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THE PLACE OF EDUCATION IN A CRISIS-RIDDEN NIGERIA

Public Lecture delivered at the 12th Foundation Anniversary and 10th Unbroken Convocation Anniversary
Lecture of Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I feel particularly challenged on this unique topic going by your kind words in your subsequent letter accepting my reply when you wrote of and concerning me, “with your antecedent, pedigree and particularly, your love for a prosperous and crisis-free Nigeria, it will not be difficult for you to prepare a one-hour lecture titled “The Place of Education in a crisis ridden Nigeria”. Surely, the audience will be of benefit from the solutions you are likely to proffer”. So, Aare and Compatriots, here we are. I will do my best not to disappoint you or my idol.

2. EDUCATION – DEFINITION AND MEANING

2.1 Definition

An online dictionary defines ‘*education*’ as “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life; the act or process of imparting or acquiring particular knowledge or skills, as for a profession; a degree, level or kind of schooling (e.g., university education); the result produced instruction,

training or study (e.g. to show ones education); the science or art of teaching; pedagogies”.¹

Similar definitions are contained in the Longman Online Dictionary², where it is rendered as “the process of teaching and learning, usually at school, college or university; the institutions and people involved with teaching”.

2.2 What Education Signifies

It suffices to say that all shades of meanings are implied in the context of this topic. Education, being the process of giving and receiving systematic enlightenment, could be formal or informal. It could also be in a formal setting (e.g. classes in school); or in an informal setting, (such as in places other than what exists in an academic environment such as the Afe Babalola University (ABUAD), Ado-Ekiti). Education allows for the acquisition or impacting of general knowledge, skills, the powers of reasoning and judgement. Education enables intellectual development and maturity.

2.3 The Importance of Education

Our ancestors and forefathers may not necessarily have received formal education in a school setting; they were nonetheless “educated” in folklores, values, ethics and deep knowledge of their environment and ways of life.

So important is education that Malcolm X once described education as “the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today”. Indeed, George Washington

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¹ <https://www.dictionary.com>, accessed on 1st October 2022

² <https://www.ldoceonline.com>; Accessed on 1st October 2022

Carver saw education as “the key that unlocks the golden door to freedom”. Not only did John Dewey believe “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself”; Albert Einstein, insisted that “education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school”. Thus, Einstein, the man who once famously told us that “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”, viewed education beyond the mere knowledge acquired in schools. It is what remains with a person – the ideals, ideas, knowledge, ethos, after he forgotten what he was actually taught in school.

3. CRISIS – DEFINITION AND MEANING

3.1 Definition

The word ‘crisis’ also does not require lengthy elaboration for our discourse. The Cambridge Online English Dictionary ³ defines it as “a time of great disagreement, confusion or suffering; an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation; a moment during a serious illness when there is the possibility of suddenly getting better or worse”.

3.1.1 What Crisis Connotes

Crisis represents intense distress, pain, difficulty or danger, a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. A crisis is a difficult or dangerous time in which a solution is needed, and very quickly too. Synonyms of crisis are emergency, exigency, pinch, strict juncture, etc.

3.1.2 What this Topic Assumes

This topic therefore right assumes that education still exists in Nigeria, albeit in a crisis-ridden environment. How does it fare in these trying times that actually try men’s souls? That is our duty to unravel today. But, first, a little history.

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>

4. A SHORT HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

According to an online source, afribary.com⁴, “Before the British arrived in the early nineteenth century, there were two major types of education in Nigeria. In the Islamic North, education was strictly religious in nature. In each Muslim community, a mallam drilled children as young as five years old in the teachings of the Qur’an and the Arabic alphabet. During the colonial era, larger cities set up more expansive Islamic schools that included subjects such as math and science. In 1913, these Islamic schools, almost all in the north, numbered 19,073 and enrolled 143,312 students. In the 1970s the government took control of the Islamic schools, but in the 1990s, the schools were allowed to operate independently again. The indigenous system was the second type of education before the British occupation. Students were taught the practical skills needed to function successfully in traditional society. Usually children within two or three years of age belonged to an age-group. Together, they learned the customs of their community and were assigned specific duties around the village, such as sweeping lanes or clearing brush. As the children grew older, the boys were introduced to farming and more specialized work, such as wood carving or drumming. Girls would learn farming and domestic skills. Boys would often enter into apprenticeship-type relationships with master craftsmen. Even in the twenty-first century, this kind of education is common. Formal, Western-type of education was introduced by British missionaries in the 1840s. The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) started several schools in the mid-1800s. The colonial government gave the church financial aid, but in the early twentieth century the government began building primary and secondary schools. By the time the British combined the northern and southern regions into one colony in 1914, a total of 11 secondary schools were in operation, all but 1 run by missionaries. There were also 91 mission and 59 government elementary schools. Nigeria has made considerable progress in the domain of education. The education system in the country is supervised by the state. There are 27 federal and state-owned polytechnics in

⁴ <https://afribary.com/works/the-history-education-of-nigeria-5180> Accessed on 5th October, 2022.

Nigeria. The first 6 years of primary education are mandatory in Nigeria.”

4.1 Education and Development

An exposition of the role education can play in addressing the many challenges plaguing the Nigerian Nation implies that the education sector is properly positioned, or is, itself, crises-free, and thus, able to perform that function of addressing the problems. This cannot but be so, because, as we say in law, *nemo dat quod non habet*- you cannot give what you do not have. Accordingly, the pre-eminent question is: what is the status of education in Nigeria? Is it, itself, crisis-free? Can it be an enabler of the solutions to the myriad of problems besetting us? Alas, I am afraid, the answer is a firm ‘No’. The reasons are not far-fetched or hard to decipher. We shall examine them anon. Suffice it to say that any serious discussion of the place of education in a crisis-ridden Nigeria, must start by addressing the systemic crisis in the education sector itself.

