Institute of Education

University of London

27 January 2010

POLITICS OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION: THE NIGERIAN STORY

By

Pai OBANYA

INTRODUCTION

This presentation is in five parts. It begins with a consideration of Politics and Education. It then goes on to highlight the major features of politics in Nigeria over the years, followed by a discussion of the influences (good and bad) of political power play on Education, and concludes with a case for re-engineering Politics in Nigeria for the benefit of the nation's educational development.

POLITICS AND EDUCATION

Discussions on the politicisation of Education often tend to contrast it with the purely technical aspects of educational development. The message of such discussions seems to be that you miss the point if you mix politics with Education. However, one clear lesson from the analysis of Education as a national development tool is that politics is the starting point of it all. Reflexions on this point have led us to the development of a 5-p chain of the education process (figure one).

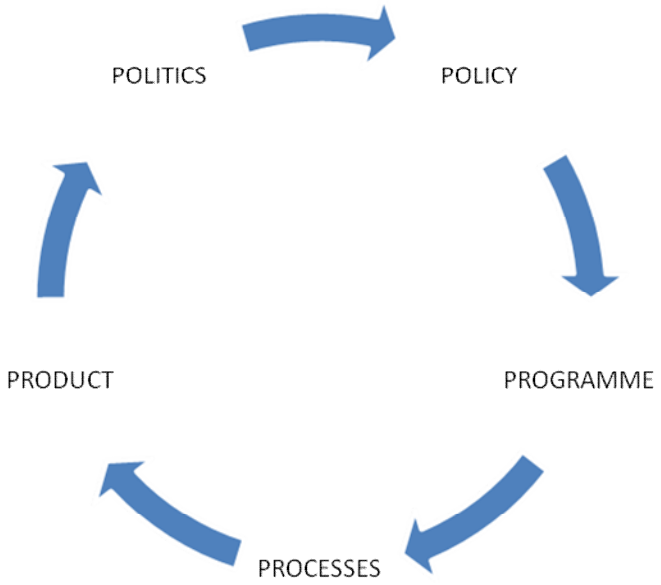


Fig. I: Education as a 5-P chain process

What figure one is saying is that political directions are at the root of education policy, which in turn informs the direction of education programme. The programme is subsequently 'processed' at school and classroom levels, to turn out the required products of Education. In ideal situations, the 5-p would be a continuous process, with the nature of the product leading to constant reviews of all the other P's in the chain.

Experience has also taught us that Politics can be either 'good' or 'bad'. Good politics is to be likened to what the French call 'la politique au sense noble du terme' (politics in the noble sense of the term – or statesmanship) while bad politics is to be likened to 'la politique politicienne' (or mere divisive politicking, or politics in its raw form). Table one shows the distinctive features of these two perceptions of Politics.

Table I: Some distinctive features of good and bad politics

Main features	**Politics in its <u>raw</u> sense**	**Politics in its <u>noble</u> sense**
1. Perception of political power	1. Political power for self aggrandisement	1. Political power for public service
2. The Priority	2. Priority is the next election	2. Priority is the next generation
3. Style of operation	3. 'Rule the people'	3. 'Serve the people'
4. Discourse Mode	4. Since we came to power'	4. 'Since the coming of this administration'
5. Set Goal	5. 'To be seen now and be hailed here and now'	5. To live in people's hearts long after I am gone'.
6. Impact on the polity	6. Political instability	6. Political stability
7. Sum Total (effect on Education)	7. Bad politics; not good for Education	7. Good politics; good for good Education'

.

As the 'sum total' section of table one shows, 'good politics' is needed for good education' while bad politics makes education impossible.

NIGERIAN POLITICS OVER THE YEARS

The Country

What most people know about Nigeria is its physical size and large human population of some 148 million people – Africa's most populous country. It is a country whose greatest wealth is its diversity, in terms of people, languages, cultures, ecology, natural resources and geographical features. It is administered as a Federation of 36 states (and a Federal Capital Territory FCT), with each state having a number of local government areas (774 local governments in all). The political joggling of the country also includes the concept of geo-political zones (a lose political grouping of geographically contingent and sometimes linguistic-culture-sharing States) of which there are six -- north west, north east, north central, south east, south west, south-south). The map below shows the country and its political divisions.

