

The Praxis of Nigeria's New National Education Policy on Age Limitation in Admission Processes into Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

Recently, the educational circles in Nigeria have been glowed with the federal government's stipulation that, thenceforth, the minimum age required of any prospective student into the nation's public tertiary institutions shall not be less than eighteen (18) as against the extant tradition—which required only WAEC, NECO, NABTEB or related certificates of the 9-3-4 system. Even though the extant system had fantastic in principle, the new policy has not fared better—particularly with regards to its age-limitation provision. The policy, it seems, tramples on basic freedoms and has had enormous implications for admission processes into tertiary institutions—especially with regards to conflicting of take-off dates, quality of score-cards, besides other social, legal and ethical issues. By adopting some qualitative/analytical method, the paper examines the various aspects of the new Nigeria's national policy on education vis-a-vis its implication for brilliance and intelligence in relation to admissibility for further child-mental/rational development. It discovers that the policy constitutes for enormous procedural conundrum for tertiary institutions administration...and some dilemma for parents, children or wards. Hence the work concludes that the new policy infringes upon constitutional child right to freedom of choice/education, an embarrassment to parents/guardians, and an encumbrance to smooth procedures in school administration. In order to improve on the situation in the quest for a better education policy for Nigeria, the work recommends that certain educational features should be integrated to accommodate all facets of human development, accommodating tradition and innovation—health, economic, and technological development programmes amid those on moral values and critical thinking and these should be features of educational projects in Nigerian and Africa social sphere.

Keywords: Age limitation, education, Nigeria, policy, tertiary education, national policy

I. Introduction

Most generally, education involves the processes leading to the acquisition of knowledge (i.e. values and skills). The two-way process is teaching and learning (whether formally or informally). Education form varies from one society to another; but every society must develop a scheme to educate its citizens on skill acquisition, modes of doing and therefore has own policy of education. This emphasizes the value that the most vital natural resource is the human capital. Particularly, formal education is vital or inevitable not only as guide against ignorance, but especially for national, economic and social development. The development and tapping of this human capital are usually done through education. Education is conceived as the key factor in national development. This is even doubly so in an information and electronic age as ours. Okonjo (2000) puts this need vividly thus:

The important point to note ...is that no nation in the world of today has been able to accumulate material wealth and improve the quality of life of its citizens and become an industrial and advanced nation without giving all its citizens twelve years of schooling

and skill training. For it is this schooling and training that enables a skilled workforce to be created. And without a skilled workforce, it is difficult to create those conditions, which lead a country to accumulate more, efficiently allocate its resources and encourage the growth of productivity (p. 55).

Against Okonjo dwelling on the need for skill acquisition and application in education, Frederick Harbison (1973) claims that the ultimate basis for wealth of nations, capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations and carry forward national development. It was the famous American philosopher and educationist John Dewey who declared that good education for all citizens is a desideratum for development. Nigeria is committed to achieving this feat. Education is so important such that it forms a major component of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Millennium/Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs/SDGs).

Expectedly, Nigeria signs into all the international agencies for educational development—NEPAD, SDGs and MDGs by integrating their relevant basic values/principles into her national development policy. It is another question whether Nigeria has achieved the tenets of those goals (especially as it relates to education—which is implied in the major components). Historically, education (as it was initially conceived) heightens one’s communal respect. Then education included skill acquisition in varying categories—communication skills; trade and barter methods; recreational training, folklore and religion among many other things. It was a kind of informal education; but it was effective, though the system was truncated with the introduction of Western style education occasioned by colonialism. Thus, initially, the quest for an education in the new fashion was to enhance one’s capacity to fit into the needs of the colonial administrative stream and colonial agents facilitated that training for both the young ones and the adult populations.

However, Western style education had its advantages over the communal style in that it introduced a radical emphasis on the basic creativity. Yet among African traditional society, “...the fundamental principles of humanitarian morality were part of the very concept of legality (and learning) and that no positive enactment or statute, however clearly it expressed and however clearly it conformed with the formal criteria of validity of a given legal system, could be valid if it contravened the basic principles of morality” (Hart, 1958). Ever since, the trajectory has never waned or gotten back. Before and since NEPAD, the SDGs and MDGs, Nigeria had had several undulating education policies which also have sometime shown inconsistency.

