

POLITICS AND THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the role of politics in the educational development of Nigeria. It recognized politics as a very powerful influencing tool for societal development, and education as an agent that politics uses to achieve development in the society. The paper alluded that politics comes before education and that education relies on the structures already laid by politics to impact positively on society. The concepts of politics, development, and educational development were articulated, and the relationship between politics and education analyzed. A brief history of educational development in Nigeria was presented, spanning from traditional education through the advent of western education by the Christian Missionaries in 1842 to the present-day Nigeria. The role of politics in education was presented to include provision, management and control of education, enactment of laws and policies on education, launching of development plans for education, and establishing of linkages with other countries and agencies towards developing education. The paper also highlighted challenges to achieving these roles. Recommendations made included review of obnoxious government policies in education, strengthening of democratic norms and principles, adequate funding of education, adequate attention to planning and implementation of educational policies, generation of adequate and reliable statistical data, and control of corruption in the education system.

Keywords: Politics, Development, Educational development, Educational policies, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education has been recognized all over the world as an indispensable tool for effecting development. Sanubi and Akpotu (2015) state that education is a bridge to the future, an agent for human capital formation, a manpower industry that produces knowledge and skills necessary for development. As a result, it has also become a central issue for discussion by various people, groups, and governments. Recognizing the contributions that education can make to the political, economic and social change in a society and considering the necessity for providing education to citizens, political actors push for the provision of educational opportunities for the people.

In Nigeria, the quest to develop and provide education to citizens has been an issue of concern over the years. Before Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, the British Colonial Government made effort to develop education in Nigeria based on her philosophy and needs. After independence, the Federal Government of Nigeria focused itself to developing an educational policy that could help realize her developmental aspirations as a nation and also address the perceived past inadequacies of the British colonial policies. The first indigenous national policy on education of 1977 and its subsequent reviews also recognized education as the greatest tool that can be used to bring about redress and make for the quick development of its economic, political, social and human resources. This recognition has brought about huge investment of resources in education by governments which are usually formed through politics and political process. A relationship has therefore, been established between politics and education. This paper examines the role of politics in the educational development of Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is imperative to clarify the concepts politics, development and educational development in the context of this paper.

Politics

Several definitions have been ascribed to the concept 'Politics' by different authorities. According to Wikipedia, the word 'Politics' comes from a Greek word 'Politikos', meaning "of, for, or relating to citizens". It goes further to define 'politics' as "the practice and theory of influencing other people on a civic or individual level. Usually, politics is regarded as achieving and exercising positions of authority and influence in governance, particularly of a state or country. Consequently, Nwadiani (2015) cites Karl Reutsch as asserting that politics is the authoritative allocation of values in a manner acceptable to various interest groups aimed at improving the well-being of the society. Jordan (2016, p.1), however, defines politics as "the intersection of power and conflict". This definition provides that some sort of power relationship must exist between two or more individuals, groups or objects; and that these individuals, groups or objects must be in conflict with one another. The power dynamic is what motivates individuals to make political decisions and settle the conflict in order to achieve an established goal. Ogbonnaya (2009: 37) considers politics as

a science and act of securing and advancing the temporal welfare of a community organized as a state. The business of politics, therefore, involves both the laying down of general principles and their application to concrete problems. The scope of politics is the temporal wellbeing of the community as a whole.

Ogbonnaya further pointed out that politics is concerned with attracting, securing and maintaining the well-being of a nation through an established government, by laying down principles to guide its operations towards finding solutions to social, economic and political problems of a nation. This implies that politics is all embracing – dealing with acquisition and use of power through decision making, allocation of resources to societal segments including provision and management of education and other social amenities, in an effort to improve the well-being of citizens. Politics also involves negotiation, lobbying, and formulation and implementation of policies for the general growth and development of the society.

Development

Development may be regarded as purposive progressive positive change in the society. This could come as a result of individual skills, ability, responsibility and discipline, as well as increased material wellbeing. Important features such as better living standard, high rate of literacy, improved transport and communication system, improved healthcare, full employment opportunities, and decline in poverty and inequality are visible in the process of development. It is in this regard that Agbe, Kwaghbo and Yawe (2013) postulate that development refers to growth plus change and improvements occurring in a system with the aim of promoting the quality of life among the populace. Sanubi and Akpotu (2015) opine that development is a total and comprehensive transformation through quantitative and qualitative improvements in the various parameters of life. Development entails happenings or changes in the system that result in improvement or higher quality of the life of citizens.

