

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN PROMOTING QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The importance of education to personal and national development cannot be over emphasized. Over the years, governments have invested heavily in education sector because of its importance in nation building. This work was undertaken to highlight the role of the church in arresting the decline in quality education in Nigeria. Leading authors on the subject matter were consulted and the history and contributions of the church in education development in Nigeria were analyzed. Western education, it was noted, was first introduced into Nigeria by Christian missionaries and the church has been playing important roles in developing education in Nigeria. The church and education have been going together since the days of the early missionaries in Nigeria. Education offered by the missionaries tended to be more qualitative than what is obtained since government takeover of school in 1970; academic excellence and character formation were the mainstay of the curriculum of the mission schools, which produced better equipped individuals. With government intervention in education, morality and the quality of education have been on the decline; a trend that has engendered the culture of examination malpractices and other social vices. The church has, however, proven to be capable of handling schools better. Therefore, some state governments have handed mission schools back to their original owners. Furthermore, churches have been complementing the efforts of government by establishing education institutions at all level which has helped boost the system. To further improve the quality of education, government needs to partner with the church through grants and provision of infrastructure.

Introduction

Education is a key component of national development. The level of any nation's economic, technological and political advancement can be linked directly to the level of her system of education. It is often said that no nation can grow or develop beyond her level of educational development. In other words, the quality of a nation's system of education determines the level of her human capital which has direct bearing on her overall development. Because of the critical role of education in national development, governments make huge budgetary allocation to the section in order to build and maintain high quality system of education that will ensure that the needs of the citizens and the states are met. The Nigerian government, over the years, has invested in education. It does, however, appear that the standard of education in Nigeria is fast depreciating. This is seen in the rate of unemployable graduates that are produced from our higher institution. The ugly trend of examination malpractices in both the basic, secondary and tertiary levels of education are all manifestations of decline in the education sector. Furthermore, moral decadence and other social vices such as cultism and drug abuse among young people are evidences of decay and decline in the quality of Nigeria's education system. Efforts to curb this decline in quality education in the country seem not to have materialized into lasting solution. Stakeholders and concerned minds view this trend as worrisome as some products of our universities and other institutions of higher learning find it difficult to defend the certificate they carry: a situation that further casts doubt on the integrity of the nation's education system. This paper examines the role of the church in arresting the decline in Nigeria's education sector.

The Concept of Education

Education is mainly seen as the form of learning that takes place in a school. This learning, according to Iwuoha (2018), leads to acquisition of knowledge and skills, passing prescribed examinations and

obtaining certificates. Education however, goes beyond mere acquisition of learning, skills and certificates. It encompasses all that equips one to function effectively in the society. United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010) describes education as comprising organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. For Okorosaye-Orubite (2019) Education is a social creation, designed to meet the specific needs of the society at any particular point in it. The society determines the form, content, methodology and clientele of its education. Nzewu (1985) sees education in terms of the role it plays as part of the society. He describes it as the preparation of individual to live in the society and thus, be able to perform specific functions for the society. Pauley and Buseri (2019) on their own conceptualize education as a socializing agent that equips all its beneficiaries with the necessary tools such as knowledge, skills, attitude, cultural values, language and social skills to enable them conform to the demands of their society. Pope Pius (XI) in his Encyclical Letter of 1929 cited in Iwuoha (2018) defines education as a social task of forming the character of the child and aiding him or her to attain the purpose of existence. To Arinze (1965) Education has to do with the development of the whole man, soul, body, intellect, will, emotion and physical well-being. This means that education is the aggregate of all experiences that enlighten the mind, and develop abilities. It includes both knowledge and such morals that helps strengthen the will of man. From the definitions, education can be said to be all experiences, formal and non-formal, geared towards acquiring knowledge and skills, formation of attitudes and character that are necessary to function effectively in the society.

The Church

The church, in this work, will be defined from two perspectives: as an institution and as an organized body of believers. As an institution, Van-Reken (1999) defines the term “church” as a formal organization that sets out to accomplish specific purposes. He equally explained that the church is an agent which can act, do things, and which can speak because it has its own voice. In addition to the possession a voice of its own, the church equally has its own plans, purposes, structure and officers, a kind of structure that could be likened to governments and schools (Van-Reken, 1999). Thus, the church is an entity, an institution with its own rules, goals and aspirations which it pursues.

