
Private Participation in Education in Nigeria: Some Issues that Matter!

Jacob Omede, (PhD)

Department of Psychology, Kogi State College of Education,
Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the challenges that hinder the effectiveness of private educational institutions in Nigeria in providing quality and functional education. In doing this, the paper discussed the structure of ownership of schools (Public and Private) in Nigeria and examined the reasons that could have brought private practitioners on board the educational ladder of the country. The paper further examined the common features that characterize Nigerian public schools such as low carrying capacity, dearth of infrastructures, incessant industrial disharmony, and examination malpractice among others. The paper in antitheses identified the roles of private educational institutions in attempting to ameliorate some of these problems thereby, restoring the lost confidence and hope of many Nigerians in the educational sector. As commendable as the efforts of private schools are in promoting learning, some challenges such as high tuition fees, creating unhealthy social class among students, use of unqualified professionals as well as aiding and abetting examination fraud were identified and discussed. Recommendations were that tuition fees should be reduced by legislation, class distinction should be discouraged by charging uniform hostel accommodation fees, illegal private institutions should be proscribed and the proprietors prosecuted as well as that private institution that aid and abet examination malpractice should be blacklisted and denied permission to serve as centers for national examinations.

Keywords: Public, Private, Institutions, Tuition fees, Class distinction, Illegal, examination malpractice

1.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Ownership of educational institutions in Nigeria is between the public and private sectors. The public sector here refers to government at the three tiers-federal, states and local while the private sector speaks about an individual, or group of persons, organizations or mission bodies coming together to establish and run an educational institution at any level of the educational system namely, nursery, primary, secondary, and or universities, colleges of education and polytechnics among others. Schools that are established and run by governments are called public schools while those established by individuals, organizations and mission bodies are referred to as private schools. Consequently, private schools are those schools that have the following characteristics:

- Supported by private organization or individuals rather than by the state
- Independent schools that are supported wholly by the payment of fees
- Schools that are not administered by local, state or federal governments
- They are schools that retain the right to select their students

- They are schools that do not rely on mandatory taxation through public or government funding

The history of private ownership in educational administration in Nigeria could be traced to the period when western education was introduced to the country in the 19th century (Odeleye, Oyelami & Odeleye, 2012). Contrary to this position was the claim that CMS Grammar School in Lagos was established June 6, 1859 (Abati, 2009). According to Abati, when CMS Grammar School was established, Nigeria did not yet exist. The school according to him was established as part of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) plan to develop locally educated elites that could help promote the Christian faith. Between 1859 and now, statistics is not able to reveal the number of privately owned secondary schools in Nigeria. And if at all the list is released one can be sure that many of them will be omitted.

Private participation in University education in Nigeria was dated to 1999 with the establishments of Madonna University on 10th May, 1999 (Universities of Nigeria.com, 2011) and the licensing of Igbinedion University on 16th May, 1999 (Encomium, 2013). Between 1999 and now, a decade and half, the number of privately owned universities had risen beyond 50. In fact, statistics had it that the number of private universities in Nigeria almost equaled that of the federal and state governments put together. There are 36 federal universities, 37 state universities and 50 private universities (Just Naira, 2014). There is hardly any state in Nigeria that has no private university. Among such universities are Salem in Kogi state, Bingham in Nassarawa state, American University of Nigeria, Adamawa state, Caritas University, Enugu state, University of Mkar in Benue state, Oduduwa University, Osun state, Obong University, AkwaIbom, Achievers University, Akure, Babcock University in Ogun state, Covenant University, Ogun state, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Osun state, Afe Babalola University, Ekiti state, Madonna University in Anambra state and etcetera. Registration of private schools in Nigeria is a continuum and the numbers of privately owned schools as well as patronage are fast outgrowing those of public schools.

