

## **Historical Assessment of Chief Michael Adekunle Ajasin As Educationist, Policy Maker and Administrator**

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### **Abstract**

Chief Michael Adekunle Ajasin was a Nigerian educationist, community leader; politician and statesman whose ramified influence had helped shape the course of Nigerian history. This paper examines his role in the educational advancement of his people and nation. The paper adopts the narrative and analytical methods of historical research. Data collection was done through oral interviews, private papers and secondary sources. While the paper noted the remarkable role of Ajasin as a teacher, educational policy maker and administrator, it also highlighted his landmark achievements and assessed the impact of same on Nigeria's socio-economic and political progress. It argued that Ajasin as a politician used his political platform to promote the cause of education for the overall benefit of Nigerians. Finally, it concluded that Ajasin was committed to quality education not only for Owo, Ondo State, and the Western region's indigenes, but Nigerians as a whole, thus leaving behind an enduring legacy in education for generations yet unborn.

**Keywords:** Education policy, Imade College, Ondo State, study group, politician

### **Introduction**

In the annals of Nigerian history, Chief Michael Adekunle Ajasin earned for himself an enduring reputation as a nation-builder. Few people contributed as much as he did to the development of Nigeria and fewer still had surpassed his records as a politician and educationist in modern Nigeria. This is on account of the various contributions he made to the socio-economic and political advancement of the country.

Ajasin was fully convinced that the key to the rapid development of Nigeria like other underdeveloped nations of the world was a radical approach to education at all levels. He believed that no nation could ever become great or realize her economic potentials if she treated education as the privilege of a few rather than the right of every citizen. As a political leader and foremost educationist, his enduring message was that education should always be accorded number one priority. In the course of over four decades of public service, Ajasin left indelible landmarks on the educational and political landscapes of Nigeria. It is against this background that this article critically examines the contributions of Ajasin to education and national development in Nigeria. In doing this, this work seeks to highlight Ajasin's achievements in Owo as a school principal at both the Imade College and Owo High School, his exploits as a teacher-politician and how he utilised his adopted political platforms to

advance the course of education - as a policy maker and administrator in the Western Region, parliamentarian in the First Republic and as Executive Governor of the former Ondo State. The study also assesses the impact of Ajasin's contributions on education and national development in Nigeria.

### **Ajasin: Educational Profile**

Michael Adekunle Ajasin was born on November 28, 1908 to Peter Ajasin and Deborah Ajasin in Owo, southwest Nigeria. Ajasin's parents were two of the earliest converts to Christianity under the auspices of the Anglican Church in Owo. In 1914, Ajasin started schooling at St. Paul's CMS Primary School, Owo, where he completed his primary education in 1921, and was appointed a pupil teacher. Two years after, he passed his Pupil Teacher's Examination Stage 1. With the encouragement of his uncle, Chief S. Adeloye Aboluwodi, he entered the St. Andrew's College, Oyo in 1924 and completed the normal five year programme in three years. As a trained teacher, Ajasin was posted to St. Andrew's CMS School, Warri in January 1928 where after a brief stint he was transferred to St. Luke's CMS Primary School, Sapele. For a while, Ajasin served under a less qualified teacher before he was elevated as the headmaster of the school in 1930. At Sapele, he studied on his own and obtained in quick succession the Second Class Teachers Certificate and Senior Teachers Certificate between 1928 and 1935. He was in Sapele until 1943.

Ajasin's life ambition was to obtain a degree, have a post graduate qualification in education and establish a secondary school in Owo Division.<sup>i</sup> In pursuance of these objectives, Ajasin studied hard on his own and through private studies he gained admission into the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, Modern History and Economics of the University of Durham in June 1946. From there, and with the continued support of the Owo community, he went to the United Kingdom for a post-graduate diploma in education at the Institute of Education, University of London from 1946 to 1947. These achievements marked the beginning of jumping over the major hurdle in his journey towards a noble goal. Ajasin's fifteen-year sojourn in Warri and Sapele, and his graduate training in Fourah Bay College and the University of London prepared him adequately well for his future career as an education policy maker and administrator. He recorded his first landmark achievement in educational administration at the famous Imade College, a community-owned secondary grammar school in Owo between 1947 and 1962.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Contributions to Imade College**

Ajasin returned to Nigeria from England in 1947 to become the principal of Imade College, Owo. By this time, the emphasis had to change from that of acquiring book knowledge to that of planning and managing human and material resources. His one year sojourn at the University of London's Institute of Education had acquainted him with modern methods of control and management in educational administration. This knowledge was deployed for good use at both Imade College and Owo High School.

