

Non-state Schools: The Education Providers in an Unwatchful Society

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***Abstract:** Indisputably, education in every society is pivotal to national development without which the society retrogresses. The world superpowers, the United States, China, Germany, UK, France, Canada, Japan e.t.c. are able to attain substantial economic growths as a result of educational advancement through quality schools that result in the production of quality education at all levels. In these countries, education in both states and non-states institutions is well funded to meetup their innovative demands and overcome challenges. This is not the case in Nigeria where education budgets are just below 15% of the total budget of the country hence, the degradation of public schools and the over-reliance on non-state schools. Regardless of the expansive growth experienced in the sector (non-state institutions), another danger looms as these schools are following the footsteps of their counterparts (state owned schools) towards unethical activities that threaten realisation of the general goals of education. This paper focuses on the basic education levels of primary and secondary schools. It looks into the activities of non-state schools that are not in tandem with the purpose of teaching and learning. The paper examines cases from the two largest states of Nigeria, Kano and Lagos wherein it analyses the situations and arrive at some valuable conclusions.*

***Keywords:** non-state schools, state schools, Islamiyya, private school, school inspection*

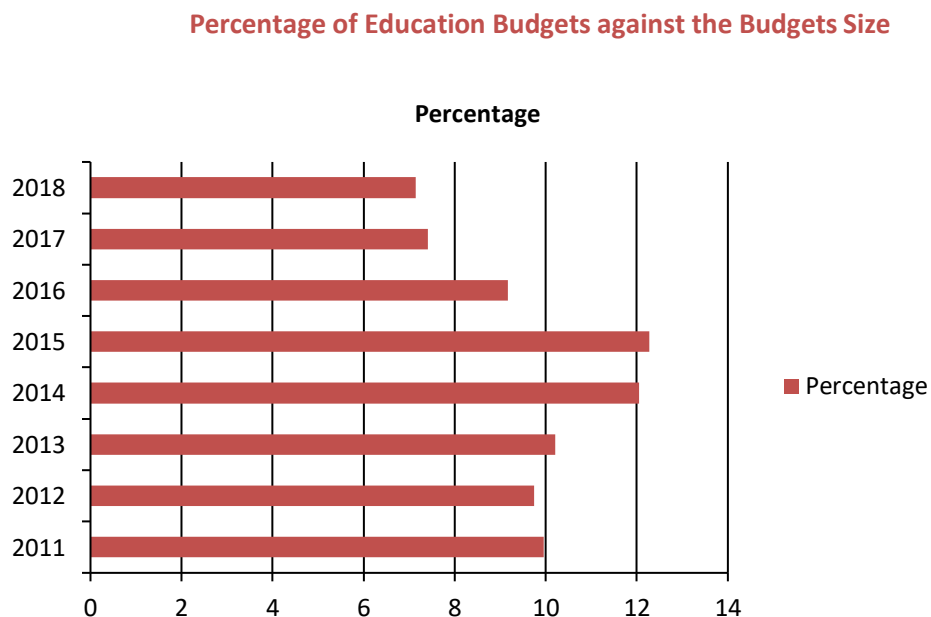
Introduction

Fundamentally, schools are established to disseminate knowledge, to build positive characters for the attainment of individual goals and national development and so on. The success to attain these goals can only be realised if the outputs of these schools are qualitative enough to push for a positive outcomes from their participants which in turn the society progresses. Though it is the primary goal of every nation to provide its citizenry with qualitative education hence, it's the proletariat right to have access to schools and colleges. Even though, it is the government duty to ensure that its masses have access to education however, it also allowed for private individuals to invest in such venture. While the government provides such service as basic amenity to its populace, private individuals venture it with the aim of making profits and covering the vacuum left by the government due to its broad scope. Thus, the non-state schools evolved. Unfortunately, their effectiveness to support the national development is obscured because the government and the society have consciously and unconsciously watched them deteriorate. Their works are no longer akin to the philosophy, principles and practice of education. Despite the expansive growths experienced in the sector, its impact to national development remains a feeble. Their leadership and operations are against the tenets of educational ethics. There is no standard benchmark put in place to ascertain their contribution to national development. The schools are left independently without check and balance either from the government or the society. Thus, they enjoy full autonomy.

