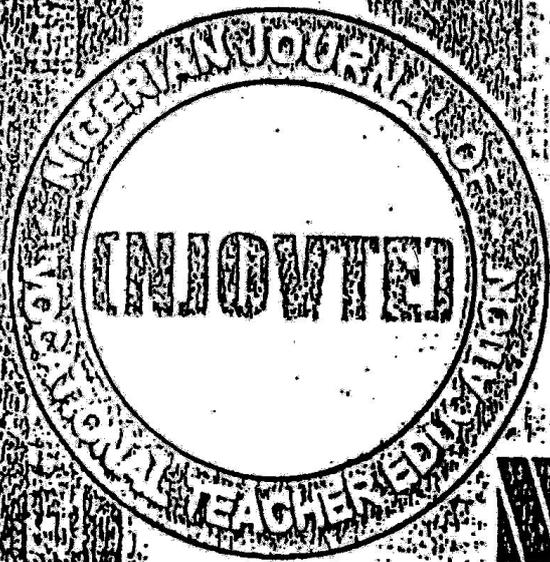


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**" A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF NIGERIA'S
NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION"**

BY

PETER A. ESSOH

Dept. of Sociology/ Anthropology

University of Uyo

Uyo - Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION:

It is necessary to state from the outset that a social scientist involved in a study of education or analysis of an aspect of education should be seen as engaging in an interdisciplinary exercise. More so a sociologist whose province and of laboratory is the society.

Education, it must be argued, and truly so, is mainly a social business. It is not static but a dynamic process of society concerned with both social and personal experiences which require analysis, selection, reflection and evaluation. Thus it is that philosophic reflection, psychology and sociology have become, with history and comparative analysis, the fundamental studies which collectively provide a corpus of knowledge for a deeper understanding of education as a whole (Ivor Morrish 1972:33).

Because education is seen, since the years of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), as a social process and phenomenon which is aimed at integrating the individual to his society, state or community (environment), it becomes imperative for a sociologist to attempt a critical examination of the National policy on education in Nigeria vis-à-vis its operation.

In obviating the rods of professional educationists as to the concern of the sociologist in his field, solace is sought from the inter-disciplinary boundary

which finds justification in the well expressed words of the Jewish sage Hillel that:

'If I am not for myself, who will be for me?'

If I am only for myself, then what am I for?"

The policy on Education in Nigeria is directed at the pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary, professional as well as technical, special, Adult, non-formal and teacher education.

EDUCATION AS PUBLIC POLICY:

In order to make more sense, operational definitions of public policies to which education as an important sub-unit of government policy objectives applies will be used.

Robert Eyestone (1971:18), defines public policy as 'the relationship of a government unit to its environment.'

This type of view presents public policy in so wide and broad a way that it could be seen to encompass just anything.

Thomas Dye (1972:18) sees public policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do." Eventhough Dye's view may be seen as roughly accurate, it does not recognize nor appreciate the fact that there may be what J. E. Anderson's public policy making calls "a divergence between what governments decide to do and what they actually do."

Carl Friedrich (1963:79) and David Easton (1965:212) provide useful additional inputs to public policy when respectively they regard policy as

"... a proposed course of action of a person group or government within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunities which the policy was proposed to utilize and overcome in an

effort to reach a goal or realize an objective or a purpose”

Friedrich adds further that policy is directed at the accomplishment of some purpose or goal.

As a public policy, Education in Nigeria fits not only the views expressed by Friedrich and Anderson but applies also within the context of what David Easton terms as being formulated by “the authorities” in a political system - executives, legislators, Judges, Chairmen of councils and their councillors. etc.”- who by their positions, “are engaged in the daily affairs of a political system and are recognized by most members of the system as having responsibility for these matters” (Easton 1965:212).

It is well at this point to draw attention to the fact that Education as a Public Policy in Nigeria, like all other government policies, is developed by government bodies and officials in the Ministry of Education - through Delegated Power (function/authority) and educational arms such as National Council of Education, National Education research Council, National teachers' Institute, National Primary Education Commission and Board, National Universities Commission, etc. etc.).

From all the above, it is safe to posit that Education or any Public Policy is purposive or that it is a goal oriented action.

