

POLICY INCONSISTENCY: MAJOR BANE TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria faces several hindrances in achieving its economic and developmental goals. One of such hindrances is policy inconsistency and discontinuity. The National Council on Development Planning (NCDP) recognises the lack of stability and continuity in programmes by succeeding governments as the major bane of Nigeria's stunted growth and development. However, before the discovery of oil, the agricultural sector used to be the bedrock of Nigeria's economy, but a lack of policy cohesion and sustainability has prevented the sector from growing to its full potential. Besides, irregularity and uncertainty of government policies also pose a problem for the macro economy as foreign investors and their investments were severely hit by policy summersault. This has implications for low foreign direct investment, while the frequent change of government often leads to a complete or partial disruption of the policies enacted by the previous administration. While it is understandable that the incoming administration might have an alternative vision and want to legislate by introducing new policies, the intent behind their action is not always patriotic. Given these ugly circumstances,

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this study examines a series of policy inconsistencies, causes of policy inconsistencies, cases of policy inconsistencies in the educational sector and the way forward on how to improve our policy formulation and implementation. The study adopted secondary data that were sourced through the use of textbooks, newspapers, journals, and internet materials. The study found that weak political will at all levels of government to effectively implement government policies on developmental educational projects is the leading cause of policy inconsistency in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that there must be strong political will among public servants, an increase in budgetary allocations to education, upgrading all colleges of education to postgraduate schools so that only postgraduates can teach, and the revamping of the University system to increase the quality of education, among others.

Keywords: Policy, Public policy, Decision making, Policy inconsistency and Discontinuity

INTRODUCTION

Policy inconsistency in Nigeria over the years has occurred in many ways with change of governments. Policy inconsistency resulting from changes in policy sometimes emerges from the attempt of leaders to reform society, not necessarily to create a setback for the citizenry. Where a leader has changed a policy, not for national interest or development but to tarnish the predecessors, such policy is likely to fail. The uncertainty and irregularity of government policies also pose a problem for the macro economy. Foreign investors are not flooding into Nigeria regardless of the numerous opportunities in the country; these investors have identified the lack of predictable policy-making as one of the reasons for keeping their distance, but the investors are not the only ones concerned. Nigerians themselves do not trust the system and are reluctant to buy into national agendas because of the long history of patchiness in government policy. An example is the mixed reactions that came with the unveiling of the national carrier ‘Nigeria Air.’ While many received the policy with ex-

citement, the majority believed that it would be subjected to a similar fate like the previous airlines (Loewenstern & Prelec, 1992). The scepticism has now been justified as the government recently announced its plan to suspend the project barely two months after it was unveiled.

The Nigerian government has already tarnished its credibility in implementing policy within the government. This signals that the popular proposal of adopting a single six-year term to improve the ability of the government to sustain policies might not be effective in the Nigerian case. The erratic nature of the policy is also a financial sinkhole in the economy and leads to high costs which cannot be recovered regardless of the outcome of the investment. Imagine all the money the Nigerian government has injected into policies and projects that were never fully actualised. For instance, the Ajaokuta Steel Factory; 39 years and \$8 billion injected later, the factory has failed woefully to produce any steel (Wayne 2011). It is a colossal waste for a nation that is regarded as the poverty capital of the world. Regime change has a direct link to policy change and policy inconsistency in any country where such exists. Thus, policy inconsistency is often a *sine qua non* to change of government. Perhaps, in every democratic society where regime change occurs, it is often predicated on the demands of the citizens, the level of economic development, employment structure, educational and cultural advancement, level of political participation, public opinion, party affiliation, percentage of educated public and pressure groups that exist in such society. All these and many other policy inconsistency issues are critically analysed in this paper.

Conceptual Review

This section explored comprehensive explanations of relevant concepts that made up the body of work, such as Policy, Public policy, Decision making, and Inconsistency, among others. It included the definitions and explanations given by various authors and scholars of repute in the fields of Public Administration and Political Science.

Policy

Policy simply means a plan or course of action in directing the affairs, as chosen by a political party, government, business or company (World Education Forum, 2015). In practical terms, it consists of a course of actions and measures deliberately taken to direct the affairs of society towards the realisation of predetermined goals or objectives. Stated most simply, a policy is the sum of government activities, whether acting directly or through agents, as it has an influence on the lives of citizens. Policy is a definite course or method of action selected by a government, institution, or individual from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and usually determine present and future decisions.

Policy gives the direction of where the country is going and, at the same time, policies are used to assess or evaluate the performance of an institution. Nigeria as a country has a serious challenge in terms of policy issues because there is no clear framework. A set of policies are principles, rules and guidelines formulated or adopted by an organisation to reach its long term goals and physically published in a booklet or any other form that is widely accessible. Policies and procedures are designed to influence and determine all major decisions and actions, and all activities that take place within the boundaries set by them.

