



EDUCATIONAL POLICIES-IMPLEMENTATION AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIAN

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Abstract

It is no longer surprising that in Nigeria today, educational standard occupies a very central space in public discussions. The public's unhappiness becomes more prominent following the annual release of various external examination results and at times internal ones. This is because, the outcomes don't always match the government and parental investment/ expectations. In respect of the above, the study examined the influence of policy implementation on students' academic achievements in Nigerian. Relevant concepts were discussed and related literature reviewed. In the course of the investigation, it was discovered that Nigeria has had beautiful policies capable of bringing the desired outcome in her system of education but has had a very poor/bad implementation processes which have affected the system to the point of marring students' academic achievement. Based on this finding, the researcher recommended inter-alia, thus; 1. Policy formulation must be critical to the available resources. The formulators should ensure that the nation has the required funds to carry such policy before formulating it. So it won't fall dead on arrival. 2. Nigeria is a policy-rich environment but poor in implementation. Corollary, the Federal Ministry of Education should coordinate annual joint review meetings to evaluate the degree to which key components of the Education Policies are being implemented.

Key words: Education, Policy, Educational Policy, Implementation and Academic Achievement

Introduction

The Nigerian educational system is administered and managed by the federal, state and local governments. Education is on the concurrent list. Federal Ministry of Education handles national policy and ensures quality control in all the education systems. It is also responsible for federal higher education. While the state governments are responsible for the administration of their own schools and educational setups, the local government handles all the basic education within their domains. Generally, policy can be seen as a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body. Marriamwebster.com (2023) asserts that policy is a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions. Policies are written or unwritten statements that guide present and future thoughts, initiatives, actions and decisions of managers. They are written when there are documented somewhere for reference purposes and are unwritten when they are made in form of pronouncements i.e. policy statements by people in power or positions of authority. Policies are guides that usually provide the latitude of operations of managers. It makes managers understand the extent to which they can go in the process of decision making (Noun, 2011). Public policies are set in place primarily by elected officials, who are voted into office for a set period of time by citizens. According to Reference.com (2020) policies are set in place by officials at all levels of government to establish rules, regulations and procedures that guide the actions of citizens within their jurisdiction. Primarily, policy decisions are made to improve the health, safety and well-being of the populace and may set standards for educational institutions, transportation operations and housing facilities. Some policies are concerned with



short-term issues, such as coordinating relief efforts following natural disasters or to alleviate economic concerns produced by a sudden downturn in the market (Reference.com, 2020). In a close alignment, Odukoya (2011) opines that public policy affects short-term issues as well as complex and intractable issues that occur in multiple locations and are carried out across generations. It helps in setting societal norms for behavior, and also strives to improve the quality of life for people. Policy decisions are made daily to cover activities across all levels of government. Some are made at the level of local units, while others are made by state actors or government officials, in other words, policymakers. **Public policy is a sacred field because policy choices and decisions made by those in power affect nearly every aspect of daily life, including education, healthcare and national security** (Ogunode & Adah, 2020). According to Ogbonnanya (2010) educational policy is the specific goals that are pursued through gazetted means. It can refer to a proposal, an on-going programme, or the goals of a programme, or major decisions as they affect education. Papanikos (2010) defines educational policy as any systematic intervention to improve the practice of education at all levels. The word *systematic* is used to describe a process by which means and resources are used to achieve predetermined objectives (targets, goals). In this context, education policy is exercised by all the potential stakeholders of education. Of course, governments at all levels (federal, state & local) play the most important role, but in many cases the effectiveness and the efficiency of such policies are best executed by other stakeholders of educational provision, such as teachers, parents, school administrators, students, community groups, employers, etc. Educational policy covers all the process of formulating a decision, its implementation and evaluation. This underscores the reason for the submission of Noun (2011) for noting that Educational Policy of Nigeria is a general statement containing principles, regulations and rules, that govern many of the decisions on how to educate children, where to get them educated, where to get them employed, who to teach them, how to finance their education, what to teach, how to impart skills, goals, objectives and even the philosophy. Also, the National Policy on Education, revised in (2013), contains every necessary ingredient for the achievement of the goals of the education system. The planning for the education system takes its root from the policy of education. Alternative courses of action would then be taken with due cognizance of the objectives, philosophy and goals of each level of education to make comprehensive plans for the education system. There are three levels of educational system in Nigeria, the basic education (primary/junior secondary schools) that spans through nine years, the post-basic/senior secondary education for three years, and the higher education which goes between four to six years depending on the program of study. In order to realize the National objectives of education in Nigeria and to meet the various international protocols that Nigeria is signatory to like UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), The African Charter on The Right and Welfare of the African Child (ACRWAC) and Child Rights Act (CRA) etc, the Nigeria government keeps developing educational policies and programme to ensure the realization of education for all. Formulating of educational policies and developing educational programme is the sole responsibilities of the government at the federal, states and local government levels. Educational programmes are designed for the masses to benefit. These programme are formulated to solve a particular identified problem. Educational policies are also developed to meet the various United Nations conversions on issues regarding educational development and access. According to Eru, Jemimah & Jones (2019) Nigeria as a nation has experienced several reviews, reforms, different educational policies and programmes. Also a lot of inconsistencies had existed and immensely contributed to the poor standard of the education in Nigeria. Giving credence to the above claims, Odukoya (2011) reiterates that between the years 2000-2016, the nation passed through five different regimes. It should be noted that each of those governments while in power featured new ministers/commissioners and management teams who in most cases shared different thoughts, ideas and perceptions with their predecessor(s). Differences which usually culminate in either abrogation or suspension of an existing policies introduced by the previous person(s), may be for selfish or political reasons. It is equally pertinent to note that frequent changes in policies and government tend to have negative impact on scheme implementation (Eru et al, 2019). Ogunode & Adah (2020) captured some of the educational policies launched between the years of 2000 to 2016 to include; the Child act law (2003), Universal Basic Education Act (2004), National Policy on HIV and AIDS for the Education Sector in Nigeria (2005), National Gender Policy (2006), National School Health Policy (2006), the Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria (2014), National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria (2016) and National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (2016). For detail purposes, the policies are further broken as follows:



