

Policy reform in the education sector: Osun state as a case study (2011–2018)

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Abstract

Organizational, governmental structures and institutions have always been guided by established policies which are expected to foster development. Policies have not been stagnant and there abounds occasions where slight or major adjustments were made to existing policies with the aim of achieving increased value and development. Unfortunately, the reforms made by Governor Aregbesola in the years 2011–2018 in the Osun state education sector brought disagreements rather than progress. There have been divergent views on the intention and prospect of the reform to achieving the desired end. Using the historical and analytical approach, the paper seeks to investigate the reforms made and also to point out the lapses of these reforms. However, findings indicated that the reforms, though have their gains, they were largely retrogressive. The paper, thus, concluded that the reforms only came to disrupt the peaceful process of the existing policy which was in place.

Introduction

Change remains the only constant phenomenon in life and it occurs across facets of life and activities. It is not new today that policies guiding the activities and operations of governmental and private institutions are often reviewed from time to time. This periodic review and reforms are often informed by certain reasons in an overall attempt to improve institutional functioning. Reforms usually refer to a major change which involves attempts to upgrade and improve systemic performance with an eye on future sustainability (Berman, 1995). However, while reforms take place in national sectors like the healthcare or social policies, this research confines itself to policy reforms in the education sector. Education remains the catalyst for sustainable societal development as it results in substantial and meaningful change (Babalola, Ademola, Okediran, Ajani, Adedeji 2006; Ogundare, 2005; Fadipe, 2005; Folutile, 2004). In fact, Burch (2006) asserts that education is necessary and plays a direct and intrinsic role in the development. This is because it affords people a chance to live a better life. Just like every other sector, certain policies guide the educational operations in every nation-state in the world and the quality of these policies coupled with long term development vision of the policy makers determines the effectiveness of the education sector.

Policies guiding education in Nigeria were launched in 1977. They aimed at some cardinal points, such as national efficiency, national unity, self-realization, social, cultural, economic, political, scientific, and technological development. The structure of Nigeria education system since 1985 includes the pre-primary or kindergarten education, usually taken by kids of 3–5 years, the primary education, usually taken by children of 6–11 years within 6 years, the secondary school education which last for normally for 6 years in between two halves, the junior and secondary school, and 4–6 years of higher studies in universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other tertiary education institutions. This is called 6–3–3–4 system. It is good to know that this 6–3–3–4 system was in place in virtually all the states in Nigeria including Osun state until Governor Aregbesola assumed office and altered the policy.

On 7 and 8 February 2011, Governor Aregbesolaled government held an education summit at Osun State University. At the summit the government introduced new education policies as well as made some adjustments in Osun state educational policy. However, it is important to note that though reforms involve deliberate efforts to pursue policy change, the resultant effect is unpredictable, the educational policies introduced by the Government of Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola seem to have resulted in debates, arguments, and have brought about certain criticisms. The reforms on their own are in one way or another problematic and have stagnated the development of the state education. What were the reforms made in the Osun state education sector in the years 2011–2018? Why the reforms and their implementation were necessary? What are the gains of the reforms? And what is the position of critics on the reforms? These questions framed the structure of the study. The article thus gives a detailed analysis of the reforms made by Aregbesolaled government, explains their reasons and attempts not to leave behind the lapses. A qualitative methodology was adopted, using historical and analytical approach to secondary data sourced from books, Internet, newspaper, journals, reports, and

other archival materials. The study provides insight into the historical background of educational policy in Nigeria and makes an explicit analysis of the reforms introduced in the Osun education sector.

Literature review

Conceptualizing subject matters has often been problematic in social science research. We often have conflictual and several meanings to concepts which frequently are premised on different environment and perspectives of authors. However, reviewing major concepts like policy, education, and related concepts remains important in the build-up to this study. In public administration, policy reform is not a new subject matter and has often received attention from authors.

