

COMMERCIALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE PROS AND CONS

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Abstract

Education has been adjudged the tool that brings enlightenment and development, and delivers a man from ignorance and darkness. This is the reason for which the world over is clamouring for access to quality education for every individual. These gave rise for the United Nations agreement for Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals amongst others. Funding of education is an expensive venture and a capital intensive project. One way nations have funded and sustained their education system is through privatization of education. For Nigeria in spite of the commercialization there is still the hue and cry for the unemployable youths roaming the streets without relevant skills for functional living, lack of learning facilities, poor teaching and learning process, shortage of qualified teachers and support personnel and so on. Commercialization of education is about creating access to quality education; whether the access is for profit making at the expense of quality is a burning issue at the table of education providers and stakeholders. The intention of this paper is to x-ray the issue of commercialization of education in Nigeria, looking at the pros and cons; to give a critical discussion of commercialization as it relates to Nigeria, and its positive and negative impact on the education system, the learners and the Nigerian project, and to suggest which way forward.

Keywords: Education, Commercialization, Pros and Cons.

The dwindling economy the world over has become a major source of concern for many nations including Nigeria. It has lead to the government not being able to meet her basic responsibilities to its citizens. This has led to many nations taking some drastic steps to tackle this challenge. One of such is sourcing for financial support from private sector in the way of privatizing some

sectors of the economy. One of such areas that have witnessed mass privatization and commercialization is the education sector. Nigeria began to witness this phenomenon in the year 1979 though short lived as at then but started in earnest in 1999. Commercialization of education is about making education sector to be business like, such that it could raise funds needed to provide the necessary resources needed

for quality education. Education therefore has been opened to private and corporate ownership. Individuals now establish and run schools from the early childhood level to the university level.

This action has generated a lot of controversy as per its impact on the education system and the society. Some school of thought has it that this step is against the fundamental human right of the citizens of Nigeria as commercialization of education has made education very expensive. Furthermore, they believe that commercialization of education has not added any value or quality to the education system as the Nigeria society is still singing the same old song of fall in the standard of education, both in quality and quantity (Atunuga, 2005; Ibrahim 2008 and Leba, 2014).

Another school of thought has it that commercialization of education will help boost the level of education in Nigeria. This is by the way of providing more access to education, the private schools providing more committed teachers, learning facilities, alternatives for parents and their wards to choose from amongst others. Placing these two views side by side which one can we say is more beneficial to Nigeria as a nation; which has contributed to the growth and development of Nigeria as a nation. Since the privatization of schools over three decades ago, what are the landmark achievements, made so far? A critical analysis of these scenarios is what this paper will try to do. This is to enable us make wise decision as to the way forward for our education

system bearing in mind our teeming youth who are the hope of the Nigerian nation.

Conceptual Issues Education

Education as a concept has no universally accepted definition. It is however believed to be the only veritable tool for man's emancipation from ignorance, poverty, marginalization and economic empowerment. It is fundamental for success in life for the individual and the society. Asaju and Sunday (2014) see education as a process of teaching and training in schools for the development of knowledge and skills, preparing the individual for functional living in the society. To Usoro (2016), it is the vehicle through which the human societies preserve, sustain and transfer their cultural values and ideals for the growth and development of the society; to improve the standard of living of the society. Education is the training of individuals, equipping them with the right kind of knowledge, skills and competencies to make them useful to themselves and to the society (Victor-Ishikaku, 2017). Education though connotes different meanings to different individuals due to dispensations of time; culture and level of civilization, has a basic denomination; the all round development of human beings which will also metamorphose to the development of the society. It is agreed to be concerned with bringing about positive changes in the human societies.

With this understanding of education in mind, it is therefore a fact that education is the greatest investment any

nation can embark on amongst all its natural resources. Education is the fundamental factor for development and as such, investing in human development through education cannot be overemphasized (Umaru, 2013). Effective management and utilization of other natural resources hinges on mans' ability and knowledge (human resource development) which in turn is a factor of quality education. In spite of this truism that the index for a nations development depends on its quality of education, Nigeria is still bedeviled by a lot of teething problems in her education system. The echoes in the society are witnesses to this fact, that Nigeria is yet to fulfill her mandate as stated in the National Policy Education (FRN, 2014) across board; from the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to the higher education sector (Otunuga, 2005; Okere, 2005; Ibrahim, 2008; and Uduk, 2016). Such issues as declining state of education, lack of learning facilities, shortage of qualified teachers and personnel, examination malpractice, graduates without employable skills, inadequate funding amongst others are front burner issues in every debate. The level of illiteracy as stated by Ibe-Bassey (2009) was about 66.9% in 2006. This is worrisome as more than half the population of Nigeria is uneducated and painfully so as they are mostly youths, the leaders of tomorrow. About a decade after former vice president of Nigeria Atiku Abubakar in a youth entrepreneur conference in Lagos in 2017 said...the number of out of school children in Nigeria was about 10 million while India

with the population that is 8 times higher than that of Nigeria has only about 1.8 million out of school children. This shows that no appreciable progress has been made. Could this be the reason for commercializing education; to make quality education accessible to the citizenry?

