

POLITICS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper critically analyzed the concepts of education, politics and leadership which are considered necessary for national development. Education is a tool for socio-economic, political and cultural transformation of the citizens for social consciousness and social re-awakening. Nigeria needs what education can offer in the area of political participation and democratic governance with a view to guaranteeing the rights of citizens and the assurance of social justice and equal educational opportunities. The paper concludes that the tripartite relationship between education, politics and leadership is a key to national development. It further recommended that leadership studies, political studies and history of education studies should form part of the national curriculum in Nigerian education. Also, the paper is of the view that appointment to leadership positions should be based on political education, leadership training and leadership knowledge.

Keywords: Politics, Education, Leadership, Nigeria, Opportunities

Introduction

Educational thinking involves some conceptions of goals and purposes. As a distinct human activity, education is not only concerned with providing a means for survival, but is seen as a tool for more enriched life, better use of leisure time and improvement in social, political and cultural life of a nation. Karpowicz in Okere (2018:16) defined politics as “The ability to actualize a good life for the society”. To achieve this goal, the citizens should be taken care of and made to become partners in the social, economic, and political life of the society. It also means that democratic structures should be entrenched, expanded and revitalized to ensure the welfare of the citizens. In the spirit of the foregoing, Nwaokugha (2021:42) notes as follows:

A good political education can enhance a people's political participation and by extension influence general decisions that can impact positively on the lives of the people by mobilizing them for

political action during elections through their votes. A good turnout and massive support for candidates whose political manifestoes guarantee environmental justice, human rights, basic human freedom and empowerment of the people can change policies in favour of the people without the barrel of the gun or any physical force.

Over the last two decades, politics in Nigeria has become a mere shadow of itself. Political actors have turned the nation into a “winner-takes-all” affair. There are cases of frequent infractions on the rights of the citizens, corruption among the high and the low, insecurity in all its ramifications and general poverty ravaging the citizens. Suffice it to say therefore, that this ugly situation requires a good educational system to provide the right caliber of human and material resources to deal with the ugly side of politics in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Nigeria is said to be practicing democratic governance. That means, politics in Nigeria should provide the people with opportunities to achieve free and equal access to education. The Nigerian philosophy of education attests to this observation when it avers that: education is an instrument for national development and social change; education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society and education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society, (FRN, 2013:6).

For Uchendu in Abigali and Ameh (2022:158), politics is concerned with the art of advancing the temporal welfare of community organized as a state. This translates to the rights, responsibilities and duties of the citizens to each other and to the state which is made possible through a good system of education.

In view of the political system in Nigeria which is acclaimed to be democratic, it is expected that learning in the school system should promote an atmosphere of non-restrained contextual freedom to promote arguments without the fear of systematic or institutionalized consequences. Furthermore, democracy should allow for mass participation of school children in matters affecting their welfare. Hart (2013), shares this view that democracy in educational contexts depends on the active participation of the people involved in such a way as to promote processes of knowledge sharing and collective decisions that result in a deeper and more meaningful understanding of participation in practice. Another basic principle in the analysis of democratic politics refers to pupil's abilities to practice democracy. This will be demonstrated through one's abilities to express oneself and to formulate one's own arguments in a clear and convincing manner. That suggests why democratic skills (Kahne & Westheine, 2014), democratic habits (Hanser & James, 2016), reasoning skills and critical democratic thinking (Kovac, 2018) are necessary ingredients of democratic politics.

Education is a process of human development. The activities of education translate to the production of acceptable, self-reliant, dependable, effective and efficient human beings.

To realize the above objectives, education should be capable of transmitting from one generation to the other, the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which would enable the individual to live in and to serve the society for its continued existence.

Dewey in Okere (2018:2) believes that:

All education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consequences of the race. This process begins unconsciously at least at birth and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education, the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together.

By implication, education is responsible for providing the vast human and material resources for political mobilization, problem-solving and socio-economic liberation in the global campaign against poverty reduction and improvement in societal well-being. Dewey (2016) is optimistic in the ability of an educational system to yield the needed solution to the nation's socio-political and economic quagmire. For him, education is experience. This experience is based on continuity and interaction so that the resulting experience becomes an educative experience. To make the educational system worthwhile, Dewey suggests that learning experiences should be based on the child's interest and needs.

