

## **‘From Pinnacle to Trough’: Christianizing and Secularizing Contemporary African Higher Educational Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

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From the seeming dwindling records on quality education in contemporary Nigerian higher institutions, corruption especially bribery plays the central stage for academic excellence between the teaching staff or faculty and the students which calls for redress. Hence, this study examines through the Christian missionary incorporation of the intellectual, lifestyle and discipleship definitions, Nigeria’s fundamental educational policy, primary objectives for higher institutions, why the contemporary debility in the growth of the Nigerian higher educational quality. This study employs a historical descriptive methodology. Findings reveal that academic-fraud through bribery wanes the quality of higher education in Nigeria. It behoves on the Federal Government of Nigeria to develop the national educational policies from the Christian missionaries’ philosophy which enhances inevitably conducive environment for a ‘pinnacle’ contextualised educational quality in Nigeria.

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**Keywords:** Contemporary, Christian, Secular, African, Higher Education

### **1. Introduction**

Definition of education varies from scholars or philosophers. Osokoya (1987) describes the definition to be elusive. Aggarwal (1985) posits its distinctive connotations as of two poles which are widely apart should be our concern; the temporal and the world of spirits. Philosophers and thinkers from Socrates to Dewey in the West and Yajnavalkya to Ghandi in the East have defined education in accordance with their philosophy of life with the result that there emerged divergent concepts and definitions of education. The reasons for these different interpretations have been due to the complex nature of human personality, complexity of human environment, different philosophies of life and different educational theories and practices. Therefore, Aggarwal enumerated over forty definitions on education. To mention but few, education, to Aristotle, is the creation of sound mind in a sound body. To Aurobindo, it is the building of human power and spirit. To Dayanand, it is the formation of character. To Harris T. William, it is preparing individual for the reciprocal union with the society. To Jack M.L, it is enabling the child to sense eternal realities. To Nehru, it is fitting a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war. To Brihadaranayak Upanishoa, it is leading from the unreal to the real, from darkness to life. To Socrates, it is dispelling error and discovering truth.

According to Osokoya (1987) in his study, education fundamentally was originated from two Latin words. He explains that “The first Latin word *Educere* means ‘to draw out’ or ‘to lead out’” (p. 1). The second Latin word in which education is said to have found its backdrop is “*Educare* meaningto ‘nourish’to bring up’ or ‘to raise’” (p. 1).

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Osokoya (1987) puts forward the sociologists' definition as "The process of cultural transmission or renewal, a definition that embraces all that obtains in all types of societies-literates or non-literates, industrialized or agrarian" (p. 2). Nduka (1975) posits that education is

A process of cultural transformation and using culture to embrace people's art, music, literature, philosophy, religion, commerce, political organization, science and technology as well as all other ideas and values, implicit, that permeate a society and bind its people into a recognizable unit (p. 3).

Ukeje (1979) view education "as a process, a product and a discipline" (p. 375). Ocha and Nwozor (1981) mention explicitly that education is "a process society that establishes to assist the young to understand the heritage of the past, to participate productively in the society of the present, and to contribute to the future" (p. 2). In process context, it is addressing the process by which one learns. The psychologists would add that such person acquires something new in the process which might result in attitudinal change, it may be an ordinary knowledge and it may be a skill. Education in this sense means a product. In the process by which man acquires a change in behaviour, we tend to find out the content of, the reasons for, the method of and the nature of the person (child)in. These thoughts gave birth to the concept of educational discipline.

### 1.1 Conceptual Clarifications

The word 'pinnacle' is the most successful or admired part of a system or achievement(Oxford Dictionary, 2019b). The usage, in this study, depicts the successful beginning of the educational background established based on the Christian missionary philosophy in Nigeria with its primary intentions of intellectual, lifestyles and discipleship definitions. Education, at the advent, devoided corruption because of the Christian philosophy of morality and holistic nature form the teachers to students and vice vasa.

The 'trough' means the low point in situation that is phenomenal though might eventually experience another high point (Oxford Dictionary, 2019a). The 'trough', in this study, depicts the contemporary low educational quality of education in the higher institutions due to the concept of bribery that plays between the teaching staff or faculty as a source for students' educational advancement. This latter is best situated in the context of the public or government owned higher institutions which are left with the tradition of making the students to pay money to pass or settle academic issues.The high point, from the trough context that might posses high situational position at other tmes, in relation to the Nigerian quality of higher education is the gradually springing up of privately owned universitiesthat are being established by the contemporary missionary organisations or denominations that devoid the act of bribery and other corrupt acts.