Commercialization of Education

Commercialization comes from the root word commerce. Commerce means trade (Hornby, 2000); exchange of goods and services for money. Commercial is associated with trading goods and services with the intention of maximizing profit. Commercialize on this light according to the author is about using goods and services to make financial gain in a manner that is not acceptable or approved by others; being more concerned with the financial gain and popularity than quality. Commercialization is the process of exchanging goods and services for financial gains with the sole aim of maximizing profit. Drawing from this understanding therefore commercialization of education is about trading education as goods and services for financial gains (profit), and of course at the expense of quality education. Borgohaim (2016) sees it as a process of introducing a service or product into the market; to sell and make gains. Commercialization of education as defined by Shubham (2016) is the ownership and management of formal education institutions by private individuals or corporate bodies outside the government with the intention of making profit. To Otunuga (2005) it is a system

where the learner pays for their education without government funding. The learner bears the cost of education more than the government and so the learner has more say in the affairs of the school as they fund their education. This leads to decreasing emphasis on humanity, but increasing attention on the demand of the learner as the learner pays the fee (Borgohain, 2016), as the saying goes “he who pays the piper detects the tune”.

Commercialization of education is a phenomenon that connotes different meanings and could occur in different ways. To Santiago (2016) it could be advertising products and services through the school, sell of products and rendering of services for profit in school and such like. It could be altering or disrupting the school programme for such commercial purposes (Docc, 2016). It could also occur at different levels in the school system, administrative and instructional (Singh, 2018). Administrative commercialization of education occurs where the school is run like a business with the purpose of making profit. This involves carrying out the administration processes of the school in a business manner such as in making policies, teacher-learner relationship, cost-effect budgeting and such like. Instructional commercialization of education is where the teaching-learning process is cost-effect driven; the teaching-learning process is carried out for producing product (graduates) for the market. Records from reviewed literature showed that the major reason for commercialization of education is the poor funding of schools. Inadequate funding of

school by the government, created a lot of gaps in the school system. This resulted in a lot of unpleasant policies in the school system to take care of these dwindling resources in the school system. Such policies as high school fees in government schools, quota system, disparity in cut-off mark for admission into government schools, priority for alleged educationally disadvantaged region, lack of accountability in the school system by principal officers and corrupt practices. In a bid to contain some of those challenges gave rise to privatization and commercialization of education (www.universityworldnews .com, 2018).

Impact of Commercialization of Education in Nigeria

The impact of commercialization of education of the Nigeria system can be seen from different perspectives; the learner, the society, public school and private schools. To the society, it witnessed paradigm shift in education from service to business resulting in great education expansion and privatization. This has given rise to mushrooming private schools across the country which is very expensive to attend. This has changed the perception of people about the purpose of education; perception that contradicts the traditional and concepts of education as a social service and has affected people’s attitude towards learning. People have developed consumer attitude towards education. Education is now seen as a commodity that can be purchased with money just like any other commodity. The resultant effect is the downplaying of

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value based education for paper qualifications.

On the other hand, the impact of commercialization of education on the society is that it has lead to increase in the number of schools. Individuals now have alternatives to choose from especially where the system allows the injustice of quota system, disparities in number for admission based on state of origin and even on cut-off points for admission in the case of higher institution, and the cases of incessant strike actions in the public school. Learners will no longer waste unnecessarily long time in schools. Again security in the private school campuses are guaranteed than in the public school, facilities and other learning resources are provided and such like. Accessibility to education and quality of education also is said to be better (Shubham, 2016).

On the part of the learner, commercialization of education gives the learner a very wrong orientation about life. Learners see education as a commodity to be bought with money, no longer acquired through the tilt of hard work and diligence. This has resulted in sharp practices, corruption and examination malpractice in the school system. This has affected teacher-learner relationship and downplayed the purpose of education as a way of life rather than a means to an end. Specifically, the impacts of commercialization of education as highlighted by Borgohain (2016) on the positive aspects are;

1. It creates employment opportunities

2. It brings economic growth and development
3. It prepares the learner to face global challenges
4. Enhances personality development
5. Provides platform for quality education
6. Brought increased access to education
7. Enhances social development of the learner

The negative impacts are;

1. It has orchestrated the emphasizes on paper qualifications
2. Emphasizes on profit making
3. Quality education is paid lip service
4. The cost of education is very high and so only the few elitist class have access to them
5. Monetizes education and certificates through giving the learner very wrong impression about life and learning.
6. Create disparity in curriculum, combining curriculum from different parts of the world
7. Lead to examination malpractice, forgery of certificates, “sorting” and all kinds of education fraud.
8. Increase in the rate of unemployment, poverty, insecurity and lack of economic growth.
9. Increase in the rate of child labour, human trafficking, prostitution and criminality
10. Over population
11. Brain drain, loss of resources to foreign countries through tuition, leading to depletion of the nation

foreign reserve. Currently Nigeria spends 2 billion dollars on tuition overseas.

