

**ROLE ASSESSMENT OF INTEREST GROUP IN THE FORMULATION OF EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: *The PTA and NUT Account Towards Education Productivity and Quality Teaching***

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper assesses the role of interest group in the formulation of education policy and practice in Nigeria. Having in mind that the government reserves the rights and privilege of making this decision to itself, the influence and proposition of interest groups had been a force to be reckon with in the field of educational practice in Nigeria. In most cases, the activities of the group checks, moderates and atimes nullified intentions and actions of the government. Particularly, with reference to the Nigeria Union of Teachers [NUT] and Parent- Teachers Association [PTA] activities who are prominent players in the first two levels of our education system. Attempt is made in this paper to review the activities of these groups and how they fare respectively as moderators of policies in the sector. It is recommended that interest group should continue to keep up their inevitable roles and have their ears-on-ground so that they can immediately respond to any issue, policy and reform of government that may be detrimental or incongruent to the group interest and for the general purpose*

**Introduction**

Various views of public policy have been propounded by various participants and observers. In the same vein, the interdisciplinary nature of the concept constitutes another problem to its conceptualization. For instance, economists' talk of economic policies, the educationalist refers to it as educational policies. Robbers and Edwards in Johnson [2001] define policy as "a set of decision taken by political actors or group concerning the selection of goals and the method of attaining them relating to a specified situation".

Similarly, policy can be referred to as "series of steps taken by the government to solve problems, make decision, allocate resource or values, implement policies and in general

to do the things expected of them by their constituencies" {Johnson, 2001}. Policy concern the formulation of a decision, how is to be implemented and evaluated. Asika {1991}expresses that since policy attempts to describe how government goes about performing it obligations, it can be said therefore that public policy is whatever government choose to do or not to do. However, the influence of interest groups in the formulation and moderation of policies become pertinent because some decisions translated into polices are a times incongruent with interest of some groups. Teachers, students or parents in education sector or even that of the general purpose as represented by the Nigerian Labour Congress [NLC].

Education policy, according to Ajayi and Ajayi [1990:97]can be regarded as the statement which expressed educational goals and procedures for achieving those goals. Similarly, Nwokafor [1983] sees education policy making as a definite course of action recommended and adopted by government body as necessary to issues and problems of education. Education policy from the above definitions can be seen as set of decisions adopted by government in tackling certain educational problems for the achievement of national goals.

### **Policy Making**

Current legal provisions in Nigeria education ascribed responsibility of the ultimate determination of policy matters to the political authority. Hence, at Federal level, the Minister of Education is the chief policy maker while at the state level; the Commissioner for education is in charge. It is as a result of this that both political officers are held accountable for whatever their ministries does in terms of overall control, determination and evaluation of policies with respect to goal structure and operation of the system.

For policy formulation below cabinet level in Nigeria, the National Council of Education [N.C.E] composed of the Federal Minister of Education and all States Commissioners and the Joint Consultative Committee of Education [J.C.C] made up of education officials and outside education experts took charge of educational policy formulation on behalf of the Federal and State Government.

Atimes, some unforeseen or accidental decisions are taken especially by the executives [President, State governors] during campaign, state or local government visits or any other public outings. These decisions are translated into policy in which state funds are to be expended. For example during the formation of political parties in 1999, the three political parties, which finally qualified to context election to the office of governor and president did not fine-tune or have a clear-cut agenda. When president Obasanjo latter

won the election and announced UBE scheme during his inauguration speech in October that year, it invariably became a decision of Mr. President in which state resources were to be expended. In a civilian dispensation however, such decision is translated into a bill to be sent and deliberated by the National Assembly, pass and endorsed by the president before such decisions can become law, binding and on which state fund is to be expended

