INTRODUCTION

Education can be defined as the transmission of the values and knowledge of a society. A Child is born without culture and knowledge. Education is designed to guide such a child in learning a culture, molding his behaviour in the ways of his community, and guiding him towards his eventual role in the community. In primitive culture with no organized form of education, the entire environment constitutes a "school" while all adults, particularly parents, are "teachers." In complex societies, however, the quantity of knowledge is so much that there arises a need to evolve a more effective means of cultural transmission called "formal education." While the most important components of formal education are the students, schools and teachers, the parents also have an important role to play.

Since independence, there has been a consistent increasing demand for educational services in Nigeria. This demand arose as a result of population growth, increasing social demands (the desire to educate a good proportion of the population) and the need for more skilled manpower in the country. The increasing demand on educational services means the establishment of more schools, particularly primary and secondary schools, and provision of more teachers and materials. The result is that the burden of funding education in Nigeria, which rests mainly on the various tiers of government, is becoming unbearable. This fact is evident by the existence of numerous problems bedeviling the Education Sector in the country. It is a foregone conclusion that in Nigeria with a population of over 100m, a good percentage of which consists of young people, the funding of education can no longer be totally left in the hands of governments.

Other sources of funds and assistance are required for any appreciable progress to be achieved. In this regard, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) can play an important role. This paper discusses the role of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) as instruments of community participation in education.

WESTERN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA:

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The history of western educational development in Nigeria dates from the
coming of Christian Missionaries to the coastal areas of the then southern provinces. The missionary activities can be traced back to the early 16th century when in 1515 Portuguese missionaries visited Benin. However, the first organized missionary contact in modern times in Nigeria was made by Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, which started its activities in the coastal town of Badagry in 1842. Soon several other missionaries arrived and established a number of schools and even spread inland.

By the time Europeans first came to Nigeria, there existed some form of organized education in the northern parts of Nigeria as a result of Islamization of the area. Intensive learning and religious activities were already going on in places like Sokoto, Kano and Katsina. In fact, by 1913, the number of Islamic schools in the area was estimated at 19,073 with a total attendance of 143,312. Thus not only did the missionaries arrive these parts of Nigeria late but also found a form of education solidly entrenched in the area. This fact accounts for the well-known and still existing so-called educational (western) imbalance between the southern and northern parts of Nigeria.

Following the establishment of Colonial Administration in Nigeria, the colonialists saw the need to start some form of education. The main objective was to produce low-level supporting manpower needs of the administration. It was also intended to organize education for the sons of the Emirs and Chiefs in order to sustain the colonial policy of Indirect Rule." The colonial government established new schools while missionaries were allowed to move to new parts of the country. By 1960 when Nigeria became independent, there were several government-established secondary schools in the country located in 51 Provincial Headquarters while primary schools existed in both rural and urban centers.

In addition, several primary and secondary schools established by the missionaries also existed. Population growth and increasing demand for manpower to replace expatriate staff, particularly in the Education Sector, led to further establishment of more schools. By the end of the 1960s, Nigeria had established five universities (the so called First Generation Universities) and a number of other tertiary institutions (Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc). There are now over thirty universities in the country while almost every state of the Federation has one or more other tertiary institutions. In fact these institutions, particularly the universities, are now considered too many for the country; currently, there is a debate on the need or otherwise to rationalize them.

The scenario described above, particularly the rapid changes in the Education Sector since independence, depicts a state of chaos and planlessness in the sector. The result is that numerous problems are easily discernible in the sector including the following:

a. poor infra structural facilities in schools at all levels;
b. poor number and quality of teachers, particularly at primary and secondary levels;
c. poor quality products (graduates) from schools at all levels;
d. crises resulting in disruption of academic calendars of schools, particularly at
tertiary level;
e. inconsistent education policy and poor implementation of policies; and
f. loss of confidence by the general public in the sector.