Educational Development

Educational development refers to growth and changes in the educational system that help to bring about improvements that promote the quality of life of the citizens. Such improvements must include acquisition of individual skills, abilities and discipline that result in decline in poverty and inequality, and improved literacy rate. Babalola (2007) posits that educational development connotes how people and organizations can make the formal education sector to grow and function more effectively and efficiently. This has to do with the generation of policies, strategies and measures with due consideration to the likely outcomes. The policy process is, therefore, a crucial element in educational development.

Relationship between Politics and Education

Politics is concerned about influencing decisions and actions to achieve societal well-being through development. Education which according to Asamonye, Obaonu and Agu (2015), is the process through which knowledge, skills, values, morals and norms of a society are transmitted to its people from generation to generation, on the other hand, is an instrument of development. Asamonye, Obaonu and Agu further posit that it is the political system that decides the values, type of education, and the means and strategies for its implementation. It is therefore difficult to separate politics from education because political debates develop the policies to improve educational development. The goals of education include preserving, upgrading and transferring the core norms, values, skills, and attitudes required and necessary for effecting development in the society. The concern of politics for

development and the role of education in achieving development in society therefore make the concepts closely linked.

It is difficult to separate politics and education with ease. This is due to the role education plays in the political life of a nation and the role politics plays in the educational development of a nation. Education is provided through a political system. It is in this regard that Okunamiri (2009) submits that the political function of determination and allocation of resources in the society is carried out by the political system through the several social institutions and agencies in the society, one of which is the educational system. Education functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, towards societal transformation and development which are core values of politics. The goals of politics and education on development are, therefore, interwoven.

Brief History of Educational Development in Nigeria

Before the advent of Islamic and Western education, traditional education held sway in Africa and what is Nigeria today. It provided the Nigerian child with physical skill, character, intellectual skill and sense of belonging to the community as well as inculcating respect for elders, giving vocational training, and the understanding and appreciation of the community's cultural heritage. Western style education was formally introduced to Nigeria in 1842, when the Christian Missionaries planted a mission and built a school at Badagry (near Lagos). Other schools were later also established in various parts of Nigeria, and were managed and supervised by the Christian Missionaries until 1882 when the British Colonial Government started showing interest in the education of Nigerians by enacting the first Education Ordinance (Imam, 2012). Several other ordinances were enacted at various times in order to transform and strengthen education through curriculum content, funding, quality and control. Education continued to grow and develop through phases, culminating in the establishment of the Yaba Higher College in 1932 and the University College, Ibadan in 1948. Today, Nigeria has over 100 universities and many other tertiary education institutions, all struggling to improve the quality and quantity of education in Nigeria.

The Role of Politics in the Educational Development of Nigeria

Politics and education are interwoven concepts in societal development. They relate and complement each other towards societal development. However, politics comes before education as education depends on the structures established by politics to function well. Politics therefore, has played important roles in the development of education in Nigeria. Some of these roles include:

- i. **Grants-in-Aid to Educational Institutions:** The provision of education to Nigerians, its management and control was the sole responsibility of the Christian missions until 1887 when the colonial government granted 200 pounds to each of the three main church missions providing education in the Lagos Colony (Okon, 2006). This political decision of educational funding through grants-in aid lessened the burden of educational financing of the private providers of education. This culminated in the out-right take-over of schools by government in the early 1970s in order to enhance funding and government control. These were political policies designed to develop education in Nigeria.

- ii. **Enactment of laws and policies on education:** Through the institutions of politics and political action, laws and policies to develop education have been enacted. A policy for the establishment of a partnership agreement between the state and church around the 1920s saw the colonial government promoting education for the purpose of producing literate and clerical staff who would help in keeping the colony in subordinate position for continued exploitation, while the church aimed at producing lay readers, catechists, teachers and literate personnel for commercial houses (Ogbonnaya, 2009). Educational development here, was therefore, focused towards serving the interests of the colonial masters mainly. According to Okon (2006), other ordinances were promulgated later which affected educational development in various ways. The 1951 Macpherson constitution which regionalized education among the three regions: Western, Eastern and Northern Regions, authorized the regions to make laws on education and this impacted seriously on the development of education. For example, Oni (2008) submitted that the political policy of Universal Primary Education (UPE) that was launched in Western Nigeria on January 17, 1955 was a phenomenal success as 391,859 children appeared for registration in primary class 1 in 6,274 schools and the total attendance in all the classes was 811,432. Four years later, the number of schools had risen to 6,518 with 1,080,303 pupils attending them (p. 24). In Lagos which was a federal territory, the Lagos Town Council initiated a free primary school scheme from January, 1957. This scheme grew from 96 primary schools with 50, 182 pupils in 1957, to 129 primary schools with over 140,000 pupils by 1966.

