

NIGERIAN RETURNEES FROM THE UNITED STATES AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The focus of this paper is a series of portraits that illustrate the efforts and difficulties faced by educationalists returning to Nigeria from the United States of America during the colonial period. It is pertinent to state here that these American-trained Nigerians attempted to introduce the type of education they received in the various American universities they attended but their efforts were frustrated by the British colonial administration in Nigeria. The paper is focussed on the geographical context of Southern Nigeria because the three personalities under scrutiny were indigenes of this area. Again, it is a well-known fact that Islamic education was well received by the people of Northern Nigeria; hence, colonial educational development in that region was strictly restricted to the provision of learning. This ultimately did not allow for the widespread introduction of western education until the attainment of independence in 1960.

During colonial period, American colleges and universities served as educational havens for students from Africa, particularly Nigerians in the early 1920s through the early 1940s. In their quest for higher education, most Nigerian students took advantage of the receptiveness of these universities especially those located in the southern part of the United States. The operators of these colleges and universities were happy to admit students from Africa because first, it enabled American students

acquire knowledge of and, respect for other people's culture. Second, by interacting freely with Americans, the foreign students also acquired a deep understanding of American culture. A spillover effect of this was that this enhanced international unity, peace and understanding between the United States and other countries of the world. The question now is what or who facilitated the movement of Nigerian students to the United States? The answer is not farfetched, while some students were encouraged by American missionaries others were caught by the fascinating stories of America as a land of possibilities. Yet others preferred the curriculum in American universities and colleges that emphasises academic, vocational and industrial education as against the British curriculum that was strictly academic.

Available records have shown that some American Baptist missionaries who came to Nigeria during the mid-19th century were responsible for the first stream of Nigerian students who travelled to the United States for education purposes. More specifically, the Reverends W. J. David and C. E. Smith encouraged Miss Moloto Oshodi and Nathaniel David Oyerinde to acquire higher education in the United States during the late 19th and the early years of the 20th centuries. Following the example of some Nigerian students, such as N. D. Oyerinde, Miss Moloto Oshodi and Eyo Ita, Paul Cardoso left Nigeria in 1922 for the United States where he studied at the Hampton Institute.¹

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¹ Paul W. O. Cardoso, "Bridging The Gulf Between America and Nigeria" in *Southern Workman*. LIV, 10 (October, 1925), 472.

Owing to the non-recognition of Paul Cardoso's academic qualification by the colonial government in Nigeria, he became a teacher at Eko Boys High School, which at that time was not given grant by the colonial government. He later moved to Lagos City College founded by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the early 1950s (also then non-government aided), from where he left to establish Gaskiya College – a school which he patterned after the Hampton model. In 1976 when the Lagos State Government in Nigeria took over all private and mission schools in the state, he was moved to Awori Ajeromi Grammar School, where he retired from active government service in the late 1970s. Thus, Paul Cardoso was compelled to spend his long teaching career in non-government approved schools.² Paul Cardoso's case is just one example of how Nigerians who trained in the United States were unjustly and unfairly treated by the colonial government in Nigeria.

Moreover, records have shown that Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe arrived in the United States in 1925 for higher education and left in 1933. His assistance and inspiration led the following Nigerian students: C. A. Bolaji Macarthy, Eyo Ita, Asuquo Idiong, Abdul Disu, Nwafor Orizu, Mbonu Ojike, Nnodu Okongwu, Julius Okala, Kobina Mbura, George Mbadiwe, Kingsley Mbadiwe, Reuben O. Ikejiani, M. N. Chukwuemeka and Ibanga Udo Akpabio to follow his footsteps. It is worthy of note that during the Great Depression no Nigerian student arrived in the United States and the trickle was held in check.

However, in the 1949/1950 academic session, about one hundred and twenty-one Nigerians were registered in fifty campuses located in 19 states and Washington DC.³ While in the United States, these students learnt to appreciate the dignity of labour and realised that the acquisition of a higher level of education should not exclude one from participating in manual work. Having studied or passed through the Hampton-Tuskegee model, most of

these students realised that the acquisition of industrial or vocational education aided the upwards mobility of black Americans. They, therefore, reasoned that it was an appropriate prescription for the economically exploited and socially disabled people of Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole.

It is against this background that this essay shall discuss the efforts, frustrations and achievements of three prominent American-trained and certified Nigerians. These Nigerians returned to their fatherland and adopted the American curriculum in the various educational institutions, which they established during the colonial period in Nigeria. This study is also aimed at emphasising the fact that the hopes and aspirations of these American-trained Nigerians were thwarted not only by the British colonial administration in Nigeria but also by British-trained Nigerians. Most of these British-trained Nigerians campaigned vigorously against American degrees, and collaborated with the British colonialist to frustrate and kill the introduction, adoption and operation of American curriculum in Nigeria during the period under review.

