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University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: FOCUS ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Saidu,A.; Amali, I.O.O; Oniye, M.I & Bello, M.B.

Abstract
Nigerian education system is faced by numerous challenges such as underfunding, corruption and incompetence of teachers and government officials, inadequate infrastructural facilities among others. However, several measures have been taken by the government to curb these challenges. One of which is privatization of education. This paper therefore, examines critically the concepts of privatization especially as it is related to education sector. It traces the historical antecedent of privatization of education in Nigeria with particular reference to secondary education. Also, prospects and challenges for adopting privatization of education sector in Nigerian secondary education were examined critically in this paper. Finally, the paper gave recommendations on how to enhance standards in privately owned secondary schools in Nigeria.

Key words: *Privatization, privatization of education sector, prospects and challenges*

Introduction

In every society whether simple or complex, education has become a basic human need. This is because it enables one to acquire appropriate knowledge, attitudes, skills and values that would make one to contribute positively to the development of oneself and the society at large. Also, education remains a veritable tool used by numerous countries all over the world to enhance national development. John and Agba (2010) opined that education is the single major factor for stimulating national development. This agrees with Kelly (1995)'s opinion that the economic, social and political status of any nation depends on education. Therefore,

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any nation that is not taking the education of its citizens seriously is endangering her future.

Education has taken a central stage in Nigeria that successive Nigerian governments have always expressed commitment to it. This is in a bid to overcome illiteracy and ignorance as well as accelerating national development (Otive, 2006). The significance and linkage of education to national development is well known in Nigeria. This is evident in the Nigerian government's policy statements on education, the National Policy on Education (2004) that education is the instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. However, in spite of the provisions of this policy document, the Nigeria educational system is fast descending to the state of decadence. The system is in deep and infectious crisis that is yearning for attention of all stakeholders (Erinosho, Akindele, Obasi and John-Odepe, 2001). Corroborating this assertion, Agba, Ushie & Agba (2010) are of the opinions that the standard of education in Nigeria is falling every day.

Various stakeholders such as Azikiwe (2008), Otive (2006), Denga and Denga (1998) and Ekaette (2001) have attributed the current trend in Nigerian educational sector to issues such as poor funding, corruption and incompetence among teachers, school administrators and government officials in the Ministries of Education, inadequate infrastructures, instructional resources and so on. All these challenges have constituted a nightmare not only to the Nigerian educational system but also to the overall development of Nigeria as education remains a social, economic, political and technological tool for development of any nation.

Several measures have been taken by the Nigerian Government to stabilize the system so as to make it effective and efficient. One of which is the privatization of education sector. By this, private individuals, faith-based organizations, voluntary agencies and Non-governmental organizations could establish and manage educational institutions in Nigeria. It is a common believe that privatization is the solution to the challenges facing Nigerian education sector. Against this backdrop, this paper is aimed at achieving the following key objectives.

1. to analyse the concept of privatization of education in Nigeria.
2. to trace the historical antecedent of private secondary school in Nigeria.
3. to highlight the prospects of privatization of education in Nigeria.
4. to highlight the challenges for adopting privatization of education.

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The concept of privatization of education in Nigeria

The concept of privatization has several meanings. It can be used to describe a process whereby private individuals or organizations are encouraged to own and control business, enterprise, agency and educational institutions. Privatization can also mean a process of transferring the ownership of public services or properties from public sector or government to the private sector. According to Alimi and Abiola (2006) privatization is the process that involves divestures of government interests in companies which governmemt has substantial shareholding. In the Bureau of Public Enterprise Act of 1993, privatization is defined as the relinquishment of part or all of the equity and other interests held by the Federal Government or any of its agencies in enterprises whether wholly or partly owned by the government. Privatization is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Nigerian governments, at one time or the other, encouraged private individuals or organizations to own and control business and state services so as to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Nigerian education sector like other public sectors is not immune to privatization. However, Nigerian Government welcomes participation of private individuals, voluntary agencies and communities in the establishment and management of schools (FRN, 2004). It is a well known fact that Nigerian education sector is faced with many challenges which is making it to suffer a setback. Hence, privatization is seen as a way of bringing it back to a normal shape. Osokoya (2006) identified four reasons which make privatization of education imperative. These include:

1. Inability of the public schools to satisfy the growing demand for quality education, hence the need for the private sector to expand student access to quality education
2. There are the de-regulation policies of the government on the provision of education and thus giving adequate opportunities for private participation in education
3. In many African countries, the demand for employment oriented courses and subjects of study had changed and public schools seem unable to respond adequately to this phenomenon, hence it become necessary that private sector should increase
4. Public education is criticized for inefficiency while the private sector is increasingly promoted for it efficiency in operation

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This trend in Nigerian education was not subjected to a lot of controversies. While some Nigerians embraced it and saw it as an opportunity to get quality education needed to develop the country, others were of the opinions that the implementation of privatization policies is capable of eroding completely the educational standards of the country.

Emergence of private sector in the provision of secondary education in Nigeria

The involvement of private individuals, faith-based organizations and voluntary agencies in the provision of secondary education in Nigeria is not a new trend. As a matter of fact, the first secondary school to be established in Nigeria (CMS Grammar School) was established by a faith-based organization called Church Missionary Society in 1859. Also, other faith-based organizations such as Wesleyan Methodist Society, Baptist and Catholic followed suits in the establishment of secondary schools in the country in the 19th century (Saidu, 2009). At that time, Government was a sleeping partner in the provision of education to the populace. All government did at that time was to give grant -in-aid to the mission schools. But as time went on, the interest of Government in education was gradually moving beyond the provision of grant-in-aid to the mission schools to the level of establishing and managing schools across different parts of the country. This move therefore, led to the establishment of Government schools around the country, starting with primary school and later on, secondary school. The privately owned secondary school at that time out-numbered the government established secondary school. Rhette (2010) submitted that all the eleven secondary schools in the country in 1914, except King's College, Lagos, were run by the private missions.

Before thè establishment of Mayflower School, Ikenne in 1956 by a renowned educationist and social critic, Tai Solarin, private secondary schools in Nigeria were not individually owned. They were either owned and run by faith-based organizations or communities. By implication, Mayflower School, Ikenne was the first private secondary school to be individually established and owned in Nigeria

Rhette (2010) reported that Nigerian government took–over the control and management of all private schools in the country in the mid-1970s. Although, the reason for this trend was not established by him. But it was established by Fabunmi (2005) that the Education Edicts of 1966-1979, where each state promulgated an edict for the regulation and management of education, had a common ground such as State take-over of schools from individuals and other organizations, establishment

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of school management boards and unified teaching service. This perhaps, explains why government absorbed all privately owned secondary schools during that period.

However, in consonance with National Policy on Education 1981 revised edition where private individuals, voluntary agencies, communities were encouraged to own and establish schools. Private secondary schools thereafter sprang up again in different parts of the country. Although, the private secondary schools were small in number in the 1980s as reported by Saidu (2009) but later on, they increased in numbers as they are now in every nook and cranny of the country.

Another milestone in the history of privatization of secondary education in Nigeria was an attempt by a onetime Minister for Education to privatize all the one hundred and two Unity Schools in Nigeria. This attempt was premised on the fact that the standards of the Unity schools, the Federal Government's model colleges for secondary level, have fallen as it was evident in percentage of failure recorded against the students in public examinations. Therefore, an attempt was made by the Federal Government to allow competent private sector-driven education organizations to manage the schools. But this attempt could not be accomplished as it went away with the Minster.

Prospects for privatization of secondary education in Nigeria

The number of individuals and private organizations participating in the provision of secondary education in Nigeria gives a prospect that privatization of secondary education has come to stay in the country. However, the prospect has been enhanced by some of the following factors:

1. **Academic Quality:** private sectors are well known for efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of services than the public sectors. In Nigeria, private sectors are known to be given qualitative secondary education to the populace by striving to provide good facilities such as e-library, modern and well equipped laboratories, well managed hostels, conducive classrooms and so on. All of these are compromised in public secondary schools.
2. **Underfunding of Public Schools:** funding plays a major role in any development programme. It is central to the provision of education in the society. Lack or inadequacy of it, as it was observed by Azikwe (2008), is capable of hindering the provision of qualitative education to the citizenry. However, studies such as Daramola (2010), Azikwe (2008) have shown that Nigerian public secondary schools

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are grossly underfunded which is resulting into infrastructural decay, ill-equipped library, and poor condition of service and welfare of teachers among others. All these are impacting negatively on the standard of education in Nigeria. Hence, the private sectors' involvement in the provision of secondary education in the country would go a long way to ameliorate most of the funding associated problems in the sector.