Public Policy

Public policy is the outcome of the decisions taken by the government at all levels on serious and sensitive issues of general interest (Dye, 1995). He stressed further that public policy is conceived as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. To him, however, governments do many things in the state. Thus, governments regulate conflict within the society; they organize society to engage in conflict with other societies; they distribute a great variety of symbolic rewards and material services to members of the society, among others.

Public policy is the means by which a government maintains order or addresses the needs of its citizens. Anderson (2003) viewed public policies in a modern complex society as ubiquitous, that is, being everywhere at once. They confer advantages and disadvantages, causes, pleasure, irritation and pain, and collectively have important consequences for

people's well-being and happiness, as well as constituting a significant portion of our environment.

Public policies are those developed by governmental bodies and officials. The special characteristic of public policies stems from being formulated by David Easton has called the authorities in a political system, namely, elders, paramount chiefs, executives, legislators, judges, and administrators, among others. According to him, the persons who engage in the daily affairs of a political system are recognised by most members of the system as having responsibilities for these matters and take actions that are accepted as binding most of the time by most members so long as they act within the limits of their roles.

Stages of Public Policy

Policy cycle is a tool used for analysing the development of a policy. The four (4) stages of policy circle are:

- i. Agenda Setting (Problem Identification):** The public becomes aware of an issue as a problem, and because of demands being made by certain groups and dominant values in society, this problem is defined as a problem on which action needs to be taken (problem definition). This problem then becomes a part of the political-decision agenda, meaning that a decision has to be made as to when and who will deal with the problem and in what form (agenda setting).
- ii. Policy Formulation** This is the pre-decision phase that encompasses the steps in the decision-making process which include identification of alternatives; gathering and analysing alternatives, and applying a decision tool- estimation and selections are done at this stage.
- iii. Policy Implementation:** This refers to the execution of selected options. It is the translation of policy mandates into actions and prescriptions into concrete desirable results and goals into concrete realities (Atuka, 2009). Implementation is also the process

of converting inputs- financials, information, materials, technical, human, demand, support among others- into outputs- goods and services.

- iii. Policy Evaluation:** This stage of the policy process is concerned with determining the impact of policy real-life conditions. It deals with the estimation, assessment or appraisal of a policy, including its content. Evaluation asks questions of the following sorts: What officials and programmes or policies are successful or unsuccessful? How can that performance be measured or assessed? Is the policy working? If not, why is it not working?

Decision Making

Decision making is the selection from among alternatives for a course of action; it is at the core of planning. A plan cannot be said to exist unless a decision, commitment of resources, direction or reputation have been made. Decision-making is the development of alternatives, and it is rare for the alternatives to be lacking for any course of action. Managers sometimes see decision-making as their central job because they must constantly choose what is to be done, who is to do it, when, where and, occasionally, even how it will be done (Adediran 2008).

Inconsistency

Inconsistency is the quality or state of being inconsistent. To be inconsistent is to lose the sequence of one's actions. Policy inconsistency resulting from changes in policy sometimes emerges from the attempt of leaders to reform society not necessarily to create a setback for the citizenry. Where a leader has amended a policy, not for national interests or development, but to tarnish the predecessors, such policy is likely to fail. Policy inconsistency occurs in many countries with the change of governments. For instance, President Donald Trump of the United States signed an executive order that aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions from power stations, an act which is at variance with Barack Obama's policy; Theresa May amended the controversial social care policy introduced by the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron; Italian labour policy also changed

in the 1990s. In Nigeria, several economic, political and social policies have changed due to changes in governments from one military government to another, military to a democratic leader, and civilian government to another civilian.

Methodology

This study strictly relied on secondary data. Data were gathered through the use of textbooks, newspapers, journals, and internet sources, among others.

Reasons for Policy Inconsistencies in Nigeria

According to *Public Policy and Administration Research Journal*, several reasons have been attributed to policy failure in Nigeria, among which are:

- i. Lack of sufficient and unreliable data
- ii. Unexpected economic disturbances
- iii. Lack of skilled manpower, which has also resulted in brain syndrome
- iv. Corruption, both at political and bureaucratic levels, has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian economy
- v. Disregard or oversight of recurrent cost implications of capital projects /expenditures
- vi. Unnecessary reliance on External Sector in Revenue Projections
- vii. Lack of commitment and political will to implement policies; resistance to change and innovation; vague plans and policy objectives. Therefore, performance targets and benchmarks cannot be meaningfully specified

Cases of Policy Inconsistency in Nigeria

Policy continuation is something that is lacking in Nigeria. Once a new government takes over power, it usually abandons the previous governmental policies or programmes. This was made worse by past frequent military interventions in our polity, and even the civilians have not done better; they still follow the concepts of policy inconsistency.

