

Education and Politics: Its Implications for National Transformation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The history of the linkage between politics and education is rooted in the development of the civil society itself (Adelabu, 2004:188). It is based on this understanding that this paper engages how the interaction between education and politics has been impacting on national transformation in Nigeria. From the colonial administration in Nigeria till the contemporary political dispensations, politics has exerted implied or expressed influence on education policies and their implementations. Successive regimes and administrations in Nigeria have seen education, through their manifestoes and actions, as a political tool. The paper focuses on tertiary education as the case study but with some reference to primary and secondary education. Through theoretical understanding of relevant literatures, it is observed in this paper that the inconsistency in the education policies and programmes in Nigeria is as a result of the interplay between politics and education. This paper is therefore of the opinion that relevance and pro-activeness should be the hallmark of education in Nigeria for national transformation. The paper concludes that education in Nigeria can help in the ongoing transformative agenda if the government demonstrates some political will in the implementation of the national education policy.

Keywords: Education; Politics, National Transformation, National Policy on Education, Vocational Education

Introduction

The interplay of politics and education is not novel in Nigeria. Since the period of colonial administration, the planning, administration and management of education has been under the influence of political arrangements. Apart from the political arrangements, sociology and economy of the moment also influence the course and curricular design of education.

During colonialism, the colonial government instituted education policies that favored Eurocentric culture over African culture. This situation was reflected in the syllabi and curricular of the period. The curricular of colonial education favoured the teaching of English Language, European history and literature. The secrets behind this were to foist European culture on Nigerians and to further establish European hegemony in the country. Nigeria was greatly under colonial education between 1891-1951 (this time frame does not foreclose the understanding that the Nigerian education was under the colonial administration till October 1, 1960). The real impact of colonial education was not felt until 1852 when Akintoye was made the king of Lagos after the dethronement of Kosoko (see Fafunwa, 1982). For the first twenty years of colonial administration in Nigeria, the colonial government only paid lip service to the development of education. Grants, aids and subscriptions were not given to the missionaries that engaged in "colonial" education.

It was only in the year 1872 that the colonial government made available the sum of E30 to each of the three missionary societies involved in educational activities in Lagos-The CMS, The Wesleyan Methodist and the Catholic to support their educational activities (Ukeje and Aisiku 1982:206). It was at this point that education in Nigerian society began to attract government attention and involvement. In our opinion, the reason for the interest of the colonial government in education was political. When colonialism was gaining its footing in Nigeria, there was a dearth of manpower, hence the need to educate the natives in the basic literacy and numeracy for ease of administration. To further encourage education in the colony, the colonial government increased the grants in aid from E30 to E200 per annum for the three missionaries.

Before the close of 1800, the colonial government saw education as a good political tool and thus, established several schools across the country. Further still, at the beginning of 1900, the government established the first department of education (1903). By 1908, the first Education Ordinance for the Crown Colony and the Southern and the Northern Protectorates was promulgated. This ordinance was meant to regulate the standards of colonial education.

The truth of the matter is that education in the colonial period involved three principal actors: The colonial government, the missionaries and the local chiefs. One peculiar feature of colonial education of 1900 until 1926 was the haphazard control and administration of education by the missionaries. Each of the missionaries was running its affairs by its individual standards. To check this situation, the first Nigerian Education Code was made in 1926 to ensure uniformity and standardization of education. This code categorized education into the following:

- (i) Infant : Classes of 1 and 2
- (ii) Primary : Standards 1 to 6
- (iii) Secondary : Forms 1 to 6

This action marked the grade system in Nigerian education. Since the time of political independence on October 1st 1960, Nigeria experimented and implemented with various educational grade systems such as standard and form classes; 6-3-3-4 scheme (six years in the primary school; three years in the junior secondary school; three years of the senior secondary school; and four years in tertiary institutions). In the recent time, this categorization is now put in the structure of 9-3-4 system (9 years of basic education, three years of senior secondary education and four years of tertiary education).

