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The Challenges and Prospects of Managing Private School System in Rivers State

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Abstract

The Private School System is part of the education system in Rivers State as indeed other parts of the country. Though part of the education system, the Private School System has its peculiarities. This paper therefore looked into the challenges and prospects of managing the Private School System (PSS) in Rivers State. In the process, the paper examined the education policy and law of Rivers State in view of their implications for the management of the Private School System. The paper also made suggestions in achieving efficiency in Private School System in its contribution to education development of Rivers State.

Key words: Private School System, challenges, prospects, managing.

Introduction

Education is recognized internationally as key to human, social and economic development. The Jomtien Declaration on Education For All 1990, The Dakar Framework For Action, 2000; the International Consultation Forum on Education For All, Amman 1996, are some international efforts and

commitments indicating the significance of education to national and international development (<http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/JOMTIEN>, <http://www.un.org/en/development/education.shtml>). At home in Nigeria, education is instrument “par excellence” for effective national development (FRN, 2004). The importance of education reflects huge expenditures made by government at various levels on provision and services and the persistent cry by the public for Government to implement 26% UNESCO recommendation (<http://www.vanguadngr.com>).

The education sector is massive

Punch Newspaper of Thursday 26, March, 2009 reported that Nigeria had 87,911 Public Primary Schools, and 7,129 Junior Secondary Schools. There were 24,422,918 pupils in the public primary schools. A breakdown shows that 54.5% or 13,302,269 were male and 45.5% or 11,302,269 were female. Public Junior Secondary Schools were holding 3,266,780 students (<http://www.nigeriamuse.com/.../nigeria...nigerians/nigeria>). The Roadmap of the Nigerian Education Sector, 2009 shows the actual enrolment of Public Senior Secondary School to stand at 2.8 million or 28% with potential enrolment expected at 7.2 million (<http://www.nigeriamuse.com>). From the foregoing Public Primary, Junior and Senior Secondary Schools were holding a population of 30,489, 698 pupils.

Records of Nigerian Demography by World Bank, CIA World Facebook, Wikipedia, and National Population Commission show that Nigeria population in 2012 stands between 165 million and 170 million (<http://www.indexmundi.com/Nigeria>; <http://www.population.gov.ng> and <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki>. All reports show that 42.8% or 72,812,961 are aged 0 – 14 are in public schools.

Call for participation by all

In view of the enormous population size of the aged 0 – 14, the provision of education requires massive expansion. In recognition of this, government at every level not only desire private sector connections in funding but also in active participation in provision (FRN, 2004).

Evolution of private sector participation in the provision of education

The history of education and private participation in Nigeria cannot begin or end without a glowing mention of the contribution of the missionaries who came to Nigeria in Mid Nineteenth Century.

- In 1843 Methodists missionary society founded the first school.
- In 1847 the Anglican Communion also established chains of schools.
- In 1887 in Southern Nigeria Education Department was established and its role was to set curricula requirements and administer grants (<http://www.photius.com/nigeria>). By 1914 there were ninety-one (91) missions schools in the South of Nigeria.
- In 1916 Frederick Lugard, 1st Governor General of the unified colony set up an inspectorate division charged with the responsibility for discipline, buildings, and adequacy of teaching staff.

Rivers State as part of the South had a fair share of the experience of mission schools. Names such as St. Aquinnas Secondary School, Elele, Sancta Maria High School, Omoku; Ascension High School, Eleme, Stella Maris College, Baptist High School, Port Harcourt, Holy Rosary Secondary School, Port Harcourt, etc. suggest early missionary ownerships of school and contribution to educational development. They had remained so till after the war, when Government through Policies took ownership, control of administration and mass provision of education.

Education policy in Rivers State

Education policy in Rivers State directly derives from the National Policy on Education. Curricula, structure, programmes and administration of education in Rivers State are similar to what happens elsewhere in Nigeria (FRN, 2004). Variation may only be noticed in the peculiar emphasis placed on vision, values and principles of provision. The Rivers State vision of education is to produce globally competitive, functionally literate and self sustaining scholars and citizens. Again the enduring values of education in the state remain people, knowledge, integrity, excellence, peace and commitment. The principle of education emphasizes effective policy implementation and productive delivery. Massive expansion to facilities provision of free books and uniform and recent allocation of 20.7% of total state budget to education is a clear manifestation of the vision, values and principles of education in Rivers State (BRACED COMMISSION, 2012).

