



POLITICISATION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A. G. Ossai

School of Education, College of Education, Agbor, Nigeria

Cite This Article: A. G. Ossai, "Politicisation of Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Development", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, Volume 6, Issue 2, Page Number 32-36, 2020.

Copy Right: © IJMRME, 2020 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

Education is an instrument for national development. For several decades past governments in Nigeria have made unsuccessful efforts through several policies and the reshaping of institutional mechanism to revamp the education system. The current deterioration of the Nigerian education sector is a cog to national development. Several literatures on the education system attribute the deploring condition of the education sector to poor financing, poor policy formulation and implementation, and monitoring. This paper argues on the contrary that, the problem with the education sector in Nigeria is beyond the identified bottlenecks. The paper posits that inspite of the relationship between education and politics, the politicisation of the education sector based on primordial factors such as ethnicity, religion and godfatherism are rather responsible for the deploring condition of the education system in Nigeria, which has multiplier effect on national development. The paper submits that when the politicisation of the education sector along these primordial identities is discouraged and the trend reverted to meritocracy, then the nation will move in an oil-wheel towards national development

Key Words: Politicization, Education, National Development & Godfatherism

Introduction:

Education is one of the most crucial sectors in any society, because it is central to the preservation of the society membership. Education as a process of imparting knowledge, skill and skills and ideas that have been learned, either formally or informally, forms the basis for human capacity development, both physically and mentally to fit into the society. It is in this context that education is perceived to be the system motivating positive institutional changes and developments geared towards creating the required internal solidarity, cohesion and integration of people to achieve the common good for all in the society. As opined by Abdu, democratic ideas became interwoven with the belief that education was the only path to a useful and productive life⁽¹⁾. In 1964, for instance, the President of the United States of America justified his interest in advancing education by saying it has been his passport from his parents' condition, that of tenant farmers, to the one he had himself achieved. Thus, education came to be regarded as a necessity to the state because it seemed to be the path to prosperity and power. More important, perhaps, was the notion that the advance of industry and technology was intimately bound up with the expansion of education. The larger the pool of literate, schooled citizens, the greater the possibilities of industrial, technological, and scientific progress. In the new age of science and space, UNESCO posited that improved education is essential to give meaning to our national purpose and power⁽²⁾. Axinn and Mark, added that it requires skilled manpower and brainpower to match the power of totalitarian discipline⁽³⁾. It requires a scientific effort which demonstrates the superiority of freedom. These developments moved the developing countries of Africa, that gained their independence after the Second World War to establish governments complete with civil services of every kind. The case in Nigeria is on the contrary. On the other hand, the government have been blamed for poor financing of the sector and on the other hand, educational managers including policy makers, have also been accused of contributing to the deteriorating standard of education in Nigeria basically for lack of effective policy making and poor management. Beyond these impasses, the sector is suffering from virulent politicisation to untoward tendencies such as ethnicity, religion and godfatherism which have become an enduring legacy of colonialism and post-colonial politics in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary at this juncture to look at the relationship between education and politics and its implications on national development.

History of Political Influence on Nigerian Educational System:

A look at the history of education in Nigeria will more or less indicate the important role played by politics on its educational system. As the British colonial influence in West Africa became stronger, there was the need for well trained natives to assist in the administration of government agencies. The colonial government began to give grants in-aid to the various missionary groups for the running of Schools on the condition that such missions fulfilled the policies of colonial government. In 1886, Lagos was separated from Gold Coast (Ghana) and became the colony and protectorate of Lagos and therefore, the first purely Nigerian Education ordinance was enacted in 1887. The ordinance created a board of education, comprising the governor, members of the legislative council, the inspector of schools and four members. This was to make the supervision of schools and grants more effective and so increase the involvement of the colonial government. In 1892

Education Ordinance Henry Carr was appointed the Inspector of Schools and in 1908, separate education boards were created for the Eastern, Western and Central Province of Nigeria. In 1914, the Northern Nigeria was amalgamated under Lord Lugard and this led to his Policy on Education in 1916 which was partly aimed at educating the Muslims.

The Nigerian government got involved in the management of education from the time of Arthur Richard's Constitution of 1946, which created regional governments. In 1951, Macpherson's Constitution permitted each region to appropriate and use funds for education. These Schools became the responsibility of each regional government. By 1952 three political parties emerged. These were the N.C.N.C. (dominating the East) A.G. (West) and N.P.C. (North). Thus each region was made to make its own education laws, finance its own educational programmes and maintained its teachers and services all of which gave rise to a lot of implication for the educational system. In 1955 Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced the Universal Primary Education in Western Region, while in 1957, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe introduced it in the then Eastern Region. Unfortunately both of these programmes failed woefully. After independence in 1960, schools were still under the control of the different regions.

