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# **Education, Politics and Leadership in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines education, politics and leadership in Nigeria; challenges and the way forward. The concepts of education, politics and leadership were elucidated. Education is recognized as the positive tool for enhancing individual and societal development. Sadly in Nigeria, education has not lived up to its expectation as a result of politics, which is highly ethicized and regionalized. The political leadership directly influences outcomes of the educational sector in terms of policy formulation and implementation, funding and administration. The paper opines that the political class has failed to provide leadership that will galvanize the educational sector and make it productive. The challenges of education in Nigeria were identified and solutions on the way forward proffered. The decline in standard of education in Nigeria ranges from deterioration of facilities, lack of facilities, obsolete equipment, inadequate funding, examination malpractice, inadequate and unqualified teachers, incessant strike, political interference and above all, lack of proper implementation of educational policies. The paper proffers that adequate funding, training and retraining of teachers, reorientation and re-education of the citizens and political class, political education at all levels of education, merit in the place of mediocrity, just to mention a few, are way forward for the challenges of education, politics and the political class in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Education, Politics and Leadership.

## **Introduction**

Education is recognized as the bedrock of every society. It is the catalyst for development which confers on the recipient values, attitudes and skills to move the society forward. It is also the agent for positive change. Education is the process by which societies through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit its cultural heritage, its accumulated knowledge, values and skills from one generation to another (Indera 2014). As an instrument or agent of change, education can impart knowledge, training and skills as well as inculcate new ideas and attitudes among the young. In Nigeria, education is one of the vital tools utilized by the political class to enhance their legitimacy, control the machinery of government and the administration. Politics produce the leadership who formulate and implement educational policies. It is generally accepted that the quality of leadership in an organization; be it religious, social economic, political etcetera. To a large extent politics affect the success or failure of that organization. The politics of a country determine the direction of the educational system. In Nigeria, there are some political issues that have influenced education directly; they are the issues of control and management of education. The Nigerian political class has failed to implement policies and programmes of education due to indiscipline, corruption and lack of the political will to do so. This has seriously impinged on

the ability of education to bring about the much needed development associated with education. It is pertinent to note by discussing the issues of the challenges of education in Nigeria, how has the political class contributed to the number of problems and challenges of the educational sector, what are the remedy to unproductive nature of education and leadership in Nigeria?

### **Concept of Education**

The concept of education varies according to the perspective of the individual. The nature of education is a lifelong process starting from before school and ongoing for life. Gbadesin (2010) defined education as that process of physical and mental culture whereby men's personality is developed to the fullest. He observed that while literacy is important aspect of education, it is not its equivalence and may jeopardize the object of true education which is the full development of the entire personality of a human being (Akanbi in Gbadesin, 2010).

According to Obanya (2002), for education to make meaning, it must lead to the acquisition of stable skills for understanding life situation, adapting to it and acting to influence it by contributing to its development. This can be applied using literacy programmes, vocational education, science education, teaching, training and educating persons with disability. Obanya (2002), opined that functional education focuses on the learner within the context of him or her becoming a fully functional member of society and with a view to equipping him or her meaningfully. Society and its many structures are subject to constant change, the educational system which serves as an agent of change must be dynamic, innovative and sensitive to societal expectation, aspirations and goals. Thus, Eden (2004) referred to education as a major force in economic intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. Its value in bringing about character change rates as high as its ability to reshape human potentials to bring about effective leadership in any society.

Copper (1999) opined that the quality and availability of education in any society is influenced by a lot of factors namely; social, cultural and environmental. These factors constitute in most cases what defines a society and even classified it; and are often influenced by other political and contemporary social problem. These factors in turn influence the quality, availability and access to education. Education is structured towards making the individual possess sound character, useful knowledge and skills. This prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria to formulate a National Policy of Education geared towards building the necessary foundations of education in Nigeria which include:

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

These objectives are aimed at achieving a balanced society with adequate equal educational opportunities for all at all levels.

