

Opinion

www.guardian.ng

Guardian Nigeria GuardianNigeria Guardiannigeria Guardian Nigeria - C00264288

Stop the tragic student's excursions

By Luke Onyekakeyah

THE death of 22 young students and their teacher in a ghastly auto crash in Kano last week once again raises questions about the wisdom of ferrying students on long inter-state excursions. This is not the first time students on such excursions have perished in gory accidents. There is no official record of how many students and teachers have lost their lives on road crashes while on excursion. The Ministry of Education in each state should regulate the way and manner schools should transport students including those on excursion visits.

All the accidents recorded so far are preventable if there were standing rules and regulations from the Ministry of Education that guide or regulate such irrational excursions. Every school does what it likes by engaging uncertified public transport operators and drivers to drive students. The results of irrational school excursions are the fatal accidents that send innocent kids to their early graves. Both the families and nation lose the young minds that could be leaders tomorrow.

In March 2010, for instance, 42 persons (students and teachers) from Aricent Nursery and Primary School, Olupitan New Site, Ore in Ondo State, perished in a ghastly road crash on the Ondo-Ore federal highway. The incident shocked the state and devastated families whose lovely children went to school and never returned home alive.

On May 11, 2011, a school bus conveying four pupils of Cornerstone Bright School, Sangotedo in Lekki, Lagos to school crashed on the Lekki-Epe Expressway along with five other vehicles during the early morning rush hour. Nineteen persons, including four

pupils were involved in the crash. Three of the pupils, including Tobi and Phillip Adebisi of the same parents perished in the crash.

In the latest Kano incident, an 18-seater bus was conveying the students and some staff of Government Secondary School, Misau in Bauchi State to Kano on a school excursion when the accident occurred on the Bauchi-Kano highway at Tsaida village in Gaya local government area of Kano State at about 11a.m. The bus collided with an oncoming DAF truck. Reckless driving and speed may have caused the accident.

Among the 22 dead students were 12 boys and 10 girls, whose bodies were deposited at General Hospital Gaya. The others sustained injuries. "Two of the injured were taken to Gaya General Hospital while the remaining one has been referred to a Specialist Hospital in Kano," according to Public Relations Officer of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) Kano State Command, Kabir Daura.

Now, let's look at the nitty-gritty of the incident to show the lack of wisdom on the part of the school. The driving distance from Bauchi to Kano is 294 kilometres. It will take an average of four uninterrupted hours to reach Kano on a speed of 80 kilometres per hour. If that be the case, the return journey will take another four hours drive. That altogether means 8 hours. It is unwise to pack the little kids in the bus for 8 hours under a very horrible hot condition.

It might take another four hours to criss-cross Kano city to do the excursion. Altogether, the students would be spending a minimum of 12 hours. That would entail too much stress and exhaustion on the part of the students. The return journey would be a night trip over the dilapidated highway infested with robbers, kidnappers and sundry

criminals. The students could also be kidnapped. Why were the students exposed to such avoidable dangers? Given all the nasty possibilities, why did the school pack the students on a bus for such a long distant trip to Kano? Was the bus a school bus or commercial operator that uses reckless drivers?

Indication was that they were going to a Hausa service radio station in Kano! What is that? Is there nowhere in the entire Bauchi State that students could be taken for a Hausa language excursion. It is not that they were going on a scientific excursion to an observatory or things like that that are not found everywhere. Hausa language is spoken in Bauchi. Why go to Kano for something that is available in Bauchi?

It is important to apportion blame appropriately in this grave misfortune for other schools to learn their lesson. Certainly, the school did not act in wisdom and that has cost the lives of innocent students. The Ministry of Education also shares the blame for failure to do their work. There are no guidelines on how students should be transported in Nigeria - no bus specifications, which is why schools, both private and public, use all manner of vehicles and drivers to convey students. The results are frequent accidents and death of innocent young students.

School excursions are usually fun trips that excite students. It is not a suicide mission as most excursions have turned out to be. The Kano incident has, once again, brought to the fore the issue of standards in running both private and public schools in the country. The decay in virtually every facet of the country's life has created a culture of impunity whereby people and insti-

tutions do whatever they like knowing full well that nothing would happen. Families whose kids are killed in such avoidable accidents ought to sue the school and or government and press charges for compensation.

For instance, it is well known that most schools don't have standard school bus of their own. The schools hire rickety commercial buses with reckless drivers to drive students. Quite often, so many student/pupils are packed like sardines in the decrepit buses. In the Ore incident, 64 pupils were reportedly packed in an 18-seater bus for an excursion. The bus was overloaded and that might have contributed to the accident.

If field excursion is part of the school curriculum, there should be guidelines on how to go about it. The state Ministry of Education ought to give approval before a school undertakes an excursion. The approval should be based on the condition of the bus, the driver, the destination, and so on. Why does the Ministry of Education overlook something as crucial as excursion thereby endangering the lives of innocent pupils? Whenever a school organises an excursion, the students are excited but only to go and perish on the road! Failure of the ministry to intervene is why these accidents keep occurring.

It is high time that government made it mandatory for schools to have standard school buses for conveying students/pupils. School bus ought to be part of the infrastructure needed in a school. It is as important as a school building. Except this matter is addressed by the authorities, students will continue to perish in chartered buses. This trend should be stopped forthwith.