

# **POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

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## **Abstract**

Education is the major pivot on which the entire gamut of national development is placed in the third world countries. Although western education was introduced into the shores of Nigeria in the 1840s by the Christian missionaries, its growth and development subsequently have been influenced by both political and military leaders from pre-independence period to date. This paper examined the leadership factor in the provision of education in Nigeria and its attendant contributions to national development. Information was collected through secondary source s such as journals, books, newspapers and magazines. Analysed data revealed that some political leaders accorded education its right place in the scheme of social services provided during their tenure. Thus, civilian and military leaders alike established schools, colleges and tertiary institutions with a view to widening access to education and solving problems of illiteracy, hunger, disease and squalor and producing the required manpower for socio-economic, political, cultural, scientific and technological development of the nation. The schools and tertiary institutions established over the years have impacted on the nation's development in terms of increase in literacy rate, improved access to education, production of skilled manpower, improved health services, communication and diversification of economic activities among others. It was however discovered that educational institutions have not made optimal contribution to national development due to limiting factors of underfunding, frequent changes in policy, obsolete curriculum and politicisation of education among others. Based on this, it was recommended that the present crop of Nigerian leaders should fund education adequately by meeting the 26% UNESCO recommendation, ensure that education is provided for all, implore universities and other specialised institutions to embark on research aimed at combating the problem of the nation's technological underdevelopment.

**Keywords:** Education, Development, Leadership, Manpower

## **Introduction**

Formal Education is the pivot on which the entire gamut of national development is based in the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive. The National Policy on Education (2013) defines education as an instrument par excellence for effective national development. To claim that Education is the highest treasure of man is like stating the obvious, the more reason philosophers, and educators have proposed diverse definitions of education and have also highlighted its immeasurable contributions to individual, community or national development.

Western education was introduced to the shores of Nigeria in the 1840s by the Christian missionaries. Their efforts were complemented by the colonial administration which formulated the laws that regulated provision of education throughout the colonial period. Provision of education as a social service came into limelight with the coming on board of Nigerians as administrators at the helm of affairs beginning from 1952. Politicians and some significant individuals have strived to leave behind imperishable legacies through the provision of essential services for their people in the form of health services, training in modern agricultural practice, introduction of cash crop plantation and provision of education among others. Adesola (2010) claims that the primary objective of politics is to render services to the people with a view to improving their socio-economic wellbeing. The quality of service, relevance and benefits which people have been deriving from politics have been contingent upon the political ideology, party manifesto, vision and mission of leaders at the helm of affairs at a given period of time in the nation's political history.

Newman (1997) asserts that leadership is the discipline of deliberately exerting special influence within a group to move it towards goals of beneficial performance that fulfils the group's real needs. The leadership factor is so central to the success or failure of any organisation or nation. Gbervbie *et al* (2013) claim that everything depends on leadership as weak leaders equal weak organisations and strong leaders equal strong organisations.

Political office holders are held in high esteem particularly in the third world countries such as Nigeria because citizens depend on government for the provision of comfort of life in terms of essential social services in the areas of education, health, employment generation and overall transformation of the society.

The two major channels through which political leaders have emerged in Nigeria are through the democratic process of election and military incursion to power via coups and counter coups. Over the years, Nigeria has produced some indefatigable leaders such as the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the late Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, the late Tafawa Balewa and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo among others, whose administrations set a great revolution on course with the introduction of one free education programme or the other.

Since the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigerian leaders have put in place national development plans aimed at transforming the country in terms of manpower, socio-economic, technical and industrial development. The role of education in attaining the goals of national development plans cannot be overemphasized, and this appears to be the rationale behind the provision of free primary education and the huge investment on the establishment of tertiary institutions across the republics. Despite the fact that the provision of education has featured in almost every development plan formulated so far, there is the general feeling among elites that provision of education has not impacted much on industrial and economic development of the nation. This paper therefore examines the contributions of the political leaders to the expansion of educational facilities and its foreseeable impact on national development.

