

POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IMPLEMENTATION: FOCUS ON UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this paper was to examine politics of educational policies implementation with special focus on the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Also, the paper aimed at highlighting the influence of politics on administration and full implementation of free and compulsory education in Akwa Ibom State. Historical analysis of educational policies in Nigeria with a particular reference to free and compulsory education was considered. Issues that cause political influence on education and politics in UBE programme implementation in Akwa Ibom were analyzed. This research by implications is justified by the recommended strategies for effective Universal Basic Education programme implementation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Politics, Educational Policies, UBE Implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The growing politicization of education is a factor for state control and planning of education in most nations of the world. In Nigeria and many other developing countries, educational institutions (schools) are witnessing more and more government interest and control as well as increasing intervention by the legislatures and courts (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999). Furthermore, in recent years parents and the general public made serious agitations and demands that educational system should make good its promise to produce successful citizens by way of product accountabilities, (Okunamuri & Ajoku, 2008). Also, determination of input sources, appointment of heads of institution education institution and resources use have become issues of political or public concern; to justify their continued funding by government.

The position of this paper is on the issue of a close relationship between education and politics and implies that many of the issues and problems of public education in Nigeria have strong political implications. For instance, the fundamental question of why political issues in education in Nigeria via Akwa Ibom State originated from the very constitutional provision which according to Chapter 11, Article 18 of the 1999 constitution reads.

- (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate education opportunities at all levels ...
- (2) Government shall promote science and technology.
- (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to
This end Government shall as and when practicable provide
 - (a) Free compulsory and Universal primary;
 - (b) Free secondary education;

- (c) Free university education and
- (d) Free adult literacy (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999, P-10)

Therefore, the issue of politics in educational policies implementation on a focus of Universal Basic Education in Akwa Ibom State was the main problem that captured the attention of the researcher to embark on this investigation. This paper mainly focuses on the education politics and policies of education, impact of politics on the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria, issues that cause political influence on education in Nigeria, UBE programme implementation in Akwa Ibom State and political factors affecting UBE implementation.

Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN, (2004) view education (2012) calls education “the most important instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. Federal Republic of Nigeria while acknowledging the important of education in the National Policy on education (2012), stated that education is the greatest investment any nation can make. Education is a process of teaching, training and learning in schools, colleges and tertiary institution for the purpose of imparting, improving, developing skills and, values for general improvement of the society.

Politics to different groups have many connotations. But Uchendu (2004) sees politics as dealing with power. That is, how power is structured, pursued, captured, retained and lost. The mission of power is the right of the politician who is empowered by society to make public policies (based on the political ideology of its party) and in the context of this paper, educational policy.

According to Okunamiri (2009) politics of education could be referred to as the social and political contexts of education, aimed at identifying the various social and political factors, influences, issues and problems which affect education production process. Uchendu (2004) noted that politics of education involves a complex inter relationship among interest groups, politicians and bureaucracy. He added that considering the whole educational structure the politicians wants schools to serve particular goals and needs of political party in power.

In Nigeria, educational development has been guided by politics, for instance in the area of social demand for education, takeover of schools from missions by governments, the boarding or day schools (The Federal Government Colleges) and location of new schools as well as content of the curriculum and manner of transmission are all politically determined. There is always political or social purpose behind and educational policy which is contingent upon the ideology of the government or party in power (Mu’azu, 2013).

Basically, in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State the efficiency of education and its administration are influenced by the realities of political power. For instance, policies and programme on nomadic education, Universal Basic Education and (UBE), Unity schools, and Private universities have political undertones. The post civil war experience brought a lot of changes to the education and more direct involvement of the Federal Government at all levels of education (Adesola, 2002).

Analysis of Government influence on educational development showed; introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 by the Military Government of Obasanjo to bridge the educational gap between the Northern Nigeria and the Southern Nigeria.

The same UPE can be traced to 1955 when the government of Western Nigeria led by Obafemi Awolowo stated it UPE Scheme of free and compulsory primary education for all children of school going age. The government of Eastern region also launched the UPE in 1957. However, the Scheme recorded great failure consequent upon inadequate planning and poor implementation by the political class.

In 1999 the then civilian government under the leadership of Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to give free and compulsory education to Nigerian children. The Federal Government's involvement in the organization of UBE Scheme was necessary if the set objectives were to be achieved. The desire to inculcate in children the knowledge of literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate made UBE Scheme worthwhile venture. Through the UBE, Government wanted to use education to lay sound foundation for scientific and reflective thinking, character and moral training and development of sound attitude.