Prior to Ajasin's arrival, Imade College was characterised by poor educational standard, incompetent leadership and poor infrastructure. These had brought some setbacks to the school and Owo community. The first Principal of the college was not a university graduate.

The whole pioneer students of the college were asked to repeat class two all over again in 1947. This had caused anger and resentment on the part of the teachers, a development that led to mass resignation of majority of them. To worsen the situation, many of the frustrated students especially those from poor homes withdrew from the school and never returned again. One of Ajasin's first priorities as the substantive Principal was how to overcome the challenge facing the school. To solve this problem, he initiated a programme that not only addressed the problems of incompetent teaching staff and inadequate teaching aids, but also indigent students.

He attracted teachers to the college by offering them such pay as was sometimes higher than his own as principal. He sponsored teachers and old students with good grades on bonds to the University with the sole purpose of making them teachers at Imade after their graduation.

He also placed emphasis on the teaching of science to the extent that Imade College Science Laboratories compared favourably with those of Government College, Ibadan<sup>iii</sup> and Kings College, Lagos. Through systematic planning and resourcefulness, Ajasin brought the school, which was the only secondary school in the entire Owo Division at that time, up to the standard of those of the older secondary schools in the Western Region, like Ibadan Grammar School, Abeokuta Grammar School, Ijebu Ode Grammar School, Ondo Boys High School and Ilesha Grammar School.<sup>iv</sup> Even though Ajasin's discipline was in the arts, he encouraged the teaching of the sciences, and because of the solid scientific base he laid for the school, many of its products are today doctors, engineers, computer scientists, among others.

He put into his job everything required to promote good relationship between him and the students on one hand, and the teachers on the other hand. On compassionate grounds, he would allow indigent students to pay school fees by installments, apart from getting the Owo Local Council to give twelve scholarships and bursaries every year to students from Owo Division, thus burying the seed of incompetence that characterized the administration of the school before his arrival as the principal of the institution.

He also tried as much as possible to make the school free of political influence. In spite of this, he clashed with some notable personalities in Owo who tried to force politics into the administration of the school in the early sixties, a development that unfortunately led to his resignation from Imade College in December, 1962. This marked the beginning of another phase in his career as a school administrator.

### **Ajasin's Contributions as the Principal and Proprietor of Owo High School**

One of Chief Ajasin's lifelong ambitions was to become the proprietor of a secondary school. Having administered Imade College well and transforming it into a reputable institution, he felt it was time for him to establish his own school. When Ajasin established Owo High School in January 1963, the project at the time seemed a tall order. At that time, secondary grammar schools were few and far between. Most of the schools were largely mission schools while the few private ones were community owned. It was very expensive to establish a grammar school while the prevailing socio-economic situation in the country was

discouraging enough. His major areas of immediate challenge was in funding the project, building classrooms, ensuring adequate student admission and employing qualified staff.

The school opened officially with an innovation on 18th January, 1963 with forty-two boys and eighteen girls, under Chief M.A. Ajasin as the principal and proprietor. The co-educational status of the new school was a departure from what obtained in his former school, Imade College, which provided secondary education for boys only. This reinforced Ajasin's policy of providing equal educational opportunities for all irrespective of gender and background. Many important people in Owo also assisted with the establishment of the school. These included Rev. Canon J.O. Fagboyegun, Chief Sasere Adetula and Chief Aboluwodi. The School started its activities in a temporary accommodation, a produce store that was provided by Late Rev. Canon J.O. Fagboyegun. The school's permanent site was a gift from Ajasin's cousin, Chief Samuel Adeloye, the then Aboluwodi of Owo.