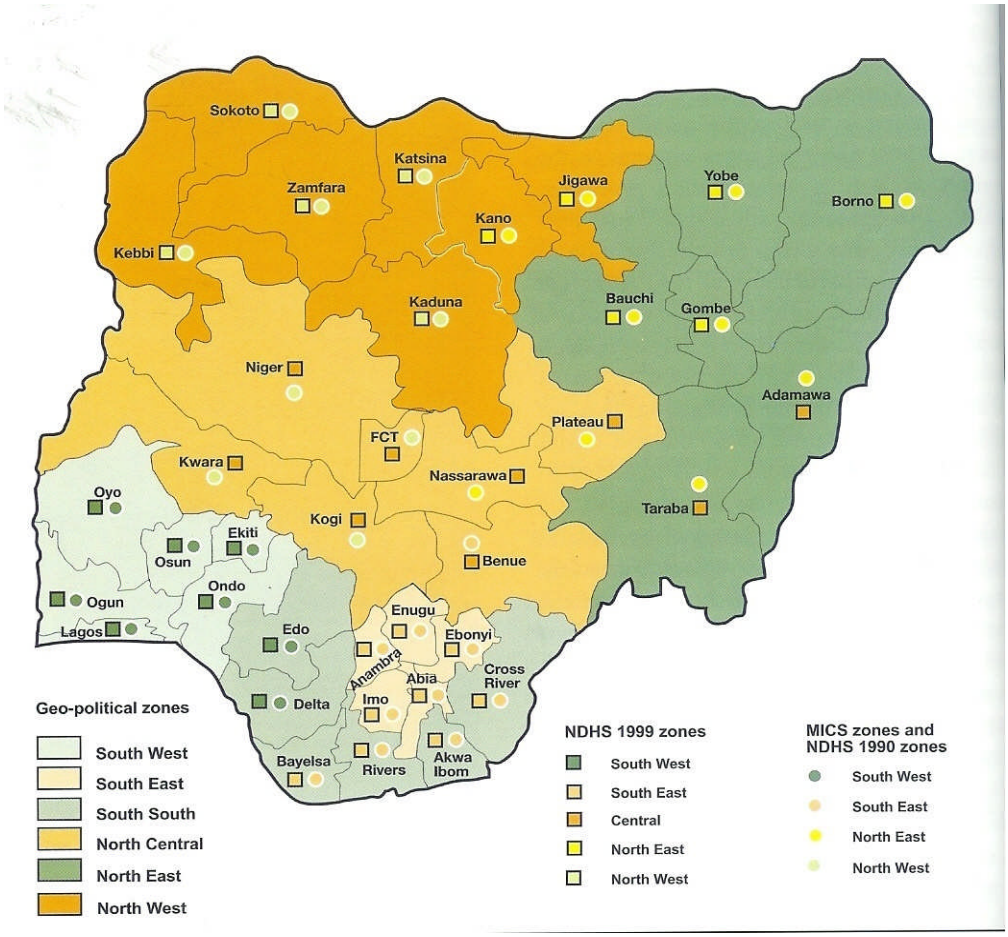


Fig. 2: Map of Nigeria (36 States, FCT and six geo-political zones)

Nigeria is also known as a potentially rich country and is a major exporter of petroleum. Its 'huge human potentials' have remained under-developed while its huge earnings have not translated into improved living standards for the people. That explains the country's low rating on most of the indices used for UNDP human development reports (table 2).

Table 2: NIGERIA – Selected Human Development and Human Poverty Indices

Index	Value	Ranking (out of 182 countries)
1. Human development Index (HDI)	0.511	158
2. Life Expectancy at birth (years)	47.7	167
3. Adult Literacy (% of age 15 and above)	72	112
4. Combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	53	150
5. GDP per capita (PPP US$)	1,969	141
6. Human Poverty Index (HPI)	36.2	114 (out of 135 countries)
7. Possibility of surviving till age 40)	37.4	146
8. Adult Illiteracy	28	112
9. % lacking improved water source	53	142
10. Proportion of children underweight for age	29	112

Politics in Nigeria

Pre-Colonial Nigeria

The numerous communities that occupy the geo-political space now known as Nigeria have always had political organisations and Politics in the sense of sheer struggle for power and in the form of using power to for social good has always been part of the life of the people. While many of the early social and governmental organisations remained 'fragmented' at the village, town and clan levels, a good number got established as kingdoms, while some expanded to become empires (the Hausa states, the Fulani, Ife, Benin, Oyo, Nupe, Wukari, Kanemi-Borno, Borgu, etc) that were both economically and militarily powerful and wielded enormous local and regional influence. The 'fragmentary' states operated a kinship system in which the elders of the community played a regulatory role. The kingdoms had largely hereditary kings who were supported by chiefs to whom specific portfolios were assigned. In some cases chieftaincy positions were also hereditary. The empires had a wider expanse of territory with vassal kings in charge of specific provinces and with strong combat-ready armies.

The Colonial Period

British colonisation began in the middle of the 19th century with progressive 'pacification' of traditional territories that subsequently came under a 'Protectorate'. Early in the 20th century, the entire geographical space was occupied by the British and administered as two different 'countries' – the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The two were 'amalgamated' into a single Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914.

The British colonial government recognised the diversity and plurality of Nigeria and accorded a degree of respect to the cultures and traditions of the various communities, including traditional systems of government and forms of politics. This was perhaps the reason for breaking the country into districts, with a group of districts constituting a division, and a group of divisions constituting a province. There was also a geographical grouping of provinces into Eastern, Western and Northern.

The British also instituted a system of Indirect Rule, meaning that the traditional systems of government and social organisation continued to function. Thus, 'native' courts co-existed with British-type judiciary, as did Muslim Sharia courts. The Native Authority (often under the headship of traditional rulers) was the grassroots level of governance. Nigerian indigenous languages were used in local administration, in native authority courts and in public enlightenment campaigns and in the early years of formal education.

Islam (as a religion and as a way of life) was well established in the north eastern and north western zones of the country and had fairly deep penetration into the north central and south western zones. British colonial government did not do much to interfere with well established Islamic practices, particularly the judicial and education systems that had gained grounds well before the advent of colonial rule.

While recognising and respecting the ethnic and cultural diversities within the country, British colonial rule did bring in some unifying factors. First among these was communication by rail, road and telecommunications. Second, was a national security force (The police and the army). Third, was the civil service. Fourth was the rise of coastal and inland cities that brought people from different parts of the country living and working together. Fifth was the use of the English language for administration outside the native authorities, as well as in schools (beyond the very early years); thus giving the country what is now called its 'national language'. Thus, the British enforced a 'one Nigeria' concept while according a pride of place to local differences in culture, language, religion and socio-political organisation.

The years immediately following the Second World War (1939-1945) saw the rise of nationalism in Nigeria as well as in other parts of colonised Africa. Initially, the anti-colonial movement was a unified force seeking political independence for the country. It was also broad-based in that it included labour, Youth and the local elite classes of the time. It did not respect ethnic boundaries. For this reason, and because a strong 'wind of change' was already blowing all over the colonial world, the anti-colonial movement was able to progressively wrest political power from the British in the decades of the 1940s - 1960s.

