

DE-REGULATION OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CITIZEN'S RIGHTS TO EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is a social service that is globally recognized as an agent of socio-cultural and political development in all nations of the world. As an agent of social mobility for individuals and groups, education is equally a fundamental human right for all regardless of sex, religion, geographical location, class and political inclination. This was acknowledged and adopted by the United Nations over fifty years ago and Nigeria is a signatory to this resolution. Consequently, all United Nations member states are making efforts through various programmes and schemes to achieve universal education. This paper attempts to analyse the impact of deregulation of education in tertiary institutions on the citizen's rights to education in Nigeria. In order to achieve this objective the paper identified the principles of citizenship right to education, deregulation of education, and the implications of deregulation of education to citizen's rights to education. The paper has offered some recommendations. One of the recommendations is that deregulation must be done gradually in Nigeria in order to uphold citizens rights to education.

Introduction

The right to education is one of the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Universal Nations Declaration of Human

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Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948. A major concern for all nations of the world, since the declaration more than fifty (50) years ago, is to work out strategies for achieving their professed goal of education for all. At the Addis Ababa Conference of African Ministers of Education in 1961, the year 1980 was set as the target (UNESCO, 1961). This was what led to the introduction of Nigeria's UPE scheme in 1976, as one of the steps aimed at translating the various ideological statements into concrete observable action. The primary aim of UPE was to bring formal educational opportunities to the doorsteps of every Nigerian child at very minimal cost to the parents. More recently, this commitment to the provision of basic education for all was renewed at the 1990 Jomtien, World Conference on Education for all, and new vigour, determination and zeal were injected into the movement towards education for all by the year 2000 (Junaid, 1993 p. 145). The federal government of Nigeria in its drive for education for all had to re-launch another version of the UPE scheme known as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 at Sokoto, the same state where the 1976 version was launched.

As a principle, citizenship became a contentious principle at the end of the 20th century. Citizenship is the status of being a native or naturalized member of a city, state or country. It is a position of membership in a country with defined rights and duties. In a country, every citizen has certain rights, one of which is the right to education. With the rapid growth of education demand and the globalization of the world economies, new concepts of education management have emerged. These new concepts have implications on the citizen's right to education, especially in modern times of Nigeria's drive for Universal education, which is basically aimed at the provision of education for all.

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According to Dubey and Barth (1980), a citizen is one who conforms to certain accepted practices, holds particular beliefs, is loyal to certain values, participates in certain activities and identifies with the norms and values of the group. Consequently, a good citizen can only be produced through socialization and indeed education. The responsibility of imbibing a culture of development of the society is basically that of education.

Citizen's Rights to education imply also that the state provides equal opportunities to access to education for all the citizens, irrespective of their family background, religion, sex, race, and place of birth. The right to education for the minority groups and the disabled should be upheld by the state for their induction, initiation and socialization in to the mainstream Nigerian society.

Citizen's Rights to Education

Under a citizenship model, the state is the instrument by which equal rights are gained for all individual members. Citizenship is not limited to the citizen's legal status and the voting right, but it implies citizen's rights in key areas and services such as social and welfare services and more particularly education. The right to education is proclaimed as a basic human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly.

According to Aggraval (1981), education, as a citizen's rights, should develop in citizens' qualities, which are of great importance for them to function effectively and efficiently and of-course take their responsibilities in a democratic society. A citizen should develop intellectual, social and moral qualities in society. Thus, citizen's right to education implies four main principles, namely:

- * The development of democratic citizens
- * The improvement of vocational efficiency among citizens
- * The development of personality among citizens

* The development of the qualities for leadership and followership

The Development of democratic citizens implies the acquisition of certain qualities which in turn provides an opportunity for the production of a culture of development and of the good citizens. The provision of education for citizens is capable of enabling them to have clear thinking, receptivity to new ideas, clearness in speech and writing. In addition, learn the art of living in a community, acquire a passion for social justice, develop the spirit and culture of tolerance, as well as develop the attitude of true patriotism.

Education as a social service is the cornerstone of any social, cultural, political and economic development. The educational system provides basic literacy, socialization, shaping of values and attitude to the needs of the contemporary society. It can also be regarded as a direct and indirect means of training the much needed labour force and therefore is important in manpower planning and fostering social mobility in democratic society.

