The importance of education to human being cannot be overemphasized. Education is a right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. The overall philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria are clearly stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004). The policy placed emphasis on the training and retraining of teachers to enhance their quality in meeting the challenges of the society especially in the 21st century (Ocho, 2005 and FRN, 2004).

Accordingly, Onwari, (2010) stated that the emphasis on training of teachers as contained in the national policy on education, is a right step in the right direction considering the enormous roles placed on them in the realization of the educational aims and objectives as contained there-in. He however stated that the teacher is central to the determination of what is learnt especially in formal education. This therefore implies that education can also take place through informal means as
there are other agents of education than the school. One can get educated through the home, the media (print and electronic), the church among others.

Ajayi (2003) opined that education is a natural obligation of the adult to the younger generation. It is imperative therefore to state clearly that formal education requires educated individuals who are saddled with the responsibilities of affecting the needed positive changes in the behaviour of the learners. Hence, to educate others, the teacher himself must be educated, since the teacher can only teach what he knows thereby justifying the fact that one can only give what he has. Often time, various stakeholders in the educational sector, especially the academics, become worried on the possibility of Nigeria as a country to achieve the goals and objectives of education as stated in her National Policy on Education. This is simply because the Nigerian education system today has reached a stage of deterioration and decay such that one is in a dilemma on how to suggest ways of restoration and redemption (Omebe, 2010). The importance of teachers in the realization of the nation’s aspirations on education cannot be overemphasized. Hence the teachers can be seen as the central hub upon which every other variable in the formal education revolves (Nwite, 2007).

Obviously, the educational crises that bedevil Nigeria at present may stem from the inability of the policy-makers, government, private partners and the general public to give the curriculum implementers (teachers) their pride of place in the implementation of the National Policy on Education in the country. It is the people especially the political class that preside over the allocation of means and ends. It is therefore the perceptions, views and resolutions of the political gladiators and decision makers that determine what is to be done and how it should be done. Thus, the educational system, which seeks to preserve, transmit, change and advance the culture of the people, depends to a great extent on the decision of the political class to perform its role effectively or otherwise (Ocho, 2005).

Hence, this paper is geared towards identifying the roles of the curriculum implementers (teachers) in the implementation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria with a view to suggesting more practical strategies of enhancing their performances for the attainment of the pre-determined educational goals and objectives as contained in the National Policy on Education.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria

According to Ocho (2005), the National Policy on Education in Nigeria is a product of the seminar of experts which was held in 1973. Accordingly, the seminar drew participants from a wide range of interest groups within
Nigeria. The seminar, which included voluntary agencies and external bodies, deliberated on what a policy on education for an independent and sovereign Nigeria should be. Consequently, the draft document arising from the 1977 seminar of experts gave rise to a policy frame work that is popularly known today as the National Policy on Education which was first published in 1977 after it had been considered by the various states and interest groups.

The National Policy on Education recognizes education in Nigeria as an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development (FRN, 2004). According to the policy, the five main national goals include the building of:

1. a free and democratic society;
2. a just and egalitarian society;
3. a great and dynamic economy;
4. a united strong and self-reliant nation;
5. a land full of bright and equal opportunities for all citizens.

Furthermore, the document also states the national educational goals as derived from the philosophy to include:

1. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
2. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
3. The training of the mind in understanding of the world around;
4. The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as an equipment for the individual to contribute to the development of the society.

In this case, the document no doubt spells out in clear and unequivocal terms the philosophy and objectives that underlie the nation’s investment in education. The conditions under which education can be made to serve the expressed aspirations of the country revolve around the quality of the teachers. Indeed, an education of quality is not possible without an intelligent, well educated and professionally qualified teaching staff dedicated to the service of humanity. Hence, it takes only teachers of amiable qualities and integrity to understand and relate the policy of education to classroom practice and experiences (Ocho, 2011). Hence, the National Policy on Education seeks to fulfill that role by placing much emphasis on the training and retraining of teachers to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of the policy (NPE, 2004).