As a body of believers in Jesus Christ, Iwe (1979) sees the church as the organized body of people of God; a spiritual and moral force to be reckoned with. In this sense, the church could be regarded as a special people called out for the service of God. Consequently, the church could be seen as an institution and as a body of believers in Christ. Harris (nd) buttressed this when he stated that the church could be seen as both individual believer and the institutional entity.

The History of Education in Nigeria

Education is often spoken of in terms of Western Education. With this notion, it seems to appear that there was no form of education in Nigeria before the advent of western missionaries who brought the western style of education. Traditional and Islamic educations existed, before the coming of western education. Thus, three different traditions of education operate in Nigeria namely: Indigenous or traditional, Islamic and western education. Indigenous education was the earliest type of education in Nigeria. It operated within the pre-literate era and is informal in nature (Ajah, 2015). Indigenous or traditional education was family based and was well established within the community. The family and other members of the community who possessed specialized abilities and skills in various human endeavors provide this form of education. In this setting boys were trained and mentored by their fathers, and other masters in learning various skills and etiquette. Skills such as farming, trading, craftwork, fishing, cattle rearing, wine tapping, black smiting, traditional medicine among others were offered to the boys while the girls were expected to stay back at home and learn home making, hair weaving, dye production, decorations of the body, and the like from their mothers (Mkpa, 2013).

The traditional form of education pre-dates the colonial era. It is often referred to as informal, tribal and community-based education. There were no schools, professional teachers and students with uniforms as obtained in Western education (Ajah, 2015). There were, however, centres for initiation into

adulthood and other social groups, and adult members served as teachers (Esu and Junaid, 2012). This traditional form of education was propagated by Africans within the context of traditional religion and it serves as the process by which every society preserved and transmitted its accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage. This enables the continuity of such cherished values and tradition and foster the wellbeing of everyone (Esu and Junaid, 2012). Indigenous system of education helped to preserve African tradition, culture, beliefs and practices. It was a way of preparing individuals to function positively and actively as adult members of the society.

Before the arrival of western education into Nigeria in the 19th century another educational tradition, Islamic learning had been established (Fafunwa, 1974). Islam, according to Ajah (2015), came into Hausa land in early 14th Century through the activities of traders and scholars who came from Wangarawa to Kano in the days of Ali Yaji. Subsequently, most of the areas that became known as northern Nigeria was Islamized. Along with Islam came Islamic education and Arabic learning. Arabic language is the language of the Quran and is perceived as having enormous spiritual value. Thus, Arabic and Islam were taught at basic or primary levels of education. Those who possessed Arabic and Islamic learning had political and social influence conferred on them leading many of the rulers to employ Islamic scholars as administrators (Mkpa, 2013).

Islamic education was further boosted by the efforts of Uthman Dan Fodio. Ajah (2015) observes that Uthman Dan Fodio's efforts helped to revive, spread and consolidate Islamic studies as well as extending access to education to women. Thus, before Western Education came into Nigeria, Islamic studies had been strongly rooted in the Northern parts of Nigeria and had also made inroads into Western Nigeria. Support for this form of education came from some influential northern leaders. Abdullahi Bayero, Emir of Kano built a Law school for training of Islamic teachers and scholars as well as introduced English and Arithmetic upon his return from Mecca in 1934 (Mkpa, 2013). It should be noted, however that Islamic education was more or less informal in nature and learners were under the tutelage of Mallams and Ulama. These were scholars who specialized in religious learning and teaching. It was estimated that by 1914, about twenty-five thousand (25,000) Quranic schools were already in existence all over Northern Nigeria (Ajah, 2015).

The third educational tradition that operates in Nigeria, Western education, was championed by Christian missionaries in the Mid-19th Century. The development of Western education in Nigeria preceded the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, and of course, the political independence in 1960. The period between 1882-1942 was marked by intensive missionary activities and expansion in Southern Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1974). One of the challenges faced by the missionaries was high level of illiteracy among the natives and language barrier. This gave rise to the need to educate some contact men who were taught English language to act as interpreters to the missionaries (Uko-Avoimoh, 2003). The trained contact men became the link between the missionaries and the natives. The period between 1882 -1942 saw the establishment of various mission in Southern Nigeria. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), Methodist Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Mission, Church of Scotland Mission, Qua Iboe Mission, Basel Mission among others were firmly established in the area (Fafunwa, 1974). The missionaries employed education and schools as means of conversion. Consequently, each of the mission bodies opened schools with special interest on the children without totally disregarding the adults. They considered children more profitable to their venture hence the special interest on them. The Methodist Mission which arrived in 1842 opened a mission and school. In 1878 and 1895, they established the first boys' school and a girls' school at Lagos respectively (Ajah, 2015). From 1846-1849, the CMS opened schools at Abeokuta, Badagry, Lagos and Ibadan, while the Roman Catholic Mission opened theirs in Onitsha area. The famous Hope Waddell Institute was opened in Calabar in 1895 by the Church of Scotland Mission (Taylor 1996). It is a known fact that mission bodies introduced, expanded and developed western-style of education in Nigeria. These schools offered both theoretical and to a large extent, practical learning which helped to arm the learners with skills necessary for life.

