
IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICY AND CURRICULUM: IMPERATIVES FOR SOCIO- TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is a vital instrument for socio-technological transformation of a country. This has made the Nigerian government to embark on expansion of access to primary education. Effective implementation of primary education policy and curriculum is imperative for actualizing the goals of inculcating permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively in addition to possessing technological skills. In spite of government's effort to implement the policy of free access to basic education, children in Nigeria encounter formidable constraints in their effort to enroll in and attend schools. These include poverty, dearth of infrastructural facilities, teaching materials, in addition to political will in policy implementation. Remedial options include improving governance and increasing accountability, use of school grants and conditional cash transfer targeted at poor children as incentives to improve enrolment; improved funding to upgrade infrastructural facilities, water and sanitation facilities to ensure quality primary education.

Keyword: Education policy, transformation.

Education has been identified as a veritable tool for equipping citizens with relevant knowledge, skills and values so that they will be able to contribute to the development and transformation of the society. Basic education which starts with the primary level has a holistic mission and aims at not only preparing informed citizens but also serve as a instrument for the social, economic and political development of any nation (Lawal, Olumuyima and Ekundayo, 2008)

Primary education is the core of development and progress in any society. It is the level that develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. As the largest sub-sector of the educational sector, UNESCO (2001) posits that it offers the unique opportunity to contribute through the transformation of the society through the education of the young ones. It is also one of the strongest predictor of poverty as noted by Bruns, Mingart and Rakotomalma (2003).

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) is a policy document for different levels of education and the content on primary education is expected to lead to the acquisition of skills for strategic communication and functional literacy and innumeracy (Inyan- Abia, 1997). At the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, two documents were unanimously adopted, these were: (1) The World Declaration on Education for All, and (2) Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs (World Conference on Education For All. WCEFA, 1990). These documents represent a worldwide consensus on an expanded vision of basic education and a renewed commitment to ensure that basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults are met effectively. Meeting the basic learning needs is in tandem with one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Goals 2,- that is achieving universal primary education by 2015. This is because of the importance attached to primary education achieving literacy among others.

Although the federal government of Nigeria has introduced a good number of initiatives in form of strategic interventions to facilitate the implementation of universal primary education (which is part of universal education), not much has been achieved judging by the overwhelming rate of illiteracy. In a report on Nigerian Country Study (2012) by Global Initiatives on Out-of-School children, the sub-saharan Africa region accounts for 52% of the global out of school children; 22% of primary school age children in sub-saharan African were out of school. Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS),(2008) showed that 7.3 million of primary school age children were out of school. According to UNICEF (2014) statistics, about 42 percent of primary age school children, roughly 10.5 million are out of school. Brown (2014) noted that ninety per cent of these out of school children never attended school. Children who are in school are struggling to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills. Children are worse off in the north where more than two-thirds of children who have completed sixth

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grades are unable to read. Also nearly 6.3 or 60 per cent of the 10.5 million children who are out of school live in the northern part of the country. Even when enrolled, hundreds of children (especially girls) are not showing up for classes (UNICEF, 2014). In addition, UNICEF observed that rural areas are disadvantaged almost everywhere in the country, while wealth and socio-economic status confer a definite advantage in terms of enrolment, attendance and completion.

Although Nigeria government has introduced a good number of initiatives intended to facilitate the implementation of primary education, there are lot of challenges/ obstacles. High level of poverty and opportunity cost makes many families unable to afford sending their children to school. More than two-thirds of Nigerian citizens are living poverty and their life expectancy is just 52 years (Brown 2014). Other barriers include insufficient and ill-maintained school infrastructure, lack of appropriate teaching materials, poor funding and lack of qualified teachers (Odoemenam, 2009; Odoemenam and Ominyi 2014). UNICEF (2014) also added that politics and governance in form of having strong will to implement policies by the government in power is also a challenge. All these have contributed to the low education outcome indicating poor curriculum implementation and making the policy on primary education difficult to achieve. It is therefore imperative that these challenges must be addressed for the envisaged socio-technological transformation to be realized that. This paper therefore discusses the challenges/ barriers and suggests solutions.