The Child Rights Act

This codifies the rights of children in Nigeria. The Act was designed to incorporate into its laws all the rights guaranteed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989. It defines a child as a person below the age of 18 years, consolidates all laws relating to children into a single law and specifies the duties and obligations of government, parents and other authorities, organizations and bodies. The Act gives full protection to privacy, honor, reputation, health and prevention from indecent and inhuman treatment through sexual exploitation, drug abuse, child labor, torture, maltreatment and neglect to a Nigerian Child. It declares that every child has a right to life, to be allowed to survive and develop. The Act also confers responsibilities on children, which include working towards the cohesion of their families, respecting their parents and elders, contributing to the moral well-being of society, and strengthening social and national solidarity. The Act mandates parents, guardians, institutions and authorities to provide the necessary guidance, education and training to enable the children to live up to these responsibilities. To support the principle of creating institutions for servicing the needs and welfare of children living in difficult circumstances, like orphans, street children and children with physical disabilities. The Act contains provisions for the establishment, registration, regulation and monitoring of those institutions (World Bank, 2017).

Universal Basic Education Programme (2004)

The Universal Basic Education Act provides the legal framework for the implementation of the UBE Program, which makes basic education not only free but also compulsory. Subsequently, the UBE Commission (UBEC) was established as a way of ensuring the proper implementation of the UBE Program. The commission is responsible for the coordination of the activities of the program (World Bank, 2017).

National Policy on HIV and AIDS for the Education Sector in Nigeria (2005)

The Policy acknowledges that HIV/AIDS is a critical national issue that must be addressed as a matter of priority, if Nigeria is to achieve Education for All and MDGs. The Policy provides the basis to address issues and complications from the epidemic as well as strategies to respond to them. For orphans and vulnerable children, the Policy requires the education sector to: (i) ensure that the HIV status of a child or parents is not used as a criterion for admission or exclusion from school activities; (ii) enforce the principle of nondiscrimination and non-stigmatization of such children; (iii) sensitize all staff and learners to the special physical and psychosocial needs of such children and provide medical, psychosocial support and counseling services for them; (iv) ensure that such children have free access to education and advocate for the removal of all barriers that prevent them from obtaining quality education; and (v) ensure that such children have access to bursaries, loans and scholarships for higher education (World Bank, 2017).