'Christianizing' implies the establishment of Christian education that is characterised by high quality moral standards while 'secularizing' implies public educational institutions that devoid practice of morals or holistic Christian philosophy of education. This study therefore focusseson public Nigerian higher education which contemporarily experience low level practice (trough-like)or phenomenal that devoid the original intentions of the initiators and tried to make suggestions.

## 2. Religious, Sociological and Educational Enterprise in Nigeria: A Historical Reflection

Ayandele (1980) describes the Nigerian indigenes before the inter relation with the Western world as follows:

From the earliest times Nigerian people have been neither incorrigibly insular, nor irrationally impervious to external ideas and influences- whether those were cultural, ideological, religious, economic and political- nor have they been amateurishly unpractised in the art of neighbourliness (p. 367).

Burns (1929) reveals that before the coming of the early missionaries, greater number of Negro that inhabited Nigeria were pagans. Awolalu (1983) asserts that the term pagan "is applied to these people because they are said to be worshipping "sticks and stones" (p. 65). He added that the *Sango* worshippers, the *Egungun*, the *Babalowos* and *Ifa* worshippers all come under this category. Burns (1929) expresses that even at the presence of the Negroid and the Berber tribes of the North the majority were Muhammadans. In considering the pagan beliefs of the people, the appreciation of the existence of the Supreme Being is practical throughout the country. This Supreme Being however is invincible and remote, and little likely to interfere much in the pretty concerns of the individuals. Though, He is not forgotten, more attention is paid to the minor deities, good and evil who were considered to have more interest in the affairs of humans. They were close to the spirits and the images people adored are the representations of the spirits and not gods themselves. In most cases, there were usually tribal and household gods as practiced in each village.

In addition to these, there were usually gods for every object of nature, for every river or stream, for every grove, for every large and remarkable tree. Each adherent was constrained to making sacrifices to avert their evil influence. Along the rivers and creeks are to be seen sticks, rags and other things sent by the fishermen to the river gods. Awolalu (1983) sums it up that the major features of the Nigerian indigenous religion were: i) The Supreme Being, ii). A number of divinities and spirits, iii) Ancestral spirits and IV) Mysterious powers.

The dawn of the Western Education in Nigeria is synonymous to the coming of early Christian missionaries to Nigeria. According to Ejiogu (1986), the coming of formal education into Nigeria was on September 24, 1842 when the Wesleyan Methodist Society opened up a Christian station at Badagry, near Lagos. The missionaries were the members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and their first post of call was Badagry then later left for Abeokuta. In 1953, the first non-British mission entered the Nigerian soil, Southern Baptist Convention (of the United States of America) and led by Rev. T.J. Bowen. This American church organization established numerous schools in Lagos and Abeokuta. Thirdly, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in 1876 under the leadership of an Irish Reverend Father established several schools as well. The theoretical framework for this study is that Christian education must be the incorporation of intellectual definitions, lifestyle definitions and discipleship definitions which is not generally obtainable in the Nigeria milieu. The theory has the prerequisites for quality education in the contemporary Nigeria.

### **3. The Formation of Higher Institutions, Aim and Quality of Education in Nigeria**

The history of quality education in Nigeria has been an issue since time immemorial as imbedded in its aim. Therefore, Aggarwal (1985) narrates that education occurs when new ideas combine with the old. Something is grafted into the mind by the synthesis of two which goes on consistently. Different experiences help one to face new ones. Education must lead to experimentation, the discovery of new truths and the use of new truths to get more education in the development of man. He affirms further that Education is both retrospective and prospective. It is both conservative and progressive. Education transmits the culture of one generation to another (p. 9).

Aggarwal (1985) adds that higher education exists to help children succeed, make man self-reliant and selfless, training of children in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue. For example, take a lift from the experience of the Nigerian higher education, the goals have been subjected to various interpretations from the past. According to Awokoya (1990),

The Phelps-stoke Commission wanted Africa to develop Agriculture and improved health. Hussy, on opening Yaba Higher College, placed the emphasis on Agriculture, Medicine, Education, Engineering, Surveying, Wood and Metal Technology, Commerce and Arts. He was highly criticized at that time and was almost being condemned. We know today that he was right. The Elliot Commission recommended that the University College, Ibadan should flowt departments of Arts, Religion, Classics, Agriculture, Medicine and Science but no Engineering or Law. Today, these omissions are being rectified. The College of Arts, Science and Technology as conceived in 1952 was to have included baby-sitting and Home Economics but the original proposal had to be withdrawn from the House of Representatives and we now have in its place the Universities of Ife, Ahmadu Bello, and the University of Nigeria (Nsukka). Today, relevance and comprehensiveness are synonymous with qualitative education in Nigeria (p. 5).

