

# Conceptual Issues in Politics of Education

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## 1. Introduction

Politics of education is a vast field of study. Although, a lot of theorizing on the subject matter exists, there is need for proper documentation of the political context of education in Nigeria so as to throw more light on the relevance of the concept in this era of globalization. In other words, it is sometime necessary to undertake the explanation of the concepts used in the study of politics of education so as to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The concept politics of education thus refers to the social and political contexts of education. Its main objectives is to identify and examine the various social and political factors that influence issues and problems which affect education production process and also to identify the possible strategies for harnessing or otherwise such controlling factors that influences issues and problems for the benefit of educational administration and planning in the society. In philosophy of education, the content of education is expressed in curriculum, syllabuses and textbooks which have tended to reflect the dominant ideologies and policy outcome of government in power.

Unchendu (2004) noted that politics of education involves a complex interrelationship among interest groups, politicians, educationist, bureaucrat and knowledge brokers. He added that across the whole gamut of educational structure, these actors want educational institutions (Schools) to serve particular goals and needs as they define them.

## 2. Politics

The concept of politics has most often been interpreted to mean simply the unbridled struggle for power among individuals or groups in a particular society. Thus defined, politics is conceived as “a dirty game”, too unwholesome for the sanitized humanitarian act of education. Such narrow or restricted conception of politics was common with the perceptions of the earlier politicians and the traditional political scientists. Generally speaking, people have misconception and biases on the true meaning of the term politics. This is much so when we realize that the meaning of words have history and association. The difficulty of evolving an exact meaning of words are increased by lapse of time and differences of cultural environment. At this juncture, we may attempt to evolve a general contextual meaning of politics by first delineating what politics is not and secondly, attempt to provide an ostensible definition of the term. Crick (1982) cited in Okeke (2007) simply remarked that politics as a conceptual term:

*Is rarely praised as something with a life and character of its own. Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history or economics. It neither solve everything nor is it present everywhere, and it is not anyone political doctrine such as conservatism, socialism, communism or nationalism though it can contain elements of most of these things. Politics is politics, to be evolved as itself not because it is like or really is something else more respective or peculiar.*

From the above explanation, the concept of politics encompasses the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect an individual person, community, state, country or a society, it includes matters concerned with getting or using power within a particular group or organization. Politics is therefore a concept where an individual uses his/her power or authority to influence decision of others to his/her advantage. Another element of politics is interest. Politics is a kind of game play that involves activities which people enter into to pursue groups, personal or selfish interest(s) or ulterior motives.

According to Okolie (2004) politics arises from accepting the fact of the simultaneous existence of different groups in the society. Hence, different interests and different traditions within a territorial unit under a

common rule. There is no definition of politics that holds the allegiance of all political thinkers. Contending explanations reflect important epistemological and methodological disagreements within the discipline. Similarly, alternative conceptions of politics construed differently, in part because they derive from different understandings of reason, evidence and explanation and in part because they are informed by radically, different understandings of human possibility (Hawkersworth and Kogan eds, 1992).

Thus, Scholars such as Lasswell (1950) Catlin (1964) and Morgenthau (1967) cited in Okolie (2004) conceived politics as “a struggle for power”. The central question for the political research is who gets what, when and how. Such a research focus necessarily expands political inquiry beyond the bounds of government agencies, for although the official institutions of state constitute one venue for power struggle. Within this, politics is ubiquitous. They further conceived politics as a process of bargaining, negotiating, conciliation and compromise through which individuals seeking markedly different objectives arrive at decisions within which all are willing to live. On this view, politics is a moderating activity, a mechanism for deciding policy objectives from competing array of alternative (Crick, 1992). However, the above analysis failed to provide a comprehensive conception of politics. It tends to regulate war, revolution, terrorism beyond the sphere of politics. Besides, the notion of equal rights of participation and influence negates the formidable powers of the state and economy in determining political outcomes. Perhaps, a better way to conceptualize politics according to Okolie (2004) is to locate the explanation within the ambit of those action and inactions which directly or indirectly relate to mobilization and administration of human and material resources for specific ends in a given political entity.