### **Interest Group and Method of Influence**

According to Roberts and Edward [1991] in Johnson [2001:91] interest group is defined as; an organized group which has as one of its principal purposes the exercise of influence on political institutions in order to secure decisions favorable to the interest the group represents, or to discourage decisions from being taken which would be unfavorable to these interests. Similarly, interest group is an organization that attempts to influence the policies of government through pressure or persuasion of the office holders. That is why they are often regarded as pressure groups. Interest groups are more interested in the policies of government and seek to obtain laws and policies compatible with their own special interests [Dare and Oyewole 1991:40]. Examples of such interest groups in educational enterprises are, National Association of Nigerian Students [NANS], Academic Staff Union of Universities [ASUU], Non Academic Staff Union of Universities [NASUU], Academic Union of Colleges of Education [ASUCOE], Nigeria Union of Teachers [NUT], National Parent-Teachers Association of Nigeria [NAPTAN] among others.

### **Method of Influence**

There are several methods open to interest groups to press home their demands or make their views known about policies of concern. Among them are:

- a. Employ Professional public relation agents to state their cases.
- b. Press release and communiqué
- c. Sponsor candidates for election who will be sympathetic to their course.
- d. Lobby key decision makers such as president, house of assembly and cabinet members to take certain decisions.
- e. Threat of strike, sit down strike and total strike action.

### **Interest Group and Policy Formulation Overview: Parent-Teachers Association (PTA)**

This association became a pillar in both primary and secondary school. As a result of incapacity of government to solely fund primary and secondary schools, it is therefore very popular in these two levels. But today the association has gone beyond monetary donor to a force in curriculum planning and selection of educational ideas. For example, the contribution of parents towards the making and adoption of the 1969 all Nigeria curriculum conference is a reference point. In support of this Nnolin [1988: 96] express that:

*Parent must have input in the selection and the ideas the society advocates and which the school teaches because they have the greater responsibility in term of time, in the calculation of those idea. To accomplish this, parent participates in curriculum design. The school system must make provision for local management boards with a reasonable percentage of representation by parents selected because of proven knowledge and understanding of curriculum matters.*

Similarly to the expression above, some of the state chapters of the PTA had penetrated into administration and school procedure. Many a times, they curtailed excesses of some school principals and headmasters and prevents unpopular decisions of school authority from biding on pupils or parents.

Furthermore, National Parent-Teachers Association of Nigeria [NPTAN] has taken it upon itself to seek the indulgence with the government when it deem it fit to discuss and re-think certain decisions that affects the teachers, the parents and the schools. This group had been in vanguard fighting against those decisions that are detrimental to pupils' and guides the government through adopting responsible laws. Generally, the PTA had made frantic efforts in this regard. For instance, the [NPTAN] which had, Alhaji Alade Babs Animasahun as its first president and held the association for quiet a long time {1980-2007} made good efforts and influenced lot of policy decisions of the state. Of particular reference is that of the funding and control of primary education. During the year 1991-1992, 1992 – 1993 and 1993- 1994 sessions [the ill fated third Republic periods] when primary education was handed over to the Local Government Councils [LGC] through decree 3 of January 1991. The Decree dissolved the National Primary Education Commission [NPEC] {Jagaba 2004:21}. Education funds were diverted to other use

resulting into non-payment of teachers' salaries and allowances for several months across the country. It is the combined effort of the NPTAN and NUT that made government to reconsider its policy on councils' control of primary education and recreate National Primary Education Commission [NPEC] by Degree 96 of 1993. At present, the two associations still opposed the return of primary education to the Local Government despite the council's chairmen unrelenting efforts in this direction {Third Eye, 1995:5}. Similarly, the NPTAN ensured that it has representative in all education committee. For instance, it has representative in the "inter-ministerial committee on Teacher Salary Structure set up in March, 1995 during Abacha's regime and equally has one on "Social Security Scheme [SSS] panel for teachers.

Apart from the above, the significance of PTA in our schools and colleges cannot be over emphasized if we are to assess its moral and financial commitments. It has built classrooms, laboratories, libraries and provides teaching materials to schools when the need arises especially when government attention is not forthcoming. The mark of PTA in this direction can be seen in our various schools today. Before May 2007, that terminated the Obasanjo administration, the NPTAN led other interest groups condemning the Federal Government decision to partner or sell the Unity Schools to private sectors. The support it gave to teachers and non-teaching staff made the Federal Government go back to the drawing board.

