

Impact of Unregulated Privatization of Education in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Lead City University- National Universities Commission Dispute

John Kalama

*Department of Political Science,
Bayelsa State College of Education, Brass Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

Charity E. Etebu

*Department of Business Management
Bayelsa State College of Education, Brass Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

Charles A. Martha

*Department of Geography
Bayelsa State College of Education, Brass Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

Sophia M. John

*Department of Economics
Bayelsa State College Of Education, Brass Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

Abstract *The proliferation of private institutions (Nursery, primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions) throughout the country coupled with frequent closure of schools prompted this research. The findings in this study show that the privatization of education that took place between 1980 and 1990 through the granting of private licenses to individuals was done indiscriminately without proper supervision and monitoring. Further investigations show that the beneficiaries of the privatization exercise are either serving or retired senior public office holders. Thus, making it difficult to ensure compliance (standards). The study also reveal that while monitoring, regulation and control of tertiary institutions in the country is effective through the National Universities Commission (NUC), regulation and control is completely absent at the nursery, primary, and secondary school levels. However, the systems political theory was applied while explaining and analyzing the subject-matter. In terms of methodology and scope, descriptive analysis and secondary sources of data (textbooks, published articles and journals) were relied upon. Nevertheless, cases of unrest and other forms of crisis facing the education sector in Nigeria can be minimized and curtailed if the government (local, state and federal) through its regulatory agencies (ministries, departments, boards and commissions) conducts regular and periodic evaluation and supervision of existing private schools and institutions throughout the country. This will no doubt ensure compliance, prosecution and revocation of existing licenses of schools and institutions that fail to meet approved standards.*

Keywords: *Private institutions, Privatization, Education, Private licenses, Supervision, Monitoring, Private schools, and Tertiary institutions.*

Introduction

The educational system in Nigeria is faced with series of problems ranging from policy inconsistency, unregulated proliferation of private schools, colleges and universities. The teachers too are also poorly paid and motivated that they have no option but to become emergency businessmen and women. It is on record that successive administrations have also played bad politics with various polices that have not really advanced the cause of education in the country. Thus the problems and consequences generated as a result of the federal government's privatization of education in Nigeria forms the major thrust of this paper.

Methodology and Scope

This aspect of the study provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Most of the data used for this study were culled from published scholarly works (textbooks, published articles and journals) and descriptive analysis. Although the paper is centered on the impact and consequences of the federal government's education policy (privatization of education) in Nigeria, it was limited to the Lead City University-National Universities Commission (NUC) dispute.

Theoretical Framework

The systems political theory was applied in this study in order to explain the problems facing the educational system in Nigeria. The theory deals with interrelationship and interdependence among individual, groups, institutions and sub-systems or environment. The Nigerian State clearly represents what system scholars describe as input, output, feed back and conversion box which is the regulatory mechanism. According to system scholars, input here refer to actions, contributions and demands while output represents reactions from the political system (government) that gets to the people in form of projects and policies through a process called feedback. The decision of the federal government in the 1980's to privatize education by granting operational licenses for the establishment of private schools, colleges and universities in the country represents an input of government while the proliferation of schools and institutions coupled with abuse and non-compliance by private operators which has led to frequent closure and industrial unrests in the sector also represent what is regarded as output. Advocates of the systems theory further argue that with good policies and programmes in place through an effective input and output process, conflict and industrial unrest within any political system will be minimized. The theory is relevant in this context because any unchecked conflict in the education sub-sector could spread and constitute a threat to other sectors and the entire political system as a whole. Proponents of this theory include David Easton, John Locke, Almond and Verba.

Summary of the General Objectives of the National Policy on Education.

The federal ministry of education bulletin (2007) listed the following as the general objectives of the national policy on Education.

1. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
2. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria nation.
3. The training of the mind in understanding of the world around, and finally
4. The acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competence (mental and physical) as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society, community and the nation as a whole.

The policy further divided Nigeria's school structure into the following three stages:

- a. The primary school stage,
- b. The secondary school level, and
- c. The higher education stage (Kalama: 2008P.19).

Privatization of Education in Nigeria and Issues Involved

In spite of the philosophy and good objectives of Nigeria's education policy, access to qualitative education in Nigeria remains a serious national problem. The term privatization refer to the transfer of ownership from the government (public) to private ownership, Thus, privatization of education means allowing private individuals and organizations to own and manage schools, colleges and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is on record that

privatization of education in the country promoted healthy competition but lack of proper monitoring, supervision and control led to inadequate funding, industrial unrest and frequent closure of schools throughout the country. However, the crisis between the Lead City University and the National Universities Commission (NUC) which led to the closure of the Lead City University will be appraised in order to explain the impact and consequences of unregulated privatization of education in Nigeria.

