

EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ITS FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL ROLES

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THE objective of educational development often raises some controversy among educational planners. For instance, some hold the view that education should be provided for its own sake, as a means of enriching the individual's knowledge and enabling him to develop his personality. In essence, this view holds that education is terminally oriented as in Britain where education is primarily pursued for the status it confers. Here, far from a close relationship between what industry requires, and what the school system attempts to do, there has in the past been a noticeable movement away from vocational education.

On the other hand, there is the notion that education should be geared towards preparing people to undertake specific tasks and employment functions essential to the transformation of society. This view contends that educational policies have to be instrumentally oriented, directed primarily towards the attainment of specific national objectives. The aim of this paper is to examine briefly the orientation of the Nigerian educational system and its functional and dysfunctional contributions. In Section I, the colonial impact and its dysfunctional role are dealt with while Section II examines the influence of the new awareness by Nigerians since regaining their political independence. In Section III, we examine the dysfunctional roles.

I. COLONIAL HERITAGE

The years of British rule in Nigeria left an almost indelible print on the educational system. Colonial education was terminally oriented as seen in the fact that many Nigerians who embraced formal education in those early days did so primarily because it conferred a distinction from the rest of society. Education was not pursued primarily because it enabled them to improve their skills but because it made them closer to white men. These early pioneers took pride being interpreters for the white officials, especially the Divisional Officers. They eventually emerged as a distinct social class.

The school curriculum was arts-oriented, producing men who could work as clerks in the white man's administrative establishments. The natives were not taught how to improve agriculture. The children, therefore, were sent to school not because of any material benefit it would confer but because it provided status. A man is reported to have admonished a catechist in a protestant church for preaching that people should send their children to school saying, "If all of them

send their children to school who will serve our children?"¹ To this man the symbolic value of education was such that if other's children embraced it they would perceive themselves as a class that would not accept serving others. The mentality imparted to the citizens by the colonial education system is apparent.

Even when there was a high demand for the few educated natives to serve as clerical officers many did not offer themselves for recruitment. They had many alternatives open to them. Many went into farming, attractive because of the fertile land. Others found self-employment by engaging in weaving, woodwork, and pottery. Lord Luggard, then British Governor General in Nigeria, noted in his *Political Memoranda* that the natives in a normal situation of peace and security could rely on the land or engage in trade without remaining as slaves or seeking wage work [10, p. 7]. Those who embraced formal education were not primarily motivated by material benefit, otherwise, they would have willingly taken up wage employment within the administrative establishment. In fact, the general unwillingness of the people to take up wage employment was cause for Luggard's remarks about forced labor [9, p. 30].

Furthermore, the symbolic value is not completely lost even today since some who have built up a financially strong family business, even though they cannot lay claim to formal education, send their children to school only to get them into the family business afterwards. A good number believe that education is not a prerequisite for material advancement. One is often quickly reminded that "Mr. X has made it and yet he cannot even write his name." But education is appreciated for its status value.

The terminal value of education tended, however, to decline as it was demonstrated that instrumental content is highly rewarding. For instance, as those few who accepted wage employment became visibly richer during the colonial era than the majority, many became educated with the hope of enhancing not only social status but also economic standing, itself a factor in social status. This upturn notwithstanding, education could not claim to be a means of meeting national manpower needs. It remained lopsided, emphasizing the arts at the expense of science and technology.

II. A NEW AWARENESS

As can be seen in Table I, the lopsidedness of education continued even after the country was granted independence in 1960. In the 1964-65 academic year, of the total number of students enrolled in the country's universities, 32.5 per cent registered in arts and education, and 25.22 per cent in social sciences and law, while only 15.34 per cent registered in pure science and 7.66 per cent in technology.

Nigeria has been an agricultural country. In this regard, one would expect that agriculture and veterinary science would be emphasized. But agriculture and forestry attracted only 6.85 per cent and veterinary science a meagre 1.85 per cent in 1964-65.

¹ F. M. Ezeaku in a personal interview.