The PTA also led its voice on the decision of the Government on boarding matters in Nigerian Universities. Its condemnation to the proposed N10,000 per bed space per students in the year 2004 led to government silence on the matter and to the discretions of the individual university authorities. The importance of PTA in support of schools was further reinforced through a program such as, Community\World Bank assisted program under the auspices of UBE commission; where reconstruction, rehabilitation of classrooms were being carried out based on PTA deposit of cash, material or labour.

### **Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT)**

Historically, the teaching profession in Nigeria has been taken to be low status occupation. This has been the image at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century and to some extent up to the present time. According to Adesina {1990} teachers were looked upon with mixed feeling of pity and respect. Whereas, pity and respect do not mix well, this led to the idea of teachers' union in 1930. In response to its neglect and attendant militancy of the teachers since political independence, NUT's role has shifted from that of a professional organization to trade union. In effect, few people endeavor to link the

organization to the Nigerian Bar Association [NBA] or Nigeria Medical Association [NMA].

On the contrary, in Great Britain, Teachers' Association is the largest best organized and most articulate union. The association is a powerful group in education affair and will only support policies and programs that will contribute to social growth and economic development of United Kingdom. One of the major issues in which the association played a major part was in 1963. It mobilized 86 organizations and 130 distinguished people in the campaign for education; 30 public meetings, 2 national rallies, a film and many other activities helped to create a favorable climate for the minister, which enable him, win 84 million for school building [Mann 1979:49]

In a similar approach, the Nigeria Union of Teachers [NUT] from the very beginning [1<sup>st</sup> Conference] had asserted that its activities is not going to be restricted to improvement of condition of members alone but among other role, an organ through which the opinion of teachers on matter affecting the teaching profession directly or indirectly could be channel to government [Fajana 1978:294]. Following this submission, the NUT president, Esua in 1972, during the inauguration meeting of World Conference Organization of Teaching Profession [WCOTP] on educational policy for Africa., re-emphasized in his address to the delegates that the NUT would continue to maintain its political status and that it was not to be accused of political meddling when it saw fit to criticize any education proposal on professional ground [Smyke and Stone, 1973:204]. The NUT has influenced some significant prepositions and is still contending some policy issues with the government. Its roles can be assessed through some major policy decisions since its formation.

- i. **Control of Education:** The history of who control education is as old as the formal education itself. It is on record that in 1939 at a board of education meeting of the Federal Executive Council, the NUT opposed the government policy of turning over its primary schools to the missions, the native authority or private individuals [Adesina 1990:55]. In 1963, the issue and the question of who was ultimately to control primary and secondary education in Nigeria re-echo. The NUT during the 32th conference did not succumb to this idea. During this conference in January, the Federal Minister of Education emphasized the commitment of the government to the retention of religious instruction in Nigerian school but did not suggest it is pre-requisite for the retention of control of schools by voluntary agencies [Symke and Store 1973:215].

Although, the NUT latter won the battle on the control of education by virtue of the “take-over of school” policy of the Federal Government in 1976; in the early hours of the Fourth Republic, the issue became a fresh demand not only from the voluntary and religions groups but between the three tiers of government. According to Vanguard {2004} some state chapters of NUT later headed to court to challenge the return of some mission schools to their former owners. Lagos, Anambra, Edo, Oyo, and River were among such states. Today, the numbers of private schools up to university level are now competing with government owned institutions across the nation in term of effectiveness, resource management, quality teaching and good products due to the liberation of the sector. This development becomes a challenge to the NUT in both career prospect, quality control and competition