4.2 Before the Crisis and Challenges in the Educational Sector

In this regard, it is no exaggeration that the 9-month long (and still counting) of industrial action by University lecturers (ASUU) is but symptomatic of the crisis which has been plaguing our educational sector for at least the past 40 years. From a time since political independence in 1960 to about two decades afterwards, Nigerian education – with the benefit of hindsight – never had it better. Teachers were well-trained and motivated. School environments were clean and well kept. Educational institutions were better funded and equipped; and students were, on the whole better behaved and disciplined. Industrial actions by staff were relatively rare. The school handbook which showed dates of resumption of schools, holidays, examinations and ends of sessions were religiously kept.

The yawning mismatch between the excellence of products of Nigerian education institutions and the then decent environment which produced them has been well-documented.

5. SOME OF THE IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS

5.1 Out-Dated Curricular and Infrastructural Decay: Lack of Quality Education

One of Nigeria's most pressing educational issues is the lack of access to quality education. Whether it's about college essay writers or any other field, it always ends up the same. Because of this, Nigeria is trailing behind other African countries due to innovation, growth, prosperity, and access to information. Many a time, Nigerian universities and students use obsolete and out-of-date textbooks and lab equipment. It is sad to observe that as against nations, including South Africa, Germany, Canada, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, most Nigerian instructors are actually illiterate on ICT matters. They lag behind their global school compatriots, even on publications and journals.

5.2 Total Neglect of Schools

Total neglect by the government has led to the demise of many schools in the last 4 decades. Our academic institutions are in utter disrepair. Students who graduate from them aren't given the skills they need to compete globally. Many institutions lack basic science equipment, while those that pretend to have, are still using outdated ones. Students are thus solely exposed to the mere academic aspects of their course of studies rather than the hands-on activities.

5.3 Dearth of Qualified Teachers

Aside the hydra-headed technical difficulties most of the universities are also in crises because they only rely on foreign and government subventions, for sedans and upkeep. They now troop abroad for better salaries. Online education in sub Saharan Africa is also affected because professors who could have stayed back to teach online programs now live abroad. Yet, the population number of students keeps growing hugely day by day (Adeyinka, 2013). In Nigeria, for instance, we have many online universities, but no qualified teachers are available to efficiently teach the courses.

Notes (Adeyinka, 2002), it is interesting to note that a few decades after the publication of the Phelps-Stokes and Advisory Committee Reports, particularly after World War II, slight adjustments were made in schools' curriculum which was slightly

oriented towards African life. But the progress in this direction was not remarkable, for as late as the 1960s, education in African schools, particularly in Nigerian Universities, was still “too literary, not practical, not adapted to the needs of a developing agricultural nation,” (Adeyinka, 2002). The strong words of Ajayi and Obidi (2005)

5.4 Teachers’ Poor Working Conditions

The poor working conditions, poor remuneration and allowances teachers are subjected to have discouraged capable and qualified teachers from taking up teaching jobs. Many of them apply for other better paying jobs, even as drivers, while some migrate abroad in droves. This leads to low level of dedication as they are always on the lookout for greener pastures.

5.5 Insufficient Funding by Government

Financing is the most pressing issue in the educational industry. Not just in Nigeria, but globally. It discourages educators and students to fight for grades. Nigeria's education budget is greatly meagre and much lower than the 26% recommended by the United Nations. Education has become one particularly difficult industry to navigate. The educational sector, which has a greater impact on society, does not receive the type of attention due to it. The 2022 budget for education which stands at 5.4% of the total budget has been faulted by UNICEF ought to have been N1.14 trillion naira, representing 8.4%. With a miserly 470 billion just proposed for universities and other tertiary institutions in the 2023 budget, the sector is in more dire strait.

5.6 Failure to Accommodate the Rising Population Demands

The total population of Nigeria as at independence was 45.2 million. As at October 6, 2022, Nigeria’s population was estimated to be 217.66 million. This has become a major problem as the education system cannot fully enroll its rapidly growing population. For instance, Nigeria’s basic education sector is overburdened by strong population growth. In 2015, the country’s population under the age of 15 was about 44 percent. The system has failed to integrate large parts of this growing youth population.

As at today, Nigeria’s under-5 population is 31 million children. At least 7 million babies are born each year. The poverty level of Nigeria is one in three. 22% of Nigeria’s population is made up of

children. Over 20 million children are out of school as at 1st September, 2022 (UNESCO). No one bothers about the almajiris, drops-out, nomadic migrants and pastoralists; poor children of farmers, fishermen, etc. they are part of the forgotten vulnerable of the society – the hoi polloi; the Frantz Fanon’s “Wretched of the Earth”.

According to the United Nations, 8.73 million elementary school-aged children in 2010 did not participate in education at all, most of which were the almajiri children. They constitute the largest group of out-of-school children in Nigeria. These boys are sent to Qur’anic teachers to receive an Islamic education, which includes vocational or apprenticeship training. Some are involved in street begging. The Ministry of Education estimated that there were over 9.5 million almajiri children in the northern part of the country in 2010, making Nigeria the country with the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. The net enrollment rate at the elementary level was 63.8 percent compared to a global average of 88.8 percent. This low rate of enrollment to basic education in Nigeria has further increased illiteracy level in Nigeria. The country in 2015 had a youth literacy rate of 72.8 percent and an adult literacy rate of 59.6 percent compared to global rates of 90.6 percent and 85.3 percent in 2010 respectively (data reported by the World Bank). The non-literate population is no doubt alarming.

5.7 The Factor of Greed

Greed has crept in as a major issue in Nigerian education because most instructors are paid far less than what they deserve. Thus, the heads of these schools frequently embezzle part of the money for themselves instead of using it for the earmarked purpose. This forces lecturers to milk parents and pupils dry of funds, to survive.

6. HOW HAVE WE SO FAR FARED?

According to a popular online source⁵, British Nobel laureate, Dorothy Hodgkin, once noted that the University of Lagos was

⁵ “Smartest People, mediocre nation – the irony of Nigeria; accessed on 11th September, 2022

one of the world centres of expertise in her specialist field of chemical crystallography. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, had the first world class computer centre in Africa. The University of Ife (now OAU), had a notable pool of expertise in nuclear physics. Our premier University of Ibadan had an international reputation as a leading centre of excellence in tropical medicine, development economics and historical sciences.