In 1967 Nigeria was divided into 12 States. At the end of the Civil war in 1970, the states took over all schools. This was a landmark in the management of schools by the state governments and marked the complete takeover of schools from the missionaries and individuals. To ensure effective control of schools, each state created local school Management Board to assist; the Ministry of Education. In 1974 the Federal government launched the Universal Free Primary Education which however took off in 1976. Just as usual the only thing that didn't go wrong was the surplus population of pupils that turned out for the programme. It is on paper that the projections made were quite below the expected number of pupils that registered for the programme. In order to make education more universal and utilitarian, the Federal government summoned in 1973 a seminar of distinguished educational experts under the Chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebayo. A lot of the recommendations led to the formulation of the 1977 National Policy on Education (6 3 3 4). This was the first educational policy that was made for the whole of the country. In 1981 however, this policy was modified to make it still more utilitarian, the goals and the mode of achieving them more detailed. The government also changed the curriculum by introducing the 9-3-4 system of education. The transitory changes in Nigeria education curriculum as observed reflected on the politicisation of the sector at the policy levels in search for effective system of education. As beautiful as the policy is, it has remained unrealistic and unattainable due to the deep seated systemic corruption in Nigeria⁽⁴⁾.

Politics Versus Education:

Education cannot be separated from politics because it is an aspect of political needs of the society. Education is a vital instrument for national development. That is one of the reasons why the federal government is involved in education at all levels in Nigeria. The political class has influenced educational system over a long period, even during the period of Socrates and Plato. Obi, observed that "educational plans are political in their nature and effect"⁽⁵⁾. Uwuoma & Uname stated that "there is hardly any problem marrying politics with education". They further posited 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⁽⁶⁾. 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. Thankachalam stated that no matter the system of education a country adopts, the likely solutions to problem 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⁽⁷⁾. Okunamin posited that all political systems tend to perpetuate their culture, ideas and culture, and this could only be achieved through education. Hence the interest of the Nigerian ruling class in education⁽⁸⁾.

In fact, education is by necessity an extension of our political system, resulting in schools being reduced to vehicles for implementing political mandates. However, the central flaw in the need for structure and hierarchy is that politics prefers leadership characteristics above expertise. As noted by Blasé & Blasé no politician can possibly have the expertise and experience needed in all the many areas a leader must address (notably in roles such as governor and president)⁽⁹⁾. But during the accountability era in education of the past three decades, the direct role of governors and presidents as related to education has increased dramatically – often with education as a central plan in their campaigns. One distinct flaw in that development has been a trickle – down effect reaching from presidents and governors to state superintendents of education and school board chairs and members; people who have no or very little experience or expertise as educators or scholars attain leadership positions responsible for forming and implementing education policy⁽¹⁰⁾. In other words, the faces and voices currently leading the education reform movement in Nigeria are appointees and self-proclaimed reformers who, while often well-meaning, lack significant expertise or experience in education. Politics cannot teach us but educators and researchers can lead schools if we commit ourselves to genuine social reform that allows teachers to do that which they know how to do⁽¹¹⁾.

Politicisation of Education in Nigeria: What Implications:

As from 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an unequivocal increase in the numbers of educational institutions, following the private sector driven economy in Nigeria. In spite of the increase, the standard of education has been deteriorating, as the objectives for which they are established are much to be desired⁽¹²⁾. Although, poor policy making process, poor financing, poor implementation of policies and poor monitoring process could partly attribute to, and explain the reasons for the deteriorating standard of education in Nigeria, the problems in recent times could be highly associated with ethnicity, religion and godfatherism in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, where ethnicity is less pronounced, religion assumes dominance and where religion is less pronounced, ethnicity assumes dominance. In some other areas where ethnicity and religion assume moderate status, godfathering becomes operational. Within this setting, godfatherism applies to determine “who gets what, when and how”. The propelling factors for the manifestation of these identities in Nigeria education sector could be clannish or sectarian conception of social life in Nigeria societies which most people associate it to political elitism and manipulation of the mass mind.

