

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN NIGERIA: THE CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN LOCATION, FUNDING AND RELEVANCE

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Abstract

This paper examines the political influence of educational policy in Nigeria vis-a-vis the crisis of confidence in location, funding and relevance. The study is also meant to sensitize stakeholders in education on the negative impact of political influence and consideration on institutional location, funding and other areas of relevance in the policy guideline. The study creates awareness that the educational initiative of the political leaders involves serious financial implication which quite often is undermined. It sighted some instances of instability, inconsistency and outright contradiction in educational policy document. Besides, the paper affirms that quite often political influence and consideration override the tenets of school location and hence schools are sited without due academic consideration or suitability of location. It therefore, concludes that with democratic governance, improved literacy, enlightenment and information dissemination among the citizenry, there will emerge a better culture of co operation and interaction between politicians and professionals in education.

Introduction

Until 1960, the system of education in Nigeria was based on the British system. It was only after independence that some Nigerians began to question the relevance of the existing curriculum to the Nigerian needs and aspiration. Subsequently, there were several attempts to make the curriculum relevant to the Nigerian situation. There was the need for the articulation of policy guideline on standards, procedures, strategies and for the co-ordination of roles to ensure and sustain the delivery of qualitative education in Nigeria (Nwagwu, 2007). These various attempts culminated in the national curriculum conference of 1979. In 1973, as a follow-up activity as seminar of experts from government education ministries and establishments, voluntary agencies and international organizations developed a draft which eventually led to the emergence and publication of the first national policy on education in 1977. The national policy on education treats all aspects of education, from philosophy, different levels (pre-primary to university), non-formal education, special education, teacher education, educational service, management of education and financing of education.

National Policy on Education

The national policy on education can be defined as government's way of realizing that part of the national goals, which can be achieved using education as tools (NPE, 2004). That means, it is a guideline on effective management and implementation of education at all tiers of the system. Therefore, it is a statement of intentions. Expectations, goals, prescriptions, standards, a requirement for quality education (Nwagwu, 2007). However, no policy on education can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation.

The Overall Philosophy of Nigeria

The philosophy of any nation and the educational policy cannot be treated in isolation. The educational policy of any nation reflects the needs (philosophy) of the people. Since the philosophy of Nigeria emphasizes unity and peace through understanding, there is the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive and united nation. On this basis the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to:

- live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice,
- promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

The five main national goals (objectives) of Nigeria as stated in the Second Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of:

- a free and democratic society

- a free and egalitarian society
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (NPE, 2004:6). Taking a close look at the philosophy of education, it is believed that:
- education is an instrument for national development and to this end the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for general individual's sake, and for the general development of the society;
- every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability;
- there is the need for functional education for the promotion of progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

For the philosophy to blend and be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, Education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. The national education goals, which derive from the philosophy, are therefore:

- the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
- the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and
- the acquisition of appropriate skill and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

However, the dynamic nature of the educational process, the social economic and political changes characterized by new concept and national aspiration, as well as global educators initiatives, often move and encourage the need to review such policies. For instance, the first edition of the National Policy on Education was published in 1977, the second, third and fourth edition were published in 1981, 1989 and 2004 respectively. A review of the 2004 edition is imminent because of the following reasons:

- the passing of the University Basic Education (UBE) act in May 2004, to reflect the 9 years free compulsory and basic education;
- The review of Basic Education and Senior Secondary Education Curriculum by the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC);
- The need to accelerate the integration of computer application to the educational sector;
- The promotion of entrepreneurial skills and local indigenous technologies with the educational system; As a result of the reform, there is the need for operational definition of the concept.

Concept of Politics in Educational Policy

The term policy, as it were, is vague, it requires some operational definitions and understanding. Koll (1969:9), considered public policy as: "the structure or confluence of value and behavior involving a government prescription". Nwagwu (2002), sees policy as encompassing both formal and informal legislative, executive, judicial functions, position and decision performed or exhibited by government, organization, and individuals. Campbell, Corbally and Ramseyer (3 966:p25.7), use the term policy as "the expression of the broad goals or purpose of education" which need to be articulated, processed and achieved. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th Edition) policy is defined as a plan of action agreed or chosen by a political party or business etc. A policy can be perceived as official position, belief or philosophy of an organization or its leadership.

