

# **The State, Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Some Critical Policy Options**

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## **Abstract**

*The dynamics of sustainable development in the Nigerian state have continued to elicit immense research attention. This paper is critically about the educational variables of these dynamics and the role of the state, attendant thereto. The paper highlights the role of the state in the critical area of education for sustainable development. It interrogates the role of the Nigerian state in education, and proposes policy options for an effective state-participation in education. A major problem of state policies in the Nigerian state was identified in the study, as their verbose documentations. Hence, the paper avoided wordiness in its own propositions. The Nigerian state as a whole, the study highlights, looks down on the teacher. Therefore, the proposed policy options in the paper, simply and squarely border in the first place, on the enrichment of the teacher's status at all levels of education in the Nigerian state. In addition, state policies are recommended to be promoted in the area of entrepreneurship education, which is considered ultimately critical, for sustainable development in the Nigerian state. The study posits that the strategic role of competent and dedicated teachers, who would guide members of the Nigerian state through entrepreneurial education, can not be overemphasized. And until the state encourages entrepreneurial education, the dreams of policies for sustainable development in the Nigerian state would remain pipe dreams.*

**Keywords:** *The State, Education, Sustainable development*

## **1. Introduction**

Nigeria, a developing country, is being confronted by enormous economic, social, political and educational challenges (Salman et al, 2011:1). These challenges, indeed, tremendously affect the national attempts to institute sustainable development. Hence, the dynamics of sustainable development in the Nigerian State, have continued to elicit immense research attention (Akinola, 2006; Anya, 2008; Onuoha, 2008; Ajimotokan et al, 2010; Okonjo-Iweala et al, 2010; Salman et al, 2011; Muoghalu, 2013a; Muoghalu, 2013b; Okeke, 2014). This paper is essentially about the educational variables of these dynamics. In the specific area of education, tremendous research output is equally in existence, on the twin issues of education and sustainable development in Nigeria (see Makoju et al, 2005). However, it appears as if the missing linkage in the translation of the extant sustainable development ideas to effective strategies; is locatable in the role of the state in education. According to Muoghalu (2013a:7), the educational system in Nigeria faces enormous challenges which need to be urgently addressed. Joking with education, Ikharehon (2007:25) argues, is laughter into penury and poverty. The general objective of this paper therefore, is to examine the role of the state; in education for sustainable development in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: (i) assess the role of the Nigerian state in education for sustainable development and (ii) propose policy options for an effective state-role, in education for sustainable development in Nigeria. The methodology for the study is the critical mode of research. Invariably, the theoretical framework for the study is the state-centric theoretical framework.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

### ***The Concept of the State***

According to Barzel (2002:4) the state consists of (i) a set of individuals who are subject to a single ultimate third party who uses violence for enforcement and (ii) a territory where these individuals reside,

demarcated by the reach of the enforcer's power. Laski (2008:25) describes the state as an organization for enabling the mass of men to realize social good on the largest possible scale. Hence, the state exists primarily to advance the course of social welfare (Okolie, 2012:34). The state, explains Marshall (1998:635) is a distinct set of institutions that has the authority to make the rules which govern society. Hence, the state includes such institutions as the armed forces, civil service or state bureaucracy, judiciary, and local and national councils of elected representatives (such as a parliament). Consequently, the state is not a unified entity. It is rather, a set of institutions which describe the terrain and parameters for political conflicts between various interests over the use of resources and the direction of public policy. Frequently there are conflicts over policy and resources, between elected politicians and non-elected civil servants or between politicians in different parts of the state. It is therefore difficult to identify a state's interests, since different parts of the state apparatus can have different interests and express conflicting preferences (Marshall, 1998:635).

Marshall (1998:635) continues: It is also difficult to identify the boundaries of the state. Older administrative perspectives see the state as a clearly defined set of institutions with official powers. Others, including Marxist theorists, question the distinction between the state and civil society and argue that the former is integrated into many parts of the latter. For example, Althusser maintains that civil organizations such as the Church, schools and even trade unions are part of the ideological state apparatus. It is indeed, increasingly difficult to identify the boundaries of the state. Many parts of civil society are given institutional access to the state and play a role in the development of public policy. The state also funds a number of groups within society which, although autonomous in principle, are dependent on state support. In addition, the boundaries of the state are continually changing, for example through privatization (transferring responsibilities from the civil service to private contractors) and the creation of new regulatory bodies. Often, the nature of these quasi-autonomous organizations is ambiguous: it is simply not clear whether they are part of the state or part of civil society (Marshall, 1998:635).

