

The Political Economy of The Teacher Shortage Crisis and The Proliferation of Private Schools in Obajana, Kogi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the persistent shortage of qualified teachers and the proliferation of privately owned, low-standard schools in Obajana, Kogi State, through the lens of Critical Political Economy (CPE). It explores how capitalist labour dynamics, weak state capacity, and the hegemonic influence of Dangote Cement Plc have reshaped the educational labour market and deepened structural inequalities in access and quality. Drawing on a qualitative design, data were generated through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with school proprietors, teachers (serving and former), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, parents, and senior secondary school students. Thematic analysis reveals that poor remuneration, exploitative working conditions, and the allure of better-paying jobs in the industrial sector contribute to teacher attrition. This has forced many private schools to rely on NYSC members and underqualified personnel, undermining educational consistency and learning outcomes. Moreover, the regulatory vacuum enables the unchecked establishment of private schools by unqualified individuals, reinforcing the commodification of education in a profit-driven local economy. The findings highlight that the teacher crisis in Obajana is not a stand-alone educational problem but one embedded in broader political-economic contradictions of neoliberal restructuring and elite-driven development. The study concludes that sustainable solutions require a reinvigoration of public investment in education, improved teacher welfare, stricter regulatory oversight, and stronger public-private partnerships to mitigate the structural factors perpetuating inequality in the education sector.

KEYWORDS: Obajana, Private School, Teacher Shortage

INTRODUCTION

The crisis of teacher shortage in Nigeria is more than a numerical deficit-it is symptomatic of deep structural contradictions within the country's political economy of education. In Obajana, Kogi State, a locality marked by the visible footprint of large-scale industrialization, particularly the dominance of the Dangote Cement Company, the paradox of educational deprivation amidst economic expansion is starkly evident. While industrial presence often signals development, it has, in this context, accentuated a disarticulated labour market wherein teaching, especially in low-cost private schools, is rendered unattractive, underpaid, and unstable. Subair and Talabi (2015) note that low remuneration, poor working conditions, and increasing student enrolment combine to drive widespread teacher attrition and dissatisfaction. These conditions are not merely episodic but entrenched within broader patterns of policy neglect and labour market disincentives.

The emergence of private schools in Obajana, primarily as substitutes for an underperforming public education system, has not translated into qualitative improvement. Rather, these schools often operate in precarious institutional environments where teacher recruitment is driven by affordability rather than competence. As Martina and Ogunode (2020) highlight, the teacher education landscape in Nigeria is beset by inadequate funding, limited professional development, and poor supervision, conditions that inhibit the production and retention of skilled educators. These constraints, when projected onto Obajana's privatized and poorly regulated educational sphere, produce a situation where unqualified, underpaid, and overburdened teachers become the norm.

More fundamentally, the retreat of the Nigerian state from its responsibility as the guarantor of social welfare, including education, has enabled a troubling market logic to dominate the sector. Adegbamigbo and Adewole (2013) argue that the failure to implement key national education policies-particularly those targeting early childhood and universal basic education-has allowed private capital to fill the vacuum, often to the detriment of poor households. In such a climate, education is no longer a public good but a commodity, accessible only to those who can afford its increasingly inflated costs.

This crisis is further deepened by systemic dysfunctions, such as corruption, insecurity, and poor governance, that perpetuate exclusion and inequity. Ogunode, Chinwuba, and Ayoko (2022) link the phenomenon of out-of-school children to institutional failures and socio-economic vulnerabilities, suggesting that the education system, in its current configuration, reproduces rather than mitigates marginality. Meanwhile, even the interventions of multinational corporations, though well-intentioned, remain fragmented and insufficient. As Bello and Kazibwe (2022) show, corporate efforts to contribute to education-related development