Awokoya (1990) deciphers that the relevance to the quality of education in Nigeria are essential and must be pursued. He narrates further that this must be learnt fast, innovated fast, researched fast, to ensure our survival in this technological age. The idea should be reiterated, encapsulated growth and development as the embryo of an animal does. It may even be with a quantum jump. Kant posits that the religious aim as cited in Aggarwal (1985) could be likened as "life without religion is incomplete and so is morality." E.D. Burton states as in Aggarwal still that religion and education are natural allies. Christian education inculcates morality, duty and reverence. These afore-mentioned qualities are parts of Christian philosophy of education.

### **4. The Goals for the Establishment of Christian Schools around mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century in Nigerian Milieu: A Perspective**

According to Ejiogu (1986), the colonial government did not interfere with educational sector at its inception; it was first controlled by the Christian missionaries. The policy of conversion through education was adopted by the Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M). The Protestants believed rather in education through evangelism. Boyd as cited in Ejiogu (1986) states that

The church undertook the business of education not because it regarded education as good in itself, but because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents, and especially its clergy, as much of the formal learning as was required for the study of sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties (p. 3).

Adesegun and Eregare (2014) posit that the first Methodist missionaries had three goals paramount in their minds as they came to Nigeria which were the spread of the gospel, education for all, and healthcare for all. These issues were described to be a holistic intention that would affect all facets of human existence. Burton & Nwosu (2013) add that Christian education can be deciphered to be the integration of faith based and learning. From the American early missionaries thrust for education, Bowen in Ejiogu (1986) states that it was likened to

We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds and social life of the people, so that truth and righteousness may remain and flourish among them.... They must have the Bibles... They must read the Bible and this implies formal instruction or education (p. 3).

This “manifest destiny” concept unveils the desire to “liberate” their African “dark” minds from barbarism and idolatry. The reason being that the Victorian British summed up the blacks as (a.) a true species of the homosapiens quite distinct from and inferior to the whites, (b.) a low species of humanity with a level of educability decidedly inferior to that of an average European, (c.) a good imitator of the whites but capable of creating a comparable society of his own, (d.) lazy and lethargic in his state, (e.) suited for menial and tedious occupations such as farming and unskilled labour and (e.) incapable of assimilating new ideas because while his “perspectives” faculties are strong, his reflective and imaginative faculties are very much underdeveloped. This thus led to the third evidence for educational mission by David-West as cited still in Ejiogu (1986) which was aimed to lead the Africa into “Light”. Fafunwa (1974) concludes that Christian Education cum Western-oriented was born during and after the Dark Ages. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the old literary and rhetorical education of the Roman age was considered pagan and secular. Thus, the Church ignored it and found Christian education that was religiously based. Fafunwa posits that “the ultimate reason for any form of education was the advantage it brought to the faith” (p. 73).

### 5. The Prospects of Christian Education in Contemporary Nigeria: An Analysis

In view of the two basic general worldviews of education by Osokoya (1987) in his study, education is from two Latin words *Educere* and *Educare*. “The first Latin word *Educere* means ‘to draw out’ or ‘to lead out.’” The second Latin word “*Educare* meaning to ‘nourish’ ‘to bring up’ or ‘to raise’” (p. 1). There are usually at least two people involved in education, the teacher and student(s). These basic concepts expediently give the evidence of teachers playing leadership roles. In playing a leadership role, Barna (1997) features teachers as being morally pure, maintaining God’s standards of righteousness, walking in faith, demonstrating hope and manifesting love with students, prudent, live well-ordered life that make education attractive, unselfish and generous.

From the Christian perspectives on education White (2000) reflects that

True education means more than pursuing a certain course of study. It has to do with the whole person, and whole period of human existence possible to human beings. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers (p. 9).

White (2000) adds that the source of such education was rooted in Colossians 2:3 that points to the infinite One: In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (p. 9). White narrates further that every gleam of thought, every flash of the intellect finds its root from Jesus Christ. It is believed that all true knowledge and real development in Christian worldview comes from God (Prov. 2:6). White (2000) affirms that

Wherever we turn, in the physical, mental, or spiritual realms; in whatever we observe and study, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed. Whatever line of investigation we pursue with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The human mind is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the infinite (p. 10).