### **Provision of Elementary Education under Successive Administrations**

Nigerians began to take charge of their own affairs following the 1951 elections. Thus, the Action Group formed government in the west, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the East and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) in the North. The regional governments laid premium on the provision of primary education. Primary education is the education provided for children between the ages of 6 – 11. It is the type of education in quality and concept that is given in the first level of education (Yoloye *et al*, 1993). It is the foundation upon which subsequent levels of education are laid. Its goal is centred around functional literacy and numeracy and the inculcation of positive attitudes towards community and national development (Yoloye *et al*, 1993).

Primary education unlike other levels of education has been accorded a pride of place in the scheme of social welfare services provided by successive administrations from independence to date. Nigeria subscribed to the United Nations' charter upon independence in 1960 which guarantees individual right to education. Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." Ever before Nigeria subscribed to the United Nations' charter in 1960, provision of free primary education was one of the cardinal programmes of Chief Awolowo's Action Group – a party that was in government in the old western region. The Western Regional Government enacted the Western Region Education Laws 1954 (no 6 of 1955) which came into operation on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1955. The Action Group policy paper on education states 'Education should be free and compulsory from the age of 5 to 13; that is elementary education of the eight-year course, Infant to standard VI should be free and compulsory. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, 1955, free Universal Primary Education became a reality (Akanke, 2010).

The introduction of the scheme led to a sharp rise in school enrolment. A total of 391,859 children brought by their parents, relations, guardians or by themselves walked into 6,274 schools, enrolled in primary 1 and joined the other children in the upper classes under the 6 years' free primary education scheme (Adesola, 2010). The Eastern Region Parliament enacted its own UPE law in 1953 but modified it in 1954 and 1955 respectively. The Scheme took off in 1957, it experienced so many problems that it was modified in 1958 and it was later virtually abandoned. The Eastern Regional Government Education Law came into effect on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1957 (Osokoya, 2008). The Oldman Commission set up by the Northern Nigeria government in its report in 1960 made proposals for the introduction of Universal Primary Education scheme in the North. This served as the basis for the Northern Nigeria Education Law of 1962. The law recognised a partnership between the government and voluntary agencies for the development of public primary education (Osokoya, 2008).

Though the free primary education programme launched at regional levels achieved varied degrees of successes, it was a bold attempt at setting the nation on the path of monumental development that education could facilitate. On the success and impact of the scheme in the west, Akande (2010) comments thus: *up to the present time, the successful establishment and implementation of the free primary education programme by Awolowo in the western region as far back as 1955 is considered to be a feat and political achievement of monumental value*'

The Military leaders came on board on January 15, 1966 and remained in power till September 30, 1979 in the first instance. The military again struck on December 30, 1983 thus ending the second republic and remained so till 1999. The Military leaders towed the path of providing free primary education for Nigerians. A nationwide scheme of Universal Primary Education was launched on September 6, 1976 by the regime of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd). Ali (1976) in Akinyemi (1982) regards the UPE scheme as the greatest social scheme ever embarked upon by any African government. Also Durojaye (1978) in Akinyemi (1982) expressed the view that the commencement of the Universal Primary Education Programme is a great investment in man.

Some of the succeeding military leaders built on the foundation laid by the Murtala/Obasanjo administration and influenced the course of provision of free primary education through the enactment of relevant decrees to guide its provision e.g. Decree no 31 of 1988 – National Minimum Primary Education Commission (Amendment) Decree 1988.

Some political leaders in the second republic 1979-1983 sustained the practice of providing free primary education in line with their party ideology. In some states of the federation, provisions were made for writing materials and textbooks while the programme was just tuition free in some states. Thus, the banned Unity Party of Nigeria under the sage, the late Obafemi Awolowo extended

the provision of free education programme to the secondary school level in the states under her control (Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Bendel, Ondo).