The improvement of vocational efficiency among citizens simply refers to the function or role of education in the following aspects:

- i. Creating a new attitude towards work by inculcating in the citizens the dignity of work. This could be noticed in the value and importance accorded to the vocational and technical education programmes. This might not be unconnected to the relevance of this aspect of education in the economic and technological development of Nigeria. It will also help in the eradication of one of the most serious social problem of Nigeria. By this social problem, reference is being made to poverty. The provision of vocational and technical education knowledge will provide an opportunity for education for self-reliance and sustainable development

of Nigeria. That is not all; education for the improvement of vocational efficiency is capable of the following:

- ii. Making citizens understand that self-fulfilment and national prosperity are only possible through work and that everyone should fulfil his or her duty honestly, effectively and efficiently.
- iii. Making attempts by the state through education to ensure that attitude of the citizens are in conformity with the norms and values of the school which is a replica of the larger society.
- iv. Promotion of technical skills and efficiency at all stages of educational endeavour, with a view to providing trained and efficient personnel to occupy the different sectors of the economy in Nigeria. Hence pave way for greater development for a better Nigeria.

All these are possible when education is provided to all without prejudices to class, sex and political considerations.

The development of the total personality of citizens is needed for the development of the Nigerian society. Thus, the needs to provide citizens with those qualities that are capable of making them fit and ready for participation in the cultural and political life of the state. This basically connotes that education that is geared towards the development of peoples' personality is relevant in a variety of ways:

- Making citizens through education to know and appreciate their cultural heritage;
- Cultivating rich interest, which they can pursue in their leisure and contribute in later life, for the development of this heritage;
- Giving a place of honour in the curriculum to subjects like art, music, dancing and the development of hobbies;

The development of the qualities for leadership and followership is another principles, Education via schools should train citizens

to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently. They are to be trained in the art of leadership and followership. Citizens are expected to be trained to assume the responsibility for leadership in the social, political, industrial and cultural fields. This is with a view to enabling them assume leadership roles in society as well as learn to follow others. It is generally believed today that leadership calls for a higher standard of education, a deeper and clearer understanding and conceptualization of social issues and greater technical knowledge and efficiency.

De-regulation of Education

According to Uwaiye and Don (2005) deregulation of education means that education is no longer a public good. Its consumption by an individual is now deemed to possibly reduce to amount of good left for others. Secondly, the benefits that an individual receives must now depend on that person's contribution. Deregulation and privatization are two types of freeing or liberalizing of higher education markets. Market is generally seen as a means of organizing the exchange of goods and services based upon price. Dima (2004) perceived deregulation as a process whereby the influence of government has declined relative to the autonomy of institutions and the role of the market.

However, there are various issues regarding deregulation of education. These include cost-sharing, commercialization and privatization, tuition fees, bed space fees and so on. As a basis for generating funds for the universities, government is mandating universities to make more and more money from parents in order to survive. For example Sedov (2004) observed that

On December 1, 2003, President Obasanjo summoned all Vice-Chancellors of Universities and other heads of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to Abuja and ordered them to begin immediately to charge a minimum of N10,000.00 per bed space in students' hostels. Where

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does the civil servant, for example, who earns N5,500.00 (minimum wage) per month, which is not regularly paid, get the money to pay N10,000.00 for each of his three children in the University(p.3).

The privatization and commercialization of our tertiary institutions and universities as a chief source of funding is only capable of leading to the abolition of public universities. The public universities are likely not to survive functionally without a continuous provision of public funds by the government. Funds generated through commercialization cannot fund significant research and advanced laboratories and up-to-date equipment essential for teaching and learning. Moreover, in the real and pragmatic sense, the cost of maintaining a University is gargantuan. This therefore, requires that the funding of the universities has to be from the collective pool of the country's resources. It is pertinent to assert without fear of contradiction that adequate funding of education from the collectively owned enormous resources of the country is never an act of benevolence but rather, an act of social, political and economic responsibility of the state. Let us remember that the provision of education to citizens by the state is a fundamental human right. A duty that has to be performed by the state, hence it is its responsibility.