2.0 REASONS FOR PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

The reasons for private participation in the establishment of school at whatever levels of the educational system in Nigeria are not farfetched. As pointed out before, the CMS Grammar School was established according to Abati (2009) as part of the missionary society's plan to develop locally educated elites that could help promote the Christian faith. The intention was to use education as a basis for facilitating the proselytization of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *That was the driving intention then but what about today?* I'm sure you know what the answer should be. Not even some of the missions' schools have this again as a driving force talk less of some private individuals and organizations. Most mission schools around us today have become so expensive, financially discriminatory and far from seeing provisions of education as a social service that it ought to be to the people. In Babcock University according to Encomium (2013) "your meal and hostel defines your money." The school fees in this university according to encomium ranges between six hundred and twenty thousand (620,000) and three million Naira (3000000). The Encomium gave the breakdown of the school fees thus: Medicine, 3 million naira; Law, 2 million naira; Accountancy, 1.5million naira; Nursing, 1million naira, other faculties pay between eight hundred and sixty thousand naira (860,000) and six hundred and twenty thousand naira (620,000). In American University of Nigeria, the students pay as much as one million, three hundred and seventy thousand, five hundred naira (1,378,500) and this money

is paid in Dollars (Encomium, 2013). To own a private school in Nigeria now is a very lucrative business (Toscany Academy, 2012). This is a trend that runs through almost all the private institutions particularly the universities.

Other private bodies that establish schools in Nigeria may be to memorialize their departed loved ones or immortalize their names, or as service to humanity, or as investment, social security against retirement and as means to provide employment to job seekers among others. No matter what the driving force may be, if the federal, states and local governments had not failed in their primary responsibility of providing qualitative education to the citizenry, the private sector wouldn't have taken the advantage. What are those things that are lacking or grossly inadequate with the public schools that brought private practitioners on board? This paper will soon provide the answer.

Qualitative education is too important to be compromised. Issues that affect the performance of education are issues of concern to families, communities, local, states and federal governments. Governments at all the levels in Nigeria are seen to be helplessly watching public structures and institutions collapsing and some in a dangerous state of coma with little or no hope of being revived. The public are fast losing confidence in government. Nothing seems to be working or moving forward. Security is fast running out of the control of government, poor, epileptic and very low voltage supply of electricity even now that is privatized, government hospitals are glorified monuments, health centers are without drugs leaving the health officers that are managing such centers and who are on government pay roll to use the centers as private clinics for commercialization of drugs. Pipe-borne water in most local government headquarters have now become stories of the past. The remains of rusted and broken pipes now only serve as reminders of those good old days. Many roads-intra and inter local governments, states and other countries-have become death traps to users. Nothing, absolutely nothing of public statuses seems to work again in Nigeria.

The educational institutions seem to be the worst hit. The standards and qualities of education have fallen so dangerously that remaining indifference to governments ineptitude to revitalization of this sector would mean waiting endlessly. The centrality of education to individual, community and national developments makes it imperative that alternative means of training our children be sought. *The original intention of genuine private practitioners in education as I think should be to intervene and redeem the collapsing public institutions rather than for the economic benefits that seems to be the most driving force for many of them.* The genuine private investors in educational institutions endure their investments as the proceeds or dividends are not in the short run unlike the fraudulent ones that milk the institutions dry and undermine quality and infrastructural provisions.

3.0 STATE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

In order to appreciate private participation in education in Nigeria, it is good we examine cursorily the features or characteristics of our public schools.

- Low carrying capacity (Public schools are inadequate to absolve the teeming population of admission seekers on a yearly basis). This is one major area of private intervention. Even though this problem is not ameliorated, in all fairness, it is curtailed.
- Falling standards and qualities of education (standards in terms of administration, monitoring, supervision and discipline while quality is in the content of what students

are taught and learned. The seriousness of teachers to teach and that of students to learn are fast coming down and no authority seem to bother to checkmate this downward trend.