II. Statement of the Problem and the Method of the Study

Osewa (in *Nairaland*, 2021) emphasized the lack of consistency in Nigeria’s educational policies, the system and national objectives. Debalen, Oni & Adekola (2000) also described the Nigerian educational system as being based on outdated curricula which fails to prepare graduating youths for after school experience. In consequence, the above swells the unemployment and poverty figures in the country.

Hence, in 2024, the federal government of Nigeria, through its ministry of Education, instituted that thenceforth, the minimum age required or any prospective student into the nation’s public tertiary institutions shall not be less than eighteen (18) as against the extant “open, free for all” tradition once such candidate had successfully earned the WAEC, NECO, NABTEB or related certificate (the 6-3-3-4 and 9-3-4 systems respectively). Even though the extant system had

fantastic in principle, it also showed signals of deficiency right from inception (with inadequacy of qualified teachers/instructors to drive the policy, while necessary infrastructural/instructional materials and equipment were either inadequate or not operational), yet the new policy has not fared better—particularly with regards to the age-restrictive provision in the policy. The policy, apparently a trample on citizens’ right to freedom to pursue their desired goals, has had enormous implications for admission processes into tertiary institutions—especially as regards to conflicting of take-off dates, quality of score-cards, besides other social, legal and ethical issues.

The work shall adopt quantitative and qualitative critical analyticity, in which case we shall look into extant literature/records on the new Nigeria’s policy on education, with particular attention on the provision for age-limit to admissibility in the nation’s tertiary institutions. The critical method allows for sifting the practical implications the policy on admission processes into tertiary institutions—especially as regards to conflicting of take-off dates, quality of score-cards, besides other social, legal and ethical issues. Thus, this paper examines the various aspects of the new Nigeria’s national policy on education vis-a-vis its implication for brilliance and intelligence in relation to admissibility for further child-mental/rational development. This method relies simply on up-to-date and reliable secondary sources of information: questionnaire, interviews, roundtables, printed (statutes, books, newspapers, magazines, and journals) or soft (the internet/social media). Its analyticity posture is qualitative; and, although the work is initially descriptive, in the end, it would be essentially normative.

III. The Research Questions

The following constitute the basic questions for the study.

1. What is the main thrust of Nigeria’s new National Policy on Education?
2. How has the principle of “age-restriction” impacted on the admission processes in Nigeria’s tertiary institutions?
3. How could the critical issues arising from “2” above be resolved?

IV. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study is to put to perspective how Nigeria’s New National Education Policy on Age Limitation impacted on the praxis of Admission Processes into Tertiary Institutions. However, the specific objectives are, to:

1. Adumbrate the main thrust of the Nigeria’s new National Policy on Education;
2. Determine and evaluate the principle/provision and impact of “age-restriction” on the admission processes in Nigeria’s tertiary institutions; and
3. Articulate how the critical issues arising from “2” above could be resolved.

V. Clarification of Basic Concepts/Literature Review

Education is, formally or informally, the transmission of knowledge and skill. Education and socialization are intricately, if not inseparably, related. But in some respect, education is often thought of in terms of schooling; in other respect, however, effective training for the individual, as both a member of a group or as autonomous individual, is a continuing process. In either case, education and socialization process help in the preservation and transmission of societal values and culture; education and socialization are a stimulus to creative thinking and action, which accounts

for possible culture change; culture change, in turn, may account for loss of some precious cultural values. Accordingly, Brand Blanshard declared that:

What turns knowledge into account is the habit of Trained Reflection; Paschal said that most of the ills of the world were due to the fact that youth of today stand a good chance to alter the trend and direction of events, if only they are prepared to adopt a more rational, intellectual, ethical and pragmatic approach to Africa's prolonged predicament. Here is the task in which the vanguards of the struggle are millions of tertiary and secondary institution students, and many more millions who have completed their "education" without the hope of employment for the indefinite future (1977, p. 312).

As much as this view captured the reality of the African condition, it fails, however, to recognize that the learning youth embraces the dictates of the curriculum; secondly, he failed to recognize that the value for employment is consequent upon other basic ability of the student –such as that high aptitude, good moral values and critical ability. *Tertiary Education* (usually formal schooling) refers to the acme of higher/advanced level effective learning of social values/roles, acquisition of personal skills, and technical or specialized knowledge. Tertiary education is usually through the recognized (but not restricted to) institutions such as polytechnics, colleges of education, universities, amongst the many.

