

EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is expected to develop the individual and prepare him for meaningful development of his society including politics. Politics therefore should be used to improve upon the existing institutions for man's development including education. However, today it is only a propaganda machinery manipulated by politicians for their political victory into power. Education suffers its worst decline during the era of democracy. Schools in many states suffer as a result of negligence resulting from poor funding and appointment of inefficient politicians to head institutions and educational departments. This paper tries to look at politics, education, and the implications for politicizing education in a democratic era on the development of any society.

Introduction

Education is the only instrument that when wisely and effectively utilized can develop the entire society. It is expected to prepare the medical doctor for his profession, the engineer, architect, teacher, politician and all other professional towards the full development of their society. Education is the single largest industry that is expected to attract the lion's share of a nation's budget if meaningful development is to take place as it affects all spheres of life of the totality of any society.

Infrastructure, teaching materials, qualified teachers and efficient monitoring and supervision are necessary pre-requisites for effective educational system in any society. It is glaring in Nigeria today that most of these pre-requisites are not sufficient for effective functioning of the educational system. Poor funding of the educational sector is responsible for the poor condition of the schools and the educational system in Nigeria today. Poor management as a result of greed and selfish interest as well as unqualified personnel controlling the educational sector because of political inclinations are also contributory factors.

The importance of education for Nigerian development was highlighted at the sixth Nigerian Economic Summit, 1999 when, after listing some of the problems facing the Nigerian economy, recommendations were presented to the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, the notable key areas listed out for concentrated development action are:

- Productivity growth.
- Technology.
- Human capital development.

It was noted that though democracy has created potential external support and created great expectations and trust/legitimacy internally, however, the economy is still weak. In the recommendations, proper education of the Nigerian populace was stressed. The government was therefore advised to;

- Ensure human capital adequacy vis-a-vis technology development.
- Fund institutions and ensure competitive wages;
- Encourage private education at all levels.

The importance of education in national development cannot be overemphasized. In fact, the Federal Government of Nigeria regards education as "an instrument par excellence for effecting national development" (NERDC, 1998).

Despite the role played by education in the national development of Nigeria, it is disheartening to see that politicians have made education a tool for political campaign only. In most cases politicians are fond of promising the people better schools and education but only as campaign slogans and paper documents which never materialise on the ground. Most schools especially in Yobe State are nothing to write home about. They are in dilapidated conditions, lacking qualified teachers and teaching materials.

What is Politics?

Politics according to Chamber's 20th Century Dictionary; is the art or practice in science of government. It is a method of selecting leaders based on party system backed by constitutional processes for facilitating peace, unity and equity in social distributions of resources for the progress of state or nation.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defined politics as matters concerned with acquiring or exercising power within a group or an organization. It is competition between political parties in which they are not concerned with welfare but politics.

What is Education?

Oyekan (1994) regarded education as a cooperative teaching-learning process of preparing individuals, from birth and all through his life, for happy and useful living in the society within the context of his/her culture and resources. Education is also seen as bridge between every-child and his/her future and also as an activity that promises economic well-being to the child and prosperity to his/her country.

Yoloye (1980) defined education as a weapon for combating ignorance, poverty and disease; as a bridge between confusion and comprehension, as dam for conserving man's store of civilization and for generating the power to move to greater civilization; as a rocket for transporting man from a state of intellectual subservience to a state of intellectual sovereignty. Yoloye is saying that education is all that makes society what it is and makes man a whole person, capable of controlling any situation in which he finds himself.

Dewey (1916) in Ughamadu (1992) defined education as the continuous reconstruction or reorganization of experience, which adds to meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. Education is therefore the process of developing the habit of problem-solving which ultimately produces knowledge. In this definition the learner has control over his destiny.

Farrant (1980) describes education as the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed. Farrant's definition relates to Fafunwa's (1989) definition of education as the aggregate of all the processes by means of which a person develops abilities, skills and other forms of behaviour of positive (and sometimes of negative) value in the society in which he lives. Education is the totality of experience. Education is not a single process but a conglomeration of processes or activities which enable a person to grow in adaptive behaviour in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable him not only to survive in his environment but to contribute to the development of society.

Education as seen from above is an instrument which a nation uses in bringing up its members in order to be useful to themselves and also contribute to the general well-being of the society. The development of any country seems to rest squarely on the availability, nature, adequacy and quality of

its educational system. This, is perhaps why Aboribo (1999) stated that "there is no doubt that the socio-economic and political development of a given society depends on the awareness of its citizens, which again is determined by their level of education".