The consideration for colonial education does not foreclose the fact that there was education in Africa and Nigerian, in particular before the exposure to colonial administration. Education, in Nigeria before colonial administration was informal and traditional that began from birth till death. This form of education is informal and unstructured but fulfilling and goal-achieving. Fafunwa (1982:11-12) has identified seven cardinal goals of traditional African education. He is of the opinion that traditional African education was meant:

- (i) To develop the child latent physical skills;
To develop character;
- (ii) to inculcated respect for elders and those in positions of authority;
- (iii) To develop intellectual skills;
- (iv) To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour;
- (v) To develop a sense of belonging and to encourage active participation in family and community affairs;
- (vi) To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Considering the goals of traditional education, it can be said that this form of education encouraged sustainable national, societal and individual development. It actually impacted on the moral, physical and psychological development of a child. It is therefore our argument in this paper that education was not alien to Nigeria before the colonial incursion. We also argue that traditional education in Nigeria favoured literacy development and societal transformation. This argument is given because literacy and lifelong education share the same quality. This entails linking literacy and livelihood in such a way as to create opportunities to apply the skills of literacy and numeracy to work and social life, thereby making learning a meaningful and worthwhile experience (Haladu, 2008:113).

It is an indisputable fact that formal education in Nigeria has been characterized by policy somersault as a result of persistent change in the educational policy. The inconsistency in the country's education sector is a bane to sustainable national development and the realization of the transformative agenda embarked upon by the present administration.

Education in Nigeria: Contemporary Realities

The state of education in Nigeria calls for the urgent attention of educationist and policy makers to ensure sustainable development and attainment of national transformation. It is a truism that no nation can outgrow the quality of its education. Nigeria education from pre-basic to the post-basic stage requires purpose-driven reformation for sustainable national transformation. We engage our argument with the review and critique of the national educational goals, as contained in the National Policy on Education. In the policy, it is written that the goals of national education are:

- (i) The inculcation of national consciousness;
- (ii) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society;
- (iii) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
- (iv) The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Successive regimes and administrations in Nigeria have not been able to achieve the national goals of education as identified above. Some socio-political factors such as Eurocentric attitude of Nigerian populace, poor implementation and lack of programme continuity as a result of constant change in government are responsible for the failure of the country to achieve national educational goals, as observed so far . Nigerian education sector, like every sector in the county has witnessed unstable programme implementation.

In the tertiary education, graduates become or remain unemployable after graduation owing to the following observable problems in the country's tertiary education:

- (i). Dilapidated facilities for effective teaching and learning. The laboratories and libraries are ill-equipped for proactive and pragmatic learning outcome that will be problem-solving in approach.
- (ii). Poor staffing. The teaching and the non-teaching staff are not adequate for effective teaching and learning.
- (iii). Monetization of admission process. In the contemporary Nigerian society, admission process has become monetized under the name of post-UTME. With this practice, the higher institutions in the country rake money from the helpless and hapless students. The consequence of this practice is that it amounts to double

standard that favours the highest bidder, which may lack the moral and academic intelligence to pursue a particular course of study.

(iv). Incessant strike. The country's tertiary education has been riddled by incessant face-off between the government and the lecturers in the colleges of education, Polytechnics and Universities. Among the reasons for this face-off are the poor funding of tertiary education and poor conditions of service for the lecturers. This face-off lasts for the minimum of three months to one year, depending on the category of the institution.

(v) Poor process-product matching. The country has not been able to record enough success in technological development and economic advancement because the products of tertiary education have not been able to translate theory into practice.

Thus, it can be said that Nigerian education since independence has failed to inculcate national consciousness, national unity and the right types of value and attitudes for the survival of the individuals and the Nigerian society. This situation is reflected with the spate of violence and insecurity, coupled with the magnitude of corruption in the country. In the real sense of the matter, an educated man should be cultured and proactive in the making of decisions for sustainable individual, societal development and national transformation.

