

## **Greco-Roman educational structure as a model for shaping Nigeria's basic education system**

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**Abstract:** A nation's basic education should be organised as a tool for the effective integration of an individual into a society. Through this organisation, the individual can develop national consciousness, achieve self-realisation, strive for social, economic, cultural, and political prosperity, and promote institutional unity. Many writers who are familiar with both the Greco-Roman and the Nigerian educational cultures have remarked on the striking similarities between the two cultures. However, the Nigerian educational formative seems to be devoid of a solid foundational approach probably due to civilisation and absence of quality assurance control and source remembrance in policy formulation.

This paper argues that the Greco-Roman system should form a basis for a solid foundational education. Therefore, the paper compares the educational system in the Greco-Roman and Nigerian societies and emphasises operationalization that are supposedly adapted from the latter to the former.

**Keywords:** Greco-Roman education, Quintilian philosophy, Rhetor, Nigeria's basic education.

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### **Introduction**

A nation's basic education should be organised as a tool for the effective integration of an individual into a society. Through this organisation, the individual can develop national consciousness, achieve self-realisation, strive for social, economic, cultural, and political prosperity, and promote institutional unity. The ways by which the ways of life, values, norms and ethos of a people are transmitted to successive generation are considered *education*. Having education in a social space helps people think, feel, and behave in a way that contributes to their success, and improves not only their personal satisfaction but also that of their communities. It also develops human personality, thoughts, dealing with others and prepares people for life experiences.

To become familiar with what is being done in some countries, why it is being done, and the insights that can be adapted from it into other structures is a necessary part of the training of scholars and students of modern day educational concepts. Only in that way will they be validated to study and understand their own systems and plan intelligently for the future which, given the basic cultural changes that have taken place throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is going to be one where we are thrown into a more observable contact with other peoples and other cultures. This paper will compare the educational system in the Greco-Roman and the Nigerian societies and emphasise formatives that should be adapted from the latter to the former.

### **Greco-Roman Educational Ideals**

In the early years of the Republic, almost the entire education of the Roman boy and girl was under the supervision of their parents. This education was largely moral; the sense of responsibility to moral law, to parental authority, and to the state was ever present. Religious hymns, national songs, and the Twelve Tables furnished material for a limited literary training. When the boy became old enough, he accompanied his father to the forum and soon took an active part in public affairs. The girls continued their domestic training under the supervision of their mothers.

Rome had been greatly influenced by the Greek culture, and nowhere was this influence more effective than upon Roman education. While the fathers and mothers in some homes continued to assume the responsibility of the education of their sons and daughters, there was a general tendency to leave the training of the children to a nurse, a pedagogue, or a private tutor, as was the custom of the Greeks. Children generally received some instruction in reading and writing at home before they were old enough to attend the elementary schools, the age varying according to the attention given to their education, and to the inclination of the children to learn.

Quintilian encouraged early training for children. He states that though the knowledge absorbed in these years may be but little, yet the boy will be learning something more advanced during that year, in which he would otherwise have been occupied with something more elementary. He continues:

Such progress each successive year increases the total, and the time gained during childhood is clear profit to the period of youth. Let us not waste therefore the earliest years.

I am not however so unacquainted with differences of age, as to think that we should urge those of tender years severely, or exact a full complement of work from them; for it will be necessary, above all things, to take care lest the child should conceive a dislike to the application which he cannot yet love, and continue to dread the bitterness which he has once tasted, even beyond the years of infancy. Let his instruction be an amusement to him; let him be questioned and praised; and let him never feel pleased that he does not know a thing; and sometimes, if he is unwilling to learn, let another be taught before him, of whom he may be envious. Let him strive for victory now and then, and generally suppose that he gains it; and let his powers be called forth by rewards, such as that age prizes (Quintilian, 1922).

The Romans, like the Greeks, instituted imitation as an educational method. The Roman youth was to become pious, reverential, courageous, manly, and prudent by the direct imitation of his father and of legendary Romans of so heroic a character as established in their histories. This is why a proper choice of associates from their earliest childhood is emphasised. 'If you want a boy to be an orator', Quintilian asserts, 'the time to start this training is in his infancy. Place about him only educated people, those who speak correctly and who are well mannered. His parents, nurse, pedagogue, and companions must all be worthy examples for him to imitate; for he will imitate them whether they are worthy or not, and will imitate more quickly and remember longer the bad habits, either of speech or of conduct of any of his associates, than he will the good'.

