

## REGENERATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL LEARNING & SELF-MOTIVATION

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### Abstract

*The paper examined the role played by digital learning and self-motivation in regeneration of public schools. An overwhelming percentage of our population lives below the poverty line, and will definitely be without the means to pay for education in private schools, which has gained enough acceptance, and popularity in the society. This has made them to take recourse to public schools. The state of public schools in Nigeria has so much degenerated that one can refer to them as dead woods with battered structures, worn-out classrooms and equipments and very low staff esteem due to poor remuneration and working conditions. This condition has affected the standard of education and hence national development. This work attempts to proffer a two-pronged solution which we hope will effectively upturn an anachronistic educational system into one which is able to prepare its beneficiaries, our youths, for great achievements in a digital age. First, we have to discover that most scientific and research activities now depend on instantaneous data sharing, aided by the internet through strengthened investment in digital learning; provision of quality internet access as well as a wide scope of visual learning environment in schools. Second, inculcating the philosophy of self-motivation among the students will help them develop self-competence to tackle different challenges and invariably actualize their dreams in life. We hope that by the end of this academic forum, our society will be better of academically and otherwise.*

**Keywords;** learning, self motivation, public schools, private schools and working conditions

### Introduction

Improving the standard of education in Nigeria is a particularly daunting task, especially in the state in which most public schools lie. As a result of poor maintenance and disrepair of structures, most public schools have the pressing challenge of infrastructure, and so, more than half of their resources are usually directed to that end. While a conducive environment and supporting infrastructure is critical to effective teaching and learning, this work addresses a more important need – the need to rework our pedagogical approaches to measure up to contemporary standards. It appears that we are now firmly rooted in the ‘information age’, a term with which Castells (1996) described a period in which the movement of information through networks would overtake the circulation of goods as the primary source of value in a society. Today, what counts as information is increasingly biased towards what can be represented in digital form. Following this trend, many scientific and research enterprises now depend on data being shared in the almost instantaneous fashion enabled by the internet. Vast libraries have as well been digitized (Beetham and Sharpe 2007).

Therefore, to meet the challenge of improving the standard of education in Nigeria, we must look into reworking our approach to pedagogy in a way that reflects digital learning as the underpinning of an information age, as well as incorporates practices that empower our youths with the drive to great achievements. In effect, linking the classrooms to the workplace; whether it is salaried employment or it is entrepreneurship. Consequently, we shall, in the course of this work, examine the crucial role of digital learning and self motivation in regenerating our public schools.

### **Why Public Schools?**

Owing to an apparent case of mismanagement, public schools seem to be in an appalling and dilapidated state. Most public schools are littered with battered structures; worn out equipments; broken down vehicles; raggedy classroom buildings; over-crowded classrooms; inadequate manpower in quantity and quality; instability in the academic calendar as a result of strikes; very low teacher (staff) morale due to poor remuneration and working conditions (Adebayo 2009). Poor planning and lack of consistent investment in the education system characterize the way most public schools are run. This poor state of affairs manifests in falling academic standards, and, in turn, leads to loss of confidence in our educational system. In response to this situation, Adebayo (2009) observed that private educational institutions in Nigeria have grown in profile in the last 10-15 years, such that they have gained acceptance and huge popularity among parents.

However, despite the advent of private educational institutions, it is obvious that private schools aren't within the means of many Nigerians. According to a recent study (NEEDS 2004), an overwhelming percentage of our population live below the poverty line, and will definitely be without the means to pay for education in a private school. However, parents who can afford it appear to favour privately run schools as viable alternative to the crumbling public school structure.