Public policy consists of courses or patterns of action by government bodies especially as it relates to implementation and enforcement. Public Policy has legitimacy to itself in that it is based on law and is authoritative

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIGERIAN EDUCATION

Prior to the enactment of the philosophy of Nigerian Education, several actions and processes went into operation. In 1973, Chief Simon O. Adebo - a former Permanent Representative of Nigeria at the United Nation - was appointed as

chairman along with other distinguished Nigerians to deliberate on all aspects of a National Policy on Education (Information 1977:3).

The Chairman and his team met and organized seminars in the Universities, related Research Centres and invited informed opinions/inputs from interest groups, individuals and organizations. The responses, reactions from all groups concerned with matters of education in Nigeria and the guided wisdom of the Adebo Committee served as the basis for the policy recommendations to the government.

In making those recommendations, the committee first of all identified itself with the overall philosophy and objectives of the Nation. And the main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the Second National Development Plan, to which the Policy on Education applies, are entrenched in the building of

1. a free and democratic society;
2. a just and egalitarian society;
3. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. a great and dynamic economy
5. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (Information 1977:4)

When these ideals were enunciated under the Gowon government, it was hoped that the philosophy of Nigerian education will be based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen with equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the Primary, Secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system.

Chapter two of the suspended constitution of Nigeria 1979: Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy lend credence to the above ideals and in particular section 18 subsection (1,2,3a, b, c, and d)

1.

As a result of the above well spelt out National vision of education, the quality of instructions at all levels was meant to be oriented towards inculcating values such as:

- (a) faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- (b) respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals;
- (c) moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations;
- (d) shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- (e) respect for the dignity of labour and
- (f) promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children.

The philosophy itself was geared towards the social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress of the citizenry. Furthermore, the blue print on educational revolution in Nigeria had the aims of

- (a) inculcating national consciousness and national unity
- (b) inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society
- (c) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and
- (d) the acquisition of appropriate skill, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Sub-section 7 of the Philosophy enunciates the various measures which the government will adopt to implement the policy.

Accordingly, the government said among others, that

- (a) Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is 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 education revolution;
- (b) Lifelong education will be the basis for the nation's educational policies.
- (c) Educational activity will be centred on the learner for maximum self-development and fulfillment;
- (d) Universal basic education, in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities will be provided for all citizens
- (e) Efforts will be made to relate education to overall community needs.
- (f) Educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalised by basing them on a whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual;
- (g) At any stage of the educational process, after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing his full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on; and
- (h) Opportunity will continue to be made available for religious instruction. No child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to the wishes of his parents (Nigeria Constitution 1979:5).

In concluding its remarks on the National Education Philosophy, the government emphasized the linguistic aspects of child's education and

consequently learned the three major languages of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba to be a very alternate language for a child to learn while in school

While the philosophy represent the national goal for education at all levels, our attention is focused on the policy as it relates to primary and secondary school systems after which our critical evaluation follows:

POLICY ON PRIMARY EDUCATION

The nation's policy on primary education aims at training children of between 6 and 11 years. The policy sees primary education as the bedrock on which the success or failure of the educational objectives lies. In the light of this, the objectives of primary education were identified as

- (a) the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- (b) the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (c) citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- (d) character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes, and so on.

These objectives were to serve as the basis of primary education all over Nigeria and in consequence the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme took off in September 1976 during which time primary education became free. The policy furthermore identified, aside from the above objectives, the study of science, the study of the social norms and values of the local community as well as of the country through civics and social studies, the giving of health and physical education, moral and religious education, the encouragement of aesthetic, creative and musical activities, the teaching of local crafts and domestic science and agriculture.

POLICY ON SECONDARY EDUCATION

In broad outline, the policy here directs attention to a two-tier system of secondary school education. Under this arrangement, pupils who finish from primary school, will spend the next 3 years in a Junior Secondary School where all technical, commercial and grammar school forms of education will be provided. After spending three years, pupils can proceed to the next 3 years in the Senior Secondary School.

What the policy articulates is basically that Secondary School System of education in Nigeria will change from 5 to 6 years and on successful completion of 6-3-3 training, a student will proceed to the University for a 4 year course of study. This formula is expressed as 6-3-3-4 in the Nigerian philosophy of education.

