SCHOOL DROP-OUT AMONG THE YOUTHS: A CRITICAL CHALLENGE IN A KNOWLEDGE-DRIVEN AGE

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Abstract

This paper deals with the issue of the high rate of school drop-out among Nigerian youths. The paper identified the problem of the special skills and knowledge demand of life in the twenty-first century and the fact that these knowledge and skills set are better acquired in the schools that have keyed into the facilities provided by the tremendous developments in information and communication technology. Haven identified such problems as academic difficulties and other behaviour problems, the paper maintains that the twenty-first century is a knowledge driven era. It is a period when the skills that worked in previous centuries are no longer working; a period when the skill of critical thinking has become paramount. Adopting a method that is contextual and textual, the paper concludes that for the youth of today to survive and achieve his or her potentials in the high-skill demanding world of today, there is the need to not only return to school, but also to stay there and complete the academic program of study.

Introduction

Man has progressed from the most primitive ways of life to the complexities and sophistications of life and living of today. During the earlier period in the history of human existence, man informally developed traditional ways of living. These traditional methods were learnt and transferred from generation to generation and have sufficed and served man well in his battle for preservation, survival and sustenance. However, following the culture-contact that occurred with the advent of Europeans in most indigenous societies of what is today, Nigeria, and subsequently colonialism, formal education had to replace informal education. A major institution or instrument for the delivery of formal education is the school.

The emergence of the school as a formal education centre in traditional societies of Africa coincided with the transition of the Western world to the Industrial Age. The Industrial Age brought about the development and use of machines in place of crude implements and methods. This was propelled by the

need to meet increased demand with equally increased production in the heat of a massive competition. Thus, the school system remains one of the most important legacies of colonialism in Africa. The school has been described as a place where characters are moulded, skills imparted and individuals are not only prepared to become responsible members of the society, but they are also equipped to be able to fend for themselves and at the same time contribute to national development. The School is the central place for the impartation of learning and education. Education – the process of imparting knowledge and learning is the all-important process of causing positive change in the behaviour of individuals and also building the man-power resources of any given society.

Formal education in schools takes effect from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood. But the crucial age for formal education in schools is the age of the youth. Bearing in mind all the attempts to theorize definitions of who is a youth, the youth in the context of this paper is the age from school age to the beginning of adult professional life. Thus, in the context of this paper, the youth includes the child in primary school, the adolescent in secondary school and the young adult in the tertiary institutions. It includes all the groups for whom are prepared different curricula of education in the different levels of Schooling. According to Kennedy Ekezie, the youths are "the wellspring of ethical actions that replenish the dying world." Youth is very crucial to any society, because it is that "special group of people with strong stamina and passion for realizing certain set goals and objectives. The youth has certain distinguishing characteristics including that he or she is: impatient, for change, zealous, radical, rebellious, curious, hardworking, egoistic and ambitious. These are the propelling factors for national development (*Nigerian Youth and National Development*, www.rccg.org). All these characteristics of the youth and the enabling skills are honed through education at the schools.

The problem, however, is that a good number of the youths are dropping out of school. Not just that a good number of the youths are dropping out of schools, the world today is also changing with electronic speed in many respects. New skills are emerging, new ways of doing things are developing, without getting into and completing schooling, how is today's youth preparing for the challenge of living in a new knowledge-driven age. It is the aim of this paper to interrogate this question.

The Problem of Youth Dropout of School
Following the inability of the system of education inherited from the colonial masters to satisfy Nigeria's national aspirations, the country took time to develop its own educational system. From the 1970s, Nigeria began to reform its educational systems with the introduction of the Universal primary education (UPE) in 1975. The policy was reviewed and revised in 1981 and 1990, leading to the promulgation of the Universal Basic Education Act of April 2004. In 2015, Nigerian ranked 103 out of 118 countries in the UNESCO Education for

All (EFA) Development Index which took into account universal primary education, adult literacy, quality of education and gender parity. Irigoye (2017) reports that, by the 2015 UNESCO review of education in Nigeria, it was found that enrolment into primary and junior secondary school levels had greatly increased since the year 2000. However, transition and completion rates remained below 70%. This is the crust of the problem – school drop-out.

