

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL STABILITY THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

Patrick Eya (Ph.D.)

ABSTRACT

National Policy on Education is one of the good outcomes of the famous National Curriculum Conference of 1969. The Policy is a perfect document. Some people have advocated alternatives to Nigerian education following series of problems plaguing education in this nation. This paper: sees the effective implementation of the policy as one of the answers to the problems of education in this country. Full implementation of the policy in all the states is very likely to help in the achievement of sustainable democracy and political stability.

INTRODUCTION

Education all over the world has been recognized as an instrument for development and progress. In the 1976 Lagos Conference of African Ministers of Education, it was agreed that education should strengthen economic independence and rectify political colonialism. Education is the key for the acquisition of scientific and technological know-how. In realization of the importance of education, nations of the world have been formulating and implementing educational policies to enable them accomplish the main tasks of education.

Following the research findings by Fafunwa (1964) and other educators that concern about the lack of relevance of Nigerian education, a National Curriculum Conference was proposed. Eventually the National Curriculum Conference was held in Lagos in September 1969. The recommendations of the conference gave rise to the white paper - the National Policy on Education published first in 1977. The Federal Government set up a seven-man "Implementation Committee for the National Policy on Education in the same year 1977 under the chairmanship of Prof. S.D. Onabamiro. The committee was given the following four terms of reference:

- (a) To translate the policy into a workable blueprint and to develop programmes for the implementation of the policy;
- (b) to coordinate and monitor the implementation of those programmes developed under the policy;
- (c) to advise Government on and to assist in providing the infrastructure and other requirements for policy implementation; and
- (d) To provide a continuous review and assessment of the aims, objectives and targets of the policy with a view to ensuring the adequacy and continued relevance of the policy (and those programmes developed under it) to our national needs and aspirations, and to propose modifications on any aspects as may be found necessary.

This beautiful policy has not been fully implemented. Several factors have continued to militate against the full implementation of the document. The document has been revised twice in 1981 and 1998.

Features of the National Policy on Education

The National Policy on Education treats eleven important aspects of education in Nigeria. These aspects are:

1. Philosophy of Education
2. Pre-primary Education
3. Primary Education

4. Secondary Education
5. Teacher Education
6. Higher Education
7. Technical Education

8. Adult and Non-formal Education
9. Special Education
10. Education Services
11. Educational planning, organization and financing.

Other features of the policy document are the emphasis on science and technology, continuous assessment, women education, change in the structure of secondary education - 6-3-3-4, mother tongue -Nigerian Languages, and vocational subjects. The policy stipulates that student's admission to universities should be in the ratios of 60% science to 40% humanities. This policy applies only to Universities. It does not apply to other lower levels of education. The policy on continuous assessment cuts across all levels of education. At the primary level it states that the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) should be based completely on continuous assessment. The Junior Secondary School Certificate should be based on combinations of continuous assessment and examinations.

The 6-3-3-4 structure means that:

- 6 years should be spent in the primary school
- 3 years in the Junior Secondary
- 3 years in the Senior Secondary and
- 4 years in the University

The junior secondary should be both pre-vocational and academic. The senior Secondary school should be comprehensive in curriculum. At the Junior Secondary Level, the core subjects are Mathematics, English, Nigerian Languages (2), Science, Social Studies, Art and Music, Moral and Religious Instruction, Physical Education, vocational subjects. The pre-vocational subjects still at this level are Woodwork, Metal work, Electronics, Mechanics, Local Crafts, Home Economics and Business Studies. The Woodwork, Metal work, Electronics and Mechanics come under the umbrella of Introductory Technology,

Another major feature of the policy is the provision for Universal Primary Education (UPE). The policy states that the Primary Education should be free and compulsory. According to Nwagwu (1976) it is the greatest milestone in the history of organized education in Nigeria.

Implementation of the National Policy on Education

The implementation of the National Policy started even before it was published (in 1977). But the implementation has been haphazard to say the least. The policy is beautiful. Nigerians have been known for good and laudable plans. The only problem has been with the implementation. Nwadiana (1999) remarked that the policy on education is one of the best in contemporary societies, but unfortunately it is one of those very poorly implemented. In the course of time, the goals of the policy were abandoned in implementation process. The 6-3-3-4 education system took off on September 2ⁿ 1976 during the military regime under General Obasanjo with the launching of the first figure "6" as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme (Ojiako, 1979). By 1982 when the products of the scheme in the primary were to enter secondary school, the military had handed over to the civilian government, which was not as zealous as the military about the programme. Only a section of the country was ready to move on. Only 10 out of the country's 19 states commenced the JSS in 1982. (Nduanya, 1999).