If schools are given autonomy over decision making, they must be held accountable for learning outcomes. Increases in autonomy should be accompanied by standards and interventions that increase access and improve quality and the state must hold all providers accountable to the same high standard. (SABER, 2014)

Funding of public education in Nigeria has always been a paltry sum of the total sum of the budgets; this drawback to providing qualitative education to all has placed the non-state schools at a pivotal position of education providers. BudgIT, a civil organization driven to make the Nigerian budget accessible to all, in their 2018 Education Financing Analysis and Recommendations, revealed that "the education decay in Nigeria began in the late 90s when the sector was starved of funding. Gradually, this was followed by infrastructure decay and brain drain." (BudgIT, 2018). The percentage of the country's public education budgets from 2011-2018 fell below 15% of the total budget for each year as can be seen below.

Figure 1



The data above showed the percentage of education budgets in Nigeria plus the Universal Basic Education grant. (BudgIT, 2018)

The country's education budget cannot be easily dismissed but our concern here is not the issues of financing

the public education but how their deplorable state led to the growing reliance on non-state schools as well as influencing them towards moral degradation. Predictably, a serious danger looms as a total collapse of the school system is imminent. If some serious reforms are not implemented, the activities of many non-state schools are not in tandem with the principles and ethics of educational practitioners. Many of them have gone astray with the principles of education practitioners. As education practitioners we must adopt some guiding principles in order to improve our school system as well as instructional activities in the schools. Elmore in his Building a New Structure for School Leadership essay buttressed the idea of distributive leadership in which he outlined in the following principles to improving teaching and learning:

1. All leaders, regardless of role, should be working at the improvement of instructional practice and performance, set performance target, approve standard, monitor performance, administer reward and sanctions.
2. Educators and professionals should take part in pre-service and in-service training, create benchmarks for content, practice, develop pilot new structures and new instructional practices.
3. Leaders must be able to model the behaviors, the learning, and the instructional knowledge they seek from their teachers. Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do. Likewise, leaders should expect to have their own practice subjected to the same scrutiny as they exercise toward others.
4. The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution.
5. The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity: If the formal authority of my role requires that I hold you accountable for some action or

outcome, then I have an equal and complementary responsibility to assure that you have the capacity to do what I am asking you to do. (Elmore, 2008).

Elmore's principles clearly placed responsibilities on educators, the government and the policy makers who must maintain quality standard, legislate and implement the standards. The leadership is the cardinal point to a successful improvement of school system. The five principles are also measuring tool to ascertaining the effectiveness of educational institutions.

In Nigeria, one of the banes of non-state schools (locally known as private schools) is corruption which has marred the entire school systems. It is easier to equate most of these non-state nurseries, primary and secondary schools as deposit ATM machines that accept only deposit. In other words, they are paid for the poor services they rendered to their unwatchful clients. As people ventured into the business to fill in a vacuum left by the government, their primary goal is money. Economically, while this is a good entrepreneurship, educationally, it is only worse when we realised that no clear policies are put in place to measure the standard of these schools and to ascertain if their activities conform to the state's educational goals and policies. Where measures are put in place to tackle some of their wrong doings, the proprietors are suspected to bribe their way out of any irregularity. Researchers and reform advocates have been exposing the attitudes and modus operandi of these establishments but thus far no reform from the government to rescue the sector from total decline. For instance, in 2018 an investigative video from Sahara TV exposed the fraudulent conduct of the Federal Common Entrance examination in Lagos. The exposé revealed how some private schools proprietresses in Lagos state schemed to helping pupils pass the examination. In another scene from the video, the head teacher of Araromi Baptist Children School Lewis, Lagos Island was seen trading the school's certificate and

testimonial (for 58,000 naira) to a pupils who never attended the school in which the investigator pretended to helping the client to seek foreign scholarship with the certificates. The worst scenario from the video was captured when the pupils were relating their experiences on how their role models, parents and teachers colluded to compromise the examination they had just concluded. Consequently, the decadent act has been stored into the brainpower of the children. This video has unearthed the hideous criminal cartel of school owners and their teachers in collaboration with parents who finance the hideous crime. Despite the significance of school inspection, the non-state schools are operating without inspections from the state's school inspectors. Perhaps, that is the reason many of their activities are not in concordance to the ethics of teaching profession. For now, the school inspection's policy only assigns school inspectors to the public schools.