The following concepts will be explained: policy, education policy and transformation

Concept of Policy and Education Policy

Policy can be defined as a framework of action that embraces both the process and the end result thus providing guidelines to nations towards achieving defined goals (Odoemenam & Ibiam,2009).

Educational Policy

Educational Policy according to Maduabum (2006) refers to a statement which guides and directs all actions designed at achieving national development through the education sector. The mission thrust of government education policy is to provide a universal access to quality education for the people to attain full potentials and contribute to national development, unity and cohesion in society. The achievement of the above dreams hinges on the formulation of good policies and their implementations.

The planning of policies should be people oriented to register since commitment on the part of the stakeholders at all levels for the purpose of sustenance. It also involves periodic review of the policy strategies where and when necessary in the course of implementation to identify problem areas with a view to addressing them promptly and adequately.

Since independence, the Nigeria educational system has undergone a range of reforms. Through the national policy on education which was first introduced in 1977 and was last updated in 2004, the government has tried to transform the education system from the British Colonial structure to a structure that is more relevant to the culture and life of the Nigerians in line with its development aspirations expressed in vision 20:20 20. One of the key objectives is providing universal access to basic education. The programme offers nine years of basic compulsory education which includes three years of junior secondary education (FME, 2004). The general objective of UBE policy is to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration (UBEC, 2012).

Transformation

Transformation is a complete change, usually into something with improved appearance or usefulness (Encarta Dictionary, 2009). Transformation means a change for the better and progress in development. Mandela (2007) identified education as a primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development, and increasing people's capacities to transform the vision of society into reality. The transformation of a nation should commence with a solid foundation for basic primary education to enable the recipients acquire literacy skills to read, write and communicate effectively. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences will equip every individual to live and contribute to the development of the society.

Objectives of Primary Education

Primary education is defined in National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) as an education given in a formal setting for children aged normally 6+11 years. It aims at giving children opportunity to develop and acquire skills within the limit of their ability and to function effectively in the society

The Policy objectives are:

- (1) The inculcation of permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- (ii) The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- (iii) Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in, and contribution to the life of the society
- (iv) Character and moral training and the development of sound attitude
- (v) Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his or her changing environment.
- (vi) Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills to function effectively in the society within the limits of his or her capacity.
- (vii) Providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (p.16)

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Policy Statement on the Implementation of Primary Education Policy

In order to facilitate the implementation of the policy on education FRN, (2004) outlined the provision of the following educational services:

- (i) School library
- (ii) Basic Health Scheme
- (iii) Counselling
- (iv) Education resource centres
- (v) Specialist teacher of particular subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Language, Librarian, Fine Art and Home Economics.

It also stated that teaching shall be practical, explanatory and experimental method. The medium of instruction in primary school shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years. From the fourth year, English shall be progressively used as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment shall be taught as a subject among others.

Primary Education Curriculum/Subjects

The primary school curriculum is discipline-based and addresses all the goals of primary education. Permanent literacy and numeracy and communication skills are top priority. In 2003, the national primary school curriculum was further reviewed and the modular approach was replaced with a thematic one. Also apart from the subject, a number of emerging social issues such as HIV and AIDS, Information and Communication technology (ICT), environment education, gender equality and child labour were introduced. The current basic education programme (primary education constitute the lower and middle basic) has 14 subjects at the primary education level

Table 1: Primary Education Curriculum Structure in Nigeria

Lower Basic Education Curriculum	Core compulsory subjects	Elective Subjects
1-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. English studies 2. One Major Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) 3. Mathematics 4. Basic Science and Technology 5. Social Studies 6. Civic Education 7 Cultural & Creative Art (CCA) 8. Christian Religion/ Islamic Studies 9. Physical & Health Education 10. Computer Studies ICT 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agriculture 2. home economics 3. Arabic language <p>Note: must offer I elective but not more than 2</p>

Source: New Basic Education Curriculum NERDC, 2013

Middle Basic Education Curriculum (Primary 4 – 6)

The only difference between the lower basic and upper basic is the addition of one extra subject in the list of compulsory subjects and that is French Language. Emerging issues emphasized include reading, security issues, religion and national values and entrepreneurship and preparation for vocational training.

