

# **Secondary Education in Ekiti State: The Functional Perspective**

**By**

**Prof Francisca Olu Aladejana**  
**Director, Institute of Education**  
**Faculty of Education**  
**Obafemi Awolowo University**  
**Ile-Ife, Nigeria**  
**faladeja@yahoo.com**

All Protocols duly observed

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you to present this paper as part of efforts to move the status of education forward in our home state, Ekiti State, truly the Fountain of Knowledge. I specially appreciate the Governor, His Excellency, Dr Kayode Fayemi and the Honourable Commissioner of Education, Science & Technology, Dr (Mrs) Eniola Ajayi for giving me this great opportunity to render this service.

## **Introduction**

Given the strategic place of secondary education in the Nigerian educational system, it is important that it should be “near-perfect” in both standard and quality. There are major issues with what we have on ground. It is therefore pertinent that all stakeholders in the education business should wake up to their responsibilities by way of playing their roles as government, as groups, and as individuals, in providing for the needs of the secondary schools, and to keep all eyes on this level of education so that it does not collapse.

## **The Strategic Position of Secondary Education**

The present state of secondary education in the country and particularly in Ekiti State should be of major concern recognising its strategic position in the national educational system. Secondary education stands as a change-over bridge receiving primary school leavers at one end and turning out her products mostly as freshmen and women for postsecondary education at the other end. This consumer and producer status implies that secondary education must provide the right type of education such that products of these schools are dually prepared to acquire the necessary skills to find employment and on the other hand are prepared to continue with academic careers in higher education. Based on the present design of the curriculum, the Junior Secondary School should prepare students to take from the options of proceeding to senior secondary education, technical education, training at vocational training centres or apprenticeship schemes out of the formal school system; while the Senior Secondary takes charge of preparation for higher education.

Secondary education is quite significant and is an instrument par excellence for national development as exemplified by the following objectives in the National Policy on Education; Section 4 Subsection 18 (FRN, 2004):

- Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex or social, religious, and ethnic background;
- Diversify its curriculum to cater for difference in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course;
- Equip students to live effectively in the modern age of science and technology;
- Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as world's cultural heritage;
- Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under the broad national aims, and live as good citizens;
- Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite in diversity;
- Inspire students with a desire for achievement and self improvement at school and in late life.

### **The Standard of Secondary Education**

It is therefore imperative that certain standards must be met in order to attain the best from the Nigerian secondary schools. These are the norms and specifications required to achieve desired learning experiences which will ultimately lead to the award of a qualification. Thus, *standard* can be described as the input into the system while the resultant output or finished product from the schools is the *quality*. So which of these two is really falling, the standard or the quality? Standard includes the curriculum, teachers that help learners to interact with the curriculum as well as the physical and abstract environment that engender the delivery of the curriculum, while the quality describes the degree of competency and performance of the graduated students who hold the prescribed certificates.

The historical National Conference in 1972 led to the first indigenous curriculum – the National Policy on Education, 1977. This NPE was reviewed in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2007. The 6-3-3-4 system of education consisting of 6years of primary-3years of junior secondary-3years of senior secondary-4years of higher education was launched in 1983 to replace the post-colonial Universal Primary Education (UPE). The 1990 National Conference led to the establishment of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) signed into law in 2004. The current 9-3-4 system was launched in 2004, the curriculum of the 9year basic education (primary and junior secondary) have been released by the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC). An overview of the secondary school curriculum shows that it specifies in great depth the content to be taught, pedagogy or how it is to be taught and assessment of how much students have learnt.

A comparative analysis of the current JSS curriculum with the past Forms 1 and 2 curricula of the 60s and 70s reveal that the content has been improved and expanded considerably to include Introductory Technology, Computer Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Social Studies and Integrated not General Science. The senior secondary which receives the end-product of the JSS has also diversified the curriculum with a core curriculum where every student takes all the six core subjects, plus a minimum of two and a maximum of three from the list of elective subjects (resulting in a minimum of eight and a maximum of nine subjects). Students have a wide range of subjects to select from such as Economics, Government, Accounts, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Agricultural Science, Food and Nutrition, Fine Art, English Language, Literature in English, Yoruba Language,

French, Religious Studies, Technical Drawing, Commerce, Bookkeeping/Accounting, Woodwork, Metalwork, Geography, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, and History.