School Inspection and the Issue of Quality Education in Non-state Schools

School inspections are carried out to evaluate educational quality of school's learning activities. School inspection is needed to identify the cause and effect variables of the school performance, measure the actual performance with the expected performance. It seeks to identify performance problems and solutions. Quality assurance should call for quality management which can be determined through the process of school inspection. Quality assurance has to be an integral part of teaching and learning processes. For a long time, no one seems to care about evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning process in the non-state schools. Besides the task forces on tax who ensured that private businesses pay their taxes duly, school inspectors from Departments of Quality Assurance or any independent body don't visit the non-state schools to evaluate the quality of teaching services they are providing their clients with. Whether they are keeping to the

designated standard of teaching and learning or not, no one seems to care or pay attention on the type of products these institutions are given to their communities. In the absence of a standard benchmark, their benchmarks have always been some comparisons with the impoverished public schools. The qualitative character and sound knowledge of the learners are less important here. The inferiority complex axiom of "our students can speak better English than their public schools counter parts" and the fraudulent campaigns with students' grades in their final SSCE examination have always been the baselines used by these schools to justify the quality of teaching and learning. They are run unchecked either by the state or any independent body consequently, turning into examination malpractice havens with non conforming activities

The Unethical Conduct of Private Schools in Nigeria

1. School Fees Increment

In Nigeria's largest state of Kano, private schools in low and middle income communities of the state charged an average fees of ₦10,000 to ₦25,000 for play group and nursery levels, ₦15,000 to ₦30,000 for primary level and ₦18,000 to ₦45,000 as fees for the junior and senior secondary school levels. While parents have been struggling to meet-up this important educational demand of their children, there is no certainty that their children will attain the desirable outcomes needed for their development because the schools activities fall below the standards needed for quality education. Besides, many schools are in the habit of school fees increment without notice and consultation of the Parents Teacher Association (PTA). Recently, we observed that between 2020 and 2021 academic sessions, many schools in Kano have increased their school fees with at least 20%. In the beginning of the 2021 academic session, the Kano state government through its ministry of education instructed school owners in the state to

reduce 25% of their school fees. The reduction is aimed to alleviate the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on businesses and households. This decision did not go down well with the school owners. While few of them complied with decision, many refuted and even went ahead to increase their fees. They claimed that they too were also affected by the Covid-19 lockdown as well as the current inflation hitting the country.

With the recent double figure inflation hitting the country's economy coupled with the season long recession, the last thing a fixed salary earner would expect would be price increase. This price hike has resulted to more school dropouts and also led to a tremendous increase of crime rate among teenagers and youth in the state. Most of the suburban hotels and motels in the state are now meeting point of underage girls whose parents cannot afford to pay for their school fees. Painfully, the misery of parents fighting to educate their children under a harsh economy is perpetuating as the schools they rely upon are becoming unaffordable to low and middle income earners. The habit of school fees increment has become a variable object the school owners are not shy of manipulating anytime they wish to. They increase fees at will and without consultations. Perhaps, they are taking advantage of a free ride from the government's ineptness to regulate their activities. Although, the lack of will from the government may have been aroused from the virtue of item 62 (e) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (amended), "only the national Assembly can control prices of goods and commodity from laws of the land to protect private enterprise to determine the amount of their services" but many people have argued that the government can still regulate the inhumane fee hike through synergy with the lawmakers. In addition, many are of the view that the lack of regulation in the sector may be directly or indirectly linked to the fact that several top government officials and

political elites are into the business and are always frowning at any reforms that is aimed at addressing the problem which is favourable to them.