Education in Rivers State and the law

By the Education Law, 2012 of Rivers State, the entire education system is under the authority of the state represented by the Commissioner for Education. Part II Section 4 subsection (1) empowers the Commissioner for Education to take all steps “that may be desirable to secure the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of people of Rivers State”. To accomplish the task of developing manpower for Rivers State, the education law further empowers the Commissioner for Education with the authority to:

1. establish or oversee the establishment of new schools
2. regulate the educational process in the state
3. withhold or withdraw approval given to establish school
4. close down schools and institution

The Imperative

The obvious is that both Public and Private schools in the state are subject to direct control, regulation and supervision of the Commissioner for Education. The implication is that education venture in Rivers State must conform to state policy on Education in terms of structure, learning programmes, activities, administration, provision, access and delivery.

School system in Rivers State

The school system in Rivers State, is co-operated and bi-sector. It is both Public and Private. The school system in Rivers State comprises of Public and Private schools. The Tables 2 and 3 below clearly show this.

A. Public schools

These are schools owned and founded by the State Government on behalf of the public. Apparently as policy initiator, education in the public schools is bound to conform to the principles and spirit of the education policy. Public schools have remained largely:

- tuition free
- centrally run by Boards
- overseen by the Ministry
- responding to change/innovations, improved school provision
- responding to demographics
- adjusting managerial styles for improved service delivery

- incorporating key values of people, integrity and excellence
- imbuing the need for universality in the approach in raising generation next
- subject to public debates and controversy
- conforming to set standards
- dynamic

Challenges

- Improvement of the system corresponding to funding
- Teachers' commitment / motivation
- Equipment / facilities
- Examination malpractice / cultism / indiscipline

B. Private schools

For more than four decades now Private schools have run as profit oriented enterprises, often owned by an individual, cooperating individuals, voluntary agencies or faith based organizations. Private ownership of schools as earlier noted, dominated the education landscape of the country during the mid Nineteenth Century leading up to the later part of that Century. The missionaries were predominantly responsible for those schools. Private schools have persisted since then. In Rivers State, there are 451 recognized Private Primary Schools and 514 recognised Private Post Primary Schools (BRACED COMMISSION, 2012).

Private schools can be categorized according to fee regimes, as Low Fee Paying (LFP) and High Fee Pay (HFP). The fee regimes are directly determined by owner's defined standards and characteristics and not subject to government regulation. Fee payment determines access and sometimes quality of programmes available in each school. Private schools are run on the basis of cash for provision mostly (ESSPIN, 2011).

ESSPIN (2011) Report reveals all or some of the following about Private school:

- Financed privately
- Managed and run privately
- Operate in environment less the standard of Public Schools
- Process of Personnel recruitment / quantity /quality of personnel strictly restricted

- Conditions of service strictly restricted
- Monitoring/evaluation system largely unknown
- Admission criteria/process determined by school
- Teacher development/Training largely unknown
- Quality assurance measure largely undisclosed
- Government recognition largely unknown for many private schools
- All year round admission
- Indiscriminate registration of candidates for certificate examinations
- Ready platforms as “Miracle Centres”
- Limited/Non availability of facilities e.g. laboratories, libraries, demonstration farms, play grounds, etc.
- Irregular school attendance by pupils

It is pertinent to note that while some private schools in the Rivers State rate highly in terms of academic performance, good facilities, discipline, and good school climate, others are usually poorly rated and scarcely sought after, because they exhibit those characteristics that neither promote excellence in learning nor make contribution to education delivery. Here lies the challenges that confront not only the Private schools alone but also education delivery management in Rivers State.

Challenges of managing private schools

The Nature of ownership of Private schools and the purpose for which the owners have set them up present a herculean task in having Private schools lend themselves to inquiries and administrative cooperation from external bodies. For these reasons the major challenges in managing Private schools would border on the following:

(a) **Quality assurance**

The process of education is vital in achieving education goals. The question therefore will be, are private schools engaging in best practices in education that contribute to good performance. In other words are private schools lending themselves to the specified statewide standards as directed by the Ministry of Education? Beginning from establishment through operation to certification, private school ought to conform to education law of the state in order to contribute towards realizing the objectives of education in Rivers State.

(b) **Facilities / equipment**

In accomplishing teaching and learning, facilities/equipment are central to any learner centred education. Most Private schools especially Low Fee Payment (LFP) may not be able to afford facilities/equipment necessary for offering certain subjects in the curriculum especially in the sciences, technical and vocational areas. This also causes most of these schools to focus more on social sciences and art subjects to the detriment of a balanced curriculum as required by the educational system.

The state education policy weighs in on sciences, technical and vocational education and has encouraged this over the years. Therefore Private schools needing to operate should have equipment and facilities likely to promote emphasis areas in Rivers State Education policy.

(c) **Environment**

School environment is a critical factor in school operations and success. Over 70% of Private schools in Rivers State are sited in either private homes or make shift buildings and do not have capacity for further expansion in the nearest future. The provisions of sporting facilities, library, convenience, dispensary, etc. are functions of space.

