
Nigeria Education and Politics of Federalism

By

R. A AHUKANNA, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education,
Owerri.*

M. I. ONU, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education,
Owerri.*

And

C. N. CHUKWUDEBELU

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education,
Owerri.*

Abstract

The paper discussed the Nigerian education and politics of Federalism. It defined politics of education as the relationship between politics and education. The concept of federalism and problems of Nigerian federalism. Implications of politics of federalism on Nigeria educational system were equally discussed. Conclusions were drawn to include amongst others that politics of federalism has affected our educational system in Nigeria. Politics is intricately linked with education because of the notion that whoever controls educational system also controls the socio-economical destiny of the country. The following recommendations were made amongst others; there is need for the government to re-examine the educational system and policies and make them more functional in order to achieve the unity and equality as enshrined in the constitution. Higher institutions in the country should play down quota system, opportunity should be given to those who actually have the ability, intelligence, physical and material

resources to attain educational heights irrespective of their state of origin.

In Nigeria education is one of the vital tools utilized by the political class to enhance their legitimacy and control the machinery of government and administration. A careful look at organization and administration of education in any given country will show that it is closely interwoven with its political dispensation or ideology.

According to Uchendu (2000:1) Educational system and politics are symbiotically linked. Educational systems are based upon and promote the ideologies of nations. Similarly abstract education that does not serve the politics of a given clan does not exist in the world today. Formal school system has become an important component for the political system to implant its ideology on the youth. National Policy on Education FRN (2004) states that Education in Nigeria is an instrument for effecting development. It therefore seeks to fulfill that role the government has stated for the benefit of all citizens in the country. Educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. Countries spell out in clear terms the philosophy and objectives that underline their investment in education which is generally affected by the political ideology of the country. Successive governments in the country insist on education for all, so that they can contribute meaningful, to the achievement of the ideas of a democratic form of government. The politics of federalism in Nigeria has directed the nature and structure of our educational system.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution (1999:23) stated that the motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be unity and faith, peace and progress. The constitution emphasizes unity in diversity and that loyalty to the nation shall over ride sectional loyalties. Federalism as enshrined in the constitution has affected the structure and administration of education in the country. In Nigeria, the states are categorized into educationally advantaged, educationally disadvantaged or less developed states which has given rise to a lot of consideration in admission policies in the higher institutions. Universities now talk about quota, remedial programmes and zoning education for the fishery community, nomadic education etc. In order to bridge the imbalance in the educational system, all in the spirit of federal character.

This Topic will be Discussed Under the Following Headings

1. What is education
2. Politics of education
3. Relationship between politics and education
4. Concept of federalism
5. Problem of Nigerian Federalism
6. Implication of politics of federalism on Nigeria educational system
7. Conclusion and recommendation

What is Education?

Education has been defined by authors in various ways to suit their own ideals of what education does or the gains of education. Anuna, (1996:2) defined education as the systematic socialization of the younger members of the society into learning, about the religion, morals, beliefs feelings of nationality and collective opinion of all kinds. It embraces not only the planned and deliberate process of school, colleges but also the indirect incidental experience of life. Okunamiri (2005:1) stated that the word education is derived from the Latin word *educio* which means to “draw out of” it implies that through the process the latent qualities of individuals such as knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies are drawn out and developed. This definition suggests that individuals have inherent abilities that are activated through the process of education.

What is Politics?

Many authors have defined politics in different ways. Okunamiri (2005:2) defined politics as “unbridled struggle for power among individuals or groups”. Dyke (1966) defined “politics as, consisting of struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues”. These definitions perceive politics as struggle for power which results in unhealthy competition among individuals or the groups involved. Clump, in Uchendu (2000:1) defined politics as a science and art of securing and advancing the temporal welfare, of community organized as a state. The business of politics therefore involves both laying down of general principles and their application to concrete problems. The scope of politics is the temporal well-being of the community as a whole. To say this means that politics is concerned with the relations of the members of the community between themselves and the things of the world. Again, it is concerned with the right and duties of citizens to each other and to state.

With right and duties of individual states towards other states in the great family of nations, with commerce, industry, social institution, public morality and the social order in general. From the above definition politics is all embracing, hence it is said that man is a political animal. It is strange to suggest that little babies and even unborn babies are concerned with politics because the decisions of the politicians can influence their existence. Uchendu (2000:3) stated that one should not look at politics just as a subject taught in the classroom but it should be seen in a wider perspective than that. It is true that politics has to deal with power, and power involves so many things like decision making, allocation of resources, settlement of conflicts and provision of social amenities. These are the major functions of government, an act that is political in nature.

What is Politics of Education?

