

# POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR THE UNDERSERVED GROUPS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The interaction of politics and education is not novel in Nigeria. Since the period of colonial administration, the planning, administration and management of education has been under the influence of political arrangements. Successive administrations in Nigeria have been using education through their manifestoes as a political tool. The paper pinpoints that the inconsistency in the education policies and programmes especially for the underserved is as a result of the interplay between politics and education. This paper has identified the underserved groups in education to include those that do not have equitable resources as other students in the education circle and those from minority ethnic groups among others. The paper has also discussed the impact of politics on educational policies in Nigeria. The negative impact of politics as discussed in this paper seems to outweigh the positive impact as could be seen in inadequate funding of education, poor school mapping and others. It is also observed in this paper that most of the education policies especially for the underserved have political undertone. The political class does not show sincerity of purpose in ensuring that these policies are fully implemented for the benefit of all. Such policies are only used as campaign tool. Based on this discovery, the paper recommends that political issues on education should be made sustainable by implementing educational policies of the previous governments. Full implementation of educational policy should be a matter of priority by the government in power among others. The paper concludes that education policies should be pursued with vigour and should not only be used as "votes catching baits" by the political class.*

**Key words:** Politics, educational Policies, Underserved groups.

## **Introduction**

Education today has become an investment for economic, social and political development as well as an aggregate tool of empowerment for the poor and the socially marginalized groups. The National Policy on Education (2013) avers that it is an effective means of developing the full capabilities and potentials of human resource, as well as the development of competent work force through the acquisition of practical life skills relevant to the world of work as a veritable means of developing sound intelligent learning societies. These enormous contributions of education to the development of most nations of the world and the individual call for the provision of guidelines for the effective administration, management and implementation of education policies at all tiers of government (Adum, 2010).

These guidelines otherwise known as National policy on Education (2013) is a statement of intentions, expectations, goals, prescriptions, standards and requirements for quality education delivery in Nigeria. It is pertinent to mention that education

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policies are not free from the grip of politics. Politics shapes educational policies in Nigeria. For instance, the government in power formulates education policies which are transmitted to the states and the local governments to implement.

Policies arise from the needs of the society and from the aims and objectives of organizations. Policies are formulated to lay down procedures or rules under which institutions, organization and the society at large can function or exist (Adzongo & Agbe 2009). According to Adzongo et al (2009), policies are laid down rules, guides, ordinance, plans, procedures or statements with particular goals or actions legally accepted by leaders in society. In a similar view Abu (2011) maintains that a policy is a set of laws, actions, activities and programmes that have specific aims and goals for the society. In education, as earlier mentioned in this paper, education policies are influenced by politics in Nigeria if not all countries of the world. Aristotle as cited in Anifowose (2015), maintains that man by nature is a political animal. Where two or more people are gathered politics is usually displayed. When an individual tries to convince his partner to key into his ideas for personal or public interest, politics is involved (Ajayi 2012). According to Anifowose (2015) politics is the process of making and execution of government decisions or policies. Education policies in Nigeria cover all categories of citizens of the country. What remains a mirage is whether these policies are implemented as enshrined in the National Policy on Education including the underserved groups (Amina, 2010).

The underserved groups are also not left out of the grip of politics of education. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2013:2) in one of the beliefs of the philosophy of education states that “Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion and any peculiar individual challenges”.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2013:2) further states that the five main National goals of Nigeria as stated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are building:

- a. a free and democratic society.
- b. a just and egalitarian society.
- c. a united strong and self reliant Nation;
- d. a great and dynamic economy and
- e. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Adama (2012) claims that these National goals are only political statements. In reality there are highly un operational especially in the realm of the less privileged in the society. One is therefore tempted to say that politics and education are un-identical twins that perform complementary roles in the society. Politics uses education as a “vote catching” bait while education realizes its goals and objectives through the political process. In the words of Osuola (2012) politics and education are interwoven and their separation appears impossible.