Since a sizeable number of Nigerian youths pass through the public educational system, we must actively nurse the public schools back to health. While we look to government, public-private partnership, and non-governmental organisations to intervene in major areas of planning and infrastructural investment, it behoves us, concerned stakeholders, to take up the mantle of revamping our methods and approaches to teaching and learning. The aim of this work, therefore, is to highlight a few areas of importance which we must incorporate in a bid to improve the performance of our public schools, and raise the academic standards generally. Additionally, we advocate for a change in our pedagogical approach to education by considering a design that incorporates digital learning as well as self motivation; bearing in mind the following significant trends in learning as observed by Siemens (2004), who posited that:

- Many learners will move into a variety of different, possibly unrelated fields over the course of their lifetime.
- Informal learning is a significant aspect of our learning experience. Formal education no longer comprises the majority of our learning. Learning now occurs in a variety of ways – through communities of practice, personal networks, and through completion of work-related tasks.
- Learning is a continual process, lasting for a lifetime. Learning and work-related activities are no longer separate. In many situations, they are the same.
- Technology is altering (rewiring) our brains. The tools we use define and shape our thinking.
- Know-how and know-what is being supplemented with know-where (the understanding of where to find the knowledge needed).

Going by these trends, this work attempts to proffer a two-pronged design which we hope will effectively upturn an anachronistic educational system into one which is able to prepare its beneficiaries, our youth, for great achievements in a digital age.

### **The Role of Digital Learning**

In our role as educators, a teacher's key job is to stay in tune with the times, in order to afford the student the vantage point of mastering her or his environment from an early age. To keep up with this task, we must ensure that our teaching and learning methods do not become outmoded. Levine and Arafeh (2002), while surveying public school students, identified a "digital disconnect" between students and their schools. Most students claim their teachers had not yet shifted their teaching to respond to the new ways students communicate and use the internet beyond their classrooms. This same situation is obtainable in Nigeria. Using the internet is the norm for today's youth, and our educational system must not lag behind. To be effective in ensuring that this upgrade is done, we must give serious thoughts into modifying our pedagogy.

The term 'pedagogy' has two broad denotations: the UK universities' Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), uses 'pedagogy' to refer to the processes, experiences, contexts, outcomes and relationships

of teaching and learning in higher education; again, ‘pedagogy’ embraces an essential dialogue between teaching and learning, such that, in recent trends of educational discourse, there is the privileging of ‘learning’ over ‘teaching’, in a way that learners are no longer seen as passive recipients of knowledge and skill, but as active participants in the learning process as observed by Beetham and Sharpe (2007). At any rate, there is the constant need, in a progressive civilisation, to update our system of pedagogy especially in this present time when digital technologies constitute a new context for teaching and learning. This new context is mostly rife among the youth as is shown by the latest figures for access to the Internet in the UK – which are 83 per cent of the 16-24 age group (Beetham and Sharp 2007). It is clear, therefore, that to ensure that youths are adequately educated in this information age, we must adopt a pedagogy that is digital-learning friendly.

To be sure, there are strides already taken in the right direction. Most schools use a public website to display information regarding courses; nowadays, students contact tutors by email, and access resources through an information portal or virtual learning environment (VLE). In the same vein, most public schools and educational bodies take examinations through a computer-based assessment system. However, it seems that these strides don’t cut it, and we may have to up our ante. Vital areas to look into include access to internet and an increased emphasis on virtual learning environment.

Easy access to internet appears to be crucial in digital learning. Since we have already established that at least 80 per cent of internet users are the youth; it remains to say that internet-savvy students rely on the internet to help them do their schoolwork. Studies show that they complete their schoolwork more quickly, they are less likely to get stymied by material they don’t understand; their papers and projects are equally likely to draw upon up-to-date sources and state-of-the-art knowledge; and, they are better at juggling their school assignments and extracurricular activities when they use the internet (Levine and Arafeh 2002). Furthermore, students were able to employ five metaphors in explaining how the internet helps them in schools: (i) the internet as virtual textbook and reference library – students think of the internet as the place to find primary and secondary source material for their reports, presentations, and projects; (ii) the internet as virtual tutor and study shortcut – students think of the internet as one way to receive instruction about material that interests them or about which they are confused; (iii) the internet as virtual study group – students think of the internet as an important way to collaborate on project work with classmates, study for tests and quizzes, and trade class notes and observations; (iv) the internet as virtual guidance counsellor – students look to the internet for guidance about life decisions as they relate to school, careers, and postsecondary education; and (v) the internet as virtual locker, backpack and notebook – students think of the internet as a place to store their important school-related materials, online tools also help them to keep track of their class schedule, syllabi, assignments, notes, and papers (Levine and Arafeh 2002). It is clear, then, that easy access to internet is the first policy call for administrators of public schools who are ready to rework their pedagogy into a digital-friendly one, as the single greatest barrier to internet use at school is the quality of the internet.

