

THE RETURN OF MISSION OWNED SECONDARY SCHOOLS TO THE MISSIONS: NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

About a decade ago the government returned mission owned secondary schools back to the missions. Although this action of government is laudable it has generated some controversies which border on the areas of the rationale behind the return, the fate of secondary education after the return; the idea of establishment of parallel secondary schools by government after the return; the fate of government secondary school staff, the state of employment and security after the return; the nature of the National Policy on Secondary School Education, and the question of free and equal access to education of every Nigerian child. The study articulate the implications of the return schools by the government to the missions, acceptance of these schools by the missions, and the responsibilities this exercise has placed on the shoulders of both the government and the missions for the overall realization of the rationale behind the handing over mission owned schools back to the missions by the government. The paper concludes that although the handing over of secondary schools to the mission by government is good and the expertise of the missions in effective administration of the schools is guaranteed, it will create some adverse effects on education and society. The paper recommends that primary schools should also be handed over to the missions, government should provide grants-in-aid, security and the enabling environment to the mission schools, and that legal backing should be provided to avoid future government interferences. The methods adopted in this study include historical, speculative, analytical and prescriptive methods of philosophy.

Keywords: Missions Schools, Rationale, Government, Secondary Schools, State of Employment

INTRODUCTION

The issue of handing over mission owned secondary schools back to the missions had graduated from the levels of proposal and debate to actualization. In fact, Ige (2021), remarked that the debate of return of schools to the missions is on front burner. Mission owned secondary schools which were taken over by the government between 1972 and 1976 with the resultant promulgation of the 1977 National Policy on Education and reviewed in 2009 have been recently, particularly in 2011 handed over to their respective missions. For instance, Warri and Issele-Uku Dioceses among others have taken possession of their respective secondary schools. According to Dayo (2016), in December 8, 2016, Delta State returned 40 schools to the missions 27 to Catholic, 8 to Anglican, four to Baptist Missions, respectively. In Ondo State, the Catholic received two Secondary Schools, namely, St. Thomas Aquinas College and St. Louis Girls grammar schools in Akure. In 2001, many schools were returned to missionaries by Tinubu, the then governor of Lagos state. Similarly, according to Jimisayo(2023), Ebonyi government was also to return all missionary schools to the missions. This decision and action is praiseworthy but it has precipitated some rational and logical issues which cannot be overlooked or compromised but needed to be addressed and analyzed for the overall feasibility and realization of the rationale and intentions for the handing over of secondary schools back to the missions. Such relevant issues can be

presented in question form: can the missions effectively run or administer the schools as the early missionaries did before the government took over those schools? Why the intention to establishment of parallel secondary schools by the government? What becomes of the displaced government secondary school staff? Can the objectives of the Universal Basic Education be achieved? Obviously, some teething challenges are already associated with the return of schools back to the mission.

The Establishment of Parallel Secondary Schools by the Government: The establishment of parallel secondary schools by the Government is creating some reservations in the whole question of handing over mission owned school back to the missions. In reality, the creation of comparable secondary schools by the government poses a threat to the rationale behind the handing over of secondary schools back to the missions. In handing over secondary schools back to the missions the government seems to be saying in a subtle way “I have failed”. If government could not handle secondary education which is implied by her handing over secondary schools back to the missions, why is the government establishing equivalent secondary schools after the handing over of secondary schools back to the missions? Although education is a tripartite venture, the establishment of parallel secondary schools by government will militate against the rationality behind the handing over of mission schools back to the missions. The missions are not jumping at the offer by the government but decided to accept it not for financial or economic advancement but to salvage the deplorable condition or state of

secondary education in the country for the sake of the future of the students and for the good and the economic, social, political, technological, religious, moral, cultural, industrial emancipation of the society and for the salvation of souls. Of course, the schools that are handed over to the missions are dilapidated and the missions have to spend much resource to resuscitate them and make them conducive for academic and educational exercises. According to Dayo (2023), the establishment of parallel secondary schools is a waste of resources. Establishing parallel secondary schools by the government is a major hazard to the success and growth of the secondary schools handed over to the missions by the government. This is due to the fact that, customarily, schools fees in government schools are cheaper or more affordable. In addition, successive political regimes may eradicate school fees and provide free education for the masses. But missions may not afford free education their students. This means that more parents or students will patronize government schools than the mission schools. Unequivocally, this will thwart the efforts of the missions to sanitize secondary education. It would be superlative if the missions are given the sole responsibility of administering secondary education in Nigeria, although community and private secondary schools can co-exist with mission schools in order to encourage competition.