In the Eastern Region, Oni notes that although the launching of the UPE scheme in 1957 (which was not well-planned) became a disaster as the program failed in just one year after it was started, pupil enrolment in 1956 which was 904,235 rose to 1,209,167 in 1957. Concerning the Northern Region, Oni posits that its educational development was tardy, as the northern regional government seemed to opt out of the race in the provision of free UPE. However, the region was concerned with education in its rural areas and also encouraged adult literacy schemes. The UPE scheme of the Federal Government in 1976 resulted in a sharp increase of pupil enrolment. Okon (2006) quotes the Federal Ministry of Education, 2001, data showing that primary school enrolment was 16.8m in 2000, from 2.3m projected in 1976/77; while secondary school enrolment rose from 826, 926 in 1976 to 4,866,420 in 2002.

The politically motivated educational policies have continued to impact on the educational development of Nigeria. Four federal universities were established, each in the three regions in the early 1960s: Western Region (University of Ife, Ile-Ife); Eastern Region (University of Nigeria, Nsukka); Northern Region (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria); and University of Lagos for the Federal Territory. Later in 1976, more universities were established to reflect the 12-state structure of Nigeria; and at present, each state in Nigeria has at least, one federal university, in addition to the individual state universities.

- iii. **Establishing linkages with other countries, international organizations and agencies for the development of education:** Generally, politics is about establishing relationships to effect development in the society. In this regard, politics tries to establish linkages and partnership arrangements with other countries, development partners like United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other donor agencies to effect

development in education. Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomitiem Declaration of Education For All (EFA) by the year 2000; and also a member of the group of E-9 nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy. This is a good example of such relationships and linkages. These relationships influenced by politics, led to the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme by then President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999. The scheme aims at making basic education free and compulsory for every Nigerian child of school-going age. This is a political effort to develop education in Nigeria.

- iv. **Formulation of policies to influence educational development:** As earlier pointed out, politics is usually at the center of development in all spheres of life including education. In this regard, political leaders try to formulate policies that influence educational development. In Nigeria, such policies include the policy on deregulation of education and policy on equalization of educational opportunities. These policies allow for private sector participation in the provision and management of education, and also making education accessible and affordable to all Nigerians, thereby encouraging educational development. Closely linked to this is the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria, NOUN, in 1983 by the Shehu Shagari administration and its resuscitation in 2001 by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration. The establishment of NOUN is to enhance access and equity in the provision of educational opportunities thereby aiding educational development in the country.
- v. **Launching of educational development programs:** Educational development programs are often influenced and launched at various times by political actors to promote educational development. In February 2020, one of such programs, the Open School Program (OSP), was launched in Abuja to address the needs of the out-of-school children in six northern states. This was a collaboration between Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The focus of the program is to encourage and enable more independent learning among learners. Earlier in 1993, the School on Wheels Program was launched as a door-step school program, to enhance educational opportunities for children. Under the program, a motor vehicle is re-modeled and equipped with all classroom supplies including computer, Television (TV), Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) player, and other educational audio-visual learning materials to serve as mobile classroom, to help reach to children in certain locations where classrooms cannot be built; to conduct literacy classes and other educational sessions.

Challenges

The role of politics in the educational development of Nigeria can be said to be very noble and worthy. However, there are challenges that have consistently hampered the effective performance of these roles. Some of these challenges include:

- i. **Obnoxious government policies:** Many government policies are aimed at developing education in Nigeria. However, there are some obnoxious policies that rather hinder effective educational development. These policies include the quota system, catchment area, and policy on educational disadvantaged states. According to Ogbonnaya (2009), quota means a number of people who should come from a state; catchment area implies some designated states from which students are drawn, while disadvantaged states means states that are backward educationally when compared with their counterparts.

When these policies are applied, it becomes immaterial the level of qualification of such candidates and education is provided to them at the detriment of the other ones that do not fall in the category used. This hampers quality educational development.

