

Military Administration and The Development of Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract- *This paper examined the contribution of the military regime in Nigeria- starting from that of the late General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi who came on board in January 1966 to that of General Abubakar Abdulsalami (rtd) who handed over to a democratically elected government in May 1999- to the growth and development of higher education in Nigeria. Primary and secondary sources of information were relied upon in obtaining relevant information. Historical method of data analysis was adopted in analyzing the data gathered. Findings revealed that the military widened access to higher education in Nigeria through establishment of Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of education. It also showed that decrees and edicts were promulgated to ensure quality control in the operation and conduct of higher education administration in Nigeria. However, an evaluation of military policies on higher education shows that hasty formulation of policies or enactment of decrees, insufficient budgetary allocations, meddlesomeness in the administration of universities and erosion of university autonomy did not allow the nation to benefit to the maximum from their educational programmes.*

Indexed Terms- *Military, University, Decree, Edicts, Policies, Autonomy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria became a self-governing nation on October 1, 1960. From 1960 to date, management of the nation's affairs has alternated between the military on one hand and the democratically elected leaders on the other hand. In other words, the source of power that directs the affairs of the nation has emanated either from the barrels of guns or the ballot boxes. Nigeria's

history with military rule is characterized by frequent coups and long periods of military dictatorship. From independence in 1960 until 1999, with a brief exception during the Second Republic (1979-1983), the country was largely under military control. This era saw numerous transitions of power through military coups, and various attempts to establish civilian rule, often with different degrees of sincerity (retrieved online via google search on 26th June, 2025). Out of a record of 64 years of political independence, the military has been in power for a total period of 28 years (January 1966 to July 1966 led by the late General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi; General Yakubu Gowon (rtd), July 1966 to July 1975; the late General Murtala Muhammad/General Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd), July 1975 to September 1979; General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) 31st Dec.1983 till August 1985; General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd), August 1985 to August 1993, the late General Sani Abacha, November 1993 to June 1998 and lastly General Abubakar Abdulsalam (rtd), June 1998 to May 1999). From 1966 to 1999, Nigeria experienced eight coups and counter-coups (Okoli, 2016)

The fact that the military has stayed in power for a long period of time gave them the opportunity to leave their footprints on the sand of time with regards to education generally but more specifically on higher education. Education is an essential social service which successive regimes in Nigeria have struggled to provide for the masses. Provision of education, particularly higher education, is regarded as "sine qua non" to the development of any nation. It is in realization of this, that both the military and civilian administrations in Nigeria since independence have regarded establishment of tertiary institutions as an important milestone in Nigeria's historical march to modern statehood (Ikoku, 1985).

Provision of higher education in the third world countries such as Nigeria is perceived to be the panacea to the myriads of problems plaguing third world countries such as high level of illiteracy, disease, squalor, ethnic chauvinism, human trafficking, kidnapping, insurgency, electoral fraud, sit-tight syndrome among African leaders, corruption, unemployment and underemployment. Apart from widening access to education, provision of higher education is regarded as a catalyst to rapid transformation of any country in all ramifications. Universities and higher institutions are regarded as important according to Ikoku (1985) because the strength, durability and dynamism of the Nigerian state will draw heavily on products of our universities and institutions of higher education generally. In the same vein, Adedeji (2016) describes universities as crucial national assets in addressing policy priorities, particularly as sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking, providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials, contributor to innovation, attractors of international talents and business investment, agent of social change and mobility and contributors to social and cultural viability. Babalola (2007) claims that higher education offers the most crucial platform to accumulate human capital in the form of relevant manpower training, abilities, attitudes, skills and knowledge. The National Policy on Education (2013) identifies the following among others as the purpose of tertiary education in Nigeria:

- Contribute to national development through the high level manpower training;
- Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of Nigerians; and
- Reduce skill shortage through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market

Although military rule is often described as an aberration, Nigerians have had the opportunity of comparing the legacies of the military regimes vis-à-vis that of the civilian administrations in areas vital to national growth and development. This paper, therefore, X-rays the contributions of the various military administrations to the development of higher

education in Nigeria under the following subheadings:

- Growth of tertiary institutions under the military regime;
- Major decrees/ edicts promulgated on education;
- Funding of education.

