

The environment of crisis on the nigerian educational system

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Crises in the Nigerian Education System CORDELIA C. NWAGWU ABSTRACT

The Nigerian education system witnessed tremendous expansion between independence in 1960 and 1995. However, the rate declined after 1986 when economic depression resulted in the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme. A population explosion, frequent changes in the government due to military coups, a depressed economy and unplanned and uncontrolled educational expansion all created an environment of crisis in the education system.

The crises included those of poor funding, inadequate facilities, admission and certificate racketeering, examination malpractices, general indiscipline and the emergence of secret cults. Personnel management problems resulted in frequent strikes and closures and the abandonment of academic standards. The thesis is that any society which stimulates the uncoordinated growth of its education system and then fails to provide the necessary dedicated teachers, teaching and learning facilities and operating funds for staff and student welfare services, is creating an environment within which all types of problems and crises will flourish. Lessons for other developing nations include the need for democratically elected stable governments instead of military regimes and better planning, funding and management of the education system. The National Policy on Education (NPE) It is necessary to examine briefly the present system of education and its immediate past in order to appreciate the nature, causes and magnitude of the different types of crises in the system.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) popularly referred to as the 6-3-3-4 system, was introduced in 1977 and then revised in 1981 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). It marked a radical departure from the British system of education which Nigeria inherited at independence in 1960. Basically it adopted the American system of 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary school, 3 years of senior secondary school, and 4 years of university education. Primary education is free, but not compulsory.

Junior secondary education is supposed to be free, but it is not yet so in any of the 30 states in the federation. The transition from primary to junior secondary education was planned to be automatic but many states conduct competitive entrance examinations since the available junior secondary schools cannot accommodate all the aspirants. A major emphasis in the NPE is the teaching of pre-vocational subjects to all students at the junior secondary level. The learning of Nigerian languages is also compulsory at the primary and secondary school levels.

Much more attention is being paid to women's education and the teaching of science, technical and vocational subjects at the senior secondary and tertiary levels. Although many policy documents support decentralisation of the system of administration, there is an ever-increasing tendency towards centralisation of

Correspondence to: Cordelia C. Nwagwu, Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. 0305-0068/97/010087-09 \$7.00 © 1997 Carfax Publishing Ltd 88 C. C. Nwagwu Educational control especially as the federal government is called upon to assume a greater role in the funding of the education system at all levels. During the 1993± 1994 academic year, there were 38,254 primary schools, 5959 secondary schools,

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55 colleges of education, 45 polytechnics and colleges of technology and 35 universities in Nigeria. Though some critics consider the above statistics inadequate for a country with approximately 100 million people, the number of institutions represents a phenomenal rate of expansion of the education system between 1960 and 1993.

Indeed, at independence there was only one university college, one college of technology, no colleges of education (only 280 low-level teacher training colleges) and 443 secondary schools (Fafunwa, 1974). It is generally acknowledged that the system has developed quantitatively, but it lacks many of the ingredients needed for qualitative growth. The problems in the Nigerian education system which have reached crisis dimensions are direct consequences of the rapid, unplanned, uncontrolled and uncoordinated expansion of the system. Contextual and Theoretical Framework

Nigeria has been politically independent for the past 35 years. During this period, a democratically elected civil government has only been in power for 10 years. The remaining 25 years have witnessed military rule by different military regimes which seized power in military coups. All over the world, military regimes, which although they claim to be a corrective intervention, are usually seen as an aberration since they govern by force and not by the wish of the people. They tend to be unpopular, undemocratic, dictatorial, corrupt and unaccountable to anyone except themselves.

In Nigeria, long periods of military rule have created problems of instability, uncertainty and degeneration on the political, economic, social and educational scenes. There are very many educational policies which are released in the form of decrees and edicts, but the policy implementation

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has been haphazard and quite unsatisfactory. Irregular and sudden changes in the government leadership result in good educational policies failing to be implemented in full or even started. In Nigeria there have been ten different governments since 1960, that is an average of one every 3. years. Many people have attributed the various crises currently plaguing the Nigerian education system to the poor and unstable national leadership, the ripple effects of which tend to hit education programmes and institutions hardest. For example, every new government prefers to start its own projects rather than to complete those started by its predecessors. Consequently, in many educational institutions, from universities to primary schools, we find uncompleted and abandoned buildings and other facilities.

To make matters worse for the Nigerians and the education system, military regimes have no defined mandate and duration, so the military officers appointed by their seniors to administrative and political positions see their appointments as temporary. They have no constituency and, invariably, they are posted to administer a state other than that of their own origin. With little commitment to the people or to the development of the education system, they cannot afford the luxury of long-term planning. In this operational environment, the education system becomes very vulnerable to crisis.

