

POLITICS AND QUALITY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW

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Abstract

Quality education implies the suitability of educational products to meet the needs of the community for which it is provided. It is the one that adequately prepares beneficiaries of institutionalized education in Nigeria to meet up with the established criteria for effective academic performance. This paper aims at establishing the relationship between politics and education generally and how politics could be used to either strengthen or lower the quality of education provided by tertiary institution to her students under-going training. It is the stance of the writer that in as much as we continue to experience indices of underfunding, infrastructural decay, unending strike actions etc in our tertiary institutions, the political class had not sufficiently played its supportive role of enhancing quality education in the nation's citadels of learning. The people therefore suggests among others that government should take immediate steps at addressing infrastructural decay, UNESCO's minimum budgetary allocation of 26% to the education sub sector and government rather than creating more tertiary institutions should focus on the improvement of the quality of the existing institutions.

Keywords: Politics, Quality and Tertiary Education.

Introduction

Politics and education have a symbiotic relationship that has made them inseparable since the introduction of Western education into the Nigerian society in the early 19th century. The role of politics in shaping the future of educational theory and practice become more noticeable with the involvement of the colonial government in the provision of education to her colonies following the enactment of the first Education Ordinance in 1882. This trend had continued even after independence, politics is being used as a tool to engineer and control both administrative and academic activities in the school system.

The national policy on education (Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN 2013) which is the political instrument that gives direction to how education should be carried out in Nigeria, stipulates in section 1 sub section 8(c) that "efforts shall be made to relate education to the overall needs of the community". The policy also indicated a nation's policy on education as a tool for giving direction to how education should be conducted in the country, including the allocation of resources to facilitate its operations. The allocation of resources to the educational system by the political class is a sure way to lubricate the wheel of the sector as a means to improve the productivity of the system and lay a solid foundation for the experience

of qualitative education, which fundamentally will advance the course of political behaviour of the people in the society.

The above is what the positive effect of politics on education can do in any country, in the specific case of Nigeria. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (FRN 2013) observed that the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect compounded by inadequate attention to policy frame work as well as inadequate funding of the sector. It is the opinion of the author that some of these challenges would be resolved if the political class exhibits the political will to run an educational system in line with the stimulated guidelines on how to achieve the goals of education as stated in the polio document.

The Concept of Politics

Politics involves a whole lot of activities geared towards the acquisition of political power and it's utilisation for the governance of a country or a group of people. Nnoli in Anung (1996) and Asuka (1997) defines politics as all the activities that directly or indirectly bring about the seizure, consolidation and use of state power by people. This perception of politics according to Scribner and Engleit in Scribner (1977:22) is described as the "set of interactions that influenced share the authoritative allocation of values". The values according to them are education, funds, jobs, etc. They further explained that "in as much as individuals and groups try to influence the authoritative allocations, they are exhibiting what is called 'political' behaviour. On their own, Payne and Nassar (2002:2) defined politics "as the means by which a society organizes its affairs". The study of politics according to them; is the study of government and the use of power and its allocation in society.

It is to be quickly noted here that political activities are carried out by government which refers to the "institutions and processes employed by societies or states to organize their affairs". Payne & Nassar's (2002:3) description of government is worth presenting. According to them:

Government seems to be with us all the time. It is in the air we breathe, as government regulates emission from cars and factories, government is in the food we eat and the water we drink as government officials or employees draw guidelines on the permissible. Government builds roads and repair boreholes, it erects bridges and installs traffic lights. It maintains armed forces and police departments. It licenses teachers, doctors, real estate brokers and car dealers. Government runs schools and universities. It is somehow everywhere, government was there when we were born and it will be there when we die.

In Nigeria, political power is allocated to different levels and organizations for the protection of lives and property from internal and external threats and the provision of several services. There is therefore, the need to organize government at three levels such as the local, state and federal or national. There is also the organization of body of persons into institutions such as the military, technology, education, legal, agriculture, economic, political and family. In Nigeria, the government in operation is called the presidential system. The president in this case head the executive, judicial and legislative arms of government.