A school drop-out is one who has entered any level of schooling without being able to graduate. The problem of school drop-out has troubled many, if not all countries of the world, with the developing countries more terribly heat. Bruineforth (2006), in a survey on the characteristics of children who are out of school in seven African countries, namely: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia and Nigeria, concluded that more than half of all children aged 10 to 19 who had already left primary school did so without completion in many of these African countries. In 2012, the Institute of Statistics of the United Nations Scientific Educational and Cultural Organisation released a report which stated that Nigeria has highest number of school drop-outs. In 2017, the British Broadcasting Corporation reported that Nigeria has largest number of children out of school in the world. This was confirmed by a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Adamu Hussaini, who stated that it was "sad to note that Nigeria had 10.5 million children out of school."

There is a tendency to think that this statistics are exaggerated or that whenever this problem is mentioned in Nigeria, it must be with particular reference to the North of the country. The truth however, is that statistics describe facts and facts are sacred. The greater problem is that the figure of the out of school children is increasing on daily basis.

The Causes of Youth Drop-Out from School

School drop-out has been simply defined as the untimely withdrawal from school. This is the situation where any individual does not complete a particular level of school so as to graduate with the requisite certificate. School drop-out has been a major problem affecting education and the educational systems in several countries of the world, including Nigeria. Fafunwa (1983) had observed that drop-out is one of the most serious problems that have continued o bedevil our educational system since independence in 1960. Bost and Riccomini (2006: p.301) state that drop-out rates vary by characteristics such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographical location and type of disability, But what are the causes of school drop-out? Scholars like Bost (2007), Oghavbu (2008) and Ajaja (2012) have identified some causes which include:

i. Academic difficulties and previous academic failures – when a child is not able to cope With the demands of formal schooling.

ii.   Behaviour problems: This is a situation where a child begins early to exhibit certain behaviours problems like truancy that impede him or her from being orderly as is required in a School environment, being attentive and concentrating.

iii.   The repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension. This leads to lost instructional time and increases academic difficulties.

iv.   High absentism, demotion and/or being held back a grade are serious risk Factors for dropping out of school.

v.   Feelings of isolation and alienation on the part of the student could lead to social and psychological disengagement that results in school drop-out (Bost, 2017, p.1).

vi.   Social and economic reasons: Here the focus is on peer group and friendship. The kind of friends one keep[s is bound to affect one's ability to stay in school and complete a programme of study. If one keeps friends who are miscreants or uninterested in schooling and who abscond from school, then, the one is at risk of dropping out of school. There are also economic implications especially with respect to the craze for materialism. The girla s would dress to go to school only to end up at a boy's house to be able to get some money at the end of the day to satisfy material needs. The boys on the other hand, form very dangerous groups and gangs that lead them to vices like drug Abuse, gaming, and cults and all these quicken withdrawal from school.

Another dangerous economic dimension is the emergence of betting and gaming as alternative means of making quick money. Today, most young people are willing to sacrifice their educational future to the attraction of quick money from betting and lottery. These young people are always dreaming to "hit it big" at once instead of taking the slow path of education that leads to legitimate career. The very chronic unemployment situation in the country has not helped matters in this direction. These young people spend their days at betting houses where they bet on almost every known sporting event. Others slop into lottery booths where the operators create private space within the public spaces with the use of large umbrella brought so low as to preclude their customers from public view.

   At the higher institution level, most of the students who withdraw from school drop-out because of the allure of quick wealth from internet fraud otherwise known as "yahoo-yahoo" or "yahoo-plus" or "419." These students get involved in this and most times in the accompanying rituals and when they hit it big as they often do, they lose the motivation to remain in school and most of them drop out.

      Thus, school drop-out follows several patterns depending on the level of education and other intervening factors such as family background,

individual traits, school environments, economic and social conditions, disabilities, among others. However, the problem now is that these young people who drop-out of school do not realize the enormity of the challenge posed by the present and future centuries as knowledge driven.

The 21ˢᵗ Century as a Knowledge-Driven Age

The world is a historical process and as such every epoch is always conditioned by certain events and the activities of individuals who live in it. The human being and his activities are the most important markers of history. And man is a being that does not rest on past achievements. Man has moved from the use of his bare body and limbs to the use of implements and methods through to the development of machines during the industrial revolution to the great complexities and sophistications of today. The world as it is today is witnessing monumental developments that make systems operated even in the recent past quickly obsolete and the speed of the drive to the future is showing no signs of waning.