Moreover, in the view of MacKinnon (1960), it is unfortunately true that the opportunities for patronage and, in the Nigerian case, ethnicity and religion as well, will usually bring into power and government institutions people who have mediocre ability or who are more concerned with self-interest than with the welfare of the public and the education system. Therefore, the

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administrative style of the military governments in Nigeria has created a context within which ordinary organisational and managerial problems in the schools quickly turned into intractable crises.

The military governments appeared more interested in exercising absolute control over the teachers and students, whom they perceived as potential troublemakers, than in intervening in educational problems which could not be settled quickly with decrees and edicts. This was especially so where the release of funds was involved. Educational planning has been described as the application of a rational, systematic analysis to the process of educational development so that national education can respond more effectively to the needs of individuals and society.

Coombs (1970, p. 15) opined that although educational planning per se is not the source of policies and decisions, people who have such responsibilities need it to guide them. It is the argument of this paper that because the Nigerian leaders did not pay sufficient attention to educational planning, particularly during the long periods of undemocratic non-consultative military governments, they could not keep the intricate internal and external relationships of the educational system in a reasonable balance.

As there were rapid dynamic changes in the social and economic circumstances of the country, the education system could not adjust quickly enough and so the environment of crises became inevitable. Whatever educational planning existed in Nigeria during the unstable and tense years of military regime exhibited the characteristics which Coombs (1970, p. 19) <https://assignbuster.com/the-environment-of-crisis-on-the-nigerian-educational-system/>

described as focusing on the mechanics and logistics of education rather than on the needs of the students and society. Such planning was therefore short-term in outlook, fragmentary in its coverage, non-integrated and non-dynamic.

Moreover, the social demand approach to educational planning was emphasised by various governments in Nigeria, both civilian and military, for political and propaganda reasons. Thus, for example, the refusal to charge tuition fees in the universities and the policy of establishing a federal university and a polytechnic or college of education in every state in Nigeria were politically popular but educationally and economically irrational decisions. The policy was made when there were only 12 states in Nigeria.

Now that there are 30 states, with the military government in the process of creating more states in 1996, the funding crisis in higher education is being further aggravated. Any education system that emphasises growth and expansion without due regard to the development of reliable sources of funding, an adequate supply of trained teachers for different academic programmes, infrastructural facilities to accommodate natural and stimulated increases in school population and a dynamic economy to absorb its graduates from the schools is laying the seeds that will, on germination, create an environment in which all types of crises will flourish. Such is the experience of the Nigerian education system. Funding and Educational Development We can examine the crises in Nigerian education from two broad perspectives. One approach is to look at different periods in the development of education in the country and the major crises that featured during each period. This method was adopted by Ocho (1995) when he

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grouped the crises periods as follows. (1) The crisis of irrelevance, 1842± 1954. (2) The crisis of unequal expansion, 1955± 1969. (3) The crisis of unplanned expansion, 1970± 1983. 4) The crisis of financial inadequacy, 1984± 1994. In this paper, we shall adopt the second approach which focuses on the crises which have plagued a given period. Here, we shall concentrate on Nigerian education in the last decade and a half, 1980± 1995, a period that has created alarm among educational administrators, parents, teachers, students and even the international community. The crisis of educational funding is a fundamental issue because critical shortages of 90 C. C. Nwagwu finance have affected the organisation and administration of education at all levels.

The oil glut in the world market in the early 1980s led to a sudden decline in revenue from petroleum products which had accounted for approximately 80% of Nigeria's income from exports. The consequences were immediate. The free universal primary education (UPE) scheme which was started by the federal government in 1976 was hurriedly handed over to state governments and the poor ones could not sustain the programme. Bursary awards for student teachers were stopped and subsidised feeding for students in higher education institutions was also abolished.

The chairman of the Implementation Committee on the NPE, Dr J. S. Sofolahan, summarised the situation when he said in his 1991 report that 'The National Policy was conceived in times of oil boom, born in times of oil glut, and nurtured in times of economic depression' (Sofolahan, 1991). Chuta (1995) said it was important to note that there was a decline of 6% in real

gross domestic product (GDP) between 1980 and 1990 and he referred to this as bad for the future of Nigeria.

In 1994, the Central Bank of Nigeria reported that the money supply, particularly by way of de® cit ® nancing in the economy, increased from 5 N 24. 3 million in 1980 to over 5 N 64. 9 million in 1990. This led to tremendous increases in the prices of goods and services. The Nigerian currency was seriously devalued from the naira to US dollar ratio of 1: 1 in 1985 to 85: 1 in 1995. Neither individuals nor the educational institutions could cope with the rate of in? ation. Worse still, the federal government reduced its subvention to educational institutions.