### **Concept of Educational Policy**

Educational policies are initiatives or directional statements mostly by governments that determine the direction of an education system (Baja 2010). According to Akanga (2011) education is a sure way in which the society initiates its young ones into full membership. So, every society needs some educational policies to guide it in the process of such initiation. In the views of Udidaas cited in Ukpong (2017) educational policy could be taken to mean projected programmes of action, which

specifies, goals, values and practices of an education system. It could also be seen as a statement which guide and directs all actions at achieving national development through educational sector.

On the other hand, Ozurumba and Ebuara (2014) sees educational policy is basically a statement (written or unwritten) that contains principles, rules and regulations that seek to provide answers to certain issues like,

- a. How will people be educated?
- b. Where and when will the people be educated?
- c. How will peoples' education be financed?
- d. To what extent will the people be educated and assessed?
- e. To what extent will the role of politics influence education policy making process?

All the issues highlighted above cannot be discussed and provided with one answer. This is as a result of the fact that the making of politics of educational policy is concerned with a wide range of options most common with the people and society where policies evolved. From the explanation given above, educational policies are very important for the achievement of the goals of the educational system and that of the society. In corroboration, Miller (2010) asserts that educational policies are the agreed ways the educational system of a nation should be operated or managed. It is also pertinent to state that educational policies are necessary in order to ensure that direction is given to any action taken on education. Nobody can just take action on educational issues without recourse to the agreed ways (policies) of operating the system.

From the antecedence above, one could consider an educational policy as a statement of intent by the government towards providing desirable quantitative and qualitative education for the citizens, thereby making education policy inevitable in any educational system. By and large the relevance of any education policy is inextricably immersed in politics.

### **Concept of Politics in Education**

The growing politicization of education is a factor of concern in most nations of the world. In Nigeria and many other developing countries, educational institutions are witnessing more and more government interest and control as well as increasing intervention by the legislatures and courts (Federal Government of Nigeria as cited in UKpong, 2017). The interplay of politics and education is not novel in Nigeria. Since the period of colonial administration, the planning, administration and management of education has been under the influence of political arrangements (Adebayo, 2015). The concept politics according to Ozurumba et al (2014) simply means the unbridled struggle for power among individuals or groups in a particular society. In this definition, politics is conceived as a "dirty game" too unwholesome for the sanitized humanitarian act of education (Ozurumba, et al, 2014). Such narrow or restricted conception of politics was common with the perception of the earlier politicians and the traditional political scientists. Generally speaking, a lot of authors have defined politics in their own views.

Harold Lasswell, an American political scientist (as cited in <https://infoguidenigeria.com> relationship-education-politics-Nigeria) defines politics as who gets what, when and how this connotes the understanding of politics by Nigerians and to a great extent Africa. To Nigerians and black African countries, politics involves

the allocation of scarce social, economic and cultural resources to individuals, groups, regions and classes.

According to Udu (2009), politics is dealing with power. That is how power is structured, pursued, captured, retained and lost. The politician is empowered by the society to make public policies (based on political ideology of its party) and in the context of this paper, educational policy.

In the views of Okunamiri (2009) politics of education could be referred to as the social and political contexts of education, aimed at identifying the various social and political factors, influences, issues and problems which affect education production process. Okafor (2010) asserts that politics of education involves a complex inter relationship among groups, politicians and bureaucracy. Okafor further adds that considering the whole educational structure politicians want schools to serve particular goals and needs of a political party in power. This clearly points to the fact that public education is by necessity an extension of our political system, resulting in schools being reduced to vehicles for implementing political mandates. Agbo (2011) notes that politics of education involves a complex interrelationship among interest groups, politicians, educationist, bureaucrats and knowledge brokers. This means that these actors want educational institutions to serve particular goals and needs as they define them.

From the above explanations, politics of education entails the use of political powers in deciding educational fortunes of a nation. Such policies affect all categories of people in the nation. One of the groups being the underserved.

### **Underserved Groups in Education in Nigeria**

Politics in Nigeria has impacted negatively on many citizens and regions of the country. Obanya (2010) highlights how politics and education influence each other which through a continuous process has failed the education sector, particularly in the last decade. Nigeria's problems of corruption, adult illiteracy, region and political instability have placed some citizens at disadvantaged positions. These are the underserved groups.