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goals, while laudable, are modest in scale and rarely address the structural causes of educational underdevelopment in the Global South.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Obajana, a once-quiet town in Kogi State, has swiftly transformed into a bustling industrial hub, catalyzed by the presence of Africa's largest cement plant-Dangote Cement Company. This industrial boom has spurred population growth and an attendant rise in educational demand, resulting in the rapid proliferation of private schools. However, this educational expansion belies a deepening crisis: a persistent and widening deficit in the availability of qualified teachers. Despite their growing numbers, many private schools in Obajana struggle to attract and retain competent teaching personnel, largely due to poor remuneration structures (Subair & Talabi, 2015) and fierce labour market competition from the cement industry, which offers comparatively more lucrative and less demanding employment opportunities. In response, school proprietors often rely on stop-gap measures, including the deployment of underqualified staff and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, a practice that undermines instructional quality and compromises learning outcomes (Namo & Ogah, 2020).

This paradox-where educational demand surges amidst systemic teacher scarcity-raises urgent and unsettling questions about the viability, equity, and long-term integrity of private schooling in emerging industrial towns. Yet, despite its significance, this dilemma has received insufficient attention within the scholarly literature, particularly from a political economy perspective. Framed within the critical tradition of Political Economy Theory, this study interrogates how the imperatives of capitalist accumulation, labour market stratification, and the neoliberal retreat of the state converge to produce and perpetuate teacher shortages in Obajana.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What factors are driving the shortage of teachers in private schools in Obajana?
- ii. How has the presence of Dangote Cement Company influenced teacher availability and employment choices in Obajana?
- iii. In what ways are private schools responding to teacher shortages in Obajana?
- iv. What are the political and economic implications of persistent teacher shortages in Obajana?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. To examine the underlying causes of teacher shortages in private schools in Obajana
- ii. To assess the influence of Dangote Cement Company on teacher recruitment and retention in Obajana
- iii. To explore the strategies adopted by private schools to manage teacher shortages in Obajana
- iv. To analyze the broader political and economic implications of the teacher crisis in Obajana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The state of education in Nigeria, particularly with respect to access, quality, and equity, has received extensive scholarly attention. Martina and Ogunode (2020) identify persistent structural and institutional challenges in teacher education, such as inadequate funding, a shortage of qualified academic staff, poor infrastructure, and ineffective supervision. These impediments, compounded by brain drain and limited staff development opportunities, have negatively affected the capacity of teacher education institutions to meet national demand.

Subair and Talabi (2015) provide empirical insight into the consequences of teacher shortages in public secondary schools, using Osun State as a case study. Their findings reveal that low remuneration, rising student enrolment, and poor working conditions contribute significantly to widespread teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. This results in overburdened teachers, diminished instructional quality, and declining student performance, which collectively weaken the education delivery system.

Adegami and Adewole (2013) explore the broader policy environment, critiquing the Nigerian government's failure to implement the 2004 National Policy on Education effectively, particularly in the area of early childhood education. The authors argue that this policy gap has enabled private investors to dominate the education sector, thereby limiting access for economically disadvantaged children and exposing them to child labour, exploitation, and eventual involvement in social unrest.

Similarly, Ogunode, Chinwuba, and Ayoko (2022) examine the out-of-school children phenomenon in Nigeria, attributing it to systemic issues such as poor public funding, corruption, insecurity, ineffective policy implementation, and socio-economic vulnerabilities like poverty and high fertility rates. The study underscores the long-term social consequences of educational exclusion, including rising illiteracy, insecurity, and dependency.

Expanding the scope beyond state actors, Bello and Kazibwe (2022) investigate the role of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in advancing education-related Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals between 2000 and 2020. Their review of

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interventions by MNCs such as Microsoft, Nestle, and PWC shows positive outcomes in terms of infrastructure development, increased school enrolment, and improved educational quality. However, the study notes that the scale of these interventions remains limited, particularly in the global south, relative to the corporations' financial capacities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

This study adopts the Critical Political Economy (CPE) approach, a strand of Political Economy Theory, to interrogate the teacher shortage crisis and the proliferation of private schools in Obajana. CPE emphasizes the centrality of power relations, capitalist accumulation, and state-market dynamics in shaping societal outcomes (Mosco, 2009). Unlike orthodox or neoclassical political economy, which treats economic systems as neutral and self-correcting, CPE posits that economic relations are historically and politically constituted, privileging dominant actors while marginalizing others (Miliband, 1973; Harvey, 2005).