An emphasis on visual learning environment (VLE) is also apposite to achieving an effective digital learning. In recent times, technological strides have seen the world of information and communication technology (ICT), take a leap from the age of passive viewing of content (i.e. Web 1.0) to the present era where users are allowed to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue (i.e. Web 2.0). Web 1.0 (or “First-generation web”) was viewed as an educational and communication resource akin to conventional or ‘familiar’ classroom resources, for example, a source of information, such as a book or a means of communicating information, such as a visiting speaker (Greenhow, Robelia & Hughes 2009). Web 2.0, on the other hand, characterises a transition from the predominantly read-only Web 1.0 into a ‘read-and-write’ platform. Web 2.0 facilitates ‘participatory’, ‘collaborative’, and ‘distributed’ practices within Web 2.0-enabled formal and non-formal spheres of everyday activities.

Applications of Web 2.0 includes social networks, such as Facebook; media sharing, such as YouTube and Flickr; collaborative knowledge development through wikis (e.g., Wikipedia); creative works, such as podcasts, videocasts, blogs, and microblogs (e.g., Twitter, Blogger) etc. Through its dynamic features, Web 2.0 promotes users and their interconnections (Greenhow et al 2009). A great way to visual learning environment in our public schools is to find a place for already existing Web 2.0 platforms in our

educational institutions, as well as to find new pragmatic uses for Web 2.0 in our pedagogy. Levin and Arafah (2002) observed that there are dozens of education-related uses of the internet – students use the internet to do research to help them write papers or complete class work or homework assignments; most students also correspond with other online classmates about school projects and upcoming tests and quizzes; they share tips and pass along information regarding sites that are especially rich in content that fit their assignments; they also frequent websites pointed out to them by teachers – some of which had even been set up specifically for a particular school or class; they communicate with online teachers or tutors; and they participate in online study groups.

If we explore the varied opportunities present with the Web 2.0, the scope of the VLE will be increased, and we will have a more beneficial, up-to-date educational system: a system which can, then, handle the challenge of educating a modern Nigerian youth. A casual observer will notice that majority of our youths mostly use the internet for entertainment and leisure. If we hope to raise future leaders of the information age, they cannot continue to be consumers of social media. We must endeavour, therefore, to equip our youths with the proper knowhow, by greatly incorporating digital learning in our pedagogy.

### **Self-Motivation**

While we have dwelled on educational processes and their improvement through greater emphasis on digital learning, another thorny issue facing our youths today is a lack of drive to put their education into good use. As observed by Ahiakwo (1998), the major aim of education is to develop the individual's competence, in order to enable her or him to function in the society. In respect of this, we wish to bring to bear, the technique and importance of self motivation.

O'Connell (1978) once observed that children appear to learn and remember things learned out of school more readily than things learned in school. He was struck at the way and speed children master rules of complex games as scrabbles and monopoly, but may not be doing well in school subjects. To address O'Connell's surprises, we must examine motivation, which, Worell and Stilwell (1981) describes as that force in the individual that (i) pushes him toward the initiation of certain activities; (ii) determines the amount of effort to be put into such activities; and (iii) determines the degree of persistence in the activities. Drawing from this, it appears that a student's desire to learn comes from intrinsic factors (such as motivation), and not primarily for external rewards (Ahiakwo 1998).