Thus, the Senior Secondary student may be choosing from over a range of 25 subjects with improved content as against about 10-15 in the past. Given all these provisions, should the standard of education be regarded as fallen curriculum-wise? The likely answer may be, “no, look elsewhere” and the where else may call for an examination of other inputs invested in education or contributions at the disposal of education. The opinion of evaluation theorist, Daniel Stufflebeam (1971) may assist to raise and answer further questions about standard of secondary education in Nigeria. Stufflebeam who designed the programme evaluation model tagged CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product Model of Evaluation) regards *context* as the curriculum, *input* as the learners, staffing (teachers) and resources (requirements, funding and physical requirements), *process* as intervention, strategies and how input is used and *product* as the outcome (the learners and what they have learnt) (Stufflebeam and Shinkfeild, 2002). Standard is determined by the context, input and process of the educational system while product determines the quality. Although the context aspect of secondary education standard can be adjudged as fairly good, this does not necessarily imply that the curriculum is perfect rather the curriculum is expected to be reviewed regularly to accommodate changes and reform.

The current secondary curricula have been expanded to include family life education, HIV & AIDS education, Computer education, drug prevention education, basic African cultural knowledge, cultural and creative arts and Nigerian history, (FME, 2004); all of which are important for the wholesome development of the child. However, I would want to suggest the inclusion of moral education to address the problem of decaying moral values of our younger generation. Since the secondary education should produce candidates for higher education as well as those who may not be able to go further but can become self employed, then, there should be the introduction of entrepreneurship as a subject in secondary school as well as the need for the introduction of skills acquisition like Needlework and Dressmaking, Practical Agriculture, Library period (to develop reading habit), Hairdressing and other important ones. It is also being suggested that nationally, there should be regular review of the curriculum to involve stakeholders of the system to bring in ideas about other aspects of education that can bring about wholesome development of a child.

This paper will be looking at other issues related to standard – the input and process as well as the product/quality with a view to achieving effective learning and ultimately making secondary education in Ekiti State functional and sustainable. It will also look at the “opportunity-to-learn” and “delivery standards”

### **The quality of secondary education**

A quality secondary school should prepare all students to succeed; it must therefore graduate students who are prepared for higher education and a career. Students’ learning outcomes could be regarded as indexes of output, product or quality of education. This implies that the success or otherwise of any educational policy or system could be determined by the performances of the learners after the course of study. This is where the idea of summative evaluation fits i.e. evaluation

conducted at the end of a long period of study, which is cumulative, comprehensive, valid and reliable (Hopkins, 1997). Such responsibility of the evaluation is bequeathed on organised examinations bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) which conduct certification examinations for Senior Secondary School students. The results of these bodies are often used to make decisions and overall evaluation of the success or otherwise of the secondary education system at one time or the other. In this case, quality (output) is misconstrued as standard. This then implies that the result of secondary school certificate examination is the product of investments - standard of curriculum, personnel, resources and logistics) in secondary education or put succinctly the output of secondary education is the index of its quality.

The quality of output of secondary education in Nigeria in recent time has been consistently very poor. Statistics released by WAEC for the May/June 2010 WASSCE show that 250,487 candidates representing 80.78% have two credits and above; 217,161 candidates (70.03), have three credits and above; while 180,480 candidates (58.20), have four credits and above. Furthermore, 141,167 candidates (45.52%), obtained five credits and above, while 99,750 candidates (32.16%) obtained six credits and above. A total of 133,507 candidates (43.06%) obtained credit and above in English, while 151,569 candidates (48.88%) obtained credit and above in Mathematics. From the total number of candidates who sat for the examination, however, only 62,295 candidates, representing (20.04%) obtained credits in English language, Mathematics and at least three other subjects., (Uwadiae, 2010). These are indeed the qualified ones to be admitted into higher education.