Similarly, Nigerian education has failed to train and culture the mind to acquire appropriate skills (physical mental, social and psychological) meant for social and societal development. Expectedly, education meant for sustainable national transformation and development should culture and nurture the three Hs of the head, the hands and the heart. The development of these three Hs will pursue and facilitate the sustainable human-capital development of a nation.

The indicators of the above problems in the realization of the national goals of education can be seen in the rate of graduate unemployment. Many Nigerian graduates have not acquired the skills that can make them independent of the paid-employment. These graduates are rather trained to be job-seekers instead of being job-creators. The reason for this problem in the non-vibrancy of the curricular of education across all levels. This needs urgent attention and proactive actions of all the stakeholders the government, the non-profit organizations and the society at large.

In this instance, a case is made for vocational technical education (VTE). This form of education makes provision for skills acquisition and craftsmanship. In the National Policy on Education, the goals of vocational education are given. It is given in the policy that the goals of vocational education shall be to:

- (a) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly art craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (b) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
- (c) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

It is however disheartening that the current curricular of vocational education in Nigeria did not have any reflection of self-sufficiency and self-reliance because of poor infrastructures and inadequate personnel. The technical schools where the vocational education is expected to take place are poorly funded and maintained. The common characteristic of these technical schools are inadequate teaching and non-teaching staff, outdated and non-functional equipment, poor enrolment and poor funding. The transformation of Nigerian society needs purposeful transformation of the education sector.

In the opinion of this paper, education in Nigeria has been engulfed with the politics of the moment. Consequently, the public schools have been subjected to the state of near collapse. The collapse the public school system is leading to the creation of a segregated school system and with it socialization patterns that have linguistic implications (Egbokhare, 2011:19). Apart from linguistic implications, as identified by Egbokhare, the collapse of the public school system also have political, economic and social implications. The consequence of this collapse on the Nigerian education system is the proliferation of many private institutions (from primary to tertiary) in the country. Before the collapse of the public school system in the Nigerian education sector, the number of private institutions was scanty and insignificant. At the wake of 1990s, private institutions of learning began to flourish in the country. Yet, quality education appears elusive (see Obanya, 2008 and Lawal 2008).

Nigerian Education and the Politics of Investment

To the economist of education, the concepts of investment and consumption have been adopted to describe the involvement of individuals and the government in educational pursuit. As an investment, economists of education measures the cost-benefit of engaging in educational pursuit. As consumption, education is seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. For this reason, education is seen as a public good. This paper, therefore, corroborates the view of Babalola (2000:14) that:

Education is, for the most part, a public good so that market forces are not completely free to determine the optimum quantity and price of education. The long lead time between the beginning of education and the time the recipient tries to sell his skills in the market place makes it difficult for the consumer to evaluate its worth at the inception.

At the termination of educational pursuit through the appropriate certification, the recipients will desire to embark upon practical demonstration of skills acquired. This is where interplay of educational consumption and investment came into the fore at the individual level. The politics of investment in education, in this paper, is seen from the broader perspectives of the government, designated ministries / parastatal and the agencies. We base our argument on the position of Obanya (1999:19) that:

Since politics deals with power play for the governance of human societies, educational systems tend to reflect the politics of the nations they are designed to serve. In serving the course of nation building, political actors evolve policies, which determine the practice of education.

The key power players of the public governance with the educational sector “conspire” to keep the public school system in a moribund state. This is occasioned by poor funding of education and “predetermined” neglect in terms of poor infrastructural facilities. The consequence is the half-baked recipients of education.