II. GROWTH OF UNIVERSITIES/HIGHER INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE MILITARY ADMINISTRATION

Between independence on October 1, 1960 and January 1966, there were in existence in Nigeria five universities (Sobowale, 2005). These were the University of Ibadan, University of Ife, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University and the University Of Nigeria, Nsukka. In addition, there were five Advanced Colleges sited in Lagos (1962), Ibadan (1962 transferred to Ondo in 1964), Zaria (1962), Owerri (1963) and Kano (1964) (Ejiogu, 1997). Higher education by then was on the concurrent legislative list and that made it possible for both the Federal and Regional governments to legislate and establish higher institutions. The military made incursions into Nigerian politics via a coup de tat on January 15th, 1966. Nigeria later witnessed a bloody civil war which lasted 30 months between May 1967 and January 1970 and that did not permit government to concentrate on development of education. At the end of the war in 1970, the military decided to take over the control of university education in order to make the institutions national in outlook and to use education as a tool of promoting national unity. On 19th January, 1972, shortly after the end of the war, the Federal Military Government assumed responsibility for higher education generally in the country.

The supreme military council has decided that the federal government should henceforth assume full responsibility for higher Education throughout the country, with the proviso that the status quo in respect of the existing universities should be maintained. It also decided that education other than higher education should become the concurrent responsibility of both the federal and state

government and be transferred to the concurrent legislative list (Igwe, 2003)

From a four region arrangement in 1965, West, Mid-West, North and East, twelve states were created in 1967 by General Yakubu Gowon led administration and the restructuring brought to the fore the need for expansion in higher education. Succeeding military administrations built on this tradition as the regime of the late General Muritala Muhammad on February 3, 1976 created new states to bring the total number of states by then to nineteen. The regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha created more states and by 1996, Nigeria had a thirty-six state structure. Creation of states influenced the growth and development of higher institutions as the convention has been for every new state to establish its own tertiary institutions. The regime of General Yakubu Gowon (rtd) was the brain behind the establishment of the second generation Universities in Nigeria. Thus, the University of Benin- 1971, University of Calabar- 1975, University of Jos- 1975, Bayero University Kano- 1977, University of Sokoto- 1975, University of Maiduguri, and the University of Port Harcourt. In addition, Federal Polytechnics were established at Bidah, Akure, Bauchi, Yola, and Ilaro (Ejiogu, 1997). In the 1980s, the federal government also established a military university i.e. the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, and specialized universities of technology and agriculture (Njoku, 2011).

The establishment of new Universities, Polytechnics and colleges of education was in response to high demand for higher education and was partly borne out of the implementation of the third national development plan. The plan was emphatic on the responsibility of federal government as far as provision of higher education was concerned. It stated in part that the six existing universities should be expanded to permit maximum utilization of facilities and that four new universities were to be established during the period. It also advocated for increased student population in universities and that university admission should be tilted towards the study of medicine, pure science and technology- a science/humanity ratio of 60 to 40. Teacher education also received a boost as federal colleges of education were sited in each geopolitical zone. The contribution

of the military to development of higher education was succinctly put by Adesina (1993):

because education was politics and politics was education, throughout the first 25 years of political independence, the Army found itself with no alternative than to respond to popular demand by continuing the political game with education. They promulgated decrees that favour the popularization of education and necessitated further decentralization and expansion.

Apart from widening access to tertiary education, establishment of universities in towns which hitherto did not have higher institutions has invariably brought rapid development to such towns and localities.

The first phase of military administration covered the period between January 1966 and September 30 1979, while the second phase of the administration was between 31st December, 1984 and May 29th, 1999. From relatively few institutions of higher learning in 1966 when they first struck, at the point of their exit in 1999 they had established not less than 52 additional higher institutions. For reasons of unity, national integration and wider geographical spread of universities the military resulted to an aggressive expansion of universities as a result that within thirty years, 52 universities (conventional, technology, agriculture) were established (Okoli, 2016).