2. Running School programs with Islamiyyah Programs and Extra lessons

Traditionally, Kano students (majority Muslims) study the western and Islamic education simultaneously. They usually attend the Islamiyyah (Islamic schools) in the evening to attain Islamic education. These Islamiyya are traditionally free of charge except for the little dues which served as stipend for the teachers and running of the schools. While schools in the state close at 1:30pm, students still have the time to rest before they proceed to the Islamic schools. However, in their quest to acquire more financial gains, the private schools have incorporated the Islamiyya programs into school programs that run after normal schools hours. In the absence of Islamiyya, some initiated the extra lesson, which also requires the students to stay in school for extra hours. They keep students from morning to evening in order to attend either Islamiyyah program or extra lesson.

The traditional Islamic schools (Islamiyyah) should be allowed to champion the cause of teaching and learning of religious studies. This does not call for the stopping of religious subjects teaching in the schools which are already in the national curriculum but to emphasise the fact that schools intrusion into Islamiyyah programs is a deviation from the fundamental principles of school education and a breach of the ethics and code of conduct of the profession. The National Board for Arabic and Islamic Education (NBAIS) holds the statutory responsibility of integrating Islamic education into western education. The private schools are only registered to provide

western education thus; any deviation from that goal would amount to a great loss in the realisation of educational goals in Nigeria. The consequences of this violation include:

I. Financial and Social implications of Incorporating Islamiyya and Extra Lesson Programs into school programs

Keeping pupils in school longer requires a lot of additional expenditures, including children upkeep, additional learning materials and extra lesson fees. The repercussions of these new expenditures cannot be over emphasize due to the fact that it increase to the already overburdened expenditure of the parents of these wards a situation we analyze above (in school fees increment analysis) hasnot only economically disrupt the budget of a lot of homes but has also morally destroyed them.

II. Psychological implications of keeping Children for long hours in school

Whenever the working hours increased, the brain is stressed and the level of stress, depression and suicidal thoughts are all increased. Incorporation of Islamiyyah and extra lesson into school programs demands children to be kept from 8am to 4pm or 5pm at least. That's an/a 8 to 9 hours job for both students and teachers. This is indeed too much for young and even adult learners. The exhaustive brain of the child will still go home with some homework to do at night. This has been the tradition of Nigerian private schools. Approximately, a child whose parent allowed him/her to attend such programs will spend at least 40 hours/week and 160 hours/month in school. This is cumbersome and more serious when we consider the social and health complications. In this situation, both students and teacher are exposed to stress and depression. A survey data on the negative impact of long working hours on mental health in young Korean workers showed that the stress levels, 23.0% of employees working between 31 and 40 hours per week responded that they felt a lot of stress, 30.3% of those working between 41 and 50 hours,

39.8% of those working between 51 to 60 hours, and 42.4% of those working more than 60 hours per week reported stress. Thus, the amount of workers who felt a lot of stress increased with increasing working hours. Similarly, the amount of depression and suicidal thoughts equally increased as the working hours increased (Sungjin et al., 2020).

3. Violation of Educational and Professional Ethics

Today, many parents are complaining of how private school proprietors are becoming so greedy in venturing into the retail jobs of buying and selling books, uniforms, sport wears, cardigans, Hijabs, food e.tc. The DailyTrust newspaper cited a parent lamenting the exploitative habits of the private schools that there are many nasty things some of the school proprietors engaged in to ensure that they milk parents dry because parents pay school fees for their wards, they are also compelled to pay for extra lesson in the same school and same class. Furthermore, he lamented that the parents must buy school uniforms, sportswear, and cardigans from the school at very expensive prices. Private schools do fix their school fees without any consideration and can increase the price without notice (Ibrahim, 2020).

