

Political Leadership and the Development of Education Programme in Nigeria: Lessons for African Nations

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Abstract

This paper examined the implications of political leadership on the development of education programmes in Nigeria and lessons for African nations. The political environment has a strong influence on educational policy planning and implementation in any nation. Successive governments, both during the military and civilian regimes, tend to pursue educational programmes in line with their respective ideologies and priorities. Funding of education programmes was not only found to be inadequate, it was also based on the priority of the ruling government. In addition, by the 1990s many African countries degenerated into severe political instability most in the form of open conflicts. This has compounded the problems of expenditure underspending during the later 1980s and thus resulting in policy somersaults. In order to reduce the level of illiteracy in Nigeria and also achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of achieving education for all by 2015, Nigeria and indeed all African nations need a political leadership that is focused and vigorously pursuing the development of education programmes that will stand the test of time and move their respective nations forward technologically.

Keywords: Development; Political Leadership; Education Programmes; Political Ideologies; Educational Policies, Political instability

Introduction

There is a strong and powerful link between education and development, viewed from the social, economic, technological and political perspectives. According to Yesufu (1970), education is a source of investment and development. Perhaps, this is why in Britain, government policies on education and training have increasingly focused on education's role in human capital development (Cooper, 2002, and Beckmann and Cooper, 2004).

In addition to offering an opportunity for profitable investment, education is significant as it also opens people's mind for freedom. By implication, education is more than a means of fostering accelerated economic growth and modernization, it has a powerful link with liberation and real political independence. Perhaps this is why Fashina (2002) believed that:

... Education has or ought to have as its goals the liberation of the people, the construction of a free and non-exploitative society where human beings can realise their potentials.

Nigeria became an independent nation on 1st October, 1960. Successive governments have recognised education as an indispensable tool for national and individual development. However, in spite of the government efforts since independence, Nigeria still harbours the fifth largest number of illiterates in the world. According to Awe (2006), out of the number of illiterates in the world, Nigeria has a 2.7 percent share of world total in 1990, but recorded a 2.9 percent between 2000 and 2004. It equally needs to be noted that most Sub-Saharan African countries are underdeveloped and a handful others remain in the "developing" categories are characterized by little or no growth to allow them join the elite group of developed nations of the world (The Punch, Friday January 1, 2010, P. 14). Education, which is supposed to serve as a growth catalyst, seems to be the mercy

of the unstable and lack-lustre political leadership. What could have been responsible for the above? While a number of factors could be hypothesised to be responsible, the political trends in Nigeria and other Sub Saharan African countries since independence may suggest that the political leadership could be responsible. It is against this background that this paper emphasizes the political context of the development of educational programmes and policies in Nigeria . Attempt is made to examine the rationale for an articulate political leadership in the development of educational programmes in the country. In addition, the paper assesses the political background of the policy thrusts of various governments, with a view to suggesting what the present and future political leadership in Sub Saharan African should do to genuinely touch the hearts of the masses through virile education policies and programmes.

Political Leadership in Perspective

The success of any organisation or administration is a function of the leadership. Leadership can be described as the art of providing appropriate and adequate guidance and direction to members of an organisation so that associated efforts could be harnessed for the ultimate achievement of set goal(s) (Akindutire, 2006). The above implies that leadership represents the art of influencing people to work together harmoniously in the achievement of group goals. Leadership influences a person's feelings, beliefs and behaviour. It involves motivating and vitalizing the members of a group to contribute maximum effort. It taps vital resources and higher levels of achievement. It eliminates inertia, apathy and indifference and replaces them with inspiration, enthusiasm and conviction. The test of leadership is determined by the number of lives that it touches and helps to grow.

Political leadership is constantly put in place to oversee government's projects and programme and also provide motivation to personnel and the citizens for the purpose of achieving national objectives. Political leadership, especially under a democratic dispensation, implies representative leadership. Political leadership thus, has the tendency to influence decision making as it affects the needs, yearnings, aspirations, and progress or otherwise of the community or nation. It is thus sad to note that, to a great extent, bad leadership in government is responsible for the woes and apparent lack of growth in many African economies. Agagu (2010) noted that a combination of warped institutions and greedy actors produce poor and exploitative policies that frustrate the citizens and consequently result in the political instability. The damaging impact of several decades of military dictatorship and miss-governance is yet to die down in Uganda, Liberia Sudan, Somalia, Sierra-Leone, Rwanda and even Nigeria.