Nnoli (2003) posits that politics is concerned with all activities that are directly or indirectly associated with the emergence of state power, consolidation and use of state power. According to him, politics has the state as its centerpiece. In addition Hawkersworth and Kogan (1992) noted that the institutional definition of politics provides neither a neutral nor a comprehensive account of political life. To them, if politics is to be understood solely in terms of the state. Critically observed, the basic problem with these theorists is that they have very shallow and misinforming idea of what state means, besides what they classified as institutional explanation did not preclude activities which are outside the official instructions of the state.

Nnoli was reasonably right when he noted that the state forms the basis for distinguishing those activities that take place in various arenas of life, such as the church, family, classroom, social club and the market from those activities that we refer to as politics. Hence, for politics to exist, these activities must be directly or indirectly associated with the state, and state activities.

### 3. Politics and Education

According to Aristotle “man is naturally a political animal” because, humanity cannot be conceived of outside society, and man can realize his full potentialities only as a citizen of a state. Man is made, human through education. Those philosophy of life is the same as the philosophy of education. Education distinguished man from all types of earthly creation and probably, even from ages.

Unfortunately, majority of Nigerian political leaders have not grasped this fundamental fact of life, that is, that we are what we are because of the type, quality, depth and philosophy of education we have received or are receiving. Appropriately the National Policy on Education (2004) accepts that “No policy on education, however can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation”. In other words, the goals of the nation are the goals of education and the goals of a nation ought to be the goals of the citizens of the nation.

The first sentence of the National Policy on Education (2004) in section one is a misinterpretation of educational possibilities. It says “a nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool”. This dichotomization of educational possibilities has been of the root of Nigeria’s leaders’ half-hearted approach to educational issues and problems because it led to the belief that certain achievements can be made without education.

One may ask, “which part of a nation’s goals cannot be achieved through education? Until our political leaders come to realize and accept that education is the only effective means, the only tool available to man to make desired changes within and outside himself, the social, economic political and religious progress of the nation will remain an illusion. We can now understand why: in fact, in a political treatise like *The Republic*, Plato devoted more attention on Education than on politics. The realization of political ends is entirely on education. This is clearly indicated in section one of the National Policy on Education which is devoted to the national and political goals of Nigeria.

Every educational system has political goals and these goals are very essential to justify the existence of the system. The findings in the research study of James (1963) cited in Uchendu (1995) on the dichotomy

between political and educational institutions, show more positive correlation with the political variables even when economic development is held constant. Meyer (1969) in Obanya (1981) observed that, “it appears that indicators of political development and the expansion of political authority are particularly related to educational enrolments at all levels of education.” Education therefore is an essential factor for Political development. Political development is the positive change that enhanced the stability of a nation, politically, economically, religiously, socially and educationally. This involves the creating of an enabling environment for people to express their views on the growth and development of a nation’s education. In addition, James (1963) reiterated that since the failure or success of the education system is dependent on the political system, education cannot be separated completely from politics as the system is an aspect of the political needs of the society. There is therefore a union between education and politics, within a common framework being the society. It is on this note that Rowley (2000) observed that educational plans are political in their nature and effect.

#### **4. Political Education**

The idea of political education is a way of distinguishing different types of education such as science education, technology education, music education, nomadic education. This type of classification does, not apply in the case of political education. Some people sometime confuse political education with citizenship education. This later concept cannot be juxtaposed with political education. The believe of this paper is that an education is political education whether it is art, science, technology, women, computer or citizenship education. The understanding of the concept of political education is its connection with the government or public affairs of a country and its relations with other countries. There is no aspect of education that is not connected with the government of a country. It is perhaps due to this connection that any attempt to distinguish between what education can or cannot do in the National Policy on Education is unacceptable since it is inconsistent with the meaning of the concept Education.

