

## **TOWARDS MAINTAINING STANDARD IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**BY**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The argument over falling or rising standards in Nigeria education has been on for many years back, and it has thus become apparent that the debates will continue for more years to come. However, many of the comments made by the academics, professional and member of the public on the matter seemed to point to the fact that there is a school of thought as regards standard in Nigeria education. A school of thought believed that standard of education has falling over the years, basing their argument on the outward look of an average Nigeria student today comparing them with students of yesteryears. In this case, standard is measured in terms of work excellence, mathematical ability, spoken English of pupils, moral standard, discipline in school and perhaps the aggregate possessed in the final examinations. That the good yester-years which is often the point of reference is faulty because of certain variables such as age of learners. The subjects offer in schools, pupil enrolments, sociological change in schools and home etc. which ought to be considered along when comparison is to be done. For example, the new system of education in Nigeria (i.e. 6-3-3-4) indicates that secondary school students at both junior and senior secondary schools will now have over 50 various subjects to choose out of. Based on this, one cannot but conclude that students of this generation are more exposed with more knowledge outlook and more imaginative than old day's students. However, this writer believes that there are other numerous factors which tend to militate against high standard in Nigeria education that actually call for solution. It is the intention of this paper to identify and discuss of some of these factors and ills, which have constituted threats to maintenance of academic standard in Nigerian Secondary Schools. Also some possible solutions and recommendations are made.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

An oxford advanced learners; dictionary of current English defines standard as a test or measure for qualities or for the required degree of excellence. It could be inferred from this definition that in the measurement of standards, there prescribed criteria which ought to be met, and once this criterion are not met, the system can be adjudged as ineffective. It can be inferred that there are no absolute standards, it is

therefore possible for a system that was once reputed for high standard to suddenly become below-standard.

Adesina (1986) states that the indices for measuring the standard in education relate to availability and quality of the human resources for the level of parental interest in investing in education. The nature of physical facilities, the rich-quality of the product of the educational system and the extent to which the product of the system are used, certain inputs, such as good students.-teachers, funds facilities and equipment which are processed and then released as finished product or output to the society. If there is any fault in the input, it will surely affect the processing and consequently the output.

#### **INCREASE IN STUDENTS ENROLMENT:**

It is certain that Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented explosion in her education, an explosion, which affect all level of her educational system. For instance, in 1960, when Nigeria got her independence, the country had 2,912,600 pupils in primary schools, and 135,400 students in secondary schools rose to 3,892,500 and 310,057 pupils respectively (Ukeje 1986). As at today, it is estimated that Nigeria has a total of 20 million children in primary schools, 4 million in post-prima institution and over 200,000 students in tertiary institution (Ndu, 1986).

In a situation of this population explosion, it thus becomes an Herculean task for educational planners to determine and on time too, the number of pupils to be educated at each level, the curriculum contents, teaching and non-teaching force needed, classrooms, books, chairs both in number and quality (Ajayi, 1984), In a situation where there is no sufficient funds to provide for all the needs of this teeming population in our schools, maintenance of standard academically might be a bit difficult. If the issue of finance is solved, most problem relating to inadequate staffing, lack of, equipment, infrastructural facilities will be a thing of the past with time and these will help a long way to improve academic standards in our schools most especially secondary schools.

#### **SHORTAGE OF QUALITY TEACHER, AND NEGATIVE ATTITUDE OF THE FEW AVAILABLE ONES TO WORK:**

Teachers are the most crucial element of all resources put in educational system. Teacher is no doubt an indispensable in the development of the potentialities and abilities of a society's younger generation. On the maintenance of academic standards in Nigerian Secondary Schools, therefore, the quality of the teacher in term of a qualification and experience must be considered as of paramount importance. In Nigeria, it has been observed that one of the major crises facing secondary school education is that of teacher's quality. According to Adesina (1986), it is not that teachers are not enough but that those that are available are not qualified to teach at the level that they are operating. He observed that there are several states in Nigeria whose primary school teachers are not qualify that the percentage could be as high as 80. The alarming number of teachers needed to service all the educational institutions

in Nigeria, undoubtedly raises the issues of quality among the teachers and standards in Nigeria education.