Nigeria, refers to the federal republic, *the Nigerian State*. The "one indivisible and indissoluble Sovereign State to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" and consisting of 36 States and a Federal Territory (The 1999 Constitution). Agreeably, before the British conquest, the country now known as Nigeria existed as independent kingdoms, communities, clans and tribes. Disputes were commonplace during the time given the quest for expansion which was prevalent among the people and kings (Edefe, 2012).

Policy/public policy Commonly, is government's legal instrument to ensure the operations of a sector or agency so as to ensure that the care of the citizens is optimized. Inherent in this is the fact that such policy indicates the government's programme to achieve a certain goal for the good of the people. Public policy is a statutory instrument of government, whether general or specific. Public policy, for Carl (1975) is the proposed course of action of the government or one of its divisions. Public policy is what idea government chooses (not) to implement. It is the integrated courses and program of action that government has set, and the frame work or guide it has designed to direct actions and practices in certain problem areas. Generally, public policies are meant to enhance societal problems particularly those considered to require public or collective action (Ikelegbe, 2006). The policy process is a sequential pattern of action, a complex web of structure, activities and interaction relating to techniques, strategies, resources, costs, benefits and policy goods and services among persons, groups and agencies. It consists of several activities and interactions between the environment which generates demands, the political system or more accurately the conversion process which converts and translates demands and preferences into policy output and the implementation system which consists of implementing agencies and activities (Larkey, 1979). State bureaucracy or the civil service is known to be an integral part of the executive branch of government. It is the institution charged with the function of formulating and implementing policies and programmes of government. It therefore becomes the agency through which the activities of the government are realized. Public bureaucracy possesses the necessary expertise, skills competence and experiences (Ikelegbe, 2006; Onyekwelu *et al*, 2015).

Rourke (1976) noted that: the policy making power of bureaucracies is also inherent in her being the administrative organization for implementing policy. The implementing function enables bureaucratic policy influence in two ways. First, it sets the range within which policies could be made. The bureaucratic abilities, experiences and orientations set, restricts or facilitates policy choices. Political leaders make policies that their bureaucracies have abilities to implement. Second, political leaders also know that implementation success will be facilitated, if the appropriate bureaucratic agencies are well disposed towards policy. Sometimes such discretionary action constitutes new policy thrusts, or forms the basis for new policy actions (Onyekwelu *et al*, 2015). Public policy is a veritable instrument deployed by government for the purpose of optimising the social welfare and well-being of the citizenry. Perhaps, this explains why the concept has received much scholarly attention. But there have been varied views on what the concept means. Sharma, Sadana and Kaur (2012) posit that public policy is the relationship of a governmental unit to its environment. This view is quite broad as it leaves details of the nature of such relationship. For Adebayo (1998) public policy is the determination, declaration and crystallisation of the will of the community. This implies that a major building block for an effective public policy is the will or expectation of the community as the participation of the people in the policy process is crucial to the support for and success of government policies (Laxmikauth, 2011).

According to Larson (1987), a good understanding of public policy provides a platform for appreciating the magnitudes of linkages between public policies and regulation of behaviours, organization of bureaucracies, distribution of development benefits, allocative efficiency, institutional structures and philosophical justification of government and governance. This understanding provides the premise for a wide variety and substantive areas of interest such as sustainable grassroots/rural economic/financial development, energy, defense, environment, education, infrastructure, taxations, housing, social security, health, economic empowerment and opportunities, urban development among others (Dye, 1981) as issues contingent upon public policy instruments.

Another source of bureaucratic influence in policy making is the secrecy with which, it operates and the inattention which, society often gives most policy issues. The secrecy in policy deliberations precludes society from giving adequate attention to bureaucratic policy activity. Bureaucratic reaction to policy choice may not always be that of neutrality, subservient support and acquiescence. Bureaucrats are responsible for co-coordinating, monitoring and enforcing implementation activities (Ikelegbe, 2006). Also, the capacity of the bureaucracy also determines to a large extent which policies can be well implemented. Thus, the vitality, leadership, discipline, skills and expertise of the bureaucracy may further or mar implementation of state policy (Onyekwelu *et al*, 2015). Public policy is commonly embodied in constitutions, legislative acts and judicial decisions.