The same high failure rate was recorded in the NECO SSCE, where a total of 256, 840 candidates registered for the 25 subjects offered by NECO, with a total of 51, 781 candidates obtaining credit pass in English. This represents just 20.161 per cent while mathematics recorded credit passes of 87, 508 candidates or 34.1%. According to the NECO Registrar/Chief Executive Officer, Prof. Promise Okpala, who announced the results at its headquarters, described the results as not encouraging. Physics recorded only 398 successful candidates out of the 99, 621 that sat for the subject, which is 0.3%. Similarly, mass failure was recorded in Literature in English, Physical Education, Geography, Government and Christian Religious Studies, which recorded between 1.0 per cent to 1.9% credit passes. Only 1.8% got five credits, including English and Mathematics. It was the poorest result in the history of the examination body. This strongly indicates failure in terms of output (quality).

Urgent steps need to be taken to improve performance in external examinations if our students must access higher education and also be able to compete favourably internationally. Teachers are very important in this matter. Now that most students are non-boarders, the school may keep the students until evening for preparatory evening reading, completion of home works and possibly extra lessons. Home work must be given regularly to keep students working hard. Continuous assessments must be done as required not once like end of term examinations in various forms to ensure that students are adequately tested.

By implication, our secondary schools had played its role as the recipient of primary school leavers, but may not be able to provide enough number and quality of entrants into tertiary education as it is expected. This ultimately will affect the quality of higher education as well as complicate issues of

drop-out from the educational system to aggravate the problem of miscreants in the society. This is a situation that Ekiti state must address with urgency as the Fountain of knowledge for the country.

### **The Functional Perspective**

The primary goal of the Nigerian educational system is to provide functional education for the nation, so that the products of the educational system can be employable or be self-employed.

#### **Achieving Functional Secondary Education**

For any education to be functional, it does not just provide education for its own sake to enrich the individual's knowledge to develop his personality, but it is geared towards preparing the individual to undertake specific tasks and employment function essential for the transformation of the society based on educational policies designed to achieve specific national objectives. Sustainability has been defined by the Brundtland Commission, formally the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), of the United Nations (1987) as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable therefore implies ability to maintain, hold up and keep going. It is the education that is functional that needs to be sustained. Such education must possess excellent standard and quality, which presently our secondary education can boast of. What then can this government do to achieve functional and sustainable secondary education? Let us turn our attention to some salient issues.

#### **Teachers and Teaching**

Teachers have been identified as the singular most important factor in learning and can be said to be at the heart of education. According to the NPE (2007), no educational system can rise beyond the quality of its teachers. There is also a significant relationship in quantity and quality of teachers and students' academic performance. Therefore, in order to find solution to the problems hindering effective functioning of secondary education, a look must be taken at the quality of teacher interaction and delivery. Situations where some teachers are not masters of the subject they teach, cannot communicate effectively, show dedication and commitment to duty do not augur well for education. Some teachers are unqualified in terms of not having the required teacher training or in extreme cases teaching a subject for which one is not trained. Nothing has changed as teachers still present themselves as the repertoire of knowledge and the students the dormant recipients with the rote method continuing. The response of students to good classroom instruction is in itself gratifying to the teacher.

Mckinsey & Co. 2007 Report on The World's Best Performing School Systems from the study of 25 of the world's school systems, including 10 of the top performers, opined that the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction. They all shared three key strategies for improving instruction, two of the three key solutions highlighted focus on the teacher: getting the right people to become teachers and developing them into effective instructors. The third strategy is ensuring the system is available to deliver the best possible instruction for every child. Instructions must move from outdated methods in which children are taught to memorise and take examinations about useless facts and figures that have no bearing with real life to teaching for understanding and application.

Teacher training institutions must recruit the right people not just anybody. Thus, individual teachers must become aware of specific weaknesses in their own practice and acquire the need to gain understanding of specific best practices. Our teachers must possess motivational and communication skills and should be helped to achieve effectiveness through continuous professional development. No matter how good the curriculum is, the quality of instruction the student receives will determine performance. The best educational policies can be made or marred by the quality of instruction. While appreciating that the government is doing a lot to improve the welfare of teachers, it is still important to mention that teachers should earn enough to live on and should be paid on time to motivate and encourage them. Individual teachers need to be motivated to make the necessary improvements; hence their remunerations should be competitive. It is important to note that the kind of remuneration the teacher gets can affect his attitude and morale and ultimately the type of interaction and encouragement that can be given to the students. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria should be further strengthened to accredit, register and enforce discipline amongst teachers.