Impact of Politics on Educational Policies in Nigeria

The concept of educational policy according to Udida (2008) could be taken to mean projected programmes of action, which specifies goals, values and practices of an educational system. It could also be seen as a statement which guides and directs all actions at achieving national development through educational section. Though education is a vital instrument in development, often there are agitations for politics to be taken off education or that education should not be mixed with politics. But at the same time the duo seem to be inseparable. Reasons why some people agitated for removed of politics from education rested on some of the bad influence of politics on education which according to Arubayi (2005) include:

- Inadequate funding of education,
- Poor planning / ineffective implementation of educational plans and objectives
- Poor school mapping as pupils travel more than five kilometers to get to school daily
- Poor supervision and monitoring of UBE programme: The constraint to effective supervision and monitoring of the UBE Scheme is attributed to.
- Inadequate vehicles for monitoring
- Inadequate number of qualified monitoring officers, inadequate office accommodation and office equipment (e.g computers and ICT facilities) militated against effective supervision of UBE programme (P1-9). The picture painted by Arubayi on poor supervision was supported by Ezenkwensili (2007) that there has been no inspection and supervision of schools in the decades", whereas, supervision of schools is the heart of quality assurance in education.

Negatively, politics had impacted on human resource in the education industry in diverse ways. For instance Government ban on employment due to economic down turn, had spelt negative effect on schooling, that is, inadequate qualified teacher's to handle teach specialized subjects in sciences and arts affected the output of our secondary schools for many decades

In a negative way Obanya (2010) highlighted how politics and education influence each other through a continuous process which has failed the education sector, particularly in the last decade. He listed the country's (Nigeria) problem as evidenced in bad politics to include:

Corruption, political instability and adult / infant illiteracy – where about twenty percent cannot read nor write and the adults lack access to university education.

Obanya also pointed out that only one fifth of applicant received a place in the higher institutions of learning across the country. For this reason, many candidates are regular JAMB customers for many years conservatively. Obanya also highlights how the political instability has led to inconsistent educational policies due to rapid changes of education ministers with different ideologies. For instance, the immediate past minister under Jonathan's administration pursued "Transformation agenda" at the federal level, while "uncommon transformation" ideals was pursued by Akpabio's administration in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria at the State level to propagate his free/compulsory education agenda

Issues that cause political influence on Education in Nigeria

In the whole of Nigeria, and states, there are certain educational policies and reforms and programmes in education that have some political undertones. At the same time, certain political issues have found expression in the policies and programmes recommended and adopted for education. In contemporary Nigeria, Okwori and Edet (2012) enumerated some political issues that have influenced education which include the following:

Political party promises and interest in Education: During electioneering campaigns in Nigeria, political parties' fast track their grips on the people by promising them better educational opportunities. By this promises, the politicians regarded education as a government responsibility and an instrument for national unity, political socialization and economic development (FRN/2008).

Control and management of Education: Since the governments (Federal, State and Local Government) commit huge funds to the provision of education for the masses, it became incumbent upon the government to assert some degree of control on educational management practices throughout Nigeria

Social and economic gaps between states in Nigeria: The question of educational gap and imbalance generated so much heat in the politics of education in Nigeria that, politicians have argued that National Unity and political cohesion cannot be achieved without bridging social and economic gaps between the different parts of the country. For instance, there exist staggering imbalance in University education between the Northern and the Southern States; therefore, the surest ways to bridge the gaps, was to bridge the educational gaps.

National Unity and Political Cohesion: The government of Nigeria looks up to educational institution as fertile grounds for the propagation and promotion of the desired national unity. For this reason, the schools programmes among other things highlights those aspects of our cultural life that bud us together (Denga, 2000). Other aspects for national unity include school mapping (i.e. siting of Higher Education, Unity schools) in different parts of the country, government programme for fresh graduates, quota system of admission policy and introduction of general studies programmes (e.g citizenship education).

Implementation of UBE Programme/Policy in Nigeria

Educational policy implementation according to Ogbonnaya (2014) refers to the process of carrying out educational objectives or plans of action. It is a stage where the educational policies formulated are tested or translated to reality at different schools by the teachers. To

further buttress this point, Egonmwar (2001) opines that policy implementation is a stage that the policy becomes operational through the passing of legislation. For instance, UBE was launched in 1999, September, but the act of parliament for its implementation became effective in the year 2000 (FGN 2000). When the proposed implementation blueprint for UBE Scheme was out through the Federal Ministry of Education.

