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## **Educational policies and problems of implementation in Nigeria**

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*The poor performance of the education sector in Nigeria has become very worrisome. What is the problem? Is the educational policy faulty or is it the implementation that is faulty? What are the implications for national development? These are the issues explored in this paper, based on a literature review approach. The findings blame the distortions in the educational system on the ineffective implementation engendered primarily by lack of political will, lack of continuity of programs, and corruption. The situation has hindered national development and, until urgent action is taken to review Nigeria's educational system, its national aspirations will continue to be compromised. The paper recommends the discontinuation of the National Policy on Education fashioned after the American system and the adoption of the model practised by Asian countries such as Japan, China and India which takes the culture of the people into consideration. In addition, the*

*provision of qualitative education should be made compulsory and entrenched into the Constitution in order to encourage result-oriented implementation. Sustained political will and eradication of corruption are necessary for effective policy implementation.*

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## Introduction

In education as in other fields of human endeavour, every official action of an organisation must have a backing or a basis. It is this purpose that a policy serves. A policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made, but it does not make the decision. It usually provides a general guide that facilitates decision-making. Educational policies provide the direction for educational activities.

The formulation of an educational policy sets the stage for implementation which, according to Ukeje (1986), is perhaps the most important aspect of planning. Planning is usually an action which succeeds policy formulation but precedes implementation. Unfortunately, educational policies and goal attainment have been irreconcilable due to implementation constraints. Perhaps this accounts for the observation made by Governor Oyakhilome of Rivers State in an address sent to the Convention of the Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning in 1986. He expressed concern about the problem of policy implementation thus:

We know it is difficult to realize planned objectives one hundred percent. But our experience in planning education in this country shows a disturbing gap between planned objectives and attained results ... As professionals in the field of education, it may be pertinent to identify whether those critical gaps are results of faulty planning or faulty implementation (Oyakhilome 1986:2).

Policy implementation in education is a conspicuous national problem that has taken centre stage in Nigeria. This paper examines

the problem in some detail and explores its implications for the development of Nigeria.

## Statement of the problem

Over the years, the gap between educational policies and goal attainment due to inadequate implementation of these policies has become of great concern to many observers. The paper is interested in identifying the implementation constraints and to explore the implications of poor educational policy implementation for national development. Following a clarification of the causes and effects of the problem of poor policy implementation, the paper will advance remedial measures.

## Research questions

In course of this examination, the following questions will be addressed.

- Are educational achievements in line with educational policies in Nigeria?
- What factors or constraints have made the implementation of educational policies difficult?
- What are the implications of poor implementation of educational policies for national development?
- What strategies can be adopted to ensure better policy implementation?

## Policy as a concept

A policy serves the purpose of ensuring that every official action of an organisation must have a basis or a backing. Terry (1977: 1989) considers that “a policy is an overall guide that gives the general limits and direction in which administrative action will take place”. According to him, “a policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made but it does not give the decision”.

A policy brings about a meaningful relationship between business objectives and organisational functions as it discourages deviations from planned courses of action. A policy ensures consistency of action because an organisation is governed by approved principles. A policy does not have to be rigid, as there should be room for adjustment if necessary after its formulation.

Perhaps this is why Hoy and Miskel (1978:215) believe that “policies are not only formulated but also programmed, communicated, monitored and evaluated”? The non-rigid nature of policies is confirmed by Lindblom (1959:86) when he describes policy-making as a “process of successive approximation to some desired objectives in which what is desired itself continues to change under reconsideration”. In fact, a good policy is one that can be reviewed as the need may arise. Lindblom believes that a wise policy maker cannot expect all their policies to achieve a one-hundred percent success. Regardless of how good a policy may be, its implementation may introduce some element of imperfection.

### The concept of educational policy

Educational policies are initiatives mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system (Okoroma 2000:190). According to Osokoya (1987:2):  
Education is a distinctive way in which the society inducts its young ones into full membership. So every modern society needs some educational policies to guide it in the process of such initiation.

In the view of Awokoya (1981), educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life of a people. He believes that the objective of any policy is to satisfy individual needs, community pressures and the degree of complexity and sophistication to which socialised personnel must be educated and trained to meet these demands. The following considerations, according to Awokoya (1981), are necessary to guide the formulation of adequate educational policy.

- It should be formulated and adopted through a political process which acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interests and desires among its participants
- It should portray some elements of guidance for properly directed and coordinated action towards the attainment of the desired goals
- It should contain information on the broad objectives that should be reached
- It should be a binding guide on the actions of those implementing it
- It should be enforceable and enforced by the society which formulates it.

