

DEMOCRATIC IDEALISM AS A GOAL ATTAINMENT ISSUE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Education in modern Nigeria attracts the intervention of the state, whose intention in this direction is clearly expressed in socio-political objectives. In this, the goal of the state is based on democratic idealism expressed in the National Policy on Education. Thus, in order to build the desired democratic, free, strong, united and prosperous nation in which the citizens enjoy sufficient latitude to develop self and society, government has refurbished the former UPE programme into a new conception of UBE with a new incorporation of the junior secondary programme all geared on a skill-acquisition model for social development in Nigeria. Presentation and discussion in this appraisal is in five sections. Section one, is the introduction which provides a background on the subject. Section two, explains the conceptual issues, statement of problem and methodological approach to the issue of education and the ideals of the Nigerian state. Section three, reviews the foundations of educational policy in Nigeria; in section four, the NPE and attendant strategies are appraised; while section five, provides conclusion and recommendations. This appraisal recommends that for goal attainment to be realized there is need for actual action in this direction more than lip service.

Introduction

Education in Nigeria pre-dates the country's colonialism and eventual emergence on the world stage as a twentieth century modern political state. The credibility of this assertion lies in the universally recognized paradigm that processes of value transmission through generations had long existed in all cultures. This became pronounced as such cultures exhibit sophistications in social organization targeted at self/group preservations and development. The profound expression in this regard is the modern state whose goal attainment for society is democracy aimed at through state policy on education.

In the view of Udokang (2000), democracy is the desired political value for the conduct of society and government in modern countries, with social principles rooted in western civilization. This derived mainly from Europe's historical interactions and abstractions with other parts of the world. The European philosophers and statesmen, not only directed the character of their states, they also modulated strategies for their sustenance: Thus, from ancient Greek city states to the great liberal and socialist societies of the modern world, education remained the reserved instrument of state policy for preservation and advancement of European societies and states (Udokang, 2000).

The Nigerian experience in state - directed policies in education moves beyond pre-colonialism and is traceable to the budding period of the colonial state. Udofot (2000) maintains that before colonialism and western education in Nigerian, the Nigerian people were educated in their cultural norms and values and on a functionalist rather than the elitist model fostered by western education.

That the pre-colonial education of Udofot (2000), was devoid of state policy and still remains relevant is that, at then, the Nigerian political state was yet to come, thus allowing the traditional education of the pre-colonial period to hand down cultural practices and occupational skills to learners who become self reliant and contributive to both community and society in the pre-colonial period (Udofot, 2000).

The only obvious gap therefore in the trade - modern relationship in regard to education in Nigeria is on the element of state policy. This first emerged in the Nigerian colonial state in 1925 under the auspices of the Phelps Stoke commission reports. This is in line with the fact that modern Nigeria is a creation of British colonialism (Awofeso and Ogunbodede, 2000: Fafunwa, cited in Inyang, 2005).

However, the limited capacity development of Nigerian education under colonial rule which was kept within bounds of British economic policy in the country were to be completely reversed and expanded by the

nationalist aspirations of the Nigerian political leadership, beginning from when the country became self governing and independent of British rule to this September 2006 (Inyang, 2005: Udofot, 2000: FRN, 1998).

Nation - building in Nigeria is anchored on the democratic ideas envisioned in both the country's National Policy on Education (1998) and the constitution of the federal republic (1999). Thus, the appraisal here is to examine the relevance of various strategies such as the UPE/UBE and Vocational Education towards the attainment of democratic idealism stated in the goal attainment aims of the Nigerian Policy on Education.

Conceptual Issues, Statement of Problem and Methodological Approach

An appraisal on an issue in education should necessarily begin with clarifying the understanding of the concept. Generally 'Education' as a concept borders on processes of knowledge and skill acquisition throughout one's life time. Peters (1966) cited in Inyang (2005), posits that education is the process of inculcating in the learner a desirable state of mind for both intrinsic and extrinsic ends. It is also a vehicle for cultural transmission through generations (Edu, 2000) and the instrument for ability and attitude development of positive values in ones society (Ntino, 1997).

Though profusely understood world-wide, 'Democracy' is generally taken to mean peoples rule, implying a majority representation in the process. However, Udokang and Awofeso (2002), credit democracy with popular participation in a political system where a periodically - elected government is accountable to the people it governs.

Cohen (1991), cited in Udokang and Awofeso, (2002), refers to democracy as community government, while Satori (1968) sees the concept as, the rule of the entire people who are the source of the political power of the government of the day.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria is the most relevant concept in this analysis, having bearing on the goal attainment objectives of government for the Nigerian society and state. This policy is construed on the central principles of developing modern Nigeria along lines of private sector capitalism in which the latitude of state and society afford the individual opportunity to develop self and community. The conception in this policy is democratic, egalitarian, united, strong, self reliant, great and dynamic nation, full of opportunities for its citizens (FRN, 1998). The strategies to arriving at these ideals include the UBE of which its vocational education component is much recognized.