One area that had not been emphasised in Ajasin's contribution to education in Owo is the inculcation of morals and character. He made the students to go through an orientation that taught them discipline, Christian devotion, honesty, respect for constituted authority - among others. They were exposed to training on personal and group integrity, courage, justice and selflessness.<sup>v</sup>Ajasin ensured high standard of discipline and morals among the students, instituted very good teacher-class and teacher-student ratios, and provided basic educational infrastructure, including classrooms, a library, a laboratory, and recreational and sporting facilities, thus affording the students well rounded education. Ajasin's stint as the Principal of Imade College and as the founder and Principal of Owo High School were marked by undiluted zeal and commitment to improve the life of his people through Western education. Hence, apart from providing an umbrella to products of the Universal Free Primary Education, Chief Ajasin worked very hard to produce for Nigeria successful and seasoned engineers, politicians, lawyers and first rate medical doctors and nurses, among others. These were good materials for education and nation building.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Ajasin as a Politician**

Ajasin was not only an educationist, but also a politician. He first ventured into politics as a student in the United Kingdom when he became the co-founder of the Nigerian Union of Great Britain and Ireland in July 1947. His belief that the Yoruba should have a political platform for expressing their political aspirations pushed him with people of like minds to establish the Egbe Omo Odua in 1948, a cultural organization that later metamorphosed into the Action Group Party (AG), which held its inaugural meeting in Owo in 1951 with Ajasin as host. In partisan politics, he worked very hard and was well recognised not only in Owo, but also in his party where he headed the AG education committee that produced the free education policy for the Western Region. He became the Chairman of Owo District Council between 1954 and 1956, and a member of the Federal House of Representatives representing Owo South from 1954 to 1956. In 1978/79, he teamed up with his AG compatriots to form the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) under which he emerged as the Executive Governor of Ondo State. He utilised these political platforms to achieve his educational aspirations not only for the Western Region, but also Ondo State in particular and Nigeria in general.

### **Ajasin as Federal Legislator**

As a legislator, Ajasin was not a bench warmer in the Federal House of Representatives. He made regular, robust and incisive contributions to the House debates on diverse national issues, particularly with regards to education. As a member representing Owo South in the House, Ajasin properly utilised the forum to advocate for a number of reforms and innovations in the Nigerian educational system particularly with regard to educational policy, science education, funding of education, teachers' wages and conditions of service, status of the Nigerian University Commission (NUC), gender equality, among others.<sup>vii</sup> It is significant to note that most, if not all of his advocacies, suggestions and recommendations have been adapted and integrated into the Nigerian policy on education. For instance, Ajasin once called for a critical examination and complete overhauling of the Nigerian educational system. In the past, Nigeria adopted the British system of education which divided grades into six elementary years, three junior secondary years and a two year University preparation programme. Those who scored high on exit examination at the end of Form Six were qualified to enter University.<sup>viii</sup> He then called for adjustment; suggesting that there should be a universal free and compulsory primary education of six years throughout the country. This should be followed by three years of junior secondary and four years of senior secondary education. At the end of the fourth year, students are to be examined to determine their suitability for higher education.<sup>ix</sup> This is known as the 6-3-4 system. Perhaps, it was this that has been misconstrued by Ajasin's admirers to mean 6-3-3-4 system of education which they claim was the brainchild of Ajasin.<sup>x</sup> His call for critical re-examination of Nigeria's education policy produced not only the free education policy but also the adoption of the 6-3-3-4 system of education by the Federal Government.<sup>xi</sup> His request for the setting up of the NUC as a statutory body and not as an ad hoc one influenced the decision of the Federal Government in 1975 to reconstitute the body as a permanent structure overseeing the expenses of universities and coordinating development of university education in the country. He also called for better condition of service for Nigerian teachers. As a result of his agitations, teachers began to enjoy the benefits of a unified service. Their salaries and conditions of service were improved, female teachers enjoyed leave benefits like their male counterparts in the Civil Service, and teachers became pensionable as most of voluntary agency schools were taken over by the government.<sup>xii</sup> Credit should be given to Ajasin and his other compatriots both in the House and the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). That Nigeria today has many polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities of Technology is due largely to the efforts of Ajasin and his co-agitators in the National Assembly who consistently reminded the Federal Government of the need to promote technological education at a time when there was little or no political will to do so.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Contribution to Free Education Policy**