On the other hand. Politics according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th edition, 2001), is the act of getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society. That is, politics is conceived with getting on using power within a particular group or organization. Politics can be defined as the authoritative allocation of the values of society. Value of society includes religion, education, money, etc. Lasswell (1936), views politics as having to do with the distribution of stakes within a society or group. Stakes refer to job, money, influence, prestige, status or even acceptance of ideas. From the various definitions, politics is a symbol of power and authority to share, allocate and control resources and

determine public policies.

Politicization of Educational Policies

The politics of free education in Nigeria was very prominent during the Second Republic (1979 to 1983). President Shehu Shagari, leader of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was in control at the Federal level, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) under the leadership of Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo was in control of five states. From the political analysts the UPN won in these five states because of its party manifesto, which emphasized provision of free education at all levels. The political initiative of the leader appealed to their conscience. With little or no doubt in their minds, the electorates went to the pool and overwhelmingly voted for the UPN. However, the education for all initiative of the political leader has a serious financial implication. From the antecedent and empirical result that followed the UPE program of 1955, the party leader knew that there was enormous financial and other problems associated with such a gigantic project as free education at all levels. For political reasons, the party leaders underplayed and undermined the problems and re-emphasized and projected the benefits to the masses whose votes matter very much at that crucial time. To the surprise of everybody, the party did not make any attempt to modify its free-education-at-all-level programme to reflect the realities of not being in control of the Federal Government which decides on how the nation's revenue should be distributed.

Another example from the national policy on education concerns the "language of the environment". It is stated that English language, French, and one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment should be made compulsory in the primary school. Experiences from research show that the policy has been impracticable, indeed unrealistic for political reasons including shortage of teachers to handle the language. More so, at the secondary and tertiary education levels, the quota system of admission used as an instrument to ensure federal character policies in federal educational institutions has not been realistically translated into practice. It is a mere shadow. There is no institution in which students admitted through the federal character principle represent the desired percentage of the total school enrolment. In short, the quota system has often been misused during admission processes as a result of political influence and consideration.

The National Policy on Education stated that: "The minimum qualification for entry into the teaching-profession shall be Nigerian Certificate in Education" (NPE, 2004:39) It is on record that this policy is breached in practice for some political reasons. Grade II teachers are still being trained and employed in some states, about thirty years after the policy was adopted. The Federal Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Education and other stakeholder who are responsible for the implementation are guilty in creating this crisis of credibility between policy formulation and implementation. This underscores the facts that politics is not only restricted to the politician and stakeholders but also in the hands of civil servants who are in power and whose responsibility it is to

protect the policy option and maintain their integrity; rather, they give up to political pressure, influence and consideration

The Inconsistency in Education Policy

There have been many instances of instability, inconsistency and outright contradiction in education policy formulation and implementation. For instance, in the early 1970's some states compulsorily took over voluntary agency and private schools by Military Edicts No 41 of 1977 in order to maintain standard and effect quality control in state schools. Since the late 1990s, the return of schools to their former voluntary agency proprietors has taken place in various forms and degrees in some states. This has political undertone. Precisely, in 1975 there was the policy of sole ownership of university by the federal government and it took over the existing, state universities. The decision was validated by Decree No 4 of 1977. By 1979, due to some political reasons state were given the power to established their own universities. The inconsistency with regard to policies on private university is surprising. In 1982, a Supreme Court verdict culminated in the freedom to establish private universities. Within a space of two years, over twenty universities were established. In 1984 by Decree No 19 of 1984, all private universities abolished and prohibited. By 1999, four private universities were approved due to political pressure and consideration. Similarly, the uncertainty and politics were very glaring in the case of Open University. It came into existence with fanfare, and within a short period it was abolished and by the year 2000 it was re-established.

Politics on Location of institutions

Other manifestations of politicking with education policies can be seen in school location. School location is a concept in educational planning and administration by which institutions are planned, co-coordinated and established in response to geo-political and other considerations to ensure maximum efficiency in resource utilization and best benefits to the end users (Nwagwu, 2002). According to Hallack (1977), school mapping can be perceived as the orderly procedure for-determining where to site education institutions to ensure proper coverage and maximum benefit to the communities they are intended to serve. Quite often, political influence and consideration override the tenets of school location and hence school are sited without due academic consideration or suitability of location.