National Policy is the document or body of general principles by which a state governs its territory or reactions to the international environment. Hence, both ideas of national interest and foreign policy obtain. Such relations as trade, law, agreements, and conferences between two or more nations are cited to help clarify the concept of international relations. However, the states of the world are inescapably interdependent, in terms of economic, scientific, technology, military matters and so on. The largest, perhaps strongest, powerful nations in the world are inevitably linked in far more ways to the smallest and weaker ones. In fact:

All nations are interdependent in terms of politics and strategy. No nation, no matter how large, can in splendid isolation be master of its fate ... no nation, no matter how large

can compel all others to do its bidding, nor convert them quickly to its own beliefs... no people and no country in the world could have reached its present level of technology, prosperity and health – nor could it maintain its present rate of progress without the decisive aid of ... foreign contributors ...No country could keep many of its own people alive without the help of foreigners (Deutsch, 1988, p. 3).

By and large, the concept of national interest “enjoys considerable favor as a basis for action and has won a prominent place in the dialogue of public affairs” (Rosenau, 1972, 34). Some scholars posit that national interest is often employed as an analytical tool “...to describe, explain, or evaluate the sources or the adequacy of a nation’s foreign policy...as an instrument of political action. It serves as a means of justifying, denouncing or proposing policies...” (Rosenau, p. 34).

VI. Theoretical Framework

According to Eseduwo (2010), analyzing an issue without a theory is like explaining a phenomenon without understanding its historical perspective and different environment; or assessing the strength of a building or structure without discernment. A theory, therefore, remains not only the building block of empirical thinking but also a veritable scientific tool that strengthens the explanatory currency of social phenomenon. A theory is a proposed relationship between two or more concepts which gives the explanation for why a phenomenon occurred. The importance of theory is illustrated by Durkheim (1997): “Without theories to explain the relationship between concepts, there will not be better comprehension of cause relationship in social life”. Theoretical perspectives are ways of viewing reality, lenses through which analysts organize and interpret what they (Lamanna and Reidmann, 2003). Investigations based on theories are expected to produce deductions and modifications of emergent issues. This work adopts the Public-choice theory.

Public-choice Theory (P-cT) is an aspect of the challenges to market fundamentalism/statist model; thus, it is a one of the neoclassical counterrevolutionary approaches to socioeconomic growth and development. Broadly, the (classical) statist approach (which gained popularity among major Western nations from the 1980s) dis favor, *inter alia*, limiting state-intervention in public affairs or “supply-side macroeconomic policies” (including privatization of public corporations, dismantling of public ownership and government regulation of major socioeconomic activities). But the P-cT counterrevolution, dubbed new political economy approach, observes that self-interest is the basic guide to all humans’ motivations and that, since bureaucrats/public officials are humans/inherently corrupt, they are ill-equipped or cannot be efficient beyond the advancement of their self-interest using the opportunity of their public power/influence. In this way, P-cT thinks that states “use their power to confiscate private property from individuals...resulting to a general reduction in individual freedoms”, since they believe, following J.S. Mill, that “minimal government is the best government” (Todaro and Smith, 2011, pp. 126-128). Notably, the P-cT is applicable to this study since it is critical of state interference with individual right, restriction of one’s freedom to behave/act in accordance with one’s rational choice.

VII. Nigeria’s Education Policy: A Brief Historical Review

Nigeria has had so many policies on how to drive home her education for citizens. Historically, educational policy in Nigeria has had three major stages, the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. In pre-colonial era, education was enhanced through cultural values. Among the north of Nigeria, educational orientation was achieved of the faithful following a uniform Qur’anic education policy (Ozigi and Ocho, 1981). Similarly, among the southern parts, each ethnic

group had its own traditional form of education based on its own culture and tradition. The general goals of those informal attempts included to developing the child's physical/intellectual skills, character, build a sense of the community as well as to acquiring some vocational training amid enduring societal values (Fafunwa, 2004). With the advent of Christian missionaries, western-style education (which introduced alphabets/writing) was introduced to parts of today's southern Nigeria from 1842 (Ozigi and Ocho, 1981). Yet western education in the northern parts rested with the colonial government. By the close of the 19th century, Qur'anic, traditional and western education co-existed in both the northern and southern Nigerian protectorates.