A cursory look at the current subjects offered at the primary level shows that it is well prepared to equip the recipients with basic knowledge, skill and information to enable them to contribute to the technological transformation of the society. Worthy of mention is the inclusion of computer studies/ICT which is expected to prepare the recipients to function well in the new technological age.

National Policy on Information and Technology

In recognition of the prominent role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, the Federal Government of Nigeria made provisions

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for it in the National Policy on Education and also as a subject as the primary level. The policy on Information Technology (FRN, 2004) promotes the integration of ICT at every level of education in order to play a leading role in the actualization of the goals of education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education. The policy stated that government shall therefore provide basic infrastructure and training for the realization of the ICT goals at the primary level. ICT is having a revolutionary effect on educational pedagogy and methodology worldwide (Ofoegbu, 2008). ICT has the potentials to enhance educational quality by increasing motivation, facilitating acquisition of basic skills and promoting inquiry and exploration. Effective teaching and learning process is expected to stimulate intellectual curiosity and offer teachers a sense of enjoyment and knowledge.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is effective instructional aids in engaging students in the learning process. The use of videos, televisions and computer multimedia and software provide information that are challenging in addition to stimulating students sensorial apparatus through image, colour, sound and movement (Gronthi, 1993)

Today, children need to be prepared for much more than book literacies. Literacy curriculum should be infused with technology in meaningful ways. Good teachers therefore need to be cognizance of these new technologies and literacy in order to manage learning activities in learners.

Challenges in Implementing Primary Education Policy and Curriculum

Although Nigerian government has good intentions in fulfilling primary education objectives and has made considerable efforts aimed at implementing the curriculum, not much can be said to have been achieved. Among the obstacles that will be discussed are poverty and economic constraints, politics, weak governance and institution, inadequate school infrastructure and teaching materials, teacher factor and financing constraints.

Poverty and economics constraints

Poverty remains one of the key constraints to progress in access to primary education. With high level of poverty and opportunity costs, many families are unable to afford sending their children to school. More than two-thirds of Nigerian citizens are living in poverty and their life expectancy stands at just 52 years (Global Education First Initiatives, 2014). Household poverty affects the willingness and ability of families/ households to enroll their children in school and sustain their support until the children successfully complete their education. Even when they enrol, some of them do not complete their primary education and this increases illiteracy rate. Added to the issue of poverty and poor economic background is early marriage and subsequent teenage pregnancy which UNICEF (2004) noted has adversely effected attendance, retention and achievement in schools.

Politics Weak Government and Institutions

The political leaders of a country play key roles as regards key educational policies and their implementation. What the political leaders of a country regard as key educational challenges determine main policy directions (UNICEF, 2014). Government priority in the area of education is critical to what educational practitioners do. The capacity of the government to implement educational policy depends on political will and the capacity to mobilize resources and deploy them judiciously. In the past, government educational policies have been inconsistent and this has affected management (Okwori & Ede, 2012).

Much of the failure to progress towards UBE goals can be attributed to institutional issues (Adamolekan, 2013, World Bank 2008). Roles and responsibilities between the three tiers of government and between government and parastatals are largely undefined; leaving no government or agency clearly accountable for results, and even more complex due to the creation of new agencies and organization. There is therefore over centralization and recentralization of primary education and even the emergence of private education.

Inadequate School Infrastructure and Teaching Materials

The achievement of the primary education objectives as stated in the National Policy on Education depends among others, on the provision of school infrastructure and teaching materials. Access and quality of schooling is affected by a range of supply side constraints including inadequate school infrastructure and teaching tools. The UPE programme launched in 1976 witnessed remarkable increase in enrolment but was marred by a lot of factors including poor/ inadequate facilities and teaching materials. Even when they are available, UBEC (2009) noted that they are often physically unsafe. Water, health and first aid box facilities are inadequate and these further discourage attendance. Public Expenditure Review (World Bank, 2008) shows that about half of primary schools require major rehabilitation. Some classrooms have not enough furniture and in some schools, classes are held under shades of trees (Odoemenam & Ominyi, 2014). Some pupils carry their benches and desks and bring them back to school every morning. The instructional materials needed to aid teaching-learning activities are grossly inadequate. All these make schools unfriendly, erode quality and affect attendance, retention and completion.