The Political System and Education Policy

Political leadership operates within the political system. It should equally be noted that educational programmes are babies of educational policies. Thus, it is imperative to examine to interface between the political system and education policy formulation. *Politics and Education: An interface* A bi-directional relationship exists between education and politics (Fabunmi, 2005). Perhaps this is why Abernathy and Coombe (1965) noted that:

The massive changes which developing countries have already experienced and those, whether induced or not, which are in process, render all the more conspicuous the reciprocal relationship between politics and education in those areas.

Education is provided through a political system. It therefore, derives its authority and resource allocation from the political system. Indeed, "no educational system can survive without the financial support and protection of the government" (Nwankwo, 1982). Because of the huge government financial involvement in education and other unavoidable responsibilities it owes both the immediate societies and the nation at large, it determines direction of the education system by formulating and interpreting educational law and policies and also establishing standards for measurement of educational quality. In Nigeria , for example, educational development has been guided by politics in the areas of social demand for education, schools take-over, the boarding or day schools, the establishment of special (unity) schools, and the location of new schools. Indeed, what education transmits as well as the process and manner of transmission is politically determined. There is always political or social purposes behind any educational policy which is contingent upon the ideology of the government or party in power. In view of the foregoing, Campbell, Cunningham and Mcphee (1965) observed that: *Difficult as it is for some educators to realise, we are convinced that the future of education will not be determined by need alone. It will be determined by schools men and their friends who are able and willing to use political influence to translate the need into public policy.* In the same vein, Omolewa(2009), observed that in Nigeria, there are several considerations; religious, ethnic,

political and economic that seem to determine the direction of policies. He also observed that there are many people who paid more attention to their narrow and sectional interest at the expense of national long-term interests. These observations have far-reaching implications for the development of educational programmes in Nigeria.

Education Policies and Political Ideology: An Overview

Education policies are general statements containing principles, regulations and rules, which govern, influence and determine the decisions on how to educate the children, where to get them educated, where to get them employed, who to teach them, and how to finance their education (Owolabi, 1987 and Babalola, 2003). Education policies are thus, agreed ways of operating the education system. They also refer to the framework within which education is administered in a given place within specific period. Educational policies are guiding principles and courses of action . deliberately adopted by relevant governmental authorities to influence and determine educational decisions. They are statements which guide and direct all actions directed at achieving national development through education. For instance, in Britain , education policy has become increasingly focused on its economic function (Beckmann and Cooper, 2004). In developing nations, like Nigeria, new educational policies evolve to meet the demands of individuals and interest groups (providing private benefits); meet the demands of the larger society (providing social benefits), e.g. 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 for self reliance, and to meet the world technological change and development.

Fabunmi (2005) identified four major modes of the influence of ideology on the planning of education policy and programmes. These are:

(i) The approach and plan to provide education services depends largely on the ideology of the ruling political party. For instance, the capitalist ideology favours viable and sustainable school systems (Qualitative education) while the socialist ideology favours equal and universal access to education.

(ii) The ideology of the ruling (or dominant) political party dictates who funds education. The capitalist states favour both private sector and state involvement in educational investment, while the socialist states favour state (Public Sector) funding of education at all levels, (iii) The ideology of the ruling (or dominant) political party determines who controls the educational institutions. For instance, capitalist - oriented political parties favour deregulation of education, which gives room for private and public (state) schools to co-exist. On the other hand, the socialist - oriented political parties favour total control of educational institutions by the state (government).

(iv) The ideological camp, which a country belongs, dictates the type or form of education in the country. Schools in capitalist states encourage

competition and materialism, while schools in socialist states make the citizens lay less emphasis on materialism, since free materials and social services are provided.

Education Policies and Political Ideology: The Nigeria Experience

Lyons (1977) claims that in Nigeria , the efficiency of education and its administration are influenced by the realities of political power. For instance, policies and programmes on nomadic education, Universal Primary Education (UPE) - and later Universal Basic Education (UBE) and Unity Schools have political undertones.

For the purpose of this discourse, the interface of political ideologies and education programmes in post independent Nigeria is presented under two major periods.

* The Military Era, and

* The Democratic Era *The Military Era*

Nigeria witnessed the first military coup d'etat on July 29 1966 , thus terminating the first republic. This was followed by the thirty months civil war between early July 1967 and 15th January 1970 .