(d) **Funding**

Availability of funds to Private school owners is important. Most Private Schools are small in size, lacking teaching equipment and facilities and trapped in make shifts house or rented accommodation. Little Patronages, astronomical costs of accommodation retard their ability to acquire education specific environment, equipment, quality teachers, all necessary to meet set standards for the operation of schools in the state or even elsewhere.

Banks hardly do business with small size schools compounding their problem in accessing loans facility (Odeleye, Oyelamin & Abike, 2012).

Government of Rivers State would perhaps make possession of a given sum of funds and facility guarantee from a commercial bank, preconditions for licencing a school.

(e) **Condition of service/motivation**

The Private School System should evolve a platform for harmonized conditions of service that mirrors what is obtainable in the Public Secondary School. This will enable teachers in Private Schools who see their job as adhoc arrangement settle down to develop careers in such

school and contribute meaningfully well to education delivery. It should also be a precondition for licencing a school.

(f) **Manpower development/capacity building programme**

The teaching force of any school makes a statement about the quality of the school. Teachers who are technically equipped would work towards achieving set goals of education. It is imperative that deliberate effort be part of the Private Schools' Plans in ensuring quality teaching and learning.

(g) **Creating board of governors**

Private school owners should be compelled to create Board of Governors, when requesting for Licence to operate. The functions of the Board, number of meeting for a year and reporting process clearly identified and specified before Licencing is done.

(h) **Merger plans**

Private schools owners would need to look at the trend in the industrial Sector to see how most firms are surviving. A number of school owners can come together to discuss merging their schools in order to develop mega school, by bringing their resources together.

Prospects

Private school system in Rivers State really can be improved to succeed and contribute more to realizing the goal of Education For All. Despite the avalanche of challenges facing the system, collaboration efforts between operators of Private School System and Government can open new vistas. This is even so as Private education providers are accepted as partners in national development. Opportunities for improvement of Private education providers abound in Rivers State. They come in the following ways:

- The population trend shows that a large market exist for Private Schools providers. As they remain active players in the education industry, parents and guardians are making informed choices of schools to send their wards or children.
- More financial institutions are available to assist with facilities and instrument.

- Private education providers in Rivers State stand to benefit from the technical and professional expertise available in Government.
- There are International Agencies e.g. UNSECO, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Base Organizations (CBOs) ready to collaborate with Private and Public education providers ready to lend themselves to best practices.
- The existence of a friendly industrial environment in Rivers State.
- Avalanche of education interactive fora are actively promoted by the Rivers State Government and Private education providers can be availed such opportunities.
- Private education providers can capitalize on available National and State policies on education as well as the Nigeria Roadmap for education sector to strengthen their programme base.
- Private sectors stand to benefit from state regulation of education that will in turn enhance their performance necessary for attracting large clients.

Conclusion

The Private school system has contributed immensely to the development of education and by extension manpower base of the country. It continues to do so even now. However, as private enterprises, most owners of Private schools have run their schools clearly as private property often paying little attention to laws governing the operations of education industry. This has presented challenges to the state in its bid to run and deliver education needed for sustainable development of the state.

Clearly the state must exercise its authority over the education sector as important as it is by ensuring that the other operators in the education system share the state's vision, values, principles which inform the objectives of state education.

Recommendations

In Licencing Private ownership and operators in the education sector, the following recommendations need to be taken into consideration, thus:

1. Comprehensive education of prospective applicants on the Education Law, Policy on Education, Policy on Environment, Resources Management and Linkage Networking.
2. Evidence of school premises complete with authorization from various government agencies connected with such approval.
3. Evidence of Journal for staff recruitment process, staff development, staff conditions of service, mid and long term development plan covering facilities, plant, staff and students personnel policy.
4. Evidence of plan of relationship with Government agencies charged with education auditing.
5. Evidence of financial plans for ten years.
6. Evidence of links with financial institutions/bail out plan.
7. Proposal of merger plans/growth pole direction in the next 20 years.
8. Social responsibility plan.
9. Evidence of plan for Board of Governors
10. Evidence of plan for Parent/Teacher Association (PTA)

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Table 1

LEVEL	POPULATION IN MILLION
Primary	24,422,918
JS	3,266,780
SS	2,800,000
TOTAL	30,489,698

Table 2: Primary schools

PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
899	451	1,350
SECONDARY SCHOOLS (JUNIOR AND SENIOR)		
266	514	780

Source: Braced Commission Facts Sheet on Education in Braced States, 2012

Table 3: ENROLMENT

Primary Schools

PUBLIC SCHOOLS	PRIVATE SCHOOLS	TOTAL
244,684	45,373	290,057

Secondary Schools

PUBLIC SCHOOLS	PRIVATE SCHOOLS	TOTAL
247,644	37,212	284,856

Source: BRACED COMMISSION, 2012.