Uchendu (2004) noted that politics of education involves a complex inter-relationship among interest groups, politician, bureaucracy and knowledge brokers; he added that across the whole educational structure these actors want schools to serve particular goals and needs as they define them. The mission of power is the right of the politicians who are empowered by the society to make public policies and in this context educational policy. Politics of education according to Okunamiri (2005:5) referred, to the social and political context of education. Its main objective is to identify and examine the various social and political factors, influences, issues and problems which affect education production process and to identify the possible strategies for harnessing or otherwise such controlling factors, influences and problems for the benefit of educational administration and planning in the society. The philosophy of education, the context of education as expressed in curriculum, syllabus and text books have tended to reflect the ideologies and policy outcomes of the ruling class or government.

Relations between Education and Politics

In recent times, it is generally accepted that the success or failure of any educational system depends on the political system of the area concerned. Education cannot be separated from politics because it is an aspect of political needs of the society. Education is a vital instrument for national unity and integration in Nigeria. That is one of the reasons why the federal government is involved in education at primary, secondary and university levels in Nigeria. The political system has influenced educational system over a long period even during the period of Socrates and Plato. Rowley (1971:11) observed that “educational plans are political in their nature and effect”. Adesina (1884:170) stated that “there is hardly any problem marrying politics with education”. He further stated that in analyzing politics, the national aim of making education available to every child, the idea of using education to wipe out hunger, illiteracy, ignorance and diseases are on the whole less educational than political. Education in Nigeria, like in any other country had not been fashioned in a vacuum but had been regulated by the government policies and therefore by implication had been a necessary function of politics. Uchendu (2000:5) stated that no matter the system of education a country adopts, the likely solutions to problems that may arise from governmental attempt to regulate the aspirations of the citizens are related to politics, as politics determines the type of education that is to be adopted, so while one can take education out of politics, politics can hardly be taken out of education. Almond, (1960:27) posited that all political systems tend to perpetuate their culture, ideas and structure. And this could be achieved through education. Hence the interest of the Nigerian ruling class in education.

The Concept of Federalism

Federalism is a three tier of government which shares powers constitutionally between the federal (central) government the regional (states) and local governments. The Nigerian federal system of government is fashioned in such a way that the federal government enjoys certain exclusive legislative powers.

Problems of Nigerian Federalism

One of the analysis of the emergence of Nigeria federalism is that the British deliberately imposed the federal system of government on Nigeria in order to maintain a neo-colonial control of the country. Since federalism is more or less an evidence of some disunity, political weakness and uneven economic development, the British definitely wanted to keep the federating units apart as possible. In this way the British might continue to meddle in the internal affairs of their former dependency to their own economic and political advantage after they would have granted the dependency her independence Ezeali, (1990) and (Uwaoma, 2001:51) stated the problems of federalism to include the following.

As a result of federalism and diversities in social, cultural, geographical and religious affinity of the people there are differences in many spheres among the national groups. The needs and desires are not the same in every respect people cherish divergent values and problems are not in many cases common. The problems are usually on who should control what type of tax? What is the most acceptable formula to the components in the distribution of the National revenue. Other problems are imbalance in revenue generation between the states and the centers, difference in population density, development, industries, material resources distribution of wealth and social services.

The Implication of Politics of Federalism on Nigeria Educational System

The government interest on education has some implications for planning and administration of education. It is planned and administered in the contest of existing governmental structure. The success or failure of any educational system depends on the political system at a time. The political issue which, has influenced education in Nigeria is equal opportunity, and according to the 1979 constitution, equal opportunity implies: the availability of places for students in the educational system, the social institutional support for attendance and the economic ability of individuals to pursue their education. The political leadership is committed to ensuring that the fundamental right of all Nigerians for equal opportunity is assured. That is the reason why the government has mounted several programmes, to attain this objective in education.

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme is expected to ensure that every Nigerian child has free access to education irrespective of historical, political, cultural or socio-economic background. There is also plans especially with the recent

introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria to ensure fee-free Junior Secondary education in all the states. Institutions for special education to take care of the handicapped and disabled children and adults are being spread all over the country. Also established in many parts of the country are adult and non-formal educations for fishery communities. All these are aimed at ensuring that even these adults who lost the opportunity to go through formal school system when they were younger are availed of the opportunity to education.

Control and Management of Education

The government's commitment on the skills required for more rapid growth of the economy and the provision of basic knowledge to the people of the country had increased the federal financial commitment. The rationale for such commitments is based upon development of human capital which implies that without the stock of skills, physical capital accumulation will be unable to lead to a rapid economic growth (Okunamiri, 2005). Since the government is financially committed to the provision of education to the masses of this country, it asserts some degree of control on educational operations especially in the higher institutions. In federal government funded institutions such as the universities this objective is achieved through the National Universities Commission (NUC) while the state universities are monitored by office of the secretary to the state government or state ministry of education. The federal government through the National Commission for colleges of education runs all its colleges of education and polytechnics. All these arrangements appear to have provided some measures of accountability in the use of scarce resources in running of these institutions.