1. N. D. OYERINDE AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Nathaniel David Oyerinde was born around 1893⁴ into the Oyerinde family of Ogbomoso – a lineage that is well known for its strong Christian tradition. It is necessary to mention here that the Oyerinde family was the first family to be converted to the Christian faith in Ogbomoso by the Reverend Thomas Bowen, a Baptist missionary who reached the town of Ogbomoso in 1855.⁵ Of all the Baptist missionaries that worked in Ogbomoso, Reverend C. E. Smith who arrived the town in 1885 had a greater and more sustaining influence on the young N. D. Oyerinde who had his early education under him. Thus, he also imbibed Smith's ideas of self-help and endurance.⁶

² Interview with Mr D. A. Oyewole (former Principal of Awori-Ajeromi Grammar School, Ojo, Lagos State) at Surulere, 7th January 1991.

³ See Phelps-Stoke Fund, *African Students In the United States: A Handbook of Information and Orientation*. New York, 1957, 11.

⁴ Chief N. D. Oyerinde revealed this in his evidence given before the High Court, Ibadan, held at Ogbomoso on 31 March, 1941. See file No. 37224, Baale of Ogbomoso. Appointment of 1940-1944. National Archives Ibadan (NAI).

⁵ L. M. Duval, *Baptist Missions in Nigeria*. Richmond Virginia: Southern Baptist Convention, 1928.

⁶ Reverend C. E. Smith was in Ogbomoso from 1885-1906. See C. E. Smith's paper on microfilm, University of Ibadan. The Rev. C. E. Smith's diaries entry for August 10, 1896.

N. D. Oyerinde left Nigeria for further studies in the United States of America in 1906, on the same boat with the Reverend C. E. Smith who was returning home on health grounds preparatory to his retirement in 1909.⁷ On arrival in the United States, Oyerinde was admitted to the Wayland Academy, a preparatory secondary school attached to Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. After three years, he gained admission into the university and obtained the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1914. It is worth mentioning that while in the United States, Oyerinde demonstrated his love for liberal rather than religious education. This informed his decision to take a Bachelor of Arts degree before “he took the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1915 and spent the next academic year widening and deepening his education in both the liberal arts and social sciences by reading Greek, Mathematics and Economics at the University of Chicago.”⁸ He finally returned to Nigeria in 1916 after successfully completing his education in the United States.

On his return to Nigeria, N. D. Oyerinde realised that he had no choice than to accept and function within the system in which he had found himself. He described his experience of the Virginia Union University, as Booker T. Washington once said of Hampton Institute, “that he found the opportunities to learn thrift, economy, and push, and that he was surrounded by an atmosphere of business, Christian influences and the spirit of self-help.”⁹ With a solid academic background, and an experience of the United States environment and educational system, Oyerinde was well equipped to put his newly acquired ideas and experience into practice in Nigeria.

It is necessary to recall at this point that the British educational policy in Nigeria was not dynamic because aside from other inherent shortcomings there were no guidelines on the curricu-

lum to be followed. Hence, the Baptist Mission, whose sphere of influence was Ogbomoso, continued to emphasise what seemed to it the best option for the Nigerian people in educational matters. With his newly acquired ideas and experience in the United States, it is natural to expect that Oyerinde’s activities in the educational development of Nigeria in general and Ogbomoso in particular were a reaction to the educational policies of the Baptist Mission and that of the British Colonial Government. It is against this background that N. D. Oyerinde’s contributions to the educational development in colonial southern Nigeria in general and his quest for the introduction of the American educational model in particular will be discussed.

To a very great extent, Oyerinde’s ideas of education were encouraged and adapted from the ideas of Booker T. Washington.¹⁰ Based on this, he chastised the Baptist Mission’s educational enterprise because they did not recognise education as a tool of “social regeneration.”¹¹ By this, he meant an education that was not wholly based on bookwork as the British and the Baptist Mission seemed to have encouraged. Oyerinde advocated for a system of education based on the learning of crafts, agriculture, literary subjects and the dignity of labour. While he was the Headmaster of Baptist Academy in Ogbomoso, he tried to introduce some of his ideas in the curriculum and administration of the school. “He strongly believed that the minimum success he achieved in creating awareness about the wider world in his pupils beyond the narrow goals set by the Baptist Mission was the immediate reason for the merger that produced the Baptist College and Theological Seminary.”¹²

As a seasoned teacher, Oyerinde did not hide his dislike for ministry (church) work, hence he taught only English and Mathematics throughout his career as a teacher. His refusal to be ordained as a pastor of the Baptist Mission “robbed him of a

⁷ Both men left Ogbomoso on May 26, 1906 and arrived in Richmond, Louisiana on July 13. See Reverend C. E. Smith’s papers.

⁸ B. A. Agiri, “Chief N. D. Oyerinde and the Political, Social and Economic Development of Ogbomoso 1916-1951”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1) (December, 1979), 88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰ See Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* New York. Airmont Books, 1967.

¹¹ See N. D. Oyerinde, *Iwe Itan Ogbomoso (A History of Ogbomoso)*. Jos, NP, 1934, 162-63, 187-89.

