

British and French Colonial Influence on African Education: A comparative Study of Nigeria and Senegal

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative study of the British and French colonial influences on African education, particularly in Nigeria and Senegal. The era of British and French colonialism had come and gone, yet the influences linger on in African education, politics, culture and economy. While Nigeria was colonised by the British; Senegal was colonised by the French. While some of the colonial influences are good and desirable some are not so good. Although they had different approaches to their colonial rules, there were similarities and differences in the colonial influences of Britain and France. Therefore, it is important to study the similarities and differences in the British and French colonial influences on African education particularly in Nigeria and Senegal (the countries of interest in this study) so as to learn from the desirable influences. The research method used is the historical approach in comparative education. It was found that colonial influences still feature in the philosophy and objectives, structure, curriculum, administration and funding of education in Nigeria and Senegal. However, it was concluded that progressively, some aspects of education in Nigeria correspond with Nigerian culture, although in Senegal most aspects of education do not reflect Senegalese culture rather, they reflect French culture. Therefore it was recommended that Nigeria and Senegal should address realistic problems emanating from colonial influences on their education.

Keywords: British, French, Colonial Influences, African Education, Comparative Study, Nigeria, Senegal.

Introduction

Colonialism has a main goal of exercising full or partial political control over another country. Most countries of the world that were colonial rulers exercised control

over some other countries in order to demonstrate their authorities. Most prominent among the countries that colonised African countries were Britain and France. While Nigeria was colonised by the British; Senegal was colonised by the French.

The era of some African countries colonised by the British and French had come and gone. But the influences linger on up to contemporary time on African education, culture, politics and economy. While some of the influences good desirable some are not so good for Africa education, culture, politics and economy (Garba, 2012). Literature has shown that there are similarities and differences in the colonial influences of Britain and France. Fenwick (2000) indicated that fundamentally, both countries had different approaches to colonial rules. It is important to study the similarities and differences in the British and French colonial rules such as to determine the influences of the two countries on African education particularly Nigeria and Senegal; and to learn from the good influences.

The British colonial influence on Nigeria largely determined the disposition of education during the colonial days. The main feature of Nigerian education before the colonial era was informal and functional, but with the colonisation of Nigeria by Britain, the system gradually changed to formal education (Fafunwa, 1974).

The French had a stronger political hold on their colonies than the British. Through the assimilation policy, the French successfully removed all symbols of traditional authorities. Likewise, through this policy, the French sought to remove the educated elites from the common fold and elevate them to the status of French citizens (Dupraz, 2017). On the other hand, the British encouraged colonised educated elites to mingle with their own people so as to contribute immensely to the development of their people. The colonial experiences had influenced African education historically, politically, economically and culturally.

This study is a comparative study of British and French colonial influences on African education particularly on Nigerian and Senegalese education with a specific focus on the philosophy and objectives of education in both countries; the structure; the curriculum; administration and funding of education in both countries. However, the historical, economic, political and cultural bases of the influences would also be considered.

Research Method

The nature of the research indicates the comparative study of education in two countries: Nigeria and Senegal. The study focuses on British and French colonial influences on education in Nigeria and Senegal. Therefore the research method involves comparative education research method.

The research method features the use of documents such as reports, policies, journals, educational magazines, reference books, and related data from official websites in the collection of data. These data were analysed using the historical approach in comparative education. The historical approach helps to know the past, in order to understand the present better, and project for better future achievement; by hinting on those factors which may be more useful. The historical approach *in comparative* education and content analysis are found in subsequent sections of this paper.

British and French Colonial Influences on the Philosophy and Objectives of Education in Nigeria and Senegal

Traditionally the philosophy and objectives of education in Nigeria and Senegal can be described in terms of philosophy and objectives of African Traditional Education which generally include an emphasis on social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral development. Learners learnt by doing. They engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and

demonstration. They were involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, and so on. They also engaged in recreational activities like wrestling, dancing, drumming, racing, and intellectual training like the study of local history, the environment (local geography, plants and animals), poetry, reasoning, proverbs, story-telling and so forth.