In the secondary school level, policy implementation as envisaged by Ogbonnaya, constitutes the responsibilities of the State Ministry of Education Secondary Education Board and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB); these groups implement policies initiated by the Government.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is a nine year basic education programme, which was launched on 30th September 1999 in Sokoto. This educational policy was adopted by the Federal Government to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration (UBE 2006, Utibe, 2001). Taking close observation, the UBE programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The implementation process of the UBE Programme has been on course since 1999 till May, 2004 when Universal Basic Education Programme Bill was signed into law, following its passage by the National Assembly. The Universal Basic Education Act (2004) makes primary and junior education free and compulsory for children, and also guarantees regular government funding from the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education for the proper implementation of the programme.

The UBE Act also provides for the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in October, 2004 to co-ordinate the implementation of the programme at the national level (FGN, 2000). In the same vein, States Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEBs) were established to implement Universal Basic Education at the state level.

Politics and UBE Programme Implementation in Akwa Ibom:

Education plays a major role in the development of political institutions and ideas or consciousness among the people and their leaders. Politics also have a great influence on the formulation and implementation of educational policies, funding of educational programmes, planning and administration of education, provision of infrastructural facilities in our educational institutions. For many decades, education had suffered so much neglect in the hands of our political leaders, who dropped the educational policy of their predecessors, and in order to fulfill their electioneering promises to the electorates.

In Akwa Ibom State administration, Governor Godswill Obot Akpabio had declared free and compulsory UBE Programme for Akwa Ibom children since 2008. The free and compulsory education programme in the state was also designed to take care of educational needs of young people and adults who have not had the opportunity to receive formal education in schools through adult and non formal education.

The specific objectives of the Universal Basic Education as stated by Universal Basic Education Act, (2004) include;

- Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- Provide free- compulsory Universal Basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- Reduce drastically, dropout rate from formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency.
- Cater for dropouts and out of school children adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of education.
- Ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy numeracy, manipulation and life skills (as well as the ethical, moral and evil values) needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning.

Very lofty and desirable as the objective of UBE has been, its implementation at all levels of education as seen in the component of the scheme depended on the Government in power and the political party in control of the Government. However, the overwhelming incursion of politics into the planning and management of education in Akwa Ibom State free education programme was that, only Government funded, with students paying no direct fees. The Government funds the entire education sector (Primary and Secondary education) through the state budget (Ukpong, 2014) More so, to make the free and compulsory education policy of AKS attainable, government also ensured the provision of a conducive teaching/ learning environment in schools through rehabilitation and reconstruction of schools. To further give UBE a boost to the implementation, the Government added more resources such as:

- Provision of science laboratory equipment
- Construction/renovation of hostels in boarding schools across the state.
- Supply of desks and other infrastructure.
- Payment of Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) fees for all students in public secondary schools.
- Payment of examination fees for all students in public technical colleges.
- Procurement and distribution of scientific equipment and other materials to public secondary schools.
- Provision of free textbooks on Biology Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Integrated Science.

Upon all the government had claimed to achieve in the education sector in AKS, Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has not been fully implemented for various reasons:-

- **Political instability:** Frequent changes in the political leadership in Akwa Ibom tended to affect the reliability and implementation of educational plans/ policies. Sometime, forceful termination of government had affected the continuing in the systematic development of National education policies. For this reasons, educational planners

therefore are often forced to drop a plan in the making to take up new programmes and decisions in the bid to comply with the political demands of the time.