It is clear that an education without Christ revives no regard to human, truth, honour, integrity, confidence, compassion, sound moral standards and self-esteem. Jesus lived for God and commune with Him. His life was one of constant trust which was constantly connecting in His service for heaven and earth was without failure or faltering. He imparted life to others and was a powerful speaker like no other over the ages (John 7:46). Christ was a teacher sent by God and all true educational works should find its centre.

Barna (1997) records Christ's as a perfect teacher and the expected qualities to be critically considered by His followers are of high moral, ethical behaviour, right attitudes, pure motives, proper goals, positive habits, quality relationships and good reputations towards their students. Jesus Christ was a leader above reproach, morally pure, maintained God's standard of righteousness, demonstrated hope, manifested true biblical love in all relationships, reflected true humility, a person of prayer, made gospel attractive to all that went through His tutelage.

White (1913) records that Jesus is a model for all ages for teachers. Teachers thus have great responsibilities. Teachers must be in words and character what they wish their students to become in life. If a teacher collects bribes from students, what would he expects of the students when they become teachers in future? Can a Christian teacher be true to its calling without these basic attributes? Do contemporary teachers impart positive influence on their students and the society? Barna (1997) claims that seeing Jesus as a teacher-leader every teacher in this age "should be living model that is obvious to both Christians and non-Christians" (p. 84). Barna (1997) describes a prudent teacher according to one of Paul's writings that

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly (or prudently), righteously and godly in the present age (Titus 2: 11, 12) (p. 89).

## 5.2 The Challenges of Higher Educational Learning in Nigeria: An Analysis

According to Aggarwal (1985), one of the challenges in the contemporary Nigerian higher education is the haws of evaluations. The chief methods have been based on the statistics of pass, failure and wastage. These parameters can only be classified as mere reflections of official records. According to Torulagha (2014), it has also been evident on records that Nigeria has attempted to resolve over years issues of corruption only within the public offices (civil servants, military and police personnel, elected officials etcetera) but not so much has been done to address the issue as bribery that currently plays out between the teaching staff and students in the public university sector. Nigeria's higher institutions in the 21st Century are mere reflections of the past in terms of academic standards. Quality has been romanced by the lecturers for insatiable drive for money extortions from their students based on educational performance or advancement. Students buy grades through bribery. Thus, such academic performance plays down standards. For example, it is evident that lecturers make their students occasionally compelled to pay for grades. Students who have money do not have to even attend classes to get passing grades. They pay accordingly to the desired grades. Eregare (2014) unveils further that students who cannot afford to pay, especially the females pay with their bodies through sexual coercion and bribery. In the Nigeria's higher institution milieu, Torulagha (2014) claimed further that

Some lecturers, registrars, and record keepers sometimes intentionally withhold students' grades until they pay a certain amount of money.... In some universities, it is alleged that some professors do not hide their financial schemes as students are told upfront what they need to do if they intend to pass a particular course (n.p).

According to Torulagha (2014), the concept of corruption is described as a psychological beast that has refused to be tamed in Nigeria higher educational institutions. He establishes that there is a symbiotic relationship between the educational and the psychosocial and political cultures of the society at large. Based on this, this study focuses on bribery, an aspect of corruption, that is becoming normal between the teaching staff and their students which has not been given rightful attention. He narrates further that

It is very necessary to clean the educational sector since education is the second or third most powerful and effective instrument of socialization. Indeed, after the family and possibly religion, education follows as the most important agent of socializing children and the youths generally. As a result, if children and the youths are not properly socialized, they are very likely to end up adopting destructive social values (n.p.).

Based on this, it is imperative to erode the concept of bribery from Nigerian higher institutions to establish a morally and sound quality education. If this is not done, it will continually influence the psychsocialization of the Nigerian society. What is the fundamental policy of educational standards of Nigeria's higher institutions from the missionary perspectives that brought education to Nigeria? Can bribery in Nigeria's higher educational system be an impetus or plague for educational accomplishment and quality? Can any value in Christo-centric educational worldview necessitate an ideal sculpt for Nigeria's higher educational learning? What essentially will Nigeria's educational system be like without bribery for educational realization?

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research reveals that the issues of education and its quality for about two centuries have been fresh sources for debates by scholars and philosophers upon which this study hinges but through historical perspective which is a rare discourse to the subject under study. In historical records, the coming of Western Education to Nigeria was primarily to make adherents by the policy of evangelism and conversion through education. Contemporarily, it is further clearly affirmed to be the integration of faith, learning and making disciples in Christ. These ideas include the incorporation of intellectual definitions, lifestyle definitions and discipleship definitions theoretical frameworks which are fundamental sources for quality education from Christian worldview.

