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CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL AS PERCEIVED BY PROPRIETORS/PROPRIETRESSES IN ILORIN METROPOLIS

SAIDU, A. (Ph.D.)

Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

AJIBOYE, S.K. (Ph.D.)

Department of Counsellor Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin

OJO, O.J. (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

&

ABURIME, A.O.

Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

Abstract

This paper examined the challenges and prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis as perceived by the proprietors/proprietresses. The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive type. A researchers-designed questionnaire was used in the study to obtain the necessary information from the respondents on their perception of the challenges and prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. The reliability of instrument was done by administering the questionnaire on ten (10) selected stakeholders of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. The reliability co-efficient was calculated to be 0.75. The population for this study included all seventy-two (72) proprietors/proprietresses of private secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the seven-two (72) proprietors/proprietresses. The data collected for the study was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result revealed that zero financial support from government is one of the challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. 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, any nation that is not taking the education of its citizens seriously is endangering her future.

Education has taken such 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 (Otiye, 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 (FRN, 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 a 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), Otiye (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. Hence, Government encourages stakeholders to establish and manage educational institutions in the country.

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 government 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 its efficiency in operation

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 schools. Rhetta (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 the 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

Rhetta (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 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 Minister.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges and prospects of private secondary schools as perceived by proprietors/proprietress of private secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. Specifically, this study examined:

- a) proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis.
- b) proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised in the study:

- a) what is proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis?
- b) what is proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis?

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey. Descriptive survey research design describes, finds out and interprets event(s) and idea(s) the way they are without any external manipulation. A researchers-designed questionnaire was used in the study to obtain the necessary information from the respondents on their perception of the challenges and prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. The questionnaire contained items that were used to gather information on the perception of proprietors/proprietresses on the challenges and prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis.

The reliability of the instrument was done by administering the questionnaire on ten (10) selected stakeholders of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. The reliability co-efficient was calculated to be 0.75 using test re-test.

The population for this study included all seven-two (72) proprietors/proprietresses of private secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the seven-two (72) proprietors/proprietresses. The data collected for the study was analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

Data Analysis and Results

The analysis was in line with the research questions earlier raised. The research investigated the perception of proprietors/proprietresses of private secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis.

Research Question 1: *What is proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis?*

Table 1: Proprietors/proprietresses' perception on the challenges facing private Secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis

S/N	Challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis	X	SD	Ranking
1	Zero financial support from government	3.81	1.78	1 st
2	Unfavourable government policy	2.81	1.72	2 nd
3	Constant unscheduled inspection by government officials	2.70	1.60	3 rd
4	Exploitation by government officials	2.67	1.51	4 th
5	Low students enrolment	2.52	1.44	5 th
6	Difficulty in registering students for external examinations	2.44	1.18	5 th
7	Poor moral support from parents	2.31	1.17	7 th
8	Inadequacy of qualified teachers	2.20	0.94	8 th
9	Difficulty in providing adequate learning facilities	2.11	0.91	9 th
10	Poor teacher remuneration	1.97	0.72	10 th

Table 1 above showed the mean and standard deviation rank of Proprietors/proprietresses' perception on the challenges facing private Secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. Five out of ten items depict various forms of challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis as perceived by proprietors/proprietresses because the mean scores are above 2.50 which is the cut-off for decision since the responses are patterned after the four-point Likert Scale Format. Zero financial support from the government ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.81. Unfavourable government policy ranked 2nd. Constant unscheduled inspection by government officials ranked 3rd in the opinion of proprietors/proprietresses with a mean score of 2.70. Others major challenges facing private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis are exploitation by government officials and low students enrolment. These findings corroborate the earlier study of Saidu (2009) where it was revealed that private secondary schools are faced with myriad of challenges such as unfavourable government policy, poor funding and low enrolment rate.

Research Question 2: *What is proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis?*

Table 2: Proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the prospects of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis.

S/N	Item on Private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis	X	SD	Ranking
1	Stable academic calendar	2.72	1.88	1 st
2	High academic quality	2.72	1.66	2 nd
3	Close link between the school and parents	2.64	1.56	3 rd
4	Good learning facilities	2.57	1.54	4 th
5	Lack of political interference	2.52	1.51	5 th
6	Affective and Psycho-Social Development of students	2.49	1.40	6 th
7	Low crime rate in the society as some people are gainfully employed	2.44	1.24	7 th
8	Student discipline is guaranteed	2.37	1.11	8 th
9	Adequate access to quality education	2.21	0.99	9 th
10	Improved efficiency in education sector	2.17	0.43	10 th

Table 2 above showed the mean and standard deviation rank on Proprietors/proprietresses' perception of the prospects of private Secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. Stable academic calendar was ranked 1st as the major prospect of private Secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis with a mean score of 2.72. High academic quality ranked 2nd with a mean score of 2.72. The result from the respondents further revealed that lack of political interference was ranked 5th with a mean score of 2.52.

Conclusion

In spite of the perceived challenges of private secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis, the number of individuals and private organizations participating in the provision of secondary education in Ilorin give a prospect that privatization secondary education would enhance high academic quality as private sectors are known for efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of services than the public sectors.

Recommendations

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

1. 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

2. 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.
3. 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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