Dropout Syndrome-Students Revolt Against Stifling Creativity in Nigeria

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Abstract
Drop out syndrome in Nigeria education system has deteriorated that millions of children of school age are out of school. Notwithstanding the free and compulsory universal basic education programme there is no corresponding increase in enrolment rate. This paper posits that it is students' perception of the inability of the school system to encourage their creativity that push the students out of the school. The pattern of teaching, teachers perception of students abilities, no respect for students, including the extractive nature of the political and economic institutions of the society combine to encourage students drop out. The society pays dearly in terms of loss of manpower, crime and waste of resources. The paper outlines some steps to stem the tide and recommends team work, collaborative effort, project methods and apprenticeship/mentorship approach using experienced craftsmen.
Keywords: Dropout, creativity.

1.Introduction

Many factors militate against the attainment of education for all (EFA) in Nigeria. Some of them stem from accusations arising from the perception of the teachers (poor motivation, policies, teacher availability, infrastructural decay and lack of instructional materials); perception of parents (system decay, poor teacher training, pedagogical skills); and perception of government (no dedication to duties by teachers, lack of knowledge of what to teach etc).

Notwithstanding the paradigm under which teachers, parents and government advance their argument they all appear to agree that if the inputs (curriculum content, text books/learning materials, teacher qualifications, training, motivation and commitment, adequate facilities and parent/community support) are available (UNESCO, 2002) many students will remain in the school.

Perhaps the above philosophy partially might have informed the approach to the implementation of universal primary education (UPE) which lasted from 1976 to early 1980s. The period witnessed the construction of classroom blocks, massive employment and training of teachers and free tuition in primary school. With the above inputs school enrolment rose astronomically. The reverse seems to be the case in the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced in 1999.

The introduction of UBE was consequent on the 1990 Jomitien declaration of Education For All (EFA). The Jomitien conference states that "every person (including children) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet his/her learning needs" (Maduewesi, 2005:40). In line with the above declaration Nigeria in 1999 declared free education for all from primary one to junior secondary school class III (JSSC III) while some states like Ebonyi extended the programme to senior secondary school class III (SSSC III). The EFA goal was later extended to 2015 with the inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

However, there seems to be no corresponding increase in enrolment rate. While in some urban and rural areas the ratio of teachers to pupils, pupils to classroom are unproportionally skewed, in some other areas empty classrooms exist without the pupils/students to learn in them. Some students drop out of school in search of "a happy life" (creativity). Their creativity is revealed in music, movies, football without completing secondary education. The above activities showcase their independence, risk taking abilities, energy, curiosity and sense of humour which are characteristics of creative individuals. Nurturing creativity involves a variety of different personal, process and situational factors (Treffinger & Isaksan, 1992). Some who manage to reach SSS III do not take the senior secondary school certificate examination. While some who take the examination and fail refuse to re-sit for the complete papers of at least five credits. The drop out syndrome has deteriorated that in 19th September, 2017, the Nigerian Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, reported that up to eleven million children of school age were out of school.

It is not necessarily financial challenges that push the students out of school but it is more of their perceived understanding of the inability of the school system to consider their life interests. Such understanding creates fear in the students while teachers turn their back on those who do not do well. (Kiyosaki, 2013). Kiyosaki

further noted that it is the failure of the education system to encourage creativity in students that is partially responsible for the increasing rate of drop outs. Those who drop out of school later on live an unfettered life of creativity-for instance Einstein.

The school especially in Nigeria force students to spend part of the most vibrant period of their life loafing about without a skill to live on. From eleven to 18 years students pass through a curriculum that seem to be at variance with the societal values. It follows that rather than waste more than two decades in a venture that does not equip them with the skills for future realities some students drop out to find their feet early on the sand of life. Moreover the parents of such unemployed, non responsible students who are already worn out in age have no hope of depending on their children. Based on the above challenges there seems to be a growing desire and culture to do something young instead of at old age, hence they drop out from school.

This paper posit that drop out is a passive rebellion against the school and by extension the society which the school stands for. Since education aims at equipping people with the basic skills needed for functioning in the society, students drop out when the system does not accomplish the set purpose. Acknowledging the drop out syndrome as a passive rebellion against schools inability to equip students with skills for surviving in the society will help one to understand better why drop out persists, the how societal institutions encourage drop out, the price paid by all due to drop out, and the steps towards stemming the tide of drop out. Subsequent discussions on the paper will focus on the above issues.