This prodigious ideals by the Christian education in Nigeria did not only created a conducive environment for learning but, as well, provided conducive environment to practice quality education whereby the students learn with the fear of God and had their academic achievements without influencing their teachers by any form of gift(s) as bribery to earn their grades or certificates.

However, this study admits unequivocally that one of the germane challenges of the 'trough' level of educational quality in Nigeria as the issue of corruption. This was precipitated by the sudden change in educational policy from faith-based to secularly oriented policies and managed by the Nigerian public sector. This shift in policy or philosophy has created a conducive environment for bribery and other corrupt acts in Nigeria's educational system which drastically meddled with its quality.

The progression of the prospects and challenges of the educational standard in contemporary Nigeria's higher Institutions cannot be clearly divulged from the complex nature of human personality, complexity of human environment, different philosophies of life and different educational theories and practices under the concept of secularization. This background emerged to divergent contemporary concepts of education, practices and quality.

Based on this study, it is best to narrate that religion especially Christianity and education in Nigeria are inseparable allies. Faith-based especially Christianity brings virtues which negates bribery and corruption. The corruption of bribery, in this study, is contemporarily described as 'pay your way in kind or cash for your desired educational achievement.' Nevertheless, the teaching staffs or faculty who are primary navigators to maintain quality in education obstinately become promoters against the high lofty educational quality built over years for the Nigeria's higher institutions through Christian philosophy and policies.

Christian education inculcates duty or morality, grow someone up, nourish someone up and lead out someone (from the 'dark to light') for reverence and faith in Christ with which the act of bribery is inimical. The challenges Nigerian public educational sector rather usually focuses on are based on the statistics of pass, failure and wastage which are mere reflections of official records—a pure secularization status. The original intentions of the Christian missionaries are no longer palpable in the higher educational practices. Christianization of Nigerian education becomes a necessity to mould a high qualitative status for the citizens. Nonetheless, history affirms that not much emphasis has been purported to fight against bribery in Contemporary Nigeria's higher institutions between the teaching staff or faculty and the students. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

If the education is the creation of sound mind in a sound body, or dispelling error and discovering truth or the formation of character through impartation of knowledge, then the idea of bribery between the teaching staff and their students is nothing less but sowing or affirming corruption in a sound body. This could only be described as a trough experience in quality of Nigerian educational standard. Therefore, it is expedient that the Federal Government and other appropriate quarters to give priority to the teacher/students relationship towards the expression of quality educational standards to every citizen in all Nigeria's higher institutions (Intellectual definitions).

If teachers could only realize that they cannot inculcate morals in students by mere discipline unless they set before them an effective example of their personal integrity, social sense and discipline, Nigerian educational system will never reflect the missionary philosophy for the establishment of educational institutions in Nigeria (Lifestyle definitions).

If teachers indeed have most powerful influence in any given communities and determine the value and quality of people and life, then if error is transmitted from one student to another then to another, the Federal Government/State/Private owned higher institutions should do all in their powers to curb bribery igniting revolution in Nigeria higher institutions and generally in the Nigerian societies (Discipleship definitions).

If the students, in turn, would want to have quality education back in their various higher educational, they should, through submission of apologies and establish peaceful campaigns against bribery and other forms of corruptions in Nigerian education. The collaboration of the parents, faculty and students would make a great difference.

If Nigeria claims to be a secularized nation, its philosophy of education and policies must not be the same in their higher educational system since it deviates morals. If it is, it is like putting a 'round peg in a square hole'. The Federal Ministry of Education should through the Federal Government of Nigeria borrow from the root of educational establishment of Christianized initiatives. This should be so because the country's educational tour originated from the Christian definitions.

This paper thus advocates that Christian education, at the beginning, had a 'Pinnacle' experience that possessed quality education. The advent of secularization provided the emergence of corruption especially bribery which described the 'trough-like' or low educational standard which Nigeria presently views as being conventional. This was because the ideology of morality and other similar virtues have been retracted by secularization. This later had generated into the corrupt status in Nigeria's national development. The researcher submits further that if Nigeria's educational quality must have a 'fresh breath,' from the corrupt status in its higher education it should be tapped from the former 'Pinnacle' philosophy of education, Christianization. This would, from the historical perspectives, help to build the present and the posterity by learning from the past formidable experience. This is the scientific aspect of historical analysis upon which this study is organized.

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