III. LAWS AND OTHER BASIC REGULATIONS GOVERNING OPERATIONS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

Military regimes rule by promulgating decrees at the federal level and edicts at the state level. Decrees made by the Supreme military council,- the highest decision making body under the military regime- remains binding in every nook and cranny of the country. New education laws and amendments began to come out in form of decrees and edicts following the assumption of power by the military as an aftermath of the coup of January 15, 1966. The military worked towards promotion of uniformity in the operations of tertiary education. The military promulgated many decrees in an attempt to control education. The decrees invariably succeeded in

harmonizing operation of schools and tertiary institutions in the country. For instance, Decree no. 14 of 1967 created twelve states out of the then existing four regions. Each of the twelve states of the federation had its own laws regulating operation of schools.

Following the creation of states, decrees/edicts were promulgated to introduce uniformity, central coordination and central control into the system. Attempts at obtaining uniformity in academic calendar was achieved through decree no. 29 of 1972 titled: the school year variation decree which changed the school year of all colleges from January to November/December to September to June/July (Fabunmi and Alimba, 2005). This decree harmonized the academic session system being operated by schools and colleges with those of tertiary institutions in the country. Aside from school calendar, various segments of tertiary institutions were coordinated under specific agencies. Decree no. 1 of 1974 established the Statutory National Universities Commission, the commission was charged with the responsibility of coordinating, monitoring, and accrediting university activities throughout the country.

With the promulgation of Decree no. 46 of 1977, the federal government took over all universities. Yoloye (1993) citing Aminu (1983) stated that the take-over of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and University of Ife, Ile-Ife was part of a wider move to burst all the centres of regional sentiment. Decree no. 3 of 1986 established the National Commission for Colleges' of Education (NCCE). The National Teachers' Institute, a body charged with the responsibility of coordinating issues relating to teaching profession, was set up by decree no. 7 of 1987.

There is no sector of education that is left out of the scheme as decree no. 17 of 1991 established The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education. Federal Colleges of Education and Polytechnics were taken care off through decree no. 4 of 1986 and decree no. 33 of 1979 respectively. Decree no. 24 of 1973 established the National Youth Service Corps scheme, amended by decree no. 11 of 1974. Decree no. 53 of 1988 set up the Nigerian Educational Research and

Development Council (NERDC) while Decree no. 32 of 1987, educational correspondence colleges' accreditation decree, gave legal backing to the establishment of educational correspondence courses. During the regime of General Mohammed Buhari, decree no. 18 of 27th January, 1984 established Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.

With the various decrees promulgated, the military has demonstrated that it was equally interested in widening access to education. This probably informed Adesina (1993) opinion that “ on the balance, the army did far more to expand the educational system and extend educational services between 1966-1990 than did the politicians themselves”.

IV. ADMISSION

In order to harmonize the admission process Nigerian universities, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board was established by Act no. 2 of 1978. The body has the responsibility to determine the matriculation requirement for the universities and conduct examination for candidates seeking places in the institutions. The first joint nationwide matriculation examination was conducted on the 29th April, 1978. Decree no 33 of 1989 expanded the operations of JAMB to cover colleges of education and polytechnics.

Other policies such as quota system, educational disadvantaged zone, catchment areas were policies designed to ensure a near even representation of students from all part of Nigeria in tertiary institutions. The inconsistency in admission policy gave undue advantage to people from certain parts of the country because admission was not strictly based on merit. However, access to tertiary institutions improved considerably across the years.

From a takeoff enrolment of 210 in 1948 at the university college Ibadan, emerged five universities in 1962 enrolling a total of 23,000 students. By 1996, the total number of universities stood at 37 with student population of 234,581- Njoku(2011).

V. QUALITY CONTROL

The Military demonstrated keen interest in maintaining standard in tertiary institutions. The minimum standard decree, decree 16 of 1984, stated the conditions for the establishment of new tertiary institution. In 1983, the sudden emergence of 26 private Universities within 6 months of the supreme court ruling that nothing in the constitution of the country prevents their establishment was repealed through decree 19 of 1984 which gives legal backing to the abolition of the then existing private universities and prohibition of establishment of private universities. Decree no 9 of 1993 tagged “the national minimum standards and establishment of institution amendment decree” was promulgated to ensure that university education was not bastardized. In response to pressure mounted by individuals and organizations, another decree was promulgated to allow private participation in provision of higher education provided they meet the requirements stipulated in the NUC approval guidelines. In addition Decree no. 16 of 1985 empowered the Federal Ministry of Education through the National Universities Commission (NUC) to inspect, assess and accredit academic programmes in universities. Babangida’s regime introduced the structural adjustment programme which laid the foundation of deregulation and rehabilitation of federal and state tertiary institutions with substantial extra budgetary grants in 1985.