Nigeria during this period witnessed intensive political mobilisation of its indigenous population. There was the rise of political parties whose agitations led to the abolition of special privileges for Whites (e.g. the change from 'European Reservations' to 'Government Residential Areas' change of 'European Hospitals' to 'Senior Service Hospitals'. More and more Nigerians rose to European (senior) positions in the civil service, the Army intensified the training of Nigerians for the officer corps, and there was a progressive increase in the participation of Nigerians in the national legislative council.

A three-region structure came into being in 1952, the same year as the regional elections that ushered in Nigerian-led governments and cabinets. Things then moved fast, with self government in 1956/1957 and independence in 1960

Post-independence Nigeria

Politics in Nigeria since independence in 1960 can best be described as both shaky and unsteady. The shaky start in 1960 was brought about by the revival of ethnic rivalries in the form of party politics. Each of the three regions was dominated demographically by one of the three largest ethnic nationalities in the country (Hausa-Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east, and Yoruba in the west). The ruling party in each of the regions drew the bulk of its membership and supporters from the dominant ethnic nationality. At the same time, each region had a sizeable opposition that was drawn mainly from minority ethnic nationalities on its territory. Thus, there were two levels of bitter power struggle – the struggle for control of federal (national) resources by each of the three dominant ethnic nationalities and (within each region) a government-opposition dichotomy with strong ethnic colorations. In the north, the dichotomy also took inter-religious colorations.

The minority group in each region clamoured for its own autonomous region – an ambition that was often repressed by the dominant party/ethnic nationality, but supported by rival parties from the other regions. These inter-ethnic/inter-regional rivalries shook Nigeria to its very foundations. Conducting a national census in 1963 became an uphill task, as no group in the country found the figures acceptable. The conduct of elections in 1964/65 finally broke the camel's back. Disagreement and condemnations greeted the results, violence and civil disobedience followed, creating an excuse for the first in what was to become a series of military coup d'états in January 1966.

The January 1966 coup also had ethnic colorations. A majority of its perpetrators were Igbo while most of the military men and politicians killed were Hausa-Fulani (in the main) and Yoruba. It was therefore no surprise that a 'retaliation coup' took place in July of 1966. Political dialogue failed to resolve the resultant inter-ethnic skirmishes, and a bitter civil war (opposing the rest of Nigeria against the Igbo-dominated eastern region that had secede to proclaim a Republic of Biafra In May 1967) from August 1967 to January 1970

The period 1967 to 1979 put Nigeria firmly in military hands. The successful prosecution of the civil war helped in 'keeping Nigeria one', while the succeeding military regimes ran the business of the federation in a non-federal style that tended to weaken the constituent states. From three regions in 1952, the country moved to four in 1963 (with the creation of a Mid West region). Just before the outbreak of the civil war in 1967, the federation was 'split' into 12 states. The number of states was increased to 19 in 1976, to 21 in 1987, and eventually to 36 (and a federal capital territory) in 1991.

While the creation of 36 states (and of 774 local governments) was intended to 'bring government closer to the people' it has had the undesired (perhaps, undesirable) effect of severely weakening the constituent units of the Nigerian federation, while over-centralizing real power at the federal level.

Military regimes also introduced the practice of decrees, edicts and directives ('with immediate effect') in place of political dialogue. Opposing views were often stifled, or at best simply ignored. Virtually every aspect of national life came under direct government control – banking and insurance, the mass media, etc.

The high point of centralised federal was power revenue from petroleum. A revenue allocation formula that gave the bulk of what is known as 'federally collected revenue' - tax on extractive industries, petroleum tax, custom and excise, value-added tax, telecommunication fees, etc) to the central government has tended to deny revenue (and development projects) to the geographical areas that are sources of the revenue. The distribution of revenue from petroleum has remained a sore point of serious national development and political concern.

There was a civilian inter-regnum in 1999 (operated under a constitution presided over by the Military). This was abruptly terminated by the Military in 1983. After a succession of coup d'états, and other faltering political steps, the country returned to democratic governance in 1999.

The ten-year period of unbroken civil rule has had its positive and negative sides. On the positive side, that civil rule has even lasted this 'long' is considered a plus. Civil society groups are beginning to come alive. The press has become more pluralistic, more independent, and more vibrant. Tele-density has improved, due to the introduction of cellular technology. Internet connectivity is on the rise. Above all, Nigeria is no longer considered a pariah nation by the international community and international development assistance and foreign direct investment has been trickling into the country.

On the negative side, Nigeria still has a heavy minus sign. Good politics is yet to take roots. Political discourse is yet to begin to focus on issues. Elections are still 'flawed' and the people feel that their votes do not count. The people are asking 'where does the money go to', as huge earnings from oil do not seem to impact on people's lives. Corruption is still rampant, and Nigeria still ranks high on the corruption perception indices of Transparency International (box one).