Policy refers to operational directives that guide lines of action (Dror, 1968). Peter (1972) opined that policy represents non-permanent precepts as to how tasks should be carried out. To him, it has its own goals and is often implemented as a due process. Peter observes further that the concept is linked to organizations, groups, private sector, individuals, and government. Presidential executive orders to co-operate with privacy policies can be expressed as policy. It also refers to chosen pattern of action by the government to solve problems or the way in which the courses of action for achieving the appropriate goals are determined. It includes taxation, regulation, expenditures, information, statements, legal requirements, and legal prohibitions among others. However, policies are often communicated through policy documents, laws, given precedents, and correspondence.

According to Ritzer (2012, pp. 105, 106) “Education refers to art of acquiring intellectual, physical and moral wherewithal for proper functioning of individual in the society”. It is the process by which the young acquires needed skills, values and knowledge which are necessary in a society (*African Encyclopedia*, 1974, p. 181). Education is antonymous to illiteracy while development is antonymous to poverty. Thus, poverty and illiteracy are Siamese twins that cannot be separated wherever they are found but with education people can acquire skills to help themselves out of poverty and into prosperity (Centre for Global Development, 2002). Osokoya (1987) opines that education is unique in its own way of inducting members of society. Education is an instrument of initiation into pattern of activities and conduct that are worthwhile. It involves rational thought, processes, and utilization of worthwhile things during the lifespan development of individuals. An educated person must have broad and deep knowledge and understanding of a thing which is capable of raising the status of his society or state (Obidi, 2005). However, Aghenta (2001) categorized education into two types: the informal and the formal education. The former is a lifelong education initiated by the family, environment, and peer group which results in the acquisition of knowledge of local traditions. There is no systematic learning method nor is there a syllabus. An individual continues to learn from daily life experiences, observation, and imitation. The latter type is acquired in schools and it is based on systematic method of teaching. In this, government is constantly faced with task of drawing up policies to guide the operations of education. However, these policies look after the

qualifications of students and teachers by giving them the precepts that determine students' actions, their workloads, their conditions of service, student certification and graduation. Osokoya (2003) comments that policy implementation in the education sector should target how people's life can be made better. Good education policy must therefore cater for the needs of people in the society, it must be able to solve societal problems, reduce community pressure, and simplify complexities. The formulation of education policies may arise from public opinion, certain observed deficiencies that affect the nation in the area of development and productivity, and it also may be influenced by or reflect some recognized and accepted international opinions. However, formulation of education policy in a developing country like Nigeria may be greatly influenced by the ideology of cultural authenticity. While other sectors seek to do better at achieving their goals, the education sector should not be left behind in the race. Thus, concerned stakeholders should pursue speed in bringing about change instead of waiting for it to happen naturally and improve it by artificial means (Caiden, 1968). Saint-Martin (2000) observes that reform in public administration is often instigated by new government in power, a political party, and parliamentary committee, a commission of inquiry, art of lobbying, users association, the media, and some other political stakeholders. He observes further that reform in whatsoever form target objectives concerning improvements to public life, eliminating corruption, increasing representativeness and accountability, and limiting nepotism and patronage.

Theoretical review

In a political system, public policy runs through a set of interrelated units. The Osun educational policy reform can be captured within the framework of forces interacting to produce results or decisions which either earn people's support or goes back into the system as an unsatisfying output. However, the systems theory is relevant in providing an insight into the processes involved in the policy reform.

Easton (1965) observes that political system is composed of several units working together to make authoritative decisions. He is known for the use of a paradigm of biological system in explaining the structure of a political system. To him, the body system of the living beings consist of sub-systems interacting to ensure the well-being of the whole body. As such, the public policy is the response of the political system to forces brought to bear on it from the environment. The systems theory can be better understood by considering its important elements. One of its important elements is the concept of system which represents a set of independent yet interrelated interactive forces that aims at converting the demands in the society into operational policy having gained popular support. The uniqueness of systems lies in the co-operative nature of their units. Another element are inputs which refer to the forces generated in the environment that affect the political system. An input usually consist of popular demands which represent shades of interest of groups and individuals which in most cases arise from the inadequacies of the actions undertaken by the government in the environment to provide basic life enhancing policies. Support represents the obedience of people to existing laws which is premised upon the popular acceptance of the output (decisions). It might take a form of paying taxes. Inputs are generally

processed by the conversion box after which decisions are made from varieties of inputs. These decisions subsequently become policies which are called the output. However, policies made are allowed to go back into the system through the mechanism of feedback. Feedback can come in the form of popular criticisms or acceptance which is expected to make room for better future policies. According to Anderson, cited in Anifowose and Enemu (2008), feedback indicates that public policies (or outputs) may subsequently alter the environment and the demands generated therein, as well as the character of the political system itself.