2.Why Drop Out Persists

Some Nigeria leaders posit that Nigeria youths are lazy, hence they are unwilling to put their hands on the plough. However, it is rather the perceived understanding of the inability and the unwillingness of the planners and school system to consider students' interest that push many students away from the school. The national Policy on Education (NPE) states that students will be streamed into secondary, technical, out of school vocational training centres and apprenticeship schemes. Unfortunately only the secondary education is mostly emphasized. The secondary school curriculum eliminates the masses and focuses on the few who learn quickly, easily, and with less challenge.

The school teaches students what to think (product) and not how to think (process). Emphasizing on the former encourages borrowing ideas and not owning them. Borrowing entails using and giving it back while owning an idea entails making a choice, improving on it, shaking, pounding, reconstructuring, re-engineering, testing and internalizing it (Bartel, 2012). The end product of school which is the result of examination encourages students to borrow ideas from text books, use same and abandon them after examination. The most important aspect of education which is the process (Omebe & Mgboro, 2017) is rarely emphasized. It is certain that in real life what is needed is where to look for facts, and whom to approach when the need arises (Kiyosaki, 2013).

The school does not view students' mistakes as opportunities for growth/development rather students are made to perceive such mistakes as times of regret, anger/resentment (Kiyosaki, 2013). Student regret is revealed in statements like, "if only I knew, I wish I had!". Regrets therefore becloud students' emotions hence they drop out of the school. It follows that the school does not accept mistakes as the fruits of practice/experiment without which learning becomes difficult.

Furthermore, teachers perception of students abilities act as labels that are integrated into students thinking and therefore determine greatly how weak or strong the students are in self motivational skills. These labels are stored in the subconscious layer of the mind which respond to the silent massages that teachers/peers project. Those students who perceive they cannot rise higher than what the teachers expect of them drop out of the school.

The school undermines co-operation, an aspect of creative education, and calls it cheating (Kiyosaki, 2017). Students are made to take tests alone while those who fail are labeled stupid. The school turns out to be a battle ground for the war of the mind. Those who cannot persist in the war drop out of the system.

Some teachers refuse to share the blame for the failure of the students therefore they do not respect the students. When students are taught by teachers who do not respect them, the students also do not respect the teachers. When you learn from someone who does not respect you it is an indication that the individual does not value your life and future (Kiyosaki, 2013). Students who perceive such lack of respect from the teachers drop out to engage in activities where they will be respected.

How Societal Institutions Encourage Drop-out

The societal institutions-political and economic-which encompass the constitution, democratic practices, ability of the state to govern and regulate the activities in the society, power distribution and sharing, freedom of individuals to pursue their own personal interest (Mgboro & Eke, 2017) encourage or discourage students drop out from school. The institutions further influence the behaviours and attitudes students adopt towards education and the reward they feel they can get through education. It means that stemming the tide of school drop out need an institutional transformation.

The prolonged military rule in Nigeria has encouraged negative values and attitudinal practices which negate progress (NEPAD, 2010). It might be on the above premise that Ajibola, (2010) noted that the gradual and consistent erosion of values have made it difficult to "hit the mark".

The extractive nature of the Nigerian institutions, where the leaders extract wealth and income from members of the society to benefit a few subset (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013) leads to centralized control of developmental process and favours elite interest and participation (NEPAD, 2010). The elites encourage those values and policies that benefit them while neglecting the socio-emotional and political climate that encourage creativity. Changes in educational policies-6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4 system of education, government take over of schools from missionaries, and later handing the schools back to the missionaries, establishment of unity schools (Mgboro & Eke, 2017); government inability to provide infrastructure and instructional materials to public schools, while private schools flourish, non availability of laboratories and libraries, inadequate professional teachers to handle teaching/learning (Ocho, 2005) are some of the elites instituted policies and reforms which preserve the status quo and their position in it. The policy makers use their military mentality to institute policies which stifle creativity hence the drop out syndrome persist.

The political and economic institutions in Nigeria are based on absolutism-a type of rule not constrained by law or the desires of the citizens but thrives with the support of small elite group, (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). It is not surprising that educational policies are frequently made and changed without involving the stakeholders. Teachers who implement the policies are not represented or retrained to implement them. Continuous assessment, computer studies, introductory technology and entrepreneurship education are some of the changes introduced without adequate preparation and practical steps towards implementation. How does a teacher without the knowledge of computer, a computer set, and electricity to power the machine teach computer to students? Agricultural loans and studies are provided and encouraged without the mechanized equipment for production. In some states the subject is compulsory even though the government approves the establishment of schools which do not have enough land for farming. This is because the proprietors of such schools have link with the government in power. Entrepreneurship education to that extent is stifled. Consequent on the above confusion among teachers teaching and learning seem directionless hence some students drop out of school to give themselves a sense of direction early in life.

