

Integrating the Secondary School System with the African Autochthonous Philosophy of Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Schools and educational institutions are set up to achieve goals that are assigned to them by stakeholders. They are expected to make pupils successful in life. In Nigeria, efforts are often made at the formal level to have a more encompassing secondary education system. Not much has been achieved over the years. Buttressing this would require analysing why the 6-3-3-4 has failed to achieve most of its goals in Nigeria. Also, that Technical and Polytechnic education has not been popular in Nigeria shows that not all is well with this cadre. Many stakeholders are myopic on what is philosophically expected of the secondary school system's goals for their wards. This paper argues that pupils are expected to be infused with life-skills and creativity. Making good grades in examinations and getting admitted into tertiary institutions should not be the sole goal of schooling. Consequently, we advocate a secondary school^{+[PLUS]} system. The^{+[PLUS]}, if achieved, would shift the boundary and goals of the Nigerian education system for an envisaged better secondary school system. The paper thus recommends that the secondary school system should encourage an interface of stakeholders, i.e. government, old students' associations, parents, teachers, learners, host communities, etc. both at the formal and informal levels. The Nigerian educational system should embrace the African apprenticeship system of education of artisan workshops and sports academies with a view to creating well-rounded educated persons. The paper is qualitative philosophical research that is analytical and critical, using a problem-centric approach to arrive at the conclusion the basis of which it proffered a few suggestions aimed at perfecting the Nigerian school system.

Keywords: *Secondary school, Life skills, Education-plus.*

Introduction

The secondary school is a mid-level cadre of learning in Nigeria. Within the formal educational setting, it is the level after primary or basic education.

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Prior to what is operational today, secondary education had a five-year duration. Today, however, secondary education is divided into two strands of 'Junior Secondary School' (J.S.S.) that is ceded to the first six years of primary education called 'Basic Education' under a '6-3' system, or a standalone 'Junior Secondary School.' It may also be part of a 'Senior Secondary School' system in order to have a '3-3' secondary component of the Nigerian formal education structure of '6-3-3-4.' That is the 'primary (6 years) -junior secondary (3 years) -senior secondary (3 years) -tertiary education (4 years) school system' respectively.¹

The secondary education system in Nigeria is an offshoot of the modern secondary school system. The secondary schools emerged out of the Colonial modern school secondary education system. The secondary school in Nigeria is usually designated as a grammar school, college or comprehensive school and in some cases 'academy.' The question that may come to one's mind is why are some are called grammar schools? This was the practice for the Anglican mission-owned schools. The first being CMS Grammar School, Bariga, Lagos (founded on June 06, 1859) in Nigeria. It was basically a British colonial heritage that is still largely retained. Here, we must note that technical, vocational and teacher's colleges were strictly not so classified or designated.

What is a grammar school? From its British origin, a grammar school is simply a government-owned school that was distinguished by the fact that entrance examinations were used to admit only very bright pupils into the schools. Invariably, those who were adjudged to be unqualified to be admitted into a grammar school were admitted into various comprehensive schools or colleges. Another trait of the British grammar school system was that they were neighbourhood schools that may also have boarding facilities even though a good number of her pupils were 'day' students. In order words, students who attend schools 'daily' from home. So being government-owned schools, admitting pupils by merit and being neighbourhood schools characterised a school that is called a *grammar school*.

We can thus discern that calling a school 'grammar' does not in any way imply that it is a place for the teaching of grammar, classics and the humanities. It was simply a secondary school within a given neighbourhood owned by the government and funded by the taxpayer.

