

## **Secondary Education in Nigeria: A Synthesis of Basic Student-Specific Concerns from Guidance and Counselling Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The paper is an extrapolation of a tripartite classification of basic concerns in secondary education in Nigeria. Experiences in school counselling practice guided the discussion on the classification– the cause, the effect and the consequence -so as to arrive at a comprehensive picture of the main concerns of secondary education Nigeria. The discussion focuses more on an area which is often accorded little or no attention that is the third leg of the classification - the consequence. The consequence of the main causes of the problems in secondary education in Nigeria is largely student-specific with a far-reaching implication to the future and general well-being of the society. The student-specific concerns are presented and discussed from guidance and counselling perspective. A case is finally made for additional official attention to student concerns in order to be able to achieve the set objectives of secondary education.

### **Introduction**

The problems in the educational sector in Nigeria have their roots in what may be described as a complicated mix of economic, political, and social situations. A civil war in the late 1960s and about three decades of political instability all have their tolls in the deteriorating conditions of education. Poorly conceived programmes and/or poor implementation of well-planned programmes coupled with worldwide drop in oil prices in the 1980s are the major culprits in the crippling economic conditions, (Ajaja 2010). In spite of these facts many attempts have been made to use education for the amelioration of the economic conditions and to address political instability for the benefit of citizens and the nation, which is to make education more relevant to the needs and aspirations of the individual and the society. For example, in 1973 there was this famous seminar under the chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebayo which deliberated on all aspects education with a view to evolving a national policy on education. There were also about three different revisions of the national policy on education which evolved as a result of the 1973 seminar, in 1981, 1989 and 2004.

In 2006 a 10-year education development plan was worked. In 2009 again a roadmap for educational development was also conceptualized and launched. In spite of these and many other similar attempts as exemplified in changes and reforms from 1977

to date, Nigeria's educational system is still bedeviled by a myriad of problems. The causes of such problems are multifaceted but, accusing fingers are mostly pointing at the worsening funding profile. Others see the problems as basically in the enrollment derive, high rate of dropout and underachievement. These are really part of the main problems bedeviling secondary education in Nigeria. But also they are problems to do mostly with the government, the system and the society. Most often than not we tend to pay little or no attention to the other side of the problem, which is viewing the problem from students' angle. Problems with secondary education in Nigeria are multifaceted as mentioned earlier and therefore, deserve a holistic approach. That is a complete system review rather than any analysis or dissection of constituent parts. Any approach to the problem of education in Nigeria may not be holistic without paying specific attention to students-specific concerns.

It is in this view that the paper uses analytical synthesis in the assessment of the tripartite classification of the major concerns in the educational sector. Synthesis in this regard was believed to have the potentials of adding value to the issue under discussion by analyzing views and research reports and making a case for stakeholders and principal actors in education in a variety of ways. The paper discusses and synthesizes a well-articulated tripartite classification of typical problems of education in Nigeria, through the lenses of school guidance and counselling practices. The sole purpose is to provide practicing school counsellors with information and research reports about student-specific concerns that they can use to improve their helping processes. The focus is therefore mainly on use of research reports for counselling purposes, rather than for sole administrative purpose. The paper therefore focuses more on aspects of student-specific concerns. It is hopefully a basis for the development of effective system-wide reform in order to enhance student learning and to improve student attainment.

To accomplish this, the paper begins with a brief background on secondary education in Nigeria from 1977 to date. A tripartite classification of typical concerns of secondary education in Nigeria were presented and discussed. The paper recognizes that attention seems to be generally more on the first and second leg of the tripartite classification with little or no attention to the third leg. The paper acknowledges the assertion that attention to the first and the second legs of the tripartite classification will provide an automatic solution to the concerns of the third leg but also casts doubts to its wholesomeness. More so, the paper has made a case for a special and/or equal attention to the third leg of the classification.

## **Secondary Education in Nigeria: A Review**

It was the recommendations from the 1977 seminar that culminated into what is today known as the national policy on education. The national policy on education (usually referred to as NPE) has provided for some broad aims of secondary education, as contained in section 4 subsection 18 of the policy (2004). They include:

- a. Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with no opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex or social, religious, and ethnic background;
- b. Diversify its curriculum to cater for difference in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course;
- c. Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology;
- d. Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage;
- e. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens;
- f. Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common lies that unite use in our diversity;
- g. Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in late life.