#### ***Who are the Underserved?***

In this paper, the concept of "underserved" will be limited to education. Underserved students are defined as students who do not receive equitable resources as other students in the academic pipeline.

Typically, these groups of students include low-income, under represented, racial/ethnic minorities and first generation students as well as many others (media college board.com>public>scho). In furtherance to this definition, one would still explore to know what it means to be underserved. Many families who live on paycheck-to-paycheck are currently underserved by the financial services industry (<https://en.m.wiktionary.org/wiki/unde>).

Explicitly, one could say that those who are underserved in education are those who are unable to pay school fees, inability to access education due to reasons of race, religion, language or social status (<https://en.m.wiktionary.org/wiki/unde>).

In 1999, the civilian government under the leadership of Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to give free and compulsory education to Nigerian children. However, factors identified above and mostly that of politics has made the policy to be cosmetic. Agena (2010) stipulates that bad politics of education have made many of the Nigerian educational policies to start and end in the media.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2013:30) has captured the following as the goals of mass literacy, adult and Non Formal Education:

- a. Provide functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who left school too early. The target groups include migrant folks, almajiri pupils, illiterate and semi-literate adults, youths and adolescents; persons who left the formal school system early and are now working to come back and continue schooling; and other categories of disadvantaged groups; who are unable to have access to the conventional educational system and therefore required other forms of educational programmes to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances;
- b. Provide remedial and life-long education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary education; and
- c. Provide in-service, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

Very lofty and desirable as the objectives of mass literacy and Non Formal Education have been, its implementation at all levels of education as seen in the component of the scheme depended on the government in power and the political party in control of the government. A close look at the scheme has shown that government has not kept to the provisions of the NPE leaving the whole scheme to become a political gimmick.

### **Impact of Politics on Educational Policies in Nigeria**

Policies are principles, rules and statements of intent guiding organizations or institutions for achieving specific set goals and objectives. The rule states what to do while the principle explains why that rule must be obeyed (Ozurumba&Ebuara, 2014). Though education is a vital instrument in development, often there are debates that politics should be taken off education or that education should not be mixed with politics. Musa (2012) however, asserts that the duo seem to be inseparable. Some people have continued to agitate for the removal of politics from education as a result of the negative impact of politics on the sector which according to Arubayi (2005) include:

1. Inadequate funding of education
2. Poor planning/ineffective implementation of educational plans and objectives.
3. Poor school mapping as pupils travel more than five kilometers to get to school daily.
4. Poor supervision and monitoring of UBE programme:
5. Inadequate vehicles for monitoring
6. Inadequate number of qualified monitoring officers, inadequate office accommodation and office equipment (e.g computers and ICT facilities). This claim by Arubayi on poor supervision was supported by Ezenkwensili (2007) that there has been no inspection and supervision of schools in the last decades and supervision of schools is the beam of quality assurance in education.

It is not an over statement that politics had impacted negatively on the human resource in the education sector regarding the underserved. For instance, the ban on employment of personnel who would have served as teachers and other workers due to economic down turn has affected the provisions of the national policy on education on mass literacy (Mangu, 2012).

Another impact of politics on education is that politics prefers leadership characteristics above expertise. As noted by Blasé and Blasé in Adedayo (2015), no politician can possibly have the expertise and experience needed in all the areas a leader must address (notably in roles such as governor and president). One distinct flaw in that development according to Ijaduola, Odumade and Agbajeola (2009) has been a trickle-down effect starting 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. In other words, square pegs are put into round holes in leadership positions as a result of politics.

Related to the above discussion is the failure of education reforms. As earlier mentioned in this paper politics bestows authority and a hierarchy on education that allows and perpetuates leadership without expertise or experience. Adedayo (2015:64) asserts that education reforms fail due largely to the following:

1. Inexpert leadership that is ideologically committed to solutions and thus implements solutions without identifying and clarifying the problems, first and
2. Inexpert leadership that is in constant flux with the perpetual changes in administrations is apt to implement the same solutions over and over with different outcomes expected.