12. Frustrating the vision of Education For All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

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The issue of the commercialization of education is like the proverbial saying of a bee on a man's scrotum, leaving to kill the bee, it can suck the man's blood until he dies and killing it could end in bursting the man's scrotum. Taking a decision to deal with it is taking a risk either way you want to go. It therefore demands weighing the two options; and following the one with a lesser risk and a better future prospects. A school of thought the Breton Woods Institution has it that if Nigeria commercializes her education system, it was going to reduce her overhead expenditure and improve the quality of her education system as more money will be left to fund education. Through this, Nigeria can compete favourably with other strong economics of the world. Otunuga (2005) argues that this cannot be possible in Nigeria owing to the fact that the Nigeria education system is in crisis due to inadequate funding as seen in table 1(a far cry of the UNESCO recommendation of 26% for education annually), high rate of corruption, misadministration, and unemployment amongst others. Emphasizing further the author said in the US and European countries where education are purported not free (but very expensive), there are

policies and programmes put in place for learners such that the burden of education is not much on them. Such programmes as loan schemes, scholarship, learner job schemes where the learner school and work and so gets paid to finance their school, grants and such like. All these put together make it difficult to place Nigeria at par with these developed countries. And so, education commercialization in Nigeria will only lead to widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

On the other hand another school of thought has it that commercialization of education has given great boost to the level of education in Nigeria. This they say is by the way of private schools providing more access to education as commercialization has lead to increase in the number of schools. Parents and their wards now have several alternatives to choose from. No more waiting endlessly for jamb admissions for years at home without success, especially with the injustice of quota system, giving admission based on state of origin and disparities in the jamb cut off point for different states in the name of educationally disadvantaged areas. Commercialization of education has also solved the problem of spending more years in the university more than required for a course due to incessant strike actions in government schools. Learners no longer have to waste long time in school unnecessarily. Also, security of learners and teachers in private schools are better guaranteed more than in the government schools. It has also lead to the provision of more committed teachers, and learning facilities amongst others. These they said

has given rise to better quality of education (Shubham, 2016)

The Journey So Far

The hue and cry for the government failing to meet the demands of funding education gave rise to the issue of commercialization of education. Despite the recommendations of UNESCO as 26% for education allocation in national budget in developing countries, the percentage allocation has remained almost static and grossly inadequate in spite of the fact that the national budget of Nigeria is increasing almost on yearly bases.

Table 1: Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to Education (2009-2018)

Year	Budget	Education Allocation	% of Budget
2009	3.049 trillion	221.19 billion	7.25
2010	5.160 trillion	249.09 billion	4.83
2011	4.972 trillion	306.3 billion	6.16
2012	4.877 trillion	400.15 billion	8.20
2013	4.987 trillion	426.53 billion	8.55
2014	4.987 trillion	493.50 billion	9.94
2015	4.962 trillion	392.2 billion	7.74
2016	5.068 trillion	369.6 billion	6.10
2017	6.061 trillion	550 billion	7.38
2018	8.612 trillion	6.5.8 billion	7.03
Total	55.19 trillion	3.90 trillion	7.07

Adopted from Ndujihe (2018)

The table showed poor funding as the major challenge that gave rise to commercialization of education. Others include intermittent and persistent strike actions; 20 strike actions (both for lecturers and civil servants) from 1992 to 2007, no Nigerian university ranked among the top 1000 universities in the world based on Webometrics Openness ranking in the first half of the year 2018.

Table 2: Higher Institutions in Nigeria and its Ownership

	Federal	State	Private
Universities	36	44	66
Polytechnics	21	38	24
College of Education	22	46	14
Total	79	128	104

Adopted from Ndujihe (2018)

Reasons why Nigerians attend universities outside the country are poor quality higher education in the country, acquiring employable skills, better job opportunities, learner job opportunities, value for foreign certificates amongst others (infoguidenigeria.com, 2018 in Ndujihe, 2018). Prof. Abiodun Amuda-Kannike (SAN) in a lead paper presented in a national conference on Higher Education studies in the University of Port Harcourt in June 2018 stated that from available records no private university in Nigeria was established by education law act of 2004 (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions). The scholar went further to state that according to part C registration under Companies and Allied Matters Act LFN 2004, private universities are non-profit making. But, this is not so in

Nigeria. Rather private universities are business outfits in Nigeria. If these institutions are established illegally, what are the intentions? They are illegal entities and so cannot sue or be sued. They are not responsible to anybody.