Secondary education is of six-year duration and given in two stages, junior and senior levels of three years each. Secondary education completes the provision of basic education that began at the primary level, and aims at laying the foundations for lifelong learning and human development, by offering more subject- or skill-oriented instruction.

The introduction of universal basic education (UBE) in 1989 as a follow up to the 1977 universal free primary education (UPE) was also an important educational milestone which became a major focus of government in line with its drive to reform the sector. In 2006 government has also worked out a 10-year education development plan as part of the drive to reform the education sector. In 2009 a roadmap for the revitalization of the education sector was conceptualized and introduced. The roadmap was introduced mainly because of the sorry state in which the education sector found itself. The quality of education had declined so much that many of the graduates produced by the nation's tertiary institutions were simply unemployable. Teachers' morale was also at an all-time low. The sector remains grossly under-funded and basic school necessities like laboratories and well-equipped libraries were simply not there. The roadmap had four components: Access and Equity, Quality Assurance, Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Funding. The document outlines improvement and turn-around strategies for each of the sub sectors of education namely basic, post-basic and tertiary. The roadmap seemed really divorced from the general problems of underdevelopment in the society. The major problems identified with the sector: funding, access and quality were more of a typical characteristic of underdevelopment.

Early in 2012 a four-year strategic plan for the education sector was unveiled by the Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayyatu Ahmad Rufa'i which would hopefully transform it by 2015. The main goal of the Strategic Plan is that by 2015, there would be significant changes in the state of the educational institutions as well as the quality

of the products. The Plan identified and classified the challenges and concerns in the education system into some focal areas as follows: access and equity; standard and quality assurance; strengthening institutional management of education; teacher education and development; technical and vocational education and training; funding partnerships; resource mobilization and utilization. The Plan had also evolved some turnaround strategies for meaningful achievement of the focal areas. Timelines as well as those responsible for their implementation were also clearly identified.

These are but just some examples of the major attempts to revitalize education in Nigeria. The likely questions now lie mainly in whether or not these excellent reform strategies have done the magic or at least, are still working and yielding the desired results or they remain like all others before them, the usual window dressing strategies and mere plans on paper.

### **The Tripartite Classification**

Classifications presented as conceptualized and presented by Jisse (2002), Kawu (2007) and Balogun (2010) have actually summarized and classified what they considered as the discerning problems of secondary education in Nigeria. The similarities between the three classifications are overwhelming and by far outweigh the differences. The summary of the classifications which is referred to in this paper as tripartite has the cause, the effect and the consequence. The cause has mainly, funding, inconsistent policies and lack of community participation as examples of the major culprits; the effects has mainly, low enrollment, shortage of quality staff, dearth of quality teachers and dilapidated infrastructure as examples of the major culprits; the consequence has mainly, dropout, underachievement (in especially SSCE) and deterioration of students' behaviour as examples.

**First Leg: the Cause:** The first leg of the tripartite classification has, among others, the following major concerns: funding, inconsistent policies and lack of community participation in the educational sector. Funding has consistently been the major concern in the education sector in Nigeria. The budget has yet to meet the 26 percent recommended by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as the amount voted for education fails to adequately address the funding of this vital sector. For the 2013 fiscal year Nigeria has appropriated only a paltry 8.43 percent of the budget to education which is by far less than the UNESCO recommended 26 percent. The surprising thing is that majority of other African countries economically less endowed than Nigeria are using these guidelines for their education systems. On the average, Nigeria spends less than nine percent of its annual budget on education when smaller, economically less endowed African nations like Botswana spend 19.0%; Swaziland, 24.6%; Lesotho, 17.0%; South Africa, 25.8%; Cote d'Ivoire, 30.0%; Burkina Faso, 16.8%; Ghana, 31%; Kenya, 23.0%; Uganda, 27.0%; Tunisia, 17.0%; and Morocco, 17.7%. The consequence of poor funding of education are so devastating and crippling, most of which will be discussed

later.

Inconsistent policies and lack of continuity are the dual concerns which follow low funding in succession. Many at times the policies are structurally sound only that they are most often than not ill-conceived. Policies change with the change of national leadership or even at the change of leadership at the ministerial level. Community involvement in the development of education refers to switching from the usual practice of schools' relations with parents in the running of schools to the full involvement of parents and the community by the school in the development of schools. One specific reason for the involvement of the parents and the community by the schools is the fact that what happens before and after the school day is as important as what happens during the school day.