Politics also has a great impact on the funding of educational programmes, formulation and implementation of educational policies, planning and administration of education, provision of infrastructural facilities in our educational institutions. Education in Nigeria according to Akpan (2012), has suffered so much neglect in the hands of the political leaders, who drop the educational policies and programmes of their predecessors and introduce new programmes and policies in a bid to fulfill their electioneering promises to the electorates.

Education programmes are not properly funded by the political leaders. Funding is central to effective implementation of any educational policy and development of any country. The issue of poor funding of education programme has been one area that politics has negatively affected education in Nigeria (Ukpong, 2017). Politics has also affected education in the area of appointment, promotion and postings/transfers of teachers. Some persons are favoured in posting, appointment as Principals, Rectors, and Vice Chancellors due to their connection to influential politicians in the state (Adum, 2010).

Impact of politics is made manifest on the sitting of educational institutions. Adamu (2010) asserts that political weight is thrown on the sitting of educational institutions at the communities of some politicians to the detriment of other communities who lack representation in the nation's corridors of power. Abu (2010) in corroboration maintains that some places are overcrowded with schools than others as a result of political influence of their representatives or their political cohorts.

The creation of states is an attempt to provide more acceptable political structure in order to usher in Peace and Unity. In the views of Amadioha (2008), this has led to some dangerous discrimination attitudes which are ultra-vires to the goals which education is supposed to achieve. Such attitudes include; (i) lack of easy employment opportunities in the public sector of the different states in the country (ii) admission of Nigerians into different state owned institutions sometimes this anomaly has been covered up in the name of quota system. (iii) the discriminatory payment of fees in some state owned higher institutions. This is a situation where the non-state indigenes pay, higher fees as if they were expatriates.

As mentioned earlier, these attitudes are working against the unity or against the main national goals of Nigeria as stated in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria as captured by the National Policy on Education (2013) which education has been trying to inculcate in the citizens.

The political system contrary to the goals of education has taught the citizens including the younger generation powerful lessons on selfishness, tribalism, the uncontrolled lust for power and the greed for more money at the expense of the common man (Amadioha, 2008). Politics has taught school children good lessons on vices like bribery and corruption, insincerity and lack of accountability. National consciousness and unity cannot be achieved when the greater population of the people are deceived and told lies on a daily basis. These vices have gone deep into the thinking of the youths more than what education is struggling to inculcate (Adum, 2010). Despite these negative impacts of politics on education, it has also contributed in funding, provision of infrastructure, security, employment among others in education.

### **Politics of Educational Programmes for the Underserved**

In Nigeria, educational development has been guided by politics. There is always a political or social purpose behind any educational policy which is upon the ideology of the government or party in power (Mu'azu, as cited in Ukpong, 2017). Basically, in Nigeria, the efficiency of education and its administration are influenced by the realities of political power. For instance, policies and programmes on nomadic education, Universal Basic Education (UBE), Unity schools, Almajiri schools all have political undertones.

For purpose of clarity, the focus of this paper would be on the Universal Basic Education Programme, and mass literacy, adult and non-formal education. Emphasis would be laid on whether government has lived up to her responsibilities for the Nigerian child. Or is it the usual "policy of popularity" as regards providing education for the underserved.

According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013:5) UBE has the following objectives:

- a. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- b. The provision of compulsory, Free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- c. Reducing the incidence of drop-out from formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- d. Catering through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education, for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling; and
- e. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, security and civic values needed for laying of a solid foundation for life-long learning.

A closer look at these objectives clearly points to the fact that there are mere political statements (Adum, 2010, Adama, 2010). The Universal Basic Education Act as cited in Ukpong, (2017) makes primary and junior secondary education free and compulsory for children and also guarantees regular government funding from the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education for the proper implementation of the programme. Akanga (2011) however, maintains that this

nebulous task arrogated by the government has contributed to the failure of the scheme already. This could be seen in the dearth of adequate infrastructure, poor motivation of teachers, inadequate teachers especially in the rural areas, just to mention but a few. Agbo (2011) affirms that government has not shown sincerity of purpose towards effective implementation of the programme.