As an advocate of experimentally based education, Dewey is of the view that an experience-based education would lead to the following:

- a. Problem-based learning;
- b. Emphasis on individual independence;
- c. Emphasis on individual communication skills;
- d. Emphasis on individual discussion;
- e. Learning by doing and;
- f. De-emphasis on theoretical education.

The above stipulations are consistent with educational leadership. Leadership is concerned with mobilizing and motivating a group of people towards achieving a common goal. Educational leadership bestows on the leader, dominance and prestige and the ability to direct and assist others in order to achieve the group's goals. Hallinger and Murphy (2015) believe that effective educational leadership should be based on a network of functions and processes. For them, the functions of educational leadership are namely; defining the mission, managing the instructional programme and promoting a positive school climate. For Tolutope and Muhammed (2014), leadership in education means always keeping the leading of students as the goal; keeping up on the latest knowledge in teaching, motivating, content and organizational theory; providing a professional content that allows and obligates teachers to do what they know is best for their students' learning. This means that one must do everything that is possible in assisting teachers to perform effectively their jobs.

From the foregoing, the typologies of educational leadership can be classified as follows: Democratic leadership, laissez faire leadership, charismatic leadership, situational leadership, and autocratic leadership style. In democratic leadership style, the educational leader carries the members of the organization along in the decision-making process. Their ideas, opinions and suggestions are welcome and their constructive criticisms are looked into before taking decision. The leader allows group discussions in which he plays an active role. Decision-making process is participative and supportive to goal achievement. The laissez-faire leadership style is leader-less. The leader assigns tasks to members of the organization but is not bothered whether the task is performed or not. He does not care about rules and regulations. A great deal of freedom is allowed to members; there is lack of cohesion and loose structure. Hence, the task is seldomly completed. Charismatic leadership relies on the personal charisma of the leader-communication skills, persuasiveness and influence in order to motivate the members to tasks achievements. He is energetic and seeks the commitment of the group members to goal achievement. The situational leadership is based on the situation or circumstances of the organization which determines the action of the leader. In autocratic leadership, the leader determines all policies, techniques and functions. The subordinates have little or no say in the administration of the group. The administrator insists on strict obedience of rules and regulations and members are grounded on fear, intimidation and force.

Relationship between Educational Leadership and Politics amidst Challenges

Educational leadership embraces a network of functions and responsibilities on the part of the leader which helps him to galvanize the group members towards goal achievement. The leadership tasks are namely: motivation, job classification, staff orientation, staff development and staff supervision and assessment. Motivation is carried out in the school system by providing the means for goal achievement and by relying on the feedback mechanisms. Closely related to the above function is job classification and specification where the new staff is assigned to specific job area based on his specialization and interest area. In staff orientation, the school head introduces the new staff to the system and this helps to minimize frictions between the staff and his job environment. Staff development according to Adesina (1992) can be approached from four angles. These are correcting staff deficiencies observed during the time of appointment, enabling the teaching staff to adjust properly in his work place due to innovations in the school curriculum. Staff development encourages non-professional teachers to professionalize while the professional teachers are encouraged to acquire higher qualifications for greater job performance and status within the school system.

Educational leadership is closely related to politics. A nation's political system is the mechanism by which the government of the nation carries out its functions to the members of the society. Education teaches politics and political philosophy. School children acquire political attitudes and values, and are enabled to take part in their country's political system. Schools are therefore training grounds for those who go into politics while the political

actors or the government provides the financial and the material resources for running the school system with the proper knowledge, skills and attitudes which are acquired during the education and training programme, a nation's political system can be guaranteed to be stable and efficient. The reverse is the case when there is unstable politics and confusion.