VI. FUNDING OF EDUCATION

Universities were underfunded under the military dispensation though, university education remained tuition free in federal universities. UNESCO recommends that 26% of the national budget should be given to education. This was however not the case in Nigeria under military administration.

The military set up the education tax fund with decree no 7 of 1973 and made it compulsory for companies and corporations to contribute 2% of their assessable pre-tax profit to support educational development in the country. Funds so generated are allocated to the three levels of education, 50% to higher education, 40% to primary education and 10% to secondary education (Nwagwu, 2004). The

military also set up a number of commissions to look into funding and reform in higher education even though the recommendation of such committees were not implemented to the letter.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocation to Education as Percentage of Total Budget in Nigeria (1977-1999)

Year	Total budget (millions)	Budgetary allocation to education (millions)	Allocation to education to % of total budget
1977	15,328.5	738.6	4.82
1978	12,452.4	569.6	4.57
1979	13,191.4	902.1	6.84
1980	16,342.1	1,549.8	9.48
1981	11,410.9	984.3	8.63
1982	12,857.5	1,135.1	8.83
1983	12,086.7	967.4	8.00
1984	15,966.5	861.2	5.39
1985	17,754.2	850.2	5.79
1986	13,081.8	1,110.6	8.49
1987	15,508.6	653.5	4.21
1988	20,290.8	1,084.18	5.34
1989	27,119.4	1,941.8	7.16
1990	36,264.0	2,294.3	6.33
1991	35,171.6	1,554.2	4.42
1992	52,035.9	2,060.4	3.96
1993	112,100.5	7,999.1	7.14
1994	110,201.0	10,288.8	9.33
1995	113,395.6	12,728.7	11.23
1996	189,000.0	15,351.8	8.12
1997	276,723.2	15,944.6	5.76
1998	287,917.1	26,721.3	9.28
1999	358,103.5	31,563.8	8.81

Source: Akinture et al (2011)

Table 1 above shows the budgetary allocation to the education sector during military years in Nigeria between 1977 and 1999. The highest allocation of 11.23 % was given to education in year 1995.

VII. ADMINISTRATION OF UNIVERSITIES

The military did not give universities authorities freehand in the appointment of vice chancellors and

other principal officers. This was tantamount to abolition of university autonomy as university authorities were hoodwinked by decrees and edicts. During the regime of the late General Sani Abacha, Major General Dongoyaro (rtd) was appointed as the sole administrator of Ahmadu Bello University while Prof Gomwalk was appointed to oversee the activities of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The excesses of military regimes in moderating university administration ignited demonstrations across the campuses. The military often applied force in quenching student demonstrations and this sometimes resulted into death of some student leaders and disrupted academic calendars on many occasions. Decree no 26 of 1988 proscribed and prohibited the Academic Staff Union of Universities from participating in trade union activities.

IX. STUDENTS' WELFARE

Military administrations in a way made provision for student welfare in the form of award of Bursary, scholarship, and sponsorship of lecturers outside the country for further studies. The military established the student loan board in 1972. The board was to provide assistance in form of loan or bursary to students in tertiary institutions. There was also a subsidized feeding arrangement in all federal universities and the arrangement lasted till 1984 when it was cancelled under the Buhari/Idiagbon administration.

CONCLUSION

The military had contributed significantly to widening access to higher education through establishment of universities in virtually all the states of the federation. The successes recorded in this regard could be partly attributed to the disciplined nature of military administration since the military is characterised by single command structure in which authority flows from the top to the other ranks. This made it easy for policies to be implemented without delay or acrimony. The successes recorded by military regimes in the establishment of schools and institutions, quality control strategies put in place in form of establishment of different boards or agencies show that progress in the field of education could be achieved without undue politicization often attached

to provision of education by the civilian administrations.

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