### **Class size and Teacher-Pupil Ratio**

One major “input problem” in our schools is the extremely large class size, which is against the required standard. It is noteworthy that the National Policy on Education (NPE) recommends that an ideal classroom should have 40 pupils and that a teacher must be in charge the class at a given time – although this deviates from the UNESCO’s recommendation of teacher-pupil ratio of 1:30, which is believed would make teaching and learning efficient and effective better than a larger class. Unfortunately, this is less so, as there are classrooms which operated in ratio 1:90, where three arms of 30 students are put in a class for a single teacher to handle. Little meaningful learning and teaching can take place in such congested classes.

However, the irony of this is that there are many unemployed teachers outside the classroom begging for appointments. Should we then say that Nigeria is short of teachers? May be not, as it seems that Nigeria has more than enough unemployed teachers and regrettably many of the employed ones do not attend school punctually and regularly, especially those in the cities who may have one business or the other. The teachers in the rural areas should be given extra incentive and encouragement to work effectively and not to work at their own convenience.

### **School Factors**

Some factors of the school are very pertinent to how well it can provide functional and sustainable education.

**Population size** is one of such factors. According to Rodger (2000), although no research has found any significant relationship between school population size and academic achievement, size has been found to affect some other aspects of the school system. Small school environment has been found to favour more positive student attitudes, lower incidences of negative social behaviour and a greater variety of co-curricular activities than large schools. Also, high attendance statistics, greater sense of belonging and interpersonal relations among students and teachers all favour small schools over larger ones. All these I remember and agree with, with great nostalgia of my experience in my alma

mater, St Louis Girls Grammar School, Ikere-Ekiti. I therefore support the current move of breaking big schools into smaller ones with different Principals to head them. I want to suggest a maximum of three arms of 30-40 students per class for the three classes in the junior and senior secondary schools. A big school may therefore consist of two or more smaller schools within the same compound.

**Mode of access** into the secondary schools is equally important. The present policy which recommends the first nine years as free and compulsory basic education (involving the 6-year primary and 3-year junior secondary education) virtually leaves the state government little or no choice to absorb all products of the primary schools. This places a lot of burden on the teacher who has to deal with some very poor students, but this is where a lot of commitment to assist learners come as well as guidance and counseling services to guide students in their choice of career – academic, vocational or technical. However, given the scenario of what we have in the country, where there are the Federal Government Colleges and Private secondary schools, primary school leavers will take various entrance examinations into these schools. Among the State schools, there are some schools that are considered special by the parents and pupils and to which of most these will want to make as their choice. The only objective criteria for placement will therefore be the use of common entrance examinations.

At this juncture, one might be tempted to ask if there is any need for special state schools like Government colleges and Government Science Colleges. My response to this question will be no and I will try to justify this answer. Already there are special schools owned by the Federal Government, private organizations and individuals. Whosoever desires can opt out of the state schools and attend these ones at their own costs. What the state government needs to do is to upgrade the standard and quality of her schools to make them attractive for all to attend, this is one of the reasons we are here today. It is important that cognizance should be taken of the issue of ownership of schools. Federal Government, private organizations and individuals own schools all over the country, Ekiti state inclusive. We must also recognize that many of these schools are doing very well and government cannot restrict the choice of parents in accessing these schools for their children as the penchant for high-ups to educate their children abroad or in expensive private schools. My recommendation is for government to allow these schools to thrive and since there are many new schools now by missions, the state government may consider the return of schools to missions. However, the interest of teachers and students in such schools must be considered and they must be given a choice to remain in such schools after their return. Once the standard of public schools has been improved, there will not be any need to beg the people to send their children and wards there.

