

Kano Science Secondary Schools at 25: Is this End of the Beginning?

By

Baba El-Yakubu Jibril

baba@ksu.edu.sa

Early last month members of Kano science schools old students association (KASSOSA) paid a courtesy visit to his Excellency the governor of Kano State. Part of the purpose was to (i) thank him for appointing some of them in various positions in the government, (ii) pledge their support and (iii) request the governor to look into the deplorable conditions of the schools especially the shortage of teachers. Invariably, as politicians know, the main purpose of such visits may be buried under essential preliminary pleasantries. In this case the issue was clear. The governor assured them that he was aware about the problem and already an order was given to address it. It is possible that the government was aware. For instance, in one of the schools I understand that the students spent the last academic term without Mathematics and English teachers. This is part of the problems facing the twenty five year old schools. As we celebrate the silver jubilee, we may also ponder on the present state of the schools. Have the initial objectives been achieved? Are the schools performing as envisioned or are they only consuming resources without the necessary returns? Is this a time for renewal of perspectives?

It is said that whatever the size and beauty of a castle, it was once only imagination in somebody's mind. A quarter of century ago, Kano Science secondary schools started from an idea that was seen to be both wild and impractical because of its uniqueness. The idea was developed at a brain-storming session that was initiated to find ways and means of addressing the then acute shortage of manpower in the newly created Kano State. As the architects grapple with the necessary difficulties of nurturing a new entity, the work became more challenging due to sudden expansion of resources brought about by the oil boom of early 1970s. The task of establishing the structure for running the state was coupled with implementation of development plan necessary for social and economic development. The plan focused on agricultural and industrial developments. Soon the planners realized the acute shortage of indigenous manpower to implement and sustain the envisioned development. At the time of creating the state in 1968 only 17% of the technical manpower needs could be supplied by the state indigenes. At same time there was no real hope of bridging the gap as only about 10% of school certificate candidates took science subjects. Under such situation, no plan could be seriously expected to be sustainable.

This problem was appreciated by the new military government of 1975. To that effect, a powerful manpower development committee was constituted to, among other things; study the manpower requirement of the state and advise the government on the ways and means to meet such requirement. The committee decided to brain-storm and generate ideas for long-term strategy to manpower development in the state. It was during one of these idea-generating sessions that one of the members suggested the creation of science secondary schools to focus on science education. The students of the schools would be prepared towards science-based careers. The committee adopted this idea. At the time, the ministry of education was skeptical about such unprecedented contraptions and attempted to frustrate its implementation. They argued that the arrangement call for spending too much on too few. Worse still, the few might be selected from elite class. Instead, they preferred science education to be encouraged in all secondary schools. There was also a fear that the schools would be anti-Islam or at best weak in Islamic studies. The proponents of the idea countered and demonstrated that such claims were unfounded.

Therefore, the science schools project proceeded successfully. The government announced the establishment of the schools in April and lessons started in September

1977. The task of the schools, as administered by the science board was to take 'the responsibility for providing science education at secondary level, with the following hopes and aspirations in mind:

1. That more secondary school leavers with science background will eventually be produced
2. That the majority of those so produced will proceed to higher institution of learning
3. That in the long run, a crop of high level manpower (doctors and engineers) will be available
4. That the expected insignificant few that might not necessarily be doctors and engineers might find themselves in the polytechnics for HND/OND course'(1).

The performance of the schools may be viewed in the light of these objectives. The first set of student graduated in 1980. Since then, there have been disappointing results. The performance of the schools as measured by the percentage of student who passed at least five subjects at credit level is displayed in the figure below. The figure says it all. It gives glaring picture of the performance of the schools. The general trend of the graph is both alarming and interesting. The alarm that raised many questions is the violent fluctuations of the results especially that of D-Kudu. There is generally about 10% difference between any two consecutive years. Why were there so volatile results? Wasn't there any internal or external mechanism for control? The same could be observed for D-Tofa, especially in the last ten years.

The D-Tofa results show interesting upward trend from 1980 – 1988. It steadily attained the highest ever by both schools in 1988. Why was there so drastic difference in the trends? Were there separate supervisions for the two schools? Was there any deliberate effort at D-Tofa that culminated into the peak performance in 1988? On the average D-Kudu performed better (34%) than D-Tofa (24%). But the combined average results (30%) are clearly below expectation of (at least) the founding fathers. Among the objectives stated above, the schools were expected to produce students ready for medical, engineering or similar professions. The 'insignificant few' that could not make it, might end up in polytechnics for diploma programs. From the graph it is clear that in some years only 'insignificant few' were qualified to be admitted for degree programs. Take for example their worst year (1993) when the combined average result was woeful 8.8%. Obviously, the schools could not be said to have performed as expected.

There could be sundry reasons for the poor results: (i) inadequate students selection procedure at the beginning, (ii) skepticism to science education by students/parents, (iii) unwillingness of the principals of the other schools to release their best students, (iv) incompetent school administrative board in subsequent years, (v) low standard admission qualification examinations (vi) commercialization of the schools in 1995, (vii) shortage of teachers and teaching materials, (viii) the attitude of some governors - in fact, one second republic governor threatened to close the schools because the founding idea was elitist, etc. If we are apportioning blames for the failing of the schools, the present government has its share. The schools are adversely affected by the recent termination of contract of all non-indigenous workers in the state. I wonder how many teachers remain in the school considering the fact that many of the schools situated outside the city were populated by large number of non-indigenes who lack the necessary 'connection' to get transfer to the city. No wonder the governor said that he was aware about the shortage of teachers and order was already given to address the situation.

Enough excuses! Clearly, right from the beginning the schools started without necessary mechanisms for evaluation and control. This is apparent from the violent fluctuations of

the numbers of passes. The schools results were unfortunately left to chances. We do not need to know the law of entropy to appreciate the fact that nothing good comes by chance. We must make deliberate choices to improve the standard of the schools. The fact that 25 years after establishing the schools, the governor is giving order to scout for qualified teachers, demonstrate that the schools have failed as sources of technical manpower in the state.

The government, parents and KASSOSA members must all put hands together to save the only goose that lays the golden eggs. Well, the 'golden' is used figuratively here for as the graph shows there is nothing golden or spectacular about the performance of the schools. It is true that there were pockets of outstanding results by some students, but that is nothing compared to the resources invested. There must be deliberate and sustained efforts to reengineer the schools. Otherwise, their future is bleak. I hope, borrowing from the famous words of Winston Churchill, that "this is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but the end of the beginning" for Kano science secondary schools.

References

- (1) Ten-year anniversary of KASSOSA at ABU (a book published in 91/92 session).
- (2) An article on the science schools by Prof. Abdalla Uba Adamu (http://www.kanoonline.com/publications/pr_articles_science_education.html)