

## **GOVERNMENT POLICIES, POLITICS AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE**

### **Osiyale, Babatunde Olabiyi**

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies,

TASUED, Ijagun Ogun State Nigeria

osiyalebabatundeolabiyi1@yahoo.com

### **Williams, Catherine Olutoyin**

Department of English Studies,

Tai Solarin University of Education,

Ijagun Ogun State, Nigeria

catherinewilliams2013@gmail.com

### **'Niyi, OGUNKOYA**

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies,

Tai Solarin University of Education,

Ijagun Ogun State, Nigeria

ogunkoyasa@tasued.edu.ng

## **Abstract**

The coming of the Europeans to Africa and indeed Nigeria and everything that came with them was eventually criticised for being European catered rather than African. The colonial education which was inherited by Nigeria was criticised for being too theoretical to be able to make meaningful impact on the life of Nigerians. This was because the subjects taught in schools reflected the taste of the colonial education officials; hence school curricula were built around the existing colonial values. Students were supposed to mimic their teachers in subject like English Language which involved demonstration of competency. The same problem which informed dependency on past colonial education relics seems to have continued even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education in Nigeria, where the educational curriculum, though ‘home grown’ yet could not address the fundamental issues facing the country. The thrust of this presentation is therefore to consider some challenges facing education in Nigeria that were either caused by the Politics or Policies of the State

**Keywords:** Curriculum, National Education Policy, Government Interference/Involvement,

## **Introduction**

The National Policy on Education known as the 6-3-3-4 approach was brought into Nigeria’s educational system for the first time in 1982 and it has the design to observe irrelevant nature of Nigeria’s existing system of education.

Whereas, before its introduction, it was believed that the British system of Education that was largely practised in Nigeria was more of “window dressing” than any meaningful system that would take care of the educational, social and economic needs of the country as a whole and the people therein

The curriculum at all levels of the education system tilt more in tune and content with the European environment than to the African and indeed the Nigeria setting. The content of

subjects like Geography emphasised the studying of capes, bays, and several other foreign features not experienced in the Nigerian or African landscape. History and Historical discourse of study was clustered with stories and analysis of European wars, empires, kingdoms, reigns of monarchs and national treaties that had very little (if at all) meaning and bearing to African minds.

But about three decades after, the situation in the country as far as education is concerned has not actually got it bearing as it were with the Europeans both in content and in practice, and this holds largely to government policies towards education, which is also affected by her Politics.

### **Functions of Education/ Importance of Education in Nigeria**

Against general belief that education is basically for teaching and learning and within the four walls of a classroom. Education is not just restricted to teaching a person the basic academics, but a much larger term. It is one of the most important factors which formulate the personality of a person. It is a productive and beneficial factor in a person's life.

Moreso, education is the window to the knowledge and progress in the modern society. The percentage of illiterate population in the country is the lost opportunity of the increase in overall knowledge and progress in particular spheres of society life

**Furthermore, education empowers women, girls and men alike**, particularly for women and girls, the economic and personal empowerment that education provides allows them to make healthier choices for themselves and their families. This also applies to men in taking certain far reaching decisions as far it affect their families.

Education Provides a Foundation for Peace Building: Education nourishes peace. Across society, every year of schooling decreases a male's chance of engaging in violent conflict. (Nigeria 2004)

### **Government Policies on Education**

The need to reform education in Nigeria was given full attention after independence, by that, the Nigerian government was saddled with the responsibility of designing a home grown

educational system for the country, as such, the journey towards educational reforms began in earnest.

In September 1969 there was a National curriculum conference held in Lagos. Participants at the conference were eager to see Nigeria chart a new course in its educational system. Such a system they reasoned will empower the country towards the path of scientific and technological development. They criticized colonial education system as lacking in vitality and relevance. In short, the conference recommended changes in the system, from 6-5-2-3 system to 6-3-3-4 system; that is 6year primary, 3year junior secondary, 3year senior secondary and 4year university/post-secondary education. (BELLO 2008)

In the beginning, the outcome of the participants at the conference was hallowed especially to a country that is keen for change and development, for a people that wants brightened future. But when politicians and political authority got the document and showed interest in it, they misinterpreted the content and outcome. The politicians failed to realize that the document is a proposal produced by academics and interest groups and not probably for political and basically economic gains. To therefore put the proposal into practice there is the need for careful planning. The planning stage of the proposal was not well-done and so the intended results of the plan was thwarted by military approach which strangled the desire of the plan.

Crisis in education started manifesting itself when government went out to implement 6-3-3-4 system without adequate planning for the system in place. The lower education specifically primary education was the first to suffer the effect of this inadequate planning. Free Universal Primary Education was launched in 1976 but the policy on education itself appeared in 1977 one year after implementation of the programme. In this kind of situation where implementation is ahead of policy, confusion would certainly emerge. (BELLO 2008)

This challenge also faced the other sections of the educational system, where the first three-year of the secondary school was faced with enormous challenge. First and foremost the status of JSS is a contentious issue. The former old British system refused out rightly to give way to a new order. The JSS birth though celebrated by Educational Planners as a shift in the education system designed to cut the tying knot that tied British education and the independent Nigeria. The essence of JSS is to launch Nigeria into a respectable industrialized

nation. But, policy intent is different from policy implementation. The new JSS is housed under the old secondary school, whereas the intention was JSS should be a separate school.