Box 1- NIGERIA's CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX

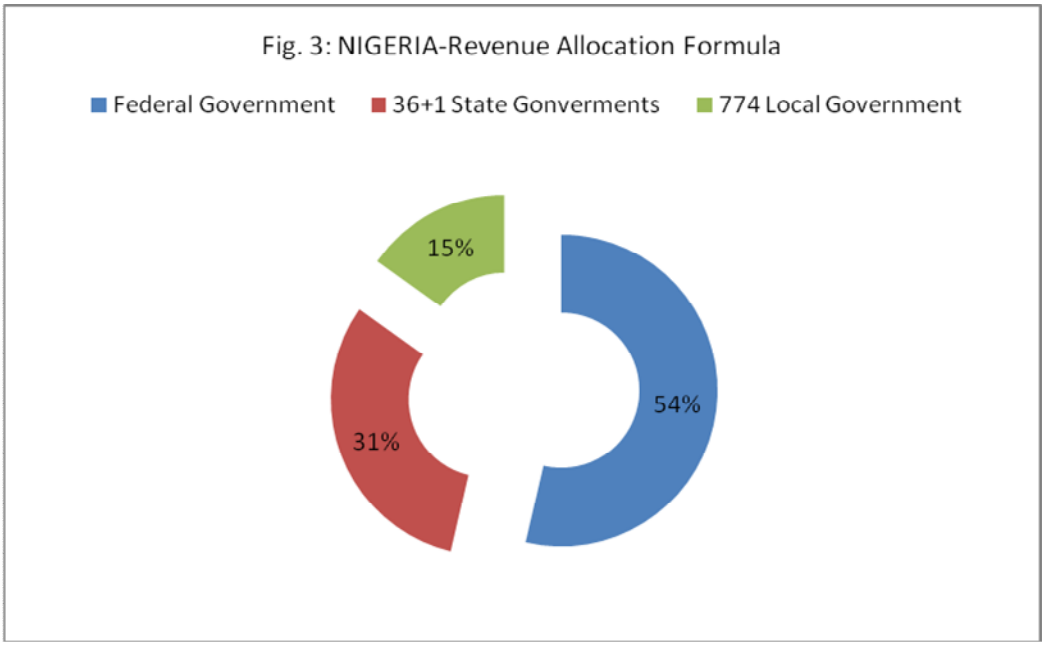
Corruption has increased in Nigeria with the country currently ranking 130th out of 180 countries surveyed in the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI).

Last year Nigeria scored 2.7 points and took 121st position out of 180 countries but this year the country's CPI score dropped to 2.5 ranking at on the same position Lebanon, Libya and Mauritania.

CPI ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians.

Nigeria's CPI index in the span of an eight year period dating back to 2001 did not improve until 2006 when it ranked 142nd out of 163 countries. Before then the country ranked second to last for four years consecutively with its lowest CPI (source: allAfrica.com - quoting DAILY TRUST newspaper – September 2009)

There is everywhere in the federation a call for 'true federalism' – a shift of responsibilities to local and state governments. This goes along with a call for 'fiscal federalism' – a change in current revenue allocation formula that is heavily tilted towards what has become known as the 'federal might' (figure 3).



The lowest point on Nigeria's negative political score is the deepening of inter-ethnic and religious intolerance. This has led to recurrent cases of civil unrest and violence in the past ten years, particularly in the northern part of the country.

The Niger Delta, where the bulk of Nigeria's oil is produced, has also been a theatre of violence. This is due mainly to prolonged neglect of the region by successive governments. Political solutions are currently being applied to the situation and these seem to be working. Efforts would need to be made to ensure appropriate follow through actions. One also expects that good politics would be installed as a means of securing sustainable peace in that region.

The sum total of the politics on Nigeria's in the post-independence era is one in which Democracy is yet to take firm roots, one in which old ethnic and religious loyalties are still strong, one in which political discourse is yet to address issues of national development. It is above all, a good example of an imperfect and lop-sided federation in which decentralisation is yet to translate into de-concentration and devolution of powers.

POLITICS IN NIGERIA AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Access to Education is to be seen as society providing all citizens full opportunities for lifelong learning (ages 0-99+ opportunities). Our stand in this presentation has been that societies governed by good politics are more likely to provide such opportunities than those in which bad politics reigns. Nigerian politics has passed through several phases, as shown in the last section, and is characterised by some degree of complexity. The strong entrenchment of ethnic and religious loyalties in situation in which national cohesion is needed is one aspect of the complexity. Lack of popular participation in a political process classified as multi-party democracy is yet another aspect. Yet a third aspect of the complexity is one in

which a federation is characterised by over-centralisation of power. And, a final item in the list of complexities, the north-south divide in Nigeria has remained a stark reality, even though both sides were amalgamated by the British way back in 1914.

All these complexities – and more – have had some impact on the development of Education in Nigeria, and on Access to Education. For ease of presentation, the impact will be discussed in the chronological sequence in which the politics of the country was discussed in the last section.

Colonial Education Politics

Christian missionaries had penetrated the coastal regions of Nigeria before the advent of colonial rule, and were able to penetrate most of the southern and the non-Muslim sections of the North by the decades of 1920-1940. The Christian push into the hinterland led to the introduction of 'western' education in all areas of missionary activity. There were varying degrees of resistance to western education, but it progressively gained roots as those who benefitted from it became the new elite of colonial Nigeria.

In the core north of the country, Islam had gained ascendancy for centuries and there were strong traditional forces to back up the religion and its form of Education. The British authorities played the good politics of not interfering with the status quo. Missionary schools were supported in the south, while a Native Authorities controlled the few western (but not Christian) schools in the North. There was also no interference with the well entrenched Islamic education system of the North. In addition, children of the indigenous elite of the north were made to benefit from both Islamic and western-type education.