¹² *Ibid.*, 188; also B. A. Agiri, “Chief N. D. Oyerinde and the Political, Social and Economic Development of Ogbomoso 1916-1951” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1) (December, 1979), 100.

higher post than that of a teacher till he left the Baptist College in 1935.”¹³ This should not be taken to mean that Oyerinde was not a religious man. It can be argued that his refusal to be ordained as a pastor of the Baptist Mission was a direct and an open protest against the policies of the Baptist Mission in Nigeria at that time.

The question now is how did Oyerinde launch his educational plans? Records have revealed that the Native Authority established by the British in Ogbomoso, which had no place for the emerging educated class. This led the elite to form the Ogbomoso Progressive Union (OPU) in 1933 with the aim of fostering rapid socio-economic and political development of the town. Oyerinde was its first president.¹⁴ The newly formed OPU comprised both militant, moderate and conservative associations and individuals. However, the Ogbomoso Progressive Union provided N. D. Oyerinde the pedestal from where he launched his educational ideas.

In 1934, the birth of the OPU, some members of the associations presented a proposal for the establishment of a grammar school in Ogbomoso. This idea was however modified to that of a comprehensive school named Ogbomoso People’s Institute, (O.P.I.). It is important to note that the name, operational, and instructional model of the Ogbomosho People’s Institute were patterned after the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes founded by Booker T. Washington in the United States of America. The newly established Ogbomoso People’s Institute was essentially an institution where Oyerinde tried as much as he could to fully implement his educational thoughts, which he acquired in the United States during his studies in that country.

With the moral, financial and manual assistance of his fellow Ogbomoso kinsmen, a building

was erected for the Ogbomosho People’s Institute between 1934 and 1938.¹⁵ Oyerinde also received the encouragement and assistance of Eyo Ita,¹⁶ who was a colleague at the Baptist College in 1929 and had returned to Ogbomoso in 1934 after his education in the United States of America. Both men had similar views and shared aspirations about the system and content of the type of education, the Nigerian child should receive.¹⁷ Without mincing words, both men had inherent belief in the operations of the American system and curriculum of education in Nigeria.

In October 1938, the Ogbomoso People’s Institute was formally opened with Eyo Ita as its first Principal. Ladipo Babatunde, an ex-student of Oyerinde at the Baptist College, was the headmaster of the primary section, while Oyerinde served as the school manager and proprietor. Subjects taught in the school included carpentry and woodwork, weaving, smithing, agriculture and literary subjects. Efforts were also made to introduce the teaching of a second foreign language – French, but this did not materialise due to the school’s inability to recruit a qualified teacher. Also, the plan to teach the French language did not materialise due to the vehement opposition of the colonial government in Nigeria to the teaching of French language in schools within its sphere of influence.¹⁸ Although the schools’ curriculum was patterned after the United States model, the tempo could not be sustained because of the problems discussed below.

A major problem that the Ogbomoso People’s Institute had to contend with was that of qualified personnel. The school was never lucky to have qualified and specialist teachers to teach vocational and industrial subjects. The reason for this is not far-fetched. First, salaries paid to clerks were higher than those paid to technicians and artisans were. As such, the zeal to acquire vocational and industrial

¹³ B. A. Agiri, “Chief N. D. Oyerinde and the Political, Social and Economic Development of Ogbomoso 1916-1951”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1) (December, 1979), 100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ See Ogbomoso People’s Institute Records in Oyerinde private papers.

¹⁶ A section of this paper will be devoted to highlighting and discussing the contributions of Eyo Ita to the introduction of American education in Nigeria.

¹⁷ See Ogbomoso People’s Institute Records in Oyerinde private papers. Also, “List of salaries of teachers of the Baptist College and Seminary for 1929” from G. W. Saddler to Mr. LaPage, District Officer, Osogbo, 5th July, 1929, Ogbomoso District Council Papers.

¹⁸ Ogbomoso People’s Institute Records.

education at higher schools of learning by Nigerians was disappointingly low. Again, only the Hope Waddel Institute in Calabar was a standard school where industrial and technical education could be acquired by the few interested Nigerians, thus, there was a dearth in the supply of this category of teachers.¹⁹

Furthermore, the official policy of the colonial British Administration did not encourage the acquisition of vocational and industrial education because it catered for its need of such personnel "through the workshops of the Nigeria Railways, Public Works Department, Marines, Surveys, Posts and Telegraphs."²⁰ What is more, the establishment of the Yaba Higher College in 1934 did not improve the situation as intakes for technical education and engineering were continuously tailored to meet government needs. Indeed, "before 1940, only about 300 Nigerians had had an opportunity to receive formal instruction and training for technical occupations."²¹

In light of the above problem of recruiting qualified and adequate personnel for the school, the authorities of the Ogbomosho People's Institute had no choice than to embark on a training scheme for the production of its own crafts teachers. Thus in 1944, the school could only "send a teacher to Maiduguri and Jos (in Northern Nigeria) to learn leather works including shoe-making."²² It is important to mention that the course was undertaken not in a formal school of learning but with established local craftsmen. Again, the sole beneficiary of the course was sponsored with funds provided by the Ogbomosho community resident in Jos.²³

Another major problem that the Ogbomosho People's Institute had to contend with was that of inadequate finance. Since it was a community project, the Ogbomosho People's Institute from incep-

tion relied on community funds for survival. The continuous flow of funds depended on the willingness to give and the unanimous support of all sections of the town. However, it was only the Baptist section that was forthcoming on a continuous basis in its financial obligation towards the upkeep of the school. The Church Missionary Society, other Christian missions, and the colonial administration were lukewarm towards the provision of finance for the school to be placed on a sound and proper footing. The Muslim population were engrossed with contributions towards the construction of a central mosque in Ogbomosho; consequently, the financial upkeep of the school was not a priority to them.