TABLE I
NEW ENTRANTS AND TOTAL ENROLMENT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORDING
TO FACULTY AND COURSE FOR 1964-65

Faculty	New Entrants	%	Total Enrolment	%
Arts and education	963	34.97	2,180	32.50
Pure science	411	14.92	1,029	15.34
Social science and law	656	23.81	1,692	25.22
Technology	270	9.80	514	7.66
Medicine and pharmacy	91	3.30	534	7.96
Agriculture and forestry	214	7.77	460	6.85
Veterinary science	41	1.49	124	1.85
Postgraduate	108	3.92	174	2.60
Total	2,754	100	6,707	100

Source: [6, p. 3].

However, the educational system has not remained static. There is new awareness in the government and the new elite that political independence cannot mean much unless economic self-sufficiency is attained. A frantic effort has been made to redress the situation where humanities are emphasized at the expense of science and technology, and the nation's manpower needs are not taken into consideration. For instance in the 1972-73 academic year, enrolment in technology increased to 10.83 per cent while in pure science it increased to 16.58 per cent. In the 1973-74 year as Table II shows, the percentages further increased to 11.63 per cent and 17.32 per cent. The rate of change is no doubt very minimal, bearing in mind that, from the experience of the advanced nations, scientific and technological advancement are prerequisites for economic and social development.

The new awareness received a great impetus later in this decade. For instance, the Third National Development Plan 1975-80 states, "Greater attention will be paid to the distribution of students into the major disciplines so as to give greater emphasis to the study of medicine, pure-science and technology. A 60:40 Science/Humanities ratio will be deliberately pursued" [5, p. 248]. The educational policy of the government after independence has been geared towards internally producing the country's manpower needs. In this respect, education has enjoyed high priority in Nigeria's development planning. For instance, in the first plan, it ranked fifth in terms of the financial resources allocation while in the second plan 1970-74, it was second attracting N77.8 million or 13.5 per cent of the total planned investment. Among the objectives of the educational program for the third plan 1975-80 are the following [5, p. 245]:

- (1) to reform the content of general education to make it more responsive to the socioeconomic needs of the country,
- (2) to consolidate and develop the nation's system of higher education in response to the economy's manpower needs, and
- (3) to make an impact in the area of technological education so as to meet the growing needs of the economy.

TABLE II
TOTAL ENROLMENT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES BY FACULTY AND COURSE :
1972-73 AND 1973-74 ACADEMIC YEAR

Faculty	1972-73				1973-74			
	Men	Women	Grand Total	Faculty Percentage	Men	Women	Grand Total	Faculty Percentage
Administration	977	110	1,087	5.20	1,145	124	1,269	5.46
Arts	2,815	715	3,530	16.90	2,991	753	3,744	16.11
Education	2,234	764	2,998	14.35	2,653	959	3,612	15.56
Law	836	167	1,003	4.80	863	229	1,092	4.70
Pure science	2,959	506	3,465	16.58	3,394	628	4,022	17.32
Social science	1,766	178	1,944	9.30	2,108	207	2,315	9.97
Med., pharm., and nursing	2,160	438	2,598	12.44	2,357	446	2,803	12.07
Technology	2,220	44	2,264	10.83	2,641	61	2,702	11.63
Agric., forestry, and vet. med.	1,834	166	2,000	9.57	1,485	184	1,666	7.18
Total	17,801	3,088	20,889	100	19,637	3,591	23,228	100

Sources : [7, p. 11] [8, p. 3].

These objectives are formulated against a background in which it is understood that investment in education is a form of capital investment which will yield future dividend. The "focus of the educational policy therefore has been the ultimate provision of education to every child of school going age to at least primary school level, on the grounds that universal education is very vital in improving people's receptiveness to new ideas" and is needed for the creation of a sufficient stock of skills for the process of overall development, social and economic. This emphasized the functional orientation of the present educational system, at least in its intent.

At this juncture, one may like to know how far the objective has been achieved of internally developing enough skills to meet the manpower needs of the country. Here it should be said that the school system has been able to meet low level manpower needs, but not middle and high level manpower needs. The following facts about the proportion of expatriate personnel in Nigerian enterprise come from a 1972 survey by the Nigerian Institute of Management [9, p. 30]:

(1) Approximately 80 to 85 per cent of senior level management positions are held by non-Nigerians.