By far, the most profound contribution of Ajasin to education in Nigeria generally was the formulation of the free education policy and the introduction of the Universal Primary Education scheme in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1955. The general belief was that Ajasin was the sole author of the free education policy. This claim has been debunked by some scholars<sup>xiv</sup> who have attributed the origin of the policy to the activities of some informed group of teachers-politicians including Ajasin, who met regularly in Ibadan in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>xv</sup> The group included well-known educationists such as Canon

E.O. Alayande, Chief S. O. Awokoya (later Professor), Canon S.A. Adeyefa and Rev. (later Bishop) T.T. Solaru. It was this policy that produced the Awokoya Policy Declaration, highlights of which was a reduction in the primary schooling from 8 to 6 years, a complete expansion of the whole range of educational institutions: teacher training colleges, modern schools, technical colleges; intensification of mass and adult education campaigns with the objective of wiping out illiteracy and expanding women education.<sup>xvi</sup> Indeed, the idea of free education was borne out of the Action Group policy to wipe out illiteracy which apart from being harmful to the society also constitutes an impediment to any serious and meaningful development in any society.<sup>xvii</sup> In January 1955, the free primary education scheme was launched throughout Western Nigeria. Some 380,000 six year olds entered school for the first time. This was more than twice the number estimated on the basis of 1952 census. The total enrolment in the Region's primary schools in 1955 thus rose to 812,000, an increase of over 360,000 from the previous year.<sup>xviii</sup> By 1960, when all children of school age were in the new system, the number in primary schools in the region reached over a million, more than the 1954 total.

This rapid growth provided the wide base from which the secondary schools, trade centres and teacher training colleges drew their new entrants. The policy boosted education of Muslim children. Hitherto, Muslims in the region felt marginalised due largely to the dominant position of the Christian missions. The new policy not only expanded the number of school places for Muslim children but also changed the pattern of school proprietorship in their favour. This had a significant impact on Muslim enrolment in schools. In Ibadan for instance, the fact that the school population rose up from 78 per cent in 1954 to 110 per cent in 1955 may be evidence of how Muslims who constituted the majority of the city's population had changed their attitude to western education.<sup>xix</sup> The policy also gave an encouragement to the education of the girl child who was traditionally regarded as less suited to academic pursuits than her male counterparts. In the Western Region, female enrolment in Elementary One in 1955 rose by 374 per cent as compared with 184 per cent rise among the males.<sup>xx</sup> The sudden realisation that an educated girl could command a higher bride price than an illiterate one probably influenced the decision of many parents to send their daughters to school as well as the relentless advocacy of Chief Ajasin. The increase in female enrolment suggests an important change in the attitude of many parents towards female education.<sup>xxi</sup>

However, the policy had its own downside. One of the negative effects of the UPE policy was the rise in the number of unemployed school leavers with its attendant frustrations. The increase in the number of people who benefitted from the free educational policy of Western Region created corresponding unemployment. There was widespread number of school leavers who could not be gainfully employed. Much as the people realised the value of a school certificate which became the passport to salaried employment in the modern sector of the economy, the available jobs could not match up.<sup>xxii</sup> The free education scheme greatly affected Nigeria as a nation. It created a precedent for other parts of the country particularly Lagos and Eastern Nigeria. Immediately the policy was implemented in the Western Region, the latter's counterpart, Eastern Region, under the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe caught the bug as it came under intense political pressure to follow the Western Regional example. The Eastern Region then had no option but to introduce its own version of the UPE

Programme in 1957. Even though it met with qualified success, it stood as a landmark in the change of attitude of the people of Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria to western education.<sup>xxiii</sup> The policy widened the gap between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria as the northern politicians were reluctant to follow the example of their southern counterparts. Thus, their unwillingness made it difficult for the North to catch up with the rest of the country. This partly explains the quota system later introduced in the 1970s into the political lexicon of Nigeria, in an attempt to bridge the ever-widening gulf between the educationally advantaged south and the disadvantaged North.<sup>xxiv</sup> This has not augured well for national unity and integration in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the educational policy of Chief Ajasin went beyond the regions. The policy of free and compulsory education was equally adopted by the Federal military government to cover the entire country in 1976 when General Olusegun Obasanjo's administration launched the UPE Scheme.<sup>xxv</sup> The Free education at all levels was also made the slogan of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in 1979 and 1983 which was introduced in the states controlled by the UPN. This policy was also included in Chapter Two of the Nigerian Constitution of 1979.<sup>xxvi</sup> Therefore, it will be right to claim that Nigeria as a nation learnt a positive lesson from Chief Ajasin. No doubt, the policy has created awareness within the citizenry which all of the governments in Western Nigeria have always exploited to win the support of the masses.