The impact of this good politics has not been that good. It has created an 'uneven educational topography' in the country. This phenomenon was captured in an earlier discussion on a related subject in the following words

> 'The result is that what has become known in the discourse on education in Nigeria as 'educational imbalance' is not simply a pedagogical issue but one with strong political undertones. Education power has to some extent translated into economic power, and a very strong current in Nigeria's political power play has been how to avoid a situation in which all the powers (educational, economic and political) are enjoyed by (or vested) in the same geographical zone.
>
> This political gimmick has been translated into educational policy in two ways: the classification of some parts of the Nigerian federation as 'educationally disadvantaged States' and, related to this, the adoption of a quota system (better known as 'federal character') for student admission to federal government institutions. Federal character is also in force in every other aspect of national life, it is a

feature of the constitution, and there is a Federal Character Commission to enforce its provisions'[i]

British politics of Indirect Rule – not upsetting the apple cart of traditional political systems – had its impact on social cohesion. The village, town and clan solidarity mechanisms that pre-dated colonisation became a strong force among groups that migrated from one part of the country to other parts, to take advantage of the new economic opportunities brought about by colonialism. This phenomenon was a common feature of the Igbo, the Efik, the Izon and other south-eastern communities, whose 'town unions' became a strong force in spreading western education. This self-help spirit was capitalised upon by successive post-colonial governments. By allowing the existence of what was known as 'voluntary agency schools', some of which received government subvention following strict quality and performance guidelines. The spirit has however since died down due to some bad politics to which we shall return later.

British colonial politics also attempted to reach out to the people through a selected elite that was to be educationally well groomed, exposed to British standards but not to be 'assimilated' as the French attempted to do in their colonies. For this reason, the expansion of educational opportunities was at a rather slow pace, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. For the same reason, standards were relatively high; schools cared for the head, the heart and the hands. What was perhaps the best result of this good politics was that most western educated Nigerians remained culturally Nigerian. This has remained a major character trait of Nigerians.

The bad side of this political move should not however be ignored. There was some education 'thirst' (social demand, in professional parlance) that was not quenched, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. As a response to this unmet social demand, secondary commercial and vocational schools sprang up in the major cities of eastern Nigeria, in Lagos and parts of today's south western zone. These were however accorded a lower status than conventional 'grammar schools'. In the 1970s, the 'commercial' schools fell into the mainstream education structure, as their products fitted more neatly into the private sector job demands.

The politics of educational elitism was most evident at the tertiary sector. For example, the University of Ibadan, founded in 1948 as a College of the University of London, offered – up till 1962 – only a conventionally narrow range of courses in the Arts and the pure sciences, Medicine and Agriculture. Only a fraction of eligible students got admitted, as competition for entry was keen.

In this particular case, the positive side must be heralded. The University of Ibadan, largely because of its world class standards (staff, programme, products)

was well regarded internationally. In fact, the University still carries its good name, even in these days of battered fortunes.

The Post-Colonial Experience

The immediate post-colonial years allowed the new leaders of Nigeria to practice the politics they had preached in their criticisms of British colonial rule. The period also witnessed increased political rivalry among the three regions and the three major ethnic nationalities in the country being manifested in nearly every aspect of national life, including the politics of educational development.

A prominent feature of education politics during this period was Free Primary Education of 1955-56-57. It was presented as a desirable gain of independence. It was also an enactment of regional political rivalry, attempting to show which part was providing 'life more abundant' to its people. It operated according to peculiar regional circumstances. In North, education was free, both neither universal nor compulsory. In the East, it was bandied as a vote-catching slogan, but was quickly abandoned apparently for lack of 'resources' since the term was interpreted narrowly to mean financial resources. No account was taken of political and social will as important resources.

The West was able to tell a success story of its free primary education programme, for reasons that we have highlighted elsewhere, as follows:

- As part of the ruling party manifesto, the electorate was aware of the scheme long before it became official government policy
- The formal proposals came, as a bill, before a regional assembly that had a very strong opposition. It was therefore subjected to wide ranging debate
- The citizenry had already embraced western-type education and saw its advantages, especially for the upward mobility of the younger generation. Support from the citizenry was assured
- The scheme brought schools nearer to rural and urban slum communities
- The Western region was the richest region in Nigeria at the time and therefore could fund the programme
- There was some thought given to what would happen to the children after primary education, as there was an upsurge in the number of secondary grammar (5-year classical programmes) and secondary modern (3-year general education) schools. Local communities and voluntary agencies (mainly religious bodies) were fully mobilised for this purpose
  There was also an upsurge in the number of teacher training institutions, to train teachers rapidly (mainly in 2-year post-junior secondary colleges) to cope with the envisaged increase n enrolment.[ii]

Nigeria's new political parties (at independence) were critical of the colonial University of Ibadan for being elitist and for offering a narrow range of courses. The government of Eastern Nigeria was the first to attempt an alternative (American) higher education model, with the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka on Independence Day in 1960. Nsukka opened its doors to a wide number of students with a wide range of courses in fields that Nigerians never

thought of (psychology, sociology, Education, engineering, architecture, journalism, home economics, accounting, etc). The response of the other two regions was to establish their own universities two years later– Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria by the North and University of Ife by the West. A second federal university also came on board in Lagos the same year (1962), bringing the total number of universities to five

This good politics was beneficial to the nation in a number of ways. It absorbed a couple of thousands of university-ready students who had been denied the opportunity for higher education. It led to the introduction of new courses that were needed in the fast growing public services. The new universities strove towards international standards bringing in experienced staff from Europe and America, and training their Nigerian staff in the most prestigious universities abroad. There was some serious planning (based largely on the manpower approach) – a task led by a renowned education economist, Harbison), and expansion was more or less measured. There was above all a clever political balancing act that enabled each of the three regions of the time to own and run a University. These regional universities were in fact open to all Nigerians (staff and students), even though student enrolment showed a preponderance of peoplefrom its proprietor region.

However, this politically well intentioned and well engineered development was to set the scene for a phenomenon of undue proliferation in later years. Bad politics was also to infiltrate the system later, often leading to ethnic polarisation of staff and students and government assault on university autonomy.