- Examination malpractice (you hear of students putting money together to be assisted in examinations particularly the national examinations. Because the teachers have failed to do their jobs, they have no confidence in their products being able to withstand external competitions.)
- Poor planning and consistent lack of investment in the educational system. There is Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) intervention for the public educational institutions, but how spread? The laboratory built for ten (10) science students in the 70s is what is still available for the use of two hundred (200) science students in 2015. Conscious and significant efforts are not seen to be done to expand these lean and age-long facilities. The facilities are becoming otiose.
- Inadequate, obsolete and decaying infrastructures. Numerical growth without commensurate infrastructural developments.
- Inadequate manpower (quantity and quality) and sometimes lopsided distribution of staff as posting of staff is influenced by politics.
- Instability in academic calendar due to frequent strikes. Students only know when they are admitted to school but don't know when they will graduate. Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Universities (ASUU) embark on frequent and protracted industrial actions, the most recent lasted for more than 6 months. Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Polytechnics had a strike that lasted 10 months in 2014, while the Academic Staff of Colleges of Education (COEASU) stayed out of the classrooms also for more than 6 months in the same year 2014. The public Primary school teachers in both Benue and Kogi States left their classrooms for almost one year in 2014. Their resumption was just recent and academic activities had begun. Nobody can tell the end to industrial disharmonies in the nation's public educational sector.
- Poor remunerations and working conditions as well as delay in payments of salaries (capable of lowering teacher' (staff) morale and encouraging divided loyalties.)
- Poor monitoring and supervision.
- Lack of will power to enforce discipline, to correct and punish offenders. When an officer wants to correct a subordinate that erred, most times it is at the risk of the officer because of the interventions of the godfathers and the possibility of diabolism or physical assaults.
- Moral decadence that reflect in rape, cultism, immorality and gangsters or other shady behaviors are common features of most public schools.

4.0 THE INTERVENTION OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The appearance of private practitioners in education in Nigeria has helped in no small measures to launder the battered image of schools in Nigeria. Private schools have helped to restore the confidence of Nigerians by:

- Providing admissions to many teeming applicants seeking admissions on a yearly basis (many Nigerians who can afford the fees they charge have been relieved in this area)
- Restoring and sustaining quality (not because they have qualified staff in the right proportions but that they ensure what is to be done be done rightly and at the right time)
- Restoring and sustaining discipline (among staff and students because they have they will power to do so added to the fact that they don't want their investment to collapse)
- Effective monitoring and supervision of academic activities (the presence of the proprietor is regularly felt)
- Running stable academic calendar. They rarely go on strike
- Demanding staff dedication and seriousness to duties.
- Discouraging examination malpractice
- Producing students that are globally competitive

The roles that private schools play in rescuing the battered image of the public schools in Nigeria are very highly commendable but there are some issues that are really retarding or staining these good efforts and these issues need to be addressed.

5.0 ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

These issues are:

- Exorbitant school fees and regular upward review of fees
- Proliferation of substandard institutions
- Promotion of class consciousness and distinctions
- Use of unqualified teachers and administrative staff
- Inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities
- Examination malpractice

5.1 Exorbitant school fees

One of the issues of utmost concern with private educational institutions in Nigeria is the fees they charge exorbitantly and the frequent upward review of these fees. Most private educational institutions have become profit driven and charge fees that are beyond the reach of many average Nigerians. The fees they charge are between N620, 000 and N3 million (Nigerian University Scholarships, 2014). With the declining academic activities of public institutions in Nigeria coupled with low or inadequate carrying capacity, many parents who could have taken solace in private schools are inhibited due to huge costs. It has become obvious with the fees they charge that private universities according to Nigerian University Scholarships (2014) can only accommodate the children of the affluent-except, of course, middle class parents that are willing to struggle and sacrifice other comforts of life. The incidence of the burdens of these huge fees parents pay is obvious on the standard of living of many families. Private owners of schools in Nigeria should give this a re-think to encourage more patronage especially as there is sense in "economies of large scale production." Students Nigeria (2014) and Brimtime-Atom (2014) reported the fees charged by some secondary schools in Nigeria to range between one million

and four million Naira (N1000000 and N4000000) annually. This, I think does not really make sense. It is simply a display of affluence. The amount paid by one student in these schools can be used to award scholarship to entire secondary schools in a Local Government (Brimtime-Atom, 2014).