Financing constraints and Teacher related factor

Effective implementation of the policy on primary education depends on adequate financial support. These include provision of school libraries, basic health scheme, payment of staff salaries and educational resource centre among others. About 90 percent of total public expenditure on education is absorbed by salaries whereas the benchmark is 67 percent (Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria, ESSPIN &

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United Kingdom Aid, UKAid 2010b). Most local government and schools have inadequate capacity and financial resources within which to manage primary education. In 2006, total public expenditure on education was estimated at 5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 12.5 percent of total public spending, well below the recommended education for all thresholds of 20 percent (World Bank 2013). Spending as a percentage of GDP was higher in the average Sub-Saharan country, but slightly lower in South Africa and Kenya, which spend 5.3 and 7 percent respectively. Worse still, spending in the sector is plagued by internal inefficiencies. Falade, (1999) added that the issue of mismanagement of fund, corruption, bribery, over invoicing and squandamania have compounded the problem of funding. Odoemenam (2010) stressed that if the available resources are not properly utilized it will affect the achievement of education goals and objectives.

The of poor quality of teachers constitutes an obstacle in policy and curriculum implementation in that it seriously hinders students' enrolment and learning. Records from Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in 2009-10 indicated only 60% percent of primary school teachers are qualified. It stated that the south west has close to 100 percent qualified teachers. But even teachers with qualifications do not have the adequate professional knowledge and competency to teach. A teacher assessment conducted in 2010 illustrates that the majority of qualified teachers had only limited (0-25) or emergent (25-50 percent) professional working knowledge. (Global Education First Initiatives, 2014).

Information and Communication Technological and Related Problem

In spite of the policy statement on information technology on primary education, many teachers and administrators as still ignorant of the need for technological application. Edige (1996) observed that some school administrators lack quality experience with technology and therefore, do not see the need for pupils experiencing teaching and learning activities involving technology.

Many teachers and students are yet to come into close contact with computer let alone explore its packages (Maduabuchi, 2008). Computers are out of reach of many Nigerian children especially those in the rural areas. There is also the scarcity of teachers with requisite qualifications. In addition, is the cost of procuring computers in various schools, and issue of poor functioning of equipment? Some rural areas are yet to be electrified and so, light is a great barrier in creating optimal technological environment.

Proposed Intervention for Socio-technological Transformation

Education is a vital instrument for social and technological development of any nation. Since primary education is the foundation for education levels, there is the need to develop sound implementation plan for policies as well as strategies for effective implementation of the curriculum. The following are proposed strategies:

- National and state structures such as the planning division of the federal and state ministries of education need to be strengthened to ensure that there is capacity in those structures to monitor implementation plan.
- Improve the management skills of school managers through training and retraining. Also capacity building programmes should be organized regularly for teachers for acquisition of technological skills needed for effective handling of instruction.
- Use of school grant and conditional cash transfer targeted at poor children can act as an incentive for school entry, reduce gender and regional disparities and improve basic education outcome (Gracia & Moore, 2012)
- Governance can be improved and accountability increased through school based management.
- Effective implementation of primary education policy and curriculum includes renovation of dilapidated primary school building such as classrooms, provision of water and sanitation facilities to ensure qualitative education
- Quality can be improved through training teachers in the use of resources for teaching local language for improvement in primary school instruction.
- There is need to change the pattern of funding so that the provision for primary education should adequately match it needs.
- Regular inspections of primary school are needed to ensure effective curriculum implementation.
- The curriculum should be reviewed periodically to ensure its continuous meeting with the needs of the students and the society. Also, the provision in the policy to provide a comprehensive and diversified curricula should be implemented to enable children achieve their potentials and prepare them for a better life in the society

Conclusion

Primary education is the foundation on which an individual's future education is laid. To prepare children for the future they hope for and deserve, there is the fundamental need to put all machineries in motion for the realization of the goals of primary education. With increased social mobilization on the need to reduce out-of school children, strong political will through improving funding, provision of infrastructure, and teaching and learning resources as well as strengthening the capacity of teachers, Nigeria will be on the part to achieving socio-technological transformation.

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