

10-24-2012

Political Legitimacy and Educational Policy in Nigeria in the 1970's: the Case of the Nigerian Military Governments. 1966-1976

K.C.P. Asagwara

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci>

Recommended Citation

Asagwara, K.C.P. (1995) "Political Legitimacy and Educational Policy in Nigeria in the 1970's: the Case of the Nigerian Military Governments. 1966-1976," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 24: Iss. 1, Article 6. Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol24/iss1/6>

This Research paper/Rapport de recherche is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact kmarshal@uwo.ca.

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN NIGERIA IN THE 1970'S: THE CASE OF THE NIGERIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENTS, 1966-1976

Ken C. Prince Asagwara, Ph.D.
The University of Manitoba

The paper examines and analyzes the crisis of political legitimacy that faced the Federal military Government of Nigeria from 1966 to 1976. The central argument in this paper is that the problem of acquiring political legitimacy played a significant role in the major educational policy implemented by the military regime in Nigeria in the first twelve years of military rule. The military rulers who implemented the national education policy of the 1970's that led to free tuition education at all levels may have acted in the best interest of the country. But they also wanted it to win national recognition and acceptance from all sections of the society. Phenomenal achievements have been made in terms of enrolment increases at all levels of the education system, relative availability of learning facilities, increases in literacy and numeracy rates in the country, and the narrowing of the education gap between the North and South in particular, and between the ethnic groups in general. The author argues however that the national education policy implemented by the military rulers seems to have benefitted the political leadership more than the political community. The Federal Military Government's national policy on education was designed for political expediency. It was meant to serve the purpose of winning approval of votes from the masses. It is a classic case of welfare politics.

Cet article examine et analyse la crise de légitimité politique que devait faire face le gouvernement fédéral militaire du Nigéria entre 1966 et 1976. L'argument central démontre que l'acquisition de la légitimité politique joue un rôle important dans la politique sur l'éducation promue par le régime militaire au Nigéria dans les douze premières années de ce régime. Ayant fait appliquer la politique nationale de l'éducation dans les années 1970 dont le résultat menait à une éducation gratuite à tous les niveaux, les dirigeants militaires avaient dû agir dans l'intérêt de la nation. Mais ils voulaient aussi être reconnus par la nation et acceptés par toutes les sections de la société. Ils avaient réalisé des succès sensationnels: une augmentation considérable des inscriptions scolaires à tous les niveaux, un accès plus ouvert des centres de formation, un taux d'alphabétisation et de capacité au calcul plus élevé dans la campagne et la réduction de l'écart des niveaux d'éducation entre

le Nord et le Sud, en particulier, puis entre les groupes ethniques en général. Mais l'auteur a voulu montrer la politique nationale de l'éducation appliquée par les dirigeants militaires avaient mieux servi la classe dirigeante que la communauté politique. La politique de l'éducation du gouvernement militaire fédéral a été conçue pour des raisons d'ordre politique. C'était pour gagner les voix de la masse populaire. C'est le cas classique de la politique providentielle.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country of multi-ethnic and cultural groups usually classified into linguistic affiliation. It is a country with powerful and prestigious public institutions whose members are often recruited on the basis of their educational accomplishments, and to a certain extent, the ethnic group that controls bureaucratic directives is as politically significant as the ethnic or geographic origin of the President and the top ministers. And often the question of who makes decisions touches the heart of the problem of ethnic political and economic dominance or pre-eminence. In this rapidly changing and politically conscious society, if any ethnic group perceives that its ability to control its destiny has been or is about to be compromised, there is bound to be challenge and disapproval of the action of the national government. When this happens, the political allegiance which all sections of the country owe to the national government is threatened. The national government will try to assert its authority over all sections of the country by the use of force, and/or by stressing and promoting inter-ethnic harmony and political cohesion of the country. If it does not succeed, its political legitimacy would be undermined.

In Nigeria, democratically elected national governments have had their political legitimacy challenged from time to time by ethnic leaders and their supporters for various reasons. In the case of a military government that shot its way into power, winning political support from all sections of the country and being accepted as a legitimate national government will be an even more difficult task. It can stay in political office by the use of force or winning widespread acceptance and political legitimacy by its public policy. I have tried to explore the crisis of political legitimacy within the military government of Nigeria from 1966 to 1976. The need for political legitimacy and national acceptance of the authority of the military government was instrumental in its national education policy of the 1970's. To put the issues into proper perspective, we will review the concept of political legitimacy.

