

Experiences of Government Politicization in Participating Over Policies and Programmes of Primary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract *The paper observes that policies and programmes directed towards the improvement of primary education in Nigeria have been suffering from government politicization. It rationalized this, by tracing the origin of the sector since 1842 and the inconsistency of all forms of government in fulfilling their promises as regards development. It pointed out that the front forwarding and back forwarding exhibited by government in being fully responsible to carry out programmes and policies targeted at improving primary education in Nigeria may be described as politicization. It also contends that the on-going UBE programme as a case in point may not escape the government political Maradona. It infact concludes that the political administrative position of the government may mean neglect of treaties, commercialization of the child education, poor quality education and neglect to societal development. Recommending on the ways forward, it suggests that NGO's and other groups should encourage government to religiously implement the content of treaties and programmes and urged the legislative arm to make enabling laws that could guarantee effective check and balance on implementing government policies and programmes targeted at improving primary education in Nigeria.*

Introduction

Primary education is one aspect of our national life that is yet to gain sufficient government participation. The numerous programmes and policies do not accredit government support but may show-case the level of government unwillingness to demonstrate commitment to the development of the first stage of education. Indeed, government may be guilty of politization with matters related to primary education. Prior and after its official commencement in 1842 with the establishment of the first primary school at Badagry by the Methodist, the position of government over its matters has not changed. Yet the Nigerian society seems to have experienced several changes in terms of government policies and programmes. To exhaustively examine this issue, the discussion shall hold within the following circumference:

1. Conceptual view of government politics, policies and participation in primary education
2. The participation, politics and policies of government on primary education in Nigeria
3. Implications of government politics and policies on primary education
4. Conclusion

Conceptual View of Government Politics, Policies and Participation in Primary Education

1. Government Politics and Primary Education

Ordinarily speaking, politics may be understood as the means of gaining the control of state administrative apparatus. This means that it can be conceived as an act or process that involves every action, reaction, correspondence, rule, regulation, effort and any instrument put in place by constituted body of persons to achieve the polity objectives of the state (Nweke 2009). Defining politics, Lasswell (1958) says that it is:

- i. who gets what, how and when?
- ii. an authoritative allocation of values in society.

In as much as Nweke's view may not be wrong, Lasswell's definition seems to provide a good ground for this study. This is so because the synthesis of his synopsis seems to reflect the true Nigerian situation. The clarion call by Nigerians that education and primary education in particular need to be accorded the right

place in the scheme of things attest to Lasswell's definition of politics that says 'allocation of values in society'. No prophet or teacher is needed to explain the fact that primary education is yet to be given the desired attention by government. If the above assumption is right, it means that those who manage it or politicize with it have only met one of Lasswell's view hence he asserts that politics with any thing is targeted at determining who gets what, how and when; and thereby placing a wrong value to its worth.

2. Government Policy and Primary Education

Policy may generally be understood as a position statement that guides the activities of a person or group of persons to attain given objectives. In Nigeria, the intention of government towards primary education is as shown in the National Policy of Education. An assessment of the intention as contained in the policy show that the good wishes of government towards primary education are yet to be realized. This simply means that the government has exhibited luke-warm attitudes in participating over making the content of the policy a reality to the people. It may not be enough to state this without citing given instances. No doubt, the government of Nigeria has in several quarters declared that education at the primary school level is free. Free? Some of those who attend public primary schools make their desks, buy their books and other writing materials as well as indirectly pay for certain services. On the other hand, those who attend private primary schools pay for virtually all services.

3. Government Participation and Primary Education

The concept of participation simply means 'taking part in'. The part or role played by government in the management of primary education provides room for all the blames pushed to the side of government. An account of its roles suggests why she is understood as being political, only a policy maker, a powerless supervisor and squander of meaningful programmes. An antecedent of educational policies and programmes targeted at improving the primary education sub sector shows that the government is not far from the description rendered in the preceding sentence. Several instances can guarantee the above courageous claim. For instance, the non fulfillment of grants in aids to primary schools by the colonial government is a reference point. The disagreement on which tier of government funds primary education through the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) is another case in point. The failures of both the national and regional UPE as well as the epileptic implementation of the policies and programmes synonymous with the on-going UBE programmes are eloquent testimonies as well. Going by these, the government participation in primary education cannot be described on a positive note.

