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## Methodist Education in Sagamu, Nigeria: A History (1946-2012)

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### Introduction

The Methodist educational system is a "faith-based non-profit faith based endeavor committed to renewal of life and transformation of society" (Ajayi, 1976). It is an educational system that projects a rare kind of arrangement in the history of Sagamu in Nigeria, West Africa. This co-educational system in West Africa is synonymous with the coming of the Methodists Missionary Enterprise into Sagamu, Remo Division around mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, under the Colony of Lagos in Nigeria. It manifested in the founding of Remo Secondary School which was a joint enterprise between the Orthodox Methodist Movement and a community of Muslims in Sagamu, Ogun State Nigeria. This paper examines the historical foundation of the first Secondary school in Sagamu and by implication the whole of Remo division of Ogun state in southwestern Nigeria as well as its prospects and challenges.

**Keywords:** Methodist Education System, Western Education, Missionary.

### Historical Concept of Western Education to West Africa

Afigbo (1968) opines that during colonial rule, one of the differentiating factors in western education as opposed to indigenous African Education is the technique of writing. Formal education in Nigeria in nineteenth century was entirely the monopoly of the missionary societies. The missionaries themselves saw education as the chief instrument of evangelization.

Bowen as cited in Ade Ajayi (1976) states that the missionaries;

Design and hope in regards to Africa are not simply to bring as many individuals as possible to the knowledge of Christ. We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds of the people, so that truth and righteousness may remain and flourish among them, without the instrumentality of foreign missionaries. This cannot be done without civilization. To establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds of the people they must have Bibles and therefore must have

the art to make them or the money to buy them. They must read the Bible and that implies instruction (p.199).

Ade Ajayi (1976) posits further that those who controlled formal education in the colonial period were either unaware of the African past or they denied its relevance to the reality of the colonial situation. The ancient gods and ancestors, the traditional sense of values, morality and norms were all under pressure from European ideas and cultures. In the circumstances, the aim of education would appear to have been to inculcate at the elementary school level a respect for the British way of life and the British Empire and its heroic founders. At the Secondary level, this empire was placed within the context of world history, the world being the Mediterranean world of the Greeks and the Romans (not Egyptians) until expanded by Europeans to Africa, the New world and Asia, the British empire being the most successful and most glorious of the Europeans efforts to civilized the world. At the University level, one had the chance to study the evolution of British history in greater details, as well as the activities of the Europeans in Africa. For the colonial ruler too, history of education was functional. It aimed to justify and promote the imperial cause and exclude from the syllabuses any information capable of inducing a contrary effect. In spite of this formidable attempt, the colonial period failed to completely break the African's sense of historical continuity. Besides the schools imparting Western education were the Koranic schools where the process as well as the content of education followed a pre-colonial pattern. In most society, particularly in rural areas, there was the pressure of new economic and social ideas for survival. A few educated Nigerians, in search for their own identities, and sometimes encouraged by missionary or European official interest in the ethnography of the subject peoples. The traditional patterns of education survived against great odds throughout the colonial period privately at home, in village age-grade associations, chieftaincy societies, religious cults.

Jones (1974) added that the pre-colonization era came with the claim to self-government accompanied by a re-assertion of the validity of the Africa past. This necessitated a fresh appraisal of the content of historical writings through all level of the formal school system so as to re-establish continuity with the past which the colonial rulers had to break. However, the focus of attention in the process of decolonization was to an undue extent placed on the recognition and the approbation of the outside world.

### **Historical Concept of Education in Nigeria**

Adesegun (2011) reveals that modern education in Nigeria dates back to 24 September 1842 with the arrival at Badagry of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman and Mr. and Mrs. William de Graft of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Ade Ajayi (1976) views the history of education of the Nigerian citizens against the background first of traditional society; second, of the colonial period, and third, of the era of decolonization and independence. History occupied a central place in the training of the citizen in traditional society. Historical information was imparted privately by parents, grandparents, and heads of lineages and others from the level of the nuclear family to the largest lineage group. At the level of community of state, ancestral traditions were transmitted by different agents, professional court historians in some societies. The manner of instruction and transmission of the historical lore varied. It could take the form of parent pointing out the limits and extent of the family land to a youth, or the more indirect form of an evening gathering to hear stories or folktales, proverbs, myths, and other information concerning gods and ancestors of the community and lineage. The community history could also be enacted in a coronation ritual, a religious festival or even as part of a masquerade or social and artistic performance. Griots also were involved in the transmitting of history from generation to generation. Training in history, then, took the form of a lifetime activity in the varied concerns and manifestations of the culture expressed in political discourse, in song, literature, religious incarnation, and in art. Afigbo (1965) establishes that Formal education in Nigeria in the nineteenth century was entirely monopoly of the missionary societies. Prior to the establishment of the educational system the missionary thus saw education as one of the chief instruments of evangelization. Gbadamosi (1976) states further that:

"By 1916, the foundation of a secondary education in Nigeria had been laid. The colonial administration had assumed control over secondary education by establishing its own model school, King's College, Lagos; and by instituting the grant-in-aid system to Government approved school (p. 94).