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

According to Lipset (1960), the desire for legitimacy or popular acceptance is common to all forms of government. It is important for a

government to possess it, or the political decisions that are made may not be accepted as binding by the political community. Legitimacy entails the capacity of the political leadership to maintain the acceptance by the political community that its goals and objectives will further their interest. Where legitimacy is lost or the political community refuses to accept the political decisions of the political leadership, the existing apparatus may no longer be appropriate for the society. The consequences may be tyranny, fear, insecurity, repression, military coup or secession.

Robert Dahl in *Dare* (1975, p. 95) argues that a government is said to be legitimate if the people to whom its orders are directed believe that the structure, procedures, acts, decisions, policies, officials and leaders of the government possess the quality of rightness, propriety or moral goodness - the right in short, to make binding rules. When democratically elected governments make political decisions, these are binding on the political community because the leaders were elected to act on the citizens' behalf. The authority exercised is legitimate because the governed or political community willingly and consciously suspended their judgment for that of the political leadership, especially if that power is exercised within certain limits and according to certain rules. "It is this belief by those who are ruled that their leaders have a right to rule" that constitutes "the foundation of legitimacy" (*Dare*, *ibid*, p. 96). An unwanted and unpopular regime could end up with a very positive image, nation-wide acceptance and legitimacy if it puts in place effective and efficient public political policies that are compatible with the values of the political community. So, a regime or political leadership can win political legitimacy or popular acceptance. The success or failure of any government or political leadership is determined by results. But a government that came to power through a coup would need popular and effective public policies in order to compensate for the initial stigma of illegitimacy.

In a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria, building political legitimacy through effective public policies is usually difficult because of sectional cleavages. The result often is the crisis of legitimacy in the political leadership of the country. If a government that is in need of political legitimacy is able to find issues or policies that are acceptable to all sections of the political community, it is likely to gain the political legitimacy needed to stay in power. The Federal Military Government of Nigeria used the issue of education as a major public policy instrument to acquire political legitimacy. We will see in the next section how this was done by the Nigerian Military Government from 1966 to 1976.

THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN THE NIGERIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENT, 1966-76

In January 15, 1966, a military coup overthrew the civilian government of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. There was apparent nation-wide jubilation and

celebration that the weak and ineffective civilian government was thrown out. But not long after, it became obvious that there was the problem of government acceptability by all sections of the country. The military coup that overthrew the civilian government came to be perceived along ethnic lines. The overthrown civilian government was headed by a Northerner, while the soldiers who plotted and executed the coup were mainly Southerners from the Ibo-speaking areas of Nigeria. Some soldiers from the northern parts of Nigeria were also involved in the coup. Most Northerners, especially the political leadership, began to believe that the coup was sectionally motivated because the majority of those killed -- both civilians and soldiers -- came from the North, and most of the others come from the non-Ibo speaking areas of Southern Nigeria. Some of these military revolutionaries who plotted and executed the coup have tried to explain in their writings why the outcome of their actions was unbalanced. (See Adewale Ademoyega, 1981; and Alex Madiebo, 1980). The new military government was given a cold reception by most members of the Northern political leadership and was perceived as illegitimate, but received popular support and understanding in the South and among some Northerners.

The new Federal Military Government was headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Ibo who was then the most senior army officer. Among the first official action of the new military government was the promulgation of decrees 33 and 34, which affirm a new unitary administrative structure for Nigeria. See (Public Order Decree 1966, No. 33, 34, Official Gazette, Vol. 43, No. 41). As events later revealed, the unification of public service decree (No. 34) did not sit well with the Northern political leadership. It sparked off three days of riots in major Northern Nigerian cities and towns during which thousands of Southerners, mostly Ibos, were attacked and killed or maimed and their properties looted. The fear expressed was that Northerners would be at a disadvantage for competitive positions given that the level of education in the South exceeded by a wide margin that of the North. There were other aspects of the unification decree that further alarmed the Northern political leadership. They cannot be discussed here because of the scope of this paper. See Dare, (Op. cit, p. 99).