Applied to education, this approach unveils how capitalist logic and corporate dominance can distort education policy and labour markets. In Obajana, the dominance of Dangote Cement Company has created a bifurcated labour environment-on one side, high-paying industrial jobs; on the other, underfunded and unregulated private schools struggling to recruit and retain teachers. This dynamic mirrors David Harvey's (2005) thesis on accumulation by dispossession, where neoliberal processes shift value away from public services toward capital-intensive sectors.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state's neoliberal orientation-characterized by fiscal austerity, deregulation, and reduced public spending-has created conditions in which private education becomes both necessary and exploitative. The result is a proliferation of private schools operating without adequate teacher support, which widens educational inequality and entrenches class-based disparities in learning outcomes.

Thus, CPE allows this study to link micro-level teacher shortages with macro-level political and economic structures, exposing the intersections of corporate power, state retreat, and social inequality in the education sector of Obajana.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to investigate the political economy of the teacher shortage crisis and the proliferation of private schools in Obajana, Kogi State.

Study Area The study was conducted in Obajana, a rapidly industrializing town in Kogi State, Nigeria, known primarily for hosting the Dangote Cement Company, whose economic activities have significantly influenced local development. The town has experienced a marked expansion of private educational institutions, particularly in the nursery, primary, and secondary school sectors. Currently, over twenty (20) private schools operate within the area, including institutions such as Golden Vessels Academy, God's Time School, The Grace International School, Scholars' World Academy, Divine Prince and Princess Academy, Creative Minds Paradise Academy, The Lords' Academy, Excellent Future Leaders International School, Step Forward Academy, Marvelous Academy, Upper Hands Academy, El-Horeb Arrows Academy, Usman Bin Affan Academy, Light Academy, Marab Victory Children Academy, SNAP Future Academy, Living Spring School, and Best Elite Standard International School, among others. This proliferation reflects both the growing demand for basic education and the intersection of industrial growth with informal educational entrepreneurship.

Population and Sampling Distribution

The target population for this study comprised individuals either directly or indirectly affected by the teacher shortage crisis and the rapid proliferation of private schools in Obajana, Kogi State. These included private school proprietors, serving and former teachers, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, parents of school-aged children, and senior secondary school students. To ensure a rich diversity of perspectives, 25 key informants were purposively selected from these stakeholder groups using a purposive sampling technique. In line with ethical research standards-and to prevent any unintended reputational consequences or perceived commercial bias names of participating schools have been intentionally withheld. The distribution of respondents across stakeholder categories is as follows:

Table 1: Respondents

Stakeholder Group	Number of Respondents	Rationale
Private School Proprietors	5	To understand recruitment challenges, teacher turnover, and sustainability issues.
Serving and Former Teachers	6	To explore their motivations, retention issues, and experiences in the sector.
NYSC Corps Members	5	To examine their role in filling the teaching gap and the quality of delivery.

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Stakeholder Group	Number of Respondents	Rationale
Parents of School-Age Children	5	To assess their perspectives on the quality of education and teacher competence.
Senior Secondary School Students	4	To gain insights into how teacher shortages affect learning experiences.

Source: Field Survey, 2025

This strategic distribution ensures a well-rounded understanding of the dynamics shaping teacher supply and private schooling in the study area.

