

DEREGULATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN PORT HARCOURT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper addressed deregulation of secondary education in Port Harcourt: issues and challenges. The population of this study comprised of administrators and teachers numbering 450. A research sample of 250 was used. Document analysis, a self designed questionnaire, "Deregulation of Secondary Education: Issues and Challenges Questionnaire (DSEICQ)" were used to elicit information. Four research questions were formulated for the study. Data from document, verbal interview conducted and percentage counts were used to find solution to the research questions. The major findings of the study include the status of public and private secondary schools, some problems encountered in course of managing the schools and strategies for improvement. Based on these findings it was recommended that Government and Proprietors should provide finance and instructional materials, employ Guidance Counselors and conduct regular seminar/workshop and follow it up with qualitative supervision/inspection. They should employ only professional teachers, provide proper remuneration, strict adherence to WAEC marking scheme, maintain a good communication system, close down unapproved schools and complementarily public-private partnership (PPP) was recommended to contribute their views/resources so as to reduce the burden on the government.

Keywords: deregulation, secondary education, issues and challenges

INTRODUCTION

Education is the biggest instrument for academic progress, social mobilization, political survival and effective national development of any country. It constitutes the single largest enterprise in the country like Nigeria (Lomak, (n.d) in Akpa, 2002:54).

Secondary education is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. This level of education is for children of the age range of 12 to 18 years, excluding the teacher training, technical and vocational institutions. The duration of the academic program is 6 years which is split into 3 years each, known as the Junior Secondary School (J.S.S) and Senior Secondary School (S.S.S). The J.S.S emphasized both academic and vocational (technical) curriculum while the S.S.S is oriented towards academic curriculum. Since the curriculum of the secondary school (J.S.S and S.S.S) caters for varied needs, ability and interests, it is usually regarded as comprehensive. The broad goals are to prepare the individual for useful living within the society and higher education under the context of the 6-3-3-4 system of education.(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004:18-20).

Education has witnessed active participation by non- governmental agencies, communities and individuals as well as government intervention. However, government welcomes the participation of voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of secondary schools. State government shall prescribe conditions to be met by the communities and

others wishing to establish secondary schools as well as regular supervision and inspection of these schools.(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004:4,22).

Formal education was the modern innovation brought to Nigeria with the coming of the Christian missionary. During the monopoly of the church mission, it was religions based, intensely denominational and shallow in content. The schools in this era were maintained with grant from home churches, donations from group and individual outside the country, contributions by local Christian churches and parents. The colonial government was reluctant to get involved until 1882 when education ordinance provided for the financing of schools established by missions and private individuals. Even though the Christian mission were credited for their pioneering efforts in spreading western education, some shortcomings were highlighted like the establishment of mushroom and enviable schools and colleges, seeing education as an instrument for evangelism and gross misuse of fund among others.

The relevance of Ashby commission of 1959 and the above shortcomings prompted government to take over schools to facilitate the process of rehabilitation, reconstruction and re-integration, after the civil war in 1970.

But as the number of schools increased with more enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, government discovered that the responsibility of funding and managing schools in Nigeria cannot be handled by them alone. This led to the policy statement in the National Policy on Education (1998) section 11 paragraphs 109 which states:

“Government’s ultimate goal is to make education free at all levels. The financing of joint responsibility of the federal, state and local governments, and the private sector. In this connection, government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and other organizations”.

From the above brief historical overview of education in Nigeria, one can realize that privatization of education has been a practice that is traceable to the traditional system of education and formal education was introduced by the Christian missionaries through private enterprise. (Adeogun and Aigboje; Alani (n.d) in Akpa, Udoh and Fagbamiye 2005:226-227, 43).

Deregulation in the economic sense means freedom from government control. It is the removal of government interference in the running of a system. This means that government rules and regulations governing the operations of the system are relaxed or held constant in order for the system to decide its own optimum level through the forces of supply and demand. Deregulation allows enterprises and services to be restricted as little as possible as well as the withdrawal of government controls in the allocation of resources and the production of goods and services. (Akinwumi, Isuku and Agwaranze (2005) in Ajayi and Ekundayo 2008:214).

According to Ekpo and Anuna(n.d) in Akpa, Udoh and Fagbamiye (2005:1) the concept of deregulation is synonymous with laissez-faire and private enterprises. Deregulation in economics and industries means non-intervention by government in individual or industrial monetary affairs. The doctrine is hinged on self-interest, competition and natural consumers’ preferences as important factors for enhancing prosperity and freedom as opposed to government’s absolute control of economic activities in a state. Deregulation as a new applicable concept in education means government diverting its interest in it and encouraging private sector participation in the management of the education system for the achievement of the pre-determined objectives and goals of education. Privatization is an important tenet in the deregulation process. It is the economic activity in the private sector as opposed to the public sector (federal, state and local government).