Education is a process of transforming an individual from ignorance, inefficiency, ineptitude, crude state into an informed, knowledgeable, skillful, rational, efficient, refined and productive state (Oladayo, Oladayo & Charles-OOgan, 2015).

Accordingly, education has also been defined as the sum total of all necessary processes by which an individual develops abilities, attitudes and other positive societal behaviours. Olubadewo (2007) opined that education is a panacea for curing all societal ailments; be it poverty, ignorance, unemployment, development, inventions, discovery, manufacturing and several others that a nation can have. Education is an index to development without which development cannot occur (Igbuzor 2006; Olubadewo, 2006). It is generally acclaimed that only the educated population can possess the necessary skills for sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) recommends 26 percent of the annual budget to be dedicated to education in recognition of the importance of education which is expected to improve productivity, health and reduce negatives of life.

Kumer and Ahmad (2012) having examined various definitions of education by different scholars posited that true definition of education should be a purposeful conscious or unconscious psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process which brings about the development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. Sudarshan (2021) however posited that education is the process of learning. It is the acquisition of skills and values. Education for a child begins at home and is a lifelong process. Undoubtedly, education is both socially and personally an essential part of human life. It is a tool that teaches them a way of living. Education expands our thinking ability and helps us understand things better.

### **Concept of Politics**

Etymologically, politics is derived from the Greek word polis which literally means city-state. So politics amounts to what concerns the state. To study politics is to study government or the study of authority; and how power is acquired, utilized and exit or relinquished from power. Easton (1981) defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values. This implies that politics covers the pressure from the larger society arising from allocations, values (benefits) or rewards or punishment). Politics can be found in governance, church, legislation, chambers, government department and social organization.

Politics refers to activities which propel people to make, preserve and demand rules under which they live (Onyekwere, 2015). He continued that politics is meant to create a just society. Politics comprises all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict within and between societies whereby people go about organizing the use, production and distribution of human, natural and other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of their biological and social life. Accordingly, Merriam Webster defined politics as activities that relate to a government or getting and keeping power in a government (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>).

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding out whether it exists or not, disposing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedy. The Merriam Webster also identified essential meaning of politics to include:

- activities that relate to influence the actions and policies of a government or getting and keeping power in a government.

- The art or science of government
- The art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy.
- The art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government (britannica.com;Encyclopedia article about politics).

It is important to note that politics is a multifaceted word which implies that it mean different things to different people. It is the vehicle through which political power is attained.

### **Concept of Leadership**

According to Bess and Avolio (2007), a single specific definition of leadership is a very complex task as literature and studies on this concept varies and there is no definition which is widely and unanimously accepted. Some definitions describe politics as an act of influence, some as a process and yet others have looked at a person's trait qualities. Omokyele (2009) viewed leadership as that kind of direction which a person can give to a group of people under him in order to influence the behaviour of other individuals or group.

In the same vein, Ngodo (2008) perceived leadership to be reciprocal process of social influence in which leaders and subordinates influence each other in order to achieve organizational goals. True leadership comes from influence, congruence and integrity. A successful leadership involves the management of relationship and communications within a team and drives the team towards achieving a specific goal. Leadership reflects on the ability of one to express a vision, influence others to achieving results, encourage team cooperation and be worthy of emulation (Nelbon, 2012). It is important to note, that anyone in formal role of leadership may not necessarily possess leadership skills nor be capable of leading. Leadership is essentially related to one's skills, abilities and degree of influence instead of power.

This means that influence is very essential to enable people to strive willingly towards the achievement of organizational goals. Hence, Yusuf (2013) defined leadership as the process of influence on the subordinates in which the subordinates is inspired to achieve the target, the group maintains co-operation and the established mission is accomplished with support from external groups obtained. He also maintained that leadership means the use of a leading strategy to offer inspiring motives and to enhance the staff's potentials, growth and development.

