

REPOSITIONING NIGERIA'S EDUCATION POLICY: CONSTRAINTS AND THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

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Introduction

The term 'repositioning' was not found in the English dictionary but it find space in the THESAURUS; where it means rearrangement, reordering, recasting, relocation or shuffle. The word education has been variously described by scholars. It could be seen as a continuous process which the society establishes to assist its members to understand the heritage of the past, and to participate productively in the future (Oyeromi and Ubong, 2015). However, the working definition adopted by this paper is the one that defines education as the sum total of the experiences acquired by any human being in life (Famade, 2001). This acquired experience brings about the most desirable change in behavior of the recipient. A policy is usually seen as a programme of actions adopted by a person, group, or government. Generally, policy is a long term guide for particular course of action. It is a definite course or method of action selected by a government, institution, or individual from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and usually determine present and future decisions. In practical terms, it consists of a course of actions and measures deliberately taken to direct the affairs of society towards the realization of predetermined goals or objectives.

Policies are explicit or implicit statements that guide future thinking, initiatives and actions of managers. They are meant to provide necessary information that will help managers to know what they can and cannot do while making decisions (Babalola, 2003). A policy ensures consistency of action because an organization is governed by approved principles.

Education policy has been described variously as:

- Definite course of action proposed by the government in power or an executive authority and adopted as expedient to the issues and problems of education (Nwankwo, 1986).
- The statement of intentions of the government, and the envisaged means of achieving those aspects of its national objectives that has to rely on the use of education as a tool (Osokoya, 1987).
- The overall plan laid down by a government embracing general goals and procedures in the provision of education (Famade, 2000).

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- A general statement containing principles, regulations and rules, which govern many of the decisions on how to educate children, where to get them educated, who to teach them, how to finance their education, and so on (Babalola, 2003).
- Policies made both inside and outside educational institutions that provide guidance in the conduct of educational activities (Owolabi, 2005).

From the above descriptions, it become very clear that when people speak about education policy, they are referring mostly to government decision rules regarding education, schools, colleges or related matters. Therefore, government rules regarding school attendance, graduation, college entry, what will be studied, who will teach, who will be paid, and who will pay, are all illustrations of education policies. So, education policies are meant to tackle issues relating to the structure, the equity, the access, the management, and the efficiency of the education system. It is meant to guide and determine present and future decisions connected with schools, pupils, and the roles to be played by parents and other interested bodies. In summary, education policies are the agreed ways of operating the education system.

From the brief description of the terms, one can say that a call to 'repositioning' Nigeria's education policy is a call to shuffle, rearrange, reorder or recast the nation's education policy for better performance. This presupposes three basic assumptions:

- (i) That the current education policy has become obsolete in all ramifications and thus, require total overhaul.
- (ii) That the Nigeria education policies have not been successfully implemented over the years, due to certain constraints.
- (iii) That there are some emerging issues that should be incorporated into the education policy to bring about sustainable development of the nation.

In trying to provide appropriate answers to the basic assumptions identified above, this paper shall focus on the following:

- X-raying the trends in education policy making in Nigeria,
- The constraints in policy implementation, and
- The road to success.

X-Raying the Trends in Education Policy Making in Nigeria

Education policy making in Nigeria could be categorized into two major phases: colonial and post-independence era.

The Colonial Period

Education policy making in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era when the British colonized the country. For a period of 40 years from 1842 to 1882, the business of education was exclusively in the hands of Christian Missionaries. Only very little

interest was shown by the colonial government in the development of education. Following persistent agitations and protestation from Nigerian nationalist leaders about the nonchalant attitude of the colonial administration on the education of the Nigerian child, the colonial government began to show interest in the education system. Quite a number of education ordinances were promulgated by the colonial administration to control the education system.

The **1882 Education Ordinance** covered the British West African territories of Gold Coast (Ghana), Lagos (Nigeria), Sierra-Leone and Gambia. The ordinance provided for a General Board of Education, with the power to appoint and dissolve Local Boards of Education, at such places as they may consider desirable. In addition, the ordinance classified schools into Government schools, which were maintained entirely by public funds; and Assisted Schools, established by private persons, but aided from public funds. The **1887 Education Ordinance** was the first education ordinance in Nigeria. It was however meant only for the Colony of Lagos. It made provisions for a Board of Education, appointment of Inspector, Sub-Inspector of schools and other education officers for the Lagos colony. In addition, provisions were made for certification of teachers, grants-in-aid to schools and teacher training institutions, as well as establishment of scholarships for secondary and technical education.

