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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NIGERIAN EDUCATION AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

There is a quickening race to put men and machines on the planets as the technology rich countries speed towards a rendezvous with super industrialism. Every nation is attempting to rapidly accelerate towards the future. Yet as nations speed forward evidence mounts that the education sector in Nigeria is dangerously malfunctioning. The Nigerian Dream, if there is any, cannot be realized while the education sector is fast collapsing; though Boko Haram shares a contrary opinion. This paper argues that to mitigate against the shock young people are already facing in Nigeria as a result of lack of clear curriculum thrust, low quality preparation due to poor investments, continuous industrial disputes and lowering of standards through corruption and examination malpractice. The paper concludes that while young people in other nations are experiencing shocks as a result of the fast pace of innovations and technological breakthroughs, Nigerian children suffer the shock that they lack competitive ability in a knowledge age as ours.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian education system just like any other across the earth remains its engine that ensures its human development, economic, civic and social progress. It is an investment that creates stock of competencies, knowledge, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform responsibilities through the input of education or training. In knowledge driven economies there are fast, fluid and self-regulating machines that deal with the flow of materials. Machines are increasingly performing the routine tasks while humans perform the intellectual and creative ones. It is a fact that machines cannot replace humans who produce them; they may be able to perform more tasks but certainly cannot replace human learning and training. They are products of human learning and not determinants of knowledge. Organizations powered by technology are already shifting from bureaucracy to ad-bocracy (Alvin, 1971). It is clearly evident that tomorrow's technology does not require multitudes of men as we have today, but men who can make critical judgments, who can weave their way through novel environments, who are quick to spot new relationships in the rapidly changing reality (Crook, 1996). The prime objective of education today therefore must target enhancement of the learner's cope- ability and adaptability in the midst of an ever changing context.

The education given today cannot be an end in itself but a means and window to the future. Today's education therefore must be qualitative enough to anticipate and interpret trend analysis, direction and rate of change. It must have answers to tomorrow's questions. The learners must be able to make probabilistic assumptions about the future and meet it prepared. This is however not achievable unless the teachers who groom the younger ones are themselves futuristic in their thinking and prepare the recipients of their training with similar skills. The relevance or voice of any people is determined by their capacity and ability. What translates into ability of any people or society is their skill, talents, fitness and propensity while capacity reflects their aptitude, competence, power, facilities and mobility. For Nigeria to speak and be heard takes more have a big market and the endowments of nature. Globalization is already laying waste nation states. For Nigeria to compete with others in a world that is fast changing and demanding changes in our engagements; she needs to critically and immediately overhaul her education sector. While all and sundry may accept that this is required, it cannot be wished into existence but deliberately built through massive and deliberate strategic investments in training and retraining. Many Nigerians have cried out demanding the government to immediately declare a state of emergency on education sector, even though this was done over two decades ago (Adamolekun, 2013). But as usual with Nigerians, we are not asking questions as to why the state of emergency declared two decades ago failed to reverse the dwindling trend. The need to

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launch radical initiatives to enhance or in fact overhaul Nigeria's education system by deliberately focusing on the quality and equity of her primary and secondary education systems. The key plans must include access to schooling, teacher quality, student motivation, infrastructure, realistic and up to date policies rooted in our culture, technology and early child education. The target must be to ensure that students completing High School are properly groomed and should be tertiary institutions and career ready and competent to learn.

Education System in Nigeria

The Nigerian education system is based on a 6-3-3-4 system which involves three levels of institutional learning processes:

- Primary school level
- Secondary school level
- And tertiary level

This arrangement does not recognize nursery education as a crucial first stage. The policy excludes this level probably because not many families can send their toddlers to nursery schools. This level has therefore assumed a class character since only the rich can afford to send their toddlers there. It has become the issue of 'the blind arguing that eyes smell'. Parents who cannot afford this level for their children consider it a waste of money since their wives can hang their toddlers on their backs and go to offices or their farms. Children enter primary school when they are about six (6) years old and spend the next six years at this level. It is hoped that when a child turns twelve (12years) he/she should graduate from primary school able to read, write and handle basic arithmetic (US Embassy). Primary school education which leads to the award of First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) is supposedly compulsory and free, indeed free of knowledge. Under the Universal Basic Education introduced by former President Obasanjo on September 30th 1999, it was hoped that Nigeria could not afford to fail again. It aimed at making education accessible and making all citizens literate by 2010 (Abayomi, 2016). Again as is typical of with the political elites in Nigeria, the government failed woefully to diagnose the ills that had caused the failure and rot of the past and thus had no real or contingency plan in place. The managers of the sector were the same unpaid, under paid, unmotivated people who had watched the system collapse in the past. The teachers to anchor this great ambition were not trained nor motivated, while resources to create conducive learning environment were withheld by corrupt politicians with impunity.

Shortly after the launch of the UBE initiative, it was reported by the government that 23% of the 400,000 teachers employed in the nation's primary schools did not even possess the Teachers Grade ii Certificate even when the NCE was regarded as the minimum certificate to enable one teach at that level. And that there were well over 2,015 public primary schools in Nigeria that held classes under trees. Though this large number of primary schools had children learning without roofs over their heads, opening or establishing of new schools became one of the dividends of democracy (Ngharen, 2016). The Obasanjo regime also failed to conceptualize key issues such as, how universal was the program. While chanting that

mantra, more children were roaming the streets than before. They also failed to ask how basic the program was. Talking about basics, it is an understatement to say that the bulk of the children did not know the basics- reading, writing, speaking and mere arithmetic? How free was the program since in practice, parents still had to pay school fees under one guise or the other, bought uniforms, exercise books and paid levies to help get basic texts for teaching since the ones supposedly given by government and marked "free, not to be sold" were arrogantly sold openly in the markets with impunity. The sad thing was that the culture of impunity goes on unchecked all across the country.

It is important to note that at primary school level, children have to put on uniforms decided by their various schools to distinguish them from others. This is particularly true of cities where parents perhaps can afford the uniforms and sandals or canvass. In rural areas, most children wear torn dresses of different colours and most children walk bare footed to and fro school. Dressing code cannot be enforced in rural areas because the parents will be more than glad to have their wards join them in their farms or go hawking to raise evening meals for the starving members of the families. The primary schools are currently resourced by teachers who possess the minimum National Certificate in Education (NCE) even though a lot of Teachers Grade 2 certificate holders and SSCE holders still teach at this level. There exists no fixed national standard on the minimum qualification. While most states in principle have pegged the NCE as their minimum, so-called educationally disadvantaged states still use whatever is available to resource the primary and secondary levels. Suffice to say the result is almost always the same. The recipients of such education are the worst off since they still graduate without the basic requirement of reading and writing.

At graduation from primary school, most pupils proceed to secondary school whether they pass or not. As a matter of fact it is only private schools that test the pupils; the public schools enroll them as they show up. Secondary education now lasts for 6years. The first phase referred to as Junior Secondary School (JSS) lasts three years. At the end of the three years, students sit for the Junior Secondary School Education (JSSE) and the 'successful ones' are awarded the JSSC. The successful completion of the JSS is a prerequisite for the second phase which is the Senior Secondary School. One is at a cross road as to whether or how "successfully they complete each level" if at all they complete. We can probably say they move since they graduate to the next level unable to read or write. At the end of the Senior Secondary School students write the Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSSC). It is important to note also that apart from regular subjects pursued at this level, there are a few technical and commercial streams. There are also vocational education courses offered at some of these few schools. Due largely to financial reasons a few children end up in business centers and other unaccredited mushroom schools in search of some form of education or the other. Irrespective of which school they attend, all those who wish to seek university or tertiary education are expected to have at least 5 credits pass in not more than two sittings and get the desired points in Joint Admissions Matriculation Board,(JAMB) and to of course pass the institutions post

JAMB screening. Tertiary education provides the last stage of formal education which takes a minimum of 4years completing the 6-3-3-4 system. Professional courses like medicine, law, dentistry etc. last a little more than four years. The tertiary institutions, particularly the universities offer some specialized Diploma certificates, First Degrees, Masters and Doctoral Degree programs. Importantly too, there are Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education that provide teacher education and artisan skills. These institutions award NCE, OND and or HND in various fields. Some of the graduates of these institutions seek admissions into universities to further their education.