### **Elementary Schools**

The elementary schools were known as *ludi litterarum* or *ludi litterarii*. At first, they merely supplemented the training of the home, but gradually as they were more patronized, they came to take almost the entire charge of the early education of Roman children. Children generally entered the elementary schools at the age of six or seven and continued until they were twelve, although the age varied with the child and with the teacher. The teacher was called the *ludi magister*. He opened his school in a private house or booth or porch, and for a small tuition gave instruction to both boys and girls of the families who were inclined to place their children under his care. These teachers were not always properly qualified for their positions and too often were engaged in teaching as a last resort to secure means for a livelihood, although the remuneration was very meagre. The true Roman father took particular care in seeing that the teacher to whom he sent his children was the best teacher available, not only from a literary but also from a moral standpoint, for he felt that the teacher had a great influence on the children.

The training included the rudiments of reading, writing, and counting. If the child had had no previous home training, he began by learning the letters of the alphabet. It was quite likely that he encountered the Greek alphabet first, and then the Latin. The child was not hurried in learning to read. Care was taken that he read slowly and accurately, with proper emphasis and understanding. One of the main text books of the elementary schools was *Latina Odyssia* of *Livius Andronicus*. The greater part of the instruction was oral. The teacher read aloud to the pupils as well as the pupils to the teacher, and together they discussed the content of the poem and analysed its form and meter.

Much emphasis was placed upon the value of training the memory of the child. Teachers gave the children selections from their reading to memorise, and they were careful to select those passages which contained precepts and examples of moral conduct, for they felt that the child's character was permanently influenced by these early impressions. At the same time, the child was learning to write. In these schools, the children learned only the first principles of writing. Seneca gives the following account of how they were taught to write:

Children are taught to form their letters, their fingers are held and their hands directed and led to teach them to fashion and counterfeit letters; then they are commanded to follow such and such examples, and by them to remodel their writings. So is our mind strengthened if it be instructed by setting up some example after which it may pattern (Clarke 1896).

Quintilian adds that the counterfeit letters were made by tracing the forms carved in wooden or waxed tablets, and that the examples which they later learned to copy were aphorisms and maxims which contained some sound moral lessons.

The methods of instruction varied. Teachers had all classes of children to work with, and had to resort to many methods to retain the interest of the students, and to secure interest from others who were less attentive. Quintilian says that when he went to school his teacher introduced class competitions which he thought did more to increase their interest in their work and to incite them to study than all the 'exhortations of their instructors, the watchfulness of their pedagogues, and the prayers of their parents.' Some teachers used games which were of an educational value, and in these supervised games the children were taught habits of unselfishness, honesty, and self-control. They were occasionally given a holiday to relieve the continual routine of school work.

The discipline of these schools was severe. That corporal punishment was a common method of correction may be concluded from the mural decorations which have been recovered, and from extracts from the various writers of Roman literature. Martial called the *ferula* - a rod used for punishing - the sceptre of the pedagogues. Horace says that his teacher *Orbilius* was fond of flogging him. Martial in one of his epigrams says that the neighbours complained because they were disturbed by savage scoldings of the abominable school masters, and by the series of the students who were being punished. Quintilian objected to this method of discipline and insisted it was only fit for slaves, and was an insult to students; that it was a reflection upon the teacher as a disciplinarian to resort to such methods of correction, and that it did not bring permanent and desirable results. Plutarch supports Quintilian's notion by expressing that 'we ought to lead children to good actions by reason and exhortations and assuredly not by blows and torture' (Plutarch 1960).

### Secondary Schools

The secondary schools were called Grammar Schools and were under the supervision of the *Grammatici*. There were two Grammar Schools, the Greek and the Latin; the former gave the same instruction as the latter, but in the Greek language. Generally, students entered the Greek Grammar School first, remaining in them until they had gained a fairly comprehensive knowledge of Greek literature. In the mean time, they entered the Latin Grammar School and continued their work in both schools. Students entered the grammar schools at about the age of twelve and stayed in them until they were ready for the school of the rhetor. The instruction generally covered a period of four years. About the only requirement for entrance in the school of the *Grammaticus* was the ability to read and write without difficulty.