The adoption by the Obasanjo regime of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was a testimony to the programming ability of Ajasin to effectively act as a catalyst for the socio-political and economic transformation and progress of the country. Through the UPE scheme, many Nigerian parents heaved a sigh of relief that their children could at last enjoy modicum of education that was previously enjoyed by those in the old Western Region. The adoption of Ajasin's concept of free education especially at the primary school level was to effectively alter and shape the perception of most Nigerians that education was the exclusive preserve of children of the wealthy. Thus the idea of education for some was challenged and replaced with the idea of education for all.

Chief Ajasin has also been linked with the authorship of the 6-3-3-4 policy on education in the Western Region. In 1962, when Professor Sanya Onabamiro was the Minister of Education in the Western Region, he had set up a committee under the Chairmanship of Michael Ajasin to review the education policy of the Western Region and make appropriate recommendations to government. Members of the committee could not meet as a result of the political crisis in the AG. However, as Ajasin did not want to disappoint the Minister and for him to meet the deadline, he single handedly wrote out what later became known as the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The policy was meant to address the technical, vocational and technological aspects of Nigerian education. The report was submitted on time and approved for implementation. Unfortunately, the report was not implemented due to violent political crises and eventual imposition of a state of emergency in the Western Region.<sup>xxvii</sup> It is noteworthy, that Babs Fafunwa, many years later, had the opportunity to initiate the 6-3-3-4 policy at the Federal level. The policy makes provision for those who are not cut out for academic work to proceed straight to trade schools immediately after the Junior Secondary stage.<sup>xxviii</sup> But the reality today is that emphasis has shifted to automatic promotion from JSS3

to SS1. Thus the opportunity for a technological and vocational knowledge has suffered reverses. The concept of free education policy further received a boost with the emergence of Chief Ajasin as the first Executive Governor of old Ondo State between 1979 and 1983. As one of the foremost advocates of UPE in the Western Region, Chief Ajasin ensured a faithful implementation of the UPE scheme in old Ondo State.

### **Ajasin's Contributions to Education in Ondo State**

The lifting of the ban on party politics by the Obasanjo regime in 1978 saw the emergence of five political parties. These were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) led by Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri, the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) led by Malam Aminu Kano and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It was these five political parties that contested the 1979 election won by Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the NPN in a rather controversial circumstance. While details of that dispute may not be necessary here, it is important to state that the UPN canvassed for votes on the strength of the policy of free education at all levels. Being accustomed to enjoying free education in the past, Western states like Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Bendel states voted massively for the UPN; thereby ensuring the continuation of a legacy bequeathed by Chief M.A. Ajasin.

In Ondo State, Chief Ajasin emerged as the executive governor on the platform of the UPN. Going by his previous experience in free education in the Western Region, he quickly put in place machinery to articulate effective implementation of the UPE programme. It did not take his government long to come out with concrete plans for the successful implementation of the free education programme. To show the level of success recorded in his first four years in office, available records show that as at 1979 when he became the executive governor of Ondo State, the total number of primary school enrolment in the state was about 1,477 and by the 1982/83 session, this figure had climbed to 1,691,898 primary school enrolment for 1979 was 583,847 as at October 1979. By the 1982/83 session, this figure had increased to 1,691,898. In the same vein, secondary school establishment and enrolment witnessed tremendous growth. For example, the number of secondary schools in the state as at October 1979 was 252. By the 1982/83 session, this figure had increased to 501.<sup>xxix</sup> Ajasin also set out to equip existing and newly established primary and secondary schools with adequate and qualified teachers. Similarly, admission into its 11 existing teachers training colleges was greatly expanded. From a student's population of 9,533 in 1979, the figure rose to 12,042 by 1993. Same could be said of the existing College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, from the previous students' population of 507 in 1979, the figure rose to an impressive 1,872 by 1983.<sup>xxx</sup> The huge investment of the Ajasin administration in the provision of qualified teaching staff to man the rapidly expanding education sector is a glowing testimony to the commitment of the man to the provision of mass, qualitative education for it represented a deliberate policy of socialisation through mass education. As in the old Western Region, the people of old Ondo State came to exhibit a sophisticated political outlook and an unmatched zeal for progress in all fields of human endeavor.