Encarta (2004) as cited by Ekpo and Anuna (n.d) sees deregulation as a private enterprise by private individuals who hope to realize a profit from their activities and who bear any risk associated with those activities. Proponents of private enterprise believe that it promotes individual ingenuity and efficiency, particularly when such enterprises are free from government regulation. It is obvious that private sector involvement is necessary in order for our schools to be effective and efficient.

In another perspective, deregulation of education means breaking the government's monopoly of the provision and management of education by giving free hand to private participation in the provision and management of education in the country. It is argued that it will help schools to become self-managing. Also, it means relaxing or dismantling the legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of education business. Moreover, it is described as a sale of knowledge to the highest bidder, which has effect of lowering standards for the attraction of customers. As a deregulated sector, education will become a private enterprise undertaken by private individuals or cooperate bodies that hope to maximize profit from their investment in education. (Caldwell and Spinks (1992); Olatunbosun (2005) cited in Ajayi and Ekundayo 208:214).

The theory of deregulation as an economic term developed from the free market economy is bequeathed to Adam Smith. The term favours capitalist self-interest, competition and natural consumer preferences as forces leading to optimal prosperity and freedom. (Encarta Encyclopedia (2003) cited in Akpa, Udoh and Fagbamiye (2005:24)).

In explaining the concept of deregulation, Obasanjo (1999) posited that "the enterprises to be privatized suffered fundamental problems such as: defective capital structure, excessive bureaucratic control or intervention, inappropriate technology, gross incompetence and mismanagement, blatant corruption and crippling compliancy which monopoly often engenders. Inevitably, these short comings take a heavy toll on the national economy. These are the compelling reasons to divert government of the burden of running these companies at a loss. Instead the private sector which can do the job better is now invited to acquire them" (p1).

Exploring the concept further, McFetridge and Lall (1991) affirmed that "deregulation involves the virtual elimination of price, entry and exit controls, the elimination of monopoly in any individual sub-market. It is the absence of ownership restriction and separation, internationalization of the institutions and the enforcement of free trade agreement. Deregulation of the educational system therefore implies private participation in the ownership, finance control and management of educational institutions".

Similarly, Omolayole (1997), Babarinde (1997) and Ikoya (2004) separately affirmed that privatization enhances individual or corporate bodies' involvement in educational management. Other studies have revealed that privatization is popular and thus been effective in the provision and management of education in both developed and developing countries.

In Sri Lanka, for example, James (1982) reports that individuals and voluntary organizations established and managed day-care centres, nursery schools, vocational training and non-formal educational institutions.

Moreover, Kaplan (2003) describes deregulation of education as a sale of knowledge to the highest bidder, which has the implication of lowering standards for the attraction of customers. Deregulation of education means relaxation or disseminating of legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of education business.

In the same vein, Hanson (1998:111-28) and Bayliss (2000) cited separately in Uwakwe, Falaye, Emunemu and Adelere (2008:164) that "privatization is a term that has been associated with the transfer of assets of ownership from the public to the private sector. The policy encompasses the private initiative in education, implying that decentralization involves the transfer of decision making, authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations. The World Bank promotes privatization in developing countries as a policy, principle, primarily, if not exclusively to reduce poverty through the development of the private sector".

Surprisingly, Findlaw (2004) cited in Uwakwe, Falaye, Emunemu and Adelere (2008:164) opined that "A blending of public and private education is advocated under this deregulation policy" and the researcher shares his view hence education has variety of stakeholders, it is imperative for secondary education to be managed by the public-private partnership (PPP) as an assistance since the burden of financing education is too much for the government.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Government gave freedom to private individuals to manage secondary schools through National Policy on Education. This invariably gave people the liberty to attend either public or private secondary schools.

However, certain issues and challenges evolved and so this study seeks to find out the quality of instruction/teachers and problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools in Port Harcourt.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out the status of secondary school management in Port Harcourt.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Find out the status of public secondary schools
2. Find out the status of private secondary schools.
3. Find out the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools.
4. Determine the strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the status of public secondary schools?
2. What is the status of private secondary schools?
3. What are the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools?
4. What are the strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education?

METHODOLOGY

The survey (descriptive) design was adopted. The study population comprised of 250 administrators and 200 teachers. This made a total population of 450. The sample size was 250 comprising of 150 administrators and 100 teachers which was selected by stratified random sampling.

The instruments used were document analysis and questionnaire. The specimen of document analysis was data from Rivers State Ministry of Education, Port Harcourt. A self designed questionnaire known as "Deregulation of Secondary Education: Issues and Challenges Questionnaire (DSEICQ)" was used to elicit responses from the respondents. It had two sections: A and B, section A generated demographic data while section B elicited information related to the research topic. The response scale used was Agree or Disagree. The instruments were validated by Lecturers in the Department of Educational Management. A test-retest method was adopted to find out the degree to which the instrument would be consistent in measuring what it should measure.