Mr. Chukwuemeka Ike a onetime Registrar of West African Examination Council (WAEC) said that the unprecedented expansion in all level of education in Nigeria as not been matched with corresponding increase in the number of qualified teachers. It a well-known fact that many of Nigeria secondary schools do not have qualified staff even at the school certificate class concluded that from experience the school that performed brilliantly were the schools with adequate teachers and facilities.

At a recent National Conference on mass failure of Nigeria in public examination organizations organised by University of Ibadan, it was revealed that one of the main cause of failure of student at school Certificate/GCE Ordinary level examination was shortage of qualified teachers in school. Teachers and principal were also observed not to be stable on the job. It was also noted that teacher of all categories were said to be poorly motivated, thus the urge to put in their best is completely lacking. In a situation as described above it is doubtful if the quality of what goes on within our secondary schools could be said to be of the required standard.

#### Poor Quality of Education Managers:

In education the success of any school depends greatly on the kind of leadership that is given to the human element within it and their response to the leadership.

Njoku (1979) opined that the achievement of educational improvement depend largely on skilled and effective educational leadership. Educational leadership in this case encompasses every one that occupies a position within the educational system.

Right from the minister or commissioner for education, the chains of inspectors in the ministry, officers of the teaching service commission, to the school principal and his team of teachers. Each of this position has specific role to play in the supervision of institution towards the attainment of the school goals.

However, it has been observed that in Nigeria even when the criteria for educational leadership positions are clearly stated, decision makers often attempt to waive this qualification and argue on the ground of what is expedient as opposed to what is desirable and required consequently, people who are unfamiliar with the field of education suddenly found themselves in positions where they have to take critical educational decision become confused and even resistant to professional ideas (Adesina, 1986).

It is obvious that the desired effect of the above described situation on the school system is poor management of human and material resources which often characterized by students mass failure in public examination, high incident of examination malpractice and falling standard of education.

#### **THE ISSUE OF AUTOMATIC PROMOTION**

This is a situation that encourages the movement of all member of a given cohort from a lower class to higher class without necessarily passing the promotion examination set at the lower class. This idea of automatic promotion was first practice in the old western region in 1955 when free universal primary education was introduced in the region. One will recall however that the banjo's commission of enquiry set up in western region to review the education system in western Nigeria criticizes the issues of automatic promotion as one of the causes of the falling standard of education. It is therefore obvious that no educational system that worth it's sop will open its gate to all and sundry without introducing a screening device to serve as a measure of standard.

#### **POLITICISATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES**

Another factor that had profound effects on the Nigerian system is the role of politics in the determination of educational decision. Politician often find it politically expedient to play politics with education because it is very easy to count the number of students that have enrolled in schools even when nothing has passed through them on coming to power.

As a result many slogans were derived out of education such as 'free education for all levels' "qualitative education for all" "Nomadic education" and recently "Universal Basic Education" was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto State. The implementation of those educational decisions led to the unprecedented expansion of the educational system and increase in enrolment at the various level of education without the corresponding increase in the necessary facilities required by them. It is not unusual today to find a school built for 300 students or less having an enrolment of over 1,000 with no increase in the number of class rooms in laboratory space, equipment or in the Library. Many of the students, that passed through this type of school often fall out or drop out before the end of the course.

#### **AGE OF THE LEARNERS**

One of the major factors that could account for the academic falling standard in Nigeria secondary schools is the age of our student. In the past, our father in the early days of formal education went to school much older than the learners of today. Then it was mandatory that the right hand pulled over the head must touch the left ear before admission was granted. They because a lot of them were matured before been admitted to school they often show readiness to learn and they performed well at school.