The Need for Education

Oyekan (2000) outlined some of the vital functions of education in any society to include:

- 1) Transmission, improvement and preservation of the culture of the society in the youths and adults who are often recognized as leaders of tomorrow;
- 2) Effecting sustainable human and national development in a serene environment;
- 3) Preparation of the people for happy and useful living within the society;
- 4) Stimulation and adoption of reflective thinking as a basis for development of problem-solving abilities;
- 5) Promotion of national awareness, patriotism, national unity and stable society;

- 6) Improvement of individual's well-being and social status through development of their potentialities, employment-generation opportunities and equality in human interactions and;
- 7) Development and supply of manpower needs of the economy.

Provision of a comprehensive functional education with diversified curricula, cross-sex interactions and varying instructional resources can enhance the students' achievement and attitudes towards schooling and life. An increased funding of education will provide the sufficient human and material resources required to accomplish the purpose of education in individual and national development.

From the above statements it appears education involves a continuing development of relevant knowledge, skills, and habits whose broad understanding and application enable individuals to contribute meaningfully towards the growth of their society. This implies that educated people are those well-informed competent persons whose states of mind and behaviour naturally exhibit creative ideas and experiences from the acquisition of fundamental concepts, abilities and attitudes exposed to them in different teaching-learning transactions. Normally, the quantity and quality of education acquired by the students will make them become refined individuals and adopt desirable aspects of human behaviours and interactions in socially-approved ways within and outside the school setting.

Education and Politics

UNICEF/GN (2002) identified child friendly schools as pre-requisites for effective teaching-learning in our schools. The students/pupils need to be healthy and well nourished to be able to learn effectively. This is possible when there is support from the family and community. There should be quality content for learning which should provide basic literacy, numeracy, knowledge, attitudes and skills for life education. Quality teaching-learning processes which should be child centred, skill based approaches with technology oriented support should be put in place for effective learning. There is need also for quality learning environments where facilities such as classrooms, water and sanitation and services in the areas of safety, physical and psycho-social skills as well as good health habits should be provided.

Successful governance leading to peace, unity and equity in social distributions for the progress of a state is not possible without good leaders. Good leaders are not made without sound education. Education is therefore a necessary ingredient for shaping the political institution of a nation. It is therefore expected that education will be able to shape the future of their nation or state.

Field visits to existing institutions of education in Yobe State have proven that there is nothing much to write home about on the ground. Most of the schools are in the state of near collapse. Infrastructure are lacking, as well as teaching materials and qualified teachers in most fields especially in the sciences. More schools are being opened in the name of scoring political victories at the expense of the people. New schools lack adequate hostels for students and accommodations for staff. There is shortage of teaching staff in most of such schools. Classrooms are in shortage too. You have more than seventy students to a class which should house nothing more than forty to fifty students. There are not enough furniture for the students. Most of the students sit on the bare floor and write on their laps. Classrooms have been converted into hostels, students use the classroom-for accommodation during the night and convert them for teaching by day time.

In the area of feeding, most of the students are underfed. Schools are closed before time because of lack of food to feed these students. A lot of money is spent by the government on paper with regard to feeding (about 26% of state budget) but are not actually on ground. Such huge money find their way into the pockets of hungry and selfish politicians and leaders. Students spend less time in the classroom and more of their time outside taking care of one thing or the other. In many instances such new schools lack bore holes and students have to move into the town or village to fetch water for the kitchen/personal use which affects their academic work for the day.

The true situation of learning in most of our schools today is that the students are virtually left without serious academic work. Most of the students leaving the secondary schools are half-baked graduates or near illiterates who went in and came out without achieving much. Today most governments are proud of the number of schools on ground and the population of pupils and students

enrolled but they are not concerned about their performance capability. The true situation is that education has been heavily politicized.

Recommendations

For education to play its expected role in developing the entire society, the following should be observed and implemented:

- 1) Child friendly schools environment should be established in all our schools at all levels to make learning conducive for the learners.
- 2) Enough funds should be made available to cater for the needs of the learners and the schools.
- 3) Quality and functional education should be provided to learners.
- 4) Qualified teachers should be employed to teach in our schools.
- 5) Government and the community should support education to function effectively but not to be used as a tool for political propaganda.
- 6) Appointments to leadership in the education sector should be based on merit and not political inclination.

Conclusion

This paper discussed politics, education and implication of politicizing education. It equally looked at what education should do to a society and what it is doing towards the development of an entire society. It looked at the situation of Nigeria under democracy and how the educational system is suffering under the guise of democracy. There is the need to give education the necessary backing it requires from both government and the community to make it achieve what it is expected to do for the society. Education is responsible for empowering the members of the society in every sphere of life. It trains the doctor, lawyer, engineer and the politician. Without sound and functional education the

society is bound to fail. This is because there will be no good leaders and these are the politicians who are governing the society today.

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