

# The Impact Of Nigeria's Democratic Leadership On Educational Policies And Values: A Case For Sustainable National Development

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**Abstract**—Education is a foremost plank for assessing the effectiveness of government. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the education sector has witnessed a good number of developments, positive and negative. While admittedly, the educational policies of the democratic governments have not been shown to be radically different from what obtained in the military era, there are noticeable changes in many integral components of education policy attributable to the democratic phenomenon including funding, value system, access, job opportunity, and the passage of very important legislations. The paper discusses the impact democratic governance in Nigeria has had on education policy in the specific areas highlighted. A lot has been accomplished in the current dispensation but only a few pass the sustainability test. The paper identified 'short-termism' as a major drawback to democratic governance which combines with poor investment in education to hold back qualitative education in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the way forward is to address these challenges head-on.

**Keywords**—Impact, Nigeria, Democratic, Policies, Leadership, Educational, Values, Sustainable, National and Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education and democracy have a strong relationship in any way one looks at it. Today, education is central to individual flourishing, economic growth, innovation, and the health of a democratic society (Reich & Allen, 2013). As a process, democracy will be chaotic if political participants and the electorates alike are uneducated in some forms and to some extent. This is because democracy is a system that thrives on the conceptualization, trading and dissemination of ideas as opposed to crude dictatorships where policy is defined as the wills and caprices of the dictator. It is essentially a marketplace of ideas. It is now evident that quality educational attainment offers a leeway out of poverty, deprivation, underdevelopment, and into opportunities, wealth, development, security amongst other endless gains. Nigeria's education sector has a long history that dates back to the pre-colonial period. Since independence in 1960, several educational goals have been set, policies adopted and reforms carried through. A lot of these were sustained through different administrations, but a lot more depended on the basic instinct of a particular government in power. Nigeria's constitutional development in the past had involved military governments with brief democratic stints. While the military governments may have contributed a lot to the growth or otherwise of the education sector, the focus

of this paper is to examine how far the return to democracy in 1999 has impacted positively on educational policies and values.

A lot of policies have been initiated and implemented since this dispensation of democracy took roots both at the federal and state levels. Unfortunately, not much can be said about Local Government Administrations because they seem to have been reduced to apron strings of state governments and lack financial autonomy. The enactment of the Universal Basic Education Act, the enforcement of free and compulsory education in many states of the federation, the educational reforms in Osun and Rivers states reflect some of the laudable strides observed so far in this democratic journey. On the other hand, incessant industrial actions, growing concern about unemployable graduates, the absence of Nigerian institutions in global universities league tables and the dearth of cutting-edge research, as well as the lack or shortage of professional capital, highlight some of the challenges that still beleaguer the education sector. In the light of these, the paper analyses the impact of democratic governance on education policy making since 1999; has the sector fared better comparatively to the previous military administrations or have they performed worse? The paper will identify the main challenges that persist and conclude by pointing a way forward.

## II. THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP ON EDUCATION

Since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1999, the federal and state governments in Nigeria have embarked on a series of major educational reforms. It is impossible to discuss educational policy reform in Nigeria as a single process. The reality of our democratic experiment in a federal system of governance presupposes that series of educational reforms are implemented at various tiers of government and as such the scope of this discussion is widened to accommodate an appraisal of key policy reforms in the various states and at the federal government level.

### A. Funding

Traditionally, public funding of education is either directly in form of teachers' salaries, instructional materials and general infrastructure or indirectly through subsidies to households in form of tax reductions, scholarships, loans and grants. The main sources of fund had always been federal and

state taxes, royalties and sale of crude oil, import and export duties and later since 1994 value added tax (Ugwoke, 2013). This model of education funding reflects the current practice in the education sector, as it was during the military regimes. It is worthy of note however that prior to the current democratic dispensation and the 1999 constitution, states had ceased to contribute meaningfully to education funding since the first military coup in 1966 that effectively brought to an end the flourishing competition amongst the various regional governments. The ascent to power of soldiers and the grand shifting of the country's revenue base from agriculture to crude oil have meant that the country depended on the federal government for funding for the various sectors within the economy including education. The transition to the democratic dispensation since 1999 did not really alter this structure mainly because the country's revenue derived from crude oil export which is vested in the federal government. Khemani (2001) observed that: "There have been increasing calls for intergovernmental fiscal relations to be reassessed in light of a widespread belief that although the states and LGAs are assigned primary responsibility for the delivery of basic public services, they are not equipped with adequate revenue resources to fulfill their expenditure obligations because the bulk of government revenues is retained by the federal government."

Most of the state governments are unable to execute basic government tasks without the regular monthly allocation from the federal government. Thus, in spite of democracy and federalism, the federal government remains the principal financier of education.

What has however changed is the allocation of resources in pursuit of educational goals. Hitherto, educational policy was dictated by the Federal Military Government and states were bound to implement them accordingly. This is because military governments operate a top-down command structure as opposed to the co-ordinate power distribution between the federal and state governments in the current constitutional democracy. The military's forays into educational policy and administration began with the enactment of an edict by the Military Administrator of the East-Central State in 1970, taking over primary and secondary education from their original proprietors, i.e. the missionaries and the voluntary agencies (Maigida, 2016). Five years after, specifically in 1975, the Federal Military Government promulgated "The Government Take-Over of School Validation Decree, 1975" effectively transferring overwhelming control of educational administration to the federal government (Maigida, 2016).