- ii. **Qualifying Examination for Teachers:** According to Smyke and Store [1973:214] the regulation of 1926 governing the award of Teacher Certificates stipulated that all teachers including university degree should sit for Senior Teacher Examination [STE]. Prior before this time, the issue had been between missions and the government. In 1926 and thereafter both were on defensive of the NUT. It was remarkable how much reasoning was put into the argument by teachers but with comparable little success at initial stage. The union offensive on this issue however largely contributed to the abandonment of government stand on such decisions in later years. At present, the union seems to have loosed out in connection with qualifying examination. This is because some state governments in attempt to reposition the education sector and make it more productive rolled out measures to improve teaching quality. For instance, among measures forwarded by the Kaduna and Kwara state governments were to examine the teachers to determine areas of their weaknesses. Similarly, the NUT did not raise any objection to the conditions laid down by the Teachers’ Registration Council of Nigeria [TRCN] for teachers’ registration. According to the council, before a teacher could be licensed to teach henceforth, he will be made to face a teachers’ examination to become qualify and be licensed. This policy actually took effect from October, 2008. This is probably because the practice has become consonant with international practice as in Wisconsin and Minnesota [Wise, 1999]. The first of such examination took place across the country on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2008. Earlier, specialists were called to Abuja to develop item of the examination.
- iii. **Salary Discrimination and Review:** The history of salary discrimination has been with teachers’ right from immemorial. It was recalled by NUT President

Canon Alayande in 1967, according to Fajana [1978:216] that in the early days of the NUT, the membership faced continual discrimination by the government for their trade union activities. Around 1939 there was a salary revision for civil service but the teachers were left out. The NUT through the good office of British Parliament which in turn ordered that salary revision of teacher takes place immediately. The next target was obtaining government approval that whenever the civil service salaries were under review that teachers would automatically be included. Unfortunately, government did not abide by this agreement. Thus, in 1950s and 1960s without persistent efforts to improve the working condition of teachers, the surge for teacher militancy reached a turning point in 1964 with unprecedented teachers' nation strike. Various strike actions and pressure resulted in a news compensation for teacher [Adesina 1990:49].

During Babangida era [1985-1993] when deregulation of the nation's economy and emolument of civil servants were among major policies of the government, the NUT and several other interest groups fought for a special salary structure. While professional union like the ASUU, NMA, NBA etc, actually secured a special structure for their members, the former is still in dispute with the Federal Government on the same and other issues in which series of industrial actions were yet to settle. Some of which are as stated in Vanguard [1994:1];

- i. Professionalization of Teaching
- ii. Teachers' Registration Council [TRC]
- iii. Teacher Salary Structure [TSS]
- iv. Establishment of a separate pension board for teachers.
- v. Establishment of a National Negotiating Committee

Although government had established the TRCN through Act 31, 1993 as pre-requisite for the professionalization; the council was not put into place until year 2001. Up till now the government is still in dilemma on how to fund a special salary scale for teachers in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. Recently again the issue of TSS lead the teachers to another Nation Wide Strike between 29<sup>th</sup> June and 29<sup>th</sup> July 2008. The strike according to the NUT was in continuation of their 18<sup>th</sup> years struggle for a separate salary scale. Yet, the five weeks strike could only secure a 27.5 % increase in their basic emolument endorsed by the forum of the governors which of course differs from state to state. In very small time, the teachers are likely to pick up the issue again in view of the reluctant acceptance of the agreement by the state governors on one hand and unacceptable terms of agreement by the generality of teachers. Trust and fulfillment of promises has been a bane with Nigerian leaders and politicians. According to the Union



branches if the politicians from across the nation could be treated with the same fat salary structure; why should that of civil servant, the teachers in particular be different. Seven months after the agreement have been sealed, some state governors are yet to honour the agreement.

On general note, the NUT had performed credibly well by getting the Federal Government to examine their grievances through some national commissions like Dike Commission and Adefarasin Commission. Equally, interest and agitation were heard through National Conferences, Curriculum reforms, publications all of which have made a far-reaching recommendations and accepted by government.