However, Ocho (2011) opined that educational aims are usually stated in general terms. It is normally the sole responsibility of the curriculum implementer to understand, interpret and translate them into specific instructional objectives that are realizable through specific subject content. To this end,
teachers are always saddled with the responsibility of developing the appropriate methodologies and finding ways of evaluating the extent of achievement of the specified objectives (Omebe, 2010). Similarly, Taiwo (1993) corroborate this view by stating that educational aims and objectives as contained in the National Policy on Education are not a hit or miss affair as in shooting. This implies that educational aims are not all realizable in a particular lesson, class or level of education but each lesson, class and level contributes towards their realization. Implicit in the meaning of education is the transmission of what is worthwhile. In other words, a teacher who is not transmitting what is worthwhile is not educating and cannot contribute to the realization of the educational objectives.

Teachers’ Role in the Implementation of the National Policy on Education

The National Policy on Education (2004) reiterates that education cannot rise above the quality of its teachers. This statement no doubt emphasizes the place of teachers in the realization of educational objectives of every country with particular reference to the developing counties like Nigeria where functional education is mostly needed.

In view of the above, Nwite (2010) stated that the importance of teachers as indispensable human resources and single most important element in the school system should be recognized and given a prominent position in the society. Also, Lassar, cited in Ofunsola and Deda (2007) referred to the teachers as the initiator of the learning process, the facilitator of the learning skills, the assessor of the learning sequence, the assessor of the learning efficiency and indeed the pivotal element in the entire educational development. According to Ayodele (2010), a teacher is a person who provides education for pupils, students or simply organized learners.

The role of teachers is often formal and is mostly carried out in the school or other places of formal education. In Nigeria like most countries of the world, a person who wishes to become a teacher must undergo some academic training in teacher education. This will enable him/her not only to be intellectually sound in his area but also be able to impact the needed knowledge to the learners. Nwadum (2004) argued that a teacher’s professional duties may extend beyond formal teaching. Outside the classroom, teachers may accompany students on field trips, supervise study halls, help with the organization of school functions and supervise extra curricular activities. Teachers also are always responsible for students’ discipline. He concludes that the increasing use of technology, specifically the rise and complexity of internet facilities recently have really begun to shape the way teachers approach their roles in the classroom. In
the same vein, Omebe and omebe (2010) observed that the teacher guides his class through the desired instructional objectives. They point out that, the learners often depend on the teacher, and see him as their light. Hence, teachers’ behaviour in and outside the classroom during curricular and core-curricular activities can either make or mar their assigned roles in the implementation of the National Policy on Education.

Contributing on the roles of teachers in the implementation of the National Policy on Education, Anikweze in Nwadum (2004) pointed out that it is the teacher who translates the educational policies into actions and principles and theories into real practices. He also argues that the decisions of the policy makers, no matter how coherent it may sound, the fashionable curriculum and the provision of adequate instructional materials notwithstanding, are all efforts in futility without adequate qualified curriculum implementers that will facilitate the needed change in behaviour of the learners, hence, Nwite (2010) maintained that it is the teachers who will transfer the needed information to the learners that will enable them acquire knowledge, skills and the right attitude that will enhance improvement in the qualities of their lives. Thus, the quality of education of any country depends to a great extent on the quality of her teachers.

On the contrary, it is pertinent to note that the roles of teachers are not without some challenges, most of which are traceable to the teachers themselves. To say the least, one can rightly affirm that to educate others, the teacher must himself be properly educated. Many of the people called teachers today are not properly educated. In fact, some of the teachers in Nigeria today are not only deficient in character but also in learning, hence the students who learn from such teachers suffer double jeopardy (Ocho, 2005). Unarguably, a teacher becomes a cheat or a fraudster once he deviates from teaching what is right in the matter of conduct and learning. Therefore, there is no gain stating that the success of any organization is a resultant effect of the quantity and quality of its working force. In view of this, Ayodele (2000) argued that no matter how important and effective an education policy is it can hardly achieve the desired result without capable teachers to see its implementation. Thus, he concludes that highly qualified teaching staff is the highest asset and best resource of the education industry not only in Nigeria but the world over.

Challenges Facing Teachers in the Implementation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria

Erudite scholars and researchers like Ocho (2005) have adduced some factors that are responsible for the dilemma confronting teaching professionals in Nigeria, thus accounting
for teachers’ inefficiency as discussed below:

1. **Lack of proper screening in the selection of teachers:** It is pathetic to state here that there is no proper selection process into the teaching education in Nigeria because teaching, especially at the lower levels (primary and secondary school) has become a despised profession. It can be recalled that the missionaries in olden days were extra-ordinarily careful in selecting candidates for teacher training. Nowadays, the reverse is almost the case as every soul who wants to teach is welcomed. In view of the above scenario, Ocho (2005) emphasized on a situation where a candidate surmounts various rigors to be selected for medicine, engineering and or law education but reiterates that a situation where colleges of education and faculties of education are today becoming all comers’ affairs and are open to everybody who cares needed to be addressed.