The problems persisted and lingered further to the extent that it affected all level of education in Nigeria including the second three-year and the four-year university education system in Nigeria. The Nigeria government went on with this system and the various challenges which ranges from planning, implementation, execution of plans, funding and data presentation and interpretation.

### **Government Politics in Education**

Politics itself touches on all facets of our lives and has a lot to do in our interactions with government and non-government actors. In the Nigeria case, politics plays a significant role in the economic, social and educational life of the people to the extent that politics determines who becomes the head of a school/institution and the policies to be adopted in the course of running an educational institution.

For instance, the exit of the Military ushered in a new age of politicising the education sector. The former military leader, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who emerged victoriously from the democratic transition of General Abdulsalam Abubakar, introduced changes in the sector based on the philosophy of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies. (NEED 2004)

The government was committed toward gearing a private sector driven economy which education was enlisted as one of the major sectors to be privatised to attract investors and to assist buster education in Nigeria. There was also the assumption that with private sector engagement, employment opportunities would be generated which consequentially will reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.

Before this time, as earlier mentioned, the system of education in Nigeria was the 6-3-3-4 system. The government also change the curriculum by introducing the 9-3-4 system; this system of education provided for 9 years primary education, 3 years secondary education and minimum of 4 years University education.

To achieve this end at the primary school level, the federal government contracted teaching staff and engaged them for the period of two years. It is expected that the teaching staff

employed on the platform of Universal Basic Education (UBE) should be incorporated into the regular teaching staff of the various states in the federation. In most parts of the North, only few states were able to incorporate them as state government teaching staff. This was a remedial solution but did not in any way solve the problem of unemployment. Besides, religion and ethnicity were determining factors in the recruitment exercise.

Nigerian politicians, both governing and non-governing elites, school managers and proprietors have not come to terms to separate partisan politics and education in Nigeria. Although, at the national level, Nigeria have had several people in the academia manning the prestigious ministerial position as education Ministers, whereas, at other times, they have only had education ministers from political affiliation, of people who were neither educators themselves or trained as one, they have achieved less at ensuring that the sector receive best attention it requires to meet the standard of international practices. It is a known fact that structural facilities and human and material resources are inadequate in most educational institutions in Nigeria. (Lenshi 2013)

Cumulatively, since the people recruited to pilot the affairs of the sector is carried out on basis of primordial considerations of ethnicity, political affiliation, religion and political balancing, the system tends to produce poor leadership and followership in the society. The system ends up as a mere jamboree where grading of students is determined by such institutional misnomer and as such also tends to produce graduates that are unproductive to themselves, their immediate social milieu and the larger society.

The politicisation of education in Nigeria has also led to the loss of intercontinental cross fertilization of scholarship in Nigerian schools. This is because of the unfriendly nature of the Nigerian societies to Scholars. Within Nigeria, the usual mixture of Scholars from various ethnic, religious and philosophical backgrounds in most Nigerian universities and schools are fast fading-off. The reason is because these institutions have been overtaken by ethnicity, religious bigotry, political attachment and clandestine relationships. The implication is more visible now that ethnic and religious restiveness has reached its peak in Nigeria. Because of this situation, many Scholars are relocating to their indigenous homelands” or areas considered being relatively peaceful.

In Nigeria today, evidence abound that Vice-Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors as well as other education managers such as Principals and Headmasters/Headteachers are motivated by

political 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 not healthy for the development of education in Nigeria because it excludes those who merited the positions.

## **Conclusion**

It suffices to establish that the main objective of education worldwide is to assist in constructing socially established normative cultures that will provide security and build the capacities for strengthening, uniting and pursuing the common good for all.

This is attainable only in a democratic system, if democracy is given the utmost visibility. Democracy, which is embedded with liberal ideals, allows all sundry to have a stake in the governing process no matter the class or status of individuals in the society. The reason is that democratic culture is constructed on the basis of liberal culture and multiculturalism, which allows for competition within the same social arrangement. Therefore, it is adequate to state that the liberal-type or multicultural type of education system is a one that encourages meritocracy or excellence, because it is constructed on the belief that intelligence quotient (IQ) plus effort equals merit.

Whereas in Nigeria today, the educational system has so changed that employment of teachers, appointment of educational ministers, promotion, and indeed citing of educational institutions are basically on politics and political entanglement. Which also implies that, merit and indeed hard-work in the appointment of and promotion of educational actors are based on politics without recourse to expertise, knowledge of the subject matter and or ability, but politics, which does not speak well of the system.

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