Apart from theoretical learning, vocational training was another component of Mission Schools. According to Fafunwa (1974), the missionaries introduced agricultural, carpentry, bricklaying and other vocational learning into their education programme starting from Abeokuta and later to Onitsha, Lokoja and Calabar. Thus, literary and practical learning were fused in those schools. According to Adaralegbe (1983) this emphasis on practical learning reflects the ideas of Thomas Buxton who stated that the missionary, school master and the plough must work together. As a result, by 1864, the missionaries had started a policy of agricultural and other vocational education (Oranelo, 2022).

Another important component of common to all mission schools was the emphasis placed on character training. There was a high regard for morality and discipline. The character of the children was closely and carefully monitored and constantly corrected when and where necessary. The various mission bodies drew up rules that discouraged certain traditional practices and encouraged high morality (Oranelo, 2022). Moral lapses were strongly frowned at and when they were noticed, offenders were severely and promptly punished. The missionaries themselves set a very high standard of morality in both private and public life. Their discipline and morality robbed off on their students. Character training and good code of ethics were enforced. Schools were also supervised and the activities of teachers and the curriculum were regulated by the missionaries through school management boards (Fafunwa, 1974, Adaralegbe, 1983).

It is clear that the story of education in Nigeria cannot be told without mentioning the contributions of the church. Education imparts literary knowledge to an individual and as well molds and shapes his/her character which in turn prepares him/her to be useful, not only to himself or herself, but also to the society and family. The church established schools primarily as a tool for evangelism. In these schools, learners received instruction in letters and vocations that will enable them contribute positively to the development of their society. These learning include physical training, character molding, vocational training, moral training among others. These made the products of mission schools complete and responsible members of their respective society.

Traditional Education existed before western missionaries arrived with their own form of education. Similarly, Islamic education had strong footing in Northern area prior to western education. Traditional education was informal in nature and the family performed the primary role of socializing the child. The coming of the missionaries in the 19th century marked the genesis of formal schooling. The curriculum offered by the missionaries incorporated intellectual knowledge, character formation, high moral and ethical standards for both teachers and learners. In addition, attitudes of cooperation and value for dignity of labour were emphasized through manual work and vocational training. Thus, education was complete and better prepared to learner for life. Onwueme and Ugbor (1994) notes that the traditional education offered by the family cannot offer the complex knowledge and skills which the learner must acquire to be able to live and participate fully in a fast-changing society. Consequently, parents began sending their children to school.

Initially, slaves and servants were sent to school instead of biological children in some societies. This was so because manual labour and corporal punishment were meted out for misbehaviours (Ajah, 2015). As time passed, the slaves that were exposed to formal education became the slave masters. It has been noted that literary, moral and manual/industrial education was pursued by the missionaries, however literary and moral education appeared to become superior to manual and vocational training. Those with literary education tended to be more valuable and more prestigious than those that acquired vocational training. Thus, when people noticed that literary education beneficiaries were accorded more honour and prestige, that clerks were better paid and respected, they encouraged their children to go for literary knowledge (Adaralegbe, 1983) and literary education began to be valued more than manual/industrial education. Subsequently, it became fashionable to aspire for and obtain the needed certification that enabled one to enter the civil service and the rise in social status. This preference of head knowledge over vocational and industrial education in Nigeria has persisted till date. This is seen in the rush for university degrees with little or no skill to become wealth creators and employers of labour. Majority

of the certificate holders only wait for employment into the civil service or by some multinationals, a clear case of inadequate preparation for life by our education system.

In the defunct western region (1955-1979), according to Ajah (2015) modern schools were established. This was followed by opening of technical secondary schools and trade centres by the authorities at Federal and State levels. The establishment of these technical and vocational centres buttresses the fact that from the onset the missionaries' aim of promoting literary, moral and industrial education was not fully actualized. As at the middle of 20th century, industrial and manual education was yet to thrive while literary and moral education flourished. An educated person at this time was one who had a good command of English language, etiquette, good dress code and high morals (Oko and Uko-Aviomah 2005). Even with the slow progress of industrial education, the other aspects were high in standard and quality. This, Nwangwu (2002) observes, was possible because there was a serious, regular and thorough monitoring and supervision by the educational boards manned by the missionaries to ensure consistency in quality.