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Nevertheless, it was established for bright students. Let us underscore a point. During the colonial era, most of the mission schools were generally quasi-government-owned schools because they were given ‘Grants-in-Aid’ by the Colonial Government. This practice was sustained for a long time in post-colonial Nigeria. Hence, they were affordable schools for almost anyone whose parents valued education. So, as Ejiogu noted,

These earliest schools were the handiwork of Christian missions who laboured unaided by the colonial government until 1883 when, following the recommendations in the 1882 Education Ordinance, the colonial government made a grant of 425 pounds to the missions whose educational expenditure at the time amounted to about 5000 pounds that same year. The first government Secondary School in Nigeria, King’s College, Lagos, came into being in 1909.²

The fact of inadequacies in the secondary school system of education in Nigeria is well-established by scholars over the years. However, what a few scholars have identified as inadequacy missed the point hence the failures in the solutions proffered by experts. It was generally believed that this was fallout from the British educational heritage imposed on Nigeria. ‘... The dilemma of secondary education in Nigeria over the years was what has to do with the traditional grammar school which was inherited from the British. The traditional grammar school was mainly concerned with ‘pumping a great deal of academic knowledge into the pupil’s head and this, in turn, was used to test his ‘intelligence’ and suitability for further education.’³ For example, Ejiogu, states that Awokoya

enumerated what subject ought to feature in our secondary school curriculum. For him, these should include Nigerian and European languages, the already too familiar humanities, fundamental (basic) sciences (including the space sciences), applied sciences (such as Mechanics, dietetics, agriculture, architecture and building technology, engineering technology and horology), social sciences, and cultural arts.⁴

Not much has changed to this day. A major shortcoming in Nigeria’s secondary educational system is that it never overcame most of its traditional problems. The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system is generally judged as not just a total failure, but one that has failed at a huge financial cost. It is our view that this failure in both policy and implementation will persist as much as the government and experts treat the African indigenous

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system of education with disdain. Indeed, this is worse because not many are even ready to accord the African indigenous system of education a status of being a 'standard' educational system in the first place.

The indigenous system of education has been with Africans before the advent of colonisation. It was an apprenticeship system of education. Its approach was a learning system in which experts in trades and other vocations usually have a school of limited pupils who learn their craft or trade until a period they are 'given freedom.' This system of learning still exists alongside the European model built around the formal school system that operates with classrooms, curriculum, examination and issuance of certificates. The fact that the traditional system still exists in spite of the lack of governmental support shows that it is still very relevant. More importantly, its heuristic and pragmatic value rest in the fact that most Nigerians depend on their products, such as automobile mechanics, tailors, bricklayers and masons, carpenters, cobblers, plumbers, electricians, sign writers, sculptors, farmers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, to mention a few; all trained through this African system of education. It must be noted that unemployment is strange to the products of this system of education. At graduation, they are *given* 'freedom' not certificates to be used to seek employment or further their studies. The 'freedom ceremony' that is often carried out as a public ceremony is an attestation to the fact that the mentee is now qualified to independently practice the trade they have learnt.

The position we wish to defend here is that policymakers in education should interface the Nigerian secondary school system with the traditional system of education. Undergoing this system of training should be made compulsory for all pupils. No doubt, there will be a need to upgrade the practitioners especially teachers and administrators who drive the educational sector at this level. Interestingly, almost every community in Nigeria boast of the presence of this cadre of traditional education. Effort should be consciously put towards achieving this goal for the development of our society. Indeed, an educational system that is not built upon the existing African system of education is bound to be dysfunctional.

Benchmarking the goals of the secondary school

For what purpose is a secondary school education pursued? A good way to answer this question is to delve into what education represents to a given people. Loosely, education is defined as the transmission of worthwhile

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values from an older generation to the next generation. Education involves a learning process. All learning processes are bipolar. There is a teacher or a deliverer on the one hand; and a learner, student or receiver on the other hand. Education involves *content* that must be passed on from teachers to learners. Experts have called these content worthwhile values. But who determines worthwhile values? Culture and society are its main determiners! Invariably, stakeholder sought to choose the *contents* of what is learned in the formal school system.