The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher and she retrieved same on completion for analysis. The data on document analysis was stated accordingly to indicate the status of secondary schools, while the data on questionnaire was tabulated and analyzed using simple percentages and deductions from the tables were used to find solution to the research questions.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULT

Research Question 1

What is the status of Public Secondary Schools?

1. The total number of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt is 12.
2. Public schools are managed by the government through an administrator (Schools Board).

3. The total number of teachers is 1,385(S.S.S.819 & J.S.S.566) while total number of students is 57,542(S.S.S.36, 495 & J.S.S.21, 047).
4. They are all professional teachers.
5. They get fund from the government
6. There is quality and regular supervision through the inspectorate division.
7. They are model schools hence they provide free, qualitative and functional education.
8. They are affordable and accessible.
9. Erring staff are queried.
10. Mass promotion is not common in public schools.

What is the status of Private Secondary Schools?

1. The total number of private secondary schools in Port Harcourt is 50.
2. Private secondary schools are managed by Proprietors and they are result/performance oriented.
3. The total number of teachers and students have not been analyzed.
4. Most of them are professionals due to the recruitment process where there is no favouritism
5. They secure fund from school fees, registration, levies, loans and sale of books.
6. There is quality supervision of teaching and learning and most private schools have standard facilities.
7. Though there is the existence of some unapproved secondary schools, these schools are not permitted to conduct external examination.
8. There is high degree of discipline in the private school hence erring staff suffer penalties like unpaid salaries in cases of absenteeism and other forms of indiscipline.
9. Some private schools are expensive and thus widen the gap between the rich and the poor.
10. Some private schools are managed by non-professionals.

Research Question 3

What are the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools?

Table 1: Percentage counts for administrators and teachers on the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools.

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	DISAGREE
	(A) Problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools.		
1	Financial constrain	231(92.4%)	19(7.6%)
2	Lack of instructional materials	180(72%)	70(28%)
3	Poor study habits of some students	175(70%)	75(30%)
4	The issue of examination malpractice	160(64%)	90(36%)
5	Recruitment of non-professional teachers	216(86.4%)	34(13.6%)
6	Staff attitude to work	210(84%)	40(16%)
7	Geographical location of a school	197 (78.8%)	53(21.2%)
8	Poor teaching method and supervision/inspection	185(74%)	65(26%)
9	Poor performance in external examination	145(58%)	105(42%)
10	Existence of communication gap	155(62%)	95(38%)

Number of Respondents = 250

Research Question 4**What are the strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education?**

Table 2: Percentage counts for administrators and teachers on strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education.

S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	DISAGREE
	(B) Strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education.		
11	Availability of finance	220(88%)	30(12%)
12	Availability of instructional materials	190(76%)	60(24%)
13	Regular counseling in school to improve study habits and reduce examination malpractice	226(90.4%)	24(9.6%)
14	Recruitment of professional teachers	165(66%)	85(34%)
15	Counseling of staff to improve work attitude	199(79.6%)	51(20.4%)
16	Increment of teachers salary and better working condition	170(68%)	80(32%)
17	Schools should be situated in serene environment conducive for learning to attract both students and teachers	173(69.2%)	77(30.8%)
18	Introduction of regular workshops, seminars and enlightenment programmes for teachers to meet up with contemporary demands. It should be followed up with quality supervision/ inspection	215(86%)	35(14%)
19	Strict adherence to WAEC marking scheme by encouraging teachers to go for co-ordination and marking of WAEC questions.	150(60%)	100(40%)
20	There should be good communication system and rapport with the management, teachers, students as well as a good PTA in secondary schools .	162(64.8%)	88(35.2%)

Number of Respondents = 250

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed the status of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt as been 12 in number, being managed by the government, having 1,385 number of teachers and 57,542 number of students, having professional teachers and being funded by the government. Others are quality and regular inspection, providing free, qualitative and functional education, being affordable and accessible, issuing queries to erring staff and not been in support of mass promotion.

The status of private secondary schools were recorded as been 50 in number, being managed by proprietors, but the total number of teachers and students have not been analyzed, having professional teachers and securing funds through school fees, registration, levies, loans and sale of books.

Others are quality supervision of teaching/learning as well as standard facilities, existence of some unapproved private schools which do not partake in external examination, high degree of discipline, some being expensive and some being managed by non professionals.