On 1st January, 1900 the Southern territories of the Royal Niger Company was merged with the Niger Coast Protectorate to become the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Subsequently, an **Education Proclamation No. 19 of 1903** meant for the Protectorate was enacted. It provided for a Board of Education and appointment of a Director of Education. However, the education proclamation was amended and promulgated as the **Education Proclamation No. 4 of 1905**. It brought the control of public funds in education directly under the government.

On 1st May, 1906, the whole of Southern Nigeria was united politically when the Colony of Lagos was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and renamed the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The new protectorate was administered in three provinces: Western Province (Lagos), Eastern Province (Calabar) and Central Province (Warri). Consequently, a new education ordinance was promulgated. The **1908 Education Ordinance** set up a provincial education administration in each of the three provinces. The ordinance provided for a Provincial Board of Education for each province; appointment of a Director of Education, Inspector of schools, teachers and education officers. Also, there were provisions for payment of grants to teacher training institutions for students in training; award of scholarships, and power to forfeit teachers' certificates.

The merger of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1914 to become one administrative unit led to the enactment of the **1916 Education Ordinance**; to bring about a unified education policy for the whole country. In 1919, the ordinance was amended and became **Education Ordinance of 1919**. The new ordinance provided for two separate Boards of Education, each for the South and the North; power to inspect and close any school-assisted or non-assisted; special grants for teaching staff, teacher training institutes and for residential pupils. In addition, no child above the age of 13 was allowed in infant school, and no pupil above the age of 20 was allowed in a primary or secondary school.

The two major defects identified by the colonial Governor- Sir Hugh Clifford in the Nigeria educational system, in his memorandum to the Advisory Committee in 1925 led to the enactment of the **1926 Education Ordinance**. The defects were poor quality of education, and growth of mushroom schools. Both the South and the North have separate education ordinances. The objectives of the 1926 Education Ordinance was:

- More government expenditure on education,
- More effective control of educational development.

The first education ordinance that covered the whole country was the **1948 Education Ordinance**. It made provisions for a Central Board of Education and four Regional Boards for the West, the East, the North and, Lagos colony. It further provided for registration of all teachers, right of inspection of schools; and procedure for opening new schools and closing a school.

The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 advanced regionalization by assigning increasing measure of responsibility to the Regions. To reflect the new Constitution, the **1952 Education Act** was enacted. The Education Act was introduced to enable each of the three regions develop its educational policies and programmes in line with their peculiar situation. The Education Act covered the whole country and contained similar provisions like the 1948 Education Ordinance.

With effect from 1st October, 1954 Nigeria became a federation of three regions, each with its own powers. Education was placed on both the Concurrent and Residual Legislative list, which the Regions were competent to legislate upon.

Consequently, the Regions enacted their respective education laws:

- The Western Region took the lead with its **Education Law, 1954** (No. 6 of 1954).
- The Eastern Region followed with its **Education Law, 1956** (No. 28 of 1956).
- The Northern Region enacted its **Education Law, 1956** (No. 17 of 1956).

- The Federal Government enacted the **Education (Lagos) Act, 1957** (No. 26 of 1957).

Though the Regional laws differed in areas of emphasis, they had similar provisions such as: Advisory Boards of Education; Local Education Authorities; power to make regulations; opening, inspecting and closing of schools; registration, conduct and discipline of teachers.

Post-Independence Period

The British educational policy fails to address the aspirations and local peculiarities of the people, leading to a clamor for change in the post-independence era. This probably led the Federal Government, in 1959 to set up the Ashby Commission, to investigate and report on Nigeria manpower needs for a period of 20 years (1960-1980). The Commission headed by Sir Eric Ashby recommended the expansion of primary and secondary education; upgrading of the university college, Ibadan to a full-fledged university and, the establishment of new universities in the East, North and West to enable the production of senior and intermediate manpower for the economy.