The intervening military years (1966-1979; 1983-1999) witnessed military-type politics guiding the development of Education. There were however some instances of good politics by the Nigerian Military that stand out as distinct points in the evolution of education in the country, and these deserve due recognition.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education was developed under the Military. It was published in 1977, after wide-ranging stakeholder dialogue that began in 1968 with a national curriculum conference. The policy document was supported by detailed implementation guidelines developed with external technical assistance. There was also a technical secretariat to monitor its implementation. It has been subjected to revisions by successive governments and has remained the major education guidelines instrument for the country. Its political credential is that it was an integral part of efforts at re-building Nigeria after the civil war and was for that reason closely linked with the national development plan of the mid 1970s.

In spite of this unique evidence of good politics, educational development in the military years had its bad political application side, characterised by the following features, which we shall discuss in turns

1. Military-type unified command structure
2. Proliferation of higher institutions
3. Misapplication of the federal character principle
4. Detachment from the people
5. A Cult of Inefficiency
6. Assault on institutional autonomy

Military-type unified command was exhibited in the progressive take-over of state (regional) higher institutions by the federal government. It was always not a case of negotiations, or the states declaring their inability to run the institutions concerned. The federal authorities would declare a 'take over' creating panic among staff and students and taking a number of years to clean up the mess so created.

Proliferation of higher institutions: As the number of states grew, so did the number of higher institutions. The development of such institutions relying on reverse-order planning, some home work after the emergence of the institution, rather than planning before take-off. Most of these institutions get bogged down with internal wrangling for power, and intrigues geared at attracting the attention of political leaders, while academic issues occupy a back seat

'Federal Character' is Nigeria's political invention intended to give each section of the country a sense of belonging. At the federal level, positions are 'zoned' to specific geo-political zones. Within the states, the senatorial districts (of which there are three) become the parameter of zoning. In education development terms, federal character is used to determine the location of institutions, the headship of institutions, the distribution of staff, the award of scholarships, the distribution of facilities, etc. It does often create a sense of 'this is ours' in Nigerian communities; just it also creates a feeling of 'we are being cheated' in others. In almost all cases, complaints about being cheated never stops and Merit is often neither recognised nor promoted.

Detachment from the people is the major characteristic of non-democratic regimes. It is a practice that abhors people's participation. Political management of education by the Nigerian Military progressively replaced stakeholder consultations by military decrees and edicts. This is the origin of today's practice of 'sensitising' the people to accept an already packaged programme, instead of carrying them along during the process of its development. It was also a major explanation for the very limited success of the UPE (Universal Primary Education) programme that the Military floated in 1976.

A Cult of Inefficiency – Unbridled expansion in the military years led to the rise of over bloated bureaucracies and the proliferation of executing agencies (para-statals) of the education sector, often with conflicting roles and interests. It has also led to a situation that emphasizes merely spending on Education (dwelling on white elephant projects and servicing the bureaucracy), instead of investing in education (channelling resources on those things that would make a difference – teachers, pedagogical materials, infrastructure, etc)

Assault on institutional autonomy- The military's 'joint command' approach was extended to the education sector in the years following the civil war. It began with universities being brought into the public service salary structure and pension scheme. It then continued with government having the last say in the appointment of Vice Chancellors. And, with new universities springing up all the time, government did appoint the pioneer vice chancellors. The move then went on to deny university lecturers the right to negotiations and being ordered out their campus homes in 1975. This was followed by the 1976 mass sack of academics (as part of a national public service purge). The process continued in a variety of forms throughout the years of military rule.

Politics of Access to Education in the last ten years of unbroken civil rule

Politics, in relation to access to Education in Nigeria since return to civil rule in 1999, seems to have borrowed heavily from the politics of old times, right from the pre-colonial period. Old ethnic and religious loyalties, which oftentimes mean divisive politics in the context of building a modern nation, are still a fact of national life. This is often nicely expressed as the politics of equal sharing of the national cake, and giving practical expression in the 'zoning' of political posts. Thus, since 1999, the post of Minister of Education has rotated between the South West and the South East, while that of Deputy Minister (Minister of State) has rotated between the North East, the North West and North Central. Experience and competence have not often been considered as worthwhile criteria, and orderly development of Education has been the victim.

Political instability over the years has contributed to retarding national development, including the development of Education. Instability has also meant frequent changes in policies as well as in the movers of such policies. In the education sector, the head of a para-statal recently expressed deep frustration in 'working with eleven ministers and 14 permanent secretaries in the past eleven years'.[iii]

The minister who was in office from 1999 to 2001 was preoccupied with seeing through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. His successor was more concerned with ensuring the take off of the National Open University. His successor focussed on curriculum reform and the review of the National Policy on Education. After him came a minister who vigorously pursued structural reforms of

the sector, an effort judged as taking on too many tasks in a single swoop and not involving stakeholders fully[iv]. The minster who came after that was pre-occupied with 'reforming the reforms', while the minister currently in post has as pet project a national educational 'Roadmap' project.

Over-centralisation was a creation of the Military and has raised the spectre of 'true federalism'. It is characterised by the federal government dictating to the states and leaving very little room to the local governments to attend to socio-economic needs at the local level. Its other characteristic is for the federal government to blame state and local governments for the failure of initiatives that are not theirs.

Most of the education initiatives of the federal government since return to civil rule have failed to respect the true federalism principle. For example, the Universal Basic Education programme of 1999 was first launched by the federal authorities before being introduced to the states. The first draft of its enabling law actually specified what was expected of the states, including ways of going about this, instead of leaving such decisions to the states. This 'intrusion' was partly responsible for the delay in passing the law by the federal parliament.

