

Historical Development of Private Secondary School Education in Nigeria: 1859-Present

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Spring 2018

Abstract

This manuscript examines historical development of private secondary school education in Nigeria (1859 – present). In the process, it examines the growth of private secondary school education with reference to quantity of resources since 1859, and then the quality of the education. Historical research method was employed because the study is historical in nature. It was found that private secondary school education in Nigeria was started by the Christian missionaries; the local communities subsequently established private secondary schools too. The government later established public schools. It is concluded that the policy of free secondary education (junior secondary education) by government should be implemented in such a way that would prevent industrial actions by teachers. Moreover, it is recommended that the free education policy should apply not only to junior secondary school education, but also to senior secondary school education.

Keywords: Private Secondary School Education, Nigeria, Historical Research Method, Quality Education.

Introduction

Western education was introduced in Nigeria by private agencies. Adebowale (2000:21-22) pointed out that its first introduction was in the south coast of Nigeria when the Portuguese merchants who established trading posts at Lagos, Benin, and Brass invited their Catholic home mission to establish schools for the sons of *Obas*, chiefs and influential citizens in the palaces of the *Obas* of the above-mentioned towns. This first attempt at introducing western education in Nigeria did not reach the interior and it was later abandoned because of inter-tribal wars and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The period of this first attempt was between 1515 and 1552 (Adebowale, 2000:21-22).

The second attempt, and successful introduction of western education was in September 1842. According to Olawuyi (2004:23-25) the Wesleyan Methodist Society was the first Christian mission to arrive in Badagry, Lagos, followed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Baptist and then, the Roman Catholic. No sooner they (the missions) arrived than they embarked upon the opening of primary schools for general education of the converts. Thus, from this humble beginning, the Christian missions pioneered the establishment of schools which gradually spread from the coasts in Lagos, Badagry and Calabar to the interior (Ayandele, 1966:12-15).

Research Method

The research method used in this study is historical research method. This is because the study is historical in nature. Thus the study employed primary and secondary sources of data including diaries, log book, policies, minutes of meetings, journal, educational magazines, and other related materials. All these helped periodic and thematic analyses of data in this study in the fashion of historical research. In the process historical conclusions and recommendations were arrived at.

Growth of Private Secondary School Education in Nigeria

Just like the primary education was pioneered by the Christian missions, secondary school education in Nigeria also owed its origin to the activities of the various Christian missions. Adeyinka (1971:48-51) in his work on 'the development of secondary grammar school education in the western state of Nigeria' attributed the origin and development of secondary school education to the pioneering efforts of the Christian missions and later, to the encouragement given by the government.

The Christian missions at the initial stage were not interested in promoting education beyond the primary school level in Nigeria (Adeyinka, 1971:17-20; Bibby and Peil 1974:34-41; Eliasu, 1998:48-50). From their proselytization perspective, secondary education was repetitious and could turn its beneficiaries into materialistic and intellectually arrogant set of people.

It is important to note that since the introduction of western education in 1842 and the establishment of elementary schools by the Christian missions in Nigeria, the few Nigerian educated people began to agitate for the establishment of secondary schools. The reason is because, they desired a kind of post-primary education that would qualify their children to work as intermediate civil servants, and that would subsequently qualify them to gain admission into higher institutions of learning after which they could become doctors, lawyers, engineers, and so forth. Thus, they could occupy leadership roles in the nation (Berman, 1975:15-17; Adebowale, 2000:43-44).

The persistent clamor for secondary school education by the few Nigerian educated people led to the establishment of the first secondary school in Nigeria – CMS Grammar School, Lagos, founded in June, 1859 (Adeyinka, 1971:34). It was a privately-owned school as it was founded by Church Missionary Society (CMS). This was the beginning of secondary school education in Nigeria. Adebowale (2000:44) stated that in 1876, Wesley Boys' High School, Lagos, was founded by the Wesleyan

Methodist Society. This was followed by the establishment in 1878 of Wesley Girls' High School, Lagos by the same mission, while Saint Gregory's College, Obalende, Lagos was founded in 1879 by the Roman Catholic. According to Ayoade (2000:13) the Baptist Academy, Obanikoro, Lagos, that was founded in 1853 by the Southern Baptist Convention, America, later metamorphosed into two secondary schools in 1885; one for boys and the other for girls. Abeokuta Grammar School, founded in 1908 was added to the number of secondary schools that were established by the Christian missions (Ayandele, 1974:43-46; Isiaka, 1999:58-63).