Basic education according to Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) shall be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative. This again has exposed the failure of government in this regard. Amina (2010) states that children of school age still roam the streets of the country freely without reprimand by the government. The enactment of the child rights act has not really helped matters. Education under UBE has not proved to be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative due largely to the politics behind the introduction of this programme.

It is pertinent to stress that the key power players of the public governance with the educational sector conspire to keep the public school system in a moribund state. This is occasioned by poor funding of education and “predetermined” neglect in terms of poor infrastructural facilities (Adedayo, 2015). Despite one of the goals of Basic Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013:6) which states that education shall “provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement” government or the political class has continued to exhibit unworthy attitude of double standard; implementation of free education with no human-capital and infrastructural facilities, whilst their children attend well equipped schools abroad with public funds or private schools within the country (Adedayo, 2015). With the private participation in the provision of education, education for all (EFA) becomes impossible due to the exorbitant school fees charged by the schools. The emergence of these private schools is the failure of the political class to provide a stable education for all as enshrined in the country’s education policy.

The politicization of Nigeria’s education system as earlier mentioned in this paper has made the realization of the goals of the National Policy on Education especially for the underserved a mere wish. The political class has continued to say one thing and do the opposite, introducing double standard. The ill luck being faced by UBE is applicable to other programmes such as Nomadic Education, education for the physically challenged, and so on. Lack of political will by the government in power to continue with already existing programmes or provide the needed sponsorship for their education programmes have continued to stare in the face of the less privilege denying them of equal educational opportunities as enshrined in the nation’s National Policy on Education.

There is no gain saying the fact that education in Nigeria has been characterized by policy somersault as a result of persistent change in educational policy. This inconsistency in the country’s education sector is responsible for the non-realization of educational goals and objectives for the underserved groups in Nigeria. Another programme designed to benefit the underserved groups and which has attracted the interest of the paper is mass literacy, adult and non-formal educational programme.

Mass literacy, adult and non-formal education programme is supposed to benefit the underserved. But due to the politicization of education, the program is well articulated on paper but non-existence. Successive governments have failed to implement this programme despite its immense benefits to the Nigerian populace. Nigerian children or the others remain illiterate thereby becoming dangerous weapons in the hands of the political class. Information technology and other infrastructural



facilities, such as libraries, viewing centres and reading rooms as stipulated to be provided as captured in the NPE are nowhere to be found. The implication of this negligence by the government is that many Nigerian youths will not have access to education. Thus, Adedayo (2015) submits that successive regimes and administrations in Nigeria have not been able to achieve national goals of education and lack of programme continuity.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has clearly shown that there is a strong correlation between politics and education. Their relationship appears to be inseparable. This relationship however, has negative impact on education which goes a long way in politicization of education policies making them to be mere political statements. Lack of political will to implement education polices has made some people to suggest that politics should be alienated from Education. The paper therefore conclude that educational policies should be pursued with vigour and should not only be used as “votes catching baits” by the political class.

### **The Way Forward**

As a result of lack of continuity of education policies, the following suggestions were offered to tame the tide of discontinuity of educational programmes in Nigeria.

1. Political issues on education should not be allowed to go with the initiators of the issues. New political office holders should try and implement educational policies of their predecessors in order to make education to be meaningful to the citizens.
2. If education is to benefit the underserved, government should see to it that policies are not just formulated to score cheap political points. The implementation of such policies be ensured to the fullest. If government intends to provide free and compulsory education, no barrier should stand the way of school age children. There should be sincerity of purpose on the side of government.
3. The political class should not promote social vices such as thurggery, tribalism, sectionalism, fraud, corruption and murder. These are the vices that education has been trying to eradicate in order to foster national unity as enshrined in the nation’s constitution and national policy on education.
4. Educational policies formulated by the political class should be well thought of, policies should not just be introduced for the sake of it. Adequate funding, personnel, infrastructure should be properly weighed before the pronouncement of the policy.
5. Education should be used as a tool for good policies. (Politics for the welfare of the masses) but not as a “vote catching bait” for the political class.

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