

POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The paper gives a broad overview of the politics of educational development in Nigeria. In late 1960, Nigeria reached a consensus about the purpose of education. Unfortunately successive governments seem not to focus on the goals which emphasises that education is the most effective weapon for breaking the vicious circle of underdevelopment ,ignorance ,poverty, disease, economic dependence and political instability .This implies that there is hardly any nation that can attain any meaningful development without taking her education seriously, Thus, education is a worthwhile venture as it is recognised worldwide as the most important engine that propels technological and national development. This explains why countries that have achieved any appreciable level of development invest massively on education. Implementation in policies has been the major bane to educational development in Nigeria. The paper identifies current challenges and offers suggestions for the future direction of educational development in Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for the generation of knowledge and development of human capital. It is also acknowledged as the building block of social and economic reconstruction. Obviously education is the most effective weapon for breaking the vicious circle of under development, ignorance, poverty, disease, economic dependency and political instability. This implies that there is hardly any nation that can attain any meaningful development without taking her education system seriously.

Thus, education is a worthwhile venture as it is recognized worldwide as the most important engine that propels technological and national development. This explains why countries that have achieved any appreciable level of development invest massively on education. No wonder it is also this recognition that prompted the Federal

Government of Nigeria to declare in the National Policy on Education that “education is an instrument per excellence for effecting national development” (FRN, 2004).

Right from the attainment of independence, the need for innovation and change had always been prevalent in the education system of developing countries (Alao & Adelabu 2006). In Nigeria for instance, the first attempt to reform the school system was through the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system to replace the inherited colonial system of education. However, (Aluede; 2006; Alao & Adelabu 2006; & United Nations educational scientific and cultural organisation (UNESCO, 2007) have opined that most education reforms have failed in the past due to the presumption of planners which later translated to poor planning.

The Concept of Education

Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the [mind](#), [character](#) or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated [knowledge](#), [skills](#) and [values](#) from one generation to another. Etymologically, the word education is derived from *educare* (Latin) "bring up", which is related to *educere* "bring out", "bring forth what is within", "bring out potential" and *ducere*, "to lead" Kellerman (1980) defined education as the process of teaching and training of the child. Ebong (1996) defined education as a powerful instrument for the development of man and the society.

From these definitions, education is a systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture, through formal or informal training of people in a society. It deals with the mental, physical, psychological and social development of the citizens in a given society. The goal of education is manpower development, aimed at national growth and development. Growth is increase in size without scientific and technological advancement.

What is development? Castle (1972) defined development as ‘a situation whereby man himself becomes both the object and the subject of his own improvement. According to Longman’s dictionary of contemporary English (1995) development means the gradual growth of something so that it becomes bigger or more advanced.

Kindleberger and Herrick (1977), defined economic development to include improvements in material welfare, especially for persons with the lowest incomes; the eradication of mass poverty, illiteracy, disease and early death.

A critical look shows that development has to do with change, improvement, value judgement and realisation of any potential in practical terms. Development can be experienced in an individual or nation; it could be experienced in social, economic, political and educational sectors of any nation.

What is Politics?

It is a process by which groups of people make collective decisions. The term is generally applied to behaviour within civil governments, but politics has been observed in other group interactions, including corporate, academic, and religious institutions. It consists of "social relations involving authority. Etymologically the word politics is

derived from a Greek word – “politics” and also from a Latin word “Politicus” meaning “citizens”.

Politics is concerned with how people are governed, but involves several processes. Anuna (1996:1) described politics as the relationship between those who govern and those that are governed. He emphasised that this relationship is controlled by political life. It is known that education is one of the means of selecting the political ruling class. Anuna (1986) also opined that in fundamental terms, Nigerian politics means the allocation of social facilities, amenities and various government facilities to the various ethnic groups in the country.

Also Okoro (1985:51) conceived politics as the science or art of government. To him, to govern is to control or direct the public affairs of a nation or state. Furthermore, Nnoli (1986:7) in Anuna (1988), aptly defined politics as all those activities which are directly or indirectly associated with the seizure of power, the consolidation of state and the use of state power.

The politicization of education is another major problem of educational development in Nigeria today. In an attempt to catch up with their counter-parts, many states in Nigeria particularly the new ones, indulge in the opening and running of many educational institutions, even when they are least prepared to do so. This was particularly the case during the Second Republic (1979-1983) and the activities of the various state Governments during and after the second Republic clearly show that education is still being politicised in Nigeria.

Universal Primary Education.

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme in September 1976. This Scheme was welcomed in many quarters in Nigeria but was abandoned. In November 1999, the Nigerian government under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme in Sokoto for the nation as a better alternative. The re-launching of a similar programme to UPE by the Federal Government of Nigeria indicated that there was something desirable which the scheme was expected to enable Nigerians achieve.

The introduction of universal primary education (UPE) scheme by the then regional governments in the country helped to expand primary education. There was an increase in the number of schools and hence enrolments.

Universal Basic Education

UBE is a monumental national enterprise, the success of which depends largely on the extent to which its efficient management can be assured.

Major challenges of managing UBE are:

- 1) Conceptualization i.e. the meaning of UBE itself. The UBE has a much wider scope and more all embracing coverage than its precursor, the universal primary education (UPE). The vertical dimensions include life - Managers long learning, junior secondary, primary school and early childhood education. of UBE have to begin by seeing the problem in its holistic sense, with its vertical and horizontal

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dimensions so as to adapt management strategies to the complex and multiple tasks involved.