Kerr (1976) believes that, for a policy to qualify as an educational policy, it must be distinct from other policies. In his view, educational policies are distinguishable from other policies by the fact that policies on education are part and parcel of educational institutions. However, it is important to note that not all policies formulated in educational institutions can qualify as educational policies. Generally, policies must be rational and purposeful to enable them to stand the test of time.

### Problems associated with policy implementation

The gap that often exists between policy formulation and implementation provokes inquiry to identify factors that constrain the effective implementation of educational policies. The problem of policy implementation is traceable to the planning stage which comes immediately after policy formulation. Okeke *et al.* (1985) and Ukeje (1986) have stated clearly that good planning will ensure effective implementation. Good planning that can facilitate effective implementation ought to consider such factors as the planning environment, social environment, political environment, and financial and statistical problems. It is in recognition of this observation that Aghenta (1984: 239) noted:

For education to achieve all ends, it has to be carefully planned. The plan must take into consideration ... the needs

of the society; the political, socio-cultural, economic, military, scientific, and technological realities of the environment are very important to its survival.

Adesina (1977) notes that planned implementation is constrained by the following factors:

- over-estimation of available resources – this is a situation where estimated resources are greater than actual available resources to implement a program
- under-estimation of the costs of implementing a plan – this happens when cost-estimates do not make adequate provisions for inflation and actual implementation costs become unmanageable
- over-reliance upon external assistance – plans that substantially rely upon assistance from foreign sources for their implementation run into hitches when such aid fails to come, and
- inaccurate statistical data – planning education requires accurate and up-to-date data. Plans that do not adequately provide for this usually have implementation problems.

Furthermore, Van Horn and Van Meter (1977) have also advanced three general explanations for unsuccessful implementation of programs, namely:

- the communication process – effective implementation requires that implementers know what they are expected to do; as messages pass through any communication network, distortions are likely to occur which can produce contrary directives, ambiguities, inconsistencies and incompatible requirements;
- the capability problem – ability to implement policies may be hindered by such factors as incompetent staff, insufficient information, political support, inadequate financial resources and impossible time constraints, and
- dispositional conflicts – implementation of a policy may fail because those charged with the responsibility of implementation refuse to carry out their own assignments.

### **National Policy on Education**

Prior to 1977 Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain at independence. The inability of this policy to satisfy the national aspirations of the country rendered it unpopular. In 1969 a National Curriculum Conference was organised which reviewed the inherited curriculum and identified new national goals for Nigeria's education. A National Seminar was organised by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973 under the Chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebo. This gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977 (Akangbou 1985; Bello 1986; Okoroma 2000).

The National Policy on Education is anchored on Nigeria's philosophy on education as enunciated through the nation's objectives. Nigeria has five main national objectives as provided by the Second National Development Plan and accepted as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education. They are the building of:

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 1998).

### **Implementation of the primary and secondary aspects of the National Policy on Education**

An analysis of the implementation efforts of the primary and secondary aspects of Nigeria's education policy will give an insight into the relationship between policies and goal attainment through implementation.

Universal Basic Education (U.B.E.)

The implementation of universal basic education in Nigeria started in 1976 under the name Universal Primary Education (U.P.E.).

The acronym U.B.E. became operational in 1999 when President Olusegun Obasanjo, dissatisfied with the result of the U.P.E., renamed and relaunched the program. However, four years later it has been established that the U.B.E. and U.P.E. are identical twins and that what was relaunched was old wine in an old bottle. The implementation problems that lead to the abandonment of the U.P.E. have also saddled the U.B.E. and are about to cripple the program.

As early as 1977, just barely one year after the U.P.E. was implemented, the following picture, according to Taiwo (1980:174), emerged:

- the figure of 2.3 million children expected in primary education rose to 3 million (an increase of 700,000 additional children who had not been budgeted for), and
- instead of the N500 million earmarked initially for the project, the Federal Government had actually spent a little over N1 billion on primary education while the scheme was just one year old.

Taiwo saw this situation as a short-sightedness in planning on the part of the Federal Government. This trend continued until the program was jettisoned in 1999. Adesina (1977) was *ab initio* apprehensive about the success of the scheme unless adequate resources were made available for its effective implementation. This fear was continued within the first year of the scheme. Onabamiro (1974) and Nwankwo (1974) have given 'recipes' for the successful implementation of the U.P.E. They included:

- accurate statistics of children of school age
- adequate number of school buildings
- adequate number of qualified teachers
- sufficient financial provisions, and
- adequate publicity to create awareness about the scheme.