For example, while student enrolment in the universities continued to increase, the government expenditure per student declined from 5 N 3085 in the 1980± 1981 academic year to 5 N 3057 in the 1984± 1985 academic year, in spite of rising costs and in? ation in the economy (Akangbou, 1986). In 1994± 1995, the government spent 5 N 5000 per university student, but the real value in terms of 1984± 1985 purchasing power was only 5 N 500. The management of the education funding crisis has been very unsatisfactory.

Basically, the strategy has been to pass the responsibility for ® nding extra funds from one tier of government to another, and to ask parents to pay fees where none were paid before or to pay more where government subsidies had formerly been provided. For example, the annual tuition fees in state-owned universities increased from an average of 5 N 1000 in 1990 to 5 N 3000 in 1993 and then to 5 N 7000 in 1995± 1996. At the secondary level,

the tuition fees, even in states that had free secondary education in 1990, rose from an average of 5 N 300 in 1993 to over 5 N 600 in 1995± 1996.

To help pay primary school teachers' salaries which were owed several months in arrears, the federal government established the National Primary Education Commission by Decree No. 31 of 1988. This was later abolished by Decree No. 3 of 1991, but was re-established by another government by Decree No. 3 of 1994. Another strategy to address the education funding crisis was the merging of some federal universities. However, the succeeding government, for political reasons rather than to improve the sourcing of funds, demerged them in the late 1980s and they exist today as separate universities.

For their part, some institutional authorities embarked on the retrenchment of staff and a reduction in enrolments. These administrative decisions associated with poor funding created problems and shortages in the educational environment. Crisis in Facilities Management The inadequacy of the infrastructural facilities to cope with the very rapid rate of expansion in student enrolment is a major source of crisis in the education system. There are two main reasons for this situation. The first is a high birth rate of 3. % per annum, thus providing a relatively young population, with 48% of the total population under 15 years of age. The second reason is economic depression and inflation which have made it difficult to build new Crises in the Nigerian Education System 91 classrooms, maintain the old ones and buy new equipment. In 1985± 1986, there were 12. 9 million pupils in the primary schools. The figure for 1993± 1994 was 15. 87 million pupils. During this period, very few new classrooms were built to accommodate the

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extra 3 million pupils, hence there is a problem of overcrowded classrooms today.

It was the same story in the secondary schools in the period 1989± 1994 as Table I shows. TABLE I. Classrooms and enrolments in Nigerian schools

Primary schools	Secondary schools	Year	Classrooms	Enrolments
1989±	1990	375, 726	12, 721, 087	76, 819 2, 749, 528
1991±	1992	377, 439	13, 776, 854	82, 930 3, 123. 277
1993±	1994	447, 859	15, 870, 280	104, 693 4, 032, 083

Source: Educational Data Bank, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1995). The crisis of the shortage of the infrastructure and facilities is felt everywhere and at all levels of the education system.

The library facilities and books are grossly inadequate and so is the provision of classrooms, classroom furniture, laboratories and workshops. Hostels are not available in some institutions, including universities. Where some are provided, the rooms are crowded with students. Chuta (1995) observed that the hostel room shortage had become so acute that a black market racket had developed. In many institutions, buses for students have broken down beyond repair, while even electricity and good drinking water are not assured on a daily basis.

To address the shortage of facilities, parents are often asked to provide chairs, desks and beds for their children in the primary and secondary schools. The government obtained a World Bank loan to purchase books and instructional materials for use in the universities and for secondary schools the federal government secures equipment for vocational workshops under a bilateral agreement with some East European countries such as Bulgaria.

Unfortunately, some schools cannot install and use these because they lack <https://assignbuster.com/the-environment-of-crisis-on-the-nigerian-educational-system/>

the necessary electricity and/or water for their operation, as well as trained technicians to manage and maintain them.

The objectives of the NPE cannot be attained in the absence of teaching and learning facilities. Indeed, the environment of the critical shortages of the infrastructure, facilities and services is a frustrating and crisis-generating one. Crisis of Indiscipline and Standards Critics from within and outside education are often locked in serious controversy over whether the standards in Nigerian education are rising or falling because they cannot agree on what the standards ought to be in the first instance.