In Nigeria today, evidence abound that Vice Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors as well as other education managers such as Principals and Headmasters are motivated by primordial factors. This situation reveals itself to the extent that today certain positions must be kept for the „indigenous people“ of the institution’s host communities. If the positions are occupied by „non-indigenes“, the process of institutional governance/ administration becomes frustrated. In some circumstances, they go to the length of watering down the criteria for recruitment in order to accommodate their primordial interests. Such system is never healthy for the development of education in Nigeria because it excludes those who merited the positions. This is the bane of national development.

Another factor that indicts such practices is that when primordial identities become prominent, established rules cease to function. The system of rewards and punishment are determined by primordial considerations or informal conventions. In such institutions, multiple layers of red tapes are created and the consequences of being caught and punished for corrupt practices are low relatively to the benefits⁽¹³⁾.

The managers shy away from asserting their proper disciplinary authority because of such affiliations. Because of primordial dominance, systemic operation becomes subservient to poor policy design and implementation processes, poor financing and monitoring processes. Even while finance is available, they are not often used for the purpose assigned to them.

Cumulatively, since the people recruited to pilot the affairs of the sector is carried out on basis of primordial considerations of ethnicity, religion and political balancing the system tends to produce poor leadership and followership in the society. The system ends up in producing graduates that are unproductive to themselves, their immediate social milieu and the larger society. Many of such graduates because of clandestine connections are given consideration when it comes to employment far above those, although are intelligent and can fit adequately into the given job, but because they are poor and lack connection suffer delay. In short a political system that rewards school dropouts with more honours and income than a university professor in a whole lifetime is fit to breed Boko Haram⁽¹⁴⁾.

The politicisation of education in Nigeria has also led to the loss of intercontinental cross fertilization of scholarship in Nigerian universities. This is because of the unfriendly nature of the Nigerian societies to foreign Scholars. Within Nigeria, the usual mixture of Scholars from various ethnic, religious and philosophical backgrounds in most Nigerian universities are fast disappearing. The reason is because these institutions have been overtaken by ethnicity, religious bigotry and clandestine relationships. The implication is more visible now that ethnic and religious restiveness has reached the moon in Nigeria. Because of this situation, many Scholars are relocating to their indigenous homelands“ or areas considered being relatively peaceful. The politicisation of education therefore has open the space for the rediscovery of old boundaries of ethno-cultural identity such as described by Professor Eskor Toyo “Ethnic chauvinism, born-toruleism, Ilorin memories, Oduduwaism, Arewaism, Ohaneizism, etc.”⁽¹⁵⁾.

There is also the contradiction associated with government policies to control what goes on in the universities, especially the introduction of the Integrated Personal Payment System (IPPS) in tertiary institutions. This is basically an attempt to rape the academic freedom of the tertiary institution. This is not surprising because the universities are now being funded by the government, so also, is the appointment to important positions at the universities. Most of the appointment were based on political connection and not upon the academic excellence of the individuals concerned, This sort of situation riot only kill initiative and creativity but also the Spirit of hard work. These situations pose serious problem to national development.

Towards Establishing More Symbiotic Relationship Between Politics and Education:

As earlier projected, education, to accomplish its required purpose, must be tailored towards the needs and aspirations of the community or environment. This is in agreement with the National Policy on Education which states inter-alia in section 1 sub-section 9 (f), “efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs⁽¹⁶⁾”.

By implication, therefore embarking on forging a mutual relationship between politics and education requires that such exercise must be precipitated by the need to yield to the demand of the community on environment where such reform is taking place⁽¹⁷⁾. This is to say in essence that the culture of the community will determine whatever form the reform should take. In other words, a community that is inherently conservative would make reform a difficult task to achieve compared to a dynamic community.

The greater participation and interaction between politics and education in the life of any nation is thus, what constitutes the major objective of community development. Technology (no matter how modest) alone does not solve problems nor does it even create friends. There is an increasing awakening that people are more important than techniques. People should have some voice in and understanding of what is being done. This is the basis of mutual benefit the world over. Symbiotic relationship between politics and education as earlier posited, comprises the people plotting their graph, the direction of their values, identifying way of catching up with the graph so plotted and working meticulously towards the realization of set goals and objectives.

This implies that a mutual relationship between politics and education requires that people themselves exert their own efforts, joining with government to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions. It is concerned with total community life and needs. It should involve the entire community participation in decision-making.

In another dimension politics and education as interact in the fullest and best sense for stimulation of the desire for better things and the urge to attain such better things. In short, mutual interaction of politics and education strive to educate and motivate people to self-help with a view to developing responsible local leadership among them, as well as inculcating in them a sense of citizenship and a spirit of civic responsibility⁽¹⁸⁾.