The Saudi Royal family used to frequent UCH for medical treatment in the sixties. The engineering scientist, Ayodele Awojobi, a graduate of ABU Zaria, was a rather troubled genius. He tragically died of frustration because our environment could not contain, let alone utilize, his talents. Ishaya Shuaibu Audu, pioneer Nigeria Vice-Chancellor of ABU Zaria, collected all the prizes at St. Mary's University Medical School, London. His successor in Zaria, Iya Abubakar, was a highly talented Cambridge mathematician who became a Professor at 28 and was a notable consultant to NASA.

Alexander Animalu was a gifted MIT physicist who did work of original importance in superconductivity. His book, *Intermediate Quantum Theory of Crystalline Solids*, has been translated into several languages, including Russia.

Renowned mathematician Chike Obi solved Fermat's 200-year old conjecture with pencil and paper, while the Cambridge mathematician, John Wiles, achieved same with the help of a computer working over a decade. However, after the harsh environment of the 1980s and IMF/WB structural adjustment programmes, the Ibrahim Babangida military dictatorship undertook massive budgetary cutbacks in higher education. Education started nose-diving.

6.1 The Exodus

Our brightest and best fled abroad. Today, Nigerian doctors, scientists and engineers are making massive contributions in diverse fields in Europe, Asia, North America and the Arab world. Philip Emeagwali won the 1989 Gordon Bell Award for his work in super-computing. Jelani Aliyu designed the first electric car for American automobile giant, General Motors. Olufunmilayo Olopede, Professor of Medicine at the University

of Chicago, won a McArthur Genius Award for her work on cancer.

Winston Soboyejo, who earned a Cambridge doctorate at 23, is a Princeton engineering professor, lauded for his contributions to materials research. He is Chairman of the scientific Advisory Board to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Washington University biomedical engineering professor Samuel Achilefu, received the St. Louis Award for his invention of cancer-seeing glasses that is a major advance in radiology.

Kunle Olukotun of Stanford did work of original importance on multi-processors. National Merit laureate, Omowunmi Sadik of State University of Binghamton, owns patents for biosensors technology. Many young Nigerians are also recording stellar performances at home and abroad. A Nigerian family, the Imafidons, were voted "*the smartest family in Britain*" in 2015.

Anne Marie Imafidon earned her Oxford Masters' in Mathematics and Computer Science when she was only 19. Today, she sits on several corporate boards and was awarded an MBE in 2017 for services to science. Recently, Benue State University mathematician Atovigba Michael Vershima is believed to have solved the two centuries old Riemann Conjecture that has defied giants such as Gauss, Minkowski and Polya.

Another young man, Hallowed Olaoluwa, was one of a dozen "*future Einstein*" awarded postdoctoral fellowship by Harvard University. He completed a remarkable doctorate in mathematical physics at the University of Lagos, at age 21. While at Harvard, he aims to focus on solving problems relating to "*quantum ergodicity and quantum chaos*", with applications to medical imaging and robotics. Another Unilag alumnus, Ayodele Dada, graduated with a perfect 5.0 GPA, an unprecedented feat in a Nigerian University. Victor Olalusi recently graduated with such stellar performance at the Russian Medical Research University, Moscow, and was feted the best graduate throughout the Russian Federation. Habiba Daggash, daughter of Senator Sanusi Daggash recently graduated with a starred rust in Engineering at Oxford University.

Emmanuel Ohuabunwa earned a CPA of 3.98 out of a possible 4.0 as the best overall graduate of the Ivy-League Johns Hopkins University. Stewart Hendry, Johns Hopkins Professor of Neuroscience, described the young man as having "*an intellect so rare that it touches on the unique...a personality that is once-in-a-*

life-time". There is also young Yemi Adesokan, postdoctoral fellow of Harvard Medical School who patented procedures for tracking spread of viral epidemics in developing countries. Ufot Ekong recently solved a 50-year mathematical riddle at Tokai – University in Japan and was voted the most outstanding graduate of the institution. He currently works as an engineer for Nissan, having pocketed two patent in his discipline.

6.2 We are no Longer at Ease

This is only the tip of the iceberg. If our system were not so inclement to talents, we would be celebrating a bountiful harvest of geniuses in all fields of human endeavour. This is why the correlates between our gene-pool and national development are so diametrically opposed, as the night and day. Unfortunately, the success stories mentioned above are the exception rather than the rule. This is because, we are fast becoming a failed state. We are currently miserably below the ladder of progress in the hierarchy of world economics and politics. None of our institutions, except ABUAD, the leading University in Nigeria which also situates within the leading 300 universities come near the top 500 in the World Universities League Table.

The profligacy, graft, bacchanalian and primitive acquisitive instincts of the ruling class (both military and civilian), have undoubtedly arguably contributed to the erosion of our cherished values and the consequent attendant degeneration in the educational Sector. The rot that set in has since ballooned and festered. So bad is the situation that it will not be an exaggeration to characterize it – as depicted in the title of this article – as a crisis. We are surely in a crisis situation.

7. HOW BAD IS THE EDUCATIONAL CRISIS?

The challenges confronting education in Nigeria are multi-faceted and well-documented. From underfunding to inclement enabling environment, cultism, “blocking”, sales of grades; and everything in between. In parts of the country (particularly in the North-East, North-West and North Central), kidnapping, armed banditry and nascent insurgency have made formal and even

informal, Koranic-style (called 'Islamiyya') education something of a luxury, the quest for which involves risking one's life and limb. In the reasoning words of Kenneth Maduagwu⁶, "the intensity of violence in Nigeria poses significant risks for school children. Several places of learning have turned to piles of ruin due to attacks by non-state armed groups. Instances are more prevalent in Nigeria's northeast zone, where the insurgency has been well over twelve years. In the northwest and northcentral zones, banditry also poses significant threats to education due to large-scale kidnappings at places of learning. In the southeast zone, school activities are suspended on Mondays and other designated sit-at-home days by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Ubiquitous terror significantly constrains school enrolment in Nigeria. The country has an out-of-school children problem, estimated at 18.5 million children. The figure is a sharp rise from 10.5 million recorded in 2021. UNICEF links the surge to northeast terrorism and banditry in the northwest and north central regions".