Parents were very exacting in the demands they made upon the *grammatici*. Juvenal satirises this by stating that:

you parents impose severe exactions of him that is to teach your boys, that he be perfect in the rules of grammar for each word - read all histories - know all authors as well as his own finger-ends, that if questioned at hazard, while on his way to the *Thermae* or the baths of *Phoebus*, he should be able to tell the name of *Anchises'* nurse, and the name and native land of the step-mother of *Anchemolus* - tell off hand how many years *Acestee* lived - how many flagons of wine the Sicilian King gave to the Phrygians. Require of him that he mould their youthful morals as one models a face in wax. Require of him that he be the reverend father of the company, and check every approach to immorality...It is not a light task to keep watch over so many boyish hands, so many twinkling eyes. 'This,' says the father, 'be the object of your care! - and when the year comes round again, receive for your pay as much gold as the people demand for the victorious charioteer! (This means the charioteer would receive for an hour's work as much as a teacher for a year's).

The first lessons of formal grammar began with learning the different parts of speech. Philology is also considered a part of grammar. This was an interesting study because of the great number of foreign words in the Latin language. Orthography began with the study of the alphabet. The alphabet was divided into consonants and vowels, and the vowels into semivowels and mutes. Reading held the most prominent place in the curriculum. Quintilian says that children must not read only that which is eloquent, but it is more important that they study what is morally excellent, because their minds are deeply impressed by what they read in their childhood. The students were given thorough instruction in the art of reading well, and much time was given in school to oral reading. The problems were much the same as they are today. Children were instructed to observe punctuation marks, to avoid reading poetry in a sing-song tone, to read ahead and grasp the meaning of the verse that they might read with proper emphasis, and with a fitting inflection of the voice. They were taught to avoid any affectations or mannerisms, and to read in a simple, natural way.

The rudiments of geometry and music were also studied by the pupils of the grammar schools, though instruction in these subjects was given by special teachers. Geometry as it was taught by the Romans was given more of a practical than a scientific application. Cicero says, "Among the Greeks, geometry was in the highest honour, but we have set the limits of this science at its practical applicability in measuring and calculating. Quintilian thought that the study of geometry was very valuable in education because of its logical nature, he thought that it sharpened the wits and trained the mind to close thinking, and promoted habits of orderly arrangement and logical deduction.

The Romans never felt the same as the Greeks did in regard to physical training, either as to its aim or its importance. While some training was given in the schools, its aim was purely practical; to give grace to personal bearing, to develop the body and to relieve awkwardness. Training never extended beyond boyhood. For one to devote himself to a professional life of a gymnast was considered beneath the dignity of a Roman. Quintilian (1922) approved of the existing curricula of the grammar schools and believes that it was profitable to divide the hours among different branches of study. This was because the mind is refreshed and restored by variety. A change of studies is like a change of food. No man wants to eat one kind of food every day for several months and then change that food for one other item of diet and follow that program indefinitely. Rather, he finds that the stomach receives greater nourishment from a variety of foods. A variety of studies incites attention and interest, and thus by a change of subjects the mind, is better nourished.

### **The Rhetoric School**

The Latin Rhetorical Schools, modelled after the Greek Rhetorical Schools, were institutions representing the culmination of a practical literary education. Training in the school of the Rhetor generally began at the age of fifteen or sixteen when the boy had put off his *toga praetexta* and had assumed his *toga virilis*. Only those young men who expected to devote their lives to a public career attended these schools, and the length of their training depended upon the ability and interest of the student, and upon the rhetor under whom they studied.

More emphasis was placed upon the moral character and intellectual ability of the teachers of rhetoric, than upon that of any other teacher, especially because of the age of the young men whom they had under their care, and because of the importance of the profession for which they were training these young men. The first essential was that the rhetor should be a man of good character, with a good reputation, one who would be interested in the moral training of his pupils, and who would be a worthy example for them to imitate. Next, he must be as distinguished for his eloquence as for his good character, and like Phoenix in the Iliad, be able to teach his pupils both how to behave and how to speak.