It follows that the leaders who control the political and economic wheels of the country carry out their responsibilities to suit their selfish needs and ambitions. No wonder children of those leaders do not attend the same public schools with the children of the "have-nots".

3.The Price Paid Because of Drop Out.
It appears the leaders refuse to open up to new ideas because they fear the emergence of creative destruction which might lead to reversal of status quo. No wonder specific industries, railways, factories are allowed only in some regions of the country while other areas/regions are denied such opportunities even though the economic climate favour such establishment. The price for the above intentional neglect is paid by all in a slowly but eroding standard of education. School libraries, laboratories, buildings, community colleges and teachers' quarters close their doors to students due to absence of activities that elevate and challenge the academic spirits of the students which further cement the bond of relationship between teachers and students, and between school and the society.

The end product of the price is widespread poverty which breeds crime. The price for crime is paid with the rising cost for law enforcement and anxiety that accompany living in a society where people cannot feel secured in their homes. Based on the above ground work students perceive despair, hopelessness, and lack of opportunity hence they drop out of the school and revert to crime.

In 2016 Kaduna state government sacked up to 2000 teachers because they failed primary four test given to them. The teachers asked for a raise in salary without corresponding increase in knowledge and productivity. While teachers' score/knowledge is going down drop out rates soar and both students and parents are not happy. The rate at which buildings, and bridges collapse; substandard construction of roads, seats and textiles lead to loss of man power, finance and time because of continuous recycling of the same projects by subsequent administration. In addition to the above price there is stagnation in development of the society consequent on the flooding of the market by quacks who dropped out the school.

4. Steps to Stem the Tide of Drop Out

The purpose of education is to equip people with the skills necessary for functioning in the society, hence the way to stem the tide of exodus of students from schools is to revolutionize the cultural values for which the society stood for. Such values include

A.   Cooperation and less competition. Cooperation entails that those who learn fast should help the slow ones instead of abandoning the latter (Kiyosaki, 2017). In the pattern of playing cultural music-one person plays a particular tune/instrument; statements like 'carry your brother along', 'when we come together we achieve more', 'help your brother when he is in pains', reveal the cooperative spirit which engender friendship and not competition. Group and project methods in the school lend themselves easily to cooperative activities instead of individualized method. Using the above methods help the students to have the "we" thinking and feeling which the society encourages as people live in a community (common unity).

B.   The cultural revolution further entails the practical implementation of craft and handiwork as contained in the primary school time table. The above subjects are not contained in the secondary school time table. In the primary school where they appear only lip service is paid to them. Where a society houses the future generation aged 11-20 years in an institution called the school, and such institution does not equip the children with practical skills to live in the society the future is already bleak. Experienced craftsmen and women abound in the society who should have been invited to help train students on some crafts relevant to the society.

C.   There is need to re-introduce technical and trade schools (Kiyosaki, 2017). Such schools employ the apprenticeship/ mentorship approach to teaching and learning. Captains of industries and business men can be asked to donate equipment/machines to enable students have practical experience of what the real life will be in the society.

5. Educational Implications

The implication of the above is that classroom activities are not responsive to the individual differences in students. The activities focus mainly on academic/cognitive aspect while disregarding vocational and personal-social interests of the students. Moreover, many students who could have been trained to assume responsible positions in the society are not given the opportunity because of the nature of education system. Furthermore, there is a gradual erosion of interest in institutional education (school) in favour of de-schooling society. Many students appear reluctant to go to school since they can get more information at the comfort of their homes because great teachers are already in videos.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made. The societal clamor for restructuring the policies/governance should be spearheaded by the school system so that inclusive education should be emphasized. More attention should be paid to team-work, collaborative effort, excursions and project methods. Such methods allow for interdependence, reciprocity and trustworthiness among students. Social networks of cultural and social behaviours should be encouraged. Social networks allow people to share their skills and knowledge meaningfully with others and give them access to vast resources and potentials of others thereby increasing their creativity. Experienced craftsmen and women should be invited to train students on crafts relevant to the society.

7. Conclusion

Students drop out from secondary schools in Nigeria appear to be a passive revolt against stifling creativity by the school. The school focuses more on the end product (examination) than the process of arriving at the end product; students mistakes are not seen as opportunities for growth/development and co-operation is seen as cheating. Moreover the institutions-political and economic- influence greatly students attitudes towards dropping out of school. The society pays too much price in terms of loss of man power and crime in the society. In order to stem the tide of students dropping out of school there should be inclusive education and a cultural revolution which will make the school focus on those skills demanded by the society.

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