Education is globally accepted as a necessary factor for creating politics, consensus maintaining political power, develop the potentials of individuals and socializing them for the political system. By so doing, education makes individuals to be so useful to themselves and the society thereby reducing the selfishness of man for the good of the society. The success or failure of any political party depends partly on its policy on education. This is so because education is closely related to politics. Education is regulated in the society by government policies and so it is a function of politics. Thus, policies determined the type of education.

In the Republic, Plato was evidently very concerned with how education can be used to produce knowledgeable, experienced and selfless political leaders. Plato’s science aims at an all-round education that emphasizes, physical, art, science, mathematical and dialectical education. The entire scheme can be viewed, as an example of what political education ought to be. The relationship between politics and education is very apparent especially when observed that the main objectives of education is political and more so, as the goals of education are constantly reviewed with the aim of attainment of a dynamic political climate in the country.

According to Rusk (2007), the political needs of a country are stability, peace, law and order. In the past few years attempt have been made to use the school system (education) to promote national, political unity and integration. This is evident in the establishment of unity schools to foster exchange of people and ideas. Another framework that linked politics and education is the introduction of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC) in Nigeria in 1973. The educational scheme was politically motivated. More so, as education is a basic human right of all citizens, political decisions have to be put in place to preserve these fundamental human rights. In addition, education is necessary for democracy to be functional. The spirit of democracy can only survive through universal education system.

#### **5. The Concept of Power**

Generally, the concept of power denotes the ability (exercised or not) to produce a certain occurrence or the influence exerted by a man or group, through whatever means over the conduct of others in intended ways. Power is a notable concept in all human activities, institutions or organizations. It is the ability to get one do what otherwise what he/she would not have done by force, coercion, conviction or persuasion. Power goes with a position. Its main feature is the creation of social relationships. It is on this note that Weber (1947) cited in Okon (2004) posits that power is the probability that one can act within a social relationship and will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance. Hence power is force or ability to get another party to do one’s will. The probability that ‘A’ can get ‘B’ to do ‘M’ minus the probability that ‘B’ would not have done ‘M’ if ‘A’ had not intervened.

In life people seek different goals to attain a level. Power is concerned as one of the major goals often sought after by people through their endeavours. In the light of this, power should be seen as an important

dimension in every organization or institution be it private or public. In human nature, people do compete for and share power over men at the expense of other competitors. Bowles (1968) cited in Okeke (2007) aptly illustrated with educational institution thus:

*Decision-making in the education system is a sensitive barometer of the power relations within a society. The selection processes, the promotion probabilities and the formulation of educational policy reflect who really counts...Let us continue to ask what school policies should be adopted. But let us also ask who should decide what, when and how.*

He reiterated the fact that more often people claim that the essence of politics is power and influence. This assertion is partly a truism particularly when one recalls the fact that history is replete with developmental changes that were brought about by people desired to be powerless. In conclusion, he noted that, we live in a world that is prone to change power is concerned with the production of that change.

In various usages, it sometimes implies sanctions while in others it does not. Usages vary in the inclusion of legitimacy in the definition. Moreover, power is sometimes used as synonym for political which in turn denote a political authority in the sense of one of the legal powers of the state organs which stems from formal authority. It transcends specific situation in which it is used and the current relation between one who wields it and those affected. Power and influence differ in terms of degree in the sense that by nature and based on government and the law, people possessed the right to live and exercise their right through voting and being voted for or political participation. Influence as a concept involves the capacity to alter other attitudes or behaviour, while power per se refers to the ability to do so regularly, strongly and even in the face of resistance (Okeke. 2007:11).

Whichever way we try to conceptualize and apply the concept of power, the control point to note is that power is the ability to extract habitual obedience and compliance from others ability to bend one's will towards a particular direction, ability to coerce and ability to influence one's conduct. As a concept with flexible applications, it is a correlate of influence and loosely related terms. More specifically power is a special case of influence that is, power relationships meet the general criteria for influence, but power additionally includes a more specific factor—the threat or use of sanctions. Power is therefore coercive influence.