The Participation, Politics and Polices of Government of Primary Education in Nigeria

A trace of the origin of primary education in Nigeria shows that its commencement has several characteristics. The features are:

1. It was carried out by investors such as churches, individuals and voluntary agencies.
2. Its initiation by the white men was done to enable Nigerians to know how to read and write; thereby ease the problem of communication in course of carrying out their nefarious businesses.
3. The British government showed no interest in its affairs.
4. Poor curriculum. Fafunwa (1974:88) observes that "there was no common curriculum among the missionsindeed each school within a mission followed its devices".

Following the manner and way it started, one may say that its initial problems are still haunting it. Therefore lack of government participation in implementing good policies may be traced to its origin. Government

lackadaisical attitude towards primary education is show-cased in many ways. Some of them are:

1. Poor and Epileptic Financial Attention: Right from the days of the colonial era till now government cannot be credited for funding primary education adequately; commenting on this Ogbondah (2008:12) laments that:

It was not until 1872 that the colonial government made superficial attempts at making financial contributions to the development of formal education in Nigeria with a paltry £30 (thirty pounds) now N60 (sixty naira) given to the three major missions of the Church Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Mission and the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

Poor enthusiasm to participate in funding primary education by government was further demonstrated among the three tiers of government during the era of National Primary Education Commission (NPEC). Following the lingering problems associated to primary education, the NPEC was set up to rescue primary education from imminent collapse arising from inadequate funding, poor management and neglects of yester years. By the establishment of the commission through the enactment of decree No. 31 of 1988; major changes were ushered to the primary school system. Some of the changes were:

- a. Separation of primary education from secondary education under the management of a board.
- b. The funding of primary education nationwide wide under the auspices of the federal government.
- c. It also established Local Government Education Authority (LEA)

Two years after, the federal government backslided from its earlier stand by abrogating the 1988 decree and promulgated decree No. 2 of 1991 that transferred the funding and management of primary education to the local government. By this arrangement, the primary school system had the following features:

- a. The Local Governments became autonomous and responsible for the funding and management of primary schools within their jurisdiction.
- b. The council chairmen automatically became the head of the local government education authority.
- c. The federal government allocation to local government increased from 10% to 15% in 1991 and 15% to 20% in 1992 yet local governments were uncomfortable with the imposed responsibility and fronted several reasons why they could not meet up with their new tasks.
- d. Zero allocation syndrome characterized the local governments due to deduction of primary education/health care funds from the local government pause.

By 1993, federal government sought the means to resuscitate the defunct NPEC by promulgating decree No. 96 of 1993. The decree charged the commission with the responsibility of disbursing funds to LEA through the State Primary Education Board. This decree wrought certain changes to the commission. Some of them were:

- a. The local government education authority could only perform delegated functions, but may initiate their own primary education policy.
- b. Under decree 96 of 1993, the secretary of the local government education authority became the chief executive and principal accounting officer.

Considering the political disposition of government in managing the affairs of primary education in Nigeria as show-cased above, no one may exonerate her from the stagnant state of things in the system. Consequent on its preponderance effect on the system, one expects her to come up with policies and programmes that would free the system from its state of pity. Perhaps it is on this note that the government shows a level of willingness to participate in proper funding and management of primary education through the formulation of ideal policies and programmes. An x-ray of such programmes may not be very necessary. Therefore this study intends to use the on-going UBE programme as a case in point. However two other programmes worthy of mention in this context are the National and Regional Universal Primary Education Programmes (UPE) during the 1950's and early 1960 and 1976 to early 1980's respectively. Within the 1950's and part of 1960's the three regions in Nigeria namely South, West and North made conscious efforts to offer primary education free to the people. The 1950 – 1960 UPE regional programmes were generally described as a

failure with the greatest success recorded in the West. The different premium attached to the programme by the various regions determined the level of success recorded in the different regions. It is pertinent to point out that the diversity in the success or failure of the programme among the regions may be responsible for the phenomenon common to education in Nigeria known as advantaged and disadvantaged educational states.