Gbadamosi (1976) explains further:

Education in its wider sense was expected to train Africans for citizenship, to promote 'enlightenment cooperation' among the indigenous people and between them and the British officers; and lastly to assist in character building (p. 94).

Eleazu (1988) said added that the Federal Government of Nigeria considers education to be the greatest investment that the Nigerian national can make for the quick development of its economy, political, sociological, and human resources.

### **The Coming of Methodist Education in Nigeria**

Methodist Education Nigeria (MCN) involvement in the field of education is as old as the history of Nigeria itself. The **Methodist Education Board** narrates that when Thomas Birch Freeman and other missionaries arrived in Nigeria, three major issues were paramount in their hearts-the spread of the gospel, education for all, and health care for all. These issues were described to be a holistic intention that would affect all facets of human existence.

History has it that as at the time when the British did not concern itself significantly with education in the country, the Methodist mission started her Nursery in 1842 through Mrs. De Graft which she called 'Nursery of the Infant Church'; established Boy's High School in 1878 and Methodist Girl's High School in 1879. It ran many Nursery and Primary schools by giving grants-in-aid, that is, a fixed unconditional yearly education grant of 200 pounds to her. This notwithstanding, the Methodist Church remains the pioneer of the field of Education in Nigeria through her commitment to provision of qualitative and functional education, having explored the three domains of education.

Maps of the World (2013) affirm that the Nigerian education system started slowly but continued developing during the colonial time until the conclusion of World War II. By 1900, three fundamentally distinct education systems existed in Nigeria - the indigenous system, the Quranic schools, and formal European-style educational institutions. Higher Education in Nigeria originated with the colonial government launching the Yaba Higher College in 1934. According to the 1979 constitution, education in Nigeria became the responsibility of the state and local councils. The first six years of primary education were made mandatory, which was a significant factor in the development of education in Nigeria. There has been a noticeable upgrading of educational facilities in Nigeria in recent years.

### **Methodist Secondary Educational System in Sagamu**

According to O. Ayodele (2006); "Western Education entered Sagamu in May 1892 when the first ever school took off" (p.21). History has it that it took another period of forty six years to establish the first Secondary school in

Sagamu. The first ever Secondary Education was named Remo Secondary school. M.A. Sosanya (2013), a student of the Remo Secondary School, Sagamu now a teacher in same school, in his narration, said that Remo Secondary School was the first Methodist Secondary Educational system. It was established in Sagamu in 1946. M.A. Sosanya (2013), added still that it was the first co-educational institution in West Africa. It was co-founded by the Anglican, Methodist and the community of Muslim. Ogunlesi (2013) added said that Remo Secondary school was established by the initiative of a Methodist missionary called William Fredrick Mellor. Education before 1946 was strictly under the British Colony. Ayodele (2013) affirmed that education, during the British Colony came to Remo Division through the efforts of one Prince Joseph Pythagoras Hastrup, a Methodist Lay Preacher.

Ayodele (2006), in his narration, mentions that prior to the coming of western education "Remo was recorded as the darkest spot in the whole of West Africa" (p. 21). Ayodele (2013) said in one of Pythagoras's visits to Sagamu from Lagos where he was based, he propagated the Methodist Mission. After launching out this exercise, he was able to garner some Methodist adherents. He nurtured the small group of people. Thus Sagamu became the first Methodist mission station in Remo. With the excitement of his achievement, he came up with the idea to establish a Wesleyan Elementary School. He singularly funded the church and the elementary school. On July 12, 1892, Rev. Scotcliff, the chairman of the Methodist Mission in the then Lagos Division and other ministers came to inspect the development on ground. By December 15 of the same year, an indigenous missionary, James Johnson from Ijebu land brought two missionary teachers from Lagos to pioneer the work. The British Colony did not establish any school then. By 1922, all graduates from these elementary schools had to go as far as Lagos, Ibadan, Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta for secondary education. For this pertinent reason in 1922, there was the agitation by graduates from outside Remo land for a secondary education in their homeland to create more opportunities and affordability for pupils that were produced from the elementary schools in Remo land to enjoy the Secondary Education in Sagamu. In the course of the agreement to establish one, obstacles arose based on who was qualified to be the principal. This idea of a secondary education in Remo land failed initially.

Ayodele (2013) corroborates Ogunlesi's (2013) assertion that in late 1930s, the passion to have a secondary education came through a Methodist Superintendent, William Fredrick Mellor. Rev. Mellor was described as a

community minister because of his mingling with all religious groups. He ministered not only to the Methodist adherents but to the Muslims and the community. Sagamu people supported his initiative. Mellor used his influence as a Briton to process the approval from Lagos. The Secondary School he established was called Remo Secondary School which was a co-founded Secondary educational system owned by three bodies: The Methodist, Anglican and the Muslim community on February 1946. The Methodist took the lion share of the funding. It began with 30 pupils, 2 girls and 28 boys. The idea for a secondary education is in line with the reasons for the Methodist mission's foundational existence.