National Gender Policy (2006)

The Government of Nigeria adopted the National Gender Policy in 2006 as a substitution of the Women's Policy adopted in 2000. The goal of the National Gender Policy includes the following: (i) eliminate cultural/ religious gender-based biases and harmful cultural and religious practices which rise to inequalities in gender-role relations in the Nigerian society; (ii) in order to tap the potentials of women for development, a gender policy which entrenches equity between men and women for development is key. All forms of gender-based violence must be eliminated; (iii) women education is a priority because it is the key to gender equity, justice and poverty reduction, improved skills and technological knowledge, as well as the general socio-economic development of the nation. A major policy goal is to ensure equal access to women, boys and girls to both formal and informal education; (iv) women empowerment is a key entry point to gender equality in the society (World Bank, 2017).

National School Health Policy (2006)

In 2001, the Federal Ministry of Health and the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with WHO conducted a Rapid Assessment of School Health System in Nigeria to ascertain the status of school health. The assessment noted the several health problems among learners, the lack of health and sanitation facilities in schools, and the need for urgent action in school health. The National School Health Policy is aimed at promoting the health of learners to achieve the goals of Education for All, outlining roles of relevant line ministries like Education, Health, Environment, Water Resources, Information and other stakeholders. The Policy and its implementation guidelines promote School Health Programme that comprises of all



projects and activities in the school environment for the promotion of the health and development of the school community. It includes (i) Healthful School Environment; (ii) School Feeding Services; (iii) Skill-Based Health Education; (iv) School Health Services; and (v) promotion of School, Home and Community Relationship (World Bank, 2017).

The Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria (2014)

The Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) is a response to children and schools affected by militants in the North Eastern States of Nigeria. The program was launched by the Government of Nigerian and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, alongside the Nigerian Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector leaders in Abuja in May 2014. The Safe School Initiative entails a combination of: 1. transfer of secondary students to other states 2. support to education in IDP camps. 3. pilot safe schools models including community mobilization. The initiative was initially implemented in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, already in a declared state of emergency. The Government of Nigeria has established a national Safe Schools Fund to accommodate capitalization from the Federal Government, Private Sector, and grants from donors. This national fund is to be complemented by the establishment of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative Multi-Donor Trust Fund (Nigeria SSI MDTF) also for donors for matching co-financing and implementation of activities pertaining to the initiative.

National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (2016)

Federal government of Nigeria in 2016 launched the National Home Grown School Feeding Policy (NHGSFP) in public primary schools in Nigeria with the aim of ensuring one solid quality meal a day for children in order to increase enrollment, reduce dropout rate and ensure quality learning outcome. The Home Grown School Feeding Programme, which aims to provide free school meals with food procured from local smallholder farmers seek to strengthen communities across the country by: (a) Increasing school enrolment and completion. Nigeria currently has a primary school dropout rate of around 30% (b) Improving child nutrition and health. Nigeria has the third largest population of chronically undernourished children in the world. (c) Strengthening local agricultural economies by providing a school feeding market in which farmers can sell their produce. (d) Create employment opportunities with jobs in catering, processing, farming, etc. The management and administration of the programme is contained in the National Home Grown School Feeding Strategic plan which maps out how Federal, State and Local governments are to work together to deliver the programme over the next four years. To facilitate the implementation of this plan, the Federal Government is working with key partners to capitalize upon global experience and evidence of good practice.

National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria (2016)

The Nigerian government developed a policy document aimed to address the challenges associated with the inclusion of Nigerian children with disabilities and unmet learning needs into the school system. Under the Vision “A society with an inclusive education system with unhindered access to quality education and active participation of all learners in the same safe school environment,” the policy sets out framework, monitoring and evaluation mechanism, and the implementation guideline. Educational policies are designed and formulated to improve the quality of education. Educational policies are formulated to address educational challenges and are designed to provide access to quality. The Nigerian government attached great importance to educational policies due to its relevance which include among others the provision of sound knowledge to the citizens for adaptation into the larger society. Affirming this, Ibrahim in Ogunodo & Adah (2020) submit that the development of any nation and its achievement of greatness depend largely on the development and the effectiveness of implementing appropriate education laws. For this reason, most governments all over the world place much emphasis on educational policies as instruments of national development. In the Nigerian context, despite the importance attached to education policy development, certain challenges affect the implementation of the education policies which invariably affects academic excellence. The capacity and commitment of government to implement educational policies is usually interrupted by number of factors including inadequate resources and lack of political will (UNICEF, 2017).

