

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: BRIDGING THE GAP IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The problem of policy formulation and implementation has been a thing of history. Oftentimes policies are formulated but the problem of implementation becomes a herculean task. This paper highlights the formulation of educational policies taking a hard look at the national policy on education and its implementation along the various tiers of education and comes up with the problems militating against the implementation such as lack of adequate statistical data, inadequate infrastructural facilities and the endemic problem of corruption among others. Recommendations are herein made to alleviate the reoccurrence syndrome.

Nigeria, the universally acclaimed most populous black country is remarkable for its vast and diverse nature in terms of geography, people, culture and religion. She is noted for the high regard she accords education. The system of education enjoys the interaction of government, religious groups, voluntary organizations and interest groups. The socio-political environment is such that an individual can belong to two or more of these functionaries.

In Nigeria, the Christian missionaries established schools which offered more opportunities for the conquest of the mind. Education provided, was used as the most effective vehicle for evangelization and penetration, the content and structure of which acted as the propelling force that produced the amalgam of the elements of “trinity of colonization”: trade, religion and power, (Okeke, 2007). The organization and management of the early western education as exemplified in the early boarding schools gave impetus to its acceptance. The Christian missionary activities in education predated British involvement in educational activities in Nigeria.

At the inception of western European model of education of schools in Nigeria in 1842, with the first primary school established in Badagry, thus opening the way for formal western education and professional schooling.

For many years, the missionaries in the South had the field of education to themselves. Besides being different in their approach, they shared many things in common in respect to their aims and objectives of education. In reality, they cherished and appreciated the school to play a pivotal role for the success of their activities, thus laying the foundation of missionary educational policy on evangelistic view emphasizing literacy and numeracy as a potential tool for the moral and intellectual elevation of their followers. In the view of Okeke (2007), the foundations of missionary educational policy were therefore laid on evangelistic view which emphasized literacy education as a powerful agency for moral and intellectual elevation of the people: religious instruction as the soul saving knowledge in the school as an aid to evangelization and character training that would through mission school education keep the morality of the wards up-to-date and transform the youths into useful members of the society.

In the North, the missionaries ventured into the non-muslim area which was essentially the responsibility of the protectorate government to provide schools for the Muslims. The unhealthy rivalry among the missionaries created distorted education policies and implementation while the protectorate government controlled the schools in the north.

Concept of a Policy

A policy is usually a document that spells out all official actions of a group or system. It is a guide that gives a general framework and direction of the activities of any corporate organization. Terry (1977) defines it as the area in which decisions are to be made but does not give the decision. It provides an interplay between an organizational goal and functions. A policy is dynamic as there is usually room for necessary adjustment of operation. It may be for this fluidity that Hoy and Miskel (1978) stated that policies are not just formulated, monitored, communicated and evaluated, but can be seen as an approximation of desired goals which continue to change as a result of reconsideration. A good policy is that which is reviewed as the need arises. However, no matter how good a policy may be its implementation can hardly be a hundred percent success.

Concept of Educational Policy

Every human activity, education inclusive, must have official backing for effective operation. This is the reason a policy is usually formulated. Okoroma (2006) opined that a policy provides the direction in which decisions are to be made, but does not make the decision. Educational policy defines the area for educational activities in a given milieu.

The formulation of any educational policy is a prelude to its implementation. Planning, as an element of policy formulation precedes policy implementation. It is however unfortunate to note that educational policies and implementation in our part of the world are usually at variance. This may be the reason a former Governor of Old Rivers State Fidelis Oyakhilome, while addressing the convention of Nigerian Association of Educational Planning and Administration in Rivers State in 1986, as cited in Okoroma (2006) stated that "we know it is difficult to realize planned objectives a hundred percent, but our experience in planning education in this country shows a disturbing gap between planned objectives and attained results. As professionals, it may be pertinent to identify whether those critical gaps are results of faulty implementation". Educational policy implementation in Nigeria has assumed a disturbing crescendo in recent times.

In the view of Okoroma (1987), educational policies are initiatives of governments that determine the direction of our education system. Generally, education is seen to be the most appropriate way in which young ones in any given society are induced to play meaningful roles in society. Consequently as major key players in the education industry, government determines formalities, and plans educational policies to guide and direct its citizens.