A theory of the state, contends (Laski, 2008:28) is essentially, a theory of the governmental act. The will of the state therefore seems to mean the will of government, as the orders of that will are accepted by the citizen-body (Laski, 2008:29). There is therefore the tendency to interchange the state with the government. Hence, this paper clearly spells out that a state is not synonymous with government. In our application of the state concept in the study, we have taken a comprehensive viewpoint of the concept of the state, as enunciated in the foregoing elucidations.

### ***The Concept of Education***

Education, it has been contended, is a systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture, through formal or informal training of people in a society. It deals with the mental, physical, psychological and social development of the citizens in a given society. The goal of education is manpower development, aimed at national growth and development (Enamiroro, 2007:19). According to Anya (2008:1), education is the fundamental cultural process that prepares an individual to live and work, function and survive in a given society. Anya (2008:3) further conceptualizes education as an instrument for inducing social change. Furthermore, Fafunwa (1983) cited in Enamiroro (2007:19), sees education as all positive efforts, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect, made by a given society to accomplish certain objectives that are considered desirable, in terms of the individual's needs as well as the needs of the society where the programme is based. Enamiroro (2007:19) further cites Ebong (1996) to describe education as a powerful instrument for the development of man and the society. In addition, Muoghalu (2013:4) opines that education is a tool for empowerment, emancipation and national development; that education constitutes one of the critical foundations for any meaningful socio-economic transformation of any country. Hence, education presupposes a comprehensive national system and a functional national structure. Therefore, one thing that education is not and cannot be is a philanthropic handout from state officials to needy citizens. Hence, education and national development are inextricably interwoven (Emeh et al, 2011:35).

### ***The Concept of Sustainable Development***

A proper and purposeful conceptualization of sustainable development would organically relate with the primary concept of development. However, let it be acknowledged instantly that development in human society is a many-sided process (Rodney, 2009:1). Okwueze (2011:80) highlights that development (a prelude to sustainable development) is geared towards the improvement of the standard of living of the people. Development means growth integrated with economic, scientific, political and home based technological expansion (Enamiroro, 2007:19). According to Rodney (2009:1) at the level of the individual, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate - depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one's class origins, and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong. However, what is indisputable is that the achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied-in with the state of the society as a whole (Rodney, 2009:1). It is the state of the society that determines sustainable development.

Estes (1993:1), cited in Nzekwe and Okeke (2014:5) highlights that credit for originating the "sustainable development" concept is generally given to the 1987 report of World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). Popularly referred to as the Brundtland Commission; the Commission's report, *Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World*, called for emboldened and dramatically new conceptions of development that advanced the material wants of the present generation without depriving future generations of the resources required to satisfy their needs. Thus, the Commission conceptualized "sustainable development" rather simply as paths of human progress which meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Estes, 1993:1). Today, the sustainable development "movement" is multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral. The movement brings together specialists from the physical and environmental sciences along with experts in development economics, political science, appropriate technology, human and women's rights, and others (Estes, 1993:7). Despite the apparent simplicity of the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development, the concept itself is rather complex (Estes, 1993:8). This study has not overburdened its concerns with the complexities of the concept of sustainable development. In this study therefore, sustainable development is underscored as human progress which meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Nzekwe and Okeke, 2014:5).

### ***The State of Education in Nigeria***

According to Osalor (2013:1), the Nigerian state operates in a 21st century economy with a 19th century education system. A system whereby much emphasis is still placed on the conventional classroom environment with much reverence for certificate for graduates, who in most cases are trained to be job seekers, as evidenced in present high unemployment rate in the land (Osalor, 2013:1). Muoghalu (2013a:8) posits that Nigeria's education system, while improving, is not fit for the demands of competitive global markets, as the system does not provide Nigerians with the skills they need to get jobs. Okonjo-Iweala, et al (2010:24) highlights that the education most Nigerians receive is of dubious quality, and illiteracy remains high, even among those who attend school. Only 45% of primary school children in urban areas and 19% in rural areas can read a simple sentence. Large numbers of children are regularly absent from school and must repeat years. In addition, facilities such as comfortable classrooms, good hostels, laboratories, standard libraries and sporting facilities, for recreation and physical development, are either in short supply, dilapidated or totally non-existent. Furthermore, many teachers lack the skills to do their jobs, while many still are frustrated due to poor working conditions or non-payment of salaries which in some instances are in arrears for months. Only recently, the media was awash with the startling story of a school teacher in Benin City, who could not read a book, to the shock of many Nigerians (Muoghalu, 2013a:8).