7.1 Kidnapping, Armed Banditry and Herdsmen Menace

We have gotten a terrifying situation where armed bandits and kidnappers now hoist flags on Nigerian soil, collect taxes from Nigerians; and give them identity cards and passes. They challenge Nigeria's sovereignty and suzerainty. Some hold school children hostage and demand from their parents, bags of salt, rice, maize, millet, and beans; baskets of tomatoes, tarodo, tatashe and miango hot pepper. They also demand for jerry cans of palm oil, vegetable oil; Maggie cubes, ugba and other condiments. These are necessary to feed the children of traumatized Nigerians held firmly in their gulag, to keep them alive for payment of enforced ransome. Herdsmen invade homes and farms freely. They kill, maim, rape and pillage. The government appears helpless. If these are not symptomatic of a failed state, then tell me what a failed state is.

8. UNICEF CORROBORATES

These alarming figures were corroborated by UNICEF itself (the United Nations Internal Children's Emergency Fund) in a

⁶ "Learning in Crisis"; <https://nextierspd.com>, July 21, 2022, Accessed on 1st October 2022

statement ⁷ to mark the International Day of Education the 24th day of January, 2022.

According to the world body, “In 2021, there were 25 attacks on schools, 1,440 children were abducted, and 16 children killed. In March 2021, no fewer than 618 schools were closed in six northern states (Sokoto, Zamfara, Kano, Katsina, Niger and Yobe) over the fear of attack and abduction of pupils and members of staff. The closure of schools in these states significantly contributed to learning losses for over two months”.

While welcoming the Government’s pledge to increase annual domestic education expenditure by 50% over the next two years and by 100% by 2025, UNICEF notes that the 7.7% allocated to the education in the 2022 Budget was way behind the internationally recommended benchmark of 15-20 percent of annual national budgets. The organization described as “tragic” what it called “the high number (35%) of children who make it to a classroom, but never make the transition from primary school to secondary school – thereby cutting off their chances for a secured future”.

Echoing these deep-seated sentiments, but in more frightening grisly details is policy and leadership expert, Dakuku Peterside, who, in a piece titled⁸, “Nigeria’s education sector crises and a future ruined”, opined that “the biggest challenge we face as a country is not about the challenges of today, but a bleak future staring Africa’s biggest economy and the most populous black nation, in the face (given) the insensitivity of our leaders to the destruction of (the) section that offers us hope to safeguard and recover the future: the educational sector . . . what is frightening is the inability of our policy makers to connect the monumental rot and negligence of the education sector today to our bleak future . . . Nigeria seems to be retrogressing in all aspects of education and skills acquisition. The net quantity and quality of education in Nigeria is comparison to past decades, given our population and economy, is negative. The products of our education system

⁷ UNICEF warns of Nigerian education crisis; <https://www.unicef.org>. Accessed on 1st October 2022

⁸ Published <https://premiumtimesng.com> on May 16, 2022. Accessed on 1st October 2022

cannot measure against their opposite numbers in India, China or the European Union . . . The loss of confidence in Nigeria's education is led by the political and other elite class. Over 95 percent of the elite leaders in government, business and technocratic professions are educating their children in tertiary institutions in Europe and the United States. Consequently, there is hardly any serious policy discussion about education in Nigeria . . . Our education sector needs a quantum overhaul that targets its outcomes. We need improvements, starting from primary education, where we see many but-of-school children. Secondary education needs a total overhaul, (given its) declining standards and low attainment in national examinations like NECO and WAEC. The complete collapse of the higher education sector, where workers engage in incessant strike actions, leading to half-baked graduates – who are grossly untrainable and unemployable – needs immediate attention. Education has suffered from insecurity at the basic primary and secondary levels in most parts of the country. The “unknown gunmen” and IPOB agitators have terrorized the South-East and forced a sit-at-home observation on every Monday (of the week). This has affected schools in the five South-East States, where 20% of the time allotted to education is lost each week. Students in the South-East States missed examinations scheduled for Mondays nationally during necessary national examinations like WAEC, NECO and UMTE.

In Sokoto and Zamfara States (in the North-East), public school students did not register for the WAEC exam this year (majorly) because the government did not pay (the requisite fees on their behalf). (Obviously), this indicates retrogression in teaching, learning and examination for certification. In other parts of the North, the uptake of the WAEC examination is minimal, even with some state Governments paying (for exam fees) for the students. Student in Internally Displace person (IDP) camps worry more about survival than getting an education. Government poorly funds government-owned schools and they owe teachers' salaries. Most government schools in Southern Nigeria are overcrowded and are populated by children from relatively poor backgrounds (who can ill-afford) the private primary and secondary institutions. . . (while) the rich, (upper) and middle classes are largely immune (as they can afford private education both locally and overseas), the widening gap between the haves and the have-not inevitably results in inequality. (This is because) in the past, education was the great leveler, as poor

school children often outperformed those from more affluent backgrounds. This engendered a can-do-spirit in the former and inculcated in them the belief that, with hard work, anything was possible.

(With the prolonged strike by lecturers in public universities) students of those institutions idle away at home and sometimes constitute nuisances to their families and communities. Governments at all levels have (failed in their responsibilities in the education sector. This is because) education policies are either not fit-for-purpose or failing to yield the desired results. Educational (standards) monitoring institutions – where they exist – are, at best, moribund. (They exert little or no control over) private educational institutions, whose charges are so high that they eat a sizeable chunk of the incomes of parents.