In his submission, Awokoya (1981) observes that educational policy is directed at increasing the quality of life of a defined set of people, the objective of which is to satisfy pressure groups, and the degree and complexity to which socialized personnel must be educated and trained to meet these demands. He says that certain elements need to be considered in the formulation of educational policy among which are:

1. It should be formulated and adopted through a political process that acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interest and desires among its participants.

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2. It should be formulated and adopted through a political process that acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interest and desired among its participants.

It should portray some elements of guidance for properly directed and co-ordinated actions towards the attainment of desire goals. It should be a binding guide on the actions of those implementing it.

Some Problems of Educational Policy Implementation

The persistent incongruity between policy formulation and implementation calls for identification of factors that militate against each other. Generally, such factors rear their ugly heads at the planning stage of the policy formulation. This is because the planning stage, to a very large extent, ensures effective implementation. It is common saying that the depth of the foundation determines the height of the building. This may probably be the reason Ukeje, (1986) observed that good planning ensures effective implementation. According to Adesina (1977) planned implementation can be constrained among such factors as:

1. Under estimation of implementation cost,
2. Inaccurate statistical data

Some other authors like Van Horn and Van Meter (1977) posited some constraints to include:

1. Communication gap
2. Personnel capability and
3. Dispositional conflict, among others

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE)

The 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) was formulated to address the identified multifaceted problems of education to the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians as well as promoting the unity and stability of the country, by laying the foundations for national integration. It also aimed at realizing self-reliance and self-sufficiency so as to meet the country's developmental needs. The policy introduced the 6-3-3-4 system of education modeled after the American system. The Federal Government centralized education in terms of financing and control and said the UPE was to be made compulsory as soon as practicable.

In 1979 the Federal Government placed education in the concurrent list, sharing the responsibility for education amongst the three tiers of government, with the federal government having responsibility for post primary, professional and technological and university education. It vested the federal government with the control of primary, post primary, adult and non-formal education within the states. Primary education was the joint responsibility and control between states and local councils, with the latter responsible for the payment of teachers' salaries. Today in most states, the governors have seized utmost control in the provision of infrastructure and payment of teachers' salaries. In 1981, the first revised NPE, the Federal Government yet proposed that it would make UPE compulsory as soon as possible.

The UPE ended in September 1981 because the Federal Government could not meet its obligations leading to unpaid salaries, degradation of educational facilities and strikes. Automatic promotion at the primary school through continuous assessment and examination was introduced. There was the persistent search for certificates rather than skills acquisitions which the policy was to address.

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Language was recognized as an important factor of cultural preservation and to forge national unity, prescribing Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa to be studied in schools. It also prescribed mother-tongue or language of the immediate environment to be used in the first three years of primary education.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) revised the NPE and prescribed a Universal Basic Education (UBE) that was compulsory for all children given in form of 9-3-4. This was flagged off as a means of achieving equal educational opportunities and eradication of illiteracy. Despite the fact that the policy prescribed compulsory UBE, it was never enforced.

In the revised policy, the minimum standard for entry into the teaching profession was raised from Teacher Grade II Certificate to the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) obtained after three years of senior secondary schooling and Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination. The policy involved various programmes like the nomadic education for migrant ethnic groups like the Fulani and Ijaw fishermen.

The NPE also prescribed changes in the direction of technological development which proposed that admissions into universities be based on a ratio 3:2 in science and humanities respectively, in order to launch Nigeria into the technological terrain. This however failed as JAMB and the universities were unable to meet the prescribed science/humanities ratio.

Again in 2004, the NPE had the 4th edition to provide an all-inclusive education taking care of persons with noticeable disabilities (PEND).

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has the responsibility for formulating basic education and senior secondary curricula under the control of the Federal Government. Each state is expected to adapt the implementation of the policy in line with the locality. Since 2008, the basic educational programme has been in operation and includes English Studies, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Religious and National Values, Cultural and Creative Arts, Business Studies, Nigerian Languages, Pre-vocational Studies, a total of 10 subjects.

At the end of the 9-year basic education in the final year of the junior secondary school, students sit for an external examination and certification is based on 40% continuous assessment and 60% examination performance.