Therefore, distressing and discouraging was the financial situation of the Ogbomosho People's Institute that Oyerinde wrote in August 1940, "in my deep consideration, Ogbomosho is not prepared for such big work."²⁴ As a result, a move was made to close down the school. This however, could be said to be the beginning of the end for the Ogbomosho People's Institute as classes were drastically reduced. Furthermore, the departure of Eyo Ita to Calabar in 1940 to assume full control of the West African People's Institute led to the closing down of the secondary section of the Ogbomosho People's Institute in 1942.²⁵ Eyo Ita's relocation to Calabar was facilitated by the fact that the colonial administration had refused to approve the Ogbomosho People's Institute as long as Eyo Ita remained its principal and also that of the West African People's Institute. In 1943, a year after Eyo Ita's exit, "the Department of Education approved the Ogbomosho People's Institute for the issue of First School Leaving Certificate and in the next year, a grant of £100 from the funds of the Ogbomosho Native Authority was given to it."²⁶

It will not be wrong to argue at this point that the approval of the Ogbomosho People's Institute as

¹⁹ J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. 31. Also, note 14 above.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123-24.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Ogbomosho People's Institute Records

²³ Mr. J. O. Oloyede was the sole beneficiary of the training scheme. See Ogbomosho People's Institute Records.

²⁴ See Ogbomosho People's Institute Records.

²⁵ B. A. Agiri, "Chief N. D. Oyerinde and the Political, Social and Economic Development of Ogbomosho 1916-1951", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1) (December, 1979), 101

²⁶ Osun Division 1/1 File No. 51 Vols. 8 and 9, Annual Reports Northern District, 1943 and 1944, N.A.I.

a First School Leaving Certificate awarding institution was a tacit approval by the colonial British Administration of the American system of education in Nigeria. When he was being congratulated for the award of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) at a meeting of the Native Authority Councillors from Ibadan Northern District on 9 July 1947, N. D. Oyerinde emphasised that he wished his school, the People's Institute, had been helped instead of the honour done him.²⁷

In accordance with the desires of the local populace, the tacit rejection of Oyerinde's school by the Ogbomoso people showed their preference for a school, which was completely devoted to literary education. However, in 1943, a woman instructor was employed to teach weaving in the school,²⁸ and, by 1945, the demand for a secondary grammar school was at its peak again in Ogbomoso. Furthermore, by 1952, the new Ogbomoso High School was inaugurated "and housed within the buildings of the Ogbomosho People's Institute which was finally phased out in 1954."²⁹ Thus, the attempt to transfer the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes ideas and models to Nigeria by N. D. Oyerinde suffered a major setback. In all, Oyerinde can be described as a man with lofty ideas who lived before his time. The focus of this essay shall now be shifted to discussing the contributions of another illustrious son of Nigeria to the growth and development of education in colonial southern Nigeria.

2. EYO ITA AND EDUCATION IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Eyo Ita was born on January, 1903 at Creek town in Calabar.³⁰ He attended Methodist School Oron, Duke Town School, and Hope Waddell

Training Institute Calabar. It will be recalled that the Hope Waddell Training Institute was the only institution in Nigeria that had consistently over many decades from 1895, offered industrial and vocational education alongside literary education and teacher training.³¹

Eyo Ita left the shores of Nigeria for the United States in 1931, and on arrival there he got admitted into Columbia University, New York, where he studied Philosophy.³² It is important to note that as at the time he left for the United States, Nigerians who had studied and obtained higher degrees in the United States were less than twenty.³³ While he was in the United States, Eyo Ita met Nnamdi Azikiwe who also was studying journalism at Columbia University. He also met George Washington Carver – the renowned African-American inventor and scientist whose works had a great impact on the thinking of Eyo Ita. Furthermore, he was imbued with the American values of love for work, of being a producer rather than a consumer, which his colonial background encouraged. Eyo Ita later adopted this philosophy in operating his school, the West African Peoples Institute, when it was opened. To demonstrate his admiration of the Hampton and Tuskegee models, Eyo Ita abandoned his doctoral degree work and enrolled for a Post Graduate Diploma in Education at Columbia University. The aim was to arm himself with a teaching qualification that would enable him to establish and run such schools in Nigeria.³⁴

It is important to mention at this juncture that the timely completion of his degrees and diploma programmes in the United States of America attracted the attention of the colonial office in London and the colonial administration in Nigeria. This development raised the issue of the

²⁷ Ibadan Division 1/1 1985 Vol. II. Divisional Council Meetings. Minutes of the Divisional Councillors' Meeting held at Ejigbo on Wednesday 9 July, 1947, NAI.