### **Methodist Educational Impact/Prospects to Sagamu People**

Western Education has changed a lot of our tradition and customs. According to Ayodele (2006), evidences show that the Methodist Educational initiatives have brought a great level of literacy to Sagamu people. It has produced great teachers, scholars, socio-political leaders since more than a century of Western educational existence in Sagamu.

To achieve a more socio-cultural, economic and political development in this technological advanced world, Ayodele (2006) asserts:

Education which involves the acquisition of basic skills and knowledge vis-a-vis mere schooling should help a nation break her vicious circle of poverty, create mass enlightenment, make the citizenry politically conscious and aware; and what is more, education should help in elevating a nation above her obscure level of underdevelopment, into achieving a technological breakthrough, which is the bedrock or cornerstone of industrialization or national development (p, 184).

Although a Methodist initiative, the founding of Remo Secondary School in Sagamu involved other religious groups such as the Anglican, and Muslim communities and thus signify an ecumenical approach. Eregare (2013) posits that Ecumenical initiative is a concept used predominantly by and with reference to "Christian denominations and Christian churches separated by doctrine, history and practice" (p. 181). Based on this we can say ecumenical movement in Remo had its root back at Sagamu as far back as 1946. The issue of male and female students staying together in a co-educational institution at that time appeared in the late 1960s Nigeria to be promoting immorality. Thus, M.A. Sosanya (2013) added that the religious lives of the students were taken seriously-morals were

esteemed. There was a peaceful co-existence among these religious groups, thus promoting religious understanding. The Methodists and Anglican students would go in white wears on queue outside the school to worship in the community. Then the Muslims went on queue as well to worship in the community Mosque to worship with their teachers following them behind respectively.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Having critically examined the Methodist educational system as a non profit faith-based organization that is committed to renewal of life and transformation of society, it can be said that their coming to Remo was impactful as they, along with others established the first secondary school in Remo. It was the first co-educational institution not only in Remo but the whole of West Africa. Western education during colonial rule was different from indigenous African education because of the technique of writing. The traditional patterns of education were done privately at home, in village age-grade associations, chieftaincy societies and religious cults. Formal education in Nigeria in nineteenth century was entirely monopoly of the missionary societies. The missionaries thus saw education as the chief instrument of evangelization. Those who controlled formal education in the colonial period were either unaware of the African past or they denied its relevance to the reality of the colonial situation. The ancient gods and ancestors, the traditional sense of values, morality and norms were all under pressure from European ideas and cultures. Besides the schools impacting Western education were the Koranic schools where the process as well as the content of education followed a pre-colonial pattern. Gbadamosi (1967) affirms the evidence later mentioned that "before western education was introduced to Nigeria, the Muslim community had its own system of Islamic studies" (p. 89).

Based on the history of Methodist education in Sagamu, positive impact made on Sagamu includes high level of literacy and civilization. Indigenous teachers and scholars have been produced and this has had a positive effect on the socio-economic development of the town. Moreover, the emergence of the Methodist educational system in Remo starting with the elementary school to Remo Secondary School has helped to break her vicious circle of poverty, create mass enlightenment, made the citizenry politically conscious and aware, elevated her obscure level of underdevelopment, into achieving economic and socio-political breakthroughs, which form the bedrock or cornerstone of industrialization or national development. The negative impact of Western education to the people

of Sagamu is that it has changed a lot of their tradition and customs inherited from their forebears. The following suggestions may be considered:

1. If the coming of Methodist Education in Sagamu in late nineteenth century could have swept away some of the cultures or traditions, the researchers suggest that the Sagamu community should challenge itself to devise other means to inculcate or maintain the positive aspects of her culture or tradition and pass it from generation to generation to preserve their traditional heritage or identity. This is applicable to other African communities and countries touched by western education.
2. If the African traditional methods of transmitting information from generation to generation as discussed in this paper could be so effective, the researchers posit that it is expedient for Sagamu community and other African communities to project its quintessence to her community so that as to juxtapose the African and Western Methods of education as effective mean of education.
3. Based on the fact that the coming of Methodist education has brought great civilization and produced great indigenous teachers and scholars, socio-political, to break her vicious circle of poverty, create mass enlightenment, make the citizenry politically conscious and awareness, elevated her obscure level of underdevelopment, into achieving a technological breakthrough, then education should be given priority by the Methodist Church in Nigeria and elsewhere to enable a better posterity.
4. Since this paper discovers Methodist Education in Sagamu to have impacted the community and influenced nation building, the church needs to make more decisive efforts to seek NGOs, national and international organizations to invest in her educational development as a church to enable a greater access and impact now and for the posterity.

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