THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION (1981) : PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND THE WAY FORWARD.

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ABSTRACT:
This paper looked at the Nigerian National Policy on Education (1981) and the problems of implementation. The structure language policy, Teacher, special, and Technical education, and Establishment of a specialised agency were considered. The results have shown that the policy is bedevilled by some inbuilt difficulties, problems of finance, personnel, poor resource management, poor attitude to work, frequent changes in leadership and the outdatedness of some aspects. The way forward is to embark on radical review taking into consideration the inherent problems, current and projected societal needs. A new policy which is more adaptable to our environment and can make Nigeria take its rightful place in the committee of nations in the 21st century should emerge.

INTRODUCTION

Education forms the bedrock of development. To be truly developed, a nation needs to be relevantly educated. Because of the tight relation between education and development, Mackinnon (1985) simply asserted that "Education is Development." Although these two terms are not synonymous, the fact is that education is the most important catalyst to socio-economic, political, scientific and technological development. For example Enoh (1996) rightly observed that education is the greatest stimulus for development because it trains the required manpower in which other developments depend. Any society that is less educated will be underdeveloped. Similarly Mahdi (1997) has asserted that education is the basic tool for national development, national understanding, national regeneration and continuity.

The history of the development of any nation is tied to the history of its educational development. The industrial revolution in Europe, the technological advancements in Japan and America, are products of functional and productive educational systems. Thus it can be safely said that if you give education its rightful place in a nation you will receive a development "blue-print". This is why societies worldwide are increasingly looking up to education to provide it with medical doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, technologists, scientists, clergymen and other cream of people whose intelligence can be tapped to solve societal problems like poverty, hunger, unemployment, shelter, epidemics etc.

Education develops the individual and raises his productive capacity. In this way, he can make greater meaningful contribution both qualitatively and quantitatively to the development of his society. In the words of Zik in Enoh, (1996:362):

Education is for spiritual, social and mental emancipation. This means education is for rational and intellectual development. A rational individual is one who approaches matters with a concern and an ability to assess them by means of relevant reasoning, who understands the type of reasons that are relevant in various logically distinct areas, who possesses a certain distinct area, who possess a certain knowledge or information, as well as an ability to conceive of alternative ways of looking at things that which is familiar, and a questioning attitude, individual who is an individual who is rationally and intellectually developed, uses such skills to contribute to the development of his country. Essentially, educational development has direct bearing with the various components of development like science and technology, economic growth, living standards, employment, agriculture, health, individual capacity of freedom.

It is the realisation of the importance of education in the life of a nation that compelled Nigeria to strive at developing an educational policy in 1977 and revised it in 1981. It was hoped that the policy would help revolutionise the life of the nation socially, politically and economically and in the fields of science and technology. Unfortunately however, what has been achieved in the implementation has fallen short of expectation. This is as a result of a series of problems, some of which are inherent to the policy.

This paper therefore looked at some provisions of the policy and the problems of implementation associated each. Other problems which cut across the entire policy were also discussed. Possible ways of
solving such problems and move Nigeria forward in the twenty-first (21st) century were suggested.

THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION.

Though simply called the National Policy on Education, it is a document that contains various policy statements and has triggered a number of actions that have affected various aspects of education. The idea of the policy was initiated at the 1969 National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos and was accepted as Nigeria's education policy in 1977 and revised in 1981. Basically, the document contains policy statements or has resulted in the formulation of polices affecting various aspects of Nigeria's education. Those discussed in this paper include:

(a) Organisational structure of education in Nigeria.
(b) Language policy.
(c) Teacher Education
(d) Special Education.
(e) Technical Education.
(f) Financing Education
(g) Establishment of specialised educational agencies.

The document is unique in several ways. For one it is the first comprehensive educational policy that took care of the entire educational ladder covering from nursery schools to the university. Secondly, it is the first comprehensive education policy that was enforced all over the nation. By this, it helped to integrate and unify the various differently operated educational structures in operation before.

THE 6-3-3-4 STRUCTURE.

The 1977 National Policy came up with an educational structure often referred to as the 6 - 3 -3 -4, meaning 6 years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education. The tagging of the system 6 - 3 -3 -4, is a simplification and summary of the system. It does not reflect other institutions of learning like the vocational centres students would move to if they failed to gain admission into the senior secondary schools. Similarly the Certificate, Diploma and N C E awarding institutions have not been reflected.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY.