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced with free education in the then Western region in 1955. This programme was later introduced to other parts of the country. The aim of the program was to improve access to education to all and sundry. Following the introduction of UPE, there was a sharp increase in school enrolments which resulted in higher literacy rate (Taiwo, 1984). The program witnessed increase in female enrolment and of course improved access to education and strengthened the entire educational system of the nation. The successes of UPE notwithstanding, it encountered some challenges. These include poor funding, inadequate infrastructure and lack of teachers leading to high teacher-pupil ratio. According to Nwangwu (2002) many children studied under the tree and substandard teachers were hurriedly employed to help out as enrolment exceeded expectations. As a result, there was consistent decline in the quality of teachers, schools were poorly inspected and monitored by ministry officials and teaching materials were in short supply and grossly inadequate (Okoro, 1991). Gradually, the quality of teaching and learning began to decline. It is important to, note that the UPE was not run by missionaries and the management style was strikingly different. Emphasis was placed on literary training while moral and character formation was relegated almost to the background. While the UPE came with a strong bias towards academic learning, the missionary schools still existed and offered academic and moral training to the learners. Western education was more strongly rooted and widely established in Southern Nigerian than the Northern parts.

Shortly after independence, the UPE was reintroduced. It was much the same as the pre-independence UPE and the flaws that attended the former was also manifest in the later (Oranelo, 2022). In the period of the civil war, the East Central government attempted takeover of schools citing the effects of the war, inability to support the schools and the need to maintain standard as reasons. Other state governments quickly implemented the policy of taking over schools from the mission agencies (Taiwo, 1984). In 1970, shortly after the civil war, government took over all missionary schools. According to Efobi (2011), government took over mission schools and hospitals in order to combat tribalism. Secondly, education was seen as a huge government venture and no longer private enterprise (Imam, 2012). Consequently, schools were effectively wrestled from the church and this came with its own consequences.

The result of this take over was that the moral and character molding, which characterized missionary schools gradually eroded. Little or no attention was paid to learners' character, morality and ethics. Secondly, many of the teachers, who themselves were products of UPE, lacked the needed moral training and thus did not possess the virtue to pass on to the learners (Oranelo, 2022). Most of the products of our educational system were and are with little or no foundation in morals and good character. This resulted in vices such as unruly and restive behavior, cultism and drug abuse. It is not uncommon to find students engaging in armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution, alcoholism, examination malpractice, murder, students' riot among others. The teacher themselves

collude with students to cheat in examination, receive monetary inducement or sexual gratification to inflate scores. In addition, teachers dodge their responsibilities leading to poor teaching and learning. Another factor that contributes to the rot in the nation's education sector is apparent government neglect. This neglect manifests in poor funding, inadequate infrastructure and policy inconsistency. The incessant industrial actions in our schools at all levels are pointers to poor funding and mismanagement in the sector. Furthermore, teachers in our schools were and are poorly paid which encourages dereliction of duty. The schools are ill-equipped with little or no learning materials. These, along with lack of effective monitoring and supervision of schools are factors that encourage decline in education in Nigeria. The takeover of schools was not essentially a bad idea, but the failure of government to adequately fund education, supervise and improve the condition of schools led to further decay in system. Consequently, new private schools were opened by individuals and religious bodies. The sharp drop in the quality of education and moral decadence in our society prompted concerned minds to advocate for return of schools to their former owners.

The decline in moral education in both public and private schools led to calls for the return of missionary schools and for various missions to establish school which will cater for both academic and moral training of learners. Churches opened nursery, primary and secondary schools, and recently universities and polytechnics. Although education is not a cheap venture, parents still struggle to enroll their children in mission schools where they are assured of good moral training and quality academics. The reports on the teaching and learning offered by the mission schools, Oranelo (2022) states had been very encouraging. Many parents are satisfied with the training their wards receive. On realizing that academics and morality are still possible and that the education sector can be salvaged, calls began to be made for the return of mission schools by government of various states. In response to this call, some states did return schools to their original owners.