Resurgence of Social Vices in Secondary Schools: Furthermore, the new established schools by the government are becoming dimples of social vices such as corruption, cultism, and examination malpractice which were realities that necessitated the handing

over of schools to the missions. This makes it challenging for the missions to sanitize secondary education in Nigeria. It also jeopardizes the rationale behind the handing over of secondary schools to the missions which is extermination of corruption and vices from schools and inculcation of patriotism and discipline in students.

Unequal Access to Education: One of the objectives of education in Nigeria is the provision of equal access to education. This is evident in the rational for the Universal Basic Education.

“An uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education by providing free, compulsory basic education for every child of school age (6 15years)”.Mission schools have the physiognomies of private schools because the funding is the solitary responsibility of missionaries. Hence, payment of salaries, provision of well-equip library and laboratory, sport and social facilities, hostel and staff accommodations are sole responsibility of proprietors of the mission schools. This necessarily implies that tuition fees of the secondary schools now controlled by the mission schools will rise considerably. Can parents afford increased tuitions fees that will be imposed by the proprietors of the mission schools? If parents cannot due to the present economic situation of Nigeria then, how can this objective of the provision of equal access to education be realized in Nigeria? If some parents cannot afford the school fees of the mission schools how can every Nigerian child have access to the mission schools in order to benefit from the moral, academic, social, spiritual, and intellectual formation imparted by the mission

schools? Of course, with the seeming reality of the inevitable increment in school fees of the mission schools, it will be difficult for some parents to afford the school fees of the mission schools, and this will deprive considerable number of Nigerian children of the right to qualitative education.

Increase of Unemployment in Nigerian and Increase in Social Vices: The problem of unemployment in Nigeria is a perennial one, i.e.; it has been in existence before the handing over of mission owned schools back to the missions. In other words, before the handing over of schools to the missions, many Nigerian working class both graduates and otherwise are unemployed, while many of those who have jobs were employed by the government, and many of those employed by the government were employed into the educational institutions including the secondary schools. Unlike the government the missions cannot employ many workers as the government does due to limited resources. Therefor the handing over of schools to missions will lead to drastic reduction of employment in Nigeria.

Escalation in Insecurity and Anti-Social activities in Nigeria: The unequivocal reduction of employment due to handing over of secondary to the missions will necessarily lead to increase in insecurity and anti-social activities in Nigeria. The problem of insecurity in the areas of kidnapping, robbery, hooliganism, theft, internet fraud(419 fraudsters), assassinations, political thuggery, militancy and ant- social activities such as prostitution, cultism, etc. have been in existence in Nigeria even

before the handing over schools to the missions by the government. The handing over of schools to the missions by the government result in the increase of insecurity and anti-social problems due to reduction of employment opportunities and high rate of dropouts as a result of inadequacy of resources to fund education by parents. As the saying goes 'a hungry man is an angry lion' or 'idle mind is the devil's workshop'.

Upturn of Loss of Lives and Properties: Already, a lot of lives and properties have been lost due to insecurity and anti-social activities in Nigeria even before handing over of schools to the missions. Armed robbery, kidnapping, fraudulent practices, hooliganism, and anti-social activities cultism (cult clashes), prostitution (HIV/AIDS) have claimed many lives in Nigerian. Now that more people may be unemployed due to the giving back of schools to the missions by the government, what happens? Definitely, this exercise of handing over schools to the missions will bring about a decline in employment by government, and this may create more security with its concomitant loss of lives and properties.

The Fate of Government Staff in Schools handed over to the Missions: Another issue that needs to be address has to do with the aftermath or the consequence the handing over of schools to the mission has on government staff who were ab initio working in those schools that were handed over to the missions. What happens to these staff after the handover? The perspective of unemployment is also highlighted by Ige (2021). Probably, it is to solve this puzzle that motivates government to decide to

establish parallel schools to absorb the displaced government staff of secondary schools. Otherwise, not being redeployed may lead to their redundancy culminating in their dismissal and eventual removal from government payroll.