²⁸ Osun Division 1/1 File No. 51 Vols. 7 and 8, Annual Reports Northern Districts, 1939 and 1943, NAI.

²⁹ Osun Division 1/1 file No. 68/2. Handing over notes, Ogbomoso district, NAI; handing over notes Mr. A. N. Fenn to Mr. W. S. Smith, Divisional Officer, Osogbo 19 October, 1953.

³⁰ Eyo Ita, *Heralds of Dawn*. Calabar, Hope Waddell Press, 1962. Also, Lawrence Eyo Ita, "Biography of Professor Eyo Ita" *The Wapian Torch*, a magazine of the West African People's Institute. Calabar, Maiden Jubilee issue, 1988.

³¹ J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism...* op. cit., 218-220.

³² J. H. Enemugwem, "Eyo Ita: A Nigerian Nationalist, 1903-1972." An unpublished M. A. project accepted by the Department of History, University of Port-Harcourt, June 1992.

³³ J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism...* op. cit., 242.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 24-25.

credibility of American degrees and doubled the doubts in British minds as well as accentuating the lack of confidence in such degrees, which they (the British) had been displaying all along. Before he finally returned to Nigeria in 1934, he stopped over in London at the invitation of the British Government and without hesitation registered for a Master of Arts degree in philosophy at the University of London. This invitation was extended to him because the British Government wanted to certify that he was academically sound and fit. To their dismay, Eyo Ita came out tops during the written examinations and performed outstandingly well during the oral defence of his thesis. It was only after this that the British Government recognised him as a sound scholar.³⁵

By 1934, Eyo Ita resumed work at Ogbomoso, and as mentioned earlier, he joined Oyerinde to direct the setting up of the Ogbomoso People's Institute while at the same time he was directing the establishment of the more famous West African People's Institute (WAPI) in Calabar.³⁶ Before discussing the founding and operational model of the West African People's Institute, it is necessary to highlight the educational philosophy of Eyo Ita and how this influenced the educational sub-sector of the Nigerian society.

In 1936, Eyo Ita inspired his colleagues and contemporaries such as N. D. Oyerinde, Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alvan Ikoku, to mention but a few including many ethnic unions to form the National Education Movement. The movement aimed primarily at setting up model schools based on communal help in the country. "The various schools' curricula were to be based on African background of cultural renaissance, morality and African languages which express the virtues of the black man."³⁷ As a matter of fact, the schools were to be patterned along the Hampton and

Tuskegee model i.e. the integration of academic study with training in industrial skill. The ultimate aim was to develop a dignified personality in the pupils to enable them lead their societies well and undertake the reconstruction scheme.³⁸

The National Education Movement also aimed at establishing schools that would train youths in rudimentary technology. A liberal education in the arts and technology at the grassroots was to be pursued using the tools and technical traditions of Europe and America adapted to suit the Nigerian environment. This invariably was to ensure that Nigeria had broad-minded citizens before attaining independence and also to "attain elaborate industrialisation and economies of scale in production and distribution through mechanised agriculture, banking and manufacturing."³⁹ Eyo Ita argued that "such economic substratum was to bridge the gap of social inequality, eliminate poverty among Nigerians and become the base of the political superstructure."⁴⁰

The actions of Eyo Ita within the National Education Movement influenced some other Nigerians within the organisation to establish schools, such as Aggrey Memorial Grammar School, Lagos City College, Ibadan Boys High School, Eko Boys High School, and Kalabari National College. This development caused panic amongst the colonial officials in Nigeria and it "brought colonial provocations and suppression into immense focus."⁴¹ Owing to this reason, most of the schools listed above had to pattern their syllabuses along the British model and in return were rewarded monetarily in grant-in-aid to help them sustain the syllabuses.⁴²

Eyo Ita's contributions to the development of education in colonial southern Nigeria can be vividly seen in the curricula and organisational

³⁵ J. H. Enemugwem, "Eyo Ita: A Nigerian Nationalist, 1903-1972". An unpublished M. A. project accepted by the Department of History, University of Port-Harcourt, June 1992, 25.

³⁶ Ogbomoso People's Institute Records. See also J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 218 - 220.

³⁷ J. F. Ade-Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School in Nigeria", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. (JHSN) II (4) (December, 1963), 532.

³⁸ Uma O. Eleazu, *Federalism and Nation Building The Nigerian Experience, 1954-1964*. Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1977, 117, 130. Also see J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 218-220.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Eyo Ita, *National Youth Renaissance*. Calabar, Hope Waddell Press, 1965, 28.

⁴¹ Ade-Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School in Nigeria..." op. cit., 532.