Changes in Nigerian educational policy became enhanced, gaining momentum from 1944 with progress in quest for self-determination; and the 1948 *Education Ordinance* decentralized educational administration in the country a mile stone in British colonial educational policy in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 2004). The 1952 Education Ordinance empowered each of the newly created Regions to develop its educational policies and systems, abolishing the Colonial Education Board (Taiwo, 1980; Fafunwa, 2004). By the 1954 national constitution and the promulgation of the Education Laws of 1955 (Western Region), 1956 (Eastern and Northern Regions), and the Lagos Education Ordinance in 1957 derived from a common source, 'the Education Act of Wales and England' 1944 (Taiwo, 1980, p.121). The 1954 Constitution of colonial Nigeria, emphasized the policy of decentralization. Beyond the Sir Eric Ashby Commission (1959), the policy of decentralization remained in force until Independence in 1960 even though ethnicity and religious identities also strengthened.

The 1969 the National Curriculum Conference identified new national goals for Nigeria which would determine the future and direction of education in the country (Nigerian Educational Research Council, 1972). The conference was the first national attempt to change the colonial orientation of the Nigerian educational system and promote national consciousness and self-reliance through the education process. Education as a social service and investment in manpower was given top priority by the government (Taiwo, 1980). The Federal Government took over mission schools as education was regarded as a huge government venture and no longer a private enterprise, marked by the establishment of school management boards as well as a unified teaching service (Fagunmi, 2005). By 1976, Nigeria embarked on the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) programme and expanded access into tertiary education and increased the number of unity schools in the country. The 7-5-2-3 educational policy was then introduced: 7 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary school, 2 years Higher School Certificate Levels, and 3 years of university education. At terminal stages, candidates would sit for external examinations and were certificated based on their performances (in tuition-free university education). Then the new policy introduced the 6-3-3-4 educational system modelled after the American system of 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary school, 3 years of senior secondary school, and 4 years of university education (Nwagwu, 2007). Although primary education was free, it was not compulsory and the policy sought to make universal free primary education (UPE) compulsory for all children as soon as it is practicable. In 1979, education was placed on the concurrent legislative list—culminating in the first and second revised National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). Notably, instead of the automatic promotion policy of the UPE, a combined method of evaluation of pupil/students' performance and certification through continuous assessments and examinations was introduced. However, this did not stop the emphasis on certification instead of skills acquisition—prescribing that each child be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages in the country; Hausa Ibo and Yoruba, other than the mother tongue (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

The National Policy on Education (1998) had been revised to accommodate changes in the direction of education brought about by technological development (Nwagwu, 2007). To this end, the policy proposed that admissions into universities be based on 60 per cent science-based programmes and 40 per cent humanities. The Federal Military Government thereafter promulgated several decrees to guide and regulate the conduct of education. There was yet another revision of the policy in 1998, which culminated in the 2nd revised edition of the National Policy on Education, introducing the universal basic education (UBE) programme the 9-3-4 system of education, comprising of nine years of universal compulsory schooling to be given as six years of primary education, and three years of junior secondary education. In 2004, the senior secondary school is of three years' duration, and is for adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years old. In terms of the school curricula design, the responsibility for basic education and senior secondary school curricula, rests with the Federal Government through its organ the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). However, each locality is expected to adapt the implementation of the national policy to suit their local conditions based on the national curricula. The 9-3-4 system had persisted until 2024.

VIII. Nigeria's New National Education Policy (NPE): Goal and Basic Presuppositions

Two aspects of the NPE are basic interest to the research: the age-limit stipulations, and the goal/aim of the provision. From the outset, to be clear, the NPE sets the minimum age for enrolment into Nursery Education One at age 3, Nursery Two at 4, and compulsory pre-primary (Kindergarten) at 5. This means that the minimum age for entrance to Primary School starts at age 6, then six in primary education; followed by three years of junior secondary school and three years at the senior levels bringing the child's age to 18 years at point of possible entry to any tertiary institution (Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Universities, for instance). The major goal of the restriction, the policy claimed, aims to standardize enrollment ages and enhance educational outcomes.