In 1969, a National Curriculum Conference was organized, which reviewed the inherited educational systems; and subsequently identified new national goals for Nigeria's education system. The Conference was the first national attempt to change the colonial orientation of the Nigerian education system, and promote national consciousness and, self-reliance through education. In order to consolidate on the gains of the Curriculum Conference, the Federal Government in 1973 instituted a National Seminar of experts on education under the chairmanship of Chief S.O. Adebayo; to deliberate on a truly Nigerian national educational policy. The report of the Seminar culminated into the first indigenous **Education Policy in 1977**. Meanwhile, in 1976 the Federal Government, introduced a Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, which was meant to provide equal opportunities and access to education, to every child.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) was geared towards addressing the problems of educational relevance to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians, as well as promoting Nigeria's unity, and laying the foundation for national integration. Hence, the education policy was based on the five national objectives as stated in the Second National Development Plan; which are, the building of:

- A free and democratic society,
- A just and egalitarian society,
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation,
- A great and dynamic economy,
- A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The policy made the UPE scheme compulsory, and the federal government was made to shoulder the responsibility of funding the education system. The policy also introduced the 6-3-3-4 education system. In 1979, the new Constitution placed education on the Concurrent legislative list. The responsibility for education was thus shared among the three tiers of government: federal, state and local governments. The education policy was revised in 1981. In the revised edition, the Federal Government shed the responsibility it undertook in the 1977 National Education Policy, to wholly finance primary education. It thus transferred the financing to both the States and Local governments. The subsequent dwindling economic situation in the country affected the funding of primary education, and school fees were re-introduced in the early 1980s. This led to a decline in enrolments in most States of the federation.

The National Policy on Education was further reviewed in 1998 and 2004 to make more relevant to the developmental needs of the country. The revised edition of 1998 prescribed a Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which was made compulsory for all children in the country. It was to be a 9 year programme, in form of 6 years primary education, and 3 years junior secondary education. So, in 1999 the Federal Government flagged off the UBE scheme as a means of achieving equal educational opportunities and eradicating illiteracy among Nigerian citizens. Though the education policy prescribed a compulsory UBE, it was never enforced. The 2004 edition of the policy, prescribes an inclusive education to take care of children recognized as having special needs (Imam, 2012). The policy laid emphasis on nomadic education for children of nomadic cattle bearers and migrant fishermen. The policy reiterates government's commitment to the implementation of the UBE programme. The policy brings about the disarticulation of junior secondary school from the senior secondary to form basic education schools. In 2007, the education policy was again reviewed but was not published; hence in 2012, a High Level Stakeholders meeting, convened by the NERDC, were held in Abuja to further review and fine-tuned the 2007 draft edition; which will be presented to the Minister of Education for approval and publication. Quite a number of reforms, innovations and emerging issues were included in the 2012/2013 revised edition.

The Constraints in Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is the act and process of converting a policy into reality or simply enforcing the policy. It is the process of translating policy mandates into actions, and policy goals into reality (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). In Nigeria, the education system is currently in comatose. There seems to be retarded development in all spheres of the nation's economy. The reason for this precarious situation is because policy implementation is a big problem for the Nigerian state. If all the educational policies formulated in the country over the years were implemented accordingly, Nigeria would have been on a fast lane of development. However, it is unfortunate

that most of these policies only exist on paper and are never implemented to actualize the objectives of such policies.

The identified constraints to policy implementation in Nigeria include the following:

1. Lack of Political Will

Policy implementation in any nation is mostly affected by the attitude or behavior of the implementers. In a situation where the implementers are negatively disposed to a policy, there will be lack of commitment to the implementation of such a policy. So, despite the fact that Nigeria has a sound education policy that stands to better the lot of Nigeria and the average Nigerians, the country lacks the political will to positively realize such policy objectives. The cabals that hold the top echelon of government will always jeopardize or frustrate the implementation of such policies. Every political player in Nigeria was always in a hurry to help himself with the commonwealth, before another group displaced him. This has affected educational policy implementation in Nigeria.

2. Poor Implementation design and conception

The problem of policy implementation is traceable to the planning stage which comes immediately after policy formulation. Proper planning is therefore a sine qua non to the success of any venture. The design of the modes and methods of implementation of a policy is a critical factor to implementation success. Wrong choices of modes and methods often mar implementation efforts, and causes policy failure. The issue of implementation design of public policies is often not taken serious in Nigeria.