Care (2014) state that until the dawn of the 21ˢᵗ century, education systems across the world focused on preparing students to accumulate content and knowledge. Thus, schools focused on providing literacy and numeracy skills to students to enable them gain content and knowledge. However, recent developments in technology and telecommunications have made information and knowledge ubiquitous and as such easily accessible in the 21ˢᵗ century. While skills like literacy and numeracy are still Relevant and necessary, they are no longer sufficient. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) agree that in order to respond to technological, demographic and socio-economic changes, education systems began to make the shift towards providing their students with a range of skills that relied not only on cognition but also on the interdependence of cognitive, social and emotional characteristics.

From these developments in the 21ˢᵗ century, a number of points have been isolated by Cortright, *et al* (2002):

i. The globalization of economic activities is an accomplished fact and will continue to dominate the cause of economic development for the foreseeable future, new ideas will continue to drive economic production and it is only those individuals and companies that are capable of generating the new ideas that can remain in business. Traditional sources of economic advantage like access to raw materials will dwindle in importance.

ii. Knowledge and commercial success will primarily occur in conjunction with the development of industry clusters, dense networks of closely –related producers and consumers who push and feed on their collective knowledge-creating skills.

iii.   Quality of life will be a paramount issue in determining which places ca establish, maintain and continuously regenerate the concentration of human capital, that is, people with knowledge, on which regional innovative capacity rests,

iv.   Local institutions and public policies will play an increasingly important role in establishing the underlying conditions for success in the knowledge-based economy.

In this transition from yesterday to today, just as the goals of education has changed as identified above, the goals of the workforce has also changed. From the goal of stability in career of the past, today, people must be ready and able to change jobs more frequently. Western economies have been transformed from industrial-based to service-based with trades and vocations assuming lesser roles. The definition of the market as a specific location where buyers and sellers meet has dissolved with the emergence of online trading, e-commerce, e-money, among others. All these changes demand the 21st century person to possess different skills especially those that enable him or her to be flexible and adaptable in different roles and career fields.

These skills as have been grouped by Trilling and Charles (2009) include:

i.   Learning and innovation skills, that is, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, creativity and innovation.

ii.   Digital literacy skills, that is, information literacy, media literacy, information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy.

iii.   Career and life skill, that is, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social And cross-cultural interaction, productivity and accountability.

All these skills are identified as key qualities of progressive education. Progressive functional education is the goal of schooling in the 21st century. University education in the past trained individuals to become professionals and experts in different areas of specialisation; today, the most important skill that employers of labour require and which the universities must be committed to offering is critical thinking. If you listen to big employers of labour, they will tell you that they are not looking for expert engineer, bankers, managers, etc. They are only looking for individuals with the skill of critical thinking – that is, the ability to breakdown a problem situation and provide a solution. Omenukor (2018: xi) sees critical thinking as the thinking that is functional for every discipline and in every situation. It is the skill that makes the university graduate marketable. No doubt. Much of the 20th century was marked by growth and development of nation-states and nationally concentrated markets and industries. Important changes in technology, including the widespread adoption of electricity, commercial aviation, inexpensive telecommunications, powerful computers all have to reshape the economy over the course of this century. In

the 21ˢᵗ century, some of these trends will continue while new ones will emerge (Cortright, *et al*, 2002).

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above analysis, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the rate at which the youths are dropping out of school is increasing even from the level of the very troubling statistics on that and the patterns of dropouts among the different levels of schooling is also changing from the problems of economic background of families to the so-many distractions on the street related to quick money. Second, the world we live in now is one that demands special skills which 21ˢᵗ century education is designed to impact. Such that any youth that does not make the effort to go to school and stay in school at different levels is likely not to be able to participate at an important level in serious matters of today.

There is need therefore, for the youths of today to take their destinies in their hands, go to school and stay in school so as to be equipped with the critical skills that today's world requires. All the opportunities you see in street trading, games betting and lottery, and internet fraud are only distractions. The decision for every youth to make is to answer the question: is where you are today ok for and will it also sustain your future? If it is not, you have to make the change that is required for the better. The government is also requested to continue to make the necessary collaborations to make the schools more attractive and effective for the youths.

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