A locus classicus on the state of education in Nigeria is provided by Muoghalu (2013b), cited in Muoghalu (2013a:8-12). The highlights of the issues raised in this contribution include:

- The problem of access reflected in the high occurrence of out-of-school children currently estimated at about 10 million. While a number of African countries made progress in school enrolments over the past decade, Nigeria regressed. The country's net primary school enrolment rate dropped to 58 per cent in 2010 from 64 per cent in 1999. The primary school completion rate in Nigeria was approximately 75 per cent between 2003 and 2010, but in Ghana the rate improved markedly from 69.7 per cent to 88 per cent, while in Tanzania it rose from 55 per cent to 90 per cent over the same period.
- The low rate of secondary school enrolment which reflects the trend in Africa. Only 28 per cent of Africa's youths are enrolled in secondary school, and while a child entering the education systems of an OECD country has an 80 per cent likelihood of going on to university or some other form of tertiary education, only 6 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa have similar chances.
- The progressive erosion of the culture of education over the past three decades, reflecting a collapse of value systems.
- The prioritization of access over quality in the quest to meet the Millennium Development Goals – which includes a target of education for all by 2015
- Secondary school terminal examinations organized by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) have witnessed mass failures for the past several years. Only 5.75 per cent of the 803,360 private candidates that sat the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in 2010 received 5 Credits (Cs) and above with English Language included, and 10 per cent did so with Mathematics included. Nigerian secondary school students have become progressively weaker in the science subjects that lay the foundation for a knowledge economy based on science, technology and innovation. In the 2006 West African School Certificate Examinations, only 23 per cent of candidates made passing grades in science subjects, with the pass ratios in subsequent years dropping or hovering at 20 per cent in 2007, 26 per cent in 2009, 26 per cent in 2010, and 23 per cent in 2011.
- The tertiary education system is plagued by weak learning infrastructure and low-quality teachers – the two factors that affect learning outcomes. University education has existed in an advanced state of decay for over two decades. Even first generation Nigerian universities have seen their accreditations withdrawn or threatened as a result of poor educational infrastructure such as libraries, classroom facilities, and student housing. Several universities are producing graduates that lack the right skills needed to perform tasks required in their chosen fields, making it difficult for them to get employment. Nigerian universities have lost their place in the global rankings – No thanks to the myriad of problems, such as incessant strikes by university lecturers and students leading to prolonged closures. No single university in Nigeria was featured in the Times Higher Education 400 Universities in the World rankings for 2011-2012, yet there were representatives from South Africa and Egypt
- In Africa, no Nigerian university is listed in the top 20 – yet there are universities in Ethiopia, Sudan, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda in this list. The lecturer-to-student ratios have worsened. The ratio of teaching staff to students is 1–122 at the University of Abuja and 1–144 at the Lagos State University; but the same ratio is 1– 4 at Harvard University, 1–9 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), 1–3 at the University of Cambridge, and 1 – 10 at the National University of Singapore.
- There is a dearth of qualified teachers at all levels of education. The report of a presidential panel on the needs of public institutions indicates a manpower crisis in Nigerian universities.

Only 43 per cent of academic staff in Nigerian public universities earned doctorate degrees. The remaining 57 per cent do not have such minimum qualifications for university teaching. Just seven universities had up to 60 per cent of their teaching staff with PhDs and Kano State University of Science and Technology, established in 2002, had one professor and 25 lecturers with doctorate degrees, while 74 per cent of teaching staff at the Plateau State University in Boko are visiting faculty (Muoghalu, 2013a:8-12).

We will not look for further illustrations to demonstrate that there is progressive decay in the state of education in Nigeria. In case however, the disclosures of Muoghalu (2013a:8-12) appear superseded, Clark and Ausukuya (2013:1), cited in Okeke (2014:241) discloses: this year (2013), 1.7 million students registered for Nigeria's centralized tertiary admissions examinations, all competing for the half a million places available; potentially leaving over a million qualified college-age Nigerians without a postsecondary place. This despite the fact that the number of available places has grown significantly in recent years, as the government establishes new institutions, in its efforts to meet demand. Since 2005, the number of universities alone has grown from 51 to 128, while capacity at existing universities has been stretched to its limits (Clark and Ausukuya, 2013:1, cited in Okeke, 2014:241). Indeed, sustainable development would remain a pipe-dream in the Nigerian state, when over a million qualified college-age Nigerians are without post-secondary education opportunities.