**Second Leg: the Effect:** The second leg of the tripartite classification has, among others, the following major concerns: low enrollment, shortage of quality staff, dearth of quality teachers and dilapidated infrastructure as the major culprits. As a result of the major causes of the problems of poor funding, inconsistent policies and lack community participation in the sector secondary education in Nigeria has become a shadow of itself with far-reaching negative effects on the system. The resultant effects are manifested in low enrollment, shortage of quality staff, dearth of quality teachers and dilapidated infrastructure. Similarly, these effects have certain negative consequences that constitute the third leg of the tripartite classification.

School enrollment at secondary school level, according to World Bank report published in 2012, female (% gross) in Nigeria was last reported at 41.21 in 2010; while that of male (% gross) was put at 46.78. The general secondary school (% gross) enrollment was similarly reported at 44.05. Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown. Net enrollment ratio is the ratio of children of official school age based on the International Standard Classification of Education 1997 who are enrolled in school to the population of the corresponding official school age. This page includes a historical data chart, news and forecasts for School enrollment; secondary; female (% net) in Nigeria

Quality of the teaching staff in secondary schools has equally deteriorated over the years. Holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) are still the bulk of the teaching staff in secondary schools even though the recommendation is graduate holders. Some of the graduate teachers are not qualified (teaching without education and some are HND graduates). The proportion of the teaching force that is trained especially in science and technology is inadequate. Lack of qualified teachers has been reported as partly responsible for the dismal performance of candidates in public examinations especially in Mathematics and English Language. Added to this disadvantage teachers and students have to walk long distances to get to school due to non-availability of staff and students buses. All these have negative effects on the teachers to teach and students to learn and consequently on quality of outputs.

Dearth of infrastructure, inadequate classrooms and offices, inadequate laboratories

for practical are commonplace. Many secondary schools lack the infrastructure that would provide safe, efficient and effective schools. Many schools lack access to water, proper sanitation and electricity and are in dire need of renovation. Poor condition of the schools has some negative contributions to the performance of students in school-based examinations prepared by teachers and also in the centrally set papers. Schools are still largely dilapidated and are unsuitable for a conducive learning environment. Students do well when they study in a conducive learning environment. It is a conducive teaching environment that makes teachers to perform at their optimum. Despite the general state of total disrepair in which most of the country's schools are in, teachers are still the lowest ranked profession that enjoyed good salary structure. Teachers are among the lowest paid professionals, in Nigeria.

**Third Leg: the Consequence:** The third leg of the tripartite classification has, among others, the following major concerns: high dropout rates, underachievement (in especially SSCE) and deterioration of students' behaviour. There is not one single cause of drop out, it is often a consequence of many events, and therefore has more than one proximate cause. Many writers are of the opinion that poverty and cultural practices are the major causes of dropout. Poverty and cultural practices were implicated as the major culprits in the escalation of dropout rates, not only because they affect the inability of households to pay school fees and other costs associated with education but also because parents would prefer to use their wards as helps in their domestic or occupational endeavors. This argument is rather implausible and old fashioned. The old practice of shifting blames to poverty and cultural practices and religion as the main retarding forces of education has since been debunked by a number of scholars. Dropout, underachievement and deterioration of students' behaviour are the direct consequences of underfunding, inconsistent policies and lack of community participation in the education.

The 2011 Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) results as released by West African Examinations Council (WAEC) had over 600,000 who failed English Language, out of the total 1,460,003. The 2012 results had about similar number 600,000 (37%) out of about 1,540,250 candidates who wrote the examination, who obtained credit in Mathematics, while over 800,000, representing about 54%, obtained credit in English Language. Although the 2012 results appeared to be better than the previous year, it was still a poor performance.