The post-civil war brought a lot of changes to the educational system (Adesola, 2002). These include:

greater and more direct involvement of the Federal Government at all levels of education;

introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme in 1976 by Olusegun Obasanjo to bridge the educational gap between the north and the south. The origin of the UPE can be traced to 1955 when the government of Western Nigeria led by Obafemi Awolowo started the UPE. The same scheme was launched in the East in

1957. The programme in both the East and West recorded total failure consequent upon inadequate planning and shoddy implementation by the political class; the centralisation of administration of education, thereby harmonizing government policies and practices the National Curriculum Conference of 1969 was organized, the result of which culminated in the publication of the National Policy on Education in 1977, and was reviewed in 1981 to reflect the provision of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution; expansion of both the technical and technological components of the education system;

teacher education was given a boost; establishment of Open University. There was a break in this period, with the handing over of power to democratically elected government led by Shehu Shagari in 1979. The military struck again on 31st December, 1983 bringing in the administration of Buhari/Idiagbon, with their own ideologies and programmes. For example, Decree 14 of 1984 abolished all existing private universities and prohibited the opening of new universities. The law however, bought sanity to the education system (Education Sector Analysis, 2003). In addition, Decree No 16 of 1985 empowered the Federal Ministry of Education through the National Universities Commission (NUC) to inspect, assess and accredit academic programmes in the universities. Ibrahim Babangida seized power in a palace coup in 1985. His regime was noted for the notorious Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which laid the foundation of liberalization and deregulation with the attendant implications for the education sector. When Babangida "stepped aside", Sanni Abacha "stepped in" with his own programmes. Apart from the consistent changes in education policies and programmes during the military era by the various leaders, the issue of inadequate funding of the education enterprise is notable. For example, an analysis of the sectoral share of total public expenditure in Nigeria between 1984 and 1994 revealed that the proportionate share of defence surpassed that of education (Ayodele, 2000). This may perhaps be due to the dire need for the military to consolidate its dominance.

The Democratic Era

Nigeria became an independent nation on October 1st 1960 . Tafawa Balewa became the Prime Minister with Nnamdi Azikwe as the President. Prior to independence, the Ashby Commission was set up in April 1959 to:

Conduct an investigation into Nigeria 's needs in the field of Post Secondary School Certificate and Higher Education over the next twenty years (1960 - 1980) (Education Sector Analysis, 2003). The commission made a number of recommendations to cover all levels of education as well as the necessary education programmes for a "young" nation's development. This report laid the foundation for educational development in Nigeria . The implementation of the recommendation was however shortlived consequent upon the Military coup of July 29, 1967 that terminated the first republic and indeed its educational programmes. General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1979. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) formed the government led by Shehu Shagari. It should be stressed that the 1979 constitution paved way for the first incursion of private universities into the Nigeria education system (Education Sector Analysis, 2003).

According to Adesola (2002), the civilian governments decided to exploit the placement of education on the concurrent list to prosecute their various election manifestoes in relation to education. He added that because of the dwindling financial fortunes of the nation, the free education policy of the federal government was effective only on paper by 1979. In addition to the above flaw, the ideologies of the various parties in government as regards education varied. The NPN controlled the central with capitalist ideology in favour of qualitative education, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) under the leadership of Obafemi Awolowo, controlled five South Western States with socialist ideology of free education. This did not only delay the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system, but the UPN controlled states were deliberately starved of fund, culminating in the failure of the free education programme. By 1983, it was obvious that the burden was becoming unbearable for the affected governments (Adesola, 2002).

The return to civilian rule in 1999 ushered in the second coming of private universities consequent upon the liberalisation and deregulation policies of Obasanjo -led administration. Another notable education programme during the Fourth Republic is the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme by President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30 September, 1999 . There are however, fears that the flaws of the UPE Programme (also launched by Obasanjo in 1976) may resurface again if the leaders cannot learn from past mistakes. Towards the end of the tenure of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2006 policy reforms in education resurfaced. For instance, Polytechnics were pronounced to be upgraded as degree awarding institutions. However, with the handing over of power to President Musa Yar'adua in May 2007,

this policy was aborted. In addition, the Obasanjo-led administration, at the eve of handing over decided to turn all Unity Secondary Schools to Senior Secondary Schools. Thus, there would be no new intakes to Junior Secondary School One (JS1). However, as usual again, the new administration felt the need to change this policy by advertising for intake of JS 1 students for the 2007/2008 academic session. However, there was implementation somersault owing to inadequate planning which chattered the expectation of parents.

From the foregoing, it could be inferred that policy reversals characterized the past and present administrations. In other words, changes in leadership have brought about instability in the educational sector which further aggravates the inconsistencies in policies on education. Perhaps, this is why Olaniyonu (2008) commented that "we are not looking forward in our planning" and therefore "we are unable to have a strong grip on the actual activities that will bring about a proper focus on education development in Nigeria."