Most of these problems arose from poor planning and inadequate funding of the sector. As a result of these crises in the Education Sector, several private schools have recently been established, particularly in urban areas. On the other hand, there is evidence that the number of public schools is on the decline. For instance, Oyo State had 2533 public schools in 1990 compared to 2079 in 1996. Despite the high cost of attending these private schools, many Nigerians are turning to them as alternatives to the failing public schools.

b. **THE ROLE OF PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION**

Parent-Teacher Associations consist of parents of students of particular schools and the schools’ teachers forming a group with the objective of improving the running of such schools. In the 1960s when schools were not too many in Nigeria, governments were able to effectively fund education and only few PTAs existed. However, with the advent of numerous problems in the Education Sector, it became necessary for most of the schools (Primary and Secondary) to have PTAs to assist in solving the problems of the schools. As a result of the proliferation of PTAs all over the country, it became necessary to organize them into Schools or Institutional PTAs, Local Government Central PTAs, State PTAs and National PTA of Nigeria. This development is a clear indication that parents would no longer sit and watch educational standards in public schools continue to fall. Some aims and objectives of the National PTA of Nigeria include:

a. to provide platform for parents, guardians, sponsors and teachers of students of Nigerian Primary, Secondary and Tertiary educational institutions to meet, exchange views deeply analyze issues, make recommendations, take and effectively pursue implementation of decisions on matters affecting education in Nigeria with the appropriate agencies;

b. to co-operate with and support morally and financially the Federal, State and Local Governments, Ministries, Boards, Commissions, and all other appropriate organizations, institutions and establishments of education to achieve high standard of academic performance, discipline, morality, service and integrity in Nigerian schools;

c. to foster mutual understanding, harmonious relationship and cooperation among parents, guardians, sponsors, and teachers in the fulfillment of their common.

d. to foster mutual understanding, harmonious relationship and cooperation among parents, guardians, sponsors, and teachers in the fulfillment of their common goal the welfare of the schools and the students therein;

e. to make for a healthy and sympathetic understanding of the education policies and programmes of government and thus influence same to create suitable climate for the reception of the same;

f. to ensure a suitable, uniform and high standard of discipline, both at home and
at school;

g. to assist materially and otherwise in providing the schools with such additional requirements that will enable it carry out its educational functions adequately; and

h. to assist in the proper and all-round development of the children physically, morally, socially, and mentally so that they grow to become useful and law-abiding members of the society;

It is obvious from the above objectives that the National PTA is playing a very prominent role in the maintenance and development of education in this country. Several examples of achievements of School PTAs can be cited in most schools, particularly boarding schools. These achievements include the following:

a. enhance understanding and good rapport between teachers and parents;
b. enable parents come to grip with the problems of the schools their children attend;
c. complement government efforts in the provision of infrastructures (building, water and electricity supplies, etc), materials and maintenance of the schools;
d. encourage students when they see their parents interested in their schools;
e. lobby government for support in the schools; and
f. contain crises that often arise in the schools.

It can be concluded that PTA participation in schools is the best way a community can participate on matters effecting education in Nigeria. Virtually, every school in the country in which PTA exists has benefited from the activities of the PTA. The benefits include provision of infrastructural facilities, materials (books, chalk, etc), food, beds and beddings. Other benefits are crisis solving, and useful advice to school management. For PTAs to be more effective in their efforts to improve education in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

a. PTA members should be made members of boards and committee of educational organizations throughout the country so as to influence policy formulation and implementation in the Education Sector;
b. government should formally recognize and strengthen the PTAs to make them more effective;
c. parent participation in PTAs should be made a condition for admission of students into schools;
d. community development officers should be asked to attend PTA meetings in their areas so as to advise on community efforts as well as become aware of PTA activities;
e. Senior education officers from the Ministries of Education should be asked to
regularly attend PTA meetings so as to advise and explain government policies and actions; and

f. Certain amount of money from the education tax fund should be given to PTAs throughout the country for their activities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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21st December, 1996

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