(Talking of which globally), the recommended average percentage of GDP to total public and private expenditure on education is 5 percent (but this is higher in developed countries). For example, (according to UNESCO) among the 34 OECD countries reporting data in 2015, Norway spent 6.4 percent of its GDP on education, the United States and the United Kingdom spent 6.1 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively. (By contrast, the world body reports that) the figure for Nigeria in 2017 was 0.85 percent of her GDP”

9. OTHER FORMS OF CRISES

Beyond the foregoing, Omebe & Omebe⁹ identified Examination Malpractices, Menace of Secret Cults, Low Enrolment/Poor Products/Abandoned Projects among key “dimensions and manifestations of the crises of education in Nigeria”. They elaborated on these as follows:

i. Examination Malpractices:

Exam malpractices such as impersonation (hiring people – either students or otherwise – to write exams); collusion involved in exam invigilators, giving assistance to students in exam halls; exam

⁹ The crisis of Education in Nigeria, the International Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Education, Vol.2, Issued 12, December 2015. www.arcjournals.org; Accessed on 1st October 2022

leakages, where question papers are seen by candidates, prior to writing the exams; mass cheating, depicted in large-scale, organized cheating involving school authorities, exam officials and candidates; smuggling of answer-scripts, involved in candidates benefiting from external assistance to take duly prepared answer scripts to and from exam halls; Dubbing, involved in candidates copying from each other; Bringing foreign materials such as textbooks, cribs and past papers and photocopies of prepared answers; Assault on or insulting exam officials or invigilators who refuse to co-operate with candidates bent on cheating; procurement of answer booklets; inscription of materials on parts of a candidate's body or objects/materials; personality connection, whereby candidates leverage on influential members of the society, their parents or even cult members to influence exam results.

ii. Secret Cultism:

Secret cult have been defined as an assemblage of people share ideas and beliefs which should not be disclosed to non-members or any association or organization which carries on or conducts its activities in secret. The incidence of cultism in our institutions of learning is rising with devastating consequences in terms of assault, destruction of properties, death (sometimes involving decapitation) members deploy a variety of dangerous weapons and in many cases, they are laws unto themselves;

iii. Low Enrolment, Poor Academic Performance, Poor Products and Abandoned Projects:

This is best understood under the sub-heads of Basic education, Secondary education and Universities.

With regards to Basic education, its challenges include high numbers of out-of-school children (alluded to earlier) particularly in the North. As for secondary education, Omebe & Omebe cite 'Poor Performance Records' as its bane, manifesting in the abysmal quality of intakes into Nigerian Universities (i.e. from secondary schools) the vast majority of whom barely know their grammar (in addition to the low level of their knowledge; high failure rate in NECO exams (98% in 2008, 88% in 2009, 89% in 2010, 92% in 2011 and 68% in 2012); Low level of students who obtained credit in five subjects, including English & Maths in May/June Exams (23 percent in 2008, 26 percent in 2009, 24 percent in 2010, 31 percent in 2011 and 39 percent in 2012), and

finally, the percentage of students who score minimum of 200 marks (out of a possible 400) in the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) exams ranges between 36 percent in 2012 and 46 percent in 2009 – for an average of 42 percent. In 2012, only 3 candidates out of 1,503,093 candidates scored above 300 and only 5 percent score 250 or more marks”

10. SPECIFIC REASONS FOR DECLINE IN EDUCATION

Coming to University education, Omebe & Omebe¹⁰ identify the following as what they called the “specifics on its Decline”, viz:

10.1 Falling Standards

The dismissal of 3 graduates of the Enugu State University of Science & Technology from the NYSC scheme for falling below the standard expected of graduates;

10.2 Crisis of Manpower

Crisis of manpower in Nigeria universities, here instead of the required 80% of academics holding Ph.D degrees, only 43% possessed that qualification; furthermore, instead of the minimum requirement of 75% of the academics being between Senior lecturers and Professors, only 44% fall within that bracket; worse still, almost all the universities have excess of non-teaching staff, with many instances where they exceed teaching staff two, three or four times, while in others, the number of senior administrative staff is more than twice the total teaching staff.

10.3 Abandoned Projects

That is not all, the two scholars report that “there is an average of 4 abandoned projects per university in Nigeria with the attendant negative consequences for classrooms, laboratories, student’s hostels and staff accommodation”. They add that “poor infrastructure adversely affects teaching, research, learning and students’ health and safety”.

¹⁰ Ibid

10.4 Exodus of Teachers

Even though Nigerian universities are grossly starved of Ph.D holders, there are confirmed reports that people with such degrees seek graduate level positions while others, incredulously, reportedly compete to be truck drivers.

11. MORE CAUSES OF CRISES IN EDUCATION

We have touched on the ‘external’ causes of the crises in education in Nigeria. By that we mean the choices made by the power elite who control access to the material and other external resources which inhibit education from attaining its optimum level in Nigeria.

But, there are other factors which are play – some of them societal, psychological, normative and cultural – which, together have combined to erode the quality of education to its present abysmal level. These factors were highlighted by Omebe and Omebe¹¹ as follows:

a. Irrelevant Knowledge and Learning

Irrelevant knowledge and learning According to them,¹²“when educators do not understand the nature of learning and knowledge, both the teacher and the student are trapped in a futile struggle. No matter how much money the tax payers spend and how many quick-fixes are tried, the chronic failure will continue until education in the country is more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people as well as relating education of the child to the demands of the labour market”;

b. Debasement of Virtues and Good Reasoning

“Debase(ment) of virtue and good reasoning. Virtue was one almost as highly exalted as truth in Western educational institutions. Reasoning was rigorously deployed to understand and define moral virtue. By contrast, modern academia propagates nations of moral relativism and situational ethics”;

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

c. Moral Decadence

Our educational institutions are more or less morally bankrupt. Both students and teacher disobey rules with impunity and have scant regard for morality. This manifest in disrespect, needless contention and antagonism, exam malpractices, inappropriate relationships, stealing, fighting, dereliction of duties etc. Hence, the rising incidence of social vices in educational institution.

d. Poor Family Upbringing

This is very instrumental in defining a person's character. Positive or negative behavior are often rooted in a person's family history. Indisciplined children are often the product of bad parentage.

e. Peer Pressure

This can affect the choices of even ordinarily good people. Habits like smoking, alcoholism, cultism, illicit sex, exam malpractices and indecent dressing have been blamed on peer group pressure.

f. Proliferation of Quacks

“Involvement of Quacks. Teaching has become something of an all-comers affairs and a transit point between jobs for the unemployed. This has inevitably compromised standards”;

g. Lack of Motivation

“Absence of motivation. This factor explains many unethical choices by especially educators: poor and irregular payround irregular training and retraining programmes being major triggers. Poor motivation manifest in low morale, indifference and indecency”;

h. Pervasive Corruption

The prevailing culture of corruption in Nigeria has rendered it virtually impossible to earn an honest living in the country. Corruption simply thrives in the country and it is often blamed for social vices in educational institutions. It is the root cause of exam malpractices, certificate and admission racketeering, misappropriation and embezzlement of official funds in virtually all tertiary educational institutions.