Political Leadership and Funding of Education in Nigeria

The influence of political leadership in the allocation of resources cannot be underestimated. The political leadership (either military or civilian) determines who gets what out of the financial resources through budgetary appropriation. In other words, total public expenditures on education is determined by the political process (Blaug, 1970). In Nigeria, and also many other African countries, the government is a major actor in the ownership, finance and control of educational institutions. By implication, educational institutions rely heavily on the government for funding. It should be noted here that over reliance on a single source of funding portends trouble for educational institutions. This is because, fluctuations in budgetary allocation to education consequent upon changes in political government has far-reaching implications for the development of educational programmes. Indeed, Agagu (2010) noted that policy implementation is often affected by erratic budgetary allocations.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocation to Education as Percentage of Total Budget in Nigeria (1977 – 2007)

Year	Total Budget ₦m	Budgetary Allocation to Education ₦m	Allocation to Education as % of Total Budget
1977	15,328.5	738.6	4.82
1978	12,452.4	569.6	4.57
1979	13,191.4	902.1	6.84
1980	16,342.1	1,549.8	9.48
1981	11,410.9	984.3	8.63
1982	12,857.5	1,135.1	8.83
1983	12,086.1	967.4	8.00
1984	15,966.5	861.2	5.39
1985	17,754.2	850.2	5.79
1986	13,081.8	1,110.6	8.49
1987	15,508.6	653.5	4.21
1988	20,290.8	1,084.1	5.34
1989	27,119.4	1,941.8	7.16
1990	36,264.0	2,294.3	6.33
1991	35,171.6	1,554.2	4.42
1992	52,035.9	2,060.4	3.96
1993	112,100.5	7,999.1	7.14
1994	110,201.0	10,283.8	9.33
1995	113,395.6	12,728.7	11.23
1996	189,000.0	15,351.8	8.12
1997	276,723.2	15,944.0	5.76

1998	287,917.1	26,721.3	9.28
1999	358,103.5	31,563.8	8.81
2000	664,935.3	67,568.1	10.16
2001	1,018,167.6	59,764.6	5.87
2002	1,188,914.6	109,455.2	9.21
2003	1,226,156.0	79,586.1	6.49
2004	1,212,231.5	93,777.9	7.74
2005	1,801,938.2	120,035.5	6.66
2006	2,193,609.2	165,213.5	7.53
2007	1,949,594.8	185,771.77	9.53

Source: Computed from Central Bank of Nigeria (2008). *Statistical Bulletin*. Tables B1.5 and B1.6

Table 1 shows the budgetary allocation to the education sector as a percentage of total budgetary allocation in Nigeria between 1977 and 2007. The table shows that in 1977 and 1978 education accounted for less than 5% of the total budget. This period was immediately after two successive military coups (1975 and 1976). The instability during these periods and the need to consolidate the military regime may have accounted for this poor allocation to the education sector.

In October 1979, the military handed over to civilian government. Between 1980 and 1983, the civilian government was in control. However, budgetary allocation to education fell from 9.48% in 1980 to 8.00% in 1983.

The coup d'etat of December 31, 1983 terminated the brief period of democratic governance. The instability of the polity again took its toll on education funding when the budgetary allocation to education fell from 8.00% in 1983 to 5.39% in 1984. This is however, expected since the new military government had to increase military spending (on defence) to consolidate the military take over. Thus, between 1984 and 1992, the budgetary allocation to education not only fluctuated, it was also less than 10% of the total budget.

The palace coup of 1993/1994 further aggravated the political instability in the country. Unexpectedly, budgetary allocation to education increased from 7.14% in 1993 to 11.23% in 1995. After stabilizing the military take over, the allocation to education fell to 5.76% in 1997.

Nigeria once again returned to democratic government in May 1999. However, the allocation to education fluctuated from 1999 to 2007. During this period, table 1 also shows that the allocation to education was less than 10% of the total budget which was far below the UNESCO benchmark of 26% in the early 2000s. The consistent fluctuations in budgetary allocation to education over the years have seriously impacted on the development of educational programmes in the country. Apart from posing serious challenges for implementing new educational policies, fund was not enough for the implementation of existing educational programmes. This may have necessitated policy somersault culminating in the abortion of many laudable educational programmes.

Policy Syndromes and Political Instability

Policy Syndromes, according to Fosu (2009) refer to “ex-ante anti-growth policies”, and are thus detrimental to growth in all areas of the polity. Policy syndromes are in the forms of state controls, adverse redistribution, sub-optimal inter-temporal resource allocation and state breakdown/failure, all of which have far reaching implications for policies and reforms.