The National Policy on Education (N P E) provides that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than his mother-tongue. The three languages, as stipulated in the policy are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Similarly, it provides that at the nursery school, government would ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at primary school; it provides that government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a latter stage English (N P E 1981 :13).

This policy is aimed at promoting Nigerian languages and culture. It is also aimed at making it easier for students to acquire concepts by teaching than in a language they are supposed to be most familiar with.

However, local language teachers are scarce and in an attempt to adhere to this policy, untrained and unqualified people are often recruited. Such people often end up misguiding their students. Besides, the idea of using the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community is unworkable in schools that draw their student population from various parts of the country or world. As such they do not have a common language for communication other than English. This is partly why most private schools do not go by this policy.

TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TODAY.

The National Policy on Education (N P E 1981:9) provides that "all teachers in our educational institutions I should be professionally trained". The professional training according to the policy was to be provided by: (i) Grade II Teachers’ Colleges (ii) Advanced Teachers’ Colleges (iii) Colleges of Education (iv) Institutes of Education (v) The National Teachers' Institute (vi)
Teachers' Centres.

Other institutions presently involved in teacher-training include some polytechnics (for NCE technical) and the Faculties of Education in Universities.

With the inception of the 6-3-4 the Grade II Teachers' Colleges were gradually phased out. This has meant that many of those who now go for NCE are either the very old Grade II teachers who are trying to escape losing their jobs or the young secondary schools leavers who are battling for a higher qualification. Unless a review is made, with time it will only be the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) holders that will go in for the NCE. Unless adequate measures are taken to provide remedial assistance, this can become a matter of concern in the future. The SSCE holders lack the background knowledge to cope with the professional training at the NCE level. This is particularly so when they are assumed to have had some previous knowledge on teaching and are expected to learn the same thing with the Grade II certificate holders.

An additional problem for the SSCE holders is the fact that they are often admitted in large numbers to pursue the NCE courses' and thus it is always difficult to give individual attention to them. Instead they are taught en masse. This coupled with the fact that they are not willing to be teachers, makes many of such students to graduate without acquiring the necessary skills. Besides they are not adequately exposed to the instructional technologies that will help them meet the challenges of teaching the modern enthusiastic children.

At the university level, many fresh secondary school leavers are admitted to acquire teaching qualification. Many of such students do not have interest in teaching and eventually go into it only if they do not have any job. For them to acquire such interest, they need sufficient motivation and individual attention. Unfortunately however this is hardly possible because of the congested nature of programmes. Although they are exposed to various courses that should help them acquire the teaching skills, their lack of interest, the absence of individual attention makes many of them unable to acquire the basic teaching skills.

The NIT which runs distance programmes sends out course materials to its students and provides some weeks of contact every year. A close study has shown that the materials provided are rich, but the commitment of many people recruited to provide the contact lectures is low. Besides many students because of their poor background, and other environmental factors, have difficulty understanding the lecture modules. The time and venues provided for the contact also pose a problem to many students who live far away from the venues or are engaged in other activities. At the centres too, there are no adequate instructional media that will assist in teaching or that can be used for demonstration. Thus like others the preparation is bookish in nature.

In the case of the Teachers' Centres which are supposed to provide in-service programmes for various calibres of teachers, many of them are under-funded and therefore find it difficult to acquire up to date equipment. They also have difficulty acquiring latest information and in mounting programmes frequently and adequately.

Generally most of these places that should provide the professional training are not current in terms of facilities and equipment. They do not have the necessary contact that should help them know the latest information on the teaching profession or discoveries in various fields of specialisation. The latest journals within and abroad, hardly find their way to the teacher trainers. The trainers therefore depend largely on the yester information rather than the current. Not much practical skills are acquired in the use of latest instructional media like the computer.

SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Government was informed of the need to promote science and technological education and therefore made it a matter of policy to promote them right from the primary school level up to the university. This has been demonstrated by establishing special science primary ( - ) schools, science and technical secondary schools, making it compulsory for commerce or arts students at secondary school to offer at least a science and a vocational subject, establishment of polytechnics, Colleges of Education (Technical), Universities of Science and Technology,
In the general universities, government pegged the ratio of admission at 60 : 40 in favour of science and technical. While this is a welcome development, the practical problem is that of having the adequate facilities to effect science and technical education. In the first place, the qualified teachers, the facilities and equipment, operational machines, laboratories are either not available or not adequate for large numbers. Besides, many villages where secondary schools are located do not have electricity and therefore cannot utilize the machines that are meant for technical education. It is interesting to note many electric generators bought for various schools were not yet installed when some essential parts were stolen. On the whole science and technical education is expensive and government does not seem willing to devout huge resources to ensure the achievement of its full potential.