General Ironsi found himself in a quagmire regarding the fate of the military officers who plotted and executed the coup that toppled the civilian government. The Northern political leadership and army officers wanted them to be tried and punished for their actions but these men were hailed as heroes by most Southerners. It was a typical case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't". General Ironsi tried other appeasement methods by ordering mass promotion of Northern army officers; this proved futile (Madeibo, Op.Cit., pp 51-82). The Northern political leadership refused to accept the political legitimacy of the Federal Military Government headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi, lending credence to Lipset's (1960) theory that if at any time the status of major political

conservative group is threatened, or if access to politics is denied to emerging groups as crucial periods, the system's legitimacy will remain questionable (p. 80).

The Northern political leadership rejected the Federal Military Government in the counter-coup of July 29, 1966. The coup was directed against the Ibos - the ethnic group of General Ironsi. Another new Federal Military Government headed by a Northerner, Colonel Yakubu Gowon, emerged, but it was not successful in the Eastern and Mid-western Regions. Because the coup failed in the Eastern Region, in particular the homeland of the Ibo ethnic group, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Ironsi appointed Military Governor of the Region, remained in political control of the Eastern parts of the country. Colonel Ojukwu and the people of the Eastern Region challenged the authority and legitimacy of the new regime led by Colonel Yakubu Gowon in Lagos. Most Southerners saw it as a revenge coup against the Ibos (Dare, *Op.Cit.*, p. 101). If the revenge coup had been just soldiers killing soldiers and ended thus, Nigeria might not have fought a Civil War. The months of September and November 1966 were a horrifying period of more blood-letting and massacres of Ibo civilians in all cities and towns of Northern Nigeria. The anger and outrage that the killing generated in the Eastern Region could not be contained. It now looked like Nigeria was at a political cross-road and the leadership did not know which way to turn.

The country began to disintegrate. Gowon applied a few measures with the hope that they would help slow down the imminent drift toward political disintegration. But none was able to restore the confidence of the Military Governor and the people of Eastern region in the Federal Military Government of Nigeria dominated by the Northerners. There were more negotiations, meetings and juggling for an accommodation of each other's viewpoints and fears. The climax came in January 1967 when representatives of the Federal Military Government led by Colonel Gowon and those of the Eastern Regional Government led by Colonel Ojukwu met at Aburi, Ghana. Ghana's Head of State, General Joseph A. Ankrah had offered to help bring a peaceful solution to the Nigerian crisis. According to the information released when both parties returned to Nigeria, agreements and accommodations were reached. But shortly after, they became subject to conflicting and contradictory interpretations (Madiebo, *Op.Cit.*, p. 92-93), thereby validating Karl Deutsch's (1974) theory that "Where legitimacy is lost, agreements break down or are reduced to matters of expediency that can be broken when convenient. The consequences may be tyranny, revolution, session, or some other form of break-up." (p. 16). From this point on, the Federal Military Government of Colonel Gowon began to lack any serious support from all parts of Nigeria except the North. The political support of the leadership from the Western and Mid-western Region appeared to be wavering, especially after Chief Obafemi Awolowo - the leader of the Yorubas of the Western Region -

threatened to pull the Western Region, and Lagos territory out of Nigeria if the Eastern Region seceded from the Nigerian federation (Panter-Brick, 1970, p. 200; Dare, Op.Cit., p. 104)

On May 30, 1967, the Eastern Region declared itself the Republic of Biafra and proclaimed its territory independent and sovereign. On July 6, 1967, the Civil War began, and became known as the "Biafran War". The war ended after almost three years of carnage with the capitulation of Biafra and the reintegration of the former Eastern Region into the Nigerian Federation. Colonel Ojukwu went into voluntary exile.

Following the end of the Civil War, and the reintegration of Biafra into the Nigerian Federation, Gowon, by now, a general and an acknowledged Head of the Federal Nigerian Military Government began the process of national reconciliation, to acquire nation-wide legitimacy. In this process, Gowon and his successor sought to use education as a policy instrument.

EDUCATION POLICY IN THE 1970'S

Dare (Op.Cit.) has argued that the crisis of legitimacy often found in multi-ethnic societies can be minimized if leaders can find issues that interest all sections of the political community. And in Nigeria, education seems to be the issue of most interest to all because it is perceived to allocate social, economic and political opportunities in the society. The overlapping relationship between a country's educational structure and the social, economic and political dynamics of the society was noted by both Durkheim and Weber more than 75 years ago. Today the situation has not changed. The structure of the national education system reflects the competing groups within the Nigerian society. And there are wide variations in the availability of economic, political and social advantages between the regions, the states, and between ethnic groups. This was caused by the uneven educational structure in the country. Ikejiani (1964) argued that there is nothing mentally particular about either region or ethnic groups to account for the variations; rather they reflect differential colonial government development as measured by the provision of schooling, and employment opportunities.