Data Collection Method

Data was gathered using semi-structured KIIs. Interview questions covered:

- Challenges in teacher recruitment and retention
- Parental preferences and school choice
- Student perspectives on teaching quality and continuity
- The effect of Dangote Cement's labor market influence on education
- Private schools' dependence on corps members and temporary staff

Method of Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes were developed inductively and categorized into themes reflecting the intersection of economic structures and educational outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Drawing on qualitative data obtained through KIIs with 25 respondents—including private school proprietors, current and former teachers, NYSC members, parents, and senior secondary school students, this section interrogates the underlying structural and economic dynamics influencing teacher shortage and the proliferation of private schools in Obajana.

Structural Roots of Teacher Shortage: Capital and Labour Dynamics

A recurring theme in the interviews was the acute shortage of qualified teachers and the transience of those currently employed in private schools. Respondents consistently observed that many university graduates who initially take up teaching positions do so as a stopgap measure, often while seeking more financially rewarding opportunities, particularly within the Dangote Cement Company, the dominant industrial enterprise in Obajana.

One proprietor recounted a particularly revealing incident in which “a graduate teacher abandoned the school to work as a security guard at the factory,” a role reportedly offering wages significantly higher than teaching salaries. Such accounts exemplify the labour market disjuncture in Obajana and affirm the CPE argument that educational labour markets are embedded within broader capitalist labour hierarchies, where profitability and capital accumulation govern the valuation, desirability, and stability of employment (Robertson & Dale, 2015).

The commodification of labour evident in this context relegates teaching to a low-status, low-wage occupation within the town's evolving economic structure. This mirrors Marxist critiques of capitalism, wherein socially necessary labour, such as teaching, is systematically subordinated to capital-intensive, profit-maximizing labour in industrial sectors. The result is a persistent teacher attrition crisis, not driven by individual choices or lack of commitment, but rather by structurally embedded opportunity costs that make educational work economically unviable in comparison to industrial alternatives.

The Dangote Effect and Market-Driven Disincentives for Teaching

The presence of the Dangote Cement Company in Obajana represents a classic double-edged dynamic: while it has catalyzed local economic growth and employment opportunities, it has concurrently destabilized the educational labour market. Across the interviews, respondents consistently invoked what they termed the *Dangote effect*, a condition in which employment at the factory, regardless of one's skill level or educational attainment, is perceived as more socially prestigious and materially rewarding than teaching. One participant remarked poignantly, “Cleaners in Dangote earn more than graduate teachers.”

This phenomenon reflects the neoliberal subordination of education to market logics, as analysed in CPE literature. Market forces, in this context, distort the social value of teaching by disincentivizing educational labour through structurally inferior wages and status (Ball, 2012). In effect, teaching is rendered unattractive not due to individual aversion, but because capitalist systems recalibrate value based on profit extraction, not social necessity.

As a result, education in Obajana is trapped in a structural contradiction: while the industrial economy encourages labour migration away from teaching, private schools, typically unregulated and profit-driven, lack the institutional capacity or incentive to offer competitive salaries or benefits. This has led to the emergence of a dual-track educational workforce: on the one hand,

highly transient or precarious staff, such as National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members and part-time instructors; on the other, a declining cohort of trained, committed educators.

This bifurcation exacerbates pedagogical inconsistency and institutional fragility, reinforcing what CPE scholars identify as the long-term consequences of treating education not as a public good but as a market commodity subject to the logic of capital.

Crisis Management Strategies and the Normalization of Educational Precarity

In the face of persistent teacher attrition, school proprietors in Obajana have resorted to a series of improvised crisis management strategies: direct classroom instruction by proprietors themselves, the recruitment of untrained part-time instructors-often drawn from the Dangote workforce, and a heavy dependence on National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members. While these interventions may provide short-term operational relief, they simultaneously entrench a deeper crisis of educational precarity and pedagogical fragmentation. One teacher aptly observed, “Most corps members are not trained educators... they simply read from their phones in class.” This anecdote highlights the erosion of instructional professionalism, manifesting in limited subject-matter expertise, the absence of lesson planning, and a weakened teacher-student relationship.