### **Problem of NPTAN and NUT**

#### **NPTAN**

- a. The state chapters of the PTA seem not to be effective. Put positively, some state wings of the association are not as active or on ground as it would be expected. That is why some decisions of the association were not binding on all state chapters. Similarly, the executive office of the association seems to be an appointment for life! Other wise a president would not be spending twenty or more years in office as thus by the immediate past president.
- b. Incapacity to seek general sympathy to a course. The NPTAN lacked the will and coercion to evolve and carry along other professional associations to jointly seek decisions that may improve productivity and quality in school instructions. This is important because parents in all professions belong to PTA chapter of their respective state one way or the other.
- c. Problem of fund. From observation, it was detected that the association is unable to call a general state meetings talk more of the nation congress. As such, issue of money to fund the association is a big problem. The only alternative which some states now adapted is to levy school pupils certain amount in the name of the union. This is against the policy of free basic education in the country since this fee is been collected by the school authority. Hence, the union should device a sustainable method to generate fund.

#### **NUT**

- a. Problem of job security among the executives. This problem handicapped the union to fight cases into logical conclusion when a threat of arrest, suspension and dismissal are waved on the NUT official

- b. Betrayal of trust among teachers and executives. Because of poverty level and civil service emolument of teachers, this had made teachers disobey their union especially when government came up with defense mechanism and the use of mass media to get the striking workers back to work.
- c. The NUT lacked the technical and cohesion to fight a good course to the finishing. A times a good course of action can be defeated when there is no technical means and public support to back up the fight.
- d. Internal crisis within the state and regional union. In other words, the crisis that engulfed the NUT do to office sharing formula and consequently led to decentralization of the national NUT between the North and West in September 2004 set back the hand clock of the union for several years. This at all cost must be avoided in future election or selection of officers.

### **Recommendations**

Interest groups are policy molders at levels in which they operates. The following recommendations may enhance their cohesion of the unions and be helpful to all and for the benefit of our education operation.

- A functional branch in all the states and the Federal Capital Territory. Since our federalism still empowered the federal government with substantial resource and power, it will be of benefit if interest group can be national in outlook. Apart from enhancing co-ordination of all state branches, it would improve sense of belonging of every member.
- Regular state and national meetings. The union should also ensure that they always speak in one voice. This is only possible through regular interaction and share of knowledge. To make this possible, state meeting should be held every three months and the nation meetings two or three times in a year.
- Union executive should avoid the sit-tight syndrome in the office. The union officers should not perpetrate themselves in office except otherwise re-elected. Any one that found himself as union leader should serve and to the best interest of his members.
- Quick detection of mal-functions in schools. As the closest to the school the parents, the teachers, are in the best position to see the development of dysfunctions in the education system. Once this is discovered, the two union should disseminate such development immediately to the government for necessary action. It is through their regular meetings and communique that

- government can take them serious and constantly seek their input before any draft of policy decisions.
- Par-take in political arrangement. The union should not be silence in the political arrangement of the country. If they do, they would be leaving the exercise to the vagabonds. Since this would not be in the interest of the country, they should lend their voice to who should be in what office and how to or not to share the limited resources. On the other hand, the union could engage and have dialogue with the serious political parties so that it interest can be accommodated in their manifestoes.
  - The lowest paid profession in Nigeria is teaching. As such, the problem of poor educational quality and products can't be addressed without incorporating professional salary and improve infrastructures of the school.

### Conclusion

Though statutory provisions at both federal and state levels on formulation of policy do not provide for involvement of interest groups, yet, the group would continue to participate in this regard inspite of the fact that their suggestions may not be utilize. The interest group would continue to pressurize government to modify, change or include decisions that is of benefit to their members thereby moderate the final draft of policy. Having in mind that members of this union especially parents' union are experts from various fields, their reactions and services becomes imperative if only to solve contemporary educational, social political and economic problems. Adesina [1990:45] earlier on concluded in a similar tone that

*The rationales for this position derives from several factors determine the nature of education provided in any society. They may be political, social, economic, cultural and religious; As a result, experts in these fields should be allowed to contribute to the definitions of policies as these affected educational programs.*

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