In recognition of the financial difficulties of the teeming population of parents in the state who had so far embraced the policy of free education policy of his government, Ajasin was

determined to ameliorate the condition of the parents by making provision for the free distribution of textbooks and writing materials to students in both primary and secondary schools. Between 1980 and 1982, the state government made available to pupils and students of the state a total of 2,786,476 textbooks worth an estimated N7, 799,498.90k. In the 1979/80 school year, government paid out about six million naira to Principals of secondary schools as refunds to parents for the books already purchased for their education.<sup>xxxii</sup> Ajasin also undertook measures to assist students from indigent homes by upgrading the bursary allowances paid to Ondo State students in tertiary institutions. For undergraduates, the bursary allowance was raised from N400 to N500 annually. Post graduate students of the state origin studying abroad received an annual bursary allowance of N2, 500 each.

Such was the determination of Ajasin's government that the fortunes of students of the state as well as the future of education in the state received a radical transformation. It was the unshakable faith of Ajasin in the powers of education as a positive force for socio-political and economic progress that propelled him towards the aggressive pursuit of the free education programme despite misgivings and criticisms from the opposition party which doubted the possibility of sustaining the free education programme as well as the suitability and quality of pupils and students that would eventually be turned out by the system.

And to encourage tertiary education among the students as the final destination in their struggle for education and providing technical manpower for the state, the Ajasin administration approved the establishment of the state polytechnic in Owo, with the provision of a six million naira take off grant for capital projects and an initial students' population of 370.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It was perhaps to crown his efforts in bequeathing a lasting educational legacy to the people of Ondo State and produce high level manpower that made Ajasin to establish a state university in 1983, the Obafemi Awolowo University, which was later renamed the Ondo State University by the succeeding military regime in 1984.<sup>xxxiiii</sup> The availability of free, mass education for all indigenes of Ondo State, made possible by the Ajasin administration was indeed a revolutionary process in the history of education in the former Ondo State, which was composed of the present Ekiti and Ondo States. From the humble beginning in Owo as a pupil teacher, headmaster and proprietor, Ajasin used education as a factor for the liberation of the mind from ignorance and exploitation. This education, which served as liberator was well conceived, better appreciated and masterfully implemented.

The schools that were established, especially at the tertiary level have continued to produce graduates in all fields relevant to development. These graduates are today participating effectively in the running of Nigeria's affairs. They are to be found in the administrative, professional and sub-professional cadres, even though there is a production of surplus graduates which the economy cannot readily absorb. This development has resulted in a serious employment problem. However, this is similar to what has happened in India, where there is huge unemployment with its attendant challenges that is being gradually solved by brain drain.<sup>xxxv</sup>

This situation, however, is being blamed on the curriculum and teaching method since these unemployed youths are expected to be able to stand and fend for themselves. This criticism has no basis as Nigeria's tertiary institutions provide the necessary mental exercise to enable

their products brace up to the challenges of society. What is lacking is a greater rate of job opportunities because of the nation's low activities in the manufacturing and production sector of the economy. Moreover, the graduates lack important capital to invest on independent work. Thus, the graduates continued to rely on traditional job markets that are not expanding, but contracting in the face of declining revenues receivable by the governments of the federation.

Moreover, the success or failure of the free education policy provided by Ajasin must be judged to a large extent by what happened to its beneficiaries. Even though many came out of the UPE scheme with no jobs to do, yet the programme produced a number of educated youths, literate and enlightened who turned out to be potential agents of social change. Before now, many Yoruba sons and daughters could not be found in the professions, executive or administrative positions in the government and parastatals. This situation would change with time as most of them trooped to schools following the implementation of the free education scheme. Thus, the scheme succeeded noticeably in affecting the way of life of the beneficiaries who are now numbered among university dons, lawyers, both at the Bar and on the Bench, engineers, architects, surveyors, accountants, bankers, and top executives in the public and private sectors. Undoubtedly, the Ajasin revolutionary initiative in making the bold attempts to expand primary education and provide opportunity for further education deserves commendation.