⁴² Ben T. Olom, "Remembering A Sage", *Nigerian Chronicle*, Calabar (November 7, 1988), 7.

set-up of the National Institute Calabar – a school which he founded in 1938 with moral and financial support from the Calabar Improvement League (C.I.L).⁴³ In accordance with his educational philosophy, he ensured that the pupils received a comprehensive education that would make them useful not only to themselves but to the society as a whole. Above all, the students were made to participate in manual work as this will make them appreciate the dignity of labour, which was in accordance with the motto of the school i.e. *Labor Omnia Vincit* i.e. “Labour Overcometh All Things.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, unlike the practice in government owned colonial schools that operated a three-term year and a six-year calendar, the National Institute Calabar operated a unique four-term school year and a four-year programme for pupils who had completed the standard-six curriculum in the primary school. The students of the school were organised into industrial clubs of their choice. This was done apparently to encourage them to form co-operative societies and industrial companies at the end of their training. This, it was believed, would make them have easy access to loans from financial institutions.⁴⁵ Eyo Ita also introduced the administration of multiple choice test questions into the Nigerian education system. The questions usually covered all topics of a subject to ensure that students were adequately and sufficiently familiar with their subjects. However, many students dropped out of the National Institute before they reached the final year because they could not obtain the sixty percent pass mark fixed by Eyo Ita.⁴⁶

In the early months of 1942, the students of the school embarked on a protest within the school premises. This protest was prompted by the student’s demand to be registered for the Senior

Cambridge Examinations like their counterparts in government owned schools. This demand was predicated on the reality of that time. At that time, only holders of the Senior Cambridge qualification could be absorbed into the colonial civil service and mercantile offices. An immediate repercussion of the student’s protest was the introduction by the management of the school of early morning lesson on block moulding from cement. This, the management believed, would make the students appreciate better the dignity of labour and vocational studies.⁴⁷ No doubt, this represented a fundamental change in the administration of the school. As if this was not enough, another incident that brought a permanent change to the existence of the school occurred during the long Christmas vacation of 1942. The school buildings and machines were burnt by alleged arsonists whom the management claimed never liked the operational mode of the school. This singular event made the National Institute, Calabar a subject for the pages of history books.⁴⁸

From the experiences of N.D. Oyerinde in Ogbomoso and Eyo Ita in Calabar, it can be asserted that the colonial authorities never encouraged industrial education in Nigeria as was the case in Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes in the United States. Again, the preference and enthusiasm of the local populace for British certificates and white-collar jobs further dampened the morale of the well-meaning Nigerians who were prepared to train the youths in agriculture and industrial education.⁴⁹ However, Eyo Ita, rather than being discouraged by the burning of his school and the attitude of the pioneer students, summoned courage, mobilised men, money and materials, and reopened the school in 1943 on the grounds of his uncompleted personal house but changed the name of the school to West African People’s

⁴³ For further reading see *The Story of Old Calabar: A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency Calabar*. Lagos, National Commissions for Museum and Monuments, 1986, 201-202.

⁴⁴ For further reading see, A. Wayfarer, “Do You Support the National School Project?”. *The African Advertiser*. Calabar (3 July, 1938).

⁴⁵ See Eyo Ita, *Reconstruction Towards Wider Integration: A Theory of Social Symbiosis*. Calabar, WAPI Press, 1949, 1-13, 13-14.

⁴⁶ See “Extracts from the Report of the Senior Education Officer, Calabar, 1940”, National Museum Old Residency, Calabar.

⁴⁷ Eyo Ita, *Reconstruction Towards Wider Integration: A Theory of Social..* op. cit., 61-66.

⁴⁸ “The National Institute Calabar,” National Museum, Old Residency, Calabar. Also see the Duke Town School Record, Vol. XXXIII. 8, October, 1949.

⁴⁹ For further reading see Eyo Ita, *A Decade of National Education Movement*. Calabar, WAPI, 1949, 14-16.

Institute (WAPI) with the same aims and objectives. The new name was in line with his educational and nationalistic belief that the whole of the West Africa region should be freed from the bondage of colonialism at the same time.⁵⁰

It is also worth mentioning that Eyo Ita introduced an essential component of democracy in the schools which he administered by encouraging the election of school prefects by secret ballot among the teaching staff. This differed from what was obtained in the public colonial school where prefects were imposed on the generality of the students and teachers by the Head-Teacher.⁵¹ The contributions of Eyo Ita to the development of the educational sector of Nigeria between 1951 and 1960 when he served as a legislator, Minister, and Leader of Government Business in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, shall now be reviewed briefly. First, Eyo Ita in his desire to have as many Nigerians as possible educated initiated a scholarship scheme which he extended to all Nigerians. Hence, two hundred and twenty nine university scholarships mostly for science and technology were awarded in 1952 with fifty-seven female recipient.⁵² Second, all post-primary schools that were not approved including his own West African People's Institute Calabar got government approval and as would be expected a master plan to introduce comprehensive education for all the post-primary schools was also initiated.