### **Challenges of Education**

**Deterioration of facilities.** Most equipment used in the educational sector are either obsolete or in very poor condition. This prevents the effective performance of the equipment. Those in leadership position fail to maintain and ensure repair of educational facilities, the result is a deterioration of these facilities and their inability to perform optimally.

### **Lack of Facilities**

In some cases, the required facilities for the educational sector to perform and meet the expectation of the general public are obviously lacking, even when they are available, they are grossly inadequate.

**Inadequate funding:** One major problem of the educational sector is the challenge of inadequate funding of the sector. The UNESCO recommendation is for government to allocate 26 percent of their national budget to education. However, in reality, this is not the case as the Nigerian government or leadership of the political class allocates 5 – 7% to education depending on the government or political party in power. Without adequate funds, it is difficult to meet the requirements that will move the educational sector forward.

**Examination Malpractice.** The educational sector continues to be plagued, with the plight of examination malpractice as a result of the heavy dependence on certificates acquisition. In order to get good grade in the certificate, students cheat and engage in examination malpractice. Employment is based on your possession of certificate and not on skills acquisition.

**Inadequate and Unqualified Teachers.** Another challenge of education in Nigeria is inadequacy of teachers in the school setting. This has led to the unqualified teaching subjects they are not qualified to teach. Employment of teachers is based on the approval of the political class in leadership position. In Nigeria, such employment are usually saddled with lot of irregularities. Where teachers are employed based on ethnicity, nepotism and parochial interest. Merit is sacrificed for mediocrity, the result will be nonperformance of the employed, and poor performance of the students.

**Incessant strike.** The school calendar is not adhered to as a result of schools going on strike regularly due to so many problems ranging from improper or lack of implementation of agreement between the government and leadership of academic staff unions, lack of infrastructure, poor working conditions, lack of facilities, poor salary structure, just to mention but a few.

### **Dimensions of Leadership Styles**

Below is a brief examination of some common leadership style dimensions and their potential impact on a group as well as their relative usefulness (Nelson, 2013).

**Laissez-Faire Leadership Style:** Also known as delegative leadership. One deficiency of laissez-faire leadership style is that it is not ideal in situations where group members lack the knowledge or experience they need to complete tasks and make decisions. Some people are not good at setting their own deadlines, managing their own projects and solving problems on their own. In such situations, projects can go off-track and deadlines can be missed when team members do not get enough guidance or feedback from leaders.

**Transactional Leadership Style:** The wheeler-dealers of leadership styles, transactional leaders are always willing to give you something in return for following them. It can be any number of things including a good performance review, a raise, a promotion, new responsibilities or a desired change in duties. The problem with transactional leaders is expectations. Transactional leadership style is defined as the exchange of rewards and targets between employee and management. Transactional leaders fulfill employee needs of rewards when targets are met. Pounder (2012) defined this style as the transaction of needs fulfillment from both sides of the organization and employees.

**Transformational Leadership Style:** Transformational leadership style focuses on the development of followers and their needs. Managers exercising transformational leadership style focus on the development of value system of employees, their motivational level and moralities with the development of their skills. Transformational leadership acts as a bridge between leaders and followers to develop clear understanding of follower's interests, values and motivational level. It basically helps followers achieve their goals working in the organizational setting; it encourages followers to be expressive and adaptive to new and improved practices and changes in the environment.

**Charismatic Leadership Style:** This is by far the most successful trait-driven leadership style. Charismatic leaders have a vision, as well as a personality that motivates followers to execute that vision. As a result, this leadership type has traditionally been one of the most valued. Charismatic leadership provides fertile ground for creativity and innovation, and is often highly motivational. With charismatic leaders at the helm, the organization's members simply want to follow. It sounds like a best case scenario. There is however, one significant problem that potentially undercuts the value of charismatic leaders: they can leave. Once gone, an organization can appear rudderless and without direction. The floundering can last for years, because charismatic leaders rarely develop replacements. Their leadership is based upon strength of personality. As a result, charismatic leadership usually eliminates other competing and strong personalities. The result of weeding out the competition is a legion of happy followers but few future leaders (Michael, 2010).