Nowadays, it is customary and infact fanciful today to see a child of three in primary school, in most cases such a child will not be mentally, physically and emotionally ready and because of this insufficient readiness and lack of maturity, he ends up performing poorly at school. Most of these unfortunate children have been known to be causalities, drop outs, truant, moral and ethical deviants. Their academic performance invariably left much that was desired of course they blamed it all on schools and the teacher (Akpore, 1981).

In a similar remark a one times Registrar of WAEC, Professor Ike was quoted as saying that the relatively low motivation among students is probably another contribution factors to the drop in academic standard whereas in Ghana it is unusual for children to enter secondary school before the age of 12. In Nigeria you sometimes find children going in at 9, complete in Naples.

Many of such children hardly appreciate the need for them to do well, and what school is all about.

### **SHORTAGE OF TEACHING EQUIPMENT AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES.**

The academic performance of students in schools has often been linked with the quality of human and material resources at it's disposal. This condition is based on the premise that if schools are provided with better buildings, facilities, equipment, health, environment and quality teachers, they would be able to however, meet the need of the government, the teachers, the learners, parents to join hands together and rededicate themselves to the course of maintaining high academic standard in Nigeria secondary schools.

In essence, if our national education policy lays strong emphasis on development, creative inventive, critical, energetic, intelligence and reflective thinking skills and habits in students it would follow that teachers at the appropriate levels should create the proper classroom climate and employ the necessary instructional strategies for the stimulation and development of these skills.

But to achieve all these skill and to maintain academic standard in Nigeria secondary schools, the following recommendations and suggestions must be looked into:

A lot can be done to motivate teachers and stem the high attrition rate through regeneration every year. If the teaching profession does not attract the best materials and brains around to teach in our schools, we shall always produce poor students. It is therefore necessary to provide relevant social security measures for all teachers to arrest what Akporo (1981) called a mounting missing Devotion. The security of a full employment, suitable and adequate shelters, food and free in-service training with pay and the provision of proper working environment.

All teachers' institutions should orient their programmes to produce relevant teachers badly needed in our schools today. Also, Federal and State governments own it a duty to the nation to legislate against future politicking with education. The new policy on education should be entrenched in such legislation, so that no future government would be able to deviate from the spirit and philosophy behind its operation. Future leaders also need to exercise some political discipline in their choice of programmes and in their implementation. Efforts should be made to discourage educational growth without development. Emphasis should be on quality education in our secondary school, which will be make recipients useful to themselves and the society at large.

Also, it should be noted that the administration of schools is such an intricate duty that it should not be left in the hand of novice on the theory and practice of

educational administration. To this end, efforts should be made to professionalise all school heads through in service training.

Rapid expansion in schools also called for more trained inspectors to complement the supervisory roles of more of our school principals. Constant inspection of schools will make teachers to be up and doing and put them in the right direction in the discharge of their duties and also help to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

The co-operation of faculties, institutes of education, as well as training colleges, who would produce specialist teachers in various disciplines and generate also the production of textbooks and materials, is highly needed.

Provision of qualified staff in the right numbers, adequate physical plan, and facilities particularly now that almost all the states of the federation have begun the implementation of the new system of education is necessary if we are to maintain academic standard in our secondary schools. I now wish to state further that there are reasons why I noted that education is falling rapidly in Nigeria. These are due to some of the reasons below:

1. Poor level of education funding
2. Decline in the availability of equipment and books due to rising costs
3. Decline in the teachers enthusiasm and commitment.
4. Priority for quick wealth, which is already leading in some states to a decline in secondary school enrolment especially among males who prefer trading to schooling.
5. Lack of educative government supervision or monitoring as a result of the ineffectiveness of the inspectorate system in most of the State Ministry of Education, and even at the Federal Level.
6. Poor and hazardous implementation of the education policy, especially the new 6-3-3-4 system, Ajayi (1978).

## **CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt; the issue of standard in education is highly a controversial one. This is because there is no absolute standard, there is no yardstick by which academic standard is being measured except the usual references to the "good old days". Rather it is obvious that Nigeria educational system is been faced by so many factors that were earlier mentioned and some likely solutions and recommendations were proffered.

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