SPECIAL EDUCATION.

The special education element is meant to cater for the handicapped and the gifted children. To ensure the smooth running of this, government was to make a census of all handicapped children and adults by age, by locality and by type, and schools will be obliged to make yearly returns of children who could be classified as so highly gifted as to attract national attention as to their potential beyond granting of to scholarship to them. (N P E 1981 : 35). The obvious problem with this is the strategies for identifying the handicapped and if and when identified, the strategies for convincing them to attend school. This is particularly difficult amongst communities that encourage the handicapped to go a - begging.

As for the gifted children, the practical problem is that of devising a uniform parameter for determining a gifted person especially in the various localities. And since those identified would enjoy scholarship, the issue of quota system comes to play. Thus at the end, the final selection is quoted and some very talented children are often dropped on the basis of their quota having been filled, while some average students, who happened to be the best in their zones are enrolled as gifted.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIALISED EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES.

The National Policy on Education triggered the establishment of specialised agencies charged with various aspects of Nigerian education and various examination bodies. Such bodies include:

(a) The National Primary Education Commission (N P E C).
(c) The National Commission for Colleges of Education (N C C E).
(d) National Universities Commission (N U C).
(e) The National Teachers’ Institute (N T I).
(f) National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPS).
(g) Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB),
(h) The National Mathematics Centre (CNMC).

Although a welcome development, there has been no proper combination among the organisations so as to ensure smooth transition from one stage to the other and to ensure that they complement each other's functions.

SOME GENERAL CONSTRAINTS ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.

As has already been highlighted, each of the educational policies has its peculiar bottlenecks when it comes to the issue of implementation. But over and above such peculiar problems, there are others that cut across the policies. Such include the problem of leadership changes; foreign linkage and foreign interference and resource manipulation.

LEADERSHIP.

Since the attainment of independence Nigeria has experienced frequent change in leadership. These
leaders have had their difficulties in both formulating and implementing 'educational policies'. From the Macpherson constitution of 1954 into the first republic, the regions were left to formulate and implement educational policies. Thus each region developed at its own pace. The various military regimes that operated in Nigeria between 1966 and 1979, formulated and implemented various educational policies to suit their imagination. The Shagari administration and later the Buhari, Babangida and Abacha administrations interpreted educational policies the way they understood them.

The idea here is that as each administration assumes power with its own vision, so are the educational policies twisted to suit their tastes. Just like there is no continuity in the leadership, so also the educational attitude to implementation frequently change. Each successive administration tries to initiate an approach that can be associated with it. As a result of confusion and conflicting attitudes to implementation, there is no continuity Nigerians really need. Such crises and public outcry against it led the head of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to constitute the Etsu Nupe committee for the Vision 2010.

FOREIGN LINKAGE.
Nigeria is a former British Colony and although it attained political independence in October 1960, the basic educational structures and patterns established by the British colonialis have continued to dominate the Nigerian educational scene. Attempts to make Nigeria retain its rightful place in the British Commonwealth have made it difficult to introduce and implement radical changes in the educational system. Even when some relatively radical changes were proposed in the 6 - 3 - 3 - 4, for example making the educational system practical and functional in nature, emphasising science and technical education, the implementation has not been smooth. The process of acquiring the science and technical equipment has not been an easy task. The foreign powers charged with the responsibility of supplying these items would not close their eyes to see Nigeria advance to a level that would challenge their enviable positions.

In all our institutions of learning there is a large number of untrained teachers. This is against the provision of the National policy which provided that eventually only trained teachers would be allowed to teach and that the National Certificate of Education (N C E) would become the minimum entry qualification to teach at primary school. The year 1998 was later fixed for making N C E minimum qualification for teaching. However as noted by Nkom (1996) while most primary school teachers in the southern states have TC II, in the northern states most are without TCII.