However, Nwagwu (1990) argued that minimum standards in education should be perceived as yardsticks for responding positively to the challenges of relevance, need satisfaction, quality and excellence in the education system. Therefore, any system that fails to meet the population's expectations of providing the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they require to solve individual and societal problems, has fallen below the expected standards. This, in the view of Coombs (1968, p.), implies subjecting the input into the education system, the programmes and processes and the education system's outcomes or products to critical analysis. In this paper, the standards in Nigerian education have been deliberately linked to the various acts of indiscipline that appear to be on the increase at all levels of the system. Three 92 C. C. Nwagwu major acts of indiscipline? admission rackets, examination of malpractices and secret cult activities? will be discussed. Admissions Malpractices

Due to the limited vacancies and high demand for placement into secondary and tertiary institutions, there is an admissions crisis, which in turn has <https://assignbuster.com/the-environment-of-crisis-on-the-nigerian-educational-system/>

affected standards for two main reasons. Firstly, the quota system leads to the rejection of many brilliant candidates and the admission of weak ones because of their place of origin and the connections they have with important personalities. For example, the Federal Ministry of Education formula for admission into the federal secondary schools is as follows: merit 15%, states quota 40%, environment (catchment zone) 30% and exigency (discretion) 15%.

The formula for admission into federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education is merit 40%, states quota 30%, catchment zone 20% and discretion 10%. Secondly and arising from a down-grading of merit as a basis for admission, there is much racketeering during the exercise. Bribery, corruption and nepotism become agents that ensure admission of weak candidates and, at times, even of the bright ones who have lost faith in merit, fair play and justice.

As a result of this situation, mediocrity and economic power take precedence over academic standards. Examination Malpractices Related to the admissions crisis is the desperate need to obtain certificates and, consequently, the serious crisis of examination malpractices. Chuta (1995) identified four main strategies for cheating in examinations by the code names given to them in Nigeria by the students. (1) Life mercenary service by which an academically able person enters the hall and writes the examination for the real candidate. 2) Hall assistance whereby materials useful for answering the questions are brought into the hall with the collusion of the supervisors and invigilators. (3) Express service by which the real candidate sits in the hall while a hired person writes the examination outside

and later smuggles the answer scripts into the hall. (4) Super express service whereby the candidate is given the question papers in advance; the candidate writes the answers at home and then brings the scripts into the hall on the examination day.

Alarmed by this development, the West African Examinations Council and other examination boards cancel thousands of students' results every year and ban some schools from serving as examination centres. The students affected are expelled or suspended. The Nigerian Government also directed that offenders should face special tribunals under the Miscellaneous Offences Decree to ensure speedy trials and stiff penalties. An important step in solving the problem is to examine the environment that has created the need for these vices and crises in the education system.

A proper analysis puts the blame on two main factors. One is the education system itself which puts so much emphasis on examinations. Worse still, the assessment of a student's performance is placed on just one examination either for admission to or for the award of a particular certificate. Continuous assessment is still new in the system and it is not a part of the evaluation process for many examinations, such as the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Examination for entrance into the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Crises in the Nigerian Education System 93

Another factor is that Nigerian society, as in many developing countries, places too much value on the possession of certificates rather than on the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills. Many students, therefore, supported by their parents and teachers, even resort to criminal activities (including membership of secret cults) to pass the public examinations which <https://assignbuster.com/the-environment-of-crisis-on-the-nigerian-educational-system/>

will secure these cherished certificates and help obtain admission into higher institutions or employment. The bogus certificates which many people carry about are, in essence, a manifestation of what Dore (1976, p.) referred to as 'the qualification± escalation ratchet' and 'the diploma disease' . In Nigeria today, students refer to their educational certificates as 'meal tickets' . Their main preoccupation is with how to obtain the certificate and not with how much knowledge and skill they have acquired from the teaching and learning experiences in their schools. Unfortunately, the educational environment has not fostered positive attitudes towards the acquisition of essential knowledge, values and skills as a condition for deserving an educational certificate.

With educational institutions very poorly funded and with great shortages of qualified teachers, instructional facilities and materials, very little effective teaching and, hence, learning, takes place in the schools. Confronted by employers and a society that are so certificate conscious and competitive entrance examinations into higher education institutions, the environment for admissions racketeering, examinations malpractices and membership of secret cults is properly set. Personnel Management Problems

After independence, there was an unprecedented popular pressure to build more schools and to train more and better teachers. The government responded positively to this social demand for education without serious regard to a cost± benefit analysis of the implications. Consequently, between 1960 and 1985, primary school enrolment increased 8 times and secondary enrolment over 22 times, while higher education enrolment

increased 84 times. As expected, there was also a tremendous increase in the number and quality of teachers.

