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CHALLENGES OF MANAGING PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

Dr. Ezeaku, Stella Nkechi
Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam Campus
Email: drezeakustella@gail.com

ABSTRACT

The private school system is an integral part of the nation's education system. The private school system has its peculiarities. This paper therefore looked into the challenges of managing Private secondary schools in Nigeria. it examined secondary education in Nigeria, private education and the challenges of private secondary schools in the country, to this end, the paper also made certain suggestions to curb the identified challenges.

Keywords: Challenge; Management; Private Secondary School

Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for the attainment of growth and development of any nation of the world, this has been well established in extant literatures. According to Cole (2002), the growth of the economy and development of a country largely depends on the education system in that country. Primarily, the aim of education is to sustain individual and societal improvement (Iloka & Nwakoby, 2025; Ojimba, 2020; Okaforcha and Okeke, 2019). Thus, the nature of the educational structure is a major determinant for the overall development of any society. As argued by Cheru (2002) and Osegbue, (2019), education is the corner stone of human development in every society. This implies that the quality of the manpower that is required for societal improvement is a function of the state of a nation's educational sector. Considering the premise, Okeke, Okaforcha and Ekwesianya (2019) and Okoye (2021) asserted that education is significant for generating the basic foundations of socio-economic development. Therefore, the administration of the educational sector at all levels is a big challenge which requires the involvement of all stakeholders.

There is no doubt that private involvement in the establishment of private secondary schools have contributed to the development of education in Nigeria (Onyekwelu, & Adinna. 2022). Advantages of private education among others as reiterated by Onyekwelu, (2024), Ofozoba and Ofozoba, (2023) and Abonyi, (2023) are: provision of access to secondary education, effectiveness and efficiency in management, setting a stage

for healthy competition between the public schools and the private sector, dedication of staff members to duty, minimal record of social vices such as cultism, examination malpractices, absenteeism and lateness to school by students, and so on. Despite these advantages, Anthony (2019) and Anushiem and Anushiem (2023) noted that private secondary school administration in Nigeria still contend with a number of issues which has affected quality delivery. Olufunminiyi and Adekunle (2018: 180) argue that "in Nigeria, education is feeling this recession sharply" and Edidionginyang and Hassan (2017), according to Onukwu and Igoni (2017:45) "reported that the quality of education is usually affected when the economy is in recession". Ezeanya (2016), Enwezor, and Chukwunonye, (2021) and Ugwaka and Igbokwe (2023) stated that without quality, education is a wastage. The deteriorating economy of Nigeria, according to Shido-Ikwu (2017:5) is also seen in human development indices as the quality of education and healthcare has collapsed.

Secondary Education in Nigeria

Secondary education is the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage for pupils in the adolescent stage, mostly between the ages of 12 to 17. Ololube (2017), Anushiem, (2023), Azubuike, (2024), and Okeke, Okaforcha and Ekwesianya, (2019) stated that the purpose of secondary education in Nigeria is to impart common knowledge, prepare the pupils for higher education or train them into a profession.

The National Policy on Education (2014), identified the broad goals of secondary education for:

a. Useful living within the society and b. Higher education

Specifically, the policy stated that this level of education shall:

a. Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background.
b. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.
c. Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades.
d. Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage
e. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence.
f. Foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
g. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens.

h. Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.

These stated goals are to be achieved in two major stages: the junior secondary school stage which is structured to be certificated and the senior secondary stage. Each of these stages shall be for a duration of three years. This level of education can be called secondary schools, high schools, model schools, colleges and/or vocational schools depending on the system of operation (Ololube, 2009; Ofozoba, 2020; Ibe, 2019; Anushiem, 2017; Ekwesianya, 2022).

Private Secondary Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, in addition to schools established by the government, the National Policy on education (FRN, 2014) stipulated that formal secondary education can also be established and managed by voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals after meeting the set minimum standards. Ezeanya (2016), Okaforcha, (2021), Adinna and Onyekwelu, (2021), Anthony (2014) stated that formal education in Nigeria can be traced to 1840s and has since its inception undergone radical changes. In the early years, secondary schools were mainly established and owned by missionary bodies and later by private individuals who managed them at their own discretion. The increase in the number of private secondary schools in Nigeria can be attributed to neglect and gross underfunding of public schools by successive governments, treatment of teachers with disdain, irregular payment of salaries as well as low salaries for teachers (Ekwesianya, 2025; Ezeaku & Okoye, 2025; Okechukwu, 2025; Osegbue, 2021). The consequence of these has been incessant teachers' strike leading to intermittent disruptions of academic activities in public schools. Furthermore, on account of the UPE programme, government realized the enormous responsibility of educating its citizenry and recognized the involvement of the private sector as well, hence the liberalization of education for private sector participation (Ezeamama & Ofozoba, 2023; Ibe, 2022; Okoye, and Ezeaku, 2025). Moja (2010), buttressed the fact that there was increased demand for places in the secondary schools following the introduction of the universal primary education scheme. But inadequate planning and funding as well as the inadequacies of the monitoring processes for the implementation of national policy on education contributed to a lack of classroom space in the sub-sector (Azubuike, 2025; Okoye, 2025; Onyekwelu, 2021; Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2021). With these developments, major stakeholders such as the private sector and the public lost confidence in the system. From the year 2000 to the present date, there is the interest in private sector education