In the case of the N C E minimum qualification by 1998, Nkom further noted that the chances of meeting the date line are very slim, as shown below. **Table I:** Staff with N C E in states, Rank ordered as percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>percentage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anambra</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Taraba</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ogun</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Kaduna</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ondo</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Abuja</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Imo</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bauchi</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kwara</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>11.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Benue</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Cross River</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oyo</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kebbi</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kogi</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Plateau</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Borno</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Abia</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Akwa Ibom</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Enugu</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Yobe</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Edo</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Kano</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sokoto</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Jigawa</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Katsina</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the table above, by 1996, no state had up to 50% of its primary school teachers with NCE or equivalent qualification. None of the northern states had up to 20% of its staff with NCE. Certainly no magic could have been performed to make many of such teachers to acquire TC II and NCE in just two years (1996-1998). At the secondary school level, because of the shortage of trained teachers especially in science, technical and vocational subjects teachers are to teach subjects they did not specialise in and thus lack the basic skills and adequate knowledge for teaching them. The situation in the tertiary institutions is even worst. Besides the Colleges of Education and the Faculties of Education, a bulk of staff in the tertiary institutions are untrained and therefore lack the professional skills for motivating their students to learn. Thus they end up putting off many students from pursuing what they are naturally gifted in and have the interest to pursue.

With the mixed caliber of teachers at all educational levels, it is little wonder that many casualties are recorded in our school system. Many pupils leave primary school without being able to read. Secondary school graduates record very poor performances in their S S C E. At the tertiary level too, many students graduate without being able to articulate issues even in areas of specialisation not to talk of other related areas.

**FINANCE**
The effective implementation of most educational policies demand high expenditure. This is particularly so for Nigeria where most of her policies are introduced in such large scale as to ridicule the countries capacity to perform. When for example one considers the reason for the failure of Universal Primary Education Scheme (U P E ) in Nigeria, there was the issue of the shortage of teachers and supportive staff, lack of physical facilities (like classrooms, furniture) shortage of materials etc.

In an attempt to cope with the increasing number of primary school leavers, secondary schools were deboarded so as to use the feeding money in other areas. But the deboarding itself came with its own ills like truancy, prostitution, hooliganism and other vices.

The 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 system faces the problem of infrastructure. The inverse relationship between the needs of our schools and the resource allocation is even more pronounced in the secondary and tertiary institutions.

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.**
Alongside the problem of finance is the problem of poor resource management. There exists a high number of abandoned projects in the educational sector. Similarly, the heavy machinery imported for ensuring science and technical education in Nigeria, have wasted in many school sites and many of such are wearing and tearing away. Similarly many people who were sent overseas for training, returned home without being put into proper use.

Other problems include poor planning, indiscipline among policy managers, negative attitude to work by education personnel, poor coordination, and devaluation of the Naira which made imported educational materials very expensive.
THE WAY FORWARD

In view of the numerous problem areas observed, urgent measures must to taken to make the educational system prepare the citizens for meeting the challenges of the 21st century. Some of these measures include:

1. A reassessment of the situation on the ground in Nigeria vis-a-vis global developments in various facets of life. This assessment can show problems of the current policy, the needs of the Nigerian society and economy, and the adjustments required to make Nigerian educational system functional as desired.

2. Taking appropriate measures to enforce the Language Policy as contained in the National Policy on Education. This step can make transition from home to school environment smoother. It will also help to promote our culture.

3. The issue of teacher-education must be viewed with greater seriousness. Much of our teacher-education programmes leave much to be desired. More attention should be given to strategies for character molding and more time should be given to practicals bearing in mind that our future teachers are S S C E holders and not TC II.

4. Teaching should be professionalised such that any one who wants to be a teacher must be trained in the profession.

5. Science and Technical Education should be reviewed with a view to making it realistic in the Nigerian environment especially the rural areas. The content of some senior secondary school subjects need to be trimmed so as to enable teachers cover it conveniently in three years.

6. We should cease to be copycats of other countries’ educational system. While relevant elements can be adapted, those not suiting our situation should be discarded.

7. Government should be seen not only making appropriate budget allocation, but should also be seen to appropriately utilise it.

8. Practising teachers at all levels should be involved in planning any future educational system, since it is they who implement the and policies understand students problems. The (-) condition of service for the teacher should be enhanced to ensure interest in the job.

9. Attention given to special education is not commensurate with the demands. Those identified as truly gifted children should be catered for even at the tertiary level. Besides, the campaign for educating the handicapped should be intensified.

10. Strategies should be developed to ensure the prudent management of educational resources.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Policies are meant to be adapted to the needs of the society they are meant serve. Thus as the needs change, policies should change. Since the present policy on education has many shortfalls, the need for a radical review cannot be over-emphasised.
REFERENCES