Officially, this is what a good secondary education is expected to entail in Nigeria as put forth in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE):

Section 5 – Secondary Education

20 Secondary education is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage;

21 The broad goals of secondary education shall be to prepare the individual for:

- (a) Useful living within the society; and
- (b) Higher education;

22 In specific terms, secondary education shall:

- (a) Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- (b) Offer a diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- (c) Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- (d) Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world cultural heritage;
- (e) Inspire its students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- (f) Foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- (g) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- (h) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;

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23 To achieve the stated goals, secondary education shall be six years in duration, given in two stages, a junior secondary school stage and a senior school stage; each shall be of three years.⁵

It is within the above framework or context that we can talk about expanding the learning frontiers of secondary education. Consequently, the new boundaries we shall draw are within the policy framework of the *National Policy on Education* of Nigeria; *vide* the Nigerian system of secondary education. But all this is about ‘formal education.’ To buttress this point, in 2014, the sixth edition of the *National Policy on Education* was issued and the section, now section three, on ‘secondary education’ was changed to ‘Post-Basic Education and Career Development (PBECD).’ This new policy envisaged a system that will provide life skills for learner. It listed such skills to be part of the curriculum of the Senior Secondary Education.⁶ In spite of this, no mention was made of integrating the age-old African system of education with the new formal method, a lacuna that has formed the basis of this paper.

‘Informal education’ is antecedent to formal education. It also continues where and when formal education stops. It is entrenched in our homes and communities. It is life-long, even though not structured and organised. No educational system can be said to be adequate and complete if this aspect – often derided and jettisoned – is not encompassed in the Nigerian formal education structure. Policymakers run away from it but the society ends up embracing it with all its crooked edges. We shall make a few remarks on how the frontiers of the existing secondary school system can be extended to this form (i.e. so-called informal) of education.

Two impediments to the secondary schools’ goal

There is a common saying that one can only give what one has. A major impediment to the Nigerian secondary school systems is that it offers very little to its stakeholders so much so that even its operators, as teachers, administrators, parents and political leaders, are neither guided nor guarded by its manual – i.e. well-written, well-thought out, and well-articulated government policies – on education in Nigeria. Ask many teachers –who are major drivers of the secondary educational system - what the policy on education entails, and how they engage it as teaching manual, the most that they may give as answer is that the content of the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) was studied in the college or university. Theory without

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practice is useless! Therefore, ways should be adopted to inscribe the goals of the NPE and the values of education it sets out to promote in conspicuous spaces of the Nigerian school system as reminders to all stakeholders of what they represent in institutions of learning.

With what yardstick are the outcomes of our school products or leavers measured? For most people, it is ‘Five Credits pass that must include Mathematics and English’, and perhaps an ability to use the ‘school certificate’ to secure admission into a university. Nothing is as devastating as this! Teaching is not merely a process to impart knowledge on students, nor one of merely giving and receiving educational advice. It is neither solely transmitting information to the students nor sharing one’s own experience alone. Teaching entails establishing a cordial relationship among the teachers, the students and the subjects. Teachers are meant to facilitate learning, provide opportunities for students to express themselves and encourage them to better performance towards attaining being educated persons. Learning occurs when there is a change in behaviour of the student for the better; that is brought about by students’ activities, training and or life experiences. It is expedient that learning never ends. Teachers and students are permanent learners. Competencies and skills are acquired through learning. Here, the existing secondary education structure seems to have failed to ‘offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.’⁷

Life skills as the secondary school’s benchmark

What the student requires, and by which their success or failure in learning should be measured, is Life Skills. Life Skills are defined as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviours. They enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.⁸ According to UNICEF, the purpose of life skills is to empower young people to take positive actions to protect themselves and to promote health and positive social relationships.