In September 1969, as the Civil War was winding down, the Federal Military Government issued directives for a National Curriculum Conference in Lagos, Nigeria. Fafunwa (1986) described this curriculum conference as a "major landmark in the history of Nigeria and, indeed, in the history of Africa" (p. 26). The conference participants examined nine particular areas identified as crucial to the conference objectives. They were:

- 1) national philosophy of education
- 2) goals of primary education
- 3) objectives of secondary education
- 4) purposes of tertiary education

- 5) the role of teacher education
- 6) function of science education
- 7) the place of women's education
- 8) education for living
- 9) control of public education (Ojelabi, 1981).

In the end 65 recommendations on the direction of future education in Nigeria were released.

Following the national curriculum conference report's recommendations, the Federal Government organized in June 1973 a seminar of distinguished educational experts under the chairmanship of Chief Simon O. Adebo "to deliberate on all aspects of a national policy on education" (National Policy on Education, 1977, p. 3). This seminar was made of representatives from Christian and Islamic religious organizations, the Universities, National Universities Commission, interested external agencies, Ministry of Education, private individuals and experts in various public sectors interested in the development of the country's educational objectives. Earlier, the government had stated:

It is (the) Government's wish that any existing contradiction, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practices in the different parts of the Federation should be removed to ensure an even and orderly development of the country ... For the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals in terms of its relevance to the needs of the individual as well as in term of the kind of society desired in relation to the environment and the realities of the world and rapid social changes should be clearly set out (Ibid.).

Unlike the National Curriculum Conference, this Seminar was composed of experts in the various areas of education. There was also a series of workshops between 1973 and 1976 "on curriculum and material production at primary and secondary education levels" (Fafunwa, Op.Cit., p. 27). The workshops were organized by the Nigerian Educational Research Council, the Joint Consultative Committee on Education, the National Council for education and the Federal Ministry of Education. According to Fafunwa (Ibid.) the purpose of the workshops was to prepare "Syllabuses and textbooks in anticipation of the proposed new educational policy." The Comparative Education Study and adaptation Centre (CESAC), a curriculum development unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, also organized some complementary study activities designed to cover materials expected in the new national policy on education.

The document that emerged in 1977 as the "National Policy on Education" was based on the extensive recommendations of the 1973 National Seminar, reviewed and refined in its passage through the workshops and activities. Wilson (1976, p. 70) described the report of the 1973 National Seminar as:

A comprehensive document which translates Nigeria's national objectives into educational objectives, outlines an educational philosophy for Nigeria and defines the elements of its educational policy.

In the introduction to the National Policy, the Federal Government stated

Education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise but a huge Government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of Government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation. The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. It is only natural then that the Government should clarify the philosophy and objectives that underline its current massive investment in education, and spell out in clear, unequivocal terms the policies that guide Government's education efforts (National Policy on Education, 1977, p.3)

For details, see 1977 National Policy on Education. Even before the *National Policy on Education* was released as an official document, General Gowon had expressed the belief that "a maximum emphasis on education was the necessary strategy for correcting the problematic educational imbalance between the various ethnic groups, and between the North and South in particular (Urwick, 1983, p.332). In 1974, Gowon had indicated the intention of the Federal Military Government to launch universal free primary education, but in July 1975, he was removed from office in the third military coup. The importance of education to promote political legitimacy was reaffirmed in 1976 when the third Federal Military Government (under General Obasanjo) launched the universal free primary education programme. The Head of State, General Obasanjo, remarked that "the UPE scheme demonstrates the government's determination to equalize opportunities for all children, whatever their background" (Daily Times, Sept. 1976). It was proposed that by 1982, UPE would be compulsory. The UPE scheme was launched in 1976, against the recommendation of a commission set by the military government to advise it on the feasibility of the UPE programme. The commission recommended that UPE scheme be delayed until 1979. We shall see why the military government ignored this recommendation.