Traditional African Education was integrated education. It combined physical training with character building and practical activities with intellectual training. At the end of each stage of education demarcated either by age level or years of experience, the learner was given practical tests relevant to his experience and job to be done. These were continuous assessments which eventually led to “passing out” ceremonies.

Traditional African education was not rigidly compartmentalised; it was not largely formal, rather it was largely informal. It was not divided into separate compartments as in the case of Western education brought by the British and French colonial masters (Fafunwa 1974; 15-16). In effect Western education brought by the British and the French colonial masters which featured intellectual and largely formal education in compartmentalised disciplines was similar to traditional education in Nigeria and Senegal; but different only largely in terms of the cultural backgrounds of the colonial masters which informed emphasis on different religious dispositions, formal schooling and largely scientific and technological advancements. All the different cultural background-factors influenced and changed the *Philosophy* and objectives of traditional education in Nigeria and Senegal.

British and French Colonial Influences on Structure of Education in Nigeria and Senegal

Traditionally the structure of education in Nigeria and Senegal was generally the structure of African Traditional Education. This featured education system segmented

by age levels and by years of experience. The learners passed through practical tests generally according to their age levels, but this could also be according to their years of experience in terms of the job to be done. There were continuous assessments which eventually led to “passing out” ceremonies. The structure of education was from the basic to the colonised levels such that the products became gradually functional in society. Unemployment was not visible because the products of the structure of education gradually learnt various things that made them functional variously in society. Classification into age levels varied from place to place but generally, education began from infancy and lasted up to 60years of age and above (Fafunwa, 1974; 18-19). The British and French colonial masters built on this structure of education from infancy (basic level of education) up to the tertiary level of education.

However, while the African Traditional Education in Nigeria and Senegal had fluid structure, British and French colonial education had definite structures. For instance, the primary level of education, the secondary and tertiary levels of education were definite. Moreover, the colonial masters patterned the structure of education after those of their home countries. The structure of education of the colonial masters was from the basic to the colonised levels. The structure also reflected largely formal education which initially led generally to white collar jobs more than to blue collar jobs. This gradually led to unemployment of some school graduates that warranted the quest for the vocational structure of education in Nigeria and Senegal (Adaralegbe, 1972; Fafunwa, 1974; Fafunwa & Aisiku, 1982).

In Nigeria and Senegal, the structure of education colonise by the colonial masters initially resulted in a reduction of job prospects of the school graduates and thus had a negative influence on colonial education. National conferences on the vocational structure of education towards independence brought about new policies on education in Nigeria and Senegal (for instance 1959 and 1977 in Nigeria) these informed new structures of education that reflected vocational and functional prospects.

British and French Colonial Influences on the Curriculum in Nigeria and Senegal

During the missionary era in Nigeria, the grammar schools were established in response to local demands, and their curriculum was purely under the control of the missionaries. Subjects offered to include English Grammar and Composition, Latin and Greek Grammar, History, Geography, Hebrew, Logic, Geometry, Chemistry, Physiology, Drawing, Rhetoric, and so forth. Students were awarded certificates by College of Preceptors, London. This body influenced the nature of the curriculum during this period (Oluniyi, 2013 j).

During the colonial era, school subjects in Nigeria were heavily tailored towards the British system, such that Fafunwa (1974) described the products of such schools as Africans in colour but British in outlook and intellects. Subjects such as scripture, Greek, Latin, Reading, Writing, English, History, Music, Mathematics, Philosophy and Recitation were introduced. This curriculum did not meet the needs of Africans in terms of vocational opportunity, career enhancement and intellectual development. After independence, the curriculum in Nigeria has undergone several reforms that feature some African vocational desires and career dispositions. Moreover, the language of instruction at the early stage of primary education is the language of the immediate environment referred to as mother-tongue in some cases (FRN, 2013).

However, during the early years of primary school in Senegal, a large percentage of the time is devoted to teaching children French, which would be the main language of instruction for most of their education. At this stage students also begin instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. In later years however children are introduced to the history, geography, natural science, music, art, and physical education (Clasby, 2013). Despite recent reform efforts to have a more uniquely Senegalese curriculum, French still remains the language of instruction.