The collapse of the public school system gave room for the emergence of materialistic tendency in the Nigerian education sector. The Nigerian politicians and business tycoons, who have profited from embezzlement of the public funds and other forms of corrupt practices, now venture into the establishment of schools. There is, thus, a mad rush for the investment in education by the private individuals and corporate bodies’ sequel to the realizations that a sizeable number of Nigerians now have an unbridled urge to be educated in a way. The relevant government agencies/parastatal in charge of approval and registration have failed to ensure quality. Many of these private schools (from primary to tertiary) usually fail to meet up with their minimum standards. They (most of these private schools) usually fail to have the required human-capital and infrastructural resources that will sustain the institutions for the first decade of existence. The course and pattern of politics of investment in Nigerian education are identified below:

- (i) The incongruity in the educational policy formulation and its implementation;
- (ii) The entry of individuals and corporate organizations into the educational sector and the ability to buy their way through approval and registration;
- (iii) The government unworthy attitude of double standard: implementation of free education with no human-capital and infrastructural facilities, whilst their children attend well-equipped schools abroad with public funds.
- (iv) With the private investment in education (of individuals and corporate organizations), education for all (EFA) becomes impossible. This position is given because the fees of the schools are not affordable for the masses;

Deduced from the above points, it can thus be said that education is no more seen as the rights of the masses, but rather, education is seen in the contemporary Nigerian society as a privilege for selected masses. It is a common knowledge in the contemporary Nigerian society that few ex-heads of states; heads of parastatal and other government functionaries own their educational institutions (from primary to tertiary). It is therefore the hypothesis of this paper that the public school system in Nigeria is put in a moribund state to ensure the emergence of the bourgeoisie class.

System Theory of Education and National Transformation

Scholars and educationists such as Cole (1996) and Ijaiya (2012) have identified the correlative between the school system and the society through their postulations of ‘input-process-output’ model. An educational system is seen as an open system because “an open system is said to be greatly influenced by its environment from which it receives most of its inputs (e.g. financial, technological, material and human resources), and it expectedly has to respond to changes in the environment” (Ijaiya, 2012:15).

Schools can be likened to other social organizations with open system. Cole (1996:71), for instance has identified three features of open system. These are given below:

- ❖ They receive inputs or energy from their environment;
- ❖ They convert these inputs into outputs; and
- ❖ They discharge their output into their environment.

The above input-process-output’ model given by Cole suggests the significance of education in the attainment of sustainable development and national transformation in Nigeria. For education in Nigeria to help in the attainment of sustainable development and national transformation, there should be adequate translation of educational programme or policies into reality. For any educational programme or policy or innovation to be translated into reality and success, it must reach the classroom, the heart of teaching” (Ijaiya, 2002: 482).

The quality of Nigerian education is becoming questionable each day because of the second-fiddle role that teachers are subjected to in the policy formulation and implementation. Teachers are seen as the rejects of the earth that only need to be pitied with pittance as salary. The welfare and the favourable conditions of service for teachers are only considered by the government to score a political mark. Despite this maltreatment of

teachers, they still receive blames for the failure of educational system. Government should be sincere and proactive and stop blaming teachers. It is therefore expected that the government should take the advice of Ijaiya (2012:14) that:

Blaming teachers for everything is however not the solution. The teachers are not responsible for the way education is being managed. In fact, they are themselves victims in a way. To change the tide, there is a need to re-invent our management practices that would produce positive change.

Going by the above opinion of Ijaiya (2012), it can therefore, be said that teacher training and welfare are central to the success of the system theory of education through “input-process-output” model.

For education to help in the attainment of transformation agenda in Nigeria through system theory, the following plans for action are given:

- i). Teachers should be well-trained and their welfare should be well taken care of. This is so because teachers are the important human factors in the process of education. They translate educational programmes and policies into realities for sustainable national development.
- ii). Education at all levels should not be free. In the opinion of this paper, free education is seen as a political propaganda. Education should be quality and qualitative for sustainable national development.
- iii). Approval and registration of private institutions by designated ministries, parastatal and commissions should be done with probity, accountability and transparency. This will help to check the proliferation of private institutions.
Consequently, this will ensure the availability of quality human- capital and infrastructural resources for quality education.
- iv). The supervision and monitoring of schools should be routinely done with relative objectivity. This will ensure proper implementation of the school curricular.
- v). There should be town-gown collaboration in the design and implementation of educational curricular.
This practice will enhance sustainable national development because it will cater for the manpower need of the country. The case is made for teachers because they nurture and maintain the foundation of tertiary education in Nigeria.