Shortly after the introduction of the UPE, educators and interested groups started clamouring for universal free education at all levels. What is implied here is that education would be free of cost to every Nigerian from primary school to the university level. In 1977, the Government released the *National Policy on Education* document. It immediately set up a seven-member "Implementation Committee for the *National Policy on Education*." The Committee was chaired by Professor S. Onabamiro with these terms of reference:

- a) to translate policy into a workable blue print and to develop programmes for the implementation of the policy.

- b) to coordinate and monitor the implementation of those programmes developed under the policy.
- c) to advise government on and to assist in providing the infra-structure and other requirements for policy for policy implementation; and
- d) to provide a continuous review and assessment of the aims, objectives and targets of the policy with a view to ensuring the adequacy and continued relevance of the policy (and those programmes developed under it) to our national needs and aspirations, and to propose modifications on any aspects as may be found necessary. (Implementation Committee for the *National Policy on Education* Blueprint, 1978, p.5. Also in Fafunwa, Op.Cit., p.27).

One year later (1978) the Implementation Committee produced a blueprint that detailed all the steps and measures necessary for successful implementation of the new education policy. The Blueprint cautioned against hasty and careless implementation of some aspects of the new education policy if negative and disastrous consequences on the economy, the political and social systems were to be avoided. It specified in clear terms:

1. gradual or installmental implementation of the universal free education programme,
2. emphasize the importance of the facilities required for each level of education,
3. the number and types of teachers needed,
4. the need for appropriate and adequate learning environment,
5. the need to provide employment for graduates of the new education system, and
6. most essentially, the financial implications (Ibid., p. 28).

It warned against full implementation of the new education policy without properly providing for the above needs.

In 1979 the Federal Government responded by releasing its White Paper called "Government's views on the Implementation Committee Blueprint" on "the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education". It accepted most recommendations, rejected some and stayed action on a few others. The Government had already introduced the UPE Scheme in 1976, next was the introduction of free secondary education programme. It followed with the abolition of tuition fees in the institutions of higher learning. This was the situation when the country returned to civilian rule in October 1979. There was an unpropitious side of a gigantic project like free education at all levels for a developing economy such as Nigeria, which the various experts foresaw and warned that it was not adequately explored. Let us at this point briefly examine four of the problems that emerged as a result of this action.

Availability of Qualified Teachers

It is indisputable that the success of any educational programme lies in sufficient and quality teachers - those who are dedicated to their work and are recruited because of their desire to teach and not as an occupation of last resort. Jack Allen in Hodenfield and Stinnett (1961, p.21) observed:

One of the prime functions of the school, indeed the chief function, is to provide a set within which boys and girls can grow intellectually. This can only be accomplished through the learners' association with information, knowledge, facts. Books can help. So can laboratories. So can numerous other types of learning materials. But always there stands the teacher, always on the edge, often front and centre. What he knows can make a difference. What he does not know can be an irreparable loss.

Teacher preparation for the new school system was inadequate structurally and otherwise. The Grade II teacher's certificate (awarded after primary schooling and five years of academic and pedagogical training) has always been the standard qualification for primary school teaching in Nigeria. Before the UPE scheme was launched in 1976, earlier projections were that 2.3 million children would attend the new school system. But when the Scheme was launched in 1976, over 3 million children showed up, an under-estimation of 30 per cent (Fafunwa, 1987). There were serious shortages of classroom spaces, teachers and equipment. Teacher-student ratio is regarded as a good indicator of the quality of a school system. In Canada, a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 would be acceptable, anything above the 1:30 ratio would likely excite parental and community concern for the quality of education.

In 1977, following the introduction of the Universal Primary Education in Nigeria, the primary school population was 8.2 million. Given a teacher-pupil of 1:30, about 273,330 teachers were required. There were only about 200,000 teachers in the country. But of this number, 68,000 had no teacher training education of any sort. As a result, only 132,000 (48% of the needed 273,300 teachers) were trained for teaching job. The teacher-pupil ratio would be 1:62 if only teachers with training are qualified to teach, or 1:41, if all teachers are counted. In either case, the teacher-pupil ratio was not acceptable. The above figures stand for national average (see Ukeje, 1980, p. 253). The pressure brought about by the demands of the UPE Scheme led to the hiring of teachers without basic teaching qualifications. If this situation is not rectified, the nation's standard of education will remain low. Without a high standard in education beginning at the primary level, there will be no hope of meeting successfully the challenges of the modern world.