With the reforms of 2002-2003, the current education sector road map, and the curriculum review efforts. Federal authorities took the initiatives, and then sold these to the states, which were expected to 'buy into them'.

Reverse-Order Planning involves taking a firm decision on an educational initiative and insisting that 'there is not going back', before any form of planning. This was the fate of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, for which no measurable targets have really been set and for whose implementation there is no efficient structure

Proliferation of institutions has continued, mainly for the old reason of 'fair geo-political spread', and often without any rigorous test of viability. For example, on the surface, private participation in the provision of higher education is good politics. In the Nigerian case, the weight of the private sector has attained some 30% (figure 4), but this only in terms of number of universities. It has nothing to do with broadening access in terms of increased opportunities for higher education, especially for the poorer segments of the population. Neither have there been increased opportunities in terms of range of courses offered.

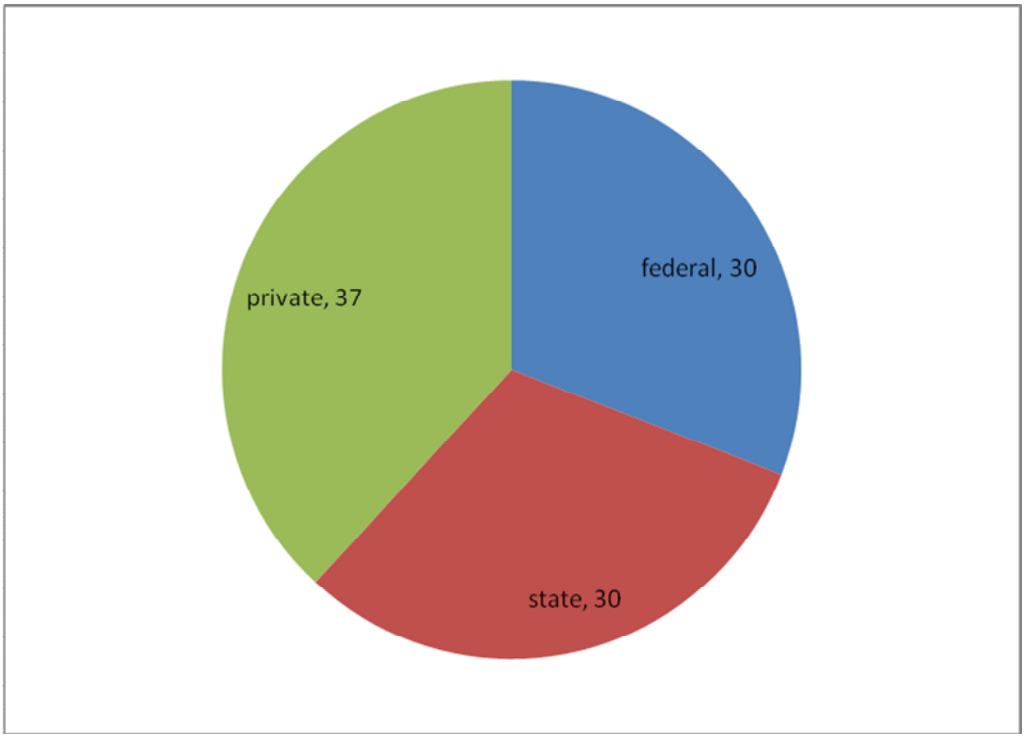


Fig. 4: Ownership of Nigerian Universities

Some prominent features of politics in Nigeria are at play in the proliferation of universities. First, 'federal might' must be felt in all parts of the country, while the location of institutions must reflect 'federal character'. Second, each state while ostensibly trying to meet social demand for higher education of its citizens, also sees the possession of a university as a political status symbol. Third, the ownership of private universities must reflect diverse political interest groups – Christian groups (different denominations), Muslim groups, business interests, cultural groups, powerful political forces, etc. In the final analysis, it is genuine access to university education that suffers.

Population censuses are a part of the political power play in Nigeria. Census figures are fiercely disputed as each group sees itself as 'undercounted and other groups 'inflated'. Since high figures mean improved shares of the 'national cake', accurate statistics is a rarity. The problem becomes really compounded when funding of government programmes is the issue. There are therefore hardly any accurate figures on the funding of education in the country. Every tier of government claims to be spending a 'huge chunk of its annual budget' on Education, but the question that is being raised by the people is 'where does the money go?

There is a growing feeling that the political governance of Education (ministers and their entourage, board members of parastatals and governing councils of government institutions) is beginning to 'chop' a huge proportion of the money

voted for Education. In situations of good politics, more of the financial resources could have gone to teacher development, infrastructure and teaching-learning resources (the red sections of figure 5), thus giving prominence to 'spending on education, as against the prevailing politics of merely 'investing on education.'