There are other areas where the school and the government are related. Children are members of various family groups and ethnic societies. They receive training right from their homes on cultivating good health and security attitudes and on civic education like obedience to rules and regulations. This informal education is transferred to the school system; which enables them to subject themselves to school laws and regulations. Consistent with the foregoing, an educational leader should be abreast with the fundamental rights and privileges of staff and students in the education sector which include:

- a. Right to peaceful coexistence and inter-dependence;
- b. Right to fulfill individual interests;
- c. Right to participate in decision-making and;
- d. Right to freedom from torture (Nwagwu in Nwosu, 2013:195)

These legal provisions should guide the educational leader to base his decision-making cognizance of the rights and privileges of both staff and students. The school administrator should also be careful to guarantee freedom of thought, conscience and religion as provided in section 37 of the Nigerian constitution (Nwosu, 2013). School heads are guided against imposition of a particular belief system on both staff and students or the imposition of unreasonable punishment. These acts constitute serious infringements on the fundamental human rights and on his right to dignity and protection from torture (section 33). Nigeria is said to be practicing a democratic political system. This assertion means that democratic discussion should go beyond mere contextual openness and participation, and involve a mode of communication that is based on dialogue and clarity of presented arguments from all involved parties. This corresponds to competent participation according to Schnack (2008). In effecting communication between the school and the government, that is politics; the type of communication should facilitate the exchange of knowledge and value-based arguments that suppress extreme individualistic position and replacement with collectivistic consensus.

Englund (2016) believes that the results of such a decision-making process are based on the process of knowledge and value exchange between different participants or groups that initially were perhaps separated due to their having opposing views or perspectives. He also opines that it will lead to deliberative communication which is compatible with basic democratic principles. Simply put, deliberative communication refers to discussions where different views are carefully expressed, and owned positions are formed only after other confronting perspectives are heard, processed and weighed. This process refers to a type of social interaction that is characterized by tolerance and respect, as opposed to established, non-challenged rulings originating from the power invested in predefined authorities.

For Dewey (1963), democratic practice in schools primarily concerns the quality of interactions and the type of relationships within a specific educational context. Dewey believes that freedom of all kinds is essential to democracy, and the cause of democratic freedom is the cause of the fullest possible realization of human potentialities. He is of the view that a society is democratic if it allows individuals to air their views and to establish free consensus whereby there is a flow of ideas, criticisms, dialogue, debate and appraisal of issues in the society which can help to produce a thinking people. He insists that education should be open to all individual as a necessity for democracy. While admitting that conflicts may arise in a democracy because of pluralism, these conflicts in interests and values can be resolved by a method of inquiry, discussion and persuasion rather than by violence. Education in a democratic dispensation helps citizens to cultivate reflective thinking and critical inquiry. With this belief, Dewey notes that the school curriculum should be socially relevant such that it contributes in making children active members of a democratic society. To do that means that school children should be able to see the differences between the supposed ideas of democracy and social reality.

Nigeria's engagement in education is aimed at integrating the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizens at all the levels of our education system. To this effect, the secondary education system is designed to equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology; foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity; inspire students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and later life, and raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labor and appreciate these values specified under our broad national goals, and live as good citizens. These values and attitudinal dispositions are expected to be inculcated into the Nigerian child for self-development and for societal contribution. As observed by Nwana (2000), good education is defined in terms of its inputs, strong financial and infrastructural provision and a relevant curriculum that meets the ever-changing needs of learners and society. Odeleye and Owoseni (2008) believed that relevant education must be viewed in terms of making the content of education to reflect local economic opportunities and realistic in a manner that graduates of educational system will contribute their quota towards national development. But with staggering financial resources to education, corruption and misappropriation of fund, in discipline amongst the educated citizenry, low teacher morale and policy somersaults, the Nigerian education system is yet to grapple with the recommendations of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for quality education.

Conclusion

Education in its wider perspective is a tool for national development in terms of training the learners to play their leadership roles in the society. The achievement of this task is hinged on a healthy and interdependent relationship between the component parts, which are education, politics and leadership. As pointed out by Dewey (1963:144) :

If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction: if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert lifeless mass. Education must begin therefore with a psychological insight into child's capacities, interest and habits... They must be translated into terms of their social equivalent in terms of what they are capable of in the way of social service.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Appointment of leadership positions should be based on leadership education and training
2. The school curriculum should reflect the study of leadership education, history of education and political education
3. The educated Nigerian should be encouraged to appreciate the interdependence between education, politics and leadership in both private and national life.

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