A country having “state controls” is characterized by heavy distorted economic markets by government. “Adverse redistribution” arises when redistributive policies are determined by and favour the constituencies of respective political (government) leaders, usually with regional and ethnic undertones and thus, most often than not, resulting in polarization. Adverse redistribution also involves downright looting by political actors thus diminishing resources meant to provide social services including education. “Suboptimal Inter-temporal resource allocation” refers to revenue misallocation over time. This is manifested in overspending during commodity booms in the mid-1970s in many African countries, and expenditure under-spending during the subsequent bust of the latter – 1980s in many African countries. Consequently, most laudable educational policies put in place in the mid-1970s were jettisoned in the latter – 1980s due to “lack of fund”. “State breakdown/failure” is in the form of open warfare (e.g. civil wars) and also acute elite political instability resulting from coups d'etat which culminate in total breakdown of law and order. Fosu and O'Connell (2006) reported that the impact of state breakdown is the largest among all the syndromes and its impact on Africa's per capita annual GDP is estimated to be as much as 2.6 percentage points.

As noted above, state breakdown has been the most potent detractor of growth among the policy syndromes. It is equally sad to note that many African countries degenerated into political disorder and open conflicts/warfare in the 1990s. By the 1990s, Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Liberia, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Togo had descended into severe political instability most in the form of open conflicts (Fosu 2009). Ho (2005) posited that "political instability incurs widespread counter mobilization to limit reform". He, however, added that the instability itself was not an unmitigated blessing for social movements. In Taiwan, for example, according to Ho (2005) the political instability under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government was more like a double-edged sword. Rather than following social movements unequivocally, the weakened public authority provided clear chances for the conservatives to roll back the existing policies to forestall the new ones. Implications of Political Leadership for Educational Development in Nigeria. A careful examination of the thrust of the leaders/government (military and civilian) since independence will reveal a lot as regards the development (or otherwise) of educational programmes in Nigeria. These include: limited or lack of strong political will to develop the education sector. This has manifested in poor funding, resulting in overt poverty of education infrastructure;

uncoordinated educational policy implementation owing to political differences; political instability, which has resulted in abandonment of educational programmes and policies by successive governments; focus of political leaders on consolidating their dominance (and power elongation) by diverting resources to defence (during military rule) and electioneering campaign (during civilian regime) at the expense of education programmes; and politicization of education data by political leaders at all levels of government.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Lack of political stability since independence has been exemplified by occasional premature or forcible termination of governments, which has eventually led to discontinuity of longterm or systematic policy planning or policy implementation in Nigeria. The political climate in Nigeria has not been conducive enough to give room for continuity of good educational plan and policies because every successive political leader (civilian or military) wanted to be identified with new policies, thereby suspending the existing ones. Even though, policies may be quite sound and progressive, it would require new designs and plans of action, which may have high cost implications. Not only this, new policy implies that the educational planners and policy makers are often forced to abandon a plan or policy still on the drawing board to design a new one which must be moulded to meet the current political demands. Political instability in Nigeria has, in fact, made the realisation of the educational objectives of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th National Development Plans a difficult task, if not impossible. Nigerian education system is characterised by constant change in educational policies. Educational policies have been changed over and over, even by the same leader in power. They have not always been given time to mature before their termination. Of course, the efficacy of any policy cannot be ascertained until its execution or implementation and perhaps its review. For instance, one would expect a policy or plan that affects the primary level or secondary level of education to complete at least two cycles each, which is 12 years before it could be adjudged good or bad; instead, most policies are discarded, modified or completely changed for reasons best known to the actors who are mostly political leaders in Nigeria. There is, therefore the need for long term plans on all activities that will impact on various stages of the educational systems. It is germane to note that the way the education system is financed and controlled by politicians, seriously determines what objectives and priorities to be pursued by educational administrators. The future is more important than the present. In view of this, the political leadership needs a well rationalised determination of their priorities and target in favour of a more synchronised educational development. Most African nations and communities are characterized by destiny diversion, which is a function of conspiracy of political leadership. Most communities and developing nations are full of charlatans and self-appointed messiahs, who are largely motivated or induced by economic reasons, rather than service. The kind of political leadership needed for the much desired development of educational programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive, is that, which will look beyond environmentally and socio-politically induced bottlenecks and plan for the future generations; that which will put structures in place to genuinely and sincerely de-emphasize and fight greed and avarice and then focus on integrity, which is the watchword of great and progressive leaders and nations. In other words, good governance in terms of meaningful and sincere democratization with sufficient constraint on the executive arm of government will serve as a potent mechanism to avoid (or reduce the incidence of) policy syndromes.

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