### ***The State and Education in Nigeria***

The state, argues Laski (2008:75) must be composed of citizens between whom there are no vast disparities of education and economic power. Laski (2008:26) had earlier argued that although in any ultimate analysis, the real rulers of the state are undiscoverable; the legal source of daily power is resident in those who legislate. Consequently, the effective source of state-action is the small number of men (and of course women) whose decisions are legally binding upon the community. They are at once, the trustees and governors of the whole. The purpose of the state finds personification in the small number of men and women whose decisions are legally binding upon the community (Laski, 2008:26). It is their business to glean the needs of the society and to translate those needs into terms of effective statutes. Incidentally, when these small number of men and women in the Nigerian state, ostensibly glean the needs of the Nigerian society, they subsequently translate such needs into terms of ineffective statutes. Let us further illustrate with the Nigerian National Policy on Education. This policy documentation was initially made in 1977, with very many subsequent revisions extending up to an ongoing revision-discussion (Awoyinfa, 2013). Nearly four decades after the initial enactment of this policy, Ademola-Olateju (2013) bemoans: Like all else in our national life, the National Policy on Education exists on paper without any serious or measurable attempt at implementation. Today Nigeria's educational system continues its death spiral. Teacher's education and training are totally absurd. The prevailing condition on teachers' education now is; secondary school leavers from poor socioeconomic background (Awoyinfa, 2013). In place of the purpose of the state finding personification in the men and women, whose decisions are legally binding upon the Nigerian community, what obtains is the personalization of the purpose of the state by the small number of governors. Hence, a central function of the Nigerian publicly owned universities is to confer Honourary Doctorates on the Nigerian governors and their alter egos.

The nature and character of the Nigerian state may easily be categorized and recognized in two epochs - the colonial state and the post-colonial state (Fadakinte, 2013). Under each of these categorizations, state actions have compellingly been propelled by metropolitan interests. Akinola (2006:7) posits as follows: Nigerian elite are alienated in terms of educational curriculum adopted by the British Government which Nigerian leaders continue till date. The curriculum did not pay much attention to the study of Nigerian culture, its roots and adaptive education that can help the society to release the potentials and capabilities of the Nigerian people. This problem still persists till today as higher institutions in the country only train students for white collar jobs instead of creating jobs using local resources. At the same time, our governments are not challenging Nigerian scholars to resolve local problems. Instead, the government depends on ideologies and innovations from developed countries, which are in most cases at variance

with Nigeria's ecological conditions. Hence, in education, the Nigerian state continues to enunciate policies and plans, geared towards the sustenance of metropolitan interests and maintenance of metropolitan structures. Thus, nearly five and half decades after independence, the need has arisen for a third categorization in the nature and character of the Nigerian state. Therefore, as the Nigerian state marks the centenary of the amalgamation of the then colonial Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria, by Lord Lugard in 1914, we contend in this paper, that the next recognizable epoch in the nature and character of the Nigerian state may be designated the post-centenary state. In essence, the challenges in the education sector in Nigeria, is complexly interwoven with the non-evolution of this next definable epoch in the nature and character of the Nigerian state. The post-colonial designation still associates developmental strides in the fully independent state with the debilitating effects of an untoward past. Indeed, for the Nigerian state, the priorities of education should be as unsophisticated as this: to develop skills that lead to employment, through expansion of vocational training, and to tackle the gross inequalities in educational provision that threaten Nigeria's integrity as a cohesive society (Okonjo-Iweala, et al, 2010). Let it be emphasized that the provision of education is one area of national life that does not call for personal responsibility. Individuals would not build schools for their own education. Every individual in the modern state would not engage the services of professional teachers for his personal education and the education of his family members. It is the responsibility of the state to provide structures and policies of functional education, within the boundaries of the state. It is the responsibility of the state to professionalize the teaching career. It is the duty of the state to tackle the gross inequalities in educational provision. It is indeed, the responsibility of the state to align education with sustainable development.