British and French Colonial Influences on Administration and Funding of Education in Nigeria and Senegal

The 1954 constitution of colonial Nigeria, emphasized the policy of decentralization of national administration which informed the decentralized administration of education in Nigeria. This policy remained until 1960 with an unbalanced Federation made up of Northern region which was bigger than the Western and Eastern regions (Imam, 2012). Presently, the administration and control of education in Nigeria is shared between the Federal, State and Local governments. Likewise, the funding of education in Nigeria is a joint responsibility of the Federal, State and Local governments, except that the Federal government contributes the largest share of education funds (Nvvagugo, 1999).

On the other hand, the administration of education in Senegal is centralized in order to regulate the political and moral opinions of the learner. The highest education officer is the Education Minister who has representatives in the various educational zones. There are inspectors in charge of the departments who inspect schools and plan the programmes of study.

A large percentage of public spending on education in Senegal is used to pay teachers salaries; therefore, the government faces fiscal pressure as greater investment in education is needed to increase education access and quality. The challenge results in inefficiency in the system. World Bank (2016) report that approximately 40 billion Senegalese francs (CFAF) are paid to staff who are not in classrooms (ghost workers) (World Bank 2016). Although there are several attempts by the government to lay off a large number of ghost teachers, the problem persists. Therefore, to expand the education system and improve the quality of student learning, there is a need to improve transparency and efficiency on expenditure. Senegal has made progress in expanding access to education, but the enrollment is still relatively low.

French Colonial Influences Resulting from Historical, An Examination of British and Economic, Political and Cultural Bases

Historical Bases

Historically, the advent of western education in Nigeria could be linked to the involvement of British colonial rule in Nigeria. Western education has over the years contributed greatly to the eradication of informal education in Nigeria. Moreover, it has contributed to the features of the **curriculum** and practices of education in Nigeria to various events. Daso (2013) stated that the adoption of western education has made Nigerians have less interest in Nigerian indigenous education. Likewise, French involvement in the education of Senegalese could be referred to as lifelong involvement with the French strong policy of assimilation.

Economic Bases

Britain and France were basically trading nations. In Nigeria, Britain was in charge of education mainly for economic gains. France as well as conquered Senegal in order to open up a trade with entire Western Sudan. British colonial influence on Nigerian education enabled educated Nigerians to contribute freely to national development. In Senegal, the educated elites (those who had acquired rigorous learning) also had access to high public office and contributed immensely to national development (Ghosh, 2015).

Political Bases

Both British and French colonial rulers wanted Africans to allow them to stay permanently in Africa if possible. However, the British experience with the Nationalist forces in the frontline States in Kenya made them relinquish this agenda in some of their colonies. When Guinea demanded absolute independence from France, the damage which France did to that country could not allow any other French colony to think of revolt. Therefore, the French had a strong political hold on their colonies for a

long time. In Senegal for instance, the French through the policy of assimilation had colonised most of the symbols of traditional authority (NOUN, 2015).

Cultural Bases

Education should function as an agent of cultural transmission and change. The British and French colonial influences gave rise to minority elites in the society who shared the preferred culture of the colonial rulers to a significant extent, but who were prevented from full participation in the colonial government. The Colonial Education Policy, therefore, resulted in a cultural division in the society between those who went to school and those who did not (Enwo-Irem, 2013).

Conclusion

In both countries, colonial influences still feature to a certain extent in the philosophy and objectives, the structure, the curriculum, and administration and funding of education. British and French colonial influences resulted largely from historical, economic, political and cultural bases in the two colonial countries. However, progressively some aspects of education in Nigeria correspond to Nigerian culture, although in Senegal most aspects of education do not reflect Senegalese culture rather they reflect French culture.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusions:

- i. Nigeria and Senegal should address realistic problems emanating from colonial influences on their education.
- ii. To expand the education system and improve the quality of student learning, there is a need to improve transparency and efficiency on expenditures in Senegal.

- iii. In Senegal, there should be more aspects of education that correspond to Senegalese culture. Most importantly, Senegalese national languages should be incorporated into the school system for educational and societal progress.

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