One is adequately educated if she or he is competent in her or his chosen field of endeavour. However, to become competent, one must first be interested in, and acquire sound relevant education. Therefore, to equip our youth with the proper education, it is imperative that public schools, administrators, and educationists pay attention to cultivating a motivating learning environment. This can be achieved effectively by getting the individual to become internally motivated.

Self motivation, thus, refer to those motivation that comes from within the individual. Generally, in self motivation, the youth is expected to establish realistic goals, take measures to meet the goal set, and reflect on the progress being made in achieving the goal (Ahiakwo 1998). A remarkable trait of a self-motivated student is in his concept of attribution. Weiner (1972) explained that students who attribute successes to their own abilities and failure to their own lack of effort tend to persist in working toward goals. This is also known as the internal locus of control. On the other hand, students who attribute success to nothing more than luck, and failure to innate shortcomings, tend to give up easily. To achieve a great deal of self-motivation, the teacher should be able to guide a student into recognising and building an internal locus of control. Students must believe in themselves. They must know that backed with motivation, they have the capacity for success, and that a lackadaisical attitude will usually amount to failure. Ultimately, a self-motivated individual is on the path to competence.

Worell and Stilwell (1981) identified five factors which are linked to self-motivation. They are as follows:

- Self-evaluation: Here, a student renders a personal assessment of her or his general skills in a particular interest area (or in a particular school subject). Motivation, in this regard, is stronger where a student expects to succeed.

- Task preferences: Most times, a student's willingness to begin work on a problem and her or his persistence on the work in the face of difficulties depend on task preferences. Such preferences usually depend on three factors – student's previous experiences, expected usefulness of the task to the student, and the extent to which the task is interesting or challenging to the student. In this regard, learning tasks should be made meaningful in such a way that all students, irrespective of their background, can evaluate and be motivated to learn them.
- Expectancy for success: Efforts and persistence on any particular task usually depends on the student's expectancy for success. This, in turn, depends on three factors – positive information or feedback, a perception of the task not being too difficult, and a positive past experience on the task. At this level, a good teacher would ensure that the students get clear feedback on their performance, match task difficulty to student's level of performance, and additionally, encourage students to expect good performance despite past failure.
- Standards for achievement: Goal setting standards usually go a long way to determine the effort a student puts in to accomplish a task. The teacher's task, here, is to help the student set realistic and sustainable goals.
- Locus of control for achievement: This entails the attribution of successes or failures to oneself or to external factors. Where students believe that they are responsible for their successes, they tend to work harder to ensure more success. The teacher, therefore, helps the student by emphasising the attribution of successes or failures to internal locus of control.

It is the primary task of a good teacher to bring up students who can take their destiny into their own hands, by effectively sequencing their learning experiences. The above outlined factors are to be taken into consideration while guiding the student on his path to self-motivation, thus that, by the end of the student's stay in school, she or he would have grown enough backbone to take on the complexities of life and society with the weaponry of self-competence.

### **Conclusion**

During the course of this discourse, two important findings were made: we discovered that most scientific and research activities now depend on instantaneous data sharing, aided by the internet; we also found that to enable students achieve self-competence, we have got to cultivate among them the philosophy of self-motivation. A reworking of our pedagogical processes is due.

Since a great percentage of education take place in our public schools, in this work, we proffer two solutions to the current unresponsive stance of our public schools in Nigeria. In order to improve our educational system to align with the contemporary times, it is necessary to peer through the lens of a young learner. It is therefore clear that a strengthened investment in digital learning; through the provision of quality internet access in schools as well as a widening of the scope of visual learning environment (VLE) in schools, will portend a crop of internet savvy Nigerian youths armed with the knowhow to flourish in today's world. Equally, we call on stakeholders of education (parents and teachers alike) to be vigilant with their ward's upkeep so as to encourage the elicitation and maintenance of those behaviours that lead to competence. This can be done by effectively instilling in our students a disposition to self-motivation.

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