In politics, there is also the issue of people's opinion as to how they want to be involved or not in governance. If the desire of the people is to actively participate in their governance process through discussions and voting to choose who should lead them, then it is called democracy. Nigeria's form of government is called democracy. It is important to add that Nigeria runs an indirect form of democracy. This is where "people are free to decide who is to govern them through periodic free and fair elections" (Asuka& Paulley 2013:164).

Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Tertiary education is the education given to students after their graduation from the secondary school in institutions of higher learning. The national policy on education (FRN 2013:39) in section 5 sub section (80) defines tertiary education as "the education given after Post Basic Education in Institutions such as Universities, and Inter-University Centre's such as the Nigeria French Language village, Nigeria Arabic Language village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institution such as Innovation Hnterprise Institutions (IEIS) and Colleges of Education. Monotechnics, Polytechnics and other Specialized Institutions such as Colleges of

Agriculture Schools of Health Technology and the National Teacher Institutes (NTI).

It went further in sub section (81) to state the goals of tertiary education include to:

- a. Contribute to national development through high level manpower training,
- b. Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians.
- c. Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work.
- d. Reduces skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market.
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service.
- f. Forge and cement national unity, and
- g. Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The above provisions spelt out in clear and unambiguous terms the role tertiary education is expected to play in promoting national development of the Nigerian nation. The questions that has always drawn our attention but left unanswered over the years is, what is the political class doing to ensure the implementation of these well articulated ideas? It is only; when what is on the policy document is marched with action at the institutions under-going tertiary education that the goals of tertiary education as stated above would be attained.

Quality Education

Quality means that which best satisfies and exceeds customers' need and wants. It is associated with the monitoring and evaluating components of education to see whether the outcome is good and of required standard. Quality education implies the suitability of educational products to meet the needs of the community for which it is provided.

According to Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009), quality education is the one that adequately prepares beneficiaries of institutionalized education, the graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to meet up with the established criteria for effective academic performance.

Ekong (2006), entails the acquisition of more knowledge, character formation and learning of new skill. This establishes the fact that when the quality of education is low, it will affect the development and growth of a nation. Quality with a good standard yields good results which help to develop the economy of a nation. Quality in university education means that the graduates of tertiary institutions are employable and able to compete favourably with their counterparts anywhere in the world. (Asiyai, 2013). She further emphasized that quality education makes a person complete and be sound in character and learning. Quality Education thus enables us to ascertain the extent of effect of the input on the students at the end of their programme.

Quality education equips the learner at all levels of education with capacity to interpret, ratiocinate and apply information gathered to real life situations. From this perspective, quality education implies a sound pedagogical and developmental process aimed at educating the learner into becoming an active and productive member of society. Quality education therefore, is not measured purely by test score or by how many words per minute a 6-year-old can remember (Enowoghomwenma & Obi-omovoh, 2020), but more by what the education received is used for.

Present State of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Education is the most effective tool for national development. In Nigeria, the federal government through its Ministry of Education is responsible for policy formation and quality control of tertiary education. Since independence, there has been a steady rise in the intake of students at the tertiary level of education without a correspondence in the provision of both human and material resources coupled with the nonchalant attitude of political leaders to the needs of these institutions has led to the deterioration in quality of tertiary education occasioned by the following challenges.

- **Under Funding:** It has been observed over the years that budgetary allocation to the education sector has never met the 26% recommended by UNESCO. The money allotted for the provision of educational infrastructure and facilities is very low. Funding is politicized in terms of poor budgetary allocation by the federal and state governments as politicians are not willing to release funds to the education sector thereby reducing the quality of the system. Due to inadequate fund, most Nigerian public universities are in a sorry state. (Olekede 2014).
- **Industrial Actions:** A common feature of tertiary education in Nigeria is the menace of frequent strike by organized labour unions of the university. According to Blaike (2002), industrial action has become part of Nigerian tertiary institutions over the years. For instance, in the year 2020 and other previous years, most universities were on strike. The academic and non-academic staffs of the universities in the country often embark on strike to press home their demands. Industrial action is the fastest means to draw the attention of government towards the demands of any industrial group (Onwuemezie, 2019). Politicians are reluctant in responding to the demands of the universities especially when money is involved. Industrial actions has crippled university education in public institutions, it has put students learning

experience at risk and discouraged many candidates seeking admission to public universities in the country.