The systems theory is a dominant paradigm in the orthodox theorizing about public policy and provides a convenient umbrella for capturing the complexity of the policy making process. It is to that extent a valuable tool for organizing our inquiry into the causes and consequences of a governmental action. To this end, the systems theory is important in the general build up to this research.

Introducing Osun state

Osun state was created as a product of collective pressure mounted on the federal military government over a long period of time by the founding fathers. The modern Osun was created in 1991 from a part of the old Oyo state. The state derived its name from the river Osun, the venerated natural spring that is the manifestation of the Yoruba goddess of the same name. Colonel Ajiborisa served as the first military administrator of the new state between August 1991 and January 1992, and handed over the power to Alhaji Isiaka Adeleke who served as the first executive governor following the election conducted under the zero party system. The state's current governor is Adegboyega Oyetola (Osun.gov.ng).

Osun state is an inland state in south-western Nigeria with its capital in Osogbo. The state covers an area of approximately 14,875 sq/km bounded with Ogun, Kwara, Oyo, and Ondo states in the South, North, West, and East, respectively. The state has had 30 local government areas and 1 area office until March 2017, when additional 30 local council development areas and 5 administrative offices were created (Osun.gov.ng). It is home to many Nigeria's most famous landmarks, including the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University, one of Nigeria's prominent institutions of higher education.

Osun state is known for having the second highest literacy rate in Nigeria, with around 80 percent literacy rate as of 2012. In 2018, Osun state has 1,277 public elementary schools, 7 schools for special needs, 1 secondary school for special needs, 236 middle schools for students within the age range of 10–14, 121 high schools, 9 technical colleges, 2 colleges of education, 1 polytechnic, 1 college of technology and 1 State University which has six campuses in the six zones of the state. The roles of individuals and organisations in the development of education in the state of Osun cannot be over-emphasized as the state has 763 private nursery schools, 1163 private nursery and primary schools, 416 private secondary schools, 5 private colleges of education, 7 private polytechnics, and 8 private universities. The major sub-ethnic groups in Osun state are Ife, Ijesha, Oyo, Ibolo, and Igbomina. People of Osun state practice Christianity, Islam, and an ancient traditional religion.

Analysis of the reforms

From 2011 to 2018, Osun state government led by Governor Aregbesola introduced new educational policies and made major reforms in the Osun state education sector. The reforms include: the restructuring of education administration, Osun school reclassification, school feeding scheme, school infrastructure developmental programme, standard uniforms for Osun state public schools, introduction of Opon-imo (tablet of knowledge), and an adjustment in curricular activities.

Restructuring of education administration

Vanguard (2014) reported that the educational reform in Osun state involved restructuring the administrative section of the sector. It had been said that new administrative process and operations are needed for the success of the reform. Thus, the state government created specialized bodies to see to the welfare and management of schools. The state government made room for three districts that shared power and functions with the state teaching service commission. These districts were to help the commission in seeing to the well-being of teachers and non-teaching staff. However, these districts are expected to gear the new policy that seeks to address management problems in public schools and they are headed by a Tutor General.

Teachers Establishment and Pension Office (TEPO) was organised and given power to enforce adequate payment of teachers remunerations, incentives, allowances, and to ensure payment of pension for retirees from the Osun public schools. The state Universal Basic Education Board was also strengthened to ensure free and compulsory education. However, strengthening of these agencies through the reform produced more grants and subventions for the public schools. The total amount of grants jumped from 7.4 million a year to 424 million a year (Aregbesola, 2014, reported by Daily Independent, 2014).