(2) At the middle management level approximately 50 per cent of the positions are held by expatriates.

(3) Only a few expatriates hold non-technical positions.

(4) Some 800 of the 2,217 expatriates included in the survey, nearly one-third, hold technical positions which are not classified as either middle or senior management.

(5) There are as yet only a few Nigerians occupying what might be called "key" decision-making positions. For instance, at the time of the survey, only one of the seventy-five firms studied had a Nigerian as chief executive.

TABLE III
ACADEMIC STAFF BY NATIONALITY AND INSTITUTION, 1972-73 and 1973-74

University	1972-73					1973-74				
	Nigerian	%	Non-Nigerian	%	Total	Nigerian	%	Non-Nigerian	%	Total
Ahmadu Bello	352	50.72	342	49.23	694	478	48.38	510	51.62	988
Benin	40	67.80	19	32.20	59	101	75.94	32	24.06	133
Ibadan	416	73.50	150	26.50	566	498	77.57	144	22.43	642
Ife	324	78.45	89	21.55	413	550	80.65	132	19.35	682
Lagos	374	84.81	67	15.19	441	380	85.39	65	14.61	445
Nigeria	423	87.76	59	12.24	482	486	85.41	83	14.59	569
Total	1,929	72.66	726	27.34	2,655	2,493	72.07	966	27.93	3,459

Sources: [7, p. 14] [8, p. 5].

One thing is striking here, that is that despite the new emphasis in education, the school system has not been able to provide enough indigenous personnel to man technical positions in Nigeria. Expatriate technicians are concentrated in textile and petroleum producing companies. If one bears in mind that petroleum production is a key sector in Nigeria's economic life, it becomes even more apparent that the country's educational system has not been fully tuned to the objective of internally supplying its manpower needs. Traditional economic theory would postulate a labor market characterized by enough labor mobility that demand and supply forces would produce and allocate labor resources. But this has not been the case in Nigeria. Rather, imperfection in the labor market has prevailed. The lack of a sufficient internal supply of technicians shows that the educational system still produces people who are influenced by the symbolic value of education, preferring administrative rather than technical jobs. This follows the traditional pattern established in Britain even there even recently [1, p. 27].

One other thing worth mentioning is that the predominance of expatriate labor in top level positions in Nigeria applies even to the educational system. The staffing of Nigerian universities is shown in Table III. In the 1972-73 academic year, non-Nigerians constituted 27.34 per cent of the total academic staff increasing to 27.93 per cent in 1973-74. The high proportion of non-Nigerians in these institutions reflects the inability of an educational system to reproduce itself. Of course, it could be that employment outside the university is more lucrative leading to a movement of labor to other sectors. However, it should be remembered that even in the private sector, there is a preponderance of expatriate labor force at the managerial level. If the analysis of the staffing situation in the universities is carried further, it is even more glaringly evident that the top positions are still occupied by foreigners.

Table IV shows more foreigners than Nigerians occupying the posts of professor, associate professor, director, and reader. The proportion of non-Nigerians would be expected to increase following the establishment of four additional universities by the Federal Military Government in 1976. To be more rational and functional, the educational system should be such that it could produce

TABLE IV
ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES BY GRADE AND NATIONALITY,
1972-73 AND 1973-74

Position	1972-73		1973-74	
	Nigerian	Non-Nigerian	Nigerian	Non-Nigerian
1 Professors, associate professors, directors, and readers	169	192	178	229
2 Senior lecturers, senior research fellows	301	155	324	211
3 Lecturers, research fellows, associate lecturers	1,047	327	1,226	402
4 Assistant lecturers, junior research fellows	350	32	360	58
5 Others, e.g., tutors, demonstrators	63	119	365	66
Total	1,930	725	2,493	966

Sources: [7, p. 14] [8, p. 6].

enough labor to man the old institutions and the new ones. But this has not been the case. Not that one expects universities to be completely manned by Nigerians since this would not make a very good situation for the cross-fertilization of ideas. Rather it only shows that despite the new awareness on the part of Nigerians, the educational system has not functioned to the extent that it can meet the man power requirements of the country with an adequate supply of labor.