#### ***Some Critical Policy Options on the way Forward***

A major problem of state policies in the Nigerian state is in their verbose documentations. Hence, we intend to avoid wordiness in our own propositions. The first policy option in the opinion of this study is to enhance the status of the teacher. The Nigerian state as a whole looks down on the teacher. The state must take the lead in the elevation of the status of the teacher. We do not imply the inauguration of committees on the status of the teacher or the production of policy documents on amelioration of the sufferings of the teacher. What is critically required is concrete action by all strata of the state, budgetary allocations for the provision of modern housing for teachers, within the environment of their various schools; provision of staff buses for teachers and payment of living wages to the teachers, as and when due. Additionally, the status of the tertiary education teacher must be made comparable to the status of the other professionals, in the other areas of national life in the Nigerian state. The tertiary education teacher must be provided with conducive office accommodation, for his research activities. Nigerian academics have switched to other labour sectors or industries and the resultant effect is the eroding of academic manpower for long term national development (Obasan and Akindele-Oscar, 2011:319). Ikharehon (2007:27) opines: The importance of funds cannot be overemphasized in the education sector. Government should fund education effectively rather than building this country by constructing gigantic buildings and other structures. It should be noted that the pride of a nation is not in those things but in the quality of her citizens. Our leaders must realize that cognitive pursuit is not just about magnificent structural edifice rather it involves more of qualified human capital resource and a rich tradition of academic excellence. Therefore, a nation built without education of the citizenry is going to crumble, no matter how good it looks from outside. According to Mallam-Madori (2013:2), the first and perhaps the greatest challenge facing Nigeria and making it difficult for good quality education that is capable of bringing about sustainable development is inadequate funding by federal, state and local governments. However, such propositions/lamentations about lack of funding, as in Ikharehon (2007) and Mallam-Madori (2013) confer on funding, some non-existent magical powers and erroneously blame only government for the funding inadequacies in the education sector of the Nigerian state. However, a critical issue in funding actually borders on what is being funded. Hence, we suggest as policy option in this paper, the funding of the status of teachers, at all levels of education in the Nigerian state.

We suggest as corollary policy option, a national focus on entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education, according to Paul (2005), cited in Arogundade (2011:27) is structured to achieve the following objectives:

- To offer functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant.
- Provide the youth graduates with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
- To serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development.
- Offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management, to make certain risk-bearing feasible.
- To reduce high rate of poverty.
- Create employment generation.
- Reduction in rural-urban migration.
- Provide the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium sized businesses.
- To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark upon.
- Create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy.

Indeed, entrepreneurship education is a sine qua non for sustainable national development of modern Nigeria. In the colonial state in Nigeria, entrepreneurship education was de-emphasized because it was unnecessary for the purposes of colonialism. In the post-colonial demarcation, entrepreneurship education remained ostensibly unnecessary, simply because it would free the periphery Nigerian state from the apron strings of the metropolitan states. In the post-centenary state, entrepreneurship education may only be neglected if the national wish relates strongly with joking with education and laughing into penury and poverty (Ikharehon, 2007). The role of the entrepreneurial teacher, in entrepreneurship education can not be overemphasized.

### **3. Concluding Remarks**

This study agrees with Okwueze (2011:80) that development should be man-oriented not institution-oriented. Hence, if we focus on the individual citizen, we can then think of what he needs at a particular time (Okwueze, 2011:80). What the teacher of the Nigerian child needs is important in these configurations. Development of education can be fundamentally teacher-oriented. A teacher-centered focus in education, would invariably lead to the extension of due attention to the child-learner by the contented teacher-citizen. The endpoint of this societal symbiosis is sustainable development. We also subscribe to the viewpoint of Osalor (2013:1) that the Nigerian state and citizens must accept the fact that times have changed and we must adjust to the new times by transiting from the old styled era of Adam Smith inspired concept of the 'industrialized specialist' which has outlived its usefulness, to a more dynamic and resourceful model, where skills and creativity take precedence. In other words, we must transit to entrepreneurship education. Hence, Enamiroro (2007:21) contends: The major role of education is manpower development. Apart from this, the manpower developed must be able to confront major issues. As a result, education must be relevant to these issues, not separated from them. These major issues include the issue of sustainable development. Furthermore, the unfortunate and general attitude today has been that of considering formal education as a ladder that enables students to further their education in higher institutions of learning and that this helps them adapt socially to their elitist role in the society (Nwogu, 2013:271). In the foregoing configurations the strategic role of competent and dedicated teachers who would guide members of the Nigerian state, through entrepreneurial education can not be overemphasized. And until the state encourages entrepreneurial education, the dreams of policies for sustainable development in the Nigerian state would remain pipe dreams.

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