This is not to say that everything had been smooth. There was a large increase in the number of schools and students enrolment, an index of a great leap forward in educational development in Ondo State. However, the result has been a mixed bag of successes and failure. The state had to pile up arrears of salaries due to teachers and civil servants, while school children had to provide their own furniture. The financial demand of the free education programme was such that other areas of the state's responsibilities were neglected. Yet, on the balance the scheme must be reckoned a success. The awareness created by the programme and the political rewards it brought emboldened successive governments in the state to sustain the free education policy in Ondo State since 1983.

In summary, it can be said that Chief Ajasin's policy on education even before his election as executive governor of Ondo State was nationalistic and revolutionary in scope and nature. Undoubtedly, Chief Ajasin's policy papers on education further emphasised his concern for the education of all and sundry. The fact that the Universal Free Primary Education programme and the 6-3-3-4 systems of education which he helped to design has been integrated into Nigeria's educational system underscores his desire for the education of every Nigerian irrespective of status, tribe or creed.

## **Conclusion**

Education is a form of investment in human capital which yields economic, political and social benefits, among others. It prepares people to contribute to a nation's future wealth and development by increasing the productive capacity of the nation. Ajasin invested his life and resources into education in Owo, Ondo State and Nigeria in general. He established scholarship schemes that gave opportunities to many indigent but brilliant scholars.

Thus, the contribution of Michael Adekunle Ajasin to the growth and development of education in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. In all cases, Chief Ajasin brought his austere and ecclesiastical life to bear on his pupils, teachers and even his contemporaries. He was a source of inspiration for many particularly the poor whom he labored for to improve their future and societal standing through education.

His realization of the strength of education in the attainment of socio-economic and political development of Nigeria led him to use everything at his disposal to promote the cause of education among the various peoples of the country. Chief Ajasin was a rare gem with an unbridled taste for quality education not only for Owo and Ondo State indigenes but Nigerians generally. His transparent commitment to the uplift of the human folk in Nigeria expressed in many of his programmes as a teacher and governor is a challenge to future generations of Nigerians. Chief Ajasin left an enduring legacy in education that will remain unequalled in the annals of Nigerian history for many years to come.

## End Notes

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- <sup>i</sup>The SACOBA: The Half Yearly Newsletter of St. Andrew's College Old Boys Association (January 1990 Vol. VI. No. 1), 29.
- <sup>ii</sup> The SACOBA (1990), 29-30).
- <sup>iii</sup> The SACOBA, 30
- <sup>iv</sup> Adeloye, S and Aina, N.F., etals. (eds.), Michael Adekunle Ajasin: The Story of a Legend, (Akure: Ondo State New Era Commercial Press Limited, 1992), 52-53; The SACOBA, 30.
- <sup>v</sup> Ajasin, M. A, *Ajasin: Memoirs and Memories*. (Lagos: Ajasin Foundation, 2003), 65.
- <sup>vi</sup> Adeloye, Aina, etals, *Michael Adekunle Ajasin*, 53.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ajasin, 430.
- <sup>viii</sup> Jega, M, "The State of Education Today" (Lecture Delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the University of Sokoto, 1997), 5.
- <sup>ix</sup> Adeloye, Aina, etals, 194.
- <sup>x</sup> The SACOBA, 31; Adeloye, etals, 55.
- <sup>xi</sup> Fafunwa, A.B, *History of Education in Nigeria*. (Onitsha: NPS Educational Publishers Ltd. (revised edition, 1995), 259.
- <sup>xii</sup> Adeoti, E.O, *Alayande as Educationist 1948 – 1983: A Study of Alayande's Contribution to Education and Social Change*. (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc., 1997), 194-196.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Osokoya, I, *Education in Nigeria: History, Strategies, Issues and Problems*. (Ibadan: Bisinaike Educational Publishers, 1987).

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