With the present democratic experience, state governors enjoy the autonomy to conceive educational policies of their own, and commit state resources towards the implementation of such policies as it suits them. Thus for instance, while the former governor of Anambra State thought schools in the state were better managed by missionaries and accordingly handed them over to churches (Vanguard, 2011), other state governments became more actively involved in the funding and running of schools within their respective domains. The reality remains that states depend largely on the federation allocation to operate but governors now enjoy the autonomy to pursue educational policies that they feel is best for the

electorates in the state who elected them into government and the discretion to distribute their resources according to their priorities of needs.

### **B. Values**

Democracy as a government of the people for the people and by the people is no less a government of values. The peoples' values reflect, all things being equal, in their government and similarly a democratic government is expected to promote the values of its people. As a multicultural society, Nigeria no doubt is home to diverse value systems. In addition to shared national values such as patriotism and dedication to fatherland, all states of the federation have some peculiar values which they uphold. Self-government under a democratic system thus offers the component parts of the country the opportunity to promote unique values and the schools are a robust platform for doing these.

The important role of the educational system in helping to diffuse educational values is aptly captured by Subba (2014) thus:

"Schools are places where democratic ideals such as equality, freedom, justice are instilled in individuals ... For democracy to continue to thrive, children must be taught to value it as a way of life. The necessary skills for building democracy do not develop automatically in children. Teaching democracy means preparing children to become citizens who will preserve and shape democracy in the future. Therefore democracy should be a key aspect in every form of education at the earliest age possible. Children should learn about taking responsibility for their action. These educational outcomes are only possible through action. While key concepts of democracy should be understood by children, living and acting in a democratic environment is the only and the best exercise. Schools, institutions, children's clubs and organizations and even families that respect democratic principles and have real democratic structures function as the best models to help children learn what democracy is about. The qualities like tolerance, acceptance, a wider view, global awareness, reflection and equal justice rests within the teachers to shape the child in all possible ways to face this competitive world of today."

During the military dispensation, emphasis was on promoting national values and paramilitary activities such as calisthenics and parades as extracurricular activities in schools. Without denying the nobility of that path, it is also important that the people are able to project their unique values through a representative government that shares their concerns, pride, and prejudices. Thus, it is now possible for some parts of the country to emphasise Islamic principles in schools, others Catholicism and others even African traditional precepts.

### **C. Wider Access To Education**

Because states are autonomous, they are able to shape policies within their respective domains. Access to

qualitative education has been a major challenge in Nigeria since the 1970s when the UPE scheme began running (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009). From primary to tertiary education, capacity has remained a big issue as growth in infrastructural expansion has not kept pace with the exponential growth in the country's population (UNICEF, 2016). With the transition to democratic governance in 1999, as with the experience of the previous democratic interludes in the first and second republic, state governments began to invest in expanding access to education by establishing more schools, recruiting more staffers and ultimately establishing state owned universities. This is a laudable step as it has afforded thousands of Nigerian children and youths access to formal education, its quality being a different issue altogether. Going by Nigeria's educational history, there is no record of state universities being created by military administrators hence this achievement occasioned by democratic transition is unprecedented.

#### ***D. Jobs In The Education Sector***

With the transition to democracy and the decentralisation of power to state governments which has led to the establishment of more educational institutions, more jobs have been created for Nigerians as teachers and non-teaching administrators. These new set of employees not only enjoy a stable livelihood but also benefit from training and retraining which ensures the overall growth and development of the nation's human resources.

#### ***E. Universal Basic Education Act***

This Act brought about one of the foremost educational reforms embarked upon by President Olusegun Obasanjo. The Act aims at equalizing educational opportunities for Nigerian children especially with respect to access to schools. Faced with large rural-urban, gender, and regional disparities in enrolment and generally poor learning outcomes, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in 1999, with the aim of providing nine years of free, compulsory basic education comprised of six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education to all children in the country by 2015 (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2009). The UBE law, which was passed in 2004, sets out the key roles and responsibilities of public agencies at all levels of government. The law also established a new parastatal-the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)-and stipulated that 2 percent of the consolidated federal revenue be allocated to basic education. Prompted by a desire to improve international competitiveness of key economic sectors and sustain economic growth, the federal government also adopted a national strategic vision for the reform of tertiary education, with a strong emphasis on science and technology programmes (World Bank, 2008).