In specific terms, the policy on Secondary School directs attention at

- (a) Provision of an increasing number of primary school pupils with the opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex, social, religious or ethnic background,
- (b) Diversify its talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school studies,
- (c) Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology,
- (d) Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and languages as well as the world's cultural heritage.
- (e) Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.

In both the primary and secondary school policies, emphasis is placed on continuous assessment of pupils. And in order to achieve these objectives, the government stresses in the document/blueprint, expand the school system, open

more teacher training colleges, colleges of education and consequently train teachers in the relevant areas of national needs.

AN APPRAISAL/EVALUATION OF THE POLICY ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:

When Carl Friedrich defined policy as "a proposed course of action of a person, group or government within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunities which the policy is proposed to utilize and overcome in an effort to reach a goal or realize an objective or a purpose," he seemed to have anticipated Nigeria as his viewpoint has a fitting relevance to a policy goal such as the Nigerian National Policy on Education.

In attempting here to appraise and evaluate the policy on education in Nigeria, we do so in the light of one of the perspectives in sociology: Phenomenology - which seeks to show the fundamental difference between the subject matter of the natural and social sciences. The natural sciences deal with matter. Since matter has no consciousness, its behaviours can be explained simply as a reaction to external stimuli.

Unlike matter, man has consciousness and so he sees, interprets and experiences the world in terms of meanings and goes on to actively construct his reality which arise, as actors, in the course of social interaction (Haralambos (1970:497-498). In the course of this evaluation of the policy, one will not help but be value-free guilty since our analysis is a product of social reality as the policy has been with us since 1976.

First, that the state owes the citizenry the responsibility of educating its young has long ceased to be a contentious issue. When such arguments arise, it is either that the state wishes to shirk its obligation or that retrogressive vested interests are powerfully at work. In such cases, the results have tended to be negative hence societal progress is either disrupted or retarded while future generation must pay a high price.

As stated in the overall policy on education, the ultimate goal of education at the primary, secondary as well as tertiary levels is to be free and later universal. When the policy came into being in 1976, it was a welcome relief to the teeming rural populace who cannot afford a fee tag on education, but within a couple of years now, even long before the present military regime, fee charge in schools in states such as Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Imo, Benue, Delta, Edo, Ogun, Akwa Ibom and Cross River State have been appallingly viewed.

Even in almighty action state of Lagos - our centre of excellence - The main reason adduced in these states for reintroducing fees has been that the state cannot afford the education bill and so must be associated.

Almost all the governors and military administrators after them preside over states where education had been a fact of life (1979-1983), in the primary school, no matter how inefficiently the philosophy or policy was being implemented. So popular was the free education scheme that before the military and in the election year of 1983, almost all the political parties in Nigeria promised various versions of free education. To have reintroduced fees now, in an economic environment as harsh as it is now in Nigeria and with the Primary Education Board cum Secondary School Board presiding, amount, to clogging the wheel of high hopes and feeling of relief in parents and guardians. In states where fees were/are charged in the last few years, it is on record that Primary and Secondary School enrolment dropped by 33 1/3% and in some 50%. The enthusiasm initially generated became dampened.

Furthermore, to have reintroduced fees (in some states over 100% increase in fees e.g. Akwa Ibom in the Secondary School), as the various states are doing, means an attempt to reverse the lofty ideal of the Universal Free Primary Education and the ultimate goals of the national philosophy and policy on education which has strong support in the suspended constitution of 1979. It betrays the nation state as a purposeless society where the exigency of the present beclouds the necessity of the future. As fees continue to be charged in schools at astronomical rates, those who drop out will, sociologically speaking, constitute a burden on the society in terms of increase in crime and delinquency.

avarice and high level of illiteracy, all of which will constitute an awful experience of the 21st century to harbour illiterates in a society that had a well laid out strategy for educating its populace.

Secondly, the policy enunciated the idea of inculcating a sense of national unity and development of social consciousness in students to enable them play useful roles in integrating the society. To that, we retort that since the policy became effective in 1976, the idea of national unity essentially remains on paper. Studies in the sociology of Education as well as in political sociology clearly demonstrate that the children first always identify themselves with their immediate environment rather than the nation state. This is so because the object of identification at the national level is a little removed away from the immediate environment of the child who identifies firstly with parent, siblings and peer group members (Issah 1991:5).