From a CPE perspective, such trends are not incidental but symptomatic of the broader marketization of education, in which cost-minimization takes precedence over educational quality (Harvey, 2005). The normalization of underqualified teaching staff, poor regulatory oversight, and uncoordinated school expansion reflects what Hill (2003) describes as edu-business accumulation, the commodification of educational delivery driven by profit motives rather than pedagogical objectives.

In this context, private education provision in Obajana has devolved into a low-investment, high-turnover model, mirroring global patterns in neoliberal education systems where the imperatives of capital eclipse the moral and social obligations of teaching. The result is not merely a staffing crisis but a structurally embedded erosion of educational standards, with long-term implications for student outcomes, social equity, and the legitimacy of schooling as a public good.

Proliferation of Private Schools: Commodification and the Erosion of Epistemic Legitimacy

Respondents consistently expressed deep concern over the unregulated expansion of private secondary schools in Obajana, often established by individuals with little to no formal training in education. A particularly troubling trend noted by participants is the widespread adoption of self-ascribed honorifics-such as “Dr.” or “Professor,” frequently bestowed by religious organizations, instead of accredited academic qualifications. One interviewee dismissed the situation as “pure madness,” underscoring a broader epistemic and moral rupture within the local educational landscape.

Viewed through the lens of CPE, this phenomenon reflects a deepening commodification of education, whereby the establishment of schools is decoupled from any developmental, civic, or pedagogical imperative. Instead, it becomes a function of market opportunism, entrepreneurial survivalism, and informal credentialism (Tikly, 2004). The school, once a site of knowledge production and civic cultivation, is thus reconfigured as a commercial enterprise, exploiting regulatory voids, state withdrawal, and the vulnerabilities of economically marginalized communities.

This shift not only undermines the quality of education but also signals a broader crisis of legitimacy: schools cease to be epistemic institutions grounded in expertise and ethical obligation, and instead operate as profit-seeking ventures devoid of curricular depth, oversight, or accountability. The cumulative effect is the erosion of public trust in formal education and a dilution of the professional status of educators, with long-term consequences for social equity and national development.

Political and Economic Implications: The Disintegration of Public Responsibility

The combined effects of escalating teacher attrition, an overreliance on members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and the unchecked commercialization of education have led to a marked deterioration in the quality and legitimacy of schooling in Obajana. Notably, respondents drew attention to a disturbing trend: the emergence of several private schools that, despite holding official approval to present candidates for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) assessments, lack the instructional capacity to adequately prepare their students for these examinations.

As a result, such schools have increasingly become informal “miracle centres”-spaces where underprepared and academically weak candidates are assured of passing grades through orchestrated examination malpractice. These unethical practices are often institutionalized through the collection of so-called “logistics fees,” a euphemism for payments that facilitate cheating and compromise the integrity of the assessment process. This phenomenon represents more than an educational anomaly; it reveals a deeper rupture in the social function of education, transforming it from a platform for knowledge acquisition and civic cultivation into a commodified credentialing enterprise (Apple, 2013).

These findings echo a central argument of CPE: that neoliberal governance often withdraws from the active provision of essential public services while imposing onerous financial and regulatory demands on non-state actors, without ensuring equity or accountability (Robertson, 2008). Within such a framework, education becomes a domain of compounded exclusion, caught between public sector neglect and private sector exploitation. For the children of Obajana, this translates into a systematic narrowing of educational opportunities and the deepening of social and economic marginalization.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically interrogated the structural underpinnings of teacher shortages and the proliferation of private schools in Obajana through the analytical framework of Critical Political Economy. The evidence demonstrates that the crisis afflicting Obajana's education sector transcends localized administrative lapses or individual decisions. Rather, it is deeply embedded in broader political-economic logics that commodify education, degrade teaching labour, and erode public responsibility.