2. **Lack of proper motivation of teachers:** The motivation of teachers in Nigeria especially at primary and secondary school levels is nothing to write home about. Suffice it to say that most of the political office holders have nothing but disdain for the teachers, without recognizing their significant roles in the implementation of educational policies. In fact, the environment of teaching and learning in most of the educational institutions today is dilapidating. The teachers are paid if and when any money is left after contractors and other civil and public servants have been paid (Ocho, 2005). These ugly situations to a great extent discourage the teachers from living up to expectations in the implementation process of the Policy.

3. **General neglect of educational sector:** Researchers have statistically presented with dismay a situational sector in the national budget that regulates the income and expenditure on education in each fiscal year. Oruwari (2010) revealed that the average annual expenditure on education in Nigeria is less than 5% of the budget. In this view, Nigeria is still far short of UNESCO’s recommendation on public spending on education which is 26%. Hence, financial constraint goes a long way to incapacitate teachers from playing their official roles in the implementation of the National Policy on Education.

4. **Poor condition of service:** The roles of teachers are mostly confronted by lack of teaching tools and modern classrooms, poor remuneration and acute shortage of qualified teachers. As a matter of fact, it is no longer strange to see classes conducted under tree shades in primary and sometimes secondary
schools in Nigeria. Hence, a teacher cannot be expected to perform optimally under these prevailing conditions and this undermines their roles in the implementation of the Policy.

5. **Unnecessary bureaucracy in the educational sector**: It is obvious that the administration of most public establishments, educational institutions inclusive in Nigeria today is characterized with unnecessary administrative bottleneck which most times makes it difficult if not impossible for the right thing to be done at the right time. These situations of course don’t go well with the country’s education as the gospel of catchment area, quota system, federal character, educationally disadvantaged and the like often lead to the glorification of mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy in the employment of teachers, admission of students and other critical issues in our educational sector.

**Conclusion**

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria is a policy framework that outlines the National aspirations and spell out the aims, goals and objectives of education in the county. However, the effectiveness of the policy no matter how efficacious, logical, relevant and necessary it may sound will only be as effective as the will of the political leaders and the effectiveness of the teachers in its implementation.

Conclusively, the roles of the teachers in the implementation of the policy on education are enormous. But, it is also disturbing to note that the mess in which the Nigerian education finds itself is the result of political decisions and ineffectiveness of teachers in the implementation of the National Policy on Education. Hence, the development of education in Nigeria no doubt, is highly influenced by her political leaders. This is because the roles of the political leaders influence the roles of the teachers and that of the teachers influence the students and consequently the society at large (Ocho, 2005).

**Recommendation**

1. The state of education in Nigeria is lamentably poor and needs strong political will for its revival. Enough support from federal, state and even local governments is needed for a successful implementation of the articulated national policy on education in Nigeria.

2. Seminars, workshops and the like should be organized in various quarters with the sole aim of sensitizing the teachers to fully recognize their all embracing roles in the implementation of the National Policy on Education to enhance the attainment of the educational goals as stated there in the National policy on Education.
3. The Government of Nigeria as a matter of urgency should design a suitable guideline for funding education. Nigeria needs to develop a sustainable funding arrangement if she is to regain her lost ground in the educational sector. Therefore, there is need for an effective monitoring of the management of fund presently being allocated to the sector and effort should be intensified to improve on the current comatose condition of the educational sector in our country.

4. It is also pertinent at this junction to re-emphasize that effective implementation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria relies to a great extent on the teachers. Hence, the adequate motivation of teachers no doubt will make for the expected positive differences in the implementation of the policy.

5. Emphasis at all times should be placed on merit in the recruitment of teachers to ensure that the most qualified candidates are employed at the right time in the right place. Similarly, the admission of students in our institutions of learning especially colleges of education and faculties of education should be strictly based on merits. Therefore, the use of catch phrases such as catchments area, quota system, clannish or zonal representation should be jettisoned to ensure credibility and effectiveness of teachers in performing their assigned roles in the implementation of the national policy on education.

References


*Journal of Teacher Perspective, Volume 8 No. 1 July, 2014, ISSN: 2006 - 0173*