Discipline, at this period of a young man's life presented a problem. Quintilian (1922) has given what he thought was the best way to handle the students, and to secure from them the desired intellectual and moral development:

For the teacher, let him adopt a parental attitude to his pupils, and regard himself as the representative of those who have committed their children to his charge. Let him be strict but not austere, genial but not too familiar. Let his discourse continually turn on what is good and honourable; the more he admonishes, the less he will have to punish. He must control his temper without however shutting his eyes to faults requiring correction; his instruction must be free from affectation, his industry great, his demands on his class continuous, but not extravagant. He must be ready to answer questions and to put them unasked to those who sit silently. Praise must be free from sarcasm and abuse. If pupils are rightly instructed, the teacher will be the object of their affection and respect, and it is scarcely possible to say how much more readily we imitate those whom we like.

The instruction in the school of the rhetoricians included theoretical and practical training. The theoretic study consisted in a careful analysis and memorising of models of poetry and prose expression, and of the modes of conveying, illustrating and enforcing ideas, passing into the study of formal rhetoric. The practical side of this study, which was vigorously pushed, consisted in declamations, in an admirably graduated series of exercises in composition, and in a course of lessons in extemporaneous speech judiciously graded to growing powers." Their training also included regular visits to the forum and temples where they heard the daily speeches of judges and orators, and thus kept in touch with the problems of the day. Much reading was done in these schools both from Greek and Latin authors, not only from the works of the poets but also from the writings of historians, orators, and philosophers.

Writing was also continued in the rhetorical school. Their first themes were chosen from history. They wrote about the deeds of famous men, about the founding of the city, and about the Roman exploits in war. There was a gradual and continual progress from these themes to those requiring a more technical knowledge,

and a more mature judgment, such as questions of law and questions involving moral principles. Rhetoric was divided into its five component parts: invention, arrangement, style or expression, memory, and delivery. Each of these divisions received careful and thorough treatment. The different kinds of oratory, demonstrative, deliberative and forensic were studied, and the method for developing each but special attention was given to the forensic type, for this was the kind they used the most when they entered the courts as pleaders.

After the work had been completed in the rhetorical schools, it was customary for those who wished to continue their education to be admitted into the Greek universities. These universities developed from the Greek rhetorical and philosophic schools, and represented the highest learning and culture of that time. The Universities of Athens and Rhodes were the most popular.

### **Nigeria's Educational System**

There were three fundamentally distinct educational systems in Nigeria by 1990: the indigenous system, Qur'anic schools, and formal European-styled educational institutions.

#### **The Indigenous System**

In the rural areas where the majority lived, children learned the skills of farming and other work, as well as the duties of adulthood, from participation in the community. Age-based schools in which mature men instructed groups of young boys in community responsibilities often supplemented this process. Apprentice systems were widespread throughout all occupations; the trainee provided service to the teacher over a period of years and eventually struck out on their own. Indigenous crafts and services from leatherwork to medicine were passed down in families and acquired through apprenticeship training as well. In 1990, indigenous education system included more than 50 percent of the school-age population and operated almost entirely in the private sector. There was virtually no regulation by the government unless training included the need for a license.

#### **The Qur'anic Schools**

Islamic education was part of religious duty. Children learned up to one or two chapters of the Qur'an by rote from a local religious teacher, before they were five or six years old. Religious learning included the Arabic alphabet and the ability to read and copy texts in the language, along with those texts required for daily prayers. Any Islamic community provided such instruction in a Muallim's house, under a tree, or in a local mosque. This primary level was the most widespread. Later, grammar, syntax, arithmetic, algebra, logic, rhetoric, jurisprudence, and theology were added; these subjects required specialist teachers at the advanced level.

After this level, students traditionally went on to one of the famous Islamic centres of learning. Throughout the colonial period, a series of Muslim formal schools were set up and run on European lines. These schools were established in almost all major Nigerian cities but were notable in Kano, where Islamic brotherhoods developed an impressive number of schools. They catered for the children of the devout and the rich, who wished to have their children educated in the new and European learning, but within a firmly religious context. Such schools were influential as a form of local private school that retained the predominance of religious values within a modernized school setting.