Power could be legitimate or illegitimate. It is legitimate when the person exercising it has the right to do so. For example, the right of a school administrator to influence his teaching staff to become dedicated to duty belongs to legitimate power. On the other hand, the power is said to be illegitimate when a person exercises power illegally. For instance, an armed robber may over power the owner of a house and force him to forfeit all his belongings.

According to French and Raven (1960) cited in Chinedu (2000), there are five sources of power namely:

**a. Reward Power**

Here, the strength of power is determined by the ability to give rewards. A person will be able to influence others if he is perceived to possess the ability to give absolute rewards.

**b. Coercive Power**

This is the ability of the influence party to punish the persons intended to be influenced if he fails to act in the expected direction.

**c. Legitimate Power**

This is the right of the influence to influence others. In this case any power sued has legal backing.

**d. Referent Power**

The basis of power here could either be through relationship or identification of the person being influenced with influencing individual.

**e. Expert Power**

This is a situation the influencing agent has expert knowledge which is superior to his own. This is the type of power lecturers have over their students, medical doctors have over their patients.

## 6. The Concept of Influence

The concept of influence is conceived as an aspect of power. In other words, influence is a kind of power, indirect and unstructured phenomenon. In political circle, influence refers mostly to situations where power is welded without any commands or other explicit orders being given. Influence therefore connotes the outwardly giver and possibly gradual exertion of power and persuasion rather than the more demanding legal or overt exercise of power connected with formal authority. Influence is therefore power legitimate. Power

becomes legitimate when it has become accepted by the people. The mass of the people be it in politics, education, social circle or economics are willing to obey. Their obedience is not really by compulsion but they necessarily obey because of the circumstance in which they find themselves. Therefore, competence to rules or directives comes by virtue of the fact that the people confer legitimate and therefore willingly accept such directives.

As aptly noted in the discussion above, influence and power are loosely related terms. Power is understood in behavioural terms as manifesting in the conformance of persons and groups to the preferences, whether expressed or implied of another person or group. More specifically, power in relation to influence is regarded as a special case of influence, that is, power relationships meet the general criteria for influence, but power additionally includes a more specific factor—the threat or use of sanctions. Power is therefore coercive influence.

In measuring influence in the social, political and education circle Robert Dah (1961) suggested that there a five basis in which students of politics of education and social change try to measure and compare amounts of influence.

These include:

- a. Identify the amount of change in the position of person being injured
- b. Examine the subjective psychological costs of compliance
- c. Identify the scope of the influence exercised.
- d. Identify the number of persons who respond to an act of influence
- e. Measure the size of the difference in probabilities of compliance. Influence in groups relates to both quality and quantity of participant contributions. The basis of impact of influence is founded essentially on eloquence with or interpersonal skills of exerting influence. From the foregoing however, there is a close relationship between education and politics, which implies that many of the issues and problems of public education have strong political implications. In other words, in proposing any educational policy or embarking on any educational programme, project or reform, the most essential criteria or consideration that crosses the minds of education planners and practitioners are usually political. This, as a matter of fact is not surprising, in the sense that one of the functions of education is political socialization, which is basically the propagation and dissemination of the philosophy of government in power. By and large therefore, the primary function of education is inextricably immersed in politics.

## 7. Politics of Educational Policy

Policies are simply principles and rules of action for achieving specific organization or institutional goals. The rule tells us what to do while the principle explains why that rule must be obeyed. Policy within the context of politics and education may emanate from the deliberate decisions that may be taken by a group(s) or individual arising from agreed interests, demands, needs and problems of a situation. It can also come from precedents or decisions made without any plan or conscience such a decision could be based on past experiences or observations made previously on a particular policy. Lastly, a policy can also be imposed as a result of certain urgent issues or exigencies to alleviate a critical situation. Okunamiri (2005) on the other hand, educational policy is basically a statement (written or unwritten) that contains principles, rules and regulations that seek to provide answers to certain education issues like;

- a. How will people be educated?
- b. Where and when will the people be educated?
- c. How will peoples education be financed?
- d. To what extent will the people be educated and assessed?
- e. To what extent will the role of politics influence education policy making process?