The UBE scheme is not the first time Nigeria has conceived of the idea of free and compulsory education: it has a precursor in the Universal Primary Education programme in 1976 and both have almost identical objectives. The UBE scheme however is broader as it includes the first three years of secondary education. Nevertheless, the point is that the

idea of expanding access to education at no cost to students was not originally conceived by a democratic government but a military administration. Thus, in order to understand the impact of democracy on the scheme, one cannot simply point to the policy formulation but actual implementation. The scheme which was launched in 1999 did not have an enabling law until 2004 when the UBE Act was enacted. With the 1999 Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria having placed education as a concurrent matter upon which both the state and federal legislatures could legislate, the implementation of the scheme was not going to be uniform even though the fundamental objectives are the same, but would definitely vary from one state to another. Many state governments set up State Universal Basic Education Boards with different success levels. It is notable that unlike the implementation of the UPE which was widely decried as unsatisfactory mostly because the military administration being unitary in structure adopted a universal yardstick for the different states, the UBE even though it has not fared much better, cannot be given a blanket assessment as the degrees of success to a larger extent depends on the commitment of respective state governments to its implementation according to the spirit and letter of the enabling law. While several states have been lacklustre in its implementation due to corruption and embezzlement of funds meant for the scheme, incompetent administrators or policy inconsistency, many states have indeed made a huge success of the scheme, others even consolidating on the scheme by taking it to further lengths. For instance, in Akwa Ibom State, the government did not just stress the "free" aspect of the scheme, but placed even a higher emphasis on the "compulsory" aspect with the goal of translating the enrolment target into reality. In Rivers State, the government since 2007 has not only emphasised on delivering free and compulsory education in the first nine years, but has also worked to improve infrastructure and man power thus recording not just quantitative expansion but also quality in delivery. In Osun State, the government which seems to arguably have undertaken the most wide reaching education reforms so far since 2010, ensures that primary and secondary school students not only enjoy free access to schools but also now have some of their most basic textbooks and educational resources on an electronic tablet known as *Opon Imo*, and also benefit from free meals at schools and free uniforms (Agbaje, 2014). Unfortunately though, some of the states including Osun have been criticised for the kind of reforms they have initiated (Aregbesola, 2014). Much like the failures of the UPE, where the UBE scheme has failed, the problems are almost the same. The northern states have not made as much strides as their southern counterparts as a result of leaner purses, cultural barriers to school enrolment, and lately anti-western education antics of the insurgent group Boko Haram, not to forget poor leadership. States like Kano, Gombe and Kogi have however recorded some remarkable achievements in the sector. What these examples show is that under the democratic dispensation, and with the benefit of federalism, there are a lot more shades to education policy formulation and implementation.



### III.SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the needs of the future. No doubt democratic governance has had a profound impact on education in Nigeria. A lot of developments occasioned by the transition to democratic governance have been outlined in this paper already. A key question at this point is how enduring are the various reforms undertaken so far in the education sector since 1999? Is there any substantial difference in the key policies implemented since 1999 from what obtained under the military administrations?

A careful analysis of the situation will reveal that a lot of accomplishments have been made especially with expanding access to education through the spread of schools including tertiary institutions. This is commendable because with the massive level of illiteracy and poverty within the country, Nigeria needs as many schools as it can get. The challenge however remains quality. Have the huge investments in establishing new schools really impacted on literacy levels? Can expansion without a commensurate attention to deepening quality lead Nigeria on a path to sustainable national development?

The Global Partnership for Education (2016) made the following observation:

Great progress has been achieved in enrolling children in school around the world. But it's not enough to get children in school, we also need to ensure that they learn to read, count, and acquire the necessary life skills. A special focus has to be given to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (including children living in fragile and conflict-affected countries, children with disabilities, and girls) *who are most likely to be affected because of a lack of well-trained teachers, inadequate learning materials, and unsuitable education infrastructure*. While democracy remains the most desirable system of government, there is no doubt that it possesses a lot of undesirable features that have profound implication for sustainable development. One of these features is what can be termed short-termism. Politicians are often obsessed with winning the next elections such that they pursue populist policies that in the end do not endure long term scrutiny mainly because the fundamentals are wrong. For instance, while existing schools and tertiary institutions are grossly underfunded in every respect which has led to incessant industrial actions by labour unions such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) etc., instead of allocating more resources to these existing institutions to improve educational output, governments set out to establish new institutions because it endears them more to the people of the area and by implication their prospects of winning the next election. Without contradicting the earlier commendation of expanding access to education, quantitative education, strip of quality, is unsustainable and in fact amounts to a negative development. The result of a perennial neglect of investment in deepening quality within the schools is what the Nigerian

government and private sector employers now term “unemployable graduates” as well as frequent references to “decay in the educational system” of the country.

The realization of sustainable national development will depend substantially on the scale of investment in the educational sector, not just in terms of expanding access but also in deepening quality. In this respect, the level of investment in the education sector at the various levels of government leaves much to be desired. Since 1999, no government has allocated 26 percent of national or state budget to education sector as recommended by UNESCO. This does not augur well for sustainable national development and such trend must be reversed. Unlike military administrations, democracies are expected to work closely with people-centered international organizations to promote the overall wellbeing of the citizenry and this expectation is no less true of Nigeria.

### IV.CONCLUSION

Nigeria's transition to democracy since 1999 has indeed impacted on education. Admittedly, the impact may not be as profound as expected but they are worth acknowledging. A lot has been accomplished with the expansion of access to education i.e. quantitative education, however, not much effort has been made to deepen quality. For the country to be set on a path of sustainable development, governments at all levels must focus on both aspects in policy formulation and implementation and investment in the education sector.

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