Implications of De-regulation of Education to Citizen's Rights to Education

As we have seen earlier in this paper, the right of everyone to education as a fundamental human right is clearly stated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. For example, "Everyone has the right to education irrespective of sex, colour, family background, geographical location" (UN, 1948). The citizen's rights to education are fundamental and are the responsibility of the state. Education is sine quanon to the socio-economic and cultural development of a nation. In addition, the

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Nigerian constitution of 1979 (section 18.1) has made it abundantly clear that government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels of our education system. This might not be unconnected with the fact that government has realized the value and relevance of education for development. .

Deregulation implies the privatization and liberalization of education which has serious implications on the citizen's rights to the provision of education in Nigeria, where the Universalisation of education is pursued with vigour. For example, deregulation of education is likely to tamper with the Nigeria's drive for Universalisation of education for all, which is currently implemented. The implications of de-regulation of education to citizen's rights to education cannot be overemphasized.

The commercialization of education may impose an additional unbearable burden on students and parents. The students, who are from poor and working class homes, are likely to drop out of school, as charges in fees in public universities and private universities will be out of reach. This means that commercialization will deny citizens the right to education and make it the property of a privileged few Nigerians. Hence, widening to a greater extent the already existing educational gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

This means therefore, that there are problems associated with deregulation of education. Hartnett (2000) in Kuna (2005) noted that:

The state of higher education in Nigeria is deplorable, indeed scandalous if compared to countries with similar resources and potential. As at 2002 in the basic and applied sciences, Nigeria had only 15 scientists and engineers per million persons engaged in research and development in comparison with 4,103, 459, 168 and 158 for the United States, China, Brazil and India

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respectively. In terms of research, the Nigeria's total output of scientific publications was 711 in 1995, representing a 33% drop from its 1981 output of 1,062. This is a far cry from India's 14,883, South Africa's 3,413 and Brazil's 5,440. This should not surprise anyone at all since priority to basic research has all but been discarded, a fact reflected in the share of the research in the budget of universities which represents a paltry 1.3% (p.6).

Similarly, Fashina (2005) in kuna (2005) maintained thus:

Enrolment into higher education lags behind other countries. Nigeria's enrolment level stands at 4% in caparison to South Africa's 17%, India's 7%, Indonesia's 11% and Brazil's 12%. Budgetary allocation to education as percentage of the total budget also shows a consistent decline sine 1999. Thus while in 1994 budgetary allocation to education was 7.83%, it was 12.96% in 1995, 12.32% in 1996, 11.59% in 1997, 10.27% in 1998, 11.12% in 1999 and by 2004, it has decline to 5.9% i.e. lower than its 1994 level (p.6).

This trend may have negative consequences characterized by social ills or problems. A large population of idle, uneducated youth can cause greater doom for the nation as a whole thereby increasing social insecurity, creating further economic burdens and of-course political turbulence, high number of criminals, area boys and area girls.

The role of the state as the provider of education for all is likely to decline, thereby leading to many citizens to be left uneducated as a result of their financial predicaments. The citizen's rights to education may no longer be upheld as education is been treated as a profit seeking activity. This may also lead to reduction in the quality and quantity of education among citizens. In addition, equal access to educational opportunities for all may

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not be possible. Children from upper classes are likely to get better education than the lower class children, hence, getting better paid jobs and social status. Thereby, compounding the problems and dangers associated with social stratification and education in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The issue of deregulation is one that is being practiced in some countries of the world. However, Nigeria has certain peculiarities and circumstances that may not warrant the successful implementation of deregulation of higher education. Thus, there are many problems and crises that are facing the education system in Nigeria vis-à-vis deregulation of education and the citizen's rights to education. Lastly but by no means the least, are the following recommendations:

1. Deregulation should be done gradually in Nigeria in order to uphold the citizen's rights to educational life chances.
2. Public educational institutions in Nigeria should not be de-nationalized so as to control the education standard and relevance.
3. The education markets (programmes and research expertise) should not undermine national educational initiatives. Therefore, education system should fundamentally reflect the socio-economic and cultural aspirations of the Nigerian society.
4. Government should intensify efforts towards the provision of education for all.
5. Government should strive with vigour in its bid to provide other social services like portable drinking water, electricity, good roads, and fertilizer and so on.

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