- 2) Mass schooling as envisaged by the UBE programme will not yield any benefits to the nation unless it becomes an opportunity for mass education, the management of UBE would therefore not simply count numbers but would pay attention to issues of relevance, quality, equity and efficiency, such that the school transforms the numbers into a critical mass of educated persons needed for national development.
- 3) UBE is being developed as a people oriented programme and it should be ensured that UBE becomes a people oriented programme. Management training of UBE has to take a more radical approach, than the orthodox one which uses seniority and experience as the only yardstick for appointment to management positions in education.
- 4) Emphasis is to shift to hands- on experience acquired through inter active and practice oriented programme.

More importantly, the compulsory free universal Basic education act amply demonstrates the political will of the Nigerian government to meet her national obligations under the constitution, as well as the international goals of education for all and the MDGS. It is believed to be one of the dividends of democracy in Nigeria, and the government is totally committed to ensure its success, but from all indications it does appear that the basic facilities needed for the full implementation of the scheme are yet to be provided. Only few schools have been renovated. No new ones are being built where there are none. All this requires money. Right now, teachers' salaries are in arrears in many states of the federation. In fact most of the renovation works on the school building are in the hands of politicians, who are not interested in executing the jobs according to specification. Some have for some reasons, almost abandoned their jobs, even in some areas where the secretaries of some local government boards were given the money to ensure that the head teachers executed the project. The secretaries gave money far below the expected expenditure.

Prospects of the UBE

The UBE programme as a nugget for national development spells out the possibility of turning every youth into a regular and efficient contributor to the well being of the country. This should eliminate the tendency of school leavers remaining idle, dependent on parents and relation for continued support years after formal education. The essence of education is to develop the child and make him fit to inhabit and transform his world in the future. It is meant to provide all round development, rural, intellectual, physical and spiritual. All this means that education is meant to develop the intellect and the acquisition of skills that enable the recipient child to

become fulfilled intellectually and acquire practical skills and abilities that would enhance his well being perhaps through self employment.

The generation gap or non – involvement of youths, continuous riots in communities, schools and colleges, drug abuse, dropping out of society, defiance of social institutions and the non involvement of youths in contributing to issues or activities related to society’s problems, and the economic liability of youth and so on are evidenced in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta Area. Majority of our youths with university degrees are unemployed. Those even employed are under-employed, due to inadequate technical skill on the job. There is lack of vertical or horizontal job mobility for many persons, city and rural areas and the lack of relevance of much education in terms of a work role. The schools should help in abridging these problems. It is noted that Nigeria depends upon education as the major social institution to provide solutions to these problems.

Nigerians must therefore endeavour to achieve her goals of education for national development through proper monitoring of the activities of the school not just in terms of what is ideal but in terms of the environment in which education functions, the attitudes of the people, and the role of the other financial, political and social agencies in our society.

The Universal Basic Education Programme is a welcomed idea in this regard. However, it should be moulded with a well formulated manpower policy especially at the lower and middle manpower level. Two major religious organization or bodies introduced formal education in Nigeria; the Muslim and Christian. They set out to achieve different goals. This as a result left the country geographically separated at two different stages of qualitative and quantitative education. Hence, the existence of educationally backward areas, tribes and states.

In order to reduce this disparity, there is need for a compensation for the culturally disadvantaged area. Cost differentials for the culturally disadvantaged should be included in the program of Universal Basic Education, of the Federal Government. However, this will increase the cost of executing the UBE Programme.

Conclusion

In order to remove some of the major problems of educational development in Nigeria, the issue of responsibility and control must be resolved and a uniform system of education introduced and operated nation-wide. There is no half measure as it is all or none event. This would mean the abolition of the present school system whereby children of the privileged class attend special schools, operate different curriculum, and sit for different examinations for schools outside the country. Furthermore, special concession should be granted to Nigerian educational institutions to import books, stationeries and other educational equipments, duty-free.

Recommendations

The success of any educational system hinges on proper planning, efficient administration, adequate funding and motivation thus for Nigeria to truly develop the following measures should be adopted namely:

1. Education should be made very cheap, available and mandatory.
2. There should be enough time for planning and coordination before a particular education policy is implemented to avoid the mistakes of the past.
3. National values and norms should be made part of the school curriculum.
4. Environmental factors (Language of a community, Terrain weather etc.) should be considered and made provision for when considering education policy.
5. A neutral body different from the ministry of education to act like a task force on policy implementation should be established for any education policy.
6. Regular monitoring and evaluation of education to UNESCO standard and also to ensure good salary for the teachers check truancy and private practices thus, enhancing their performance.
7. Government as a matter of priority must put in place machinery to streamline Institutions in their areas of specialization so as to avoid duplication and above all the much-needed funds could be channelled judiciously that it would enhance quality manpower development for the country.
8. In this era of global age, Nigerian institutions must have communication facilities so as to be abreast with latest information and be in tune with development. Its provision will enhance good academic proficiency and reduce stress and burnouts.
9. All schools should be provided with adequate equipments and facilities for teaching and learning. Additionally, frequent changes of subject syllabuses should be discouraged while teachers of all categories should be encouraged to remain in the same school for many years so that a tradition of teaching and learning could be established in each school.

Finally, problems like the issue of control must be resolved and a uniform system of education introduced and operated nationwide and this includes the scraping of the present school system whereby children of the rich attend special schools. All schools should be provided with adequate equipments and facilities for teaching and learning

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