**Autocratic Leadership Style:** Autocratic leaders are classic “do as I say” types. Typically, these leaders are inexperienced with leadership thrust upon them in the form of a new position or assignment that involves people management. Autocratic leadership style; is task centered and his/her focus is to get a certain task done quickly. Autocratic leader makes all the decisions and assigns tasks to members of the group. Autocratic leaders retain for themselves the decision-making rights. They can damage an organization irreparably as they force their 'followers' to execute strategies and services in a very narrow way based upon a subjective idea of what success looks like. There is no shared vision and little motivation beyond coercion.

However autocratic leadership style has many disadvantages and it is considered as a destructive leadership behaviour. This leadership style can distance team members from the leader which can cause low level of job satisfaction and trust in the organization. Commitment, creativity and innovation are typically eliminated by autocratic leadership. In fact, most followers of autocratic leaders can be described as biding their time, waiting for the inevitable failure this leadership produces and the removal of the leader that follows (Michael, 2010).

**Democratic Leadership Style:** This is also called the participative style as it encourages employees to be part of the decision making process. Democratic leadership is one where decision-making is decentralized and shared by subordinates. The potential for poor decision-making and weak execution is, however, significant here. The biggest problem with democratic leadership is its underlying assumption that everyone has an equal stake in an outcome as well as shared levels of expertise with regard to decisions. That is rarely the case. While democratic leadership sounds good in theory, it often is bogged down in its own slow process and workable results usually require an enormous amount of effort.

Democratic leadership should not be used when there is no enough time to get everyone's input; it is easier and more cost-effective for the manager to make the decision, the manager feels threatened by this type of leadership and when employee safety is a critical concern. However, to be able to achieve a better result, the leader or manager should be able to get everyone involved.

**Bureaucratic Leadership Style:** This is used to describe a situation where the manager manages “by the book”. Everything must be done according to procedure or policy. If it is not covered by the book, the manager refers to the next level above him or her (Blanc-hard, 2008). Bureaucratic leaders create and rely on policy to meet organizational goals. Policies drive execution, strategy, objectives and outcomes. Bureaucratic leaders are most comfortable relying on a stated policy in order to convince followers to get on board. In doing so, they send a very direct message that policy dictates direction. Bureaucratic leaders are usually strongly committed to procedures and processes instead of people and as a result, they may appear aloof and highly change adverse.

The specific problem or problems associated with using policies to lead are not always obvious until the damage is done. The danger here is that leadership's greatest benefits, motivating and developing people are ignored by bureaucratic leaders. This style is found to be ineffective when employees form work habits that are hard to break, if especially the managers are no longer useful, employees lose their interest in their jobs and in their fellow workers and when employees do only what is expected of them and no more. A good leadership style is expected to direct workers behaviours toward achieving organizational predetermined goals.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Education indeed is a tool for the total transformation and development of an individual and the society. Education has not been able to achieve its purpose in Nigeria as a result of certain challenges and constraints confronting it. These have been discussed above. Politics have not been able to bring in good leadership and good governance; politics have not been people oriented nor transparent in nature. The result of this is a political class without the discipline and willingness to implement educational policies and programmes.

Nigerian political leaders lack effectiveness of implementing appropriate education laws. Misplacement of the priority of our leaders is another major leadership problem which had adversely affected education. This is because teachers welfare is jettisoned at the expense of raising political hooliganism.

This paper presents the recommendations that adequate funding, training and retraining of teachers, reorientation and re-education at all levels of education, merit in the place of mediocrity. Just to mention but a few, are the way forward for the challenges of education, politics and the political class in Nigeria.

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