Successive Government Interference: It was due to government interference with the mission schools that led to the taken over of schools by the government. What is the guarantee that these schools handed over to the missions by the government will not be taken over again by the government in the future? It is probable that these schools that were handed over to the missions because of their collapse in all ramifications might be taken back again by the government after the missions' efforts to fully resuscitate and develop them in all ramifications. In addition, successive regimes who do not like this decision and action of the then government may decide to discard it and return to the status quo. Already in some states missions are already in courts with government over a handed over schools. To avoid government unnecessary interference in the future, government should put in place the necessary legal structures and backing. This paper is intended to attempt some enlightenments and resolutions to the above questions and matters arising from the return of schools to the mission in order to maximally realize the objectives and good intention of government of handing over secondary schools to the missions for the happiness, fulfillment and success of the missions, and for moral, social, spiritual, economic, technological development of Nigeria, and for the good of Nigerians.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts philosophical methods, namely, historical/phenomenological, speculative, analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism, discourse and prescription. The paper embarked on historical exposition of the antiquity of education in Nigeria, analyzes key words and concepts with a view to provide lucidatory clarification and elucidation for the reader, it critically discourses the various angles of the them in order to give a holistic philosophical explanation and understanding. With the tools of philosophical reasoning, the paper, prescribes necessary ideas, opinions, and recipe for comparison, application, rationalization, and understanding. Speculatively, the paper discusses and examines all dimensions, issues, and perspectives of the topic for holistic consideration and understanding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Antecedent: The origin of formal or western education in Nigeria could be traced to the second advent of missionaries in Nigeria in the 19th century, precisely 1842. The missionaries include those of the Methodist, the Church Missionary Society, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Catholic and the Qua Ibo Missions. Western type education in Nigeria, according to Asiegbu (2020), dates back to 1842 with the second coming of the Missionaries. The Wesleyan Methodist Society led the way followed by the Church Missionary Society all in Badagary. The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland followed in 1846 by founding a mission at Calabar. The American Southern

Baptist Convention arrived in 1853, the Roman Catholic Mission in 1868, the Qua Ibo Mission in 1887, and the Primitive Methodist Society in 1890. Western education which was initially under the complete administration and control of missionaries was utilized as a catalyst by the missionaries who were poised with the intention of annihilating indigenous religious practices through the instrumentality of evangelization. Before 1882, western-type education in Nigeria was a pure monopoly of the Christian missionaries without government supervision or control. Education policy this time was directed towards evangelization of Africans. It was in 1882 that the preliminary government policy on education as it affected part of Nigeria was made.

Education in Nigeria since its establishment in 1843 by the missionaries has gone through series of modifications due to incessant policy formulations. Before 1877 for instance, education in was fully financed and controlled by the missionaries. This continued until 1882 and it was in 1882 that the first government policy on education as it part of Nigeria was made. Successive educational policies such as the 1887 education policy which was formulated due to suspension of Lagos from the Gold Coast Colony and the 1908 education ordinance motivated by the creation of Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1908. This gave rise to the principles of partnership in Nigeria. By this ordinance, there emerged the principle of partnership. Similarly, by this principle, government supplemented the efforts of the voluntary agencies by giving

grants-in-aid and simultaneously established and maintained her own schools. The 1916 education code was predicated on the amalgamation of the Protectorate of Northern and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria by Lord Lugard. The 1916 education code was more universal covering the whole country. Lord Lugard who was the then Governor-General 1914-19 highlighted the essence of the 1916 education code in his memorandum “I regard it is an essential feature of a right policy in education that it should enlist in hearty cooperation all educational agencies in the country which are conducted (as mission schools are) with the sole object of benefitting the people. Unassisted schools are independent of Government control, but I hope that they will be induced to conform to the principles and policy laid down by Government, and supported and approved by the principal educational agencies (Dayo, 2016). The 1916 code tried to make the condition of grants-in-aid simpler. Instead of award based on annual examination in certain subjects, the new conditions were assessed based on:

- 30% on tone, discipline, organization and moral instruction;
- 20% on the adequacy and efficiency of the teaching staff;
- 40% on the result of periodic examinations and general progress; and
- 10% Buildings, equipment and sanitation.

The 1926 education ordinance was the aftermath of the Memorandum of the Advisory Committee in 1925 to the British Government on Education on Tropical Africa which came into existence as follow up to the Phelps-Stokes Report in

1922. The 1926 education code was actually intended to thwart the growth of unassisted schools both by the missions and individuals in Nigeria. The 1948 education ordinance came into existence when a new construction divided the country into three regions-North, East, West, and the colony of Lagos. The 1952 Education ordinance was enacted to reflect the changes brought about by the McPherson Constitution of 1951 which made education a regional function. At the end of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in 1970, the East Central State took the lead in taking over the ownership, control, and administration of education at all levels. This move was followed by other states in the federation (Ogara and Ezeodili, 2022).