At the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, the Universal Basic Education programme was launched on September 30, 1999 in Sokoto. The UBE is Nigeria's equivalence of Education for All (EFA) declared at the Jomtien conference in 1990 (Osokoya, 2012).

The Universal Basic Education launched by the Federal Government of Nigeria has the following as its aims; developing in the citizenry a strong consciousness and commitment to education, the provision of Free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age, reducing drastically the incidence of school dropouts and out of school children, catering for them and ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and like skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning (FME, 2000).

Across the republic, political leaders in Nigeria laid emphasis on the provision of free primary education being the layer upon which subsequent layers of education are laid.

### **Leaders and Establishment of Tertiary Institutions**

The strategic importance of tertiary education in the desire to facilitate socio-economic development of the nation, compels Nigerian political leaders to focus on its development. The national policy on education (2013) highlights the goals of tertiary education to include:

- Developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of the individual to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- Develop physical and intellectual skills of individuals;
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction; and
- Promoting national development through relevant high level manpower training.

The desire to have a tertiary institution of university status to produce the required manpower for the nation started long before independence. The Yaba Higher College was established in 1932 by the Colonial administration but Nigeria's foremost nationalists expressed their displeasure with its status on the ground that the curriculum of the college was narrow, inferior and incapable of meeting the needs of the country; that the certificate of the college has no recognition outside Nigeria and that the institution's certificate only qualifies Nigerians as junior staff and assistants in the colonial civil service (Fafunwa, 2003; Taiwo, 1980; Maigida, 2016).

The self-governing status attained by the Regions, Western region (1957), Eastern region (1957) and Northern Region (1959) and the constitutional provision which puts tertiary education on the concurrent legislative list motivated the leaders of

government at regional levels to set in motion machinery for the establishment of tertiary institutions (Yoloye *et al*, 1991). The idea to have a regional university in the West had been long conceived by the Action Group. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1961, the University of Ife bill was introduced in the Western Regional House of Assembly and subsequently passed. On 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1962, the University opened at its temporary site of the Old Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Ibadan (Ajayi and Afolabi, 2009).

Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Premier, Eastern Region between 1954 and 1959 and later president of Nigeria between 1963 and 1966, worked assiduously towards the realisation of the goal of having a University in the then Eastern Region. On 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1955, the Eastern Regional House of Assembly passed the bill to establish a university in the Eastern Region. Azikiwe's greatest educational achievement is the founding of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960 (Enoh, 1990). The University of Nigeria was formally opened on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1960 at Nsukka (Taiwo, 1982). The Ahmadu Bello University Zaria was the handiwork of the Northern Peoples' Congress, the party that was in power in the Northern Region.

The political leaders also utilized the opportunity provided by the 1979 constitution to establish more tertiary institutions in states under their control. The Shehu Shagari led Federal government administration made significant contributions to the provision of tertiary education. Records have it that the administration was instrumental to the establishment of seven new Universities and the National Open University between 1979 and 1983.

The states under the control of the banned Unity Party of Nigeria during the second republic ventured into the establishment of state Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics to cater for the products of their free secondary education programme. Thus, Universities such as Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, Ogun State University now Olabisi Onabanjo University among others were established during the second republic.

Some military heads of state demonstrated an uncommon zeal for the provision of tertiary education. They exhibited this via the enactment of decrees regulating, coordinating and protecting the standard of education. Part of the lasting legacies of military heads of state include the enactment of Decree no 1 of 1974 establishing the Statutory National Universities Commission (NUC); establishment of Students Loan Board (1972); Takeover of Universities Decree and Decree no 46 of 1977 by which the Federal Government assumed control of all Universities. The regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) established the Federal Universities of Technology in Akure, Owerri, Uyo, Minna, Federal Universities of Agriculture and University of Abuja in 1988. The impressive performance of the military in terms of widening access to tertiary education informs Adesina's (1998) position that 'on

*the balance, the Army did far more to expand the educational system and extend educational service between 1960 and 1996 than the politicians themselves'*

The contributions of political leaders to the expansion of education facilities have not been limited to the period they occupied the saddle of leadership. A good number of the former heads of government have taken advantage of the law that permits private participation in the provision of tertiary education to establish tertiary institutions while out of office. Thus, the ownership of institutions such as the Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai; the Bell University, Otta; and the American University of Nigeria among others have been credited to some past heads of government.