3. **Stable Academic Calendars:** one major quality of private secondary schools in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world is stable academic calendar. Public secondary schools are characterized by incessant strike actions. According to Faniran (2010) strike action usually take away valuable times of the students and thereby, preventing them from acquiring the require knowledge. Also, the disruption of academic calendar according to him makes the financial planning for the education of children very difficult for parents. Therefore, parents prefer to choose private secondary schools for their children

4. **Students Discipline**: Faniran (2010) opined that the issue of moral decadence and high level of indiscipline among students of secondary schools in Nigeria had become a source of concern to stakeholders. However, with the opportunities of private participation in the provision and management of education, it is now possible for many missionary bodies to intervene in the education of the citizenry. These missionary bodies are widely known to be good providers of moral education which help in shaping the behaviors of Nigerian students

5. **Adequate Access:** With the involvement of private individuals and organizations in the provision of secondary education in Nigeria, secondary schools are now established in every nook and cranny of the country which is making secondary education to be easily accessible by the teaming primary school leavers who are yearning for admission into secondary schools.

Challenges for adopting privatization of secondary education in Nigeria

Despite the tremendous progress made in the provision of secondary education as a result of privatization process, there are numerous challenges that need to be addressed for effective operation of private

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sector in the provision of secondary education in Nigeria. These challenges are:

1. **Enrolment Problems:** the demand for secondary education in Nigeria is on the increase. Adebayo (2010) established that there is appreciable increase in the population of students seeking admission into all levels of Nigerian educational institutions. In this case, if government is not doing anything to improve the deplorable conditions of the existing public schools, it is the private schools that would face the challenge of admitting more than they can cater for or admitting students beyond their carrying capacity. Hence, quality may be compromised in this case.
2. **Staffing/Personnel**: one of the major challenges in most private educational institutions in Nigeria is acute shortage of personnel. In most cases and also, in a bid to maximize profit, duties that are supposed to be assigned to five persons are usually assigned to one person. This is done at the expense of quality.
3. **Exploitation:** As a result of the fact that private secondary schools are not funded by the government, sourcing for fund is now a challenge as it is needed to improve the standard of the school. In a bid to meet up with this challenge, they have resulted into charging exorbitantly which most parents find very hard to cope with.
4. **Inequality:** privatization of education in Nigeria at primary, secondary and tertiary levels create inequalities among Nigerian students (Adeogun, Subair and Osifila, 2009). It is a known fact that in most public secondary schools in Nigeria, there are adverse conditions such as poor physical facilities and overcrowded classrooms. While in private secondary schools, the condition is better as they enjoy the splendor of small classroom size and modern facilities which are capable of enhancing effective teaching and learning. This situation therefore could lead to social inequalities in the society.
5. **Examination Malpractice:** examination malpractice has become a cankerworm in the Nigerian education system (Jekayinfa 2012). This menace has become very prominent in private schools in Nigeria. The idea is to make flying colour results that will attract parents to bring their children to the school.

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Conclusion

This paper has examined privatization of education sector in Nigeria with reference to secondary education. It has brought into the fore the historical antecedent of private secondary schools in Nigeria. The prospects for privatization of secondary education as well as challenges for adopting privatization of secondary education in Nigeria were also discussed.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are considered imperative in order to enhance standards in the private secondary schools in Nigeria:

- Government must put all hands on deck to ensure that education is not rendered useless by private proprietors who see the establishment of schools as a business venture rather than social services
- The proprietors and management of private schools should not compromise standard by admitting students beyond their carrying capacity. Also, qualified and competent teaching staff should be employed in adequate numbers so as to ensure high quality.
- Government particularly at the state level should ensure proper monitoring and supervision of the private schools to ensure their compliance with existing regulations and laws.

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