The monopolistic dominance of Dangote Cement as the town's principal employer has significantly distorted the local labour market. Within this context, teaching is increasingly perceived as a low-prestige, transitional occupation, readily abandoned in favour of more lucrative, non-professional roles in the industrial sector. As a survival strategy, many private schools have come to rely on underqualified or transient personnel, including National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, part-time instructors, and even proprietors stepping into instructional roles without pedagogical training. While these practices enable institutional continuity, they do so at the expense of educational quality, organizational coherence, and the cognitive development of learners.

Furthermore, the unregulated proliferation of private schools-often established by individuals with no formal training in education-reflects a profound failure of state oversight and governance. The retreat of the state from meaningful engagement in the education sector, accompanied by burdensome taxation regimes, has fostered an environment where schooling is primarily viewed as a commercial venture rather than a public good. The emergence of "miracle centres" and systemic examination malpractice underscores not only the collapse of academic standards but also the erosion of ethical foundations in the educational process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing upon the empirical findings and the structural insights offered by the Critical Political Economy framework, the following policy recommendations are proposed to redress the entrenched teacher shortages and the unchecked proliferation of substandard private schools in Obajana:

- i. Enhance teacher remuneration and employment conditions: The state government, in partnership with private educational stakeholders, should establish a regulatory framework that guarantees a livable wage and improved working conditions for teachers across public and private institutions. Such a framework should include provisions for health insurance, housing allowances, and professional recognition. Elevating the economic status of teachers is essential to restoring dignity to the profession and ensuring long-term workforce stability.
- ii. Reinforce regulatory oversight of private education providers: The Ministries of Education at both state and local levels must implement and enforce rigorous licensing and accreditation standards for private schools. Individuals seeking to establish secondary schools should be required to demonstrate verifiable educational credentials and relevant pedagogical experience. A temporary moratorium on new school registrations should be introduced pending a comprehensive audit and policy overhaul of the sector.
- iii. Institutionalize mandatory professional development: Regular and compulsory training programmes should be instituted for all private school proprietors, teachers, and administrators. Proprietors without formal educational training must be mandated to undertake certification in pedagogy and school management. This will help professionalize school leadership and enhance the quality of instruction and institutional governance.
- iv. Introduce targeted subsidies and incentives for compliant schools: Government should provide conditional financial and material assistance-such as infrastructure grants, tax incentives, and textbook support-to private schools that meet minimum educational and regulatory standards. Rather than treating private providers as profit-driven entities alone, the state should recognize them as partners in addressing educational deficits, particularly in underserved peri-urban areas like Obajana.
- v. Reform NYSC deployment to strengthen educational impact: The NYSC programme should incorporate mandatory pedagogical training for corps members assigned to schools. Deployment strategies must prioritize rural and semi-urban postings and include enhanced welfare provisions-such as accommodation, stipends, and transportation support-to discourage redeployments and improve instructional effectiveness.
- vi. Mitigate the labour market distortions of corporate monopolies: Given the economic dominance of Dangote Cement in Obajana, there is a need for structured engagement through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The company should be compelled to invest in education-specific interventions such as teacher training programmes, scholarship schemes, and school infrastructure development to counterbalance the adverse effects of labour market distortions on educational aspirations and career choices.
- vii. Intensify the fight against examination malpractice and the *miracle center* phenomenon: National examination bodies such as WAEC and NECO, in collaboration with state examination boards, should strengthen monitoring mechanisms and sanction institutions involved in examination fraud. Public awareness campaigns led by community leaders, faith-based organizations, and civil society groups should be launched to re-instill academic integrity and challenge the normalization of *logistics fees* and performance-for-pay models.

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- viii. Establish a public-private dialogue platform for participatory education governance: To foster inclusive and transparent decision-making in the education sector, a formal Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) mechanism should be instituted in Kogi State. This forum would convene stakeholders, including government officials, private school proprietors, parent associations, and civil society actors, to deliberate on policy priorities, share best practices, and collaboratively address systemic challenges in education provisioning.

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