The environment of learning

The type of environment under which the pupils learn refers to resources like school buildings, classrooms, staff and facilities, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasized so far as the quality of teaching and learning in schools are concerned. Heyneman (1980) observed:

At the minimum a school is acceptable if it provides a place for students to work without the danger of a roof collapsing; if neither wind nor rain sends students into a corner for protection; if there is a place for each to sit down, a place to write, material to write with, and a certain minimal number of maps, charts, and reference books from which to derive information (p. 13).

In line with Heyneman's thesis, Jamison et al. (1981) pointed out:

Differences in classroom quality, if measured by physical facilities, availability of materials, and levels of teachers' education, appear to be surprisingly robust as predictors of students' achievements (p. 557).

Without adequate buildings, furniture, instructional materials and facilities in the Nigerian public school system, it would be very difficult for any meaningful and purposeful education to take place. An educational expansion policy which fails to include in its priority the provision of decent accommodation for the pupils and their teachers defeats the purpose and quality of learning.

The availability of Equipment and Learning Materials

In the Nigerian primary education system, textbooks, chairs and desks, pencils, pens, chalks and boards and other writing materials are in seriously short supply. Heyneman (1980) argues for pupils to have a "place to sit down, a place to write and materials to write with" as against a school where pupils carry their sitting and writing desks to and from school, or sit on the hard floors and position their books on their knees as they write. Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987), argue that this kind of classroom arrangement is not only physiologically draining and physically cumbersome, but also educationally unproductive. We know that "pupils with enough desks and seats learn more effectively than those lacking them, and this is likely to be reflected in their examinations" (Ibid., p. 231). The works of Jamison et al. (Op.Cit.), Heyneman and Loxely (1983) support the thesis of Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda when they argue that school or classroom equipment can be reliable predictors of academic performance especially in Third World countries.

The pages of newspapers in Nigeria are replete with parental condemnations and frustrations about their children's poor performances in examinations. But what seem to be forgotten is that the academic performance

cannot be divorced from school equipment. The underlying problem is that the major concern of the government in 1976 was to increase primary schooling. The crisis conditions and the break-neck speed with which the UPE programme was implemented did not permit optimum equipment and facilities. Unavoidably the standards of teaching and learning began to erode. One should not expect otherwise. School equipment and facilities may not assume a very important dimension in academic achievement in developed countries (Jencks et al., 1972). But other studies have shown that they are very important to educational learning and achievement particularly in Third World countries like Nigeria (Heyneman, 1980, Cuttance, 1980, Johnstone and Jiyono, 1983; Saha, 1983; Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda, 1987).

The problem of Growing Numbers of educated Unemployed

Investment in education is often deemed justified if it leads to lucrative employment and the satisfaction of the expected economic benefits. Thus in a country where unemployment of the educated is rampant, something is wrong with that country's education system.

Before the introduction of the new education system in the 1970's by the military government in Nigeria, it was primarily the uneducated that were unemployed. But today, the unemployed includes the primary school graduate through university level in Nigeria. Nigeria at the height of the oil boom was sending recruitment teams to hire qualified Nigerians who wanted to return home and contribute to the development of the country. Often free return passage was provided for the individual and his family. Employers frequently scouted for qualified graduates on the local campus even before their graduation. After a year's employment, the new graduate would demand and receive some loan for the purchase of a car.

Those were the days; then came the collapse of oil, the dramatic fall in prices, the resulting loss in revenue, and the economic recession of the early 1980's. Unfortunately the Nigerian Federal Military Government failed to reckon with the above events or to put a halt to growth of educational programmes. Before the Government knew what was happening, the economy had gone from boom to bust. In desperation the Nigerian Government went to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for some financial assistance. In characteristic style of looking at Third World problems, the IMF recommended that the "over grown bureaucracy" be cut down to size. The subsidies on local products such as gasoline were abandoned. And the Nigerian Government was made to freeze any further employment (*African Concord*, March, 1987).

It is estimated that by the year 2000, about 2 million secondary school graduates and 100,000 university graduates would be in the labour market (Diejomaoh, 1984, Umo, 1985). Unemployed but qualified persons have rendered

the nation's education system ineffective. To an outsider or a casual observer of the Nigerian political scene, it would seem obvious that a Third World country like Nigeria with a uni-dimensional economy, that is, one export product, namely oil, cannot sustain free education at all levels. If only the Government had heeded the advice of its appointed commission on the problems that were bound to arise if it introduce free education at all levels! Why was it necessary for the Government to take this course?