The status of public and private secondary schools conforms to the summary of number of institutions by LGA as published by the Government of Rivers State – Ministry of Education (2010). Also, secondary schools are either owned by Government or by Private individuals as seen in the Federal

Republic of Nigeria (2004:22) where it was stated that “Government welcomes the participation of voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals in the establishment and management of secondary schools as well as regular supervision and inspection of these schools”. With reference to the status of private schools which involved the existence of some unapproved schools and being expensive, Adiotomre (n.d) in Akpa, Udoh and Fagbamiye (2005:93) stated that “Educational management must ensure effective monitoring of schools to avoid unnecessary increment of tuition fees as envisaged in a deregulated school system. They must manage schools effectively and if need be, sanction any school that fall below standard both in academic, physical structure and moral standard”.

With reference to research question 3, most administrators and teachers agree that the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools are financial constrain, lack of instructional materials, poor study habit of some students, examination malpractice, recruitment of non-professional teachers, staff attitude to work, geographical location of a school, poor teaching method, poor performance in external examination and the existence of communication gap.

These findings were supported by Barko and Ramadan (n.d) cited in Akpa (2002:138-139) who recounted the challenges of the Principal in the 21st century as shortage of funds and equipment necessary for effective teaching and learning, unpredictable and volatile staff agitation, inadequate remuneration of teachers/delay in the payment of even the little salary, failure of government and other school proprietors to implement the payment of allowances of teachers and inadequate on-the-job training programmes for school Principals and teachers to update their knowledge.

With reference to research question 4, the respondents are of the view that the strategies for improvement in the management of secondary education are availability of finance, availability of instructional materials, regular counseling in school to improve study habit and reduce examination malpractice, recruitment of professional teachers, counseling of staff to improve work attitude, increment of teachers salary/better working condition, situating schools in serene environment, regular workshops/seminars/enlightenment programmes for teachers, strict adherence to WAEC marking scheme and having good communication system and rapport with the management/teachers/students as well as a good PTA in secondary schools.

These findings approximates to Barko and Ramadan (n.d) in Akpa (2002:141-142) who opined that the Principal should be innovative and resourceful by coming up with alternative sources of staff motivation and funding in the face of dwindling financial support for the school and the ability to communicate effectively with others.

It is also supported by Gloria and Amini (n.d) cited in Pokalas, Lawani, Gambo and Mohammed (2002:27) who posited that the quality of education should be seen in terms of quality of teaching materials, quality of educational environment like classroom and quality of infrastructure. This was further strengthened by Ezewu (1987) in Nnabuo, Okorie, Agabi and Igwe (2004:217) who posited that the academic inspection should include the input variables (teacher), process variable (teaching) and output variable (achievement).

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

If the strategies are employed to cater for the problems enumerated in course of managing secondary schools, then secondary education will have a qualitative standard as well as a smooth administration so as to achieve the set pre-determined goals.

SUMMARY

The status of public and private secondary schools in Port Harcourt were highlighted as well as the problems encountered in course of managing secondary schools like financial constrain, lack of instructional materials, poor study habit of students and the existence of communication gap among

others were discussed. Strategies for the improvement of secondary education were enumerated like availability of finance and instructional materials, regular counseling in school, recruitment of professional teachers, increment of staff salary and better working conditions among others were not left out.

CONCLUSION

Deregulation has increased the private sector participation in education delivery in Port Harcourt in line with the status of secondary school where private school numbered 50 and public schools 12. It has also broadened access to education hence parents are guaranteed the freedom of choice to either send their children to public or private schools. However, the exercise has to be guided so that it does not lead to commercialization of education as recorded that some private schools are expensive.

Conclusively, this study was not conducted to criticize either public or private secondary schools but to highlight the state of art (status) in both schools and proffer a complementary management to improve the standard of secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of findings in this study, the followings are advanced:

- i. The government should improve on its budgetary allocations to education. This is to raise the standard of education in public schools while private proprietors should source additional funds to boost the financial base of the schools.
- ii. The government and proprietors should endeavour to put in place instructional materials and infrastructural facilities to facilitate teaching-learning process.
- iii. The services of guidance counselors should be employed for regular counseling of students, teachers and school administrators.
- iv. Only professional teachers should be allowed to teach
- v. There should be increment in teachers' salary and better working condition to motivate and retain staff in public and private schools.
- vi. Both public and private schools should be situated in serene environment for effective teaching-learning process.
- vii. There should be regular workshop, seminar and enlightenment programmes for teachers to improve and it should be followed up with quality supervision/inspection.
- viii. Ministry of education should ensure that both public and private schools adhere to WAEC marking scheme for success in external examinations.
- ix. There should be good working relationship between staff and management.
- x. Government should close down private schools operating below standards.
- xi. Private schools that are not adequately staffed should be sanctioned.
- xii. To complement government effort, public-private partnership (PPP) is recommended to accommodate the varieties of stakeholders in education. This makes for joint views/resources to be pulled together so as to reduce the burden on the government.

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