Part-time and sandwich in-service programmes expanded between 1985 and 1995 and led to many professionally trained teachers with the National Certificate in Education (NCE) and first degrees in education. As a result of this positive development, salaries and allowances have also increased so much that some state and local governments can no longer regularly meet their monthly obligations to teachers. With poor and sometimes unpaid teachers' salaries and allowances, the environment has been created for frustration, indiscipline, a lack of dedication to duty and frequent strike action among teachers at all levels.

Bereday (1969) remarked that 'Financing education is an under-developed and unimaginative enterprise' (p. ix) and this is very true in Nigeria. Today there are overcrowded classrooms, overworked and underpaid teachers and double sessions particularly in urban areas, yet there are many unemployed but well-trained professional teachers. Hardly a month passes without either a group of primary, secondary or higher education teachers being out on total strike action demanding improved conditions of service.

This disrupts academic sessions, breeds ill-taught graduates and retards educational development in the country. The quality of all education systems reflects the quality, dedication and motivation of its teachers. If teachers are well-supported by the government and society, they can use their commitment and teaching competence to help stem the crisis of student indiscipline and examination malpractices and to reduce the impact of the shortages of facilities and funds.

94 C. C. Nwagwu Conclusion

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This analysis of the condition of education in Nigeria shows that unplanned and uncontrolled expansion of the system, inadequate funding, corruption and poor management are mainly responsible for the many types of crises there are today. The organisational climate is not conducive to serious teaching and learning. This is because over the decades, particularly under the military regimes, Nigeria has pursued the policy of an unrestrained positive response to the social demand for education.

Thus, within the education system germs of problems had a fertile environment in which to grow until they have become chronic diseases that now threaten the very existence of the system. The Nigerian Government appear to have ignored the important advice given by educators such as Dore (1976, p. 8) that the effect of schooling, the way it alters a person's capacity to behave and do things, depends not only on what is learned, but also on how and why it is learned and the environment within which it is learned. There are a few general lessons to learn from the Nigerian experience.

The first is the need for developing countries to aspire to be governed by stable, popular, democratically elected governments which can develop long-term as well as short-term plans for the articulated development of the nation and the education system. Military regimes are arguably incapable of providing such leadership because the hand-picked military junta does not have the training and experience nor the mandate, time and temperament to operate in this way. Secondly, good policies that are haphazardly implemented can create crises.

For example, the quota system of admission came into being in Nigeria to meet the demands of the 'federal character' provision enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was designed to ensure an equitable representation of all parts of the country in all the federal institutions and the protection of minority and disadvantaged groups such as women. Unfortunately, the formula produced by the government officials for the quota system neither ensures equity nor merit because of its defective formulation and worse still, its poor, dishonest and undisciplined application.

The Nigerian experience highlights the point that supervision of the effective implementation of education policies is thus as important as their initial formulation. Thirdly, Nigerian experience suggests that the planning and management of the education system should be left to professional educators who arguably have the training, experience and, above all, the interest and commitment necessary to achieve the effective development of the system and the attainment of both short-term and long-term educational aims and objectives.

Fourthly, schooling is not synonymous with education and political leaders should constantly be made aware of this. Therefore, a situation in which young people are stimulated to go to school but are then denied reasonable facilities and opportunities for effective teaching and learning experiences is likely to lead to a crisis, not only in the education system but also for society as a whole. In Nigeria today, there is a crisis of confidence in the ability of the education system to tackle the many serious problems confronting it.

Nigeria is at a crossroads where she must develop the courage to right problems which range from home to school and through society to government. The first major step is a recognition that the environment that has generated and supported the identified crises in Nigerian education must be changed if an operational climate that will ensure effective teaching and learning is to be achieved. In the final analysis, however, what is needed most are more stable education policies which are faithfully implemented, better planning and the management and utilisation of whatever material and human resources are available for developing and maintaining an effective and efficient education system. Crises in the Nigerian Education System 95 REFERENCES AKANGBOU, S. D. (1986) Financing Nigerian Universities (Ibadan, University of Ibadan, Faculty of Education Lecture Series, No. 2). BEREDAY, G. Z. (1969) Essays on World Education: the crises of supply and demand (New York, Oxford University Press). CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA (1994) Statistical Bulletin, 5(1). CHUTA, E. J. (1995) Money syndrome, paper presented at the 10th Congress of the Nigerian Academy of Education at Abuja (Abuja, November 9, 1995). COOMBS, P. H. (1968) The World Educational Crisis: a systems analysis (London, Oxford University Press). COOMBS, P. H. (1970) What is Educational Planning? (Paris, UNESCO IIEP). DORE, R. (1976) The Diploma Disease: education, qualification and development (London, George Allen & Unwin). FAFUNWA, A. B. (1974) A History of Education in Nigeria (London, George Allen & Unwin).

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