Education, a Political Necessity

Harris Monchar (1981, p.2) argued that tinkering with the structure of the national educational system is one means to show popular and effective public policy and the achievement of legitimacy. This is because education is generally thought of as one of the most visible governmental operations. Providing education thus seems to function as a safety valve and this is recognized by governments (Ibid.). So the dynamic aspects of the relationship between educational structure and the political community in multi-ethnic societies would predict, in the case of Nigeria military regime's desire for legitimacy, that increased political instability would lead to a faster rate of increase in the provision of educational services (Ibid.). This prediction is based on the fact that a military government that violated some fundamental democratic process in the bid to acquire power will try to maintain its legitimacy through public policies that address issues acceptable to all sections of the political community.

Nwagwu (1978, p. 150) noted that in Nigeria promising or providing the citizens free education has always yielded quick political gains. The importance of using education as a major policy instrument in the quest for legitimacy by the Federal Military Government is illustrated in the following observation:

A Commission was set up by the Military Government to advise it on how to implement the policy of UPE. The Commission after a detailed study of the issues and problems involved, recommended that free universal primary education in Nigeria should be launched in 1979 and that an instalment approach would best enable the Government to tackle such problems as recruitment, and training of teachers. But the scheduling did not please the military leaders who had planned to hand over the government to civilian parliament in 1979. The launching of the UPE Scheme was seen as one of the greatest achievements of the present military regime and it could not accept to take the trouble of preparing for the scheme and then leave the glory and reward of its implementation to the civilian government. Therefore it rejected the recommendation and launched the scheme in September 1976. (Ibid, p. 154)

The military government's dire need of legitimacy and its eagerness to use national educational structures as the proxy indicators of its achievements

made it imperative to reject the findings and recommendations of its own appointed commission on the feasibility of introducing free universal education in Nigeria. The timely warning which was contained in the Somade commission Report that a scheme of free education would require "careful planning and guidance if it is not to result in negative and disastrous consequences on the economy, the political and social system of the country" (Taiwo, 1980, p. 173) was ignored by the military government, creating lots of problems in the Nigerian educational system. So, the crisis of legitimacy within the military governments of Nigeria to this day contributed to their adoption of the national educational system as one means to maintain legitimacy .

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried to examine and analyze the crisis of political legitimacy that faced the Federal Military Government of Nigeria from 1966 to 1976. I further tried to show that the problem of acquiring political legitimacy played a significant role in the major educational policy implemented by the military regime in Nigeria in the first twelve years of military rule. The military rulers who implemented the national education policy of the 1970's that led to free education at all levels may have acted in the best interest of the country. But they also wanted to win for themselves national recognition and acceptance from all sections of the society. In terms of achievements, primary education for all children has been strongly promoted, secondary and university education have also been expanded and made reasonably available to many more Nigerians. There have been enrolment increases at all levels of education and growth in education buildings and relative availability of learning facilities. The overall literacy and numeracy rates in the country are on the increase. The problematic educational gap -- between the North and South in particular, and between the ethnic groups-- appears to be closing. And many, particularly the very poor, girls and people in the villages who without the policy of free education may not have been educated have now acquired some education, especially at the primary level.

By the same token, problems of enormous proportions and consequences have emerged. There is shortage of everything, ranging from textbooks, classroom spaces, equipment and materials to funding problems at all levels of the education system. The national education policy implemented by the military rulers seems to have benefitted the political leadership more than the political community. In order to appreciate the Federal Military Government's national policy on education as an instrument for acquiring political legitimacy, it must be viewed as a classic case of welfare politics. It was a policy designed for political expediency meant

to appeal to the people's emotions for the purpose of winning their approval to stay in power. The politicians used education as a policy in this manner during the civilian government to win votes from the masses. Anyone who has studied the Nigerian geo-socio-political system knows that welfare politics are a central feature of Nigerian life.