Osun school reclassification

The administration reclassified the national 6–3–3–4 system into 6–3–3 system. In the regrouping, a middle school cadre was established and students who belong to this cadre are to use the last two years of the three years of junior secondary school. However, children of 6–9 years were to be in the elementary school, those aged 10–14 in the middle school, and aged 15–17 in high school. The elementary school was conceived as a neighborhood school, located not far from pupils home; the middle school was to be sited two to three kilometers from where pupils live. The high school students are believed to be older and capable of transporting themselves to and fro, and for this reason the high school was sited further away. This corroborates Aregbesola's statement as reported by *Premium Times* (2013): "We are changing from the traditional primary, junior secondary, senior secondary to elementary, middle school, then high school. Then, you leave to a world of your own, assessing and evaluating your own autonomy and strengthening your independence". However, the government made plans to provide discount on the school buses charges to make it more affordable for the students.

School feeding scheme

This scheme was launched in Nigeria in 2005. It failed to receive adequate attention in Osun state until Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola came into office and initiated the scheme in the state educational reforms (Osun State Ministry of Education, 2014). In this reform, the government embarked on providing nutritious meal for the pupils in the elementary schools to aid their learning. Yunusa (2012) observes that the scheme is to be supervised by the commissioner for education and the deputy governor's office. This corroborates Shaka Mommodu's assertion that there has not been proper utilization of resources available for the feeding scheme over the years. This meant that food vendors were properly employed and were given customised uniforms. However, the reform in this regard is meant to boost agriculture in the state as well as providing employment for people in local areas that form catchment areas for the elementary schools. The food vendors are to be paid as and when due and the State Secretariat ensures a nutritious and balanced diet is given to pupils. However, the government promised to extend this policy to the other cadres if it is buoyant enough.

School infrastructure development programme branded O'school

Yejide (2013) reported that one of the notable educational reforms of Aregbesola is the massive renovation of weak learning structures. This can be confirmed in Aregbesola's statement after the education summit in 2011: "The school buildings are already collapsing. We have no option but to clear the debris and weak structures to build functional infrastructure for education" (*Premium Times*, 2013). The governor embarked on putting up competitive structures which are internationally recognised. The school structures are equipped with dining hall, standard toilet facilities, reception areas, library, recreation center, beautiful lawns, computer laboratory, portable water supply system, and Wi-Fi facilities. Yejide (2013) reports further that the architectural masterpieces of Osun model schools can rarely be found in other public schools in Nigeria as Aregbesola uttered at the commissioning of the schools: "We have state of the arts school with quality finishing".

However, it is an extension of the reclassification programme as there were plans to build 100 model elementary schools, 50 middle schools, 26 high school. The motive was not to inconvenience communities and missions. It was rather to utilise the resources of the state in the most effective and productive way.

Standard uniforms for Osun public schools

The Punch (2016) reported that Aregbesola introduced a common school uniform in his educational reforms. Sina Fadare in his reports in *The Nation* (2014) also observes that the government was ready to initiate the use of common uniforms for all public secondary schools in the state. He said further that the uniform is bought by the parents but the model of sewing is provided by the government through the schools as the rules must be followed. The idea behind this policy is to create a common uniform for all public school students. Beyond this, the policy was

to give fashion designer opportunities to be involved in the process and to employ allied artisans in the production of the school uniforms. Culture-fired indigenous and standardized uniform for 750,000 public school pupils, which the Omoluabi Garments Factory tried, has received international commendations from UNESCO.