The proliferation of education institutions in Nigeria have also been found in the tertiary education in Nigeria. It is not uncommon in Nigeria to see individuals, corporate bodies and religious organizations establishing universities. At present, as at the time of this research, there are 40 federal universities, 39 state universities and 50 private universities in Nigeria. This statistics shows that there are more private universities that the federal and the state. This should have been a welcome development in national transformation if the opportunities are proactively utilized by the government. There is no pragmatic intervention from the government in the affairs of these private by the federal government, except in the areas of monitoring and control. The government does not engage in any financial assistance in these private institutions in terms of aids and grants. This situation is unhealthy for the growth and development of tertiary education in Nigeria. These private universities and other higher institutions of learning should be given the opportunity to benefit from Tertiary Education Tax Fund (TETFUND) to cushion the financial commitment of the founders of these tertiary institutions. This paper, therefore, corroborates the view of Adedipe (2013: 26) that:

It is instructive that State Universities, of which the Federal government is not proprietor, have been brought in as beneficiaries of TETFUND. It must therefore, justifiably also bring in Private Universities. They are, as Local Governments, increasingly closest to the communities, whose human well-being, has been emphasized as the primary role of the universities, both conceptually and by best global practices.

Government should be proactive and pragmatic in the transformation of education by making financial commitment towards the growth and development of these private institutions. Owing to lack of financial assistance from the government, the fees of these private universities become prohibitive for the masses. For proactive and sustainable tertiary education that will help in the realization of the transformation agenda of the country, some issues need to be addressed. Among these issues are given below:

- i. The basic education in the country should be made effective an efficient.
- ii. Private universities should be given financial assistance by the government.
- iii. Vocational education in the country should be made proactive and pragmatic to check the menace of unemployment.
- iv. There should be town-gown collaboration in order to ensure the relevance of the country's tertiary

education to societal and national needs.

One of the ways through which politics has played some role in the Nigerian University System (NUS) is in the area of monitoring and regulation of the minimum standards of the country's universities. The statutory provisions for the monitoring and regulation of universities in Nigeria favour the government institutions. Adedipe (2013: 22-23) laments this situation:

The criteria have been made tightly demanding, to the extent that, for Private Universities, the NUC is operationally assisted by its Standing Committee on Private Universities (SCOPU) that has had 6 chairmen to date.... The SCOPU processes of analysis and verification visitations are so rigorous that most applications do not make it at all, or make it over after a good number of years. In contrast, the universities established by Government (Federal or State) are mainly backed by the promulgation of an act, followed by, in my opinion, not so rigorous a process compared with those attendant on the private universities; including the stringent requirement of 100ha of land.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the interplay of education and politics. It has also examined the history of education in Nigeria from the colonial period. The paper discusses Nigerian education and the politics of investment. Individuals and corporate organizations were investing in education as a result of the collapse of the public school system. For education to assist in the transformation of the country, the paper makes use of system theory (with input-process-output) and its implications for sustainable tertiary education in the country. A case is also made for teacher education and welfare. This will ensure proper translation of education programmes or policies for sustainable national transformation. There should be town-gown collaboration for sustainable manpower development for sustainable national transformation.

Recommendations

- i. National summit on education reform should be organized by government. Resolutions of this national summit should be objectively implemented for national transformation.
- ii. Private universities should be made to benefit from Tertiary Education Tax Fund (TETFUND).
- iii. There should emphasis on functional education through vocational and technical education of practical skill acquisition.
- iv. There should be national need assessment to help in the formulation of sustainable education policy for national transformation.

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