5.2 Promotion of class consciousness and distinctions

There is an existing wide gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria already. Therefore, conscious efforts to further widening this gap should be discouraged. But this is what most of this private educational institutions seem to promote. Only children of the affluence could access it. And what this means is that they will continue to be ahead of their counterparts from low or poor socio-economic background. They are likely to graduate earlier, obtain qualitative education more than their mates in public schools or those yet to go to school because they cannot afford the high fees payable in private schools and cannot be admitted to public schools because of competition and high demand. Again, in some private schools, the amount of money students pay vary from one course to another as well as the nature and type of accommodation they get. For instance, in a private university in Nigeria as reported by Nigerian University Scholarships (2014), accommodation depends on the student' choice, either it is Regular (7 in a room), Premium (4 in a room) or Classic (3 or 2 in a room).

This distinction is not healthy for the children that are being trained to be leaders tomorrow. The socio-economic status of students is not to be used as the basis for discrimination especially in the area of hostel accommodation and the number of meals to be eating per day.

5.3 Proliferation of substandard schools

There are black sheep among private owners of schools that are abusing the good intention of providing qualitative and comprehensive education to the citizenry. They take advantage of the desire of children for higher studies and without any structure on the ground, due process of registration, set-up universities, colleges of education and polytechnics under trees and uncompleted residential buildings. It is a further abuse of our educational system for two undergraduate applicants without any known financial base to come together to float universities, colleges of education or polytechnics. For such proprietors, money-making is their goal; money-making is their objective and so disregarded registration procedures, admissions or minimum entry requirements. This is bad! The association of private owners of schools should fight this illegality that is further destroying what the genuine private ones are in the process of building.

List of such illegal institutions particularly those that are degree awarding (about 46 of them) were published in 2013 (Daily Post, 2013) by National Universities Commission (NUC), the body that regulates university education in Nigeria. The Daily Post (2013) referred to these illegal degree awarding institutions as "Degree mills" and warned the general public not to patronize them as their certificates will not be considered for the purposes of National Youths Service Corps (NYSC), employment and further studies. Similarly, in 2014, lists of 36 unaccredited or illegal universities were again released by Universities of Nigeria.com (2014) with warnings to the general public that their certificates are not yet recognized in Nigeria. In spite of these efforts, these proscribed universities continue regular academic programs with impunity. There are several others probably more than those identified that are illegally operating at full glares of government functionaries without their being bothered. The list of these illegal institutions of learning can never be exhaustive. There is no level of the nation's educational

institution that can be absolved of this illegal private participation-the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary.

5.4 Unqualified personnel

Most private institutions of learning lack qualified and adequate personnel. Since they are mostly out to make money, they lack the willingness to hire and retain qualified professionals because of high cost. This is why they employ and manage workers without due regard to quality and quantity. Many of their workers are transitory as they could leave for higher paid jobs anytime. The bulk of their workers are either retirees, fresh graduates who assuredly would leave later, or visiting teachers (teachers that are in employment with another institution) or those on sabbatical. This is not a healthy development as the students are those disadvantaged. Students need to be familiar with their subject teachers for effective learning to take place. Most annoyingly, is putting round pegs in square holes. A lecturer may be made to teach courses that are far outside his/her discipline. Why on earth should a holder of National Diploma (ND) be made to teach courses to National Diploma students? These are the illegalities that go on in most of the private schools and these are capable of destroying the nation's educational system. And governments seemed not to be seriously bothered. The future of this great country is at stake as these desperate money mongers are bent on destroying the youths that are to be the leaders of tomorrow.