Aside from the establishment of tertiary institutions, some political leaders have demonstrated further commitment to the advancement of knowledge by creating the enabling environment for learning to thrive such as the provision of bursary awards and scholarships to students who excel in their courses to pursue programmes both in Nigeria and in other institutions outside the country. Special agencies such as TETFUND were established to provide necessary financial support for the sustenance of public tertiary institutions. TETFUND was established by the TETFUND Act 2011 to fund Universities, Polytechnics and colleges of education. TETFUND makes specific provision for tertiary institutions in areas of development of physical infrastructure, book development fund, academic staff training and development and conference attendance intervention programmes aimed at giving opportunity to academic and non-academic staff of public tertiary institutions to have exposure in their various academic disciplines.

President Goodluck Jonathan's Presidential special scholarship scheme for Innovation and Development was instituted in 2012 for sponsorship of graduates with first class honours degree for postgraduate studies in the top 25 universities in the world (Industrial Leaders Communication, 2014). This is to develop professionals who will serve as agents of scientific and technological development in Nigeria.

### **Education and National Development**

Development is considered essentially to be a human issue; it is concerned with the capacity of the individual to realise his/her potentials and most discussions about the concept of national development generally centre around economic growth i.e. the state of the economy or the production system and progress in business (Osokoya, 2008). The common indices of economic growth are the output of goods and services produced internally by a country i.e. the Gross National Product and per Capital income. National development should however not be seen from a myopic perspective of economic growth alone since scholars have evolved the notion that economic growth would not translate automatically to development and improved living standard. It should therefore be all-embracing and perceived as

covering larger areas of political, social, cultural, scientific, and technological advancement over a period of time.

According to Ajayi and Afolabi (2009), national development entails better living conditions for all citizens, individuals living healthier, happier and more comfortable life, sound education and enlightenment among the populace, improved transportation and communication systems, scientific and technological advancement and gainful employment for all citizens. Alolor (2014) defines national development as the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare by providing social amenities like quality education, portable water, transportation, infrastructure and medical care.

Development in any nation depends to a large extent on the quality of human resources available to coordinate other non-human resources to bring about development. National development can therefore be viewed as the development of a nation's human and material resources and education is one of the ways to prepare individuals for participation in national development.

### **Some Contributions of Education to National Development**

Although it is not easy to measure contributions of education to national development in precise terms yet there are visible contributions in the following areas:

- Production of manpower: Tertiary institutions in the country have risen to the challenge of producing high level manpower required in vital sectors of the economy for national growth. On a yearly basis, Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education turn out graduates in large numbers in different disciplines such as engineering, medicine, agriculture, accountancy, education etc. The products of the tertiary institutions man different sections of the nation where specialised professional services are required. Blank-Thomas (2018) claimed that Nigeria has produced over 72,000 doctors with about 35,000 of them practising in the country. Nigeria also has about 60,000 lawyers (Anonymous, 2013)
- Access to tertiary education: available education facilities in the formal education sector create the required access for admission seekers to satisfy their thirst for education. Nigeria has about 150 public and private universities with a carrying capacity of about 600,000 students (<http://qz.com>). Although the institutions have not satisfied the need of admission seekers as records indicate that only 26% of 10 million applicants between 2010 and 2015 were able to secure admission. Availability of institutions to train people at locally has reduced the number of those who would have opted to pursue higher education outside the country and the capital flight that would have accompanied it.