Again, Eyo Ita pioneered the idea of a free, compulsory universal primary education (UPE). The blueprint for this scheme among other things emphasised the production of qualitative teachers and the expansion of existing facilities for teacher training. To ensure the early take-off of the scheme, at the least possible cost, he curtailed public expenditure on government officials. However, Nnamdi Azikiwe's failure to capture political power in the Western Region brought to an abrupt end Eyo Ita's

rule in the Eastern Region and this made his UPE programme that would have effectively taken off from the 1953 – 1954 financial year moribund.⁵³

Eyo Ita was a man with vision whose educational ideas had its tap root in the American model which he hoped to transplant in Nigeria. In an attempt to fulfil his aim and aspiration, he agitated for the formulation and implementation of a national system of education patterned after the American model. As a former Federal Minister of Education rightly pointed out, some of his agitations and activities within the educational sector of Nigeria have manifested in the formulation of the National Policy on Education.⁵⁴ Furthermore, his call for the introduction of a free and compulsory universal primary education can be said to have taken its roots from the American system where education is regarded as a fundamental right of every child and not a privilege. Also, his call for mass adult literacy and women education was meant to eliminate ignorance, eradicate mass illiteracy and poverty and also help in the rapid transformation of the society. Although he achieved limited success, the contributions of Eyo Ita to the growth and development of education in colonial southern Nigeria cannot be underestimated. At this point, our discussion shall be focused on the activities of Nnamdi Azikiwe who also studied in the United States and his contributions to the development of education in colonial southern Nigeria.

3. BENJAMIN NNAMDI AZIKWE: THE FAILED DREAM AND EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN COLONIAL NIGERIA

Events, circumstances and personalities in most cases bear a lot of influence on the choice of future career by young persons. This was the case with Azikiwe who took after James E. K. Aggrey, his role model. Azikiwe first met Aggrey who was

⁵⁰ Asuquoanwan Eremie, "An Ode To A Great Man", *Wapian Torch*, 5-7. Also see, Esang Nsa Bassey, "Professor Eyo Ita: A Neglected Hero," B.A. (Hons) History Long Essay submitted to the Department of History, University of Calabar, 1980.

⁵¹ Eyo Ita, *A Decade of National Education Movemen*, 3-4.

⁵² Eastern House of Assembly Debates, Official Report, First Session, January-July, 1952, 63. Also, Second Session, 1953, vol. 1, 6, 68 and 76.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁵⁴ Professor Jibril Aminu made this remark in his opening address given at the Golden Jubilee celebration of the WAPI Calabar on Saturday 13th November, 1988. See also, Abasittai, M. B. "The Life and Works of Professor Eyo Ita: Founder of WAPI and First Leader of Government Business in the Eastern Region (1951-53)," an unpublished lecture delivered at the golden jubilee celebration of the West African People's Institute Calabar on 13th November, 1988.

the only African member of the Phelps-Stokes Commission that visited West Africa in 1920. It is on record that Azikiwe was determined, and he had a deep sense of commitment to fulfil his desires for the advancement of education in Africa. This informed his role as a proponent of American educational thought and strategy not only in Nigeria but also in Africa as a whole. The most thoroughly embraced influences on Azikiwe in America were those of pragmatism, individual philanthropy, liberal democracy, and rugged individualism, which he hoped to teach fellow Africans on his return.⁵⁵ Azikiwe's movement from one university to another could be said to be a deliberate attempt by him to fulfil his ambition "[...] to study the administrative phases of education (in the United States) especially as it affects the African educational problem[...]"⁵⁶

Nnamdi Azikiwe could be said to have gathered much knowledge and experience about the American system of education after which he planned to return to Nigeria. He sought employment as a teacher in government and missionary schools in the West Africa sub-region including Achimota College but he was rejected virtually everywhere he applied. He believed that his rejection not only reflected racial discrimination but also the "official British suspicion of mission educated Africans and Africans educated in America. Such people, Azikiwe was convinced were assumed to be disloyal and anti-British."⁵⁷ His rejections notwithstanding, Azikiwe was determined to return to Africa where he would start a school that would serve as "a nucleus for a university."⁵⁸

To fulfil this ambition, and while still in America, Azikiwe proposed to establish at Monrovia in Liberia a university that would admit students from all corners of Africa. The university

was to be structured and operated after the American model. Later events showed that Nnamdi Azikwe found this plan unrealistic because funding for this project was not forthcoming from philanthropic Americans. Azikiwe planned to return home to establish a University of Nigeria, which he hoped would be funded by patriotic and philanthropic Nigerians.

Based on the above, Azikiwe proceeded to make elaborate plans for the establishment of a university of his dream. Available evidence has shown that his plans "...were thoroughly American in concept and detail. There would be thirteen faculties including education, commerce, journalism, agriculture, and technology, and degrees in most fields through the Ph.D."⁵⁹ The success of the fund-raising activities by Wilberforce University in Ohio proved a good example of how Nnamdi Azikiwe hoped to raise funds for his projects.⁶⁰ This money, he hoped would be enough for the running of the university.