i. Poverty

The challenging economic circumstances have plunged many Nigerians into poverty, forcing to resort to various social vices

such as bribery, stealing, pilfering, cheating, prostitution to make ends-meet.

j. Ignorance

Some lecturers and students who engage in anti-social behavior seem oblivious of the gravity of those choices, leading some of them to brag about (or flaunt) it as if a badge of honour.

k. Lack of Role Models

“Poor Example or Role Models. No child is born bad. He or she is shaped or moulded by socialization by parents, guardians, leaders and the larger society for better or for worse”;

12. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO OUR CRISIS-RIDDEN EDUCATION SYSTEM

I do not believe in mere damage assessment alone. Nor do I believe in drinking from the Book of Lamentations which is a collection of poetic laments and cries over the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. We must go beyond this gloomy picture I have painted above; this frightening spectre of disillusionment, to proffer workable solutions to our crisis-ridden education system.

In discussing the story of Nigeria’s collapsed educational system, there has been no shortage of precepts. Indeed, so much literature has been written and said; oceans of ink I spilled, to address the challenges and problems of our ailing education sector (with correspondingly little by way of concrete action), that it has practically been a case of too many Chiefs and not enough Indians. Everyone appears to know what needs to be done; but who is willing to bell the cat? That is the question. No one. As with the methodology adopted to x-ray the challenges, we shall discuss the possible panaceas under two different perspectives: firstly, the big picture in terms of the regulatory framework as dictated by political leverage wielded by the government, the power elite; viz-a-viz the people; and, secondly through the somewhat narrower (but perhaps more important) prism of the academic environment of the educational institutions themselves, in terms of the role of government, attitudes and choices of

parents, students, educators and administrators, in their relationship, both as individuals and interse.

12.1 Government and the Regulatory Framework Solutions by Experts

Starting with the former, Kenneth Maduagwu¹³ (quoting the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies), argues (and I agree), as follows: “quality education protects cognitive development and psychological well-being, giving children hope in times of crisis. To provide educational services to millions of deprived children in Nigeria means to sustainably address structural, cultural, security and humanitarian factors that limit children’s access to education. The Nigerian government must rethink the provision of education services, especially in conflict-impacted locations. There is need to invest in the capacity development of the existing teaching workforce in information and communication technology (ICT) skills. This can ensure that children in displacement camps, for instance, can remotely be taught in a controlled environment especially where school infrastructure has been destroyed. Remote learning can also be mainstreamed on a broader scale to care for school children in southeast Nigeria who cannot go to school on designated IPOB sit-at-home days. The practicability of remote learning will ensure that children living in areas where government agencies and development actors cannot access can receive quality education irrespective of the teaching staff strength in those locations. The semi-digitalization of teaching in public schools does not excuse the urgency of tackling Nigeria’s woes, However, it is a temporary solution to ensure that accessible conflict-affected children in Nigeria are not deprived of education while security agencies continue to push for stability. Therefore, security actors must focus on restoring peace and stability in areas affected by conflict. In addition, the government must deploy non-conflict intervention measures to de-escalate emerging and existing violent hotspots”.

“More livelihood, nutrition, and children protection programmes are needed to salvage many Nigerian children’s current challenges. The future of children in crisis-impacted zones may appear

¹³ Ibid

uncertain, but adequate intervention efforts will ensure positive outcomes. Beyond education, violent conflict affects all aspects of childrens lives. Therefore, addressing the humanitarian impact of violent conflict issues in Nigeria will help prevent its implication on education and other socio-economic activities. The effects of violent conflicts on education in Nigeria require a tailored solution. It also requires that sustainability be achieved by upscaling interventions that significantly impact the lives of communities and children”.

Contributing to this, Dakuku Peterside,¹⁴ poignantly identifies the issues in the following manner, which I concur with: “now is the time to pay attention and call for ‘a state of emergency’ in our education sector. We must bring all ideas, talents, skills and resources to the table to resolve some of the crises threatening to mar the future of the next generation of Nigerians. It is not just a policy and monetary issue. We need to focus on teacher education to improve the quality of teachers and engage in their periodic testing and retraining. The promotion of teachers should be tied to the quality of the teaching, personal development and the impact of teaching on students. We need to provide them with the teaching resources and incentives they need to do a good job. Individual states should set independent standards for teachers’ accreditation in their jurisdiction. We must provide all forms of financial and psychological incentives to teachers. We must ringfence their benefits and emoluments in both federal and state budget and never allow a situation where governments owe them salaries. The reward of teachers must be here on earth and not in heaven”. We should pay their wages when due and pay them a living wage. We must review the pay of teachers on the basis of current economic realities and attract the best to the teaching profession”.

According to the authoritative world body, UNICEF ¹⁵, “we must take a close look at what is happening to our children in Nigeria and the opportunities they are missing out on when they lack education. We need to look towards communities – leaders, parents, teachers and caregivers – and, together, find the best

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

strategies to ensure that all children enroll into school, have access to continuous learning and ensure they emerge with quality skills that equip them for a prosperous future. We need to especially ensure that girls have access to learning – so they can receive an education that will begin to address issues of gender inequality. All girls have much to offer to find solutions to Nigeria’s challenges – and we have to nurture their creativity and innovation. We also need to ensure that children are safe when they are in school – no child should be afraid their school might be attacked or that they will be kidnapped. And no parent should be fear sending their children to school . . . Nigeria’s education system can be transformed through adequate funding to ensure schools are safe, they application of gender – responsive policies, including recruitment of female teachers and improved facilities for girls, the creation of multiple and flexible learning pathways for students, such as digital and transferable skills learning, the integration of foundational numeracy and literacy in Quranic schools; and teacher training in the latest methodologies”. I cannot agree more.

