
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Mission and Colonial Education in Africa

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ABSTRACT

There is no known civilization in the world whose root is not in the dominant religion. Catholic orders and Protestant denominations have not been heavily involved in providing mass education until the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The motive for providing education has always been an altruistic concern for making or enhancing the quality of life of children to become better, and as an instrument to gain more followers. The greatest Christian missionaries' contribution to the Christian missionaries in Nigeria and in Africa was in the field of education. This work seeks to find the impact of mission and colonial educational system on Africa. This work has shown that the Western form of education was appreciated for producing the erudite and sophisticated elites in Africa. This work has also shown that the Colonial and the mission educational system were only concerned with having a literary form of education rather than technical and vocational bias and teaching its products to despise manual work. Hence refused to provide education in such fields like the science and technology profession which they know would rob them of their monopoly of significant positions and posts. This work adopts the qualitative method which used historical and content analysis. It concludes that perhaps rather fascinating to note that while a considerable measure of industrialization was achieved in white settlers dominated parts of Africa; black Africa had remained separated from the tide of industrialization.

Keywords: Africa; Nigeria; Mission; Colonial Education.

INTRODUCTION

There is no civilization in the world which root is not in the dominant religion. But “it was not until the Reformation and Counter-Reformation that the Protestant and Catholic Churches started to develop mass education. Since then, both Catholic orders and Protestant denominations have been heavily involved in providing education” (Gallego and Woodberry 2010, p. 297-298). The motive for providing education has always been for two reasons; namely, altruistic concern for making or enhancing the quality of life of children to become better, and as an instrument to gain more followers. “Often, missionary activity proceeded the colonization period. In these cases, colonizers often allowed missionaries to start or continue schooling in the colonies. The degree of missionaries’ responsibility for education varied across colonial powers but was generally substantial. For example, over 90% of Western education in Sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period was provided by missionaries” (Gallego and Woodberry 2010, p. 298).

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF MISSION AND COLONIAL EDUCATION

The history of the educational system of the colonial period is essentially the history of the interplay of three forces. The first was that of Christian missions which established several pioneering schools in the 19th century in Nigeria, The missionaries were given a free hand while the government gave modest grants to schools that achieved the required standards. The government concerned itself mainly with standards and an inspectorate and at a later stage with the setting up of a prestigious grammar school such as King’s College, Lagos (Babalola 1981). The greatest Christian missionaries’ contribution in Nigeria and in Africa, in general, was in the field of education. The first school in Nigeria was set up by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft of the Methodist Mission in Badagry and was named “Nursery of the Infant Church”. The majority of the 50 pupils were Children of Sierra Leone emigrants while the rest were Children of the local converts.

Before 1900, the Western form of education was appreciated and patronized in two areas in Nigeria – in the Niger Delta and in Lagos (Okpalike & Nwadiakor 2015). In the Niger Delta, long contact with European traders and the usefulness of English and accountancy to the Ijaw and Efik traders made the latter eager to have their children literate. Consequently, there arose a few elite, educated in Britain for an average period of eight years. Bonny was maybe in this respect, the most zealous one in the nineteenth century; producing the erudite and sophisticated King George Pepple 1, Charles Pepple, the brother to the King who joined the Gold Coast Civil Service and Herbert Jombo that was educated in Liverpool College. One of Jaja’s sons, Sunday Jaja was also educated in both Liverpool and Glasgow (Udo 1965). The educated Africans in Lagos saw the Western education as the only agency that could bring about the social revolution they imagined for Nigeria – in which literacy would reign; and thereby a host of clerks,

technocrats, doctors, ministers of religion, lawyers, and educated traders would be turned out and flourished (Ayandele 1971).

The C.M.S. was the first mission to make the most vital contribution to education in the early period. The C.M.S. Mission set up a mission station and two schools in Badagry (Hanciles 2002). They also established schools at Igbehim and Ake both in Abeokuta. They also extended their education programme to other parts of the nation. The C.M.S. again opened at Lagos a Grammar school. The first school at Onitsha was opened by Samuel Ajayi Crowther in December 1858 for girls between six and ten years old. Hope Waddell, a Presbyterian Church Clergyman joined the race of setting up schools and opened in 1854, a school at Creek Town with an enrolment of 200 pupils (Loiello 1980). St. Andrew's College, Oyo was opened by Anglican, Baptist College Iwo was opened by the Baptist Mission and Wesley College, Ibadan was opened by the Methodist Mission and these three are the oldest missionary Teaching Training College in Nigeria (Babalola 1981). It is essential to emphasize that outside Yoruba land, the missions generally speaking did not consider it their business to provide the higher form of education, and from mission to mission, opinion varied as to the form and quality of elementary education that should be imparted to their Nigerian converts and Africa in general. To all the missions naturally, the main object of all education was religious instruction, especially of the young children who could be weaned easily from the 'pagan' ideas and prejudices of their unyielding parents. All the knowledge that was considered really essential to impart was the three R's with particular emphasis on the Bible and religious tracts translated into the vernacular. Great emphasis was placed on character training and spiritual development, rather than on the raising of the status and material standing of the pupils and converts in society (Ayandele 1971).

