*Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.3 No.2 June, 2020; p.g. 285 – 290; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)*

# POLITICIZATION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND ITS EFFECT: THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract**
*Politicization of Education is as old as the introduction of education in Nigeria. Successive governments in Nigeria have been drawn to this ugly incident through different steps which include the quota system in the education of people into the nation's universities, application of quota in elevating lecturers to professorship using different standards by different universities, unnecessary application of politics in the area of accreditation of courses and upgrading of Colleges of Education to degree awarding status and even mature programmes among so many other contending issues. The resultant effect of all these becomes the lowering of education standards as emphasis is focused on certificates. From the angle of religion, it is also clear that some programmes at the tertiary level of education may have been instituted to satisfy the desire of the clergy, religious bodies, would-be evangelists and imams in the society. Programmes like diploma or degree in church management, evangelization, faith-based groups, communication to mention but a few are such examples. This work takes a look at the level of politics in our educational development and growth.*

**Keywords: Education, Politicization, Effects, Religious Perspective, Nigeria.**

## INTRODUCTION

Education is often used as a pawn in the process of politicking. Politicizing education in Nigeria occurs in two forms: Firstly, before 1960 when ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria were allowed to define political and educational system while Christian missionaries introduced western education in the south.

Lenses (2013) noted that Universities which were established to enhance national cohesion in Nigeria and named after the area they are situated has gradually assumed political identity by changing the names of the Institutions after prominent individuals mostly deceased in the areas. Recent examples are the renaming of University of Ife to Obafemi Awolowo University, Federal University of Technology (F.U.T) Yola, to Modibbo Adamawa University, Federal University of Agriculture Umudike in Abia State to Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Government ownership of many primary, secondary and tertiary institutions made their policies and politics to directly affect appointment, promotions, remunerations, funding, calendar and curriculum differently because of direct bearing of government influence on them. An example is federal character policy for appointments and admission in the process of campaigning for votes. But when they get to power, one is left to wonder if they have any idea about the challenges in the education system.

Government does not incorporate researchers in planning and process of governance because they pay lip service to educational needs of the people. Great scholars are confined to the ivory towers where their research will have no effect on the wider society. Public figures are invited to present lectures in academic and social gatherings just to attract their benevolence. Honoray degrees are awarded with flagrant abuse to politicians for financial gains. Lecturers dissatisfaction is easily described by politicians as opposition to government.

Strikes, therefore have remained the order of the day. In 2013, University lectures stayed at home for more than six months Polytechnic Lecturers in 2014 went on strike for a long time. Education is too important to be toyed with by politicians especially if the country's aspiration to be among the leading nations in the world is to be realized.

### Educational Policy during the Colonial Era and Elements of Politics therein

The colonial administration was never interested in the educational development of Nigeria. She never saw the need for an educated Nigerian to be helpful to himself and to the nation beyond certain limits. Nduka (2015:3) captured the above fact in these words: The western education which was given to Nigerians was one calculated to produce Nigerians destined to serve in subordinate positions as clerks, artisans, assistant engineers, dispensers under European supervision.

The curriculum of education at the time was shallow in content since the aims and objectives were centered on services to the colonial administration and the church. The politics in such a shallow educational plan was highlighted by flaws and multiple problems. Smyke (1973) argues thus:

> Through church and school, Christianity spread. The expansion of Christianity was going on simultaneously with the pacification of Nigeria and the

> establishment of a colonial structure of administration. Education was left to the missions, its objectives were to Christianise African children and supply a clerk class to function within the administration.

In the same vein, Ukeje (2008) quoted Margaret Reed (1972) in a report that "education of dependent people was for the purpose of their successful exploitation by more advanced economies". Ukeje, went further to argue that:

> It is questionable whether the colonial system of education was designed to guide the colonial people to self government or even for their special improvement invite of the fact that under the system, education was entirely divorced from the life of the people, the schools imparted knowledge with little understanding. They taught the student what to think but not how think. Thus, the pupils learn to memorize but not to digest, to repeat but not to reflect and to adopt rather than to adapt.

Continuing, Ukeje (2008:60) opined that contrary to the policy set down by the advisory committee on education in British tropical dependencies, the pupils were taught to reject their own culture, the healthy elements of which could have been conserved and adapted for the betterment of the peoples. It was thus established that as far as education was concerned, the colonial administration played politics with education in Nigeria. In fact, Aristotle (384-322Bc) defined politics as a natural tendency of human being which cannot be avoided. He went ahead to say that it is an aspect of life known as political life. It relates to elements of power, decision making, policy regulation and allocation of resources. Speaking further on definition of politics, Mitchell (2013) saw it as collective decision making or policy making common to the whole society. These definitions are very appropriate in this study.

**Post Independence Educational Policy**

As should be expected, those who formulated the educational policy for Nigeria at independence were the product of the system of education described above. There was no doubt that policies formulated at the initial stage were not adequate. In fact, the leaders at the time formulated and implemented policies that were practically and theoretically irrelevant to the needs of the generality of Nigerians. Thus, instead of the emergence of true Nigerians what we had from the onset were Europeanised Nigerians (Hassan, 1998). This state of affairs did not argue well for the nation's educational development. It is also a truism that politicians did not hesitate in turning our education into one of the instruments of strengthening their economic base. According to him, they siphoned most of what was meant for education to private pockets. It is through this means that education became one of the most lucrative ventures in the country for although votes were allowed for education yearly in the annual budget, highly placed individuals in government including local government education authority bosses diverted such vote. The consequence of this is that education became an industry where investments turned out to be material reward in place of qualitative manpower badly needed by the country. Usman (2000) laments that this situation has deprived the nation of education needed to ensure survival in this predatory and turbulent world.