IX. The Impact of Age Limitation on Admission Processes into Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Analysis of the critical elements in the NPE are embedded in the major goal of the restriction: to standardize enrollment ages and enhance educational outcomes. However, the basically, educational outcomes boil down to quality of graduate-output. This in turn could be broken to include critical/rational thought, decency in moral virtues, and skillfulness. The essential elements among the foregoing is also the differences among quantity, capacity and quality in human affairs, variations which also reflect humans' varying natural abilities. While the vaunted goal ignores this variation, the age-stipulations violates entire Section 1 of the National Policy on Education (2014) document. Besides, nevertheless, the new policy has had untold impact on all the parties involved in the education processes.

The age limitation provision in the Nigeria's new national policy on education have several implications for schools (secondary, colleges, polytechnics, and universities), parents/guardians and potential candidates for tertiary school admission (psychology, health and rights vs life-pursuits/aspirations). Broadly, the policy lacks one essential premise: It does stipulate any age for the beginning infant, at Primary 1. It simply assumes that all infants have similar mental ability at birth, in disregard for genetic variations. Fundamentally, men are physically (quantitative) and mentally (qualitative) different. Thus, this fact comes to play at the point of qualification for admission to higher learning; and restricting any pupil at that stage on point of "under-aged"

(irrespective of his/her uncommon mental/intellectual capability) could (or does) have real and/or potentially serious/adverse impacts on schools, the pupils, and potential parent/guardian and their wards—all against the quest for national growth in recrudescence.

On schools' admission processes By, “schools” here is meant basic educational institutions (primary/secondary, colleges, polytechnics, universities, and other tertiary levels. Consider the haziness of the policy, for instance. In the first place, the policy emerged within the shortest time-space, a spontaneity leaving no period for its gradual inculcating. Under that condition, tertiary administration procedures, parents, and students were caught off guard. Besides, the policy presupposed conflicting of take-off dates. While some institutions started immediate implementation, others were caught dangling with confusion. Between age (quantity) and intelligent quotient (quality), which should earn preeminence? Moreover, what justification suffices that certain categories of citizens be denied opportunity earlier accorded their co-citizens?

Parents/guardians A parent is either a (whether through biological or any other mode) father or mother of a child/children. The Children Act (1989) emphasize that parents have rights, duties, powers and “inescapable responsibilities when bringing up their children...” even though such rights might be lost at adoption (Person & Thomas, 2010, p. 380). In fact, Pierson and Thomas declares that parent education and training services

...help parents and prospective parents understand key aspects of parenting in order that they might become effective carers of children. These services seek to help parents to understand the emotional, intellectual, physical and social needs of children as well as their own needs...to enhance the relationship between parents (or their surrogates) and the children for whom they have responsibility. The over-arching objective is to assist parents to help their children achieve a mature and independent adulthood (p. 381).

Critically, parenting could be met with serious challenges, including some located in special need that children might have (such as autism, for instance), or others located in the social (or psycho-physical) context/condition of the parent(s). However, the kind of problem initiated by tendentious standards introduced by such external bodies as the new national policy on education is nasty, superfluous and an embarrassment to parents/guardians. Moreover, the new policy not only interferes with parental rights over their children, but hinders their capacity to even perform basic responsibilities to their them. The new policy, rather than enhancing social support for parenting (or direct support for parents), introduces a condition could be debilitating and depressing.

Like the impact on parents' rights and powers over their children, the new national policy on education in Nigeria has enormous impact on *potential candidates* for admission into tertiary institutions. Outright, the national constitution and the Child Rights Act provide for the child the right to freedom to pursue his/her life mission and happiness consistent with some other ideals specified in those statutes. The freedom to aspire is inalienable; yet the new policy tramples on it. And given that aspirations ought to be similar and free for all children, the policy is oblivious of the fact that expectations could various amongst them. The knowledge or awareness of this incapacitating measure could have untold psychological, physical, emotional overall health of the child—the slippery rope being that such condition is already an invitation to seek alternatives routes (juvenile delinquency or criminality) to meet one's aspirations and goals, leading to other social malaises.