initiative with the proliferation of private educational institutions at all levels of the education continuum (Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2014).This is buttressed by Enwezor and Obi, (2022), Ezeaku, (2025), Ezeanya (2016), and Okechukwu, (2025) who stated that due to deficiencies and resolve to reposition Nigeria's education for public consumption, the federal government of Nigeria welcomes the contribution and participation of corporate organizations and individuals in the provision of education to all citizens.

Consequently, the era of private schools seemed to have erupted. Although this paper did not delve into the total number of private secondary schools in Nigeria, statistics from few states, and findings from other studies suggest that these figures can be generalized as the practice is visible in all states. As at year 2013, Cross Rivers State had 349, Delta State had 438 and Edo State recorded 512 recognized private secondary schools (Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2014). Similarly, as at 2016, Rivers State had 564 private secondary schools approved by the state government Ezeanya (2016). Private secondary schools in Nigeria are managed by administrators who are employed by the proprietors, but under the supervision of the State Ministry of Education who regulate, supervise and inspect the schools regularly to ensure that they follow the approved curricular and conform to the National Policy on Education (Onyekwelu, 2024; Osegbue, and Nnubia, 2020; Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025). They are funded in whole or in part by mainly charging students for tuition. Craddock (2017) stated that there are a large number of private secondary schools in Nigeria which are mostly expensive when compared to public or government owned schools, and are located in urban centres. In structure, Izuchukwu, Ugwaka, Arazu and Ezechi, (2023) and Abonyi, (2021) noted that private secondary schools in Nigeria have smaller classes, with student ratio approximately twenty to thirty students per class, with modern equipment and better learning environments. Most teachers in these institutions possess at least a bachelor's degree in a specific course area and are sometimes sent for workshops or short-term programs (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025; Obumse & Egenti, 2021). Most private schools include the U.S. K-12, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge International Examination curricula, which allows the students to take international examinations such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGSCE) during their final year in school (Craddock, 2017).

Challenges of managing private schools in Cross River State

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. Osakwe (1992) and Onyiuke (2000), in Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2014 asserted that the new crop of private schools which are owned

mostly by individual investors, are plagued with inadequacies ranging from insufficient and substandard accommodation, lack of adequate facilities for teaching-learning, teaching staff insufficiency to poor curriculum implementation. Some reasons according to Ekwesianya, Okaforcha and Okeke, (2020), Enwezor, (2021) and Ojimba, (2024), among several others can be adduced for this anomaly.

1. Funding

Genuine investors in the running of private secondary schools find it difficult to access funds to pursue their dream of providing qualitative education. Agbowuro, Saidu and Jimwan (2017:38) posit that the Nigerian economy, which they argue is in coma,"is currently characterized by a modest inflation rate, high interest rate low capacity utilization and high unemployment". With high interest rate, investors in private schools find it difficult to make the necessary investments in the sector to enhance the quality of education they offer. These schools therefore rely on parents and guardians to raise the capital required for investing in their schools. Olufunminiyi and Adekunle (2018: 180) buttressed this point by stating that "nearly all private schools in Nigeria have their funding through parents and guardians" and the reason according to them is because "in all these schools, income is declining but requirements are not". Those who are able to fund the development of their schools charge exorbitant fees that now makes quality education beyond the reach of the common man. Onukwu and Igoni (2017) corroborate this by arguing that during recession, citizens find it difficult to pursue education as a result increase in tuition fees since prices of things are normally at the increase during recession.

2. 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 (Nwakoby, 2025; Nwakoby & Iloka, 2025). 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 the country (Enwezor and Obi, 2022).