In Nigeria today education is seen as an industry by the citizens. It is now money making venture rather than providing quality education for the school age children. Currently records have it that the number of out of school children in Nigeria is about 10 million while that of India is 1.8 million, yet India has a population that is about 8 times higher than the population of Nigeria (Atiku Abubakar in youth entrepreneur conference in 2017). In a country where the minimum wage is a pittance 18%, even some states have refused to pay the minimum wage, how can such civil servants send their children/wards to these private shlock schools? This leaves education for the only very few elite class. As such, the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider by the day, creating more room for inequalities in the nation. The resultant effect is that the poor will remain perpetually poor and slaves to the rich elite class. This situation cannot be farfetched for the reason for the so much corruption in the system that the indices for corruption in Nigeria is said to be endemic. Some civil servants and others who have the opportunity may not bear the pain of watching their families remain as slaves forever. They then resort to any means to make ends meet in acquiring quality education for their children/wards.

Commercialization of education in Nigeria is tilting towards the government abandoning its social responsibilities to her citizens. Provision of social amenities to the citizenry is the fundamental responsibilities of the government in any country. Pushing this responsibility to private hands is giving them the power of monopoly to monopolize the education system, defraud the people and leaving them with only paper certificates that have no value in the labour market. Private business generally is profit driven. If the education system is therefore left for private owners alone who are there for profit, it invariably means that only those who can afford it will acquire education. The right to education will only be left for the small few who can afford it. Majority of the youths whose parents are financially handicapped will remain uneducated, unproductive and a nuisance to the society (Leba, 2014). This will equally result in waste of potentials, lack of wealth creation, nuisance and social liabilities with its attendant consequences. Nigeria is rated as the poorest nation in the whole wide world; in spite of all her blessing in human and natural resources and endowments. Otunuga (2005) in a write up asked a very cogent question; depriving youths who are the leaders of tomorrow from quality education will it be considered a systematic crime and denial of their fundamental human right? To Ibrahim (2008), commercialization of education is a new-liberal economic policy that will do Nigeria no good. It is an anti-poor, pro-rich, neo-liberal and market-oriented policy. Policy as it will deny

thousands of Nigerian youth's access to quality education and a burden on parents who are also living below minimum wage. Chikwem (2008) has it that private university started in Nigeria during the 2nd democratic regime in 1979-1983. Due to lack of proper educational planning they were abolished in 1984 by the then military regime. It started again during the Obasanjo regime from 1999-2007. From then on the number of private universities in Nigeria began to rise till date as seen on the table. These though are recognized one's not the mushroom ones operating under covers which are not known legally by the government.

At this point in Nigeria with the current state of things, some pertinent questions could be asked? Has commercialization of education yielded any dividend to the Nigeria project? Has it been able to take our teeming youths out of the streets? Are our graduates today fit to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of society, and most importantly compete favourably in the world global knowledge economy? How about the high level of insecurity and criminality in the nation, child labour and child trafficking amongst others, has commercialization of education helped in any way to checkmate this trend?

The Way Forward

The echoes by scholars as education being the bedrock for any growth and sustenance development politically, socially, economically, spiritually and otherwise cannot be silenced. A critical examination of the

developed countries of the world in their policy and affairs be it America, Europe, Asia, attest to the fact that their rise to economic emancipation and technological development came as a result of their commitment to functional education for their citizenry (Asaju & Sunday, 2014). Even nations without natural resources and endowments have gotten breakthrough because of commitment to education. From the discourse the following suggestions are made as to how to make commercialization of education to be profitable to the Nigeria education system and the society at large;

1. Government should make policies to monitor the establishment, running and certification by the private school.
2. Government should properly monitor, not paying lip service, to checkmate the activities of the private school.
3. Government should allocate appropriate budget to education as stipulated by United Nations.
4. Government should make education administrators and providers accountable to whatever resources given to them.
5. Government should be serious with the fight against corruption by making human face policies and not witch hunting perceived enemies.
6. A hungry man they say is an angry man. When one is hungry the person can do anything to survive. The government should therefore as a matter of urgency give due attention to the welfare of civil servants.

7. Government should borrow a leaf from other developed countries of the world on how they run their own school and put in place such facilities to beef up education quality and access to education.

8. There is the dire need to change the orientation and perception of the citizenry to life and living; the need to see learning and knowledge as a way of life and not as a means to an end. Lifelong learning should be the watch word. Education is not a commodity but a way of life.

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