The implication of this political interest in education is that the nature of courses offered in these institutions reflects the interest of the government that established or finances them. Universities are no longer to decide on what courses to offer and facilities to provide except those approved by the National Universities Commission (UNC) as well as what caliber of students to admit except those supplied to them by the Joint Administration and Matriculation Board (JAMB). That policy has distracted the quality of school input into the university system. Prior to the establishment of JAMB, every university conducted its matriculation examination in which a large number of candidates were subjected to higher competitive examination and the best depending on the number the institution can accommodate were admitted. The present method of admission through JAMB constitutes an infringement on the traditional university autonomy and academic freedom. According to Okunamiri (2005:47).

The university council no longer exercises full control over the internal governance of the university while the traditional power of senate to exercise full control over what academic programme its university should pursue is drastically eroded. It is hoped that the present position of the Federal Ministry of education to

review the present (6, 3, 3, 4) system and reinforce higher school certificate as basis for university admission may restore the autonomy of universities to admit students.

National Unity and Political Cohesion

The national policy on education (2004) stated that the goals of tertiary education shall be among others to forge and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and integration. In Nigeria, the government policy to use education as an instrument for effecting national unity and political cohesion has some impact on the siting of higher education in different parts of the country. Due to certain historical, religious and geographical circumstances, various parts of Nigeria have tended to develop at different rates, especially between the North and South. This is traceable to differences in educational attainment which have generated unhealthy political, cultural and ideological divisions in the country. To ensure the national unity and cohesion among states of the federation, the government looks up to educational institutions as an instrument for the propagation and promotion of the desired unity. The government introduced the National Youth Service Corps programme which aims at making fresh graduates from higher institutions to live and work in states of the country other than theirs. This will make them appreciate other people's cultural and ideological backgrounds. Efforts are made to ensure that admission into strategic educational institutions like defence academy, federal universities etc reflect as much as possible the federal character (Okunamiri, 2002). Anuna, (1996:14) stated that in order to achieve national integration the federal military government in 1975 established a committee to study the festering problem of admission into the Nigerian universities. The memorandum submitted by the committee indicated the uneven distribution of Nigerian university graduates among the states in the nation, the report aptly showed that southern states with 50 percent of the nation's population provided 65 percent of the entire enrolment in Nigerian universities for 5 years, at the time the country had only six universities. This meant that benefits of the resources spent on universities were not evenly distributed, but also vital position in the federal civil service and the economy were controlled by people from the educational advantaged southern states.

Federal Government Admission Policy: Quota System

The admission to all federal higher education institution is based on the quota system imposed by federal government. According to Kosemani, (1993:5); the quota system of admission in higher institutions of learning is no doubt geared towards inter-ethnic harmony. The Federal University of Science and Technology, Owerri (FUTO) limits its admission of candidates to students of applied sciences and technology, and cannot provide at all for the large number of students enthusiastic to study law, humanities, social science and medicine. This might be the explanation for the establishment of Imo State University. The federal quota admission policy forced Mbakwe to agitate for establishment of Imo State University in view of the number of

qualified entrants from Imo State who are turned away annually. Kosemani (1991:6) maintains that the reaction of some states especially the educational advanced ones to quota found expression in the establishment of state universities. It appears inherently unfair that even some states cannot find qualified candidates to fill the place allocated to them, in some cases such positions are left vacant and allowed to be wasted. The federal government is also ensuring that in the distribution of amenities and educational service, priority is given to the so called disadvantaged states. All these decisions geared towards using education to solve a crucial political problem, have influenced the direction and dimension of higher education provision in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The policy of federalism has affected the educational system in the country because every educational policy has to take care of the geo-political zones because of the concept of equal opportunity.

1. Politics of federalism has affected the educational system in the country because every educational policy has to take consideration of entire geo-political zones in the country.
2. Education is always an extension of political purpose and must be regarded as fundamental, perhaps the most important agent that is available for that purpose. Hence educationists must recognize the interest of the ruling class in the educational system.
3. Politics is intricately linked with education because of the notion that whoever controls the educational system also controls the socio-economic destiny of the country.
4. The establishment of more universities and free education in Nigeria appeared political than educational for politicians always try to maintain their political status than the interest of Nigerian citizens.
5. Politicians can make or mar the educational system through various policies that can adversely affect the system especially in the areas of appointment, policy on admissions, over centralization and other policies that can bring confusion in the areas of implementation.

Recommendation

From the above mentioned views in the conclusion the following recommendations are made.

1. There is need for the government of this country to re-examine the educational system and policies and make them more functional in order to achieve the unity and equality as enshrined in the constitution. In Nigeria some of the policies on education are not equally implemented, for instance the UBE is free in some states while in others school fees are charged under different names, like stakeholders fees.

2. Selection and appointment of politicians into positions should be done with utmost care because when mediocres are in authority it will invariably affect the educational system.
3. The government should study the financial involvement or implications of education policies they make because inadequate funding has adversely affected the quality and academic standards in the educational institutions.
4. In Nigeria, politicians use education to achieve their political ambitions, they should grant autonomy and academic freedom to the government owned universities so that educational objectives will be fully achieved.
5. Higher institutions in the country should play down quota system, opportunity should be given to those who actually have the ability, intelligence, physical and material resources to attain it irrespective of their states of origin.

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