#### **European styled Educational System**

It should be stated that Nigeria models its educational system towards that of its colonial master, Britain. Several adoptions were made to accommodate the growing need for a knowledge-based economy. According to the National Policy on Education, the goals of education in Nigeria are: (a) Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen; (b) total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; (c) provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system; (d) inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and (e) development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013:2).

Following these goals, several educational authorities in Nigeria had set benchmarks of learning achievements for the various levels of the education system—basic, senior secondary and tertiary education levels. However, the performance of students at the various levels failed to meet the benchmarks, thus warranting the call for the declaration of a state of emergency in education. There is no gainsaying, therefore, that Nigeria is in search of ways to improve its educational system and particularly teaching and learning. This paper manifests that there is a prim similarity between the Greco-Roman model of education and that of Nigeria. An appraisal of the two systems is made and formatives that can be adopted from the former to solidify the latter's educational foundation will be observed. The discourse will also take into consideration the diverse

Nigeria's socio-cultural affiliation and propose an educational model that, with the diversification in mind, will still be adoptable universally.

### **Modifying the roots: Greco-Roman and Nigeria's educational systems**

The study of human civilisation, especially the ancient Greece reveals that they were the most intellectual people ever lived on earth at that time. Their thoughts and ideas are accurate and real that the same are applicable even in this postmodern era of the 21st century. The Greeks, despite their division in many small city states, were one people, distinguished from the rest of civilizations. As compared to any other counterpart civilization, the Greeks had a more potent system of education. The aims and objectives, the content or curriculum, the teaching methodology, teaching environment, state involvement or patronage, reveal that the Greeks were in the real sense of the term the precursors of educational thoughts and ideas. They established their education systems as per the demand of their respective city states. They strictly followed the prevalent systems of their city state so as to achieve their nationalist ideals.

The notion that the Greco-Roman education begins the learning of a child under the supervision of the parents and that the education was largely moral is the first intricacy that the Nigerian model needs to adopt. Probably due to poverty, the average Nigerian parent leaves and arrives home at odd hours. Usually, both the father and the mother work to keep the family going; there is no one to give the kid the first-teacher experience a parent should. Most families later resort to forcing infants that should still be enjoying the innocence of childhood into the academic classroom. Moreover, the absence of maiden parental instruction paved way for the moral decadence in our society. Being educated seems to be at par with possessing diddling moral values. May we conclude that the absence of parental love and pioneering educational intervention is the cause of moral decadence and lack of citizenry's acceptance of national authority? There is the need for Nigerian parents to make children receive some instruction in reading, writing and morals at home before they would attend the elementary schools.

The case of the Greco-Roman model of education making the boy accompany his father to the forum and taking an active part in public affairs and the girl continuing her domestic training under the supervision of her mother is also essential. There is a question here for the Nigerian mentality that seems to posit that sensitive issues of national polity are seen to be discourses for the elders. Where is the platform for the acclaimed 'leaders of tomorrow' to thrive? The Greco-Roman education institutes a model for the Nigerian system. The presence of the Nigerian youth parliament is acknowledged but what about its viability? Are laws passed there effective in policy formulation? Are suggestions made there integrated into national decision making process? Africans, and Nigerians specifically, seem to prioritise coercing the young generation into treading the path of religion. This is not negative but there should be an extension to social and economic life skills.

Furthermore, the concept of academic competition is dangerous to the health and mental alertness of children. This rivalry trait is manifested when a typical Nigerian enrolls a 1 year old in school. Barely talking, the 1 year old has been equipped with the contest principle and will strive to be the best in all academic tasks. This follows Quintilian's assertion that 'let him strive for victory now and then, and generally suppose that he gains it; and let his powers be called forth by rewards, such as that age prizes'. This notion is unsafe and it forms the background for examination-based education that we engage in Nigeria. When school children are meant to evaluate their individual abilities based on the performance of others, instances of unhealthy rivalry and conflicting personalities will be rife. Scholastic deceit and academic sleazing will take the place of developmental skills and progressive inventions. What is beneficial to our society is an education that prioritises individual peculiarities devoid of generally acceptable marginalising pedagogical perceptions. Remember that an artist will not need a physics, a tech guru wouldn't need a literature, a medical doctor wouldn't need to be as ingrained in languages as a linguist, a historian will not need mathematics and an engineer will not need economics. If we may employ an animalistic example, a fish should not be judged by its inability to climb a tree. We wouldn't want to be immersed in the debate that examinations should be dropped or not; if the Nigerian educational system will produce an output than it is doing at present, academic requirements would be individually distinct.