Despite being equipped with these implementation recipes, the Federal Government acted inconsistently and everything required for the effective implementation of this aspect of the national education

policy was in short supply. The scheme, therefore, did not fully achieve its goals.

Then the U.B.E. came into existence in September 1999. So far, available records have not shown any departure from the U.P.E. trend. The situation appears even worse due to the entrenched corruption in Nigerian society today. A recent study conducted by Okoroma (2003) to assess the effective implementation of the U.B.E. program revealed significant inadequacy in the implementation efforts. Among the constraints that impede effective implementation are:

- inadequate qualified teachers
- insufficiency of funds
- inadequate teaching and learning facilities
- poor motivation of teachers, and
- lack of guidance and counselling services.

These problems are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the U.P.E. This indicates that the relaunching of the U.P.E. with the new nomenclature of U.B.E. did not result from any lesson that was learned from the failure of the U.P.E. The quality of education at the primary level today is worse than the pre-1976 era.

Implementation of the secondary education policy

The implementation of the 3-3 aspect of the national education policy has equally been very contentious. Some states of the Federation started implementing the policy in 1982 while others followed gradually. Almost 22 years later, there are cries of a poor standard of secondary education in Nigeria. The policy which was initiated to guarantee functional education after the American model has become even worse than the British system that was adjudged non-developmental. Studies, seminars, conferences and individuals have confirmed that the goals of the secondary education policy have not been achieved due to ineffective implementation.

A study by Okoroma (2001:95) on the evaluation of the 3-3 aspect of the National Policy on Education in Rivers State revealed that effective implementation of the policy has been hindered by the following factors:

- inadequate teaching staff
- lack of adequate workshops
- inadequate laboratories and libraries
- insufficient funds, and
- non-availability of guidance and counselling services.

These factors are similar to those that presently handicap the implementation of the U.B.E. scheme. The same factors constrain the effective implementation of policies in other forms of education including tertiary education.

### **Nigerian factors that militate against the implementation of educational policies**

Efforts have been made to develop education in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Various policies in the interest of education have been formulated, some of which have been presented in this paper. Unfortunately, these efforts have not produced the desired effect. The state of education in Nigeria is still deplorable. It is so bad that some resourceful Nigerians prefer to send their children to Europe, America and even small African countries such as Ghana that has only two universities as against over sixty universities in Nigeria that lack adequate learning facilities.

Apart from the general problems of policy implementation common to most countries, especially those of the third world, some factors have been identified as peculiar to Nigeria and inhibiting her educational growth. It is no longer news that Nigeria is the giant of Africa in terms of resourcefulness as a major oil and gas producer. Ironically, most Nigerians live below the poverty line of one dollar per day. The following reasons, among others, account for this deplorable situation.

Lack of political will

Ordinarily, Nigerian leaders would want the country to stand out best in every thing, including education. However, political will has been lacking. Perhaps this is as a result of instability of governments or lack of continuity. Between 1960 and 2005, the country has had several governments led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (late), General Aguiyi Ironsi (late), General (Dr.) Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Mohammed (late), General Olusegun Obasanjo (as Military Head of State), Alhaji Shehu Shagari, General Mohammadu Buhari, General Ibrahim Babangida, Chief Earnest Shonekon, General Sani Abacha (late), General Abdusalam Abubakar and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Current President). In 45 years, Nigeria has had twelve heads of state out of which only three were democratically elected. Others came through military groups. This shows that most Nigerian leaders have never had time to draw-up plans of action before they drafted themselves or were drafted into leadership and therefore have been ill-prepared for any development efforts whether in education or other spheres. Most of their actions were not patriotic but for personal aggrandizement. Even Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (the Current President) had no program of action before he was drafted to become president in 1999. Chief Obasanjo was jailed for life by the late General Sani Abacha on treasonable charges. The demise of General Abacha installed General Abdusalam Abubakar who released Obasanjo from jail, granted him presidential pardon and supported him to become president. So, Chief Obasanjo really had no political programs for education or anything else. His dismal performance, especially in the area of education, may not really be surprising. The points canvassed here are supported by Hodges (2001:26) when he noted:

In the final analysis, Nigeria's development failures have sprung from the lack of success in achieving an effective model of governance. At the head of this problem has been the instability generated by the rivalry for control of the huge resources accruing to the State from the oil industry, and the use of political power to milk the state for personal gain rather than promote economic and social development.

So, educational policies were formulated by various governments but political instability stalled or discouraged the political will to implement such policies. As new governments came in quick succession and with relative uncertainty, continuity in policies could not be guaranteed. Every political player was in a hurry to help himself before he was displaced by another group. This has affected educational policy implementation in Nigeria.