The mission-owned secondary schools formed the first set of private secondary schools in Nigeria. According to Ukeje and Aisiku (1982:59-62) the schools were non-governmental because the colonial government did not show interest in education until 1872 when it gave the first grants-in-aid to the mission schools. Ukeje and Aisiku stated that the British colonial government came out with its first education ordinance in 1887. The available secondary schools were found to be inadequate, so, the agitation for more secondary schools in the country continued.

The second set of private secondary schools in Nigeria came into existence as a result of continued clamour for establishing enough secondary schools in various localities. According to Quadri (1984:24-25) the localities were the communities that felt the mission or government was not doing enough to satisfy its yearnings in the provision of secondary education for the populace. Consequently, more private secondary schools were established in the country. Some of the private secondary schools include: Ibadan Grammar School (1913), Ijebu-Ode Grammar School (1913), Eko Boys High School, Lagos (1913), Oduduwa College, Ile-Ife (1932), Agrey Memorial College, Arochukwu, (founded by AlvanIkoku in 1932), Enitonna High School, Port-Harcourt, (founded by Rev. Potts-Johnson in 1932), Ibadan Boys' High school (founded by Chief O. L. Oyesina in 1938), National Institute, Calabar (founded by Eyo-Ita, in 1938), Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesa (1939), and Kiriji Memorial College, Igbajo, (1952) (Quadri, 1984:29-35).

The activities of the Nigerian communities, individuals, tribal unions, professional groups and the educated elite regarding the growth and development of secondary schools in Nigeria are enormous. Moreover, the involvement of private individuals, missions and private agencies in educational provision in Nigeria has greatly increased in recent times (Omolewa, 2013:19-21).

The inability of government to cope with the increasing demand especially, for qualitative secondary education increased private involvement in the business of providing secondary education in the country. It needs to be pointed out that today, none of the educational levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) in Nigeria is left without the participation of private individuals, missions and private agencies.

Development of Private Secondary School Education in Nigeria

The development of secondary education in Nigeria generally, and private secondary school education in particular, was pioneered by the Christian missionaries when they arrived the country and introduced western education in the nineteenth century (Wise, 1956:39-44; Adaralegbe, 1983:27-31). Since the specific objective of the missionaries was to convert a vast majority of Nigerians to Christianity, Nigerian

children and youths were taught to read the Bible and write. Adaralegbe (1983:43-47) stated that when the trading firms and colonial masters came and they needed clerks, interpreters, drivers, cooks, sanitary inspectors and so forth, the four R's (Religion, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) as well as History, Geography, Hygiene and Nature study were taught in the schools.

Carr (1984:29-32) stated that the main objective of sending a boy to the first secondary schools in Nigeria was seldom for the purpose of enlarging his mind. It was rather, from the notion that additional schooling beyond primary education would fetch the young person more money in the employment market. He observed further that these early secondary schools taught a large number of subjects in such a way that very little of them could have been assimilated.

Fajana (1978:47-49) stated that the books ordered by Macaulay in 1859 when the first secondary school in Nigeria (CMS Grammar School, Lagos) was established included the usual ones of Grammar, Composition, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Latin Grammar, French Grammar and Philosophy instruction. Fajana (1978:51-54) stated further that the Methodist High School, Lagos (1878) listed more numerous subjects, including English Orthography, Writing, Dictation, Arithmetic, Algebra, Grammar, History, Geography, Classics, Prose and Poetry. In addition, there were two sets of optional subjects offered at extra cost, namely, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and other modern languages, Geometry, Trigonometry, Book-keeping, Drawing, Rhetoric and Logic, Moral Philosophy and Political Economy constituting one set; and Roman History, Greek History, Mythology and Antiquities, Physiology, Geology and Botany constituting the second set (Wheeler, 1969:13-16).