Gradually, the schools are deviating from the aims and objectives of schools establishment and transforming themselves into some exploitative business platforms of bookselling which are imposed on parents. Parents are forced to buy the books which the schools have already secured from unprofessional publishers. These books are designed in such a way that they could only be utilized by one person. Normally, textbooks are mostly designed to be utilized by anyone at anytime but these particular textbooks cannot be passed to one another because of their peculiar design, in which assignments are done inside the books. This means that they cannot be recycled from one sibling to the other. The consequence of this is that many parents in effort to provide quality education for their wards are pushed to a brink of debt crises as a result of the "money

grubbing" attitude of private schools. Recently, the Kano state Education Commissioner has decried the exploitative method of private school owners in the state. He exploded that private schools are not supposed to be uniform sellers and booksellers because they are not accredited publishers (Sunusi, 2020). Though, Mr. Sunusi promised that the government would stop them because it is exploitative, the questions raised by his outburst are: why did the government allowed such unethical activities going on in the school system for long despite being aware of the problem? What are the penalties now put in place against the defaulters?

4. Corruption and Examination Malpractice in Private Schools

Many private secondary schools are tagged as 'miracle centres' because a candidate, even in absentia, can pass his/her papers. The rot in the non-state school systems is similar to the schools owned by the state where corruption has degraded them to the background. A housewife identified as Aisha confessed to Solacebase Online news outlet that "I don't know the exact location of the school where I passed all my West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) papers, my husband only collected my passport photograph and returned with fantastic results months later" This infamous trait is peculiar to both the state and non-state institutions who synchronously unite in the crime of examination mal-practice. The case mentioned above is not different from that of a 22-year-old Aminu, who after failing his previous examinations for two consecutive years, registered for NECO May/June examination at a Government School in Gwale Local Government Area of Kano and passed all subjects in absentia as a 'proxy candidate (Solacebase, 2020). While Aisha used a miraculous private school to pass her papers, Aminu used a public school to do the dirty job.

Atueyi (2019), exposed how some private school teachers in Lagos state are pushed into Examination mal-practice during the May-June WASSSCE or NECO. According to Atueyi, this period to the teachers is as a harvest period where they make extra income. Some of the schools go all out to pay invigilators and examiners so that they can look the other way. One of his respondent exposed that “private schools corrupt invigilators. They get money ready before examination, which is then shared among all of them. That’s why they turn out good results. They charge exorbitant fees for enrolment and so they have to justify the amount people are paying” This reveals the level of rot in the country’s education systems hence; the country is in an abyss of leadership and followership failure.

Today it's no longer a pride for students who passed their Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination with distinctions unlike it was in the 80's and early 90's where a student with such result will make headlines because the general belief is that he worth it for his hard work. The West Africa Examination Council has sanctioned many schools in Kano due to examination malpractice. In an article written by A. Muhammad 2017 published by Vanguard, he asserts that 121 schools in Kano were indicted of examination malpractice; no fewer than 97 schools received warning letters, while 24 were derecognized by the examination body due to examination malpractice. Yet, the business slogans of these schools are a definite assurance to candidates on passing their SSCE examinations either with credits or distinctions depending on the amount of money the candidate will spend. Such assurance sprung not from the efficiency of teaching and learning but from examination malpractice championed by the schools. Worse still, the major condition for admission into such schools is money. This is a national embarrassment that wreck havocs one of the fundamentals of our national development. This anomaly is a by-product of corruption coupled with the state's negligence to consciously inspect and regulate the

activities of the schools. Funny enough a lot of times, those schools whose result are held for examination malpractice usually are the under fund public schools. There, neither the students nor their parents have the money to bribe the external invigilators sent to them therefore they face the full wrath of the law if they messed up. Public secondary schools mostly end up been the scapegoat of the double standard examiners/invigilators.

5. Labor Laws violation

Many non-state school teachers are underpaid. It beats one's imaginations to comprehend with the fact that a government that is supposed to be a fair and sincere umpire in running the affairs of it citizens, has been watching aloof as an influential sector of our national development decays abysmally. While teachers are assigned with heavy workloads their salaries fall way below the national minimum wage of ₦30,000 (New minimum wage Act 2019). The conditions of service in private schools have always not been in harmony with the labor laws of the land.