The Way Forward:

From the above analysis, the following recommendations are made:

- There is need for the government of Nigeria 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.
- 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.
- The government should study the financial involvement or implications of education policy they make because inadequate funding has adversely affected the quality and academic standard in the educational institutions.
- In Nigeria, politicians use education to achieve their political ambitions, they should grant autonomy and academic freedom to the government owned institutions so that educational objectives will be fully achieved.
- Higher institutions in the country should play down on quota system, opportunity should be given to those who actually have the ability, intelligence, physical and material resources to attain it irrespective of their status of origin.
- Appointment of educational managers should not be based on primordial considerations but on merit. This will eradicate mediocracy in the educational system.
- Democracy should be given the utmost visibility because without a viable democratic development of society, a more democratic system of education cannot be promoted and without a more democratic system of education, national development is unlikely to occur.

Conclusion:

Education is imperative for any meaningful development of any country. The politicisation of the sector is the major factor truncating Nigeria's match to socio-economic, political, scientific and technological development. There is no gain saying that extant literatures on the education in Nigeria have blamed poor financing as central to the deteriorating condition of the sector in Nigeria. However, these literatures underscored the role of primordial identities in contributing to the fallen standard of education. The former are repercussive effects of the latter which are both historical and contemporary. Equally, to achieve the merit of building an egalitarian society where merit count, stakeholders must appreciate and given in their commitment that educational institutions are major avenues through which equality of opportunities can be achieved. Merit can be celebrated only when all are equally eligible to compete for society's rewards irrespective of their birth, social positions, or primordial affiliation. With this principle, politicisation of education Nigeria would give way for meritocracy that can instill discipline and hard work among citizens of this country. This way, the standard of education in Nigeria can be revamped, and national development attained.

References:

1. Abdu, P. S. The cost and finance of education in Nigeria. *Education Today Quarterly*, 10(1), 12-16. (2003)
2. UNESCO, The Data Framework for Action: Education for All. Meeting Commitments. (Paris, UNESCO 2006).

3. Axinn, J. & Mark, J. S. Social welfare: A history of the American response to need (7th ed). Boston: M. A. Pearson/Allyn & Bacon. (2008)
4. Lenshie, N.E, Politicization of Education in Nigeria. Global Journal of Human Science. Vol. 13, 5. (2013)
5. Obi, E. Educational & Management theory and practices. Enugu: Jamoe Enterprise. (2003)
6. Uwuoma, N & Unamba, U.M, Citizenship Education in Modern Nigeria. Owerri: Bailor Publisher. (2010)
7. Thamkachalam, V. Needs for changes in models of educational organizations in higher education in India. Perspectives in Education, 21 (4), 38. (2005)
8. Okunamin, P.O, The Politics of Education: The Nigerian Experience. Okigwe: Fasmen Communication. (2005)
9. Blasé, J. & Blasé, J. The micropolitics of instructional supervision: a call for research. Educational Administration Quarterly, 38. (2002)
10. Ijaduola, K. O., Odumade, A. S. & Agbajeola, R. O. Correlation of political incursion and school management in Nigeria. EDUCERE: Journal of Educational Research, 5, 212-217. (2009)
11. Obanya, P. A. I. Revitalizing education in Africa. Ibadan: Sterling Horden publishers. (2002)
12. Adeyemo, B. Public school funding. The case of community mobilization and effective management. Journal of Educational Development, 1 (2), 27-38. (2000)
13. Falola, T., Ethnicity and Nigerian politics: Past in the Yoruba present, in Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa, B. Berman, D. Eyoh and W. Kymlicka (eds.), Oxford, James Currey. (2004)
14. Timawus, M., Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Lesson not learned, Daily Trust, 8 September, (2009)
15. Adeyemi, B. G. Strategic manpower development in Nigeria: New challenges and directions Education and Society, 17 (3), 64. (2001)
16. Federal Government of Nigeria. National policy on education, Lagos: NERDC. (2004)
17. Ijaduola, K. O. Non-governmental organizations and the financing of secondary education in Nigeria. International Journal of Investment and Finance, 1 (1 & 2), 65-73. (2008a)
18. Fabunn, M., Akinwumiju, A. Uyanwa, C. N. Planning universal basic education for national development, in Mansaray, A. & Osokoya, I. O. (Eds). Curriculum development at the turn of the century: the Nigerian experience. Ibadan: Department of Teacher education University of Ibadan, Nigeria. (2002)