Introduction of Opon-imo (tablet of knowledge)

The Opon-imo (tablet of knowledge), a technological tool to aid learning, has been said to be the most notable part of the reforms in the Osun state education sector. As Proshare (2013) observes: “The addition of Opon-imo to our education is another turning point in the public school system in the state of Osun”. *The Punch* (2016) observes that the electronic gadget contains varieties of textbooks of subjects taught in the secondary school, virtual class lessons, as well as 40,000 past questions for WAEC and tertiary education matriculation examinations. The tablet consists of hardware and software elements which provide for students a background in information technology. Opon-imo is light in size and portable for users to use in any position. The Oponimo not only contains textbooks for learning. The religious and cultural instructional materials such as Bible and Quran were also integrated in the gadget. This is to keep the pupils well informed about the Yoruba culture and provide equal opportunities for the multi-religious state. The state government provided the Opon-imo for free to students in the high school.

Introduction of Marshals for effective monitoring

This is one of the attractive features of Osun educational reform. In an attempt to have an effective educational system, Governor Aregbesola made a rule which prohibits students from roaming around the streets during school hours. To implement this policy he instructed special Marshals to apprehend students found wanting. The Marshals are to hand over the apprehended students to their parents and ensure such students are taken to nearby school for immediate enrolments. Yeji-de (2013) reports that the policy has had an impact on the enrolment of students in Osun state and today students do not have the confidence to roam the street during school hours.

The reasons for the education reforms in Osun state (2011–2018)

The reforms carried out in the Osun state education sector were informed by the observations regarding the problems of this sector, made at the summit held on 7 and 8 February 2011 at Osun State University, Osogbo. The meeting was chaired by Professor Wole Soyinka and the summit aimed at improving the quality of education in the state, resolving education crisis, establishing better funding system, curricular implementing of functional and entrepreneurial education and special education, as well as the language of education. According to Aregbesola, the reforms were necessitated by the decay in the school infrastructure, funding system, high fees in tertiary institutions, poor performance of Osun students in both internal and external examinations, among others. However, he maintained that the policy does not seek to impress but to produce the complete child, youth, and ultimately a complete citizen in learning and character.

Gains of the education reform in Osun state (2011–2018)

The reforms attracted the attention of the world agency for education (UNESCO) such that the body sought to adopt the learning aid system. The interest was confirmed when the agency expressed its satisfaction with the device in a letter addressed to the state government on 15 November 2014. In an attempt to boost productive learning activities, the agency asked for the permission from the state government to replicate the device (Opon-imo) as part of its programme in Nigeria. Attention was drawn by the agency to the moralistic, ethical, and informative features of the device which corroborate the UNESCO's objective to promote open access to quality education in the country. Also, the performances of students have soared high in competitions as revealed by the Osun Ministry of Education. For example, in the West Africa School Certificate Examinations performance rankings, Osun moved from 34th to 18th position in 2011 and to 8th position in 2012. However, the agency expressed its willingness and readiness to partner with the state government to boost adult education which involves building a regional teachers institute in the state (Aregbesola, 2014).

Criticism of the reforms

Critics alluded that more damage than benefit was caused to the Osun state education sector in the implementation of the new policies. According to Omisore (2014), the overall reform had negative effect on the state education sector and has rather disrupt the existing working education system in the state.

Firstly, critics assert that the education policy confusion was initiated with schools reclassification and consequent merger. The weak reason given is that the policy aids effective learning of the younger and older ones in the school. However, the reclassification and merger of classes was an act of disrespect to the national policies on education. The new policies initiated were untested and have negatively affected quick accessibility of schools to teachers and pupils and have reduced the effectiveness of teachers distribution in the state. This reclassification not only changed the class bands in schools, but also reduced the relevance of existing teaching materials and complement teachers skills in each merged educational institution. Aregbesola attempted cooking pepper and oranges in one pot and this action was met stiffly with expression of displeasure from the stakeholders in the state in a form of protests and unrest. It instigated religious unrest in schools and waywardness got on the increase among students. *Realnews* (2013) report that stiff resistance rose against the reforms. "Christian Association of Nigeria has protested against the attempted merger of Muslim students wearing hijab with the Christian students under the new educational policy in the state". According to *Realnews*, church leaders in the state saw the policy as a threat to Christian heritage in the state. Critics maintained that the poorly-conceived policy brought hardship on students such that most students had to go to school on foot. The Provision of school buses would have been a relieve, but the government failed to keep to its promise of providing buses for the schools.