Life skills education enables learners to acquire timely and relevant information, respond to opportunities, respond to challenges and cope with the ever-changing needs of society. If this must be for the happiness and success of students, and the productivity and success of society, then educators need to admit, face and address life skills crises. Acquisition and application of life skills can influence the way an individual feels about

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others. Mastering life skills will lead to living life fully and productively.⁹

Life skills education helps students to find new ways of thinking and developing problem-solving approaches, recognise the impact of their actions; and it also teaches them to take responsibility for what they do rather than blame others. Life skills education builds confidence in spoken skills, group collaboration and cooperation, analysing options, making decisions and understanding why they make certain choices outside the classroom. Life skills develop a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation for others. Life skills can be innumerable, some specific to certain risk situations and others of a generic nature.¹⁰

WHO and UNESCO enumerated ten core life skills that are further subdivided into Social Skills, Thinking Skills and Emotional Skills. Social skills are communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, empathy and self-awareness. Thinking skills are problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, and critical thinking. Emotional skills are coping with stress, and coping with emotions. Apart from this, we may add to any modern learning life skills, teachers' study skills and teaching skills. These constitute the added skills to the WHO's ten core skills. Teaching skills cover classroom management, subject mastery and teaching methods. These skills may stand as distinguishing factors among teachers. Teaching skills are overt observable behaviours that can be observed, measured and modified. Teachers are expected to plan classroom activities in order to bring the best out of the students. The teachers' roles are to facilitate, collaborate, mentor and direct. Teachers are expected to give students more options and responsibilities for their own learning.¹¹

Referring to the *NPE*, Section 4, 20 (b-h), we can conclude that in the light of the impartation of requisite Life Skills and creativity on pupils, the secondary education school system in Nigeria cannot be said to have achieved much. It may have produced high-quality professionals and human resources in various fields of human endeavours. Nevertheless, it can be stated that many products of secondary education are still groping and wondering if they got a good deal from secondary education system.

A good but insufficient way to overcome the lapses of the educational system, in order to go on to build a better secondary education system, is to continuously organise *In-Service-Training* for Teachers and School Administrators on the above learning values and skills. Be that as it may, the

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skills must interface the informal education offered by the African indigenous system of education. They are measurable skills and are imbued with values parents can use to benchmark the educational achievements of their wards. Furthermore, the possession of 'education' by their wards involves exhibiting these worthwhile values. The so-called extra-curricular activities inserted in Nigerian school' testimonials should not be minimised or relegated to the background in our secondary education system.

The secondary education and its problematic

The foregoing analysis, in the light of our school system, shows that even though secondary education may have achieved more in the area of manpower production for societal workforce, especially in the industry and public service, it has failed woefully in the spheres of basic vocational skills and in the impartation and improving upon of innate, in-born human skills. These are the areas the school system should identify, interface and proffer solutions.

Has the system, for example, been able to produce sportsmen and women that have represented Nigeria and won medals at the African and global levels? If it has not done so remarkably and consistently it is because of a misplaced belief that good secondary schools are the ones with standard classrooms, staff rooms, laboratories and libraries. Good school system must be more than this. It should have good sports facilities, good instructors/trainers in sports, music, craft and the arts. A good secondary education system is one that has good school counsellors who are professional by every standard. It is one that interfaces parents in the most obstinate of ways with a view to bringing out the best in their wards. Hence the position of the NPE thus, a secondary system that will:

- Inspire its students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.¹²

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Fortunately, the Nigerian secondary school system of education has a basis for the above. School leavers were usually issued ‘school testimonials’ that had provision for three headings: (i) academic ratings of the students; (ii) character of the students; and (iii) extra-curricular activities of the students. Unfortunately, stakeholders and society at large never gave serious attention to the so-called extra-curricular activities of their wards. A child that is properly trained would have made enough money and fame as an under 30yo and would still have the opportunity to pursue a good education if the system could harness and transform the life-skills’ potentials of its pupils. Can the secondary education system of today achieve this? Of course, it can, only if it has well-planned all-rounded personality training school programmes for its wards!