Taking a close look at the location of some state universities, it is clear that the Imo State University was located on political reasons. Governor Sam Mbakwe, in 1980, established the multi-campus university whose temporary site was at Madonna High School, Ihitte while the permanent site was in his town, Obowo. When the military regime of Major General Ike Nwachukwu seized power in 1984, the university was

relocated to Uturu Okigwe near the governor's home town Isiukwuato. It was hurriedly-located in erosion prone area. Hence the problem of erosion is so prominent and persistent in Abia State University. A study of the background of Edo State University Ekpoma shows that it started from an erosion prone area because the then Governor, Professor Ambrose Alii sited it in his town. When the multi-campus origin of Delta State University Abraka is examined, it becomes obvious to see senatorial district politics at work. Anambra State University of Science and Technology is sited at Uli, the home town of Governor Mbadinuju. The pattern in the above cases remains the same. Politics rides rough-shod over school location principle.

-Education Funding Policies and Politics

The funding of education is a universal problem of great dimensions. However, some government funding policies will be looked into with a view to exposing the confusion caused by political variables. It is a thing of joy that Universal Basic Education (UBE) has taken off. It is on record that the policy was announced by the Head of State in Sokoto in 1999 before the bill was presented to the National Assembly in the year 2000 and passed into law in 2002. The policy was announced even before the planning and funding arrangement was made. Here again the need to score political point was glaring. UBE funding is still a political issue. For instance, the formula provided in the National Primary Education Commission Decree 96 of 1993 on how to share the National Primary Education Fund is biased. The sharing formula is:

- 50% on the basis of equality of state;
- 10% on the basis of school enrolment;
- and 20% to all the educationally disadvantaged states.

The National Primary Education Fund is deducted directly from Federation Account. Of the 14 states classified in the decree as "educationally disadvantaged state" only two (Cross River and River) are southern states. The formula and the agenda were political decision rather than educational policies. The Baseline Studies and Education Situation Analysis of the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO reveal that Kano State now has more children at school, and they achieve better in a subject like mathematics than Imo State, which was classified as "educationally advantaged" in the NPEC decree.

Another area of concern is the policy of free tuition in federal tertiary institutions when the government is unable to provide free secondary education for the citizens. There are research evidences to show that the social returns from primary and secondary education are greater than those from higher education (Nwagwu 2002). If free tuition in university was a necessary investment in the post independence era in order to boost the human capital resource requirement in the various economic sectors of what relevance and justification are such ventures for now? The same federal government which encourages private and corporate organization participation in management and funding of educational institution also disallows the charging of tuition fees because it is a politically sensitive issue.

Conclusion

The politics of educational policies is a human activity that will endure for as long as we have important decisions to make in the planning, organization, management and funding of education. It is observed that government makes laudable policies that are not backed with appropriate resources for implementation. This gives the politicians the loophole to dictate who should be in place and what to do in formulation and Implementation of educational policies. Some politicians by virtue of their election take decisions on education by exercising their constitutional right. According to Nwagwu (2002), these politicians dictate educational policies in a reckless or mindless manner that jeopardizes the very educational aims and objectives the schools were established to achieve. However, with the democratic governance, improved literacy, enlightenment and information dissemination among the citizenry, there will emerge a better culture of co-operation and interaction between politicians and professionals, educational managers and teachers. There is optimism that such a meeting of personalities, intellectuals, and strategists will yield respectable, mutually acceptable education policies whose implementation will be facilitated by government and its agencies.

Recommendation

From the foregoing, one can observe that education policies cannot be separated from politics for now, therefore, the following recommendations are made.

- Since some of the politicians do not show much insight and interest in the future implications of such education policies, professionals and stakeholders in education must awake to the task of persistent constructive criticisms against the imposition of intolerable policies on education by those exercising political authority and power over educational system.
- There is the need for proper decision-making procedure to be followed in the formulation and implementation of education policies in Nigeria.
- All stakeholders in the education system are urged to show more interest and commitment not only in what policies are released, but also in how and why they are created; together with the consequences of their implementation or non adherence.
- Since every member of the society appears to have a stake in the education industry, there is the need to involve them and probably incorporate their inputs in education plan.
- Education is a public enterprise and a social service, therefore, it should be a-political. It is

everybody's business, that is, the policies affect everybody.

If we are to realize the global Education for All (EFA) initiative, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) as well as the National Development Goals encapsulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document in the year 2015, we have to guard our loins and resolutely redress the perceived political anomalies in our contemporary system.

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