Implementation

The word implementation is simply an act or instance of activating something; the process of making something active or effective. It is the process of moving an idea from concept to reality. in business,



engineering and other fields. Implementation refers to the building process rather than the design process (Wiktionary, 2020). According to togethertolive.com (2023) implementation is a continuous process that involves a set of activities designed to put a program or activity (that we know works) into practice. Implementation is the deliberate but flexible path to using evidence effectively. Implementation can be seen as taking action or make changes that have officially been decided should happen. In the words of Damshroder and Hagedorn (2011), Implementation refers to efforts designed to get evidence-based programs or practices of known dimensions into use via effective change strategies". On his own, Dulark (2011) refers program implementation to as how well a proposed program or intervention is put into practice and is fundamental to establishing the internal, external, construct, and statistical conclusion validity of outcome evaluations. To improve outcomes, an evidence based practice or innovation must be selected and the process of implementing that practice or innovation must be effective. In another view-point, Dun Sire (2017) opines that the concept of implementation implies that two entities – "objective and outcome" - satisfy two different relationships: the causal function and the accomplishment function. Implementation science is the study of the processes needed to bring new practices into widespread use (Barbara, Hurth, Pletcher, Shaw, Whaley, Peters. & Dunlap, 2014). For more clarification, they went further to state that, changing policies or guidelines, providing information and training alone are not adequate to bring about sustainable changes in practice. To adopt evidence-based practices, the implementation process must also address the organizational supports which are necessary to initiate and sustain the practices with fidelity. Through carefully planned implementation, the adoption of any new practice builds the system's capacity for change (Barbara et al, 2014). In the light of the above, Dulark in DunSire (2017), reiterates that implementing programs that work requires careful and advance planning, the involvement of multiple stakeholders and a process that ensures accountability. When programs are implemented poorly, it does not only reduce its potential for helping people in need but it also wastes scarce public resources because poorly implemented programs are unlikely to be successful. Additionally, the gap between how a program is intended by its designers to be delivered and its actual delivery in practice is referred to as implementation variation (Dulark, 2011). Implementation as a concept has about 5 stages which include: 1) exploration, 2) installation, 3) initial implementation, 4) full implementation, and 5) expansion and scale-up (Barbara et al, 2014). According to them, each stage has specific steps and associated activities. While the stages, steps and activities suggest a linear sequence of events, in actual implementation, there is often a more dynamic flow to the work. Some stages or steps may be occurring simultaneously and the work often circles back to revisit earlier stages. Implementation drivers such as technical leadership and adaptive leadership, organizational supports and personnel development mechanisms must align with and support the new practices (they note further). It could be so far observed, that two ideas are fundamental to the concept of implementation; i.e. that the policy program is the input that brings about the outcomes (the causal function) in such a way that the outcomes accomplish the objectives of the policy (the accomplishment function).

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is very central to education as well as the learning process. It has become an index of child's future in this highly competitive world. Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and universities. It is one of the most important aspects of teaching-learning process. Academic achievement is a key mechanism through which adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are all important parts of developing a career aspiration (Bhat & Hemant, 2015). According to HomeWorldView (2020) **academic achievement refers to a student's success in meeting short- or long-term goals in education.** In a literal picture, it could mean completing high school or earning a college degree. In some schools, high academic achievement may also mean a student being on the honor roll for a particular term, semester or session. Balasubramaniam in Bhat & Hemant (2015) refers it to as the knowledge attained and skills developed in the school subjects by an individual. It can be simply taken to mean the exhibition of knowledge attained or skills developed in/on school programmes. That informs one's extent of assimilation with respect to what is in the school curriculum. Busari (2010) reaffirms this by saying that academic achievement is generally regarded as the display of knowledge attained or skills developed in the school subject. It is however, the view of Ducane (2015) that students' academic achievements are influenced by variety of factors, from simple demographic factors, such as age, gender and family socioeconomic status to more variable factors like the quality of teachers, quality of the teaching faculty or school and the way students with special needs are grouped. For example, in some



cases, students of a certain gender or race may have a statistically better chance of academic success than their peers of a different gender or race. Also, home life including parental educational background, peace and state of emotions and finally, government's stability in policy implementation can have very big impact on how students perform in schools. Every student in Nigerian schools, be it primary, secondary or tertiary has it as his/her basic assignment to achieve high performance academically but unfortunately, researches show that while very few achieve success in their academics, many falls below expectations. However, the reason for the shortfall has been identified to be as a result of numbers of factors, part of which the present study represents.