**The Boarding House Issue.** One of the major problems we have with secondary education currently is the issue of students not being able to stay in school, spend adequate time to read up after classes, do assignments and be involved in co-curricular activities. The entertainment world, media and technology have so much taken over that an average student is busy on the ipod, mobile phone music and text messages, on Facebook or tweeting, watching or discussing or sneaking out to watch the next Arsenal/ManU match, keyed to the internet, glued to the screen with cartoons, action movies, Nollywood and all kinds of distractions that abound for the learners. Students most times prefer to watch television rather than read their text books. The restoration of boarding house might be a way out of this crisis. This situation is compounded by the fact that many parents are absentee parents;

they are away all day and at times all night on business leaving the children to take important decisions and to the influence of their peers. Boarding house can provide stability not available in families where one or both parents travel or are virtually not at home due to work schedules. The Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) should enforce laws against media organisations that do not adhere to stipulated percentage of children-oriented programmes to be aired and that government media organisations should also blaze the trail by paying more attention to it.

Although boarding house removes students from home and requires adjustment into a new environment, the advantages are overwhelming. I was in a boarding house for my secondary education, and I can conveniently say that it can help to develop student's self-reliance and independence. Students are provided with regular supervised study periods, there are rules and regulations that helped to develop ones personality, the community atmosphere can foster relationships between students and teachers and among students themselves, and there are a variety of co-curricular and athletic activities that suit individual tastes.

There are only a few schools left in the state with boarding houses. If they are to serve the desired purposes, government must upgrade the standard of boarding schools by renovating the existing hostels and building many more. Facilities in these hostels must be good – water, light, sports, recreation and health facilities, feeding arrangements, opportunities to fulfill moral and religious obligations. If the conditions in the hostels are radically lower than the average home, they may be too stiff for the students to cope with and enjoy. It is important to have good boarding house masters and mistresses that will take care of the students under the supervision of the principal. Cost for the provision of good hostels can be much, the state government can seek the assistance of parents, old students, corporations, their immediate community and friends of the institutions like Publishing houses and banks. Boarding houses cannot be free as housing and feeding really are the responsibility of parents. Therefore, because of the various socio-economic statuses of parents, boarding houses should be made optional such that those who cannot afford it can be day students. The implication of this is that there should be catchment area placement based on students' choices such that they do not have to go long distances before getting to school.

**Effective school leadership and Supportive learning environment** are two of the nine characteristics of high performing schools identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007). Principals are expected to be able to manage the facilities, the teachers and the students such that there is discipline, good ethos and adequate provision and maintenance of resources. Principals should be adequately empowered to manage the schools and their capacity must be built and continuously enhanced through attendance of workshops, seminars and conferences. Also, the school must have a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. The government should enhance and encourage the school leadership to achieve this.

**Facilities** Just as teachers serve as human resources to secondary education, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computers and internet, playground, sick-bay, furniture etc are the physical resources (infrastructures) that could determine the success or failure of secondary education. Presently, many schools cannot boast of sufficient resources that could make teaching and learning conducive. Many of the buildings are old and need urgent repairs, furniture is inadequate, while other facilities that aid

learning, such as good library, computers and internet, laboratories, play ground, toilet facilities and potable water are often also conspicuously absent in the schools. Schools should be provided with adequate facilities such that students and staff have access to timely, relevant resources including up-to-date textbooks and current technology. It is in this type of environment that students can achieve, recognising that achievement is the measure of school success.

**The budget allocation** to the education sector especially the secondary school system is too meagre. For example, UNESCO recommends that a nation should devote 26% of her annual budget to education. But unfortunately, most states in Nigeria have never met this requirement over decades. As at 2010, only 6% of the Federal total budget and 9.35% of the Ekiti State budget were allocated to education; and this has very negative trickle down effects on the education sector. This may explain the infrastructural failures and the poor salary structures that are also in turn probably accounting for the dismal performance of secondary schools. Government should strictly observe the UNESCO's recommendation of 26 per cent of the nation's annual budget to the education sector.

There is no doubt that the cost of education is expensive but not when compared with what ignorance can cost. Given the limited resources of the government, there is the need for the involvement of stakeholders mainly the parents, community and old students. They can be actively engaged in supporting the schools in constructive ways. Government needs to accord the mechanism of Parent-Teachers Association as an instrument of state policy for the operation and management of such schools. Apart from finance, high levels of family and community involvement is required to provide all round education for the students, not just teachers and school staff.