Staffing and deployment in private schools are based on the proprietors' interest to maximise profit. A teacher of Civic education might be assigned to teach subjects like English or Technology. Here, degree in education is not necessary for appointment. In 2015, the World Bank conducted a survey in Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos, Nigeria on the role of the Private Sector in Lagos. 726 schools were sampled of which 91% are non-state, only 11% are registered/approved and only 49% of teachers in all private school were certified. Although the rot in the system varies from state to state but there's a need for an active and serious national emergency be declared on the basic education of Nigeria at large.

The above analyses are not understatement to undermine the importance of private schools in Nigeria. The importance of private schools as education providers cannot be overemphasized. In 2019, Lagos, Nigeria's second most populous state had a total of 18,573 private schools. This

was revealed by the state's commissioner of Education while given approval for the establishment to new 173 private primary and secondary schools across its five education divisions. She said the approval was necessary as the state recognizes the vital roles of private schools in joining the government to provide quality and quantitative education to the people of the state, which is daily increasing in population, especially that of migrants. The story of the rise of non-state schools in Nigeria is prevalent today as many Nigerians have taken advantage to close the gaps created by government's inability to provide quality education to all. However, many people are not aware or don't care of the fact that no one is inspecting the quality of educational services they have claimed to render. Steadily, the private schools are running fast into a decline unless some serious educational reforms are implemented.

Way Out

The non-state schools must be seen as valuable collaborators in ensuring the attainment of the National Educational Goals as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. The government must ensure that it implemented and enforces educational reforms that will resuscitate the non-state schools from total collapsing. A uniform reform of educational policy that is in tandem with Sustainable Development Goal number 14 must be provisioned and implemented if our nation is seriously committed in realising development in all aspects.

- Both states and Federal governments should join efforts to initiate an “**economic-educational funds**” that provides not only subsidy to private education providers but also lay down benchmarks that will determine the quality of education they should provide the citizens. Assessing fund for this project will be based on credibility and accountability of the school vis-à-vis the benchmarks set."Government should consider,

in the design of subsidy and support programmes, the unique vulnerabilities of the non-state education sector, and that they provide targeted subsidies for vulnerable households in low-income communities". (Doorly,2020)

- Tackling the dangers of examination malpractice and corruptions in the sector requires the formation of a special board of inquiry and investigation into educational matters under the supervision of the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC. This would do well in assuaging the incessant cases of corruption and examination malpractice undermining the progress of basic education in country. Also, religious leaders, traditional rulers, parents, government and schools must join efforts in the fight against the cankerworm of examination malpractice that is undermining our educational development. Legislation of serious fines and penalty like the total withdrawal of schools operational license should be enacted and implemented without bias
- The PTA associations in private schools must be independent and act as liaison between parents, schools as well as the government. "Empowering all parents, students, and communities. When parents and students have access to information on relative school quality, they can have the power to hold schools accountable and the voice to lobby government for better-quality services" .SABER,2014
- The government must reduced tax on non-state schools because of their important contributions to the development of the country. This will make the schools assessable to low and middle-class income earners. Their fees increment must be regulated be accepted by all stakeholders of the school. School Fees cannot be increased unless on important

case like upgrading of services in teaching and learning which must also seek approval from the ministry of education and after which a thorough stakeholder meeting has taken place between the PTA, School and Ministry. "Government on its own side should reduce the tax they are collecting from the schools by two third to give room for reduction of school fees and other charges by schools". (Haruna, 2020)

- For long the Federal and State government budgets on education has always been below the paltry sum of 15% of the total budget. It will only be reasonable if government at all levels show more commitment to education through education budget increment. This will relieve the overburden reliance on non-state schools, set standards and also create good competitive atmosphere among the states and non-state schools.
- Amendment of school inspection act to capture the inclusion of private school inspection either by the state inspection unit or by an independent body specially established for the purpose. In so doing, the quality of teaching and learning process in these schools can be determined. Moreover, in line with principles of school improvement as highlighted by Elmore (2004) mentioned that school leaders and teachers should attend both in service training, workshop and seminars to boost their capacity and keep in touch with the new demands in their fields. This will enhance teaching and learning in the private schools
- The international non-governmental organisation working to support public education should also think of investing into the private education sector so that the collapse of educational standards in the country will be saved from both angles

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