Apart from the above, another area where politicization of education is clear is in educational policy. Reasoning along thus line, Opara (2005) observed that:

> The strongest evidence of politicization of education is the instability of policy by subsequent governments since independence, such policies leads (sic) to establish numerous institutions in the country as well as different structural educational systems beginning with 7- 6- 2 -3 to 6- 5- 5 -2 -3 and most recently 6 -3- 3- 4 systems, the last of which emphasizes self employment of its products.

Each of the above systems was made to appear reasonable to the ordinary person but along the line the political motives for introduction were clearly seen. In January 1995, Universal Primary Education was introduced in the Western Region and in 1957, the Eastern Region joined the race. The North did not emulate the examples of the Western and Eastern Regions. This was because of the large area of the North and the low density of the population in the area. The effect of this inability of the North to follow the rest led to a gap. Although the Northern Regional government in February 1961 invited Mr. H. Oldman, Chief Education officer in Yorkshire to study the possibility of the introduction of Universal Primary Education, it was not possible for the North to meet the pace set by the other Regions.

These two regions also were ahead of the North in the production of grammar school, secondary modern school, and secondary commercial school graduates. This was because the products of universal primary education who were many were admitted into such schools. The first higher institutions were also established in the south. For instance, the higher College, Yaba was formally opened in 1934 with other tertiary institutions in 1984 and 1960. Ahmad Bello University was established much later as one of the five premier Universities.

Soon after the established of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to oversee administration of students into tertiary institutions, quota system was introduced as a means of offering admission to candidates into Nigerian Universities. With this method, admission was no more based on merit. Also for the purpose of bridging the educational gap, nomads' education commission was established to take care of the education of normads' in Nigerian.

Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced nationwide in 1976 to ensure mass literacy. The programme failed because there was poor preparation. Politicization of education in Nigeria got to its peak in the university education. Some universities have programmes called mature programmes. These programme are embarked upon to satisfy the educational quest of the aged especially the politicians and the wealthy in the society. Half-backed individuals got degree certificates, they contest elections at all levels of governments not minding that they lack training in character and learning.

Some universities also run satellite campuses all in an attempt to make money. The National Teacher Institute, Kaduna in all corners have centers for the production of grade II teachers. Similarly, the institute has designed programme for the production of half backed NCE teachers. Graduates of this programme emerge after four long vacation contacts at the various centers nationwide.

The politicization of education in Nigeria has watered down the standard of education in Nigeria. As Udaya (2005) rightly put it, politicization of education has been the main factor responsible for poor performance of our education system which has failed to produce the right political culture and leadership that will mobilize the human and nature resources of the country towards national development.

**Religious Perspective**

In the area of religion, there are clear evidences where unnecessary politicization had taken place derailing germane educational policy and programmes. There are a number of tertiary institutions in the country that are owned by the missions which have refused to follow due process in the course of admission of students due to unnecessary politicization. There are several tertiary institutions in Nigeria where prospective students are given admissions without participating in Unified Tertiary Matriculation Exam (UTME). This is a clear case of cutting cuts to have students in such schools. These are also situations where these mission schools ask people who participated in JAMB with zero serve to come and start school. The question that begs for answers is where do the standards lie. Such institutions have sacrificed merit at the altar of mediocrity because certain high profile persons in the religious circle are involved.. This scenario equally happens in the area of course accreditation where the National Universities Commission may overlook excellence and transparency because it involves Religious body. Politics has also appeared in the area of appointment, recognition of achievement, honourary awards, and even the management of these schools. It is for this reason that some persons find it rather difficult to recognize certificates from such schools owned by the mission.

It is no longer news that schools that lack the basic needs now rush into new programmes without recourse to laid down procedure. A situation where a school that is less than four years first degree programme and a masters degree programme calls for proper scrutiny. This is no longer news in our society. Mission schools run several programmes without recourse to the expected standards. When laboratories are lacking, qualifies lecturers are lacking not to talk of libraries, yet new programmes are introduced. Though, this may not be peculiar to all the mission schools alone, it is more pronunciation in mission schools.

Politicization of education is not new in Nigerian environment. This is so because even the missionaries did not on the onset give the citizens all round education. They were merely prepared to become teachers, catechists, clerks and junior officers in offices. The introduction of universal primary education in the western region and later in the eastern region placed both regions ahead of the North. Through politicization, the resultant educational gap was filled on the long run.

**The Way Forward**

In view of the adverse effects of politicization of education, the following are suggested as the way forward.

a). Education policy should be pursued with every amount of seriousness. As a result of this, educational policies should be constantly reviewed to fall in tandem with a changing society.

b). Federal characters and quota system should not be used as a yardstick for admission into the institutions of higher learning. There is no longer any educational gap to be filled hence the need to maintain standard.
c). Universities and other tertiary institutions should be properly funded.
d). National universities commission should be alive to her responsibility.
e). Universities should be restrained from cheapening their degrees to the highest bidder.

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