The 1981 National Policy on Education which was a revise of that of 1977 and a titanic government venture, was enacted by the Federal Government with the intention that “any contradictions, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practices in the different parts of the Federation should be removed to ensure an evenly and orderly development in the country” (NPE, 1981). The objectives of the 1981 National Policy on Education include: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (NPE, 1981). By the 1981 policy, government has

taken over all mission schools, and education had become a huge government venture with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Rationale behind Government Takeover of All Mission Schools: First, there was no uniformity of educational policies due to reorganization of education. Respective regions created respective educational policies depending on their respective financial stance. Consequently, the Western Region introduced Universal Free Education in 1955 while the Eastern Region settled on Universal Freedom Free Primary Education in 1957; the Midwest took over all primary and secondary schools from voluntary organizations and the missions; the Head of State of Nigeria launched a Universal Free Primary education nationwide but latter hit the rock shortly due to insufficient fund, personnel and organization. Therefore according to the 1981 National Policy on Education, the government intended to annihilate any contradictions, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practices in the parts of the Federation in order to ensure an even and orderly development in the country.

Justification behind the Return of Mission Owned Secondary Schools Back to the Missions: For decades the government has been in control of secondary schools until recently government decided to return mission-owned schools back to the missions. Now, what motivated government's decision to return mission owned-schools back to the missions? Are there any justifications for this decision and action of government? First, education under the control of government has not been able to significantly

achieve its expected objectives in almost every area of societal life, namely, politics, religion, morality, technology, economic, social, etc. In other words, education has not been able to serve the society as it ought. The reasons for this can be predicated on some realities within education itself.

a. There is the lack of motivation of staff by government leading to incessant strike actions, delay in payment of salaries of teachers, non-implementation of certain policies especially that have to do with the welfare of teachers, problem of delay in the promotion of staff and non-payment of staff promotion arrears.

b. Ethnicity, tribalism and the whole question of state of origin in employment of staff which has led to the refusal of qualified applicants leading to waning educational standards in Nigeria.

c. Lack of political will especially in the areas of educational funding, staff welfare, supervision, inspection and monitoring.

d. There is conspicuous falling standard of education in Nigeria. In fact, according to Daud (2023), Christian Leaders in Ogun has censured the government for the collapsing educational standard in Nigeria by taking over schools from the missionaries some decades ago.

e. Lack of qualified and committed staff, dilapidated classrooms, embezzlement of educational or school funds, and negligence of staff to duties that has led to the inability of education to fulfill its set objectives.

RESULT/DISCUSSIONS

The State of Education after the Return of Mission Owned Secondary Schools

Back to the Missions: A fundamental question that has emerged is "Can the Missions effectively run the schools that government has handed over to them"? The government seems to have nostalgia about the glorious educational standards and achievements when education was under the control of the missions or when the missions were very much involved in educational administration before the takeover of schools by government. Then, there was high sense of discipline both on the parts of staff and students. There was high sense of morality, interest, efficient supervision, inspection, and checks and balances in school activities and administration. In fact, those who passed through mission schools who are still alive testify to the fact of moral, spiritual, physical, social, and academic formation and discipline imparted in them which still help them today to courageously and successfully combat the problems, troubles, difficulties, and challenges of life. They can notice the conspicuous the great difference between the educational outcomes of the mission schools and those of the schools under the control of government.

The question now still lingers "can the contemporary missions handle or administer the schools as missionaries did before the takeover by government? Can the present missionaries achieve much as the early missionaries did? The answer is still simply "Yes. This is because the present education administrators who are predominantly

ordained priests (clergy) and the religious are equipped with the same and even more moral, intellectual, educational, academic, social, and spiritual formation that can enable them to perform more effectively than the early missionaries since the horizon, contents, and duration of formation of priests and the religious is constantly reviewed, enriched, developed, and lengthened. These are personnel who, due to their discipline, cannot be influenced or intimidated by any person or group of persons, and who will unequivocally administer justice and exercise absolute control over all staff and students. In missionary institutions, vices such as embezzlement of funds, corruption, negligence, intimidation, malpractices, cultism, and injustice, cannot exist, and by their exemplary lives, commitment, interest and responsibility, the missionaries will lead staff and students to the expected perfections expected of them by the society. With this, the contemporary missionaries can effect more educational achievements than the early missionaries due to their improved knowledge, experience and discipline.

Benefits of Control of Schools by the missions: There seems to be sharp difference between the products of schools controlled by the missions and those under the control of government. Of course, government cannot return schools back to the missions without observing, noticing, recognizing, and appreciating the difference in favor of the efforts of the missionaries. Those who were privileged to receive education from schools administered by the missions do testify to the incomparable, valuable, and laudable knowledge and discipline with which they were impacted touching all aspects of their

lives - social, marital, spiritual, religious, political, cultural, economic, etc. For instance, among others, they were impacted with the following.