**Effective monitoring and evaluation system** is imperative in schools to keep teachers and students in check. The principals, vice-principals and heads of departments may serve as internal supervisors while the Ministry of Education officers can serve as the external supervisors, who have the duties to ensure that high standards are maintained and the schools are run in accordance with the laid down regulations. Also this will help to ensure that adequate volume of work is done by the teachers and learners. Fair assessments monitor progress and truly measure what students know and can do. One of the nine characteristics of high performing schools identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) is frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programmes.

### **Attitude of students to learning**

**Ensuring children's happiness** now and in the future is becoming an urgent aim for education, recognising that schools are emotional places. Everyone remembers their school days through the rhythm of emotional highs and lows. Yet the "affective life" of schools is too often ignored in favour of the so-called "effectiveness" of specific pedagogies, leadership styles, and curriculum provisions that can be used to "improve" schooling. Meanwhile, through participation in diverse digital cultures and networked publics, young people are now increasingly immersed in virtual worlds and social networks that are saturated with feeling, excitement, enthusiasm and enjoyment. These participatory, networked experiences are more emotionally charged or affective and provide students with a lot of

fun. As a result, it is highly recommended that the education system should take the affective lives of youth seriously and work to make productive connections with the taught curriculum.

Research has recently indicated growing recognition of the important role of emotions, well-being and happiness in how well young people adjust to school, behave and perform academically. According to The Young Foundation Report (2010) on the state of happiness and its significant implications for education, there should be a shift in the language and practices of schooling from “effective” to “affective” methods. The world in which we live today is steeped in science and technology and governed by ever increasing discoveries, inventions and innovations. It is the world of the Internet and e-mails, video films, ipods, mobile phones, satellite television stations, supersonic jets, CAD/CAM, the robotics and biotechnologies. It is distant from the world of yesterday characterized by dogma, witch-craft, taboos and subjugation of human and natural phenomena. All these along with the world of media and entertainment have taken over the attention of our learners with their fun and excitement; while classrooms still remain what they used to be- passive, teacher-oriented non-participatory and irrelevant to the day to day activities of the learners, (Aladejana, 2007). Students must be able to have fun and enjoy the school. One major way is by making the classroom to become active, relevant, student-oriented and participatory. There is the urgent need to adopt media and computer assisted instruction in schools.

**Truancy and Absenteeism** are major problems of our secondary education system; this may not be unconnected with the fact that students find the outside world more fun and the school boring. If the school can also be fun and interesting may be the schools will be able to keep the students. The society also has contributed in no small measure to truancy and absenteeism. Many graduates are roaming the streets and cannot find jobs whereas people in business, uneducated and even some in shady projects are living flamboyant lives coupled with the fact that more often than not the society does not question the source of their money, but gives recognition and honour to money while degrees and certificates are not recognized. All these can discourage students from school. Every government has a responsibility to see that her citizens are gainfully employed either by government or self-employed. The government must encourage hard work and honesty by rewarding such achievements. Such honours and recognitions must start in the schools for teachers and students.

### **Poor Examination Preparation and Malpractices**

Schools must be held accountable for students’ results. Experts in the education sector have been able to identify examination malpractices with poor preparation of students for an examination, and lack of self confidence as major causes of poor examination results. In some cases, some teachers are involved at the secondary schools in the malpractices considering the fact that they are aware of the inadequate preparation of their students as well as the lack of facilities to get them properly prepared for examination. Sometimes too parents aid and abet their children to commit the malpractices. The Examination bodies and all those involved in the handling of the various stages of the examinations have major roles to play in ensuring that sanity prevails in the conduct of examinations.

### **Conclusion**

The standard of secondary education in Nigeria and indeed Ekiti State is fairly good in terms of the curriculum content, but poor with regards to the input and processes involved in implementing the

curriculum. The quality is definitely falling and various factors of the school, the students and society have been described as contributing to this problem. Recommendations are made towards achieving a functional and sustainable secondary education.

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