#### Corruption

If anything has contributed greatly to the stagnation of corporate development of Nigeria, it is this virus called 'corruption'. It is found in all aspects of human endeavour in Nigeria. Its prominence in Nigeria has earned our nation a place of negative prominence in the world. Adesina (2004:16) noted:

The 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index, released by Transparency International (TI), the watchdog on global corruption, ranks Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world. In 2003, the organization ranked Nigeria second, a one-step improvement from the previous position as the most corrupt country in the world.

Although President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria was uncomfortable and disputed the rating, many Nigerians agreed that it was correct. This is because corruption pervades all segments of Nigeria's national life. Despite enormous oil and gas wealth at the disposal of the country, basic things of life such as food, shelter, portable water, electricity, good roads and education have become luxuries to the citizens. However, people at the various levels of governments and their agents wallow in enormous financial and material wealth.

Corruption has contributed to stagnate the development of education in Nigeria. Some good educational policies have been put in place. An example is the National Policy on Education already discussed. The designers of the policy, from all intents and purposes, were quite visionary. The objectives of most policies in Nigeria are often

derailed at the implementation stage due to a number of reasons: (1) the budgets for the implementation of the policies are often passed by lawmakers with strings attached to them; (2) even when the budgets are passed, the executive arm of government is often reluctant to release the funds to facilitate implementation, and (3) the inadequate funds often released to the operators of the education system (primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions) are not honestly and fully utilised to promote the cause of education. Many corruptly divert much of the available education resources to serve personal interests. Aghenta (1984) supports these observations with the following assertion:

The money available is never carefully used. The money the government votes for running the schools ... does not get to the schools and the little that gets there is normally wasted by those whose responsibility it is to manage the schools.

Since the re-establishment of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the state of education has further deteriorated. The UNESCO standard for education for all nations of the world is 26% of the national budget. During the era of dictatorship (military government) in Nigeria, education received as much as 13%. But the present democratic government in Nigeria has fallen short of this. For example, in 2001, it allocated 8% to education. In 2004, the Federal Government's provision for education was a dismal 5.6% of the budget.

The issue of corruption in education became more prominent in 2005 when President Olusegun Obasanjo made a broadcast to the nation alleging that some members of the National Assembly demanded and collected N55 million from Professor Fabian Osuji (the former Minister of Education). The Senate President and five other senators were involved in the deal. According to President Obasanjo the purpose of the bribe was to enable the National Assembly to approve an enhanced budget for the Ministry of Education (Obasanjo 2005:11). All the facts available show that the refusal to accede to such a bribery demand meant doom for the education sector for the

year. It is rather unfortunate that senators who are senior citizens expectedly demanded an inducement before they would approve that Nigerian children should go to school. Adighije (2005:5) confirmed that bribes to the National Assembly is a normal practice and that every Minister does it. Osuji (2005:1), who was involved in the corruption scandal, admitted having given N55 million to the Senate Committee on Education but said it was a public relations gift and not a bribe. According to him, other Ministers do the same to have their budgets passed in line with their proposals. This implied that such practice must have been going on over the past six years of democracy in Nigeria to the detriment of educational development. No doubt these unfortunate and corrupt practices affect implementation as they occur at the various stages of program execution. Ejiogun (2005:11) concurs:

The cankerworms of corruption and gross mismanagement of resources have been blamed for the deplorable state of the country's educational system. As a result of these two factors, the sector has consistently witnessed scarcity of resources, to the extent that less than 20 percent of eligible children of secondary school age get enrolled into schools. At the tertiary level, only 0.3 percent of Nigerian youths who are due for enrolment at that level get the opportunity to go into higher institutions.

### Implications for national development

Education is an instrument for excellence. It liberates people from poverty and ignorance. Ukeje (1966:155) believes that "education is for life and for living. It is an investment in people which pays untold dividends to the society. When that investment is not made or is made inadequately, the society suffers a loss". Presumably it is in recognition of this importance of education that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided at Section 18 as follows:

(1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

(2) Government shall promote science and technology.

(3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end,

Government shall as and when practicable provide:

(a) free, compulsory and universal primary education

(b) free secondary education

(c) free university education, and

(d) free adult literacy programs (FRN, 1999:18).

It is in pursuance of this constitutional provision that the National Policy on Education was developed and accepted. Nigeria's educational philosophy is also anchored on this constitutional mandate.

The importance of education to national development is no longer in doubt. The issue that agitates the mind is the effect of poor implementation of educational policies on the development of Nigeria. It was Ake (1988:2) who said that "education is the process of becoming the best we can be". With the numerous crises in the educational system engendered by poor policy implementation, it is doubtful whether its recipients are really becoming the best as expected. If not, what is the fate of Nigeria?