12.2 Solutions through Collaboration between the Government, the People and All Stakeholders

To address the wrong attitudes and choices of the direct stakeholders in the educational sector, i.e., the Government, the people, teachers, lecturers, parents and students, Omebe and Omebe¹⁶ have offered some suggestions which I fully subscribe to. I have also offered mine in this piece. I will therefore deal with them specifically and seriatim.

1. Government’s Direct Intervention Necessary

The first step towards having a lasting solution lies squarely in the hands of the government, which must quickly adopt certain strategies to restructure and save the sector from totally collapsing. The government at all levels must be seen to be genuinely committed to delivering of a template for a competitive standard of education across the country, vis-a-vis other countries of the world. The government must spear-head the right attitudinal disposition to get the desired results.

¹³ Ibid

2. Introduction of a Stronger Legal Framework

Introduction of a stronger legal and instrumental framework beyond the present anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC, ICPC and Police, with stronger enforcement and punishment regimes there must be put in place institutional mechanisms for frontally dealing with corruption, with provision for remedies, compensation, restitution for people whose rights have been abused. The present anti-corruption agencies must be heavily resourced and incentivized for optimal performance.

3. Enforcement of Existing Laws that Affect Education

Security agencies must enforce all relevant laws, such as the Child Rights Act, 2003, which enjoins the Government to provide free compulsory universal primary education, free university education and free adult literacy programmes; as well as the Universal Basic Education Act, 2004, which also enjoins the compulsory education of children of school-age. This accords with section 15 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. Regrettably, many States in Nigeria are yet to domesticate and internalize the Child Rights Act of 2003.

4. Targeting Disadvantaged Children

Implementation of policies that target disadvantaged children from poor families and rural areas, such as almajaris, motor park touts and girls, especially from the Northern parts of the country.

5. Investing in Education through Adequate Funding

Adequate funding with good management will provide high-quality education in Nigeria. Adequate funds must be provided for renovation of schools and other learning institutions, acquiring quality training facilities. Research grants, decent teachers' salaries, emoluments, housing and general welfare, including provision for health must be urgently tackled. It has been found that investment in education pays off eventually. Economists found in 2008 that investing in education increases the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), thus impacting positivity on the country's overall economic and social health. Education improves income distribution, raises people's productivity, promotes entrepreneurship and leads to technological development. Heavy investment in this therefore a sine qua non.

With the Federal Government of Nigeria controlling mineral resources, taking a princely sum of 52.68%, and the State

governments taking 26.72% of our derivation formula allocation (S. 162 of the 1999 Constitution), there is no reason why one single behemoth and over pampered federal government, and the 36 States cannot take over 80% of Nigeria's educational requirements. After all, the remaining 20.60% allocated to LGAs is for the entire 774 LGAs in Nigeria, with most of the funds waylaid and mopped up at source by greedy State governments. This leaves the LGAs barely enough resources to pay salary to their workforce. The result is that a tier of government that is supposedly closest to the people cannot even construct mere culverts and gutters, let alone dispensaries and skills acquisition centres.

6. Necessity of Implementing A Progressive Tax Code

A progressive tax code means that people and corporations that earn higher income pay more. This means that taxes increase along with incomes. By taxing wealthy citizens and big corporations, governments – both federal, states and LGAs – could boost our public education system. The political will appears lacking as the elites who control the economic levers are unyielding. The citizenry and the civil society must therefore be engaged in fiercely demanding that the wealthy in our society invests in its children, students, teachers and their future.

7. Open Up New Vistas For Drops-Out

Many youths drop out of their primary school education (UNESCO). Majority of these are young men and women who have taken to crimes of prostitution, armed banditry, armed robbery, kidnapping, internet scam, advance fee fraud (419), etc.

8. Attitudinal Change

Serious and deliberate attitudinal change of all by dispensing with negative, anti-social tendencies; abandoning vice and embracing such societal virtues as honesty, integrity, hard work, dignity, patriotism and respect for elders, customs, culture and traditions. There is the need to completely re-set the mindset of children and the youth psychologically, mentally, physically and emotionally, to embrace a new dawn.

The culture of “get-rich-quick” must be jettisoned. Never again should front pew in churches and front rolls of mats be reserved for Christian and Moslems in churches and mosques, respectively. National honours and honorary doctorate degrees must never

again be accorded these rogue members of the society who steal our common patrimony blind.

9. Wrong To Put Round Pegs In Square Holes

Capable persons to be appointed as Minister and Commissioner of education. Their appointments should never again based on politics of prebendalism, cronyism, sectionalism, and favouritism, but on what they are capable of. Nigeria's educational system fares better in the hands of professionals and expert Ministers and Commissioners, rather than in the hands of politicians who see everything as medium to play politics and embezzle money. It will be recalled that when Professor Jubril Aminu was Minister of Education in 1985, he adopted progressive steps to re-engineer our ailing educational system. It was during his tenure that the 6-3-3-4 educational system was introduced. He also introduced nomadic education for the Fulanis who are always on the road, walking with their cattle. Whatever happened to the Al majiri schools built by President Goodluck Jonathan. How do you put a Journalist and Accountant as Minister of Education, where there are several qualified Educationist and Professors? Surely, such an appointment can only be a round peg in a square hole!

Another good example of an expert minister of education is Professor Sam Egwu. During his administration, he entered into a pact with ASUU (Academic staff union of universities that has been on strike for 9 months and still counting), providing conditions of service, funding of tertiary institutions, autonomy of universities and means and payment of lecturers. This is one of the pacts that has always caused needless rock us as successive administrations have refused to fulfill terms of the pact on account of alleged paucity of resources and inadequate funds.

Professor Babatunde Fafunwa, appointed in 1990, also notched up significant millages during his time. He it was who introduced education that uses our indigenous languages. This was perhaps one of the first of such initiatives in Africa, since the lingual Franca or language that was then used in schools was English.

10. Wiping out Corruption in Ministries and Regulatory Bodies

We must all rise up and tackle the serious canthernorm of corruption in education ministries and regulatory bodies. We

must fiercely combat exam malpractices through the joint efforts of the government and examination regulatory bodies.