The Romans, like the Greeks, instituted imitation as an educational method. The Roman youth was to become pious, reverential, courageous, manly, and prudent by the direct imitation of his father and of legendary Romans of so heroic a character as established in their histories. Nigeria's educational system has something to adopt here. Why was Moral Instruction scrapped as one of the subjects in our primary schools? It was in that subject children were taught simple interpersonal values. Lessons on rights of neighbours, environmental cleanliness, truthfulness, goodness to parents, and kindness are memorable. The behavioural models for our children in the modern day are artists, celebrities and public figures who have little sense of moral standards. What would a society that celebrates nudity and social madness inculcate in its educational programmes? Is it not a methodical madness devoid of moral uprightness that will make a 3 year old smoke marijuana in the glare

view on social media? This should not be surprising as parents, nurses, and companions are not worthy examples, for the child will imitate more quickly and remember longer the bad habits, either of speech or of conduct of any of his associates, than he will the good.

As a corollary of a solid professional preparation and of the socio-ethical foundations underlying the exercise of the teaching profession, in line with the prevailing values in the society, teaching enjoys immense prestige and trust in the Greco-Roman society, as much as medicine, advocacy and other careers of the same reputation in terms of social value. In this way, the teaching career is life-long and is one of the most competitive. We can also borrow a leaf from Finnish education. Following Sahlberg (2011), educational accountability in the Finnish education context preserves and enhances trust among teachers, students, school leaders, and education authorities, and it involves them in the process, offering them a strong sense of professional responsibility and initiative. Shared responsibility for teaching and learning characterizes how educational accountability is arranged in Finland. Parents, students, and teachers prefer smart accountability that enables schools to keep the focus on learning and permit more degrees of freedom in curriculum planning, compared to the external standardized testing culture that prevails in a country like Nigeria. However, teacher's remuneration needs to be reviewed and nationalised. Nigeria's educational system is like the Greco-Roman society where teachers' responsibilities are innumerable but the responsibilities are not at par with their pay. There should be close congruence between prestige, respect and recognition enjoyed by Nigerian teachers, if any, and their professional remuneration.

A variety of studies incites attention and interest, and thus by a change of subjects the mind is better nourished. Thus, for the universalisation of education in the Nigerian scene, the nation needs to adopt skill-based subjects across all levels. Modules like history, mathematics, vocational aptitude, civic education and moral instruction should be emphasised at all levels and fields, though with modification. There shouldn't be segregation based on tribe, religion, social status, etc. As in the Greco-Roman society, education is an obligatory gift a nation must give its citizenry. The concept of girl child education should be re-emphasised. Also, education should not be restricted to the four walls of the classroom. There are artisans, musicians, business tycoons, etc. who may not be literate or may not have gone through formal education but whose expertise in their chosen careers is more imparting and practicable than the theorists'. Should our budding youth be denied this pool of intellectual prowess because of formalist definition of education?

## **Conclusion**

The Greco-Roman education begins the learning of a child under the supervision of the parents. There is the need for Nigerian parents to make children receive some instruction in reading, writing and morals at home before they would attend the elementary schools. There should be an extension of social and economic life skills on the training of youths and children's imitative trait. There should also be close congruence between prestige, respect and recognition enjoyed by Nigerian teachers, if any, and their professional remuneration. For the universalisation of education in the Nigerian scene, the nation needs to adopt skill-based subjects across all levels. Artisans, musicians, business tycoons, etc. who may not be literate or may not have gone through formal education but whose expertise in their chosen careers is more imparting and practicable than the theorists' should be encouraged to impart values and knowledge in the universities.

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