III. DYSFUNCTIONAL ROLES

The dysfunctional aspects of the country's educational system become very conspicuous in the social and political spheres. Nigeria today is a consumer society in the sense that most citizens are consumption rather than production oriented. It is the largest market in Africa for western consumer goods, e.g., Japanese automobiles and electronic equipment. There is an inclination for people to consume and live in comfort as in Europe and America. This owes very much to the type of educational system that exists.

The problem is not only with content but also with method. For instance, children very often are not required to learn to solve problems by themselves. The teacher does almost every thing, giving notes in the class and presenting no challenges. They are not taught creativity so that on coming out they will look for avenues of expression for their ideas. Instead, on leaving school, every child looks for employment in the civil service where life apparently appears easy-going. The aftermath is that we produce men who have not cultivated the habit of looking for challenges in life. Instead we have men who are predisposed towards living an easy life, who would like to stay where they are and fatten themselves by consuming imported western goods.

Those who stepped into the shoes of the colonial administrations after they

left the country quickly assumed the life style of the administrators. And today, this life pattern is spreading even to the common man. For instance, television sets are considered more and more a necessity rather than a luxury item. The educated elite will always want something which distinguishes them as a class from the rest of society but the less privileged feel they cannot afford to be left out in the race towards a life style emulating western culture. The inevitable consequence is a quest for material wealth as expressed in the popular Nigerian expression, "naira power." This is the aftermath led by the colonial educational system's symbolic orientation. The elite regard their consumption pattern as an index of status in society conferred by education. Those who are unable to meet the established standard resort to various malpractices in order to build up their naira power.

Furthermore, there is much emphasis today on paper qualifications. An educational certificate is the only gateway to employment. For instance, even employment as a cleaner requires at least a First School Leaving Certificate. Such a situation creates room for the educational system to become an instrument of oppression in society, because children of the less wealthy who cannot afford an expensive education have certain doors completely shut to them. Poverty begets poverty and the sons of the underprivileged are often denied educational opportunities and sentenced to virtual servitude.

By not providing alternative opportunities for those not intellectually well equipped the educational system is a source of possible civil strife in a class conscious society like Nigeria. Only a few comprehensive secondary schools teach different crafts in addition to courses taught in grammar school. The inevitable result is that those who cannot get on in normal grammar school courses are given as alternatives and filtered off into society. Rejected by the school system, they become a social nuisance. No doubt, even though their ability, as far as the educational system is concerned, is very limited, their wants are as unlimited as the intellectual geniuses.

The situation may worsen now that there is free primary education along with the expensive secondary education. Many graduates of the primary schools may be filtered out of the educational system, victims of half-education, easily becoming social misfits, unless adequate measures are adopted to ensure other ways for them to develop their personalities.

In analyzing the political crisis that led to civil war, we find that the educational system is partly responsible. The educational system has stimulated political consciousness, and political power is seen as an invaluable asset used to secure many advantages, political, social, and economic. The colonial administration divided the country into unequal parts for its own convenience, the northern administrative area having greater population and more land than the south. This conferred political advantage on the north for through sheer numbers the political head of the country always comes from this section, bearing in mind that democratic principles confer ruling power through the numerical support that each candidate is able to muster. The people in the southern part of the country quickly saw the disadvantage of the position into which the colonial

TABLE V
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES,
1972-73 AND 1973-74

State of Origin	1972-73		1973-74	
	No. of Students	State %	No. of Students	State %
North-Western	574	2.75	643	2.77
North-Central	659	3.15	836	3.60
Kano	555	2.66	576	2.48
North-Eastern	868	4.16	1,017	4.38
Benue-Plateau	874	4.18	1,108	4.77
Kwara	1,289	6.17	1,540	6.63
Subtotal for North	4,819	23.07	5,722	24.63
Western	7,010	33.56	6,920	29.79
Mid-Western	2,587	12.38	2,960	12.74
Lagos	466	2.23	486	2.09
East-Central	4,243	20.31	5,307	22.85
South-Eastern	1,024	4.90	1,036	4.46
Rivers	421	2.02	466	2.01
Subtotal for South	15,751	75.40	17,175	73.94
Non-Nigerian	319	1.52	331	1.42
Total	20,889	100	23,228	100