- ii. **Instability in government:** Instability in government constitutes one of the political factors affecting educational development in Nigeria. This arises when there are coups and counter coups, and where elections are rigged. There are frequent changes of governments with each government in power initiating its own education policies and programs or reviewing the existing ones. Funding of education is also affected as each government presents its budget based on its priorities, which may not be education, during its tenure. Of course, it may be argued that government has been fairly stable at the federal level over the past twenty years, there are frequent changes at the state, local government, and education agency levels. This affects educational development.
- iii. **Activities of pressure groups:** Pressure groups are defined by Ogbonnaya (2010) as associations formed to pursue certain interests. These associations in the education sector include National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU), Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), and a host of others. The activities of these pressure groups like staff strikes or students' riots/demonstrations, at various times, affect educational development in Nigeria. The activities of secret cult societies in educational institutions are also a cog in the wheel of educational development.
- iv. **Lack of funds:** Lack of adequate funds to finance educational development in the country is a worrisome issue and has hampered good intentions of politics on education. Political policies such as the UPE Scheme of 1976 and the present UBE Scheme have suffered setbacks due to lack of funds.
- v. **Poor policy planning and implementation:** Some political policies with the intention of developing education are poorly (or hastily) planned and implemented. Njoku (2016) averred that the UPE scheme of the Eastern Region in 1957, that of the Federal Government in 1976, the 6-3-3-4 of 1988, and the UBE scheme of 1999 are very good examples of such political policies that failed because they were poorly planned and hastily implemented.
- vi. **Inadequate statistical data:** Lack of adequate statistical data affects useful political policies on educational development. Oni (2008) echoed that usually, a projection exercise relies heavily on figures from censuses. Planning becomes very difficult when the planner does not know the exact number of children at a particular time or during a particular period. Poor projection leads to pupil population explosion which leads to inadequacy of educational resources. Population explosion and paucity of relevant and reliable statistical data on planning and implementation of good policies have negative effects on developing education in the country.
- vii. **Corruption:** Corruption, which Ikediugwu (2020) refers to as dishonest or illegal behavior – behavior which deviates from the established code of behavior for personal gain – is one of the biggest challenges of educational development in the country. There are adverse effects of corruption on educational policies and development. Aliyu, Kalejaiye and Ogunola (2014, p. 104) summed up that “corruption is a path to underdevelopment in Nigeria in all spheres.”

All these have tended to hinder politics from performing its role adequately towards educational development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has recognized politics and education as complementing agents for societal development. Politics however, comes before education as it lays the structures upon which education can thrive. Attempts were made to explain the concepts of politics, development, and educational development. The relationship between politics and education was analyzed, and a brief history of educational development in Nigeria was presented. The thrust of the paper was the role of politics in the educational development of Nigeria which was discussed to include providing grants-in-aid to education, enactment of laws and policy formulation, establishing linkages with other countries and organizations for the development of education, and launching of educational development programs. The paper identified some challenges that impact negatively on the role of politics in the educational development of Nigeria to include obnoxious government policies, instability of government, activities of pressure groups, lack of adequate funds, poor policy planning and implementation, inadequate and unreliable statistical data, and corruption.

Recommendations

For politics to play its role properly and achieve positive results in educational development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The obnoxious government policies such as quota system, catchment area, and educational disadvantaged states should be reviewed. Genuine efforts should be made to make education available and affordable to all citizens. Merit and quality should be stressed over other considerations such as catchment area such that the beneficiaries will be those who really merit admissions and who would be able to cope academically in order to achieve quality output and general societal development.
- ii. The principles of democracy should be strengthened so as to make governments stable. Elections should be actually conducted, and should be free and fair such that only the real winners emerge and are returned. The constitution of the country should be actually supreme: there should be real separation of powers among the various arms of government, with the judiciary much unbiased. The tenets of democracy should be observed and practiced such that governments would become more stable, and good educational policies could be better implemented for the development of education in the country.
- iii. There should always be dialogue with pressure groups in the education sector to find ways of curbing or minimizing strikes/demonstrations. Pressure groups should be involved in developing and implementing educational policies and programs at the various stages. Welfare issues of staff and students should be considered paramount in order to motivate them to direct their energies at educational development.
- iv. Education should be adequately funded such that most of its requirements in terms of learning materials and facilities, staff welfare and motivation can be adequately addressed. This will help reduce cases of staff strikes, students' demonstrations and riots; and make the educational system more stable towards growth and development.

- v. Adequate attentions should be given to planning and implementation of educational policies. The objectives of any educational policy should be carefully drawn and analyzed, the resources required should be carefully assessed, sourced and allocated to the various educational programs, and control measures adequately put in place to ensure that deviations from plans are controlled towards achieving the set objectives.
- vi. Efforts should be made to generate adequate and reliable statistical data required and necessary for implementing educational programs. National population censuses should be well conducted such that the population figures arrived at would be reliable. Other data such as the number of students, schools, staff requirement, facilities and infrastructure required for successful implementation of educational plans should always be generated and kept handy.
- vii. Sincere efforts should be made to control corruption in the country in general and in the education sector in particular. This will assist in proper management of the resources allocated for the implementation of educational development plans.

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