- **Inadequate funding:** Universal Basic Education according to Eddy and Akpan (2009) is not properly funded due to the fact that funding of the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State is solely left to the hands of the Government. The implication is that private sector partnership had been ignored probably giving rise to partial implementation of the UBE Scheme in the state by the government due to inadequate funds. Funding is central to effective implementation of any educational policy and development of any country in general and Akwa Ibom in particular. The issue of poor funding of UBE programme had been one area that politics has negatively affected education in Akwa Ibom.
- **Politics and non motivating Teachers:** In every level of education, teachers are said to be the implementers of educational policies through their interaction with students in the classroom. Politics affected education negatively when politicians withhold teachers' benefits/ salaries which always result in labour unrest promoted by Government insensitivity to teachers' welfare. The problem of inadequate teaching staff in the schools to teach important subjects in the sciences and arts came up as a result of Government ban on employment for the selfish motives of the party in power.
- Politics has also affected education in the area of appointment, promotion and postings/transfers of teachers. For instance, some persons are favoured in posting, appointment as principals as result of their connection to influential politicians in the State.
- **Politics school mapping:** Political weight had been thrown on the citing of educational institutions at the communities of some politicians to the detriment of other communities who lack representation in the educational institutions that can cater for the educational needs of such places. A close observation had shown that there is an overcrowding of some educational institutions in some parts of the state, than others.
- **Politicization of Educational Data:** It has been observed that "there are political data, there are administrative data and there are real data (Olalusi, 2005:180). Each kind of data serves different purpose depending on the kinds of intervention the government is embarking on. Most time this false data complicate issues for the state in terms of getting federal allocation for the UBE implementation.
- **Bribery and corruptions:** This problem has been one of the greatest political issues militating against UBE policy implementation in Akwa Ibom State. It is obvious that bribes or what in government parlance referred to as lobbying are freely offered and freely taken in Secondary Education Board, Ministry of Education, State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and different educational institutions across the state. Some officials lobbied their ways to their positions in government, some teachers offer bribes to officials of the school Boards for preferential postings to schools of their choice, some teachers and principals had immoral corrupt practices, with students involve in examination malpractice. Some of them require students to contribute money illegally, so that they can be given the freedom by invigilators to indulge in examination malpractice (Ogbonnaya, 2014).

- **Poor Supervision and Monitoring:** Government officials from the Ministry and Boards are always in the habit of sitting in their offices to do inspection because of brown envelops” or ‘Kola’ they received from schools administrators. To this end, quality assurance in the education system is eroded.
- **Poor inter-Governmental Communication/ Implementation:** Various government agencies at the three levels of government in Nigeria:- Federal State and Local Government area are involved in the implementation of the UBE programme. It has been observed that government agencies/ parastatals involve in the UBE programme implementation have unnecessary struggles for supremacy and conflicts in management to this art the smooth UBE implementation.

Recommended Strategies for effective implementation of UBE in Akwa Ibom

- Political issues on education should be made sustainable and new political office holders should try and implement educational policies of their predecessors in order to make meaning of our education programmes.
- Full implementation of the educational policy reforms such as the UBE in Akwa Ibom State should be given due consideration. This is because when the government is giving free and compulsory education to all children, some of the children should not be seen along major streets hawking goods in order to survive. Not only this, a greater percentage of Akwa Ibom youths and adolescent cannot read and write pointing to the default of UBE implementation on adult and non-formal education for those who missed the opportunity of formal primary and secondary education.
- Improving funding of the basic education sub sector by the government should be a matter of priority to past and present political party in power in the state. Effective funding of the UBE by the State Government be seen in the regular payment of teachers’ salaries and other benefit to motivate them as the great implementers of the basic education policy. Also, fund should also be provided by the government for adequate provision of instructional materials to entrance teaching/ learning in our schools.
- Recruitment of qualified teachers and appointment of school heads should be on merit, not on godfatherism in order to make meaning of implementation of the UBE Scheme in the State
- Private sector partnership with the government in the provision and implementation of UBE Scheme should be encouraged, since government alone cannot bear the high cost of the education.

CONCLUSION

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme as an educational policy was adopted as an expression of strong desire of the government of Nigeria to reinforce democracy. Even though there had not been records of successful free and compulsory education programme in Nigeria, but for the successful implementation of the UBE programme the recommendations put forward in this paper if properly articulated would result in effective UBE programme devoid

of political influence. Educational policy implementation is the process of carrying plans of action in education.

However, the successful implementation of educational programmes/policies in Nigeria via Akwa Ibom has been problematic due to many factors mainly political issues that could not allow some lofty educational policies to see light of the day. It should be noted that implementation of UBE, in Nigerian educational system involves major stakeholders, such as the politicians, Federal and State Ministries of Education; the Universal Basic Education Commission, State Universal Basic Education Board and Local Education Authorities with their administrative complexities and management conflict which showed down UBE implementation.

In conclusion this paper submitted that without successful implementation of UBE programme its objectives cannot be achieved. It is therefore important that efforts are channeled in the right direction using the recommended strategies on this paper to achieve proper implementation of the UBE programme in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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