Following the imbalance created by the 1950's to 1960's regional UPE programme, the government has shown the desire with little commitment to make basic education Available to the people. This, we can all see that the 1963 constitution was amended such that education other than higher education came under the concurrent responsibility of both the federal and state governments. This declaration was further justified in (1977) when the government through her national policy on education states that:

Education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise but a huge government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation. The federal government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument for effecting national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977:3)

Before the roll out of the National Policy in 1977 the federal government under General Olusegun Obasanjo the then military head of state formally flagged off the UPE programme on Monday 6th September 1976 during a ceremony held at Oke Suna Municipality Primary School, Lagos (Okorosaye – Orubite: 2008). Besides the government policies and public pronouncements, primary education in Nigeria is still characterized with poor teacher pupil ratio, poor funding, poor infrastructural and instructional facilities, poor enrolment and drop-out rates etc. Perhaps in attempt to bridge the observed gap and the willingness to match action with words, the government under President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999 at Sokoto made a public show of her good intention to universally and compulsorily offer basic education to all Nigerians by introducing the on-going UBE programme. This can be understood as a strategy to overcome the problems that have short-circuited the proper flow of events in the primary education sub-sector. Some quarters believe that apart from the above reason the government may rationalize the introduction of UBE programme on several grounds. Chief among their philosophy are as follows:

1. Fulfillment of the content of International treaties signed by Nigeria: Nigeria has been a signatory to major international covenants on basic education. Some of such treaties are:

- a. Jomtien Declaration and framework for Africa on Education for all (1990);
- b. New Delhi (1991) Declaration on E – 9 countries;
- c. Ouagadougou (1992) Declaration on the Education of Women and Girls;
- d. Amman (1996) Affirmation on the pursuit of the Goals of Jomtien;
- e. Durban (1998) statement of commitment on inter-African collaboration for the Development of Education;
- f. OAU Decade of Education in Africa (1997 – 2006);
- g. The Dakar (2000) Education for all (EFA) forum.

Source: *Adapted from FRN (2000)*

The consent given to the above treaties, mostly the Education For All (EFA) may be held responsible by some people for government's magnanimous declaration of the UBE programme. Not to be left out among the treaties is the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) which stipulates that every child has a right to education. Nigeria was not a member as at 1948 but adopted the UN's declaration as soon as she gained independence in 1960.

2. Attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): A scan of the philosophy behind the millennium development goals shows that the child which does not exclude the Nigerian child is a major beneficiary in the actualization of the goals. Briggs and Nte (2008) explains that:

As a means of domiciling issues of Child Development in its proper perspective, we wish to observe the serious concerns of the global community on the matter. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were ratified by 189 Heads of state and governments in 2000, probably constitute the most audacious plan ever made by mankind to improve the quality of life and to assure the well-being of all. The goals refer frequently, albeit in a tangential manner, to the issue of proper Child Development as a precursor to subsequent healthy living in a number of the 8 development goals. 21 quantifiable targets, and 60 indicators by the target date 2015. Specifically, MDG 2 requests that by that target date, children everywhere, boys and girls, should be able to complete a course of primary school education.

Going by the emphasis laid by the MDG's as explained by Nimi and Nte one may deduce that the attainment of a sound primary education is not only a Nigerian issue rather a global concern. Therefore the policies and programmes of government directed towards the child primary education may be conceived as a right step in the right direction if genuine efforts are made to actualize them.