### **The 'Classification' from Guidance and Counselling Perspective**

The third leg of the tripartite classification, which is the direct consequence of among other things, underfunding, inconsistent policies and lack of community participation in the educational sector, as presented and discussed under the first leg, is the focus of this paper. In many attempts to ameliorate the worsening conditions of education in Nigeria and the sub-Saharan Africa generally, little or no attention is usually accorded the student factor, (Green 2009). Deterioration of students' behaviour and reported gross indiscipline

in secondary schools are continually posing threats to the hopes the society reposes in its youth as future leaders. There are a number of behavior related cases reported by stakeholders or by the students themselves which require official and professional attention in order to adequately address the deterioration in secondary education. It is not true that improving funding alone can address the decay in the system. Student related concerns are profession-specific concerns that require professional intervention strategies. First of all, we need to begin with a brief elucidation of these concerns. They are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below.

**Table 1: Cases and Challenges Reported by Students in an Individual or Group Sessions**

Category	Sample Cases
Educational	Coping strategies, comprehension, study skills, exam anxiety
Vocational	Career aspirations, fear of (choice and) unemployment, what to do in future, desire to know about occupations
Personal	Financial constraints, imposition from parents, parents quarrels (and divorce), being made fun of
Social	Interpersonal r/ships, so much responsibility at home, wanting to belong
Other	Teachers attitude in the class, to self , after school engagement

Source: Garba (2007)

Table 1 presents typical cases and challenges bedeviling studentship at secondary school level. These challenges were reported by the students themselves as documented by Garba (2007). The challenges, as usual were divided into five. The category of educational challenges facing secondary students as reported by Garba (2007) included: ineffective strategies in coping with academic demands; lack of clear understanding of what is going on in class; lack of study strategies; and developing anxiety especially during examinations. The category of vocational challenges facing students included: lack of aspirations especially of career; fear of making the wrong choice of career and fear of unemployment; lack of adequate knowledge of what to do in the future; and an increasing desire to know more about occupations. The third category of personal concerns facing students included: lack of money enough to cater for the demands of schooling; frequent imposition of what to study in school; reported cases of parents fighting at home (which sometimes lead to divorce); peers laughing at him/her and making fun of. The fourth category of concerns that are social in nature included: the problems of keeping friends and making new ones; increasing demands from home; and the desire to belong to a social group. The last category included challenges that are not categorized such as: teacher’s negative attitude towards students in and outside the class.

**Table 2: Emerging Cases and Challenges**

Category	Emerging Cases
Educational	Exam malpractice, impersonation, mass failure in promotional exam, too many school rules, teachers' attitude to work
Vocational	Total lack of r/ship between courses and vocational interests, part-time jobs, not doing well in selected subjects
Personal	STDs, peer influence, emotional changes (breakdown), evil spirits and witches, substances abuse
Social	Gangsters, inter-communal youth clashes, inter-party youth clashes, rudeness
Other	High rate of petty stealing in class

Source: Garba (2007)

Table 2 presents challenges that emerged over a period of five years (2001 to 2006). These challenges were not reported by students or anybody but were documented from what has been happening in the school system and as documented by Garba (2007). The challenges, as usual were divided into five. The category of emerging educational challenges included: reported cases of malpractice in especially centrally coordinated examinations, demonstrated mainly in impersonation; mass failure in promotional and SSCE examinations; authorities setting too many rules which makes students largely confused; and increasing cases of teachers' attitude to works. The category of emerging vocational challenges included: observed total lack of relationship between courses students offer and their vocational aspirations; students' engagement in after school part-time jobs; and students not doing well in some key subjects such as English and Mathematics. The third category of emerging personal concerns included: sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); influence of peers to commit crimes; emotional breakdown; possession by evil spirits; and substance abuse. The fourth category of emerging social concerns included: increasing involvement with gangsters; clashes between communities; and also clashes between and within political parties. The last category included emerging challenges that are not categorized such as: high rate of petty stealing especially at home and in school.

**Table 3: Case and Challenges Reported by Stakeholder**

Stakeholders	Sample Reports
Parents	Nigerian and Hausa films, romantic novels, video games, cell phone chatting, defiance, social IT media
Teachers	Absenteeism, low performance, learning and conduct disorders, substance abuse, destruction of school property, recurring violations of school rules, exam malpractice
Agencies	Drug abuse (NDLEA), stealing and burglary (Police), substance abuse
Community	Hanging out with girls late night, disruptive behavior, substance abuse
Media	Football hooliganism, substance abuse
Counsellors	Shunning counselling

Source: Garba (2007)