There are 117 universities in Nigeria consisting of 36 Federal, 36 State and 45 private universities accredited in Nigeria as degree awarding institutions. In addition to the universities, there are 59 Federal and state Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Monotecnics. The population distribution of Nigeria indicates that over 60% of Nigerians are young people between the ages of 13-45years. Education in Nigeria is a shared responsibility of the federal, state and local governments (NBS, 2010). The federal ministry of education regulates the industry by formulating policies and ensuring quality control. The Federal Government is more involved or concerned with the tertiary level. The secondary level is largely managed by the states while the Local Governments seem to be left largely with the burden of primary sector.

Decay in Nigeria's Educational Sector

The educational sector in Nigeria as every other sector has taken in problems. Everyone is concerned that the education sector has taken a nose dive and the hope that it can be rescued leaves so much to prayers. The problems plaguing the sector are many and varied. The list of these virile infections is endless. The failure of political leaders to take politics out of education has already led to the social paralysis that we see everywhere. Different regimes have toiled with so many confusing programs and policies which have only served as avenues to steal money by the corrupt politicians and their cronies from the government treasury. Certain people have blamed the crisis on poor educational policies and apparent lack of planning for the sector. Others blame the collapse on poor teacher quality (Ngharen and Meshi, 2009). Government has refused to acknowledge that something very critical is malfunctioning and the entire system could grind to a halt. For example, Former President Good luck put the blame on examination malpractice perpetrated by parents who are desperate to find placements for their wards in tertiary institutions. The parents blame the Government for absence of basic infrastructure and regular industrial actions that often paralyze the system.

The Nigerian Confederation of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) has put the blame on societal values and lack of respect for hard work, honesty, commitment and dedication. The organization blames the conscience of the Nigerian state which has enthroned mediocrity. These and other reasons encourage students to find their future, not in hard work but through examination malpractices, (Ogbeifum and Olisa, 2001). While the blame game ranges on, the

common denominator irrespective of school of opinion suggests that the rot has reached appalling proportions. It is 'normal' of Nigerians to play the blame game and pretend as though we do not know where this monster has come from, or as though the problem fell from above upon an unsuspecting and innocent us. One thing is sure, as Nigerians continue to play the blame game; the more the nation's priceless jewel is compromised. It does not yet seem to have dawned on Nigerians that the collapse of this sector results or manifests in all other sectors. Education is everything. It is the jugular vein of any nation. Poor education produces half-baked medical doctors who butcher patients in hospitals, that is what produces the unqualified civil engineers who build houses that collapse, construct bridges and roads that are washed away. It is this failed system that churns out teachers who cannot read but who manage our school system. It is this same system that releases pilots who fly our planes and pharmacists who produce the drugs.

Some people have also put the blame squarely on the children's attitude to studies. They blame the drift on addiction to European League football, face book, Black Berry pinging etc. This paper opines that while these may be contributory factors, they alone cannot be the reason behind the abysmal performance by the youths. It queries why the young people in Europe etc who watch the games live perform better than Nigerian teenagers who watch on screens. Certainly, watching the leagues matches indicates that the students have too much alternative times provided by many industrial disputes; some which last indefinitely. Recently a survey of 102 secondary schools selected across the federation, using the Quality Assurance Instrument for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria, only six schools were rated good, 28 others rated fair, 65 schools poor while three schools were rated very poor (Onyukwu, 2012)The Federal Government through the ministry of education regulates the industry. The lawlessness, planless-ness and ad-hocism with which policy formulators operate has left the sector permanently experimenting ill-conceived, far-fetched and unworkable syllabus and policies. Policy formulators do not check out policies with policy implementers and particularly the teachers. It has been suggested by some examination bodies that some examinations cannot be passed by students because even the teachers do not understand the topics. You cannot give what you don't have (Adamolekun, 2013). There is also weak administrative mechanism in the education regulatory authorities. Policies are initiated and forced down the throats of other stake holders without a feedback system. What seem to matter is the new supplies, contracts and opportunities to jet around the world and the nation as though something tangible is taking place. The zeal with which the policies are initiated is almost always not sustained. Poor teacher quality which is the result of examination fraud is the main reason for the dwindling fortunes of the education sector. Poor teacher quality replicates itself in various ways. It takes a poor trained doctor to produce after his kind (Adeyemi and Igbineweka, 2004). Some teachers in public schools especially in the rural areas teach English, social studies and chemistry using Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba languages without considering that the students while writing their final year examinations would do so in English language. Examination fraud has much to do with emphases on