- i. Discipline through the enforcement of school and educational laws, rules and regulations.
- ii. Commitment, interest, and dedication through reinforcement and motivation of staff and students.
- iii. Academic excellence through supervision, inspection, absolute control, perfect management, monitoring, assignments, research and keen competitions in academics and sports among students. This is also the opinion of Dayo (2016).
- iv. Perfection through hard work and checks and balance.
- v. Leadership qualities through good leadership styles, division of labor, delegation of powers and functions, assignment of tasks, duties and responsibilities to staff and students.
- vi. Moral perfection through exemplary lives, moral instruction and formation, discipline, rewards and punishments of staff and students. In this regard, Asiegbu (2020) remarks that mission owned schools, administration instills higher discipline.
- vii. Justice, courage, moderation, and wisdom through counseling, advice, prayer, and religious instruction to staff and students.

- viii. Respect for constituted authorities through exemplary lives, moral instruction, discipline, reinforcement and historical awareness.
- ix. Collaboration through team work, class discussions and debates, democratic processes in decision making and appointments.
- x. Responsibility in all aspects of lives such as economic, social, financial, marital, moral, political, and religious responsibilities through extra-mural activities, self-control, and assignment of responsibilities to both staff and students. In fact, Odili and Eluku (2020) stated that lethargic attitude in mission is considerably low.
- xi. Citizenship through legal instruction, inculcation of societal and moral values.
- xii. Critical thinking through inculcation of philosophical and logical reasoning.
- xiii. Integrity, firmness of character, simplicity, and flexibility.

Expected Role of Government after the Return of Schools to the Missions: In order to realize the laudable objectives or intentions behind the handing over of schools back to the missions, the government has the following uncompromising roles to play:

- i. The government should provide constitutional or legal backing through the acts of parliament and constitutional review to prohibit and prevent interference of government in the future.
- ii. The government should provide enough grants-in-aid and other financial assistances to the missions for the resuscitation of the dilapidated school structures, provision of educational and learning facilities and favorable environments for meaningful academic exercises.
- iii. Government should provide adequate security to prevent robbery attacks, cult activities, harassment, and any other anti-social activities which result in loss of lives and properties, disruption and discouragement of peaceful educational process in campuses.
- iv. Government should not only create enough jobs to absorb applicants, but also create the enabling government for private investors which serve as government employment alternatives.
- v. Allocations intended to be used to build new secondary schools by the government should be given to missions to assist them to renovate and equip the schools, and mobilize staff in up review of salaries.

CONCLUSION

Government's decision to return mission owned secondary schools back to the missions is a laudable one because it will help the secondary educational system in following

varied ways, namely, boost the falling standard of education; sanitization of the secondary education purging it of vices and corruption; production of patriotic citizens; and the overall realization of the objectives of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria. However these laudable objectives of the return of schools to the missions would be thwarted by certain problems precipitated by the handing over of schools to the missions. For instance, the problem of creation of parallel secondary by the government, future government interferences, reduction of employment by the government; and unequal access to education must be anticipated and proactively resolved and annihilated in order to maximally realize the laudable objectives of the return of schools to the missions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion and the conclusion on the reality of the return of mission owned secondary schools back to the missions, the paper makes the following recommendations:

1. Having noticed the efficiency and efficacy of the missions in school and educational administration, the government should hand over not only mission owned schools but the entire secondary education system to the missions. This will help in the sanitization of the entire secondary educational system for the political, moral, economic, social, scientific, technological, religious, advancement of the nation.

2. Government should also concede the entire primary education system to the missions to administer, considering the fact that primary schools and the primary education are also infected with corruption, vices and anti-social activities. It is better to catch them young because it will be very difficult to reform students who had been corrupted or had acquired or cultivated certain bad habits in the course of their primary school education.
3. Constitutional provision should be made to back the return of schools to the missions to prevent future interferences from government. Parallel government secondary schools should not be established by the government as this will thwart the efforts of the missions to sanitize the secondary education. Adequate security should be provided by the government to the mission schools to prevent security breaches on campuses. The government should give enough grants and donations to the missions to facilitate rapid resuscitation and development of handed over schools.
4. In order to be at par with the contemporary technological and scientific advancement, the required information and values must be imparted, created and inculcated in the minds of students. For the success and possibility of this, the missions should appoint competent personnel, and also embark on training and retraining of their personnel.

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