In such a situation, the policy output in terms of national unity and aspiration remains a far cry from actuality.

Thirdly, at the time the policy was formulated, it was envisioned that within the first phase of the operation of the UPE scheme, some one million children would have been enrolled on the Primary and Secondary Schools by 1982. But by that year, the target enrolment figure was well above one million and such has been the trend ever after. To compound the problem more, the promised expansion programmes in Secondary Schools preparatory to the 3-3 tier system, teacher training programmes and Universities still remain a far cry from fulfilment.

Some of these inabilities of the policy to meet its goal could be traceable to the societal constraints - financial, political, socio-cultural, unforeseen circumstance and so on. It is a well known fact that most pupils in schools receive instructions in shades and ill staffed schools and under conditions that fall far short of the policy recommendation and adoptions by the government. Under the policy goal, it is provided that the minimum number of students per class should range from 35-45 but reports from NTA Network News carried on

schools in Kwara 14/2/96 indicated that as many as 90-100 students are enrolled per class. One can conjecture the innumerable shortcomings and problems students in such schools encounter in terms of space, attention to the teachers' lessons and loitering while schools are in session. The Kwara example is replicated in virtually all schools in Nigeria with the possible exception of the unity and other elite schools in the country.

It would thus appear that the rate at which the policy is being executed, the 6-3-3-4 policy on Nigerian education may fail to have the impact intended. What then, is the place of children of the greater majority of the proletariat whose wage earnings cannot see them into and out of the privileged elite schools? The consequence of this is that there is a spill over effect into the Universities. With the paucity of adequate financial commitments and trained manpower both in the school situation and within the government circles, the policy on education as it relates to the products of primary and secondary schools will hardly meet the vision of the policy formulators as enshrined in the blueprint and the constitution of Nigeria 1979.

It became imperative, at this point, to agree with J.M. Akintola Executive Secretary, National Education Research Council (NERC), that "the fact that some states are no longer willing to continue with free education is an indication that it is a failure and Nigeria is not ripe for it yet" (Onyenorah, 1984:15). What one infers from this in essence is that Nigeria lacks the capacity and resources at the moment to implement free education at all levels.

The fact that teachers are generally not paid for many months in a number of states in Nigeria is a clear indication that free education has broken. The fact also that there has been a lack of facilities all over the nation to cope with the rising demand for education coupled with the apparent untimely scrapping of hitherto existing teacher training colleges as well as the fact that the policy on free education is unequally implemented in the states show that before free education becomes effective in Nigeria, the type of education required to raise the total competence of the people, create knowledge and independence must be provided. Presently the dependency syndrome has a telling impact on our

and all national development. Twenty three years after the policy became effective, virtually all instructional materials and books are imported from the developed countries which in itself has a telling impact on the already depleted national purse.

CONCLUSION

Education is a social process. It is not static but a dynamic process of society concerned with social and personal experiences which require selection, reflection and evaluation. Durkheim and others after him, see this social process aimed at integrating the individual to his society, state and community. The philosophy of Nigerian education corroborates the overall national objective which draws inspiration from the Second National Development Plan period and Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Republic of Nigeria 1979. The National policy on education in Nigeria was aimed at producing a set of Nigerians that would have confidence not only in themselves but on the nation-state.

Although the policy has attained a reasonable degree of success, reasons and instances are adduced as to the lapses inherent in the process of implementation of the policy at the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria.

It is however, recommended that if fees are charged for the purpose of quality and development for the individual to be eventually functional, then it is a worthwhile investment. It is further recommended that the various State Primary Education Boards and all the agencies saddle with the responsibility of making education meaningful in Nigeria at the primary and secondary levels be strengthened with all the moral fibre of government to enable enforcement of the policy. There should be a higher degree of commitment and subsidy by government as it is the cases in the Universities so that the cost of education will not be too exorbitant for both parents and pupils who will serve as the worthy carriers of our civilization in the next century. The Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar's Budget of Realism in 1999 pointedly lucidates the weakness that in

our educational system and the way forward as addressed in his January 1, 1999 Budget speech to Nigerians.

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