associated with dwindling education is qualitative in nature and not quantitative.

Another cause of dwindling education closely associated with ubiquity of corruption is poor remuneration and minimal motivating conditions of service for workers in the sector. In some countries especially in first world countries, officers in charge of education earn a lot than political leaders. This is the case in the United States of America. But in Nigeria, the reverse is the case where a Councillor earns much more than a university Professor who has painstakingly devoted almost his lifetime to studying. What an injustice?

The Nigerian teachers are among the least paid in the world while the Nigerian Senators earn more than some Heads of States of European nations as empirical investigations have shown. This is quite absurd as the teachers now resort to various survival strategies to cope with the high standard of living in the nation. The implication of this is detrimental and contributes to dwindling education, as some teachers are now alleged to accept various forms of gratification.

Politicization of education has also had inimical effects on the educational sector. This is quite apparent since state governments now appoint Vice Chancellors of Universities

thereby using them as mere puppets to promote and protect their interest, thus maintaining the status quo.

Corruption has spread its tentacles within the academic environment thus impeding educational growth and increasing dwindling education with serious implications. Okorie Princewill (2001) contends that peculiar corrupt practices among youths in secondary and tertiary institutions can be deciphered. Among these practices are truancy, drug abuse, smoking, immoral activities like casual sex, stealing, examination malpractice and forgery of result, cultism etc. Some unscrupulous teachers, on their own part, are not left out as they indulge in terrible corrupt practices ranging from sexual harassment, withholding of results, selling of handouts and other materials etc.

Also, the school authority is not left out as it is apparent they indulge in corrupt practices such as delay or seizure of teachers' salaries, lack of provision of amenities as money being released for this purpose is channeled towards personal use. If the above is the case in secondary and tertiary institutions, how then will Nigeria attain great height in its quest for development and unlock the shackles of corruption when the leaders of tomorrow continue to derail the dictates of a corrupt-free environment by continuously indulging in Juvenile delinquent behaviour? What is the hope for emancipation from imperialism? How then can industrialization thrive?

There is a popular saying that "a person cannot eat his cake and have it" and Walter Rodney in his book titled 'How Europe underdeveloped Africa' argued that the principal industry in Africa is administration. He contended that third world countries including Nigeria spend so much in running their government (its administrative functions) and as a result have little left to invest in other sectors such as education. In a country where 25% of the annual budget is gulped by the National Assembly, in a country where barely few days of leaving office, Dimeji Bankoles the former speaker house of representatives is being paraded by economic financial crimes commission for alleged contract inflation and awarding of contracts amounting to ₦894 million without recourse to the procurement act, why wouldn't education dwindle. Instead of representatives in the National Assembly, we have representatives who neither care about enacting laws to promote education nor protect the interest of the people they claim to represent.

Recently, Nigeria has about 36 public Universities, 46 Polytechnics and 64 Colleges of Education. In addition, four new private university licenses have been registered and approved by the Federal Government. These private Universities include Babcock University, Bowen University, Igbenedion University and Madona University. As the ugly tradition of corruption persists, the public tertiary institutions have been left to rot away, hence, dwindling education.

IMPLICATIONS

The implication of dwindling education and ubiquitous corruption hovers all over the Nigerian society as Nigerians continue to bemoan the production of half-baked graduates which is now a common trend in present day Nigeria. The explication of this phenomenon is best when one takes a glance at the problems highlighted earlier on. The movement of the Nigerian state is like that of a crab taking one step forward and two steps backward ever since independence. How else can this be explained except that the country constitutes a set of egoistic pretenders whom interest in the status quo is not predicated on the good of the nation but on their deep throat and bottomless pocket even at the detriment

of education so long as the black gold is flowing, they care less about the future of the nation.

The continued neglect of the educational subsystem will definitely lead to socio-economic paralysis. Our argument is simple: we cannot forever rely on foreign expatriates to construct our roads, operate sophisticated machines in our oil industries and elsewhere, we must not be bound with the chain of imperialism forever. With meaningful education to young ones, they can take over from these foreign expatriates and run the Nigerian state rationally. But without proper educational empowerment as evidenced in present day Nigeria, the majority of Nigerians including the unborn generation will continue to wander in exorbitant enthusiasm and unrealized dreams.

Also, substandard education makes learning boring and less fascinating. The Nigerian child will always prefer militancy, kidnapping, cultism etc. than mixing acids on the board without any pragmatism enabling him to hold a test tube and mix the acid himself; thus, the geometric increase in crime rate.

OPTIONS

Various options are open to Nigerians to resurrect the dwindling educational sector only if our elites can see beyond the present and acknowledge the need to work towards a brighter future. Education must be highly prioritized by the government while identifying the correlation between education and development. The situations whereby other sectors such as security and industry attract more attention than education is unfair (Ifeanacho 2007).

The Nigerian state must educate the educators and motivate them to perform their duties without fear or favour. There must be adequate teacher training so as to prepare the teachers who will, in turn, imbibe in young ones the skills necessary to successfully thrive as members of the society who are highly productive in nature. More attention must be paid to the grassroot level i.e primary and post-primary schools which have suffered from neglect in the past years as a person without good foundation at the nursery, primary and secondary level will find it difficult to cope in the University.

A healthy public-private-partnership (P3) such as the TISHIP scheme in universities should be encouraged with the government playing a more serious supervisory role in the affairs of the private sector operators. The politicization of the educational sector should be scraped and autonomy should be granted these institutions to enable them handle their own affairs on a professional platform void of favouritism.

More funds should be made available and proper supervision should be put in place to ensure utilization of such fund. It is on record that between 2005 and 2007, Universal Basic Education (UBE) invested 89.780 billion (N24.300 billion in 2005; N84.780 billion in 2006; and N35 billion in 2007) in the scheme. But Nigerians still wonder whether these billions were invested in Nigeria or somewhere else because its effect is yet to materialize. Thus, adequate supervision on how the funds are spent is quite necessary so as to achieve the desired result.

Incessant industrial disharmony and strikes by ASUU can also be curtailed if government keeps to the terms of agreements freely entered into with the aim of increasing remuneration, providing decent working conditions, University autonomy and academic freedom and extension of retirement age of Professors to 70 years. The Nigerian educational system has suffered a serious decline in the recent past, but its fortunes can be positively turned around if corruption in public

institutions is curtailed. Removing the problem of corruption will free more funds for the educational system thus, empowering our youths with necessary skills for socio-economic and political development.

REFERENCES

- Amadi S, (2003) "To fight corruption chop off heads", Human Rights Defender (Third and fourth quarterly)
- Gbadegehin S, (2011) "A question of structure" THE NATION Newspapers. (Friday, June 17, 2011) pp.64.
- Ifeanacho, M. (1988). The Nigerian Culture: An institutional approach, Springfield publisher, Owerri.
- Ifeanacho, M. (2007), Spectrum for analytical social thought. LuLu Publisher, London.
- Belo-Osagie, K. & Adekunle, O. (2011) "Setting Education Agenda for Jonathan" THE NATION Newspapers (Thursday June 9, 2011), pp.27.
- Okorie, P. (2001), The Nigerian youth and corruption problem solving approach. PUO ventures. Owerri.
- Omisakin, S. (1998), Crime trends and prevention strategies in Nigeria, Nigerian institution of social and Economics Research (NISER), IBADAN.