1. **The Right of the Child:** Just as stated in 1948 by United Nations 'every child has a right to education. In Nigeria, the Nigerian's child rights act of 2003 states among other things that "every child has a right to survival and development (FRN; 2003). It defines free compulsory basic education as the right of every child and charged government with the responsibility of providing it. In the bid to fulfill this obligation, the government on May 26, 2004 approved a bill known as Compulsory, Free, Universal Basic Education; bill No. 66, volume 91. The bill among others stipulates that:
 1. Without prejudice to the provisions of item 30 of Part 11 of the second schedule and item 2 (a) of the Fourth Schedule to the 1999 Constitution dealing with primary school education, the Federal Government's intervention under this Act shall only be an assistance to the States and Local Governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria.
 2. (1) Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.
(2) Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his
 - (a) Primary school education; and
 - (b) junior secondary school education, by endeavouring to send the child to primary and junior secondary schools.
 3. The stake-holders in education in a Local Government Area, shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him under section 2(2) of this Act.
 4. A parent who contravenes section 2(2) of this Act commits an offence and is liable-
 - a. on first conviction, to be reprimanded;
 - b. on second conviction, to a fine of N2,000:00 or imprisonment for a term of 1 month or to both; and
 - c. Consequent conviction, to a fine of N5,000:00 or imprisonment for a term of 2 months or to both.
- 3... (1) The services provided in public primary and junior secondary schools shall be free of charge
(2) A person who receives or obtains any fee contrary to the provisions of subsection (1) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding N10,000:00 or imprisonment for a term of 3 months or to both
- 4... (1) Every parent shall ensure that his child receives full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude by regular attendance at school.
(2) The provisions of sections 2(2) and 4(1) of this Act shall not apply to any parent who, for the time being, is resident outside Nigeria

5. The provisions of section 2 and 3 of this Act shall not apply to any child who is resident outside Nigeria and who has not received such education.

6. The Magistrate Court or any other state court of competent jurisdiction shall have jurisdiction to hear and determine cases arising under section 2 of this Act and to impose the punishment specified.

Source: *Federal Government Gazette on Compulsory, Free, Universal, Basic Education. No. 66, Volume 91*

An interpretation of government's proposal implies the guarantee of the child to be educated. Unfortunately, the activities of government may not warrant any one to declare that she backs her words with action.

4. National Committee Reports and Policies: Following the obvious failure of the regional UPE programme in the 1950's due to politicization and the desire of political office holders to conserve funds for either personal use or political aggrandizement; committees were set up at both the regional and federal tiers of government. The reports of those committees led to the 1969 curriculum conference that gave birth to 1976 UPE programme; national policy on education in 1977 and the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system of education. Going further to discuss this, without sparing time to throw light on the issue of politicization, good meaning may not be gotten from the position of this writer who may have claimed that politicization of educational policies and programmes has remained the highest problem of education in Nigeria. A good instance of this assumption is traceable to the dramatic change of both the political leaders and the head of the Eastern UPE programme in 1953/1954. The sudden change of professor Eyo Ita as the head of political power in Eastern Nigeria and Mr. R. I. Uzoma as the region's minister of education resulted to the abandon of the systematic regional UPE programme of the East as was programmed by professor Eyo Ita led administration. The quash and compulsory take over of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Akpabio as head of government and educational business respectively from their predecessors was not a good omen to primary education in Nigeria and the East in particular.. Accounting on this, Okorosaye – Orubike (2008) explains that

Having lost out in the struggle for a majority of his party members to control the Western House of Assembly in 1952, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe found himself as the only national leader of a major political party in Nigeria that was not in control of a government. Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Obafemi Awolowo were leaders of Government business in the North and West respectively. Thus embittered Nnamdi Azikiwe moved base from Lagos/Ibadan to Enugu in 1953 and amidst political and ethnic disaffection wrestled power from Prof. Eyo Ita (an Efik) and assumed power as premier in 1954.

This power reshuffle did not only affect the political administration alone because the greatest casualty was the primary education hence R. I. Uzoma gave way to I. U. Akpabio (the former principal of Ibibio State College, Ikot Ekpene) as minister of Education and so did Eyo Ita/Uzoma UPE policy give way to Azikiwe/Akpabio fire brigade UPE programme that manifested its failures in almost all dimensions. Perhaps in the bid to correct the anomalies several policies and programmes of government directed at re-positioning primary education have been propounded, implemented and failed. However the government do not seem to be tired on matters concerning education in Nigeria. This is so because during the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's led administrations as head of state in 1980's; the federal government set up a committee headed by Dr. Samuel J. Cooley to work out modalities on how to make the first nine years of education in Nigeria free, compulsory and universal. The committee made up of eminent Nigerians from all works of life asserts that:

Nigeria has a literacy rate of only about 20 percent for people who are above 15 years old. This shows urgency for a scheme or mass education if the population is to be socially mobilized. In order to have a literate Nigerian society there is need to have the education of our Youths free for the FIRST NINE YEARS (FRN: 1987)

Observations show that the reports of the Cooley headed bureau did not attract any significant response until the declaration of the UBE programme by the government in 1999. Following the above account one may be tempted to observe that government is only good in setting committees and propounding politics

without equivalent commitment to implement the content of those reports and policies. A sum of such disposition may be understood as POLITICIZATION.

Implications Of Government Politics And Policies On Primary Education In Nigeria

The way and manner government handles issues related to primary education may not have left the system without effects. The lessons or experiences acquired over the years may warrant the activities of government towards primary education to be described in the following ways:

1. Neglect of Treaties: The government is known for participating in several treaties related to primary education. In spite of her consent to such agreement of nations, no one can confidently say that she has been religious in implementing the resolution of such treaties.

2. Commercialization of the Child's Education: The proliferation of private nursery primary schools is traceable to the disposition of government in both its funding and management. Government attitude towards childhood education may have warranted some people to describe the government as a licensing officer; hence she is responsible for authorizing the private school operators. In this vein, Yahaya in Yaloye (1993: 50) asserts that "this level gets very little mention perse, in the laws of the country because it is optional and with very rare exceptions, a wholly private system".

3. Quality of Education: Correlating the fact that the government policies and intentions in signing treaties targets at ensuring quality education for all and the fact that they are yet to match actions with their words, it means that they are not interested in letting all acquire good education. The fact that education at the primary school level is a basic one, such that none acquisition of the skills imparted at that stage among Nigerians may lead to the production of citizens who may not distinguish wrong from right. The government needs to demonstrate the minimum sagacity in rendering it as a need and not as a want. Anero (2008) observes that "a man without a functional academic background and has no special vocational skill is a curse to humanity. He further explains this by stating that such a person is characterized as follows:

- a. He cannot care for himself;
- b. He depends on nothing for survival and passes a hopeless life;
- c. Members of his immediate family fend for him, else he will die premature and serve as a source of reproach to them; and
- d. He does not possess the capability to meaningfully contribute towards the growth and development of the society.

Infact he is known as Mr. NOBODY!

4. Neglect to Societal Development: The reasons are abundant to support the fact that education is a major instrument for societal development. Yet, it may not have accorded the required recognition by government who is known as the chief manager. This accusation stem from the fact that sometimes, panels set up to look into educational issues do not diligently carry out their functions much more implementing the recommendation of committees, panels and educational boards. The editorial of Argus newspaper (2003) holds that:

The urgent need for the panel to carry out its task independently is anchored in the premise that education is too serious a business to toy with We therefore appeal to the respectable members of the panel to remain immune to whatever pressures they may be brought to bear on them and remain focused to transparency.

The lesson from this account implies that if the government deserves the development of the society, it must of necessity carry out the content of all treaties that she signed as well as fully implement the recommendations of committees, panels, boards, councils and so on.

Conclusion

The major business of this paper was the examination of government participation in matters related to primary education. It explained that the extent of participation can best be described as politicization. The above conclusion was buttressed by examining the promise and fail syndrome synonymous with government decisions over the funding and management of primary education programmes. It stressed that government inability to fulfill her declaration is traceable to the days of British colonial rule in Nigeria. The study emphasized that all forms of government has not exempted itself from the wreckless abandon of primary educational programmes. It inferred that the poor disposition of government towards matters related to primary education should be held accountable for poor quality of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In as much as no one may argue that government politicization over policies and programmes directed at improving primary education is an evil wind that pays no one no good; the following recommendations are made:

1. NGO's, agencies and other groups should encourage government to implement the content of treaties, policies and programmes targeted at improving primary education;
2. The legislative arm of the government at all tiers of government should make laws that could be pragmatic in effecting checks and balances to guarantee policies and programmes in favour of primary education

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