Towards achieving a secondary school^{+[plus]}

There is no Nigerian community that is devoid of artisans and vocational workers such as bricklayers and masons, automobile mechanics, tailors, cobblers, shoemakers, painters, carpenters, plumbers, farmers – crop, fish and poultry - electricians, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, and many more. The Nigerian secondary schools system should, in conjunction with parents, register pupils as trainees (commonly called apprentices) in these trades during the long holiday period as part of their secondary education. On the average, this will give learners a cumulative period of 12-months training in six years at the minimum. This is one way of expanding the secondary school’s frontiers towards embracing the African autochthonous informal education sphere. It is imperative for government and stakeholders to attach, for example Sports Academies to existing stadiums’ facilities that are currently largely under-utilised in Nigeria. The thinking is that students with sporting skills should be made to concurrently/simultaneously pursue sporting/training programmes in their grammar school years. This is the only way they can become world-class athletes. Today, sports are business!

Education ought to make learners complete and well-formed individuals that are useful to the society and self. A society with a good educational system never has unproductive people. The paper thus articulates an educational system that will make learners realise their full potential as human beings. Such education was envisaged by the early Roman poet, Juvenal, who held a philosophy of ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body – *mens sana in corpore sano!*’ Add this to the fact that health is

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wealth!

Our schools ought to be centres where the best of our youth's abilities are discovered and developed to their full potential. The development of the full potential of our wards in other life skills they may possess is missing in our school system - in music, entertainment and in all other aspects of human creativity.

There are two ways the youth of any nation may be perceived. Negatively, they may be judged as a liability. Where this is the case, institutions see them as *enemies* that should be kept at bay. Many public institutions from primary to tertiary levels usually treat the youth under their steads as liabilities that should be dispensed off as quickly as possible.

The other way of treating the Nigerian youth is by seeing them as agents of development, change and national pride. We subscribe to this attitude. Consequently, we propose a reversal of the negative attitude and go on to argue that platforms for sporting and other creative programmes built on business models, should be adopted and developed in our schools. The gain of this is that the Nigerian youth would constitute the base of Nigerian pride. Therefore, we suggest that all our institutions should be interfaced with Sports Academies and local artisan's workshops and craftsmanship of our communities. The academies should be domiciled at our various Sports Centres and artisans' workshops. Our institutions must work with our various artisans and craftsmen in order to have well-trained all-rounded and fully developed children with Life Skills.¹³

Conclusion

The Nigerian secondary school system must, for example, promote viable and robust home economics departments whose curriculums are not limited by course outlines designed to make girls (and only girls) good housewives. It should be able to produce –without gender restrictions - great bakers, hoteliers, and owners of eateries from such a nascent and limited background. Consequently, we cannot but advocate and argue for a secondary education system that would have great relevance for the community and persons. We, therefore, propose an educational system that would be 'talent building' and not a 'talent quenching,' and one that would add to the existing superstructure and infrastructure of existing secondary school education system.

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Existing literature in the psychology of development and learning shows that at the secondary school age grade, pupils are capable of, and better prepared to learn various trades alongside other academic activities. The secondary stage is regarded by psychologists as the period of ‘gang age’, ‘the age of conformity’ and the ‘age of creativity’.¹⁴ This is the stage that falls within the age bracket of 6 to 11 years. The period covered a normal child in the secondary school system. Ajoku et al point out that at this stage, ‘they should acquire social, schooling and play skills’ and listed that essential ‘development tasks to develop these skills [as] identified by Havighurst as, among others’ earning a physical skill or motor skill for ordinary games. This implies that some of the skills are acquired by children through interaction with their peers. The parents and teachers should enable them to develop these motor skills through proper coordination, supervision and teaching.’¹⁵ Given this, it is therefore imperative that these learners are configured to accept being integrated into the African traditional learning system in their communities.

If this is achieved, we would have expanded and extended the frontiers of the secondary education system in Nigeria by recognising and embracing the so-called traditional apprentice system of education into the existing formal system currently being operated. If this is carried out, then we would have worked towards achieving the vision “to establish a modern and vibrant education system that ensures the maximum development of the potentials of individuals and promotes a knowledge-driven society that propels the nation’s development” as envisioned by the Nigerian State.¹⁶

Endnotes :

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