3. Corruption

This is a major issue in policy implementation in Nigeria. According to Adesina (2004), the 2004 Corruption Perception Index released by Transparency International, the watchdog on corruption globally, **ranks Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world.** Corruption seems to be the only thriving sector in the country. This means that the only thing working in Nigeria is corruption. We seem to speak, breath and eat corruption. It has become a way of life for an average Nigerian. This probably informed Okoroma's (2006) assertion that the objectives of most policies in Nigeria are often derailed at the implementation stage, due to the following reasons:

- The budgets for the implementation of the policies are often passed by lawmakers with strings attached to them,
- Even when the budgets are passed, the executive arm of government is often reluctant to release the funds to facilitate implementation,
- The inadequate funds often released to the operators of the education system (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions) are not honestly and fully utilized to promote the cause of education (p.255).

A classic case of corruption impeding educational development was the allegation made by former President, Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005 that some members of the National Assembly demanded and collected #55million from Prof. Fabian Osuji (then Minister of Education) to enable the National Assembly approved an enhanced budget for the Ministry of Education. Osuji, who was sacked from office, admitted given the money to the Senate Committee on Education; but said that it **was a public relations gift and not a bribe** (Osuji, 2005). He further stated that other Ministers do the same to have their budgets passed in line with their proposals.

So, it is clear that the malaise of corruption has continued to entangle, ruin and make impossible the implementation of education policy in Nigeria.

4. Lack of Adequate Resources

No doubt, Nigeria is blessed with enormous resources. However, provision of adequate financial resources is not often made to implement public policies. For instance, while the UNESCO recommended the appropriation of at least 26 per cent of a country's annual budget to education; in Nigeria, yearly budgetary allocation to education often oscillate between 10 and 15 per cent. At times, it is as low as 5 per cent. The low budgetary allocations are not always released. This is a case of 'budget in space' versus 'budget in motion' syndrome.

5. Inaccurate Diagnosis

Adesina (1977) in a well thought-out treatise identified the following constraints as impediments to effective implementation of a planned policy:

- Over-estimation of available resources: a situation where estimated resources are greater than actual available resources to implement a programme.
- Under-estimation of the costs of implementing a plan: a situation when cost-estimates do not make adequate provisions for inflation, and actual implementation costs become unmanageable.
- Over-reliance on external assistance: a situation where plans that substantially rely upon assistance from foreign sources for their implementation run into hitches when such funds/aids fail to come.
- Inaccurate statistical data: planning education requires accurate and up-to-date data. However, when this is lacking, implementation problem ensues.
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6. Other militating factors includes:

- Unexpected economic disturbances
- Institutional weaknesses
- Poor monitoring
- Inconsistencies and policy somersaults
- Also, the relatively rapid turnover of governments, ministers and senior bureaucrats is another factor militating against effective policy

implementation. This creates lack of stability which makes commitment to a given set of policy actions difficult to maintain.

Conclusion: The Road to Success

In Nigeria, there seems to be no capacity for problem solving. There are quite a number of instances where potentially useful reforms were not implemented. This could be attributed to the fact that some senior public officials or politicians were either unsympathetic to changes proposed, or were inhibited by inertia, or because the resources needed to effect change were not provided. Yet, the road to success and sustainable economic development lie in proper planning and implementation of transformative policies.

What do we do? What can we do?

There is urgent need for a workable educational policy for Nigeria. In the light of this fact:

- Education should be removed or insulated from the sphere of politics. It should be made purely a constitutional matter.
- Government and leaders should develop the necessary political will for education to grow and transform the society.
- There is need for total commitment of our leaders to sincerely address the concerns of the people they represent.
- There is need for selfless service and value re-orientation among Nigerians. We must remove **greed** and **self** from our plans and actions – let there be leadership by example.
- There is urgent need to build the capacity of our leaders to resolve the conflict of interest regarding policy design and implementation.
- We must nip in the bud, all forms and manners of corruption in our national life.

Now, the big question: **can we?** Yes, we can, but only if we are prepared and ready.

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