certificates. In Nigeria, it is not competence but certificates that determine one's placement in virtually everything. It is not what one can do but what certificate one has. (UNESCO 2012) Students know that they need credit passes to get admission or jobs. Parents also target credits through whatever means for their wards. There are those other desperate parents and highly placed individuals who would rather acquire original NECO and WEAC results without them sitting for the examinations. This is done with the connivance of some bad eggs within those organizations.

Principals are usually under pressure from parents or government to deliver. The expectation and pressure is certainly not targeted at quality but certificates. Every principal must be seen as doing their best thus the ever increasing incidence of examination malpractice. For example, Governor Wada recently charged and threatened to hold principal responsible for students' poor performance in examination (Mijinyawa, 2012). To avoid been held responsible and perhaps risk demotion or 'punitive transfer' the principals must work hard to justify their salaries by allowing examination malpractice. The principals fall back on their staff that must assist the students by writing answers on the chalk board or allow them use their text books to write the exams. It is also a fact that both public and private schools engage in examination malpractice. Some schools register 'special candidates' who pay more than the others and are given preferential treatments. A breakdown of 2009 WAEC results showed that only 358,981 out of 1,373,009 candidates representing 25.99 % obtained five (5) credits including English language and Mathematics, with a failure rate of 75 %. In 2009, Nov/Dec NECO registered 12,197 students who got five credits including Mathematics and English representing about 5.2% of those that sat for the exams. For the same exams, NECO recorded 236,613 cases of examination malpractice with Kogi topping the other states. In 2010 Nov/Dec NECO results, only 4,223 students (1.8%) out of 234,682 of those that wrote the examination got five credits including Mathematics and English. Leaving the percentage of those who failed at 98%. Kogi, Bauchi and On do states led other states in the list of examination malpractice. In 2010, WAEC claimed 23.71 % of candidates that sat for their exam obtained five credits including Mathematics and English. In 2011 the examination body claimed there was an improvement over the previous year (Adamolekun, 2013). In the same year(2011), 90% of candidates who sat for the Nov/Dec senior school certificate examinations of NECO failed the examination. Only 5% of those who wrote Islamic studies scored credit pass while less than 1% scored credit pass in CRS.

In NECO June/July 2011 results, 79% failed English. 66,519 candidates that sat for English had their results cancelled while 615,000 cases of examination malpractice were recorded with River state topping the list with 45,131 cases, Kaduna state followed with 41,878 cases, Enugu 36,904, Nasarawa 35,510 and Lagos with 31,904 cases. The commonest form of malpractice being mass cheating which recorded 452,027 cases while aiding, abetting, seeking and receiving help from non-candidates amounted to 87,778 (www.waecdirect.org). Other examination bodies like The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) have had their share of the story