The performance determines whether or not the candidate could proceed to senior secondary level. We don't know how many schools have the workshops and how many products of such

schools are so skill-equipped. It is also doubtful if the 40% allotted to continuous assessment plays any significant role in the overall certification at the end of the UBE.

English Language is the Medium of Instruction. The policy however prescribes the use of vernacular or mother-tongue for instruction in the lower primary school. But Woolman (2001) observed that Nigeria has over 270 indigenous languages that qualify for instructional tongues for early primary classrooms, many of which have no written orthography which makes material production more difficult. Agina-Obu (2009) has opined that despite the lack of text materials, the local primary school teachers are not even fluent in the indigenous languages. This may be one of the reasons, English is continuously used in all strata of the education as the readily available means of instruction.

The NPE provides opportunities for adult, non-formal and open and distance education programmes. One major objective of secondary school education is “preparation for useful hiarin in the society and for higher education”. In the view of Imam (2012), there are high failure rates in the SSCE and a clamour for higher education while those who are unable to proceed beyond the senior secondary school level are bereft with requisite self-reliant skills in any vocation. Indeed, lofty policy, poor implementation.

Problems of Implementation of the NPE

An analysis of the problems militating against the implementation of the NPE will elucidate an adequate insight into the relationships between policy and goal attainment in Nigeria’s education system.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE)

In 1976, the implementation of universal basic education started under the code name, universal primary education (UPE). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) started operation in 1999 as a result of the dissatisfaction experienced with the UPE.

However in 2003, it was observed that the UBE was seen as an old wine in a new bottle. The implementation problems that led to the abandonment of the UPE had also saddled the UBE. In other words, the virus which affected the UPE was transmitted to the UBE. According to Taiwo (1980), while the scheme was barely a year old, the projected pupil population rose from 2.3 million to 3 million while the financial estimate, vaulted from N500 million to over N1 billion, the trend continued until it was abandoned in 1999.

It is therefore observable that there were:

1. Inaccurate statistical data
2. Poor funding
3. Lack of quality teacher supply. In other words there was hasty project implementation.

The Junior and Senior Secondary

This sector also suffered similar setback with the primary education sector as it is marred by the following:

1. Inadequately trained teachers
2. Lack of workshops, laboratories, libraries etc and;
3. Poor funding among others.

The Tertiary Institutions

These can also not be exempted from the travails of the lower educational sectors, as when a finger is dipped into a can of oil, it easily spreads to the other fingers. Every year, the more than 100 universities churn out hundreds of thousands of graduates who are ill-equipped to face the challenges

of the ever-dwindling labour market, the result of which are unemployment, youth restiveness, oil bunkering, kidnapping, hostage taking and other social vices, a country that parades herself as;

1. free and democratic
2. just and equalitarian
3. united, strong and self-reliant
4. land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens among others (FRN, 1998).

Another factor, is corruption and ethnic and religious bigotry. A situation where money budgeted for projects will be diverted to personal use with impunity. A situation where National Assembly Members will be bribed before approving budget for education, a situation where House Committee Chairman of power, probing corrupt practice in power, was later entangled in the web; a situation where people will openly agitate that if not their ethnic or religious person, no one else would be allowed to occupy a position.

These often lead to unending strikes in educational institutions by teaching and non-teaching staff. The consequences lead to poor motivation, brain drain, inclement teaching and learning environment among others.

The Way Out

The penchant for acquisition and accumulation of wealth through whichever means has been the bane of our society. Such wealth acquired for generations only breeds a society of complacent and indolent citizens. History is awash with people who acquired ill-gotten wealth and left those it was meant for, as paupers.

There must be attitudinal change among Nigerians. Leaders must learn to be honest and transparent in their handling of the common wealth. The National Orientation Agency must wake up to its responsibilities of reshaping the society. Our indigenous value system where honesty, sincerity and hard-work were the hallmark of our society in the past, must be relived. Above all, anyone caught, must be prosecuted in order to serve as deterrence to other intending ones.

No matter how good an educational policy may be, if it is not adequately implemented, the policy goes sour. Government at all levels should use whatever means at its disposal to ensure smooth implementation of educational policies.

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