The first state to return missionary schools was Lagos state (Oranelo, 2022). The state did this with the hope of seeing an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Some other states such as Imo, Ogun, Plateau and Anambra equally returned schools to their original owners. It was reported that Anambra returned 1,040 primary schools (Ajah, 2015) and a number secondary schools to their original owners. Most missions such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterian churches, were and are working assiduously to restore moral training, quality learning and the past glory of their schools. This, according to Oranelo (2022) resulted in some parents withdrawing their children from public schools to mission schools. Mission bodies have proved that school can be properly managed and quality teaching and learning maintained. This is seen, for instance in the rate of success recorded by Anambra State in external examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council and National Examination council in recent years (sunnewsonline.com, August 28, 2018).

There is no gainsaying the fact that the churches have been championing and maintaining high standard of academics and morality in their schools. This tradition was started by missionaries who laid emphasis on character molding and academic training. The takeover of schools, though done with good intentions, suffered from abuse and poor funding leading to further decay in the standard of education. The recent return of schools to mission bodies bears witness to the fact that churches are better placed to manage the schools, maintain morality and improve supervision which can lead to improved learning. It is true that moral standard of today's schools cannot measure up to that obtainable in the days of early missionaries, but church owned schools have been working hard to take education and their schools back to their former glory.

The church and sustainable education in Nigeria

Without any doubt, education is aimed at preparing the learner to be productive and adapt fully to the society. This implies that both academic learning and character formation are important aspects of education. It has been established that the mission founded schools of old integrated learning and character molding in their curriculum which resulted in all round education for the learners. The church, on account of her position as a spiritual force, is better placed to inculcate sound morals, ethics and

etiquette to the learner. This will enable them to function effectively in the society. Secondly, the church understands schools not merely as a place where values which are being actively lived are presented but also a community whose values are being transmitted through the interpersonal and sincere relationship of its members and through individual and cooperative adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school (Iwuoha, 2018). Thus, the values of love, cooperation, dignity of labour, sincerity, sincere relationships and hardwork which the church upholds are transmitted by mission schools.

The government alone cannot provide education for all the citizens. This fact is seen in governments' policy of returning schools to missions and liberalizing the license to establish tertiary institutions. Following this development, a number of churches have established universities, polytechnics and other institutions of higher learning. Notable among churches that have established tertiary institutions are the Living Faith Church, The Roman Catholic Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Anglican church, the Assemblies of God Church, Deeper Life Bible Church among others. Besides this development, there are various basic and secondary schools established and ran by the churches. Through these schools, the churches have been contributing to the development of education in Nigeria. In the mission schools, discipline is taken seriously. There is constant and effective monitoring and supervision by the various education boards and committees set up by the churches. The boards and committees ensure that quality is maintained. This helps to reduce incidents of indiscipline, truancy and neglect of duties by the teachers. It also helps to maintain high level of discipline among pupils and students. The careful supervision and management of mission schools ensures also that corruption and misappropriation are reduces to the barest minimum, which enables the schools to function smoothly.

Draw backs to church's intervention in education

Taking the schools back to their former glory is not without some challenges. One of these is funding. Education is indeed capital intensive; it requires enormous material resources to build and operate schools. To meet the high demand in school operations, high school fees are charged, and these fees are exorbitant when compared to public schools. This high cost of school fees leaves the low-income earners with little or no chance of enrolling their wards into mission schools. Thus, the mission owned schools, to a large extent, are the exclusive reserve of the haves while the have nots are left with what the public schools can offer.

With the cost of school fees in mission schools, it does appear as if the churches establish schools solely for profit making. It is important to note that the mission bodies today depend on the fees to run the schools as there are no grants and subventions from anywhere, unlike in the days of the missionaries. Because of the high cost of providing quality education, the church cannot provide quality education without charging school fees. The government, international organizations and donor agencies need to support the efforts of the mission bodies in this regard with grants and learning materials so that the aim of seeing an improved educational system and providing quality education at an affordable cost is achieved.

Conclusion

No doubt, the church has played and still plays an important role in the education sector in Nigeria. Quality education is germane to nation building, growth and development of both the economic and political system. Mission schools have been consistent in training both the mind and character, a training that upholds dignity of labour and the culture of hardwork. At a point in the history of educational development in Nigeria, morality began to decline. Along with it came the decline in teaching and learning leading to the production of half-backed graduates and increase in social vices. However, the church, as the conscience of the nation has the ability to restore quality learning in our schools. This ability was recognized when some state governments return schools to their original owners. However, funding remains a huge challenge in the church's effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. A partnership between the government, donor agencies and the mission bodies in this regard will yield better result.

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