too. For example, in 2012 one million five hundred and three thousand, nine hundred and thirty one candidates sat for JAMB UTME. Only 40 % (602,055) score 200 and above. Only 3 candidates scored up to 300 points. While 27,266 cases of malpractice were recorded (www.waecdirect.org). The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board claimed that the 2013 result was better because ten students scored 300 points while 127,017 scored less than 160points as against previous year where only three students scored 300 points. Another disturbing trend in the education industry is the endless industrial disputes which erupt often due to cocked up frustrations by the teachers and the other supporting staff. Government is to blame for its reluctance to provide the much needed resources to sustain the industry (TayoDemola, 2012). Education is not considered a top priority across the country. There are still many schools that operate under trees and dilapidated structures and the teachers so poorly remunerated. Some schools present students for science subjects without laboratories just as they now undertake computer test or e-exams; though some of those writing the e-exams have never seen a computer in their lifetime and some of the exam centers are not connected to power. Yet the examination bodies insist on administering computer based tests, (Ngharen and Dugga, 2016). Some states owe teachers many months' salaries areas and appeal to the teachers to be patient and work hard; afterall, the teachers reward is still in heaven. Teaching no longer retains the best of brains but has assumed the status of intellectual dregs. It is has lost every symbol of dignity and importance even in the public face. Teaching as a career is left for those who cannot get well-paid jobs in other sectors. The drop out syndrome in schools is another disturbing trend. The reasons for drop out are hydra-headed. The major one remains the fact that parents cannot afford the cost of training their children. The 'change mantra' that brought the present regime to power has not yielded results yet. Inadequately trained teachers contribute to student dropout (Falola, 2010). Even the best of schools can experience dropout where economic hardship or poverty is the cause.

Table 1. Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to Education

	Year	Allocation (%)
i	1995	7.20
ii	1996	12.32
iii	1997	17.59
iv	1998	10.27
v	1999	11.12
vi	2000	8.36
vii	2001	7.00

Table 2. Spending on education (% GNP) for some African countries

Country	(%) GNP
1. Angola	4.9
2. Cote D'ivoire	5
3. Ghana	4.4
4. Kenya	6.5
5. Malawi	5.4
6. Mozambique	4.1
7. South Africa	7.9
8. Tanzania	3.4
9. Uganda	2.6
10. Nigeria	0.76

What is the Future of Nigerian Children?

From the myriad of issues raised it is certain that the future of Nigerian children is spinning elusively. The future is bleak because not only are they half baked, the opportunities do not exist. There is no Nigerian dream which ordinarily should subsume their dreams. Development economists suggest that more educated and literate adults/parents live healthier lives have reduced fertility and less diseases prone children (Eniola, 2012). Reverse is the case with poor families. Poverty does not only dehumanize, it reduces the likelihood of school participation. Children from poor families are usually compelled to attend the understaffed, unequipped schools. Most of these schools lack basic necessities such as furniture, class rooms etc. It is against this background that we can understand why school feeding program is believed to attract school enrolment (UNESCO, 2007). The question we need to ask is why school feeding program works better among the poor children. The children do not attend school because they want education but because they can get a meal. We all know that the teachers drank the 'Nutrisip' more than the children. Instead of wasting those millions through contracts etc, why not use the money to improve the quality of education? Why not get simple furniture for the schools, why not pay the teachers their salaries. Why not invest in teacher training? A cursory look at government allocation to the education industry when Obasanjo launched the UBE program is revealing to say the least (UNESCO, 2007).

Similarly, a look at spending on education (% GNP) for some African countries as compared to Nigeria (Table 2) is disheartening (UNESCO, 2000).

One can only get what he has ordered, for failing to invest in education; Nigeria has ordered insurgency, mediocrity, instability and decay. Education ultimately is the laboratory of every nation. Its quality through deliberate investments or lack of it delivers its dividends.

Conclusion

We can conclude by saying that due to a nexus of neglects, the education system in Nigeria has taken a back seat among others in the world. It has become normal to hear of strikes and of armoured tanks at the gates of tertiary institutions and forceful ejection of students from hostels who may just be complaining of poor learning conditions. As things are now, posterity is compromised to the extent that we should expect the worst. It is garbage in and garbage out. The children come unbaked and leave half-baked and produce after their kind. They are poorly trained and go away to infest the system with their illiteracy. If we continue to ignore education, if Nigeria continues in the same direction, the political landscape will be littered with illiterates and mediocre. Thus, if we fail now as we always have, to put education on the front burner, the young people will continue to be half baked and social vices will continue to gain the ascendancy and the dream of becoming one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020 will remain a mirage and wishful thinking.

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