- **Academic Corruption and Fraud:** Nigerian universities are prone to corruption and fraud. According to Peremiegha and Asuka (2023), academic corruption is “any act of deviation by actors from formal rules that regulate their behaviours in the system”. It is an act of non-compliance by students, teachers, parents, invigilators, examination bodies and other stakeholders to lay down rules and regulations in the process of assessing learning outcomes. Corruption poses a big threat to successful academic achievement of students in Nigerian public institutions and its consequences are devastating, resulting in lowered academic standard, loss of confidence in certificates gotten from Nigerian schools, misappropriation of funds, disparity in curriculum objectives and attained objectives (Hallack & Passion 2017, Peremiegha & Asuka, 2023).
- **Infrastructural Decay:** Aside from the fact that most public universities do not have adequate buildings and other critical infrastructure for effective teaching and learning, the few available structures are in deplorable state. There is a general lack of maintenance culture by various school managements making the school environment unconducive for academic exercise.

Politics and Quality Tertiary Education in Nigeria

No nation can develop beyond the quality of its educational system. Politics to a great extent, brings about change in the educational landscape of a nation, at all levels of education, be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary level Obed-chukwuka (2021) posited that politics can develop or under develop the contents and process of curriculum and instruction since politics involves the allocation of scarce resources to different sector of the economy, the percentage that goes to education are politically motivated. Ogunyemi in Obed-chukwuka (2021) noted that Nigeria has failed to meet the UNESCO standard on the percentage that should be allocated to education. This is so because most Nigerian politicians campaign promises on education are left unfulfilled thereby ruining the nation's educational system by not bringing any improvement to the education sector in general and tertiary education in particular. This has resulted in poor staffing, constant strikes, dilapidated facilities, examination malpractices and low quality of graduates.

Education is required to train and produce political leaders and others in decision-making, executive office holders and judicial officials. Education could bring about enlightenment among the citizens and foreign residents about political affairs and opportunities locally and globally (Leg. 2020).

On the other hand, politics could also have a tremendous influence on education. Politicians or those in authority could decide budgetary allocations or funding of the education sub-sector as they may deem fit. The people at the helm of affairs in the country could fundamentally influence the structure and content of the school and provision of equipment and infrastructure. Politicians belonging to the party in power could determine the staffing positions of tertiary institutions to the advantage of some schools and disadvantage of others. A case that really comes to mind in this regard is that of Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State where the then Executive Governor in conjunction with the school management in 2019

retrenched over six hundred non academic staff of the institution while at the same time recruited over a thousand staff to the university of Toru-orua in his home town.

A country where little or no value is placed on education by the political leaders, where agreements reached between trade unions and government are flouted at will with impunity, where budgetary allocation is far from meeting the 26% recommended by UNHSSCO little would be achieved in terms of quality on the products of such educations institutions.

Sadly enough, the above situation represents the true position of what the education system at all levels looks like. Under such crucial and unfriendly learning environment, little could be achieved by both teachers and students due to lack of motivation from the system and the resultant effect of all these is a decline in the quality of education attained by the products from such institution.

Conclusion

It is crystal clear that politics has a role to play in the growth and development of tertiary education in the country. If tertiary institutions in Nigeria are to achieve its goals as stated in the national policy on education (FRN 2013) the political class need to get abreast with the roles they are expected to play in the education sub-sector and step into action by showing some form of commitment in the discharge of her statutory obligation of providing quality education to the citizenry rather than pay lip-service while allowing the education industry to deteriorate. Following from the discourse above, it is not far from the truth to state that politics has not done much in the quest for qualitative tertiary education in Nigeria.

Way Forward.

Based on the forgoing the following suggestions are made as measures to be taken to improve the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

- a. Immediate implementation of UNESCO's minimum budgetary allocation of 26% to education.
- b. Government should take immediate steps at addressing the issue of infrastructural deficiency.
- c. University administration should be left free from political influence.
- d. Government should endeavor to grant university autonomy backed by adequate provision of funds.
- e. Government should stop the creation of new public institutions and focus more on improving the quality of the already existing ones.

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