The Colonial Government did not implicate or connect herself with the provision of Western Education in Nigeria until 1877. The Christian Missionaries were really involved in the provision of Western Education between 1842 and 1914 (Adeyinka & Ndwapi 2002; Offiong 2016a; Offiong 2016b). Intensive missionary and education work began in Nigeria when ten different Christian Missions came. Christian Missions built schools and began to try very hard to get pupils and members in such a way that there was a sudden increase in the number of primary schools set up by different missions (Enwo-Irem 2013). Orji (1992) posits thus: "It was in 1877 that the Colonial Government gave a grant of £200 (two hundred pounds) each to the three major missionaries operating in Lagos, as recognition of their good work. The act became the first known government involvement in Western education in Nigeria" (pp. 116-117).

A different situation arose in May 1882, when the colonial government passed to law the first education Ordinances for the British administration to control education in Nigeria (Danladi 2013). The implications of the education Ordinances for the missions and the future development of education in Nigeria were far-reaching (Undiyaundeye 2010; Undiyaundeye 2011a; Undiyaundeye 2011b). The British administration by declaring religious neutralism in matters of education dealt a potential blow at the very basis of education in the country before 1882 (Biswas & Agrawal 1986). The missions

became apprehensive henceforth of Government avowal of interest in education and whatever financial help it offered. The religious clause of the education Ordinance marked the beginnings of the divergence of opinion between government and missions on the content and purpose of education, a phenomenon that persists to this day. The twin forces of Western education and mission activities made stronger the splitting trend in Nigeria, Africa inclusive. It is this influence of colonial education that gave rise to what Uche (1984) considered as the “Marginal man” - a sociological term meaning a minority in a society who share the preferred culture to a significant degree but are blocked from full participating” (p.11). The British administration’s education policy brought serious economic, cultural and social division among those who went to school and those who did not go to school.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF MISSION AND COLONIAL EDUCATION

The Colonial educational system and the mission education, in particular, have in recent times often been criticized for having a literary rather than technical and vocational bias and teaching its products to despise manual work. This is why it is argued that the colonial administration refused to provide education in such fields as science and technology, a profession which they know would rob them of their monopoly of significant positions and posts. This was why they laid much emphasis on liberal arts and religion instead of science and technology. This could be seen also in their educational work, where the missionaries exhibited an inclination or tendency to draw toward or give their attention to reading, writing, and arithmetic to the full disregard of industrial and technical training. Another negative of missions and colonial education was that it alienated pupils from their own culture. A modern writer like C. E. Uche (1984) lamenting this ugly incidence of irrational assimilation and uncritical adulation of European culture especially in the sphere of religion has avered thus:

But despite stiff opposition, the relatively few converts, supported by colonial power, imposed upon society many customs, some of which were erroneously thought to be Christian. At school and at Church it became more heathen or pagan than fashionable to be called Nkemdirim. Many Olivers, Franklins, and Dicksons as well as Juliets, Rose, and Celestinas emerged in society, more often than not without knowing the meaning of the foreign names pasted on them....To make matters worse, beautiful and meaningful names, such as Olorunimbe and Chimenze, with direct bearing on the Almighty God, were rejected in preference to foreign ones which either had no meaning at all or paid no tribute whatever to God. For example, Green, Brown, White, Yellow (p. 11).

The passion or emotional state or reaction then was that one had to identify with the European culture and names to be modern and accorded some social rank. For this reason, many follies imposed on themselves names such as Dog, Hub, Stone, Stonecool and Gear. This reason in turn makes some African scholars like Rodney (1973) have

come to believe that “Colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of Africa and filled him with complexes” (p. 273). It is undeniable, however, that Christian missionaries did play incidentally some negative cultural roles, in their fire of religious zeal and sentiments. This is why Rodney (1973) remarked that:

The Church often took up the role of arbiter of what was culturally correct. African ancestral beliefs were equated with the devil (who was black anyway) and it took a very long time before some European Churchmen accepted prevailing African beliefs as constituting religion rather than mere witchcraft and magic (p. 278).

Problems have also been inherited in the sphere of formal education from our colonial experience (Egbe & Okoi 2017; Egbe & Okoi 2018). The imperial authorities had in the recent colonial past, a very limited and narrow conception of the role of education in their various African colonies. The colonial educational system was given an elitist white-collar orientation and functionally designed to provide the limited personnel required to run the colonial administration. Christian Churches in most cases had a higher humanitarian programme in education than the colonial administrations (Ekpenyong & Okoi 2018). However, both agencies only saw education as a very limited precious commodity to be selectively rationed for limited purposes (Iwe 2002). The colonial system of education was aimed not at the development of high-level manpower on a massive scale. Education as a fundamental factor in the economic development and growth of Africa, or as a gainful economic investment for the Africans was conception alien to colonial educational theory and practice.

CONCLUSION

The non-industrialization of Africa, according to Rodney (1973) was not left to chance when he argues that “It was deliberately enforced by stopping the transference to Africa of machinery and skills which would have given competition to European industry in that epoch” (p. 254). It is perhaps quite intriguing to note that while an appreciable measure of industrialization was achieved in white-settlers-dominated parts of Africa, black Africa had remained insulated from the tide of industrialization, even while it was contemporaneously, revolutionizing the life of the white Australian colonies.

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