When the continuing cohort finished the JSS in 1985 and was ready to move to SSI, only 7 out of the 10 states commenced the SSS segment. By then another military regime had come to power. This time the regime ordered all the states that had not started the SSS segment to do so. It was only in 1991 that all the states of the Federation presented candidates for the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) (West African Examination Council, 1991).

On the admission ratio of 60% and 40% in favour of science and humanities in the Universities, the ratio is never followed. On the Introductory Technology, many schools do not have workshops not to talk of the equipment. Shortage of Introductory Technology teachers is

the greatest maladjustment in this level of education. Students who are talented in vocational subjects are supposed to be identified at the JSS level so that they will be encouraged in that direction while those who are academic should continue to the Senior Secondary School (SSS) and University. The issue is that every student including most of their parents want to continue up to SSS and University at all costs.

The teachers who are the implementers of the policy at all levels are neglected. In some states teachers are owed up to four months salaries. The effect is that they go on strikes and the children roam the streets. Now the pre-primary, most primary and post primary institutions are in the hands of private individuals and organizations.

The management of primary education has been moving from local to state and from state to the Federal and now it has been given to states. Meanwhile some states are busy handing over schools to the missions. Likewise the examination bodies are being created and banned. The Federal Government has earlier this year established a new National Examinations Council (NECO) to run in parallel with WAEC in the conduct of the Senior School Examinations. Subsection 23 of the National Policy on Education (1981) states that "Nigeria will, for the present, continue to use the West African Examination Council as its national examinations body, since this does not prejudice Nigeria's national interests, and in fact has advantages'. We are yet to know which body will conduct the May/June 2000 Senior Secondary School Examination WAEC or NECO as the manoeuvre is still on.

One can go on and on in pointing out areas of the policy that are infringed upon or haphazardly implemented. Many factors are responsible for limiting the full implementation of the policy. Some of these factors include:

- i) Politics: - Different governments both military and civilian with different objectives have operated the policy. Last week another programme called Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched at Sokoto. The implementation of the policy has been going on without accurate and current statistics. Again, different political parties controlling states have been implementing the policy in their own ways.
- ii) Inadequate Finance: - This has been responsible for many states not recruiting teachers and not financing education adequately. Pupils and students go to schools with their own seats. There are no libraries, laboratories and where they exist they are not equipped. Educational services are neglected.
- iii) Neglect of Teaching Profession: - In Nigeria teaching profession is rated very low. With the result that they do not have the zeal to implement the policy. Products of JSS and SSS do not opt for teaching profession. Teaching is now for dropouts and rejected people in other professions and women who want to pass time with it. According to Ivowi (1989) what remains in closing down teachers colleges is empirical evidence to be provided for the feelings of society. In some

states only one or two of the colleges are left while others have been closed down. It is to be noted that the products of these teachers colleges are the best-equipped teachers for the proper implementation of pre-primary and primary education. iv) Increase in the Number of Institutions: - There has been an unprecedented explosion in the establishment of educational institutions at all level. Nigeria had 13 Universities in 1976 when the implementation started but today there are 39 universities with many more coming up. There are 54 Colleges of Education and 83 Federal Government Colleges. With the increase in the numbers of the educational institutions, proper implementation of the policy becomes more difficult to monitor and regulate. In urban centres almost every other building is a nursery school. It has become almost impossible for state ministries of education to regulate and control the operations as well as to ensure that the staff are adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided as stated in the National Policy.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Nigerians are not lacking in good ideas and beautiful plans and programmes. The only problem is in implementation. Research findings abound on the cases of poorly implemented programmes and plans including the National Policy on Education. Mogbo (1999) opined that if the National Policy on Education had been successfully and properly implemented, the Nigerian students would have been exposed to wide range of options making it possible for them to identify their interests, abilities and limitations within a broad spectrum of academic, scientific, technical and technological exposure and the Nigeria of our dreams would have been born.

Since education is the bedrock for sustainable democracy, development and growth it is the view of this author that the answer to sustainable democracy and political stability is the proper implementation of the National Policy on Education. Furthermore since it is teachers' college that produces the best-suited teachers for pre-primary and primary education the institution should be sustained or its curriculum incorporated into that of the Colleges of education. Sustainable democracy and political stability is a necessity in Nigeria and it should be pursued at all costs.

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