3. Proliferation of mushroom private schools

There has been a proliferation of mushroom private schools to accommodate the masses that are unable to afford the cost of quality education offered by several private schools. In Rivers State for instance, Enwezor (2021), Okeke (2022), and Okeke and Okaforcha (2025) noted that the insistence of the Ministry of Education that all private schools in the state get operational approval threw up a lot of revelations about the sorry state of a number of private schools in the country. Across the country, a number of private

primary and secondary schools are lacking in quality of teachers, facilities and management. Some of the schools, according to Okaforcha and Okeke (2020) and Nwankwo, and Ezeibe (2021), have unqualified personnel and are under staffed, operate with inadequate buildings for instruction, lack laboratories and sporting facilities, etc. Also, many private schools operate in residential houses, unfinished buildings, community halls and church premises, without equipment or facilities required of schools, and with curricular that are inconsistent with the national curriculum (Tabotndip in Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2014). These lapses are evident because the nation has had a very high percentage of private schools which are not certified by the ministries of education of the various states. Such illegal school operate without a clear vision, are unable to enforce discipline, have poorly motivated staff, and in some cases aid and abet examination mal-practice (Ethelmary, Nwankwo and Aroh, 2019; Iloka, 2025). The impact of recession on the educational sector is so wide spread that according to Olufunminiyi and Adekunle (2018), all the stakeholders in education sectors including students, teachers, lecturers, researchers, librarians, administrative clerks and school proprietors are not spared by the effect of recession. They argue that, "with decreasing revenues and rising costs, schools are forced to make tough decisions if they are to balance their budgets and still meet the needs of their students and staff (Olufunminiyi and Adekunle, 2018: 180).

4. Inability of parents to meet up with payment of school fees

There is problem of the parents who cannot meet up with the payment of school fees to withdraw their children and wards from the school. Some children will remain dropout while some will be sent to the public schools where tuition fees are almost free especially in Rivers State (Nwankwo, 2022; Obumse, 2022). Some school dropouts today may be as a result of parents unenable to pay their fees in the private schools hence they take odd jobs in the street, indulge in criminality and cause nuisance in the society. According to Nwiyi, Osuyi and Okorie (2014) school dropouts are mostly the cultists we have in Rivers State, as some of them would not want to attend the public schools, and therefore take to cultism which bridges the peace in the school system and also the communities where these schools are situated. According to them communities in Rivers State where cult activities have led to the close down of some schools has extreme negative impact on learning and development of the society. Communities like Ukelle in Yala, and other communities in Boki Local Government Area of Cross Rivers State recently vacated their homes, schools closed down over cult activities that resulted to the death of many people, students, youths, and elderly.

5. Indiscipline among the students and teachers:

When school climate is unsuitable for learning, it affects students' and teachers'

behavior. Teachers and students' pride and sense of dignity suffers when school buildings are dilapidated and not properly maintained. The result will be unconscious display of contempt and resentment (Orupabo, 2013). He further explained that the neglect of the physical condition of classroom in a school can trigger disruption behaviour among students and teachers alike, poor physical classroom condition is more likely to cause distraction, stimulate disorder and encouraged general misconduct. Teachers who are not paid well and regularly may decide to come to school late or absent themselves from school without permission from the owner of the school. This form of indiscipline exhibited by teachers affect teaching and learning which could lead to poor productivity (Nonyem & Chimaa, 2020). Nonchalant attitude by these teachers are very unhealthy to teaching learning process, hence performance of the students may be very poor (Enwezor and Chukwunonye, 2022; Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025).

6. Lack of Motivation among the teachers:

In this dwindling economy where teachers are owed for months in the school, work/shops and conferences are not attended by teachers and general staff development programme are ignored, teachers' morale will be very low, and activities in the school will crumble (Abonyi, 2020; Nwabachili, Iloka and Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2022). Abonyi, (2022) stated that the propelling forces that enable the teachers to perform their prescribed duties effectively are not there and the enabling environment for effective teaching and learning is also not provided, hence the students who are at the receiving side would suffer.

7. Manpower development/capacity building programme

The teaching force of any school makes a statement about the quality of the school (Obumse & Chinwe, 2021; Onyekwelu, 2024). Okaforcha and Iloka, (2025) reported that 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 (Nwankwo & Okoye, 2022; Osegbue, 2022).

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 it 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 country's vision, values, principles which inform the objectives of state education.

Suggestions

Haven examined the constraints facing private secondary schools in Nigeria, the following suggestions are made:

1. There should be a level of funding support from the government for the private schools, and the provision of an enabling environment and policies to encourage the proprietors.
2. Regulatory bodies should ensure that private secondary schools conform to standards and all other forms of regulatory practices as contained in the National Policy on Education.
3. There should be strict monitoring and supervision by relevant government agencies to ensure that the approved private schools maintain quality and always operate within the approved standards.
4. Government should intensify its efforts in ensuring that private schools operating without approval is, or those approved without the proper requirements are closed down and its owners sanctioned.
5. Parents/ guardians should patronize private secondary schools which are duly certified.
6. Proper motivational packages should be put in place to enable teachers perform effectively, see the job as a career rather than temporal job
7. It is imperative that deliberate effort be part of the Private Schools' plans in ensuring quality teaching and learning.

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