The National Council on Development Planning (NCDP) recognised lack of stability and continuity in programmes by succeeding governments as the bane of Nigeria's stunted growth and development. Very few policies have stood the test of time, out with the old and in with the new policies. Most politicians are entirely focused on getting re-elected rather than enforcing feasible and viable policies that actually drive long-term growth. As a result, the frequent change of government after elections often leads to a complete or partial disruption of the policies enacted by the previous administration, whether good or bad. Politicians have a sense of "my policy". The Abuja-Kaduna railway is a typical example, where supporters of ex-president Goodluck Jonathan did not let Nigerians forget that Jonathan began it, and Muhammadu Buhari completed it.

Before the discovery of oil, the Nigerian economy was purely agrarian. However, a lack of policy cohesion and sustainability has prevented the sector from growing to its full potential. The issue of discontinuity was rooted in the military era, and since then, subsequent governments have adopted the same attitude towards policy. For instance, in 1975, General Yakubu Gowon introduced the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) policy. This was followed by the popular Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) policy introduced by General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime in 1976. Obasanjo's successor, President Sheu Shagari, abandoned the OFN policy and started the Green Revolution campaign, and when his successor, the then General Muhammadu Buhari, came into power in 1983, he abandoned both schemes started by his predecessors. The cycle continues until today. When General Ibrahim Babangida came in 1985, he introduced the Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Reliance (MAMSER) which also aimed to increase agricultural productivity. He also introduced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Part

of Structural Adjustment Programme policies entailed the deregulation of the agricultural sector by abolishing the marketing boards and eliminating of price controls. Mrs Maryam Babangida started the Better Life Programme for Rural Women. It is interesting to note here that no rural woman was involved in this project despite the fact that it was meant to help them. Mrs Maryam Abacha introduced her Family Support Programme, while Late Stella Obasanjo introduced Child Care Trust Project. Also, Mrs Turai Yaradua had her pet project called Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation (WAYEF). Various wives of State Governors and Local Government Chairmen have one pet project or the other. These projects at times duplicate the functions of some government ministries and are in reality wasteful projects and a waste of public funds. It is important to say that there are no constitutional provisions to fund the pet projects of First Ladies, yet governments still fund them.

In 2018, farmers and those investing in the agricultural sector were feeling the impact of the inability of the Nigerian government to see one policy through “policy inconsistency is running our business” they expressed. Very few policies are retained by subsequent administrations; examples of these are the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). This scheme has lasted 36 years now. The Federal Character Principle (the 1979 constitution) has also lasted for 30 years. Other policies might have also lasted, but the rate of policy inconsistency is grievous and not healthy for the nation. Policy inconsistency is also part of the reasons for numerous abandoned government projects. The prevailing economic circumstances might entail a change in policy direction, but a careful study of the Nigerian situation shows most of these policy inconsistencies are an avenue for siphoning public funds. Rather than starting a new one that will be abandoned by another administration, there should be continuity.

Policy Inconsistency in Educational Sector

It was observed in *The Pointer Magazine* of 9th November 2019 that inconsistency and poor implementation of policies are the major banes of our educational system. Too often policies evolved are not understood, and while they are being studied, new ones are introduced. The frequent changes in government and the paucity of technocrats within government

contribute negatively to the nation's educational system. There is also the issue of an acute shortage of infrastructure and facilities at every tier of our education and some 49 per cent of the teaching force are unqualified. For over 34 years, the nation has been unable to successfully implement the National Policy on Education, (NPE), which was introduced in 1977.

The 6-3-3-4 system was introduced to replace the previous system, including the Higher School Certificate, HSC. The flaws with the 6-3-3-4 system were noticed by the Obasanjo administration when the system had not been fully implemented. Consequently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced, and the HSC was re-introduced in selected

Institutions. The importance of education to the general wellbeing of mankind cannot be over-emphasized. The relationship between education and development has been established such that education is now internationally accepted as a key development index.

Regardless of the incontrovertible evidence that education is crucial to the development of the community and the nation, there remains an inequality in access to education in the country. Underfunding education has been a recurring process and even the underfunding filters away through corruption. The inadequate and often misused research grants and indiscipline are also some of the challenges in our educational development. Lack of commitment by the teachers because of the urge for extra financial returns affects the system and so have the endless serial strikes affected every tier of our educational system and there seems to be no end in sight. Every successive government aims to change and introduce policy, some for the sake of changing existing policies, and most of these changes and policies are merely on paper and never effected. There was the info-tech education, but following a lack of electricity to operate the system, it collapsed. The 6-3-3-4 system was not different from the previous system. The planners are up there and do not integrate with the key implementers of their policies. Teachers are not being carried along at the policy formulation stages; therefore, implementation becomes difficult.