The posture of the Nigerian state and society professes liberal political ideology going by the provisions of its federal constitution (1999) and national policy on education (NPE), (1998). The problem however, is whether the lofty idealism of Nigerian nationhood via education is realizable through the instrumentality of the UBE and vocational education as strategies to implementing the NPE in Nigeria.

In appraising the implementation of the NPE in Nigeria, the methodological approach is a documentary survey relying on published facts and stated intentions of all stakeholders in Nigerian education.

Foundations of Educational Policy in Nigeria

All societies directed by a political state are a goal attainment organization. In this regard, the federal republic of Nigeria is not an exception. Thus, educational policy in modern Nigeria began with the colonial state. The fact also arises that a consideration of state policy on education necessarily reflects the political character of the state concerned

whose superstructure manages the economic endowment of such states, the class structure and pattern of elitism that exploits the state and the political philosophy of the ruling class.

The sophistication of the colonial state in Nigeria over the earlier existing pre-colonial political entities that made up the country called for:

- (i) a level of low profile manpower for the colonial administrative authorities, trading companies and (religious missions) church offices and schools,
- (ii) a modest response to both the rising capacity demand in the colonial economy and aspirations of the indigenous population.

This resulted in first, the Phelps - Stoke's report of 1925, which brought in state intervention into education in Nigeria with a view on adaptation to local conditions (Fafumva, 1974). The Phelps - Stoke - induced colonial policy on education in Nigeria came to lapse in 1945, when it became superseded by the Elliot commission report.

Next was the Ashby commission report of 1960, which incorporated the Harbison High level

manpower study for Nigeria's future. The Ashby recommendations became adopted as policy for transforming Nigeria from dependency to an independent state and lasted till the military take-over of government in Nigeria in 1966, from where further transformations enshrined in the initial edition of the National policy on education in Nigeria came out in 1977, with revisions in 1981 and 1995.

Democratic Idealism in the Nigerian National Policy on Education: An Appraisal

The assumption behind democracy in a state of affairs is that it allows for unfettered growth, sufficient freedom for expression and thus development. This is much the case when the NPE, favors rapid change across the broad spectrum of socio-economic life in Nigeria. It is also assumed that a stable polity will be the result when the approximated 60% youth component in Nigeria's national population (FOS, 2001), are programmed into useful life other than potential restiveness in the society.

The further assumption in line with the above is that, once community spirit is cultured through the NPE, patriotism and national pride will become the guiding posts to culture on coming generations of Nigerians to accept and project the fate of the country as Africa's pride.

However, to arrive at this envisage ideals, government wisdom is that a sound primary and vocational education provided at the foundation levels of the country's education system using NPE philosophy will help realize the socio-political ideals stated in the national concept.

Strategies for Realizing the NPE in Nigeria

1. Universal Basic Education

The universal basic education scheme (UBE), is recently inaugurated in Nigeria by the federal government. This inauguration is more or less a re-statement, or an amplification of the earlier UPE (universal primary education) programme carried out in the former western region of Nigeria during the first republic (Fafunwa, 1974) and revived on nation-wide basis by the country's third military government in 1977.

In all its phases, the UPE/UBE scheme seeks to strengthen primary education as necessary foundation for achievement in the upper layers of the education hierarchy. What perhaps makes the UBE unique is its incorporation of the junior secondary into the primary orbit as a single structure to provide foundation for civic-oriented mass education in Nigeria (Inyang, 2005; Ibritam, 2000).

2. Vocational Education

The national policy on education not only acknowledges but also incorporates vocational education as an instrument of change for enabling the achievement of Nigeria's democratic goals (Ibritam, 1997).

In this approach both the primary and junior secondary levels is incorporated to ensure the acquisition of appropriate skills in the first nine years of a child's education.

This effort is to benefit from appropriate legislation to ensure the realization of the national concept such that there is no fall-out in the envisage programme of action.

Recommendations

1. The government should ensure that all proprietors of UBE schools in Nigeria equip and maintain the schools at not below minimum standard for the UBE programme.
2. Improvisation should be the key word in this skill-acquisition scheme, to ensure ingenuity, maintenance and development.
3. Since liberal societies tend to exhibit class antagonisms and exploitation except checked, the government should narrow the gap between the rich and the poor in the society by providing public institutions that serve real populist purposes.

Conclusion

Government in Nigeria believes in the virtues of the liberal democratic state. In this political climate, latitude is given to free enterprise for self and national development. The path to this goal is structured on the national policy on education. In this dimension, the Nigerian state does not depart from the colonial orientation of its socio-economic cum political philosophies. It is laudable that government acknowledges both the foundations of the primary level and the relevance of technical skills as pre-requisites for national development. However lofty these goals and strategies, they remain to be seen whether intention will be translated to action through the UBE and vocational strategies enshrined in the Nigerian National Policy on

Education.

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