Another criticism levelled against this reform is that it has robbed schools of an important source of pride and identity which the state has enjoyed since it was part of the defunct Western Region. Critics maintained that it remained unclear what educational lessons or evidence

informed the policy of common uniform. Schools identities looked the same and every student looked the same. This policy no doubt opened the door to miscreants who now parade the streets in Aregbesola's common uniform, wreaking havoc because of the confidence the anonymity this common new uniform policy offered to them. In the same vein, by the introduction of common uniform, thousands of fashion designers were denied their major sources of income as the uniforms are to be sewn by the government factory. Moreover, students purchased the uniforms at high price. Government not only monopolised the sewing of the uniforms, but monopolised their distribution, thereby creating more difficulties for parents who are truly struggling to provide sound education for their children in trying economic times.

Adeyemi (2013) asserts that for about two years of implementation, the number of students that had Oponimo in their hands were very few. 15,000 tablets have only been received as against the 150,000 pieces promised to be distributed by the state government. To him, the hidden idea behind the initiation of the gadget was a calculated attempt to embezzle public funds by the government. It has therefore been said that there were too many abstract distributions which were never real. However, Omisore (2014) observes that the defect and clearly cynical aspect of the device is the fact that the contents are such that any student who relies on the device for any external examination is unlikely to do well because most questions prepared for nearly all subjects were poorly constructed and invariably bore obviously wrong answers.

According to him, examples include: Mathematics (for SS1 candidates), where chapter 1 is titled "Number base system" and questions provided are either wrongly stated or the answers supplied are equally wrong. Chapter 2 is titled "Modern Arithmetic" and diagrams are referred to by first and second question which are not in the device under this chapter. In fact, some of the questions in the chapter do not correlate with the modular arithmetic. Same applies to chapters 3 and 4. Many topics that the students are meant to learn in the mathematics curriculum were left out. Incomplete questions are many in the device and there exists major repetition of questions for the three senior classes. In fact, many mistakes are also been spotted in the composition of English language as questions were not properly conceived and constructed. Omisore (2014) observes that the ill-conceived questions and tenses are capable of making a perceived educated person uneducated.

English language questions were equally fraught with errors such as wrong spelling of words, wrong answers, poorly constructed questions, etc. The tablet supplied to Osun schools by the government has the capacity to misinform the users rather than fulfil its educative purpose. As a parent, Omisore (2014) reported that he feels sad that a government in a democracy can introduce such a poisonous device to its own students. This clearly reveals that efforts were not made to make the questions error free before the distribution of the device. It is rather confusing than educative, and the motive of the initiators of the device is being questioned.

Conclusion

In this article, concerted effort was made to discuss the reforms carried out in the Osun state education sector by the government of Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola within the timeframe of 2011–2018. Whether on the ground of pecuniary gains or sincere visionary leadership, reforms are bound to

be made in a political, socio-economic system especially in the third world societies where continuity is hardly appreciated. However, the impacts of the reforms on individuals making up a system suggest the original intent behind policy reform and reveal the intellectual capacity of the policy makers. The educational reforms discussed in this study were necessitated by the decay in the schools infrastructure, funding system, high fees in tertiary institutions, poor performance of Osun student in both internal and external examinations, among others. Despite reorganizing the education administration of the state, the reclassification of schools, new infrastructure, introduction of Opon-imo and the use of common uniform, critics maintained that the reforms was largely for selfish gains and brought backwardness and hardship on teachers, students, and even parents. However, we must be reminded that this study focused not on judging the reforms but organized itself through concerted effort to point out the reforms, the achievements, and the criticisms. Though the reforms earned the recognition from UNESCO such that they approached the state government seeking to adopt the e-learning device created by the Rauf Aregbesola administration, Opon-imo (tablet of knowledge), and to institute a new advanced adult education, critics were quick to point out that the reforms are no better than the existing educational set up. However, since there's no perfect policy, efforts are being made by those at the helm of affairs to improve institutional functioning and it is through the instrumentality of reform that this is achieved.

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