The euphoria with which Nigerians welcomed the National Policy on Education has died down and been replaced with despondency due to non-performance. The National Educational Research Council Report of the Baguada Seminar of September 1980 captured this euphoria as expressed in that seminar thus:

The introduction of the new system of education is deemed crucial to the implementation of the philosophy of "developmentalism". It is hoped that when fully operational, it will help transform the society and launch the nation along the developmental trajectory that will lead us to a state of parity with the advanced world (Baguada Report 1980:7).

In the same state of mind, Ukeje (1986:8) noted that "the 6-3-3-4 system is more than a structure. It is a new process, a new orientation

and a new activity, which hopefully will lead to new individuals and a new and bright future". The ineffective implementation of the various programs canvassed by the National Policy on Education has relegated these hopes and optimism to back-stage. Nigeria is caught between one 'evil' (the rejected British educational system which is still unofficially practised) and one 'saint' (the accepted American educational system which we can neither officially nor unofficially practise). Consequently, the conservatism of the British educational system which helped us to maintain our traditional values and a healthy society has been lost. On the other hand, the American system with its potential for technological development and growth has failed to make any difference in our society because we have not learned anything.

In the present circumstance, the dream of Nigeria to move to a state of parity with the advanced world appears to be a mirage. Ukeje (1986) was full of hope that the new system would lead to new individuals and a new and bright future. Eighteen years later, the system has not produced new individuals and the future appears more hopeless than in 1982 when the policy commenced.

If Nigeria continues to hide under the umbrella of the National Policy on Education conscious of the implementation problems, our national aspirations will suffer greater impediments. Our national development will only rely on miracles, if any. The British system of education was found inadequate for Nigeria's developmental purposes. It is also true that the American system has failed in Nigeria because of our sociological circumstances. We need not continue to deceive ourselves with a national educational policy that has been found unworkable else in the future there will be no policy to lay hold on.

## Recommendations

There is an urgent need for a workable educational policy for Nigeria. It is for this reason that the following recommendations are advanced.

- The present national educational policy should be disbanded on account of its non-workability.
- An indigenous system of education fashioned after the models operated by Asian countries should be adopted. Ideas that are alien to the cultures of Nigeria should be avoided because they are bound to fail.
- Education 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. When the constitution states that "Government shall as and when practicable provide free education at different levels", the right to education has been denied the citizens and political leaders may be non-committal as the provision of education becomes a discretionary matter.
- The entrenchment of education as a non-negotiable right of every citizen in the constitution would help check corruption in that sector. Corruption is largely responsible for the failure of the National Policy on Education and other policies in Nigeria.
- Mismanagement of educational resources at any level should be made a serious offence attracting a minimum of five years' imprisonment. This should be included in the next constitution of Nigeria. It is believed that in the presence of corruption no new system of education can succeed.
- Nigerian governments and leaders should develop the necessary political will for education to grow.
- Every effort should be made to eradicate corruption from all spheres of Nigeria's various programs so that available resources can be utilised for public interest.

## Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, we can conclude that the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria are constrained by the following factors.

- Most educational policies are well focused but the planning is often defective, making implementation difficult.
- Resources available for the implementation of a given educational policy are often over-estimated and thereby elicit unrealistic expectations that fail to materialise.
- Since educational policies are usually translated into plans before implementation, studies have shown that the costs of implementing such plans have often been under-estimated. Most educational policies have become stalled at the planning stage.
- Reliable data have not been a popular feature in planning education in Nigeria. This situation has not facilitated the effective implementation of educational plans.
- The implementation of educational policies is also often hindered by the interplay of politics, which may sometimes relegate reality to obscurity.
- Qualified teachers are not in sufficient numbers in the entire educational system in Nigeria. Studies have already confirmed this to be true of the U.B.E. Scheme, as well as the secondary education program. The tertiary level of education, where hundreds of students receive lectures hanging out of windows and doors and taught by one lecturer, is also confirmation.
- Facilities such as classrooms, offices, laboratories, workshops, libraries, power, water *et cetera* are basic requirements in every school system. These have been found to be grossly inadequate in most Nigerian educational institutions. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has confirmed this in its numerous publications.
- Insufficiency of funds for implementing educational policies in Nigeria is a problem that has recurred in almost every

implementation study that has been carried out. The importance of funds for carrying out any activity need not be over-emphasised.

- Government lacks the political will for effective implementation.
- Corruption at all levels hinders the implementation of educational policies and programs.

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