Table 3 presents typical cases and challenges bedeviling studentship at secondary school level as reported by the stakeholders and as documented by Garba (2007). These challenges were divided into six. The first category presents challenges facing students as perceived by parents, included: proliferation Nigerian movies (Nollywood) and Hausa movies (Kannywood); proliferation of local romantic novels; proliferation of video games which are often violent; chatting on cell phone especially at night; and the encroachment of social media in the IT world. The second category presents challenges facing students as perceived and reported by teachers which included: increasing absenteeism; increasing low performance; reported cases of disorders mainly to do with learning; rudeness to and abuse of teachers; substance abuse; deliberate destruction of school properties; deliberate violations of school rules and regulations; and examination malpractice. The third category of emerging concerns facing students as reported by government agencies included: increasing cases of substance abuse reported by the National Drug Laws Enforcement Agency (NDLEA); petty stealing and burglary as reported by the Police. The fourth category of concerns as reported by the various communities included: hanging out with girls late night which is contrary to the norms; increasing cases of disruptive behavior; and substance abuse. The fifth category included challenges reported by the media which included; increasing cases of football hooliganism; and substance abuse. The last category includes cases reported school counselors which is mainly the case of students shunning away from counselling.

It may be noted that none of the following cases featured anywhere: fear of bullying; failure in homework; school phobia; mutism; autism; attention deficit; and similar concerns. This is simply because these types of problems are more prominent at primary school level and their occurrence at secondary or other levels of education is abysmal. It may also be noted that none of the following cases featured anywhere: fake

results; cultism; rapes; union rivalry; marriage and relationship issues; homosexuality; schizophrenia; maladjustment; and other similar concerns. This is largely because they are more prominent at tertiary levels and therefore their occurrence at secondary or other levels of education is abysmal. Again, it may also be noted that none of the following cases featured anywhere: suicide; eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia nervosa); sexual dysfunction; sexual orientation; depression; bipolar disorder; and other similar concerns. This is largely because they are more prominent outside school system and more importantly most of them are seen to be alien to the culture.

### **Implications of the Guidance and Counselling Perspective**

Of major concern here is that the majority of the population of Nigeria, West Africa and even the entire Sub-Saharan Africa, fall within the youth category (age 15-35), a trend which is projected to persist for some decades to come. Data from the National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria (1997) show a high proportion of children in the population. Those under 15 years of age constituted about 45 per cent of the total population. The proportion of aged persons (60 years and above) in the population constituted only 3.3 percent. The age structure of the population, according to the 1991 census, shows a very broad-based pyramid, reflecting the large proportion of children and young persons. Those children and young persons are ideally expected to pass through the education system. If the educational environment is crowded with the kind of problems presented here then the dream of bright future is apparently threatened because the very basic requirement for a meaningful life for the youth is grossly being compromised.

Whatever is thought of as a recipe for the amelioration of standards in secondary education in Nigeria will likely head to the rocks so long these basic student-specific concerns have not been adequately and meaningfully addressed. The question is how can the student-specific concerns be addressed? In Nigeria the answer is simple. The current national policy on education (FGN 1977, 1981 and 2004) has provided for the introduction and/or implementation of guidance and counselling in schools. Guidance and counselling as a support service is deemed by the national policy as a catalyst for resolving student related concerns. Professional school guidance counselors are expected by the national policy to provide a broad range of services in schools under the direction of their professional ethics.

Students of especially secondary school age, who are mostly in the age range of pre- and post- adolescence period, are today living in exciting and demanding times with an increasingly diverse society, evolving technologies and expanding opportunities in a competitive global economy. As they transition from childhood through adolescence and to adulthood, secondary school students are faced with multifaceted challenges impacting achievement and readiness for postsecondary success. It is only the proper implementation of the provisions of the national policy that can adequately address students' concern and ensure success at this level of education.

## Conclusion

In conclusion it should be emphasized that the school system plays a crucial role in the socialization of students because the family alone cannot adequately fulfill the role of training responsibilities of its ever growing adolescents. The socialization role of the school is not limited to provision of skills and practical knowledge to teachers, parents and counselors alone. It also involves instilling among students forms of positive interpersonal relationship, commitment to self-development, dedication to social integration and growth, selflessness, honesty and sincerity. It is therefore essential for schools to develop and review school policy to address student-specific concern.

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