An Appraisal of the Lead City University- National Universities Commission Dispute Over Accreditation

In a newspaper report captioned "NUC directive; Lead City Varsity Postpones Examinations, deploys Riot Policemen in Campus" published in The Punch Newspaper of Thursday, 27th January, 2011, the authorities of Lead City University, Ibadan, postponed the 2010/2011 session's first semester examinations by two weeks. The report shows that the postponement was necessitated by the face-off between the university and the National Universities Commission.

It will be recalled that the National Universities Commission (NUC) had alleged that the university (Lead City) had no accreditation for its law, nursing and post-graduate programmes hence, directed that the Lead City University discontinue the unaccredited programmes without further delay. In addition, the commission warned that it would not hesitate to begin the process of withdrawing the university's operating license if the school fail to show proof that it had discontinued the programmes within six weeks (January 27th-28th February 2011). This development prompted aggrieved students to go on rampage on the campus, destroying school facilities. On the other hand, the university's Registrar, Dr. Oyebola Ayeni, in a press release assured the students that the situation was being addressed and that the presidency and the ministry of education stepped into the matter with a view to resolving it amicably in favour of parents and students. According to the registrar, "students are hereby advised to avoid any inciting actions which may lead to breakdown of law and order that may hinder the positive support that we are getting from the presidency and the federal ministry of education." It is also important to state unequivocally that Nigeria has over 200 private universities including nursery primary, secondary schools and polytechnics throughout the country. Thus, making it difficult for the government and regulatory agencies to ensure compliance.

Analysis Showing the Impact of Unregulated Privatization of Education In Nigeria

The position and views of eminent Nigerians and scholars were analyzed in order to arrive at a justifiable conclusion. In a newspaper report captioned, "primary, post-primary schools, most neglected- NASU", published in The Vanguard Newspaper of Thursday, the 8th of October, 2009, Lagos Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Related Institutions (NASU), stated in Lagos that despite the importance of primary and post-primary schools as the bedrock of education, both were the most neglected in Nigeria. The union therefore called on the government to do everything possible to resolve the industrial unrest in Nigeria universities lamenting that the fallen standard of education was being worsened by the ongoing strike by the university unions. Lagos State Chairman of NASU, Comrade Steve Agboga, spoke at a meeting of NASU members in schools and colleges trade group council, across the country, at the Yaba College of Technology, noted: "primary and post-primary schools are very important sectors not only to NASU but to the world. It is the bedrock of formative education," he stated. I am yet to see any of our leaders who did not pass through primary or secondary education, he asked rhetorically. In a related development, General Yakubu Gowon, GCFR, in a lecture titled "Alarming Decline in Education Standard; Reversing it and Moving Forward", delivered at the 2nd personality lecture of the Afe Babalola University, (ABUAD), Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, on the 21st of January, 2011 and published in The Nation Newspaper of Thursday, the 3rd of February, 2011, noted that consistently inconsistent educational policies have caused a great deal of confusion in Nigeria's educational system. While expressing his displeasure he recalled, "at some point, there

was a policy on just primary education, followed by universal basic education (UBE), now I hear talks of an attempt to once more review the policy," he wondered. On tertiary education, he stated that the proliferation of tertiary institutions in the country has reduced the quality of instructors, given the rate at which universities are mushrooming. Specifically, he cautioned that the time has come, therefore, for all approving authorities, especially the National Universities Commission (NUC) to be more circumspect in granting approvals for the establishment of institutions of higher learning. For institutions to qualify for accreditation, it must meet the highest standard of expectations and excellence right from the start. Education is a good platform to launch the rebirth of our dear nation (Nigeria,) he concluded.

The above position clearly show that the federal government's decision to privatize education in Nigeria led to the neglect of public schools and institutions while lack of supervision, monitoring and control characterized the post-privatization era. The crisis that led to the closure of the Lead City University and several others clearly confirm this fact. The decision to include unaccredited courses like law, nursing and post-graduate programmes in its curricula is also an indication that non-compliance and violation of approved standards by private schools, colleges and tertiary institutions were some of the consequences that characterized the federal government's post-privatization era(1982-2010).