Policy- Implementation and Academic Achievement

One of the Nigeria's most significant national objectives is the building of great and dynamic economy through functional and well implemented education system. Moving towards that, Nigeria under her successive government/ administrations from 1960 has had various policies well formulated, though not well implemented. This is in line with the view of Okoroma in Eru et al (2019) who laments thus; "unfortunately not much of the Nigerian educational policies have been achieved". The reason for this is because the said policies were neither well-planned, implemented nor given enough time to survive. As in his earlier statement, Odukoya (2011) reemphasizes the incessant and unwarranted changes in Nigerian educational policies. To buttress his point, he states that between the years 1991-1999 the country had over four different regimes, which also translates to; or even more in the number of Educational appointees as Ministers, SAs & PAs, Directors, Boards Members etc. At the same time, the states were not exonerated from these changes. Each of the presidents, ministers, Governors, commissioners and what have you had different conceptions and policies on education for implementation during their tenure. Consequently, he further notes, that with such instability in the system of governance, most of the policies were abandoned half way, this is probably not just because funds were not available or provided but because most successive governments usually lack the will power to continue from where their predecessors stopped. A development which Nigerian government across board can be said to have earned a pass mark in. In further perusal of the impact of government's inconsistencies in policy implementation on academic achievement, Ogunode & Adah (2020) observe that, "the incessant changes and paucity of technocrats within most government/administrations resulted in lack of continuity of programmes, fallen standards, and incomplete and half-hazard achievements of the educational objectives. In corroboration, Okoroma in Eru et al (2019) argues that the political and administrative inconsistencies were so much that they affected not just policies but also distorted teaching learning processes thereby hampering academic achievements of students. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that while policies are formulated to improve the quality of the Nation's education system, its implementation process and strategies have become counterproductive in Nigeria. The problems are not with policy itself, they are mostly good. What has been found to be at center of this issue is the implementation process which can be said to be both confusing and frustrating. The process of educational-policy implementation in Nigeria is usually disruptive especially when the new introductions result to abandoning/ abolishment of the existing ones. Also, opinions as reviewed above show that government has done noble with respect to policy formulation but also failed woefully in their method of implementation. What this means, is that, Nigeria will continue to mirage the achievement of her educational objectives and students may remain poor academic achievers until the situation is redressed.

Conclusion

In most developing societies today, there are many challenges that hinder the realization of educational objectives, part of which is the process of policy implementation. These challenges need to be addressed to make possible the actualization of the aims and objectives of education in Nigeria. Educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life and human capital. Successive governments in Nigeria have made several policies with the aim of arresting unwanted developments in the country. It is at the same time, very unfortunate that, the system has equally undergone lots of changes in her educational policies without due considerations to such factors as aptness, validity, time, resources, available personnel etc; at the time of the said changes. Nigerian government is good at making policies but lacks the will power to follow them up till maturity. This has contributed to the failure of many students to achieve high performance in their academic pursuit. It is therefore, the researcher's opinion that if this trajectory is changed, it will impact positively the country's education and enhance students' academic achievements.



Ways forward

1. Every policy formulated must be backed by law to exist a particular period of time, at least to enable results evaluated before its abolishment if need be.
2. The fact that education is considered a public good, it should be removed from the sphere of politics. It should be made purely a constitutional matter, but not as provided by the 1999 constitution which allows escape routes for political leaders to abandon existing policies with the excuse of lack of funds.
3. Policy formulation must be critical to the available resources. The formulators should ensure that the nation has the required funds to carry such policy before formulating it. So it won't fall dead on arrival.
4. Government must make use of the right type of persons to achieving policy objectives. quackery will continue to render both government and individual efforts futile.
5. Nigeria is a policy-rich environment but poor in implementation. Corollary, the Federal Ministry of Education should coordinate annual joint review meetings to evaluate the degree to which key components of the education policies are being implemented.

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