Sources: [7, p. 13] [8, p. 5].

administration either consciously or unconsciously had put them, and they sought legitimate means to gain more power. The obvious choice was education, although perhaps their judgement was not rational. They realized that through education, economic power could be secured. Hence the pursuit of education was stronger in the south than in the north. This has led to educational imbalance which probably could have been avoided if compulsory free education had been instituted in the colonial era. Traces of the imbalance in the present decade are seen in Table V. Educational imbalance led to suspicion between different regions and this mistrust exploded in civil unrest.

The table shows that in the 1972-73 academic year, all northern states put together accounted for only 23.07 per cent of the total student enrolment in Nigerian universities while in the south Western State alone accounted for 33.56 per cent. In 1973-74, however, the northern states share increased to 24.63 per cent. This is expected to increase especially since more universities have been built in the North.

The imbalance has done Nigeria a lot of harm; much of the ethnic tension and jealousy is traceable to it. As Otonti Nduka succinctly puts it, "much of Nigeria's subsequent social and political history, right up to and after the civil war, has turned on the attempt of various ethnic groups to narrow or eliminate the "gaps" in economic and political power between those with early access to Western education, and the late starters" [4, p. 93]. There is no doubt that the upsurge in the number of educated Ibos is a factor in social unrest. The Ibos

are among the late starters. The Efiks and Yoruba were early beneficiaries, the Yorubas having the opportunity to occupy most of the enviable posts so that by 1920 they were over 40 per cent of the total educated persons in prestige occupations while the Ibos filled only 11 per cent [3, p. 143]. However, in subsequent decades, the proportion of educated Ibos rose dramatically and seriously threatened the Yoruba hegemony of professional occupations [2, p. 63]. This did not delight the Yorubas who saw in the upturn an attempt to unseat them from an enviable position.

Another dysfunctional role of education is producing people divorced from their own culture and traditions. Traditional ways of life are looked upon as primitive while the behavior of the whiteman is the embodiment of civilized culture. Recipients of education become colonized willy-nilly in their mental attitude and it will be a herculean task to decolonize them. Traditional political authority has been over-thrown the exercise of political authority shifting from the elders to the educated younger generation. The days are gone in which authority was based on age and status, sanctified by heredity and ancient custom and buttressed by supernatural sanctions. The overthrow of the older generation has been facilitated as youth has received Western education and become increasingly less dependent economically on the older generation.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing it should be clear that education in Nigeria still bears the imprint of colonial heritage despite the new awareness by Nigerian leaders that the system needs to be overhauled to usher in rapid social, political, and economic development.

Many recipients of formal education believe that they should not have to work with their hands, because greater pecuniary and non-pecuniary advantage, i.e., status, power, and prestige are attached to administrative and clerical positions. Despite the constantly reemphasized objective of internally producing. Nigeria's manpower needs, much of Nigeria's top level manpower still comes from outside the country. There is an acute shortage of highly skilled technicians and educational imbalance between ethnic groups. The various attempts to overhaul the educational system have not decolonized the thinking of most of the Western educated. Instead there is a growing belief that white is "white." Furthermore, there is a notion that education is a privilege for only a few, hence the objectives of Universal Free Primary Education are inadvertently thwarted by reactionary policies and measures from the same government that introduced this free primary education scheme.

The past decades have seen the country grappling with the problem of developing purely functional education. It cannot be claimed that it has met with much success, not because the task is gigantic but because the people in the position to initiate and implement the measures are the direct beneficiaries of the status quo. Men act in accordance with their own consciousness, but that consciousness is a function of social and economic position. It is therefore my view

that in order to produce and operate a rational and functional educational system, we need first of all to decolonize the mentality of Nigeria's educated elite who hold the power and authority.

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