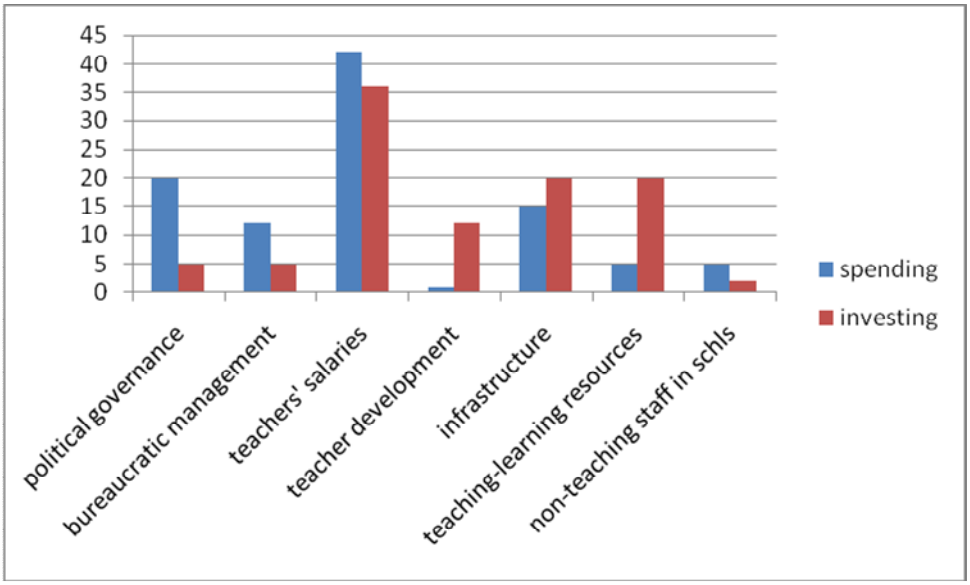


Fig. 5: Differences in the use of funds in situations of 'spending' in and 'investing' in Education

One major heritage of old political times (especially colonial and immediately post-independence times) is self-help, which is closely tied to community involvement. It was a heritage that helped the development of grammar school education in western Nigeria. It became well entrenched in the life of the Igbo, through their town and clan unions, that gave financial and material support to Christian missionary education endeavours and also established and managed independent schools for Igbo resident in northern Nigeria.

The self-help/community participation zeal was lost to the bad politics of the post civil war military regime. Government saw the takeover of non government schools as key to its efforts at promoting national unity. In some cases, government changed names of schools (in the mid west region, for example) to permanently erase the memories of their original founders. Government political message at the time was 'government can do it all alone'. The result was total abandonment of responsibilities by parents and communities. The present civilian government has since been preaching another doctrine, that of PPP (Public-private-partnership). It has given directives for enforcing school management committees (SMCs) in schools, but public reaction has at best been lukewarm. This is because the bad politics of 'free education at all levels' of most state governments is not understood to include any form of contribution (funds, materials, ideas, labour, etc) by parents and communities.

Table 3: NIGERIA-EFA Score Card

Index	Rank/Score
1. Overall EDI rank	111 (out of 129)
2. EDI score	0.734
3. Primary NER	0.696
4. Adult Literacy	0.691
5. Gender Specific EDI	0.81
6. EFA Index	0.822
7. Survival Rate to Fifth Grade	0.726

In summary, Nigeria's education politics has changed very little over the years. The return to democratic rule does not seem to have erased the political memories of the past. Regimes may have changed but the political players have not.. Reforms have been introduced in different directions, there have been increases in numbers, as well as increases in spending but the demand for education is has not been sufficiently stimulated; where demand has been stimulated, it is yet to be met. This conclusion is well captured by the 2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report, as summarised in table three above.

CONCLUSIONS: DEVELOPING GOOD POLITICS FOR THE BENEFIT OF GOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's wealth is neither agricultural products, nor solid minerals, nor Oil. Its wealth is the People. Denied access to Education, the country's huge population becomes a mere crowd; but empowered through unfettered access to Education, the population becomes the country's major resource. Education is the key to transforming the huge population into the solid intellectual and skills base on which Nigeria's possible participation in the knowledge economy of the present century can be premised.

A paradigm turnaround from bad to good politics would be the beginning of wisdom here, and the task that lies ahead should involve the following political-type concrete steps

1. Electoral reforms, to reduce the incidence of flawed elections, to ensure that the people's votes really count, and as a first step in the emergence of governments that would reflect and represent the people's will

2. Good governance that enshrines accountability and espouses a philosophy that public office is to be held in trust for the people.

3. Return to 'true federalism' – eliminating over-centralisation and giving strong political and financial muscle for the management of basic human development needs to local and state governments

4. Drastically reducing wastage and corruption in the entire system, to release energies and resources for genuine national development endeavours.

Such political-type reforms would provide more fertile ground for the development of education, where the major focus should be on strategic planning and the development of strong institutions for educational service delivery, particularly at the local and state levels. Access to education is best assured in a situation in which Education just doesn't happen; that is, one in which Education is planned and managed.

There is also the need to capitalise on established/inherited traditional institutions, like the British colonial government did. These are the most effective mobilisers to stimulate effective demand for Education. They are also efficient monitors of programmes, as well as the viable channels through which the authorities can get to the people.

Social organisations, like the town unions among the Igbo, the trades' guilds among the Yoruba, the Islamic clerics and powerful traditional rulers of the North do wield strong political influences in the country. They will have to be used to bring back community participation in the development of Education.

Coming down the purely technical dimensions of educational development and service delivery: planning, curriculum development, teacher continuing professional development, etc,) there is need to 'democratise' the process by really involving (not merely consulting or informing) all classes of stakeholders.

Finally, Nigeria must eliminate 'census politics' from the Education. Orderly development of Education cannot take place in situations of either absolutely no data or the prevalence of unreliable/unusable data

NOTES and REFERENCES

[i] Obanya, Pai and Binns, Felicity (2009): UPE and UBE in a Federal System-What happened in Nigeria in Bown, Lalage (ed.): Maintaining Universal basic Education-Lessons from the Commonwealth, 80-101

[ii] Op. Cit. – page 87

[iii] Interview with Pro. Taiwo Ajayi, Diector of the national Institute foe Educational Planning and Administration (8 January 2010)

[iv] Obanya, PAI (2007): Education Sector Reform in Nigeria: A change Management Challenge- UNESCO-Abuja publication