11. Review of Teaching Curricula

The teaching curriculum of our schools require total overhaul, review and updating. It must be based more on practical research. A country that surprisingly deletes history from its curricula is asking for trouble. History was yanked off Nigerian schools in 2009, allegedly because students avoided the subject; graduates did not have job prospects; and teachers were scarce. Yet, history engages the present with the past; how cultures remember events; and how these events are presented to generations yet unborn. Surely, today is the tomorrow we mentioned yesterday. This is calling on the governments at all levels to immediately bring history back to our curricula.

12. Stop Commercialization of Education

Due to paucity of funds and systematic corruption, schools are learning to seek quicker for ways of funding. This has led to astronomical increase on school fees. It has thus gone beyond the reach of the poor people to afford. Commercialization of schools has become the vogue. Many others, especially public schools have been neglected. They are in a poor decrepit and miserable states. Poor infrastructures and dilapidated buildings adorn the land scopes of schools. Continuing this commercialization of education will finally kill any available opportunity for schooling for the poor and average people in the society. The poor will continue to be more ignorant while the children of the rich will continue to be better educated. Money spent on wasteful expenditure should be channeled towards funding schools and renovating the buildings. Reading materials, modern lab equipment which are needed for running the schools should be procured and provided by the governments and wealthy people, to lift our education out of its present doldrums.

13. Adequate Remuneration for Teaching and Non-Teaching Personnel

To enhance the quality of education at all levels, fair living wages which can motivate teachers and non-teaching staff to do their work on a high-quality level must be ensured. This will attract qualified and dedicated teachers and do away with the present attitude of young people who now desert the teaching profession

for better and more remunerative professions. Teachers themselves must be comprehensively vetted before employment.

14. Admission must be Based Strictly on Merit

Admission into tertiary institutions should be based solely on merit and nothing more. Quota system which kills merit and discourages initiative, while encouraging mediocrity must be dispensed with.

15. Reconsider the 6-3-3-4 System of Education

There is the urgent need to redesign the system of education in Nigeria, since the current 6-3-3-4 model has failed the test of times. Not much development, whether on science or technology, has been achieved under it.

16. Sponsorship of Education must be Encouraged

The idea of wealthy individuals sponsoring children who are in need through schools should be encouraged. This could be by way of scholarships, bursaries and special grants.

17. There Must be Deliberate Policy to Incentivise Teachers in Rural Communities

Policy makers and governments should not only focus on funding education through building new schools and improving others, but must also increase funding and incentives to teachers, particularly those teaching and living in rural low-income areas. This is because most teachers prefer to work in affluent urban areas because of the potentials for better pay and working conditions. The quality of teaching in such poor rural schools suffer immeasurably. This must be avoided now before it is too late.

18. Bring Back Morals, Values And Ethics as Part of Admission Requirements

Moral uprightness and rectitude – not just merit alone - should form part of the yardstick for entry into schools and recruitment of staff, whether academic or non-academic. This should also be the case in entry into offices in the larger society. As mandated by the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), we must bring back values, morals, ethics, integrity and anti-corruption ethos in all our schools curricula. Fighting corruption is a task for all, since the school environment is a microcosm of, and therefore affected by larger societal corruption.

19. Strengthen Whistle-Blowing on Corruption

The culture of whistle-blowing which appears now abandoned by the Government, must be re-introduced and strengthened, with more incentives. Monetary reward and protection must be accorded all whistle-blowers. The policy appears to have died down after the initial surge because the government is said to have short-changed whistle-blowers who discovered huge hidden sums.

20. Introduce Restorative Justice for Students

Alternative disciplinary measures, rather than outright expulsion or suspension can lead to significant improvement in student retention and success in schools. Focusing on restorative justice as a means of conflict resolution, as opposed to sterner measures has been found effective. Restorative justice focuses on rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with student victims and the community at large.

21. Involve Parents and Guardians in Decision-Making

Involving parents in their children's education can contribute to a student's achievements. When parents come together with school authorities and policy makers with coherent messages about the changes they would like to see in their children's education systems, the students will benefit more.

22. Discourage Rampant Strikes by University Personnel

The various academic unions for universities, polytechnics and secondary schools are always in the news for persistent strikes; and this is not always their fault. The government fails to remunerate or pay them their dues, or give them certain agreed rights which they are entitled to. Government usually refuse to implement agreements. There have been strikes for various reasons in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2022. Indeed, ASUU alone has embarked on 16 strikes in 23 years. Students now use between 7 and 10 years to graduate from a 4 year program. This must be halted immediately.

23. Create Anti-Cult Groups

Special anti-cultism groups should be created in schools with the aim to stopping cult practices in secondary and tertiary schools; and arresting offenders, who must also be prosecuted.

13. CONCLUSION

UNICEF best sums up the ideal which every Nigerian (and friend of Nigeria) desires or craves for his children: “All Nigerian children deserve a fighting chance – no matter who they are and where they are. And this must include an education. It is not only their right – it is the smartest and best way to secure the future of Nigeria as a whole”.

It is clear from our above discourse and analysis that once we get the educational system right, every other thing will fall in to place. Education is the most powerful weapon with which we can change the world. Knowledge, they say is power. An educated citizenry is an enlightened citizenry. An enlightened citizenry is free from ignorance, bondage and primordial cravings. He is even easier to govern. Little wonder the pride of place which education occupies under various Constitutions, the African Charter and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, 1948. As usual, however, the devil is in the detail. In other words, the concrete realization of the lofty goals of these discussed precepts is the major challenge. As ever, however, where there is a will, there is a way. And it is the leadership that shows the way. There must be political will to see these precepts manifest results. As the late novelist, Prof. Chinua Achebe, opined in his book “The Problem with Nigeria”, with the right leadership, Nigeria will fulfill its destiny and reach its full potential. I must add, with the right citizenry (civil society). Education might not be a silver bullet or a magic wand which we can wave to make all our problems disappear; but it is certainly the best guarantee for a secure, peaceful, prosperous, egalitarian and stable Nation, governed by law, and not by men. It is the only guarantee of fairness, equity and social justice. As the popular saying goes, “If you are not informed, you are deformed”. We can emulate the Asian Tigers - Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan which used education as a key component of their strategic growth plans and rapid industrialization.

I thank you Mr. Chancellor and distinguished audience for listening to me.