X. Analysis, Recommendations and Conclusion

As were with all its previous models, the entire new NPE could be lofty in several ways; it also is deficient in much more critical ways, particularly with the age restriction provision with the goal to “enhance educational outcomes“. However, in this era of freedom and increasing impact of AI, the move is retrogressive and amounts to a decline; it is not just an overstretch but unsustainable in several ways.

One troubling dimension is that the policy is not a product of on any known research outcome or some other national evaluation report. That is, no empirical study; no monitoring document from the schools that attempted implementation as its premise. At best, the NPE is an assertion. Rationally, one cannot build trust in public policy when the evidence remains invisible. Governance gains its authority not from pronouncements, but from transparency. Nigerians deserve to see evidently what the government saw; without that, the decision cannot claim the credibility of evidence-based reasoning. Moreover, recent government political policies strive to reduce age for qualification for political participation (consider the “not too young to run” policy, 2024, for instance). If such politically motivated policies must be reasonable, any contrary policy that could jeopardize its applicability is superfluous; the NPE is such. Besides, Nigeria must not feign ignorance of the fact that, in recent times, younger (thoroughly educated) vibrant leaders emerge among nations/international systems all around the world.

And yet, the policy also sets aside an overwhelming global consensus about how children learn. The human brain, whether in London or Lagos or Kenya, Kano, Enugu, or Johannesburg, acquires literacy fastest in a familiar language and mostly at an early age. This is a neurocognitive fact, not an emotional preference. Weigh the impact the undulating policies (particularly the latest NPE version) has had on the smooth-running of academic sessions of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Nigeria’s children deserve more than policy reversals built on incomplete reasoning. They deserve to be where their brains could lead them. They deserve a system guided by the best available science, strengthened by our cultural realities, and protected from political swings. Hence, the Nigerian policy makers must open the evaluation process to independent review, and reconsider whether this decision aligns with Nigeria’s long-term developmental goals—goals consistent with basic human values. So, while values are learned through education, education is itself a value. Without the one, there is no other. Conveniently, one could say that the relationship between values and education is necessary because it is two-pronged.

By her successive education policies, the Nigerian state has not displayed modicum concern for citizens’ rights and values. According to Nwodo (1998), “We have to stop pretending that the injustice we do to others is deserved by them. We cannot continue to pretend to be happy knowing that what we are doing is morally wrong.” The real lesson is that

we must accept it as a guiding principle that there are right and wrong ways of conducting one’s life and of doing things; and that it pays to be morally good because there is a stringent demand that we live the morally good life, a demand that is neither arbitrary nor a matter of personal opinion but rather something that springs from some abiding principle in man’s own nature (Fagothey, 1981, p. 2).

Those who act immorally violate or destabilize this abiding principle, destroy a value and upset the objective moral order. Most contemporary Nigerian political class/education policy makers seem to be lacking in those virtues. Yet, education on values and the virtues may not be the end, but a means to some end—no matter the age of its set-off.

Where all these issues are allowed to go without critical hindsight, it could hinder the quest for national growth in recrudescence. Accordingly, self-interested thinking must be avoided. Policy makers must watch out when issues get personal and one becomes emotionally vested; they must be alert to ways that critical thinking can be undermined; they should always ensure that nothing has been left out of consideration, and avoid selective attention.

Since 1944 (or the colonial era), successive governments in Nigeria have expressed some commitment to education of citizens, in the belief that overcoming illiteracy and ignorance will form a basis for accelerated national development as evidenced in the successive national education policies. But, as Woolman (2001) opined, there is observable relationship between education and national development; yet, education continues to be a question of critical concern in many of the countries just like it is in Nigeria. Since education is an agent of cultural transmission as well as change; the constant revision of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria readily finds validation in that education should also reflect the dynamic process of nation building that is continually being modified by new conditions.

Nevertheless, as with its several previous versions, Nigeria's new national education policy introduces some novel ideals; but it is especially replete with inconsistencies and critical elements. Perhaps, the NPE could have been informed by state-incapacity to create work-force for teeming output of tertiary education; or introduced, perhaps, in fear of nation's diversity/educational disadvantaged North, first observed in the pre-independence era that delayed Independence from 1956. Hence, the 12-4 system is a misplaced priority and symptomatic policy inconsistency, a superficial policy window-dressing that fails to address the core issues plaguing Nigeria's educational system.

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