Iyabo Lawal (2020) asserted that prior to 1960, Nigeria's educational system was fashioned after the British's six years of primary education, five years of secondary education, and two years of higher-level or A-Levels. There were resounding successes in terms of inputs and outputs. A couple of years after independence, the system changed. In 1983, the education system was updated to the 6-3-3-4 system (six years in primary school, three years in junior secondary school, three years in senior secondary school, and four [not in all cases] years in higher institutions), similar to the American system. A decade after that, precisely in 1993, the Federal Government developed and adopted the first National Policy on Education that signalled the genesis of changes and modifications at various levels in the system.

In the northern part of the country, the Qur'anic school system, with its attendant problems of lack of accountability, continued to thrive and run parallel with the national educational system. Even though the Universal Primary Education (UPE) made primary education free and universal, little or no attempt was made to make it compulsory for all children. The national education policy was once again revised in 1998 and 2004 to "make it relevant to the development needs of the country," especially the north.

Experts have noted that since education is an agent of cultural transmission, as well as change, Nigeria's revisions of its educational policy should reflect the "dynamic process of nation-building that is continually being modified by new conditions." The 1998 educational policy introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, prescribing nine years of continued education (six years in primary school and three-year junior secondary school) designed to eradicate illiteracy and provide equal learning opportunities. There was no enforcement of the policy. Not done with inventing and re-inventing policies in the education sector, the current administration of Muhammadu Buhari came up with "Education for change: A ministerial strategic plan (2015-2019). The document is concerned with the issue of out-of-school children, basic education, teacher education, adult literacy, curriculum and policy matters on basic and secondary education, technical and vocational education, education data planning, li-

brary services, information and communication technology, and tertiary education.

In the document, the Federal Government proposed strategies for engaging with state governments in addressing the problems of out-of-school children. It also planned to raise the national Net Enrolment Rate (NET) by enrolling 2,875,000 pupils annually for the next four years, as well as renovate schools destroyed by Boko Haram insurgents and construct additional 71, 874 classrooms yearly. But education managers and stakeholders, in their separate assessments of the sector in the last 60 years, said the sector has worsened and would require an overhaul to meet the 21st-century challenges.

Concluding Remarks

Policy inconsistency in one way or the other has led to a lack of economic growth, especially in a country like Nigeria. Lack of continuity in policies relating to education, roads, electricity and social welfare has led to the major bane of Nigeria's structural development. The only way to resolve this issue is for the political leaders, during their governance, to start putting the people's interest first, and stop being selfish and egoistic about decisions that concern the generality of the people.

Recommendations

If Nigeria is to witness any form of advancement in growth, especially in educational policy formulation and implementation, the following recommendations must be strictly followed:

- i. Leaders, administrators and the entire citizenry should ensure and enforce commitment to policy implementation. It has once been argued by scholars, such as Rogoff (1987), and Lucas and Prescott (1967), that strict adherence to rules and regulations governing societies is one action too many. As far as this paper is concerned, it can be argued further that value re-orientation of both the leaders and the led appears to have a better quality outcome than strict compliance to rules, and the absence of the former renders the latter ineffective.

ii. There must be political will among public servants to maintain the policies put in place by their predecessors, except when it becomes necessary to make amendments.

iii. Civil society and institutions also need to install stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms to monitor, regulate and [appraise](#) the activities of the government. Most importantly, policymakers need to adhere to the parlance, “don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater”.

iv. Efforts should be made to synergize our educational policy with our societal needs. Problem-solving should be the core of our education, and policies should be formulated to suit our local environment.

v. Policies should evolve research teams that have a strong bearing on the formulation and implementation of national educational policies. Provision should be made for follow-up on getting our research findings adopted for policy formulation and implementation. For as long as we continue to import foreign policies, implementation will continue to be the bane of such policies.

vi. Both the government and the citizens must first admit that there are problems in the sector and therefore declare a state of emergency to address them.

vii. There is the need to increase budgetary allocations at all levels of education; all colleges of education should be upgraded to postgraduate schools so that only postgraduates can be employed as teachers. Also, salaries of teachers should be doubled; other extra allowances to attract and retain the best and brightest into teaching should also be introduced.

viii. The University system should be revamped to increase its quality and funding. Also, PhD students should be sponsored with bursaries and allowances; there should also be increased funding by TETFund for research, preferably in dollars, as well as automatic employment for first-class graduates. In so doing, the system must have a reward system, whereby not all professors would earn the same salary. The ability to attract research grants should include more substantial personnel costs to

researchers to make them comfortable and better focused; this will also attract bright students/staff to their research groups.

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