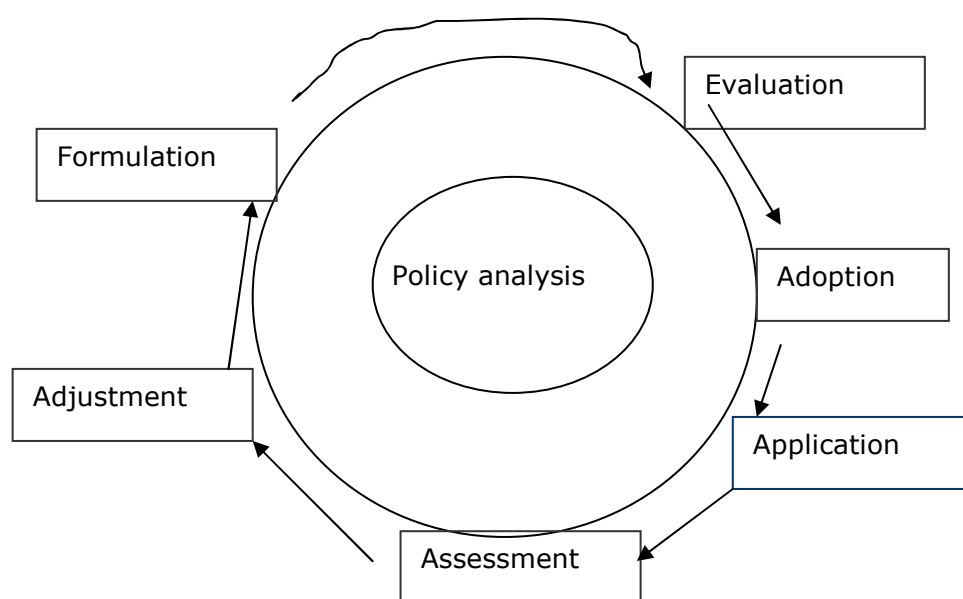
All the issues highlighted above cannot be discussed and provided with one answer. This is so because the making of politics of educational policy is concerned with a wide range of options most common with the people and society where policies evolved.

From the explanation given above, educational policies are very important for the achievement of the goals of the educational system and that of the society put simply, Miller (2010) educational policies are the agreed ways the educational system of a nation should be operated or managed. It is also important to state that educational policies are necessary in order to ensure that direction is given to any action taken on education. Nobody can just take action on educational issues without recourse to the agreed ways (policies) of operating the system. This action, must take the form of education policy making process where is a circle of political activities be carried out by political juggernaut, administrative practitioners and stakeholders in



education. These political activities of education policy making process according to Hadad (1994) include, policy formulation, evaluation, adoption, application, assessment, adjustment and analysis.

The politics of educational policy making process starts with formulation usually done in two phases. The first phase has to do with the analysis of existing situation while the second phase is concerned with the generation of policy options. The evaluation of the policy options follows from the generation of various options, what follows next is the adoption of the most efficient options(s) as a policy decision. The next stage is the application of the policy option that has been adopted and followed by policy impact assessment. Adjustment that will start the policy cycle all over again, if there is any gap or unsatisfactory in the policy impact assessment. Below is the structural representation of the politics of policy making process in education.



Politics of educational policy making process adapted from Igbineweka, V. politics of Educational management (1995:66)

The politics of policy making process exercise often commence as shown in the organogram above. The policy analysis phase either commence or end the policy making process. Factors identified as obstacles to the application of the policy are removed during the assessment and adjustments. During the analysis period, certain factors that favour adoption of the policy are identified and incorporated for adoption accordingly.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, having surveyed the extent to which politics has exercised some influence on education provision and functions especially in Nigeria, one may veritably conclude that from what has so far been discussed it is clear that issues and problems of public education have strong political implications. Politics has influenced on decision in educational management. Thus, the concepts of politics and education function as complementary agents of societal change.

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