Adaralegbe (1983:38-43) observed that in terms of development, the Nigerian secondary school curriculum hardly improved on the above throughout the entire colonial period except in a few modifications of the number of subjects being offered, particularly due to shortage of qualified staff to teach. Significantly depressing in the list of school subjects offered by these earlier secondary schools for the next one hundred years, according to Adaralegbe (1983:43-45) was the absence of science, technical and technological subjects. Another disturbing feature in the development of private or earlier secondary schools identified by Adaralegbe (1983:47-49) was the evidence of little relevance of the school subjects to the improvement of the quality of life of the individuals and socio-political life of the nation. Yet another disturbing feature of the secondary school curriculum, as pointed out by Adaralegbe was its non-functionality in the sense that it was mainly examination oriented, depending mostly on rote-learning, with very little attention given to developing the mental and manual skills of its recipients. Carr (1984:12) described this as "encyclopedic learning" which leads to nowhere.

Fajana (1978:50) held the same view as Carr when he stated that the school subjects taught had no direct practical value. According to him, children were sent to the secondary schools by their parents so that they could secure white collar jobs and become clerks after graduation. Fajana noted that the curriculum was not in line with the Nigerian aspiration and culture.

Aiyepoku (1989:36) supported Fajana (1978:50-51) when he noted that the objective of colonial secondary school was to train the students in literary subjects as a result of which only white-collar workers were produced. He observed further that the new system of secondary school education in Nigeria has introduced more relevant, functional and suitable curriculum.

Osokoya (1985:33-37) stated that the curriculum inherited from the missionaries aimed at converting the beneficiaries to Christianity as a result of which religious instruction was made the core of the school curriculum. Another objective of the formal missionary education identified by Osokoya was to guarantee basic literacy and general education which would enable Nigerians to function as interpreters, messengers or clerks, or that would make Nigerians generally inferior to the colonial masters. This would imply that the inherited educational curriculum had failed to meet the demands and aspirations of Nigerians.

The pre-independence Nigerian administration, as observed by Adaralegbe (1983:46-48) hardly improved upon the colonial records in secondary school development. However, by the 1960's (during the formative years of independence), Adaralegbe stated that there were visible and discernible signs, of gradual change from the irrelevant curriculum to more relevant one. Gradually there were indications to emphasise science education at the secondary school level to make the various subjects relevant to Nigerian (and African) needs. Various bodies were established by government to ensure that this is done. Such bodies include the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and National Council on Education (NCE).

Moreover, the National Policy on Education contains policy issues that give progressive direction on education whereby the various levels of education in the country are expected to feature standard education for national development in the various institutions (government and private institutions). In effect there are indications to show that education, including secondary school education, is witnessing appreciable development in Nigeria.

However, for the country to witness greater development in education, the Universal Basic Education policy by government (up to the end of junior secondary school) should be extended to the end of senior secondary school education, as it is in the developed nations like: the United States of America, United Kingdom, France and so forth.

Conclusion

Private secondary school education started in Nigeria through the effort of Christian missionaries in 1842. The private schools taught subjects that had little relevance to developmental desires of the nation. But with great agitation from Nigerian elites the subjects were increased, and the school products could work in wide areas of national economy. At independence the government made great efforts to improve upon the quality of education such that it could provide more job opportunities, and the result was that the quality of education had greater impact on the economy. Moreover, the government made education free up to the junior secondary school level in 1999. But because the government could not pay teachers' salaries for some time, teachers in

government schools embarked upon industrial actions for some time, and thus increased the patronage of private secondary schools. The private schools did not generally compromise quality as a result of increase in patronage. The government schools later got back to work but the private schools continued to be relevant and qualitative. So the government and private schools are making good progress in providing quantity and quality education in Nigeria.

However, the policy of free secondary education (up to junior secondary school level) by government would make better impression in terms of mass and quality education if extended to the senior secondary level of education.

Recommendations

In the light of the gradual progress being made by private secondary school education in Nigeria, it is recommended that private secondary school education in Nigeria continues to be relevant and qualitative. In addition, education in government Basic Schools should be free up to the end of senior secondary schooling. By so doing the education given in government primary and secondary schools would have greater impact on the nation in terms of national enlightenment, and job opportunities. Moreover, such mass education would help in the quality of participation of the citizens in socio-political and economic activities for the betterment of Nigeria, Africa and the world at large.

This is not to suggest that the private secondary school education which features fee paying is discouraged. Rather when government free education is extended up to the senior secondary school level the competition between the government schools and the fee paying private secondary schools would be in more impressive dimension such that the quality of education in the country would be of greater dimension.

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