References

- Ademoyega, A. (1981). *Why We Struck: The story of the First Nigerian Coup*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited.
- Agbabiaka, T. (1987). "Few Prospects for Graduates: Unemployment in Nigeria", *African Concord*, March, pp. 7-15.
- Allen, J. (1961). "Always There Stands the Teacher." In Hodenfield, G.K. and Stinnet, T.M. (Eds). *The Education of Teachers*. Englewood, Cliff New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Asagwara, K.C. Prince (1989). A Perspective on Free Education at All Levels in Nigeria, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University on Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Cuttance, P. (1980). "Do Schools Consistently Influence the Performance of their Students?", *Educational Review*, Vol. 32, pp. 267-280.
- Dahl, R. (1970). *Modern Political Analysis*. Englewood, Cliff New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dare, L.O. (1975). "Nigerian Military Governments and the Quest for Legitimacy." *The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 95-118.
- Deutsch, K. (1974). *Politics and Government: How People Decide Their Fate*. Boston, Atlanta, New Jersey, London: Houghton Mifflin, Co.
- Diejomaoh, V.P. (1984). "Planning for the National Economy by the Year 2000", *Presidential address at the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Nigerian Economic Society*, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
- Fafunwa, A.B. (1987). "Education in Nigeria: A Mixed Background", *Alminbar*, Special Nigerian Independence Anniversary Edition, pp. 172-175.
- Fafunwa, A.B. (1986). Education in Nigeria; Development of Education in Nigeria, in Ukeje, B.O. et al. *Issues and Concerns in Educational Administration: the Nigerian Case in International Perspective*. Ibadan, Lagos, Nigeria: Macmillam Nigeria Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1966). Public Order Decree 1966, No. 33 & 34, *Official Gazette*, Vol. 53, No. 51, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Heyneman, P. (1980). *The Evaluation of Human Capital in Malawi*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Heyneman, P. and Loxely, W.A. (1983). "The Effects of Primary School Quality on Academic Achievement across Twenty-nine High and Low Income Countries", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 88, No. 6, pp 1162-1194.
- Ikejiani, O. (1964). *Nigerian Education*. Lagos, Nigeria: Longman.

- Jamison, C. et al. (1981). "Improving Elementary Mathematics Education in Nicaragua: An Experimental Study of the impact of Textbooks and Radio on Achievement", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 73, pp. 556-567.
- Jencks, C. et al. (1983). *Inequality: A Reassessment of Family and Schooling in America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Johnstone, J.N. et al. (1983). "Out-of-School Factors and Educational Achievements in Indonesia", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 27, pp. 278-295.
- Lipset, S.M. (1960). *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics*. Garden City, New York: Double Day & Co. Inc.
- Madiebo, A.A. (1980). *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Monchar, P.H. (1981). "Regional Educational Inequality and Political Instability", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1-12.
- Mwamwenda, T.S. and Mwamwenda, B.B. (1987). "School Facilities and Pupils' Academic Achievement", *Comparative Education*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 225-236.
- Nigeria (1978). Implementation Committee for the National Policy on Education, *Blueprint*. Lagos, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Information.
- Nigeria (1978). *Government views on the Implementation Committee's Blueprint*. Lagos, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Information.
- Nigeria (1977). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division.
- Nigeria (1973). *Report of the Seminar on a National Policy on Education*. Lagos, Nigeria: Academy Press.
- Nwagwu, N.A. (1978). "The Politics of Universal Primary Education in Nigeria, 1955-1977", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 149-156.
- Ojelabi, A. (1981). *A Guide to School Management*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Valuta Educational Publishers.
- Panther-Brick, S.K. (1970). *Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to the Civil War*. London: University of London, the Athlone Press.
- Saha, L.J. (1983). "Social Structure and Teacher Effects on Academic Achievement: A Comparative Analysis", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 27, pp. 69-88.
- Taiwo, C.O. (1980). *The Nigerian Education System*. Lagos, Nigeria: Thomas Nelson (Nig.) Ltd.
- Ukeje, B.O. (1980). The Governance and administration of Education in Nigeria. In D.Friesen et al. (Eds.). *Educational Administration: A Comparative Overview*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Department of Educational administration, The University of Alberta.
- Umo, J.U.(1985). "Education-Employment Connection: The Nigerian Experience", *The Nigerian Journal of Economics and Social Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 23-27.
- Urwick, J. (1983). "Politics and Professionalism in Nigerian Educational Planning", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 323-340.
- Wilson, D.W. (1976). "National Educational Planning Influenced by Military Government: Nigeria." *Educational Planning*, Vol. 2, No.4.