- Literacy rate: there has been steady increase in literacy rate in the country. Adult literacy rate in Nigeria stands at 59.2%. Higher literacy rate translates into increased awareness in human rights, civic duties and political participation among others.
- Improvement in gender access to education: At the basic education level, records show that as at 2015/2016, enrolment rate for boys was 52% against girls' rate of 48 % (FME,2017). This no doubt is an indication that the gap in boys' and girls' access to schooling is being closed. The obsolete cultural practices that hinder girls' access to education are being jettisoned as awareness of the benefits of girl-child education increases.
- Political participation: Nigeria has had twenty years of uninterrupted practice of democracy 1999-2019. This could be an indication of political maturity. There are equally noticeable changes in the composition, formation, structure and running of political parties compared to what transpired in the first republic. Political parties today are more national in outlook and membership cuts across ethnic, religious or regional boundaries. There has also been steady increase in the number of women appointed into political posts at the federal level. In 1999, Obasanjo appointed nine women into his cabinet, Yar'Adua appointed seven, thirteen formed part of Jonathan's 42-member cabinet and Buhari appointed six in 2015 (Suleiman, 2015).
- Revolution in the field of Agriculture: Universities and Agricultural institutes in the country have introduced innovation into the cultivation of certain crops in Nigeria such as cassava, rice, yam etc. such that Nigeria is now the largest producer of cassava in the world among other breakthroughs in the field of Agriculture.

### **Inhibitions to Educational Institutions Contribution to National Development**

Researchers and Educationalists expressed the opinion that there is hardly much correlation between the number of tertiary institutions and national development. Adesina (1998) describes the history of the Nigeria education system as one of growth without development. He identified four key diseases that make development difficult if not impossible to attain. The diseases according to Adesina (1998) are increasing but economically inactive population, large scale unemployment and underemployment of the products of the educational system, neglect of agriculture and mass movement from the villages to the towns.

Proliferation of universities has brought in its trail reduction in quality due to poor or overstretched facilities, inadequate instructional resources among other things. Maigida (2016) claims that "our educational system over the years has experienced phenomenal expansion in terms of enrolment figures without a corresponding

increase in funding and provision of facilities, There are poorly stocked libraries, inadequate laboratories and equipment, poor condition of service prompting brain drain and poor quality of teaching resulting into poor quality of graduates especially in science and technology.

Nigeria is lagging behind in compliance with the 26% of national budget UNESCO recommendation to education as a result, tertiary institutions are faced with problems of inadequate access, infrastructural decay and unsteadiness in the educational system. This has affected the educational system to the extent that in April 2015, UNESCO listed Nigeria as one of the countries unable to meet the six key educational goals between 2000 and 2015 in 164 countries assessed. The six key educational goals in the millennium development goals include enrolling all children in primary schools, halving adult literacy and ensuring that girls have equal access to schooling (Okobi, 2015).

The poor culture of accountability that characterises politics at the national level has reared its head in our educational institutions. This poor culture of accountability has put educational institutions management at loggerheads with the staff unions occasionally resulting in protracted strikes and closure of schools. This has taken its toll on maintenance of infrastructure and the quality of education being provided in tertiary institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Education in Nigeria remains one of the social services which political leaders have demonstrated varied degrees of commitments to in terms of budget allocation, formulation and implementation of policies, provision of essential instructional resources and welfare of workers. Political leaders in Nigeria, civilians and military, have made substantial provisions for the education of her citizenry through the launch of UPE, UBE, establishment of tertiary institutions, enactments of laws or decrees to regulate and maintain the quality of education being offered. The leaders' commitment to the provision of education has translated to increased literacy rate, promotion of unity among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria, improved healthcare services, near equality in boys/girls access to education, production of manpower that mans different sectors of the economy. This is however not to deny the fact that development in the areas of science and technology still falls below expectation despite the high number of tertiary institutions. For the nation to attain its goals of development, the present crop of leaders must invest more in education in terms of funding, provide opportunity for all to be educated, pay deserved attention to welfare of workers, make provision for indigent students in terms of bursary award and fund research adequately at tertiary education level.

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