While blaming the policy inconsistency and industrial unrest in the education sub-sector on the character and attitude of political office holders, Dr. Bola Adekola, Registrar of Fountain University in Osogbo, Osun State, expressed concern that politicians aspiring to be president have not really focused attention on what they will do to improve the quality of education at all levels. In newspaper report captioned "How to Improve Education in 2011," published in The Nation Newspaper of Thursday, 6th January, 2011, the registrar re-affirmed his position when he said, I expect education to take the front burner in this year's election as part of issues to be discussed. It is disappointing that those presidential aspirants are not talking about education, he lamented.

Also reacting to the problems confronting the educational system in Nigeria, Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), argued that government needs to play less politics and implement more long-lasting programmes in the sector. He re-affirmed this position when he said "my expectation is that the government should play less politics with education and be more realistic. We should be going into more lasting and holistic rather than adhoc programmes, he advised.

Conclusion

The above analysis clearly show that unregulated privatization of education in Nigeria led to the proliferation of all types of schools, colleges and tertiary institutions throughout the country. Lack of effective supervision and monitoring on the part of the government at all levels also encouraged abuse and non-compliance by private school proprietors. This development as reflected in the Lead City University and National Universities Commission dispute is responsible for the unrest and several other crises confronting the educational system in Nigeria. Since education, especially primary and post-primary education is the bedrock of formative education. Conscious efforts should be made by the government and stake holders in the sector to ensure that there is stability, peace and industrial harmony in the education sub-sector in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will no doubt help to improve the quality of education and learning in Nigeria.

1. Since the problems facing education in Nigeria can not be effectively addressed without revisiting the foundation which is primary and post primary education, there is urgent need to improve the quality and welfare of teachers and lecturers through regular wage reviews, training–retraining and

- award of scholarships and research grants to teachers and lecturers who wish to develop themselves academically.
2. In line with the position expressed by General Yakubu Gowon as sighted earlier in this paper, the National Universities Commission (NUC) and other regulatory agencies should be more circumspect in granting approvals for the establishment of institutions of higher learning in the country. For any institution to qualify for accreditation, it must meet the highest standard of expectation and excellence right from the start.
 3. With reference to the views expressed by Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as sighted earlier in this paper; the government should play less politics in the appointment of people that manage educational institutions and agencies in the country. They should put round pegs in round holes to avoid policy inconsistency and somersaults.
 4. The federal government should ensure adequate funding and infrastructural development in existing public schools and tertiary institutions in order to maintain standards and also enhance the quality of learning and teaching.
 5. In order to check the high rate of failure and poor performance of students in subjects like English language, Mathematics and Science related subjects, there is need for the introduction of instructional technology through the training of some Nigerians who will then return home and impart the knowledge to others.
 6. State and federal ministries of education should ensure periodic appraisal and evaluation of existing public and private schools and institutions in order to enforce compliance. Such appraisals through the setting up of visitation panels and commissions will enable the authorities to revoke licenses of erring schools /institutions and also determine the nature of assistance required.

References

- Achebe, C. (1994) *The Problem with Nigeria* London: Macmillan Publishers.
- Adebayo, A. (1986) *Power in Politics* Ibadan: Spectrum Books LTD.
- Adeayo A. (1984) *Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria* Ibadan: Spectrum Books LTD.
- Adamolekun, L. (1983) *Public Administration: A Nigerian and Comparative Perspective* London: Longman's Group Ltd.
- Collins S.P. (1980) *Administration for Development in Nigeria* London: African Educational Press.
- Elayelagha, M.C (2004) *Politics and Governance in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective* Port Harcourt: Amethyst and Colleagues Publishers.
- Habibu, A.S (1994) *Public Policy Analysis: Theoretical and Applied Approaches* Okene: Desmond Tutu Publishers, Kogi State.
- Kalama, J.T. (2008) *Public Policy Formulation and Implementation in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects* Port-Harcourt: Pearl Publishers.
- "Primary, post-primary schools, most neglected –NASU," in *The Vanguard Newspaper* Volume 25, No. 60950 of Thursday, 8th October, 2009.
- "Alarming decline in education standard: reversing it and moving forward" in *The Nation Newspaper* Volume 6, No. 1659 of Thursday, 3rd February, 2011.
- "How to improve education in 2011" in *The Nation Newspaper* Volume 6, No.1631 of Thursday 6th January, 2011.
- "Poor teaching methodology causes mass failure in Maths-Esindu" in *The Sunday Punch Newspaper* Volume 17, No. 19.627 P.53 of 27th February, 2011.