The immediate problem that Azikiwe had to contend with was that of insufficient working capital. To overcome this, he made direct contacts by letters with his African and American friends soliciting for funds. A portion of the letter he sent out read thus:

"For eight years (1925 – 1933), I have laboured and struggled in the United States to secure an education for service to those who are not privileged as I have been. My tutelage is invaluable and I feel that no greater service could I render to African youths than to share with them the joys of my new life in the West. Towards the realization of my aims and dreams, it is proposed to establish an institution in West Africa for the intellectual and manual education of Africans, male and female[...]"⁶¹

⁵⁵ See Azikiwe's "Solemn Vow" for the New Year, 1934, in *My Odyssey*, 174, 121-22.

⁵⁶ Azikiwe to Anson Phelps Stokes, January 12, 1929, Azikiwe Correspondence Files (PSFA). The letter was written by Azikiwe to express his gratitude for the funds the Phelps-Stokes Foundation gave him and the assistance of Mr. Anson Phelps-Stokes to his obtaining a scholarship at Howard.

⁵⁷ Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 181. For more information about Azikiwe's search for job in West Africa while still in the United States, see the correspondence between Jones Harms Vischer (Secretary of the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on African Education) and E. R. J. Hussey (Director of Education for Nigeria) in Azikiwe Correspondence Files, PSFA, New York.

⁵⁸ Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 167.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 168.

⁶⁰ The Wilberforce University had successfully embarked on fund raising campaign by listing the donors/contributors to the fund on a Special Roll of Honour.

⁶¹ Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 168.

However, Azikiwe failed to raise sufficient working capital as most of his respondents failed to honour his request for financial assistance. He thus refunded the little money to those who contributed and considered his “pet scheme for the founding of a University of Nigeria thwarted.”⁶² This made him turn his attention to journalism to earn a livelihood, since no future was immediately open to him in education in spite of its centrality and vitality to the socio-economic and political development of Africa.

It is noteworthy that Azikiwe took advantage of any opportunity in addition to the use of his writing skills and position to propagate the cause of higher education and the American education model in Nigeria. For instance, in his book, *Renasant Africa*, he argued for a greater role for the educated and mentally liberated youths, and in considering the higher education question, he threw down a challenge thus:

“Give the renascent African a university, you who are capable of financing same. With twelve million pounds, there is no reason why the best libraries, laboratories, professors, cannot be produced right here, and this continent can become overnight ‘A Continent of Light’.”⁶³

This challenge further attracted comments from some other Nigerians who noted that Azikiwe’s express mission was to awaken the taste for higher education among Nigerians.⁶⁴ This was particularly so because at the time he returned to Africa, the agitations by nationalists for higher education had started receiving the attention of the colonial authorities.

As secretary of the West African press delegation to the United Kingdom, Azikiwe propagated the cause of a functional education for Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole. Azikiwe opined that education should be the first point of reforms in post-war reconstruction in British West Africa. He argued further that education should be “designed to fit the citizen to his environment; to enable him

fulfil his obligations and responsibilities as a citizen; to develop him intellectually and socially; to train him as a useful member of society; to train him for a trade or profession.”⁶⁵ This shows clearly that Azikiwe was firmly committed to the adoption of American concepts of education in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. He was also ready to do all within his capacity to ensure the implementation of these concepts particularly in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. However, it is on record that Azikiwe was unable to realise his dream until Nigeria achieved independence from the British in 1960.

CONCLUSION

On a final note, it can be argued that Eyo Ita, N. D. Oyerinde, and Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe had lofty ideas on how to develop a self-reliant citizenry through a system of education that would ensure the production of a generation of hard-working, selfless, and creative Nigerians who could provide their own basic needs and those of their fellow Nigerians. However, these men could be said to have lived before their time. This was because a greater number of Nigerians during the period under review preferred pure academic schools and certificates obtained from the colonial government public schools, which enabled them to secure clerkship positions in colonial government establishments and the various commercial houses. These men encouraged the acquisition of practical education that enabled graduates of such schools to be self-reliant and self-employed. The study has also shown that the philosophy of education of Eyo Ita, N. D. Oyerinde and Nnamdi Azikiwe greatly influenced the direction of educational policies in present-day Nigeria. Today, school’s curriculums in Nigeria are heavily tilted towards the mixture of academic, industrial and vocational education. Conclusively, the personalities must be credited with their individual efforts in laying the foundation for the eventual take-off of a semblance of American educational model in Nigeria.

⁶² Ibid, 170. However, Nnamdi Azikiwe was able to establish the university of his dream in October 1960. For details see Michael M. Ogbeyi, “The Nsukka Project: Nnamdi Azikiwe and the Establishment of the University of Nigeria”. *Lagos Historical Review*, 2 (2002) 81-95.

⁶³ Azikiwe, *Renasant Africa*, 140.

⁶⁴ This comment was made in an article by O. Ikejiani and J. O. Anowi, “Nigerian Universities” in Ikejiani, O. (ed.), *Education in Nigeria*. New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, 131.

⁶⁵ See West African Press Delegation to Great Britain, “The Atlantic Charter and British West Africa: Memorandum on Post-War Reconstruction of the Colonies and Protectorates of British Africa”. August 1943.