5.5 Poor and inadequate infrastructures

Many private institutions of learning in Nigeria have problem with expansion. This is not necessarily that the finance is not there but the will powers to plough back proceeds generated to further improve the institution. You see proprietor of an institution that is gathering momentum for growth suddenly using the proceeds from this institution to establish a new one in another geographical location. Hence, one person could own two or three universities with none of the three being fully developed. Students in some such private institutions of learning particularly, the universities have had their programs extended by the National Universities Commission for not being able to meet accreditation requirements.

5.6 Examination Malpractice

This is another feature that is common with many private educational institutions in Nigeria particularly, those institutions below the tertiary level of the educational system. The proprietors or teachers in some of these schools that prepare their students for external examinations such as West African Schools Certificate Examinations (WASCE) and National Examinations Commission (NECO) encourage examination malpractice so that their schools could be distinguished and rated as excellent. They do this to win patronage, to attract more students to the college. Parents who are ignorant of these fraudulent practices will be willing to send their wards to such schools where their students are not doing very badly in external examinations. The "excellent" performance in this case is not a function of qualitative academic efforts of teachers and students but that of cheating and aiding the students in the examinations.

These shady practices have their immediate and long term consequences particularly on the students that pass through such institutions. They are morally devalued and those are the ones we are training as leaders for tomorrow. The popular opinion in Nigeria is that "Nigerian police are corrupt." But is not all of them that are corrupt. There are some that are not corrupt among them. Similarly, not all the Nigerian politicians are thugs. Why? The answer is in their levels of moral foundations and later development.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The entrance of private practitioners in education in Nigeria is a good one. They rejuvenated confidence of Nigerians about the decadence that is prevalent with the public institutions particularly, the public educational sector that had suffered protracted industrial actions and dearth of infrastructures. The private owners of schools have helped tremendously by running stable academic calendars, monitor and supervise academic proceedings for quality delivery and to some great extent have reduced yearly admission problems.

But as commendable as are the roles that private educational institutions play in Nigeria, they are surrounded with some unhealthy practices such as charging of fees exorbitantly, widening of gaps between the rich and the poor, proliferations of illegal and substandard schools and employment of unqualified and inadequate personnel among others. These unhealthy practices need to be addressed to enhance the performance of private educational institutions that are undoubtedly beneficial to Nigeria and Nigerians.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested to help private schools in Nigeria overcome some of the unhealthy practices identified so as to be able to enhance their performance. These recommendations are:

1. Reduction of tuition, accommodations and feeding fees that is highly exorbitant. This can be done through government legislation. Private institutions should be made to charge fifty percent (50%) fees above those of the federal and or state governments. This regulation is necessary yet that public educational institutions are not meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry in the meantime in terms of quality and quantity.
2. Private Institutions of learning particularly the tertiary institutions that have been licensed to operate and had operated successfully (meeting the minimum requirements of their regulatory bodies like NUC) for up to ten (10) years should be made to draw funds from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). About fifteen (15) percent of the funds giving to the states and federal tertiary institutions of learning by this body should be conceded to such private institutions.
3. All illegal Educational institutions operating in Nigeria are to be blacklisted, proscribed and their proprietors prosecuted by the bodies that regulate them. In addition, frequent jingles on the media particularly in the states where such proscribed institutions are should be carried out so that the masses in such states could have sufficient education about the illegality of their operations and the consequences of patronizing them. Until the government is seen to be serious on this matter, the “cows of Bashan” in this enterprise will continue their exploitation.
4. Hostel accommodations should not be defined by money and class. If it is ten thousand naira that is charged as flat rate for accommodation and students are able to pay, then they should be exposed to about the same hostel conditions. A situation where accommodation fees is graduated and the student that can afford the highest pay gets the best or “exclusive” accommodation is not proper at all for students particularly, the

undergraduates. What this is capable of doing is a further widening of the age-long existing gap between the rich and the poor.

5. Licensed private schools that are already in operation whose administrators aid and abet examination malpractice should be made to face the wrath of the law by the supervisory states or federal ministries or agencies. Such schools are to be blacklisted and their students relocated to other schools of their interest.

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