

Bridging Policy Implementation Gaps in Nigerian Education System: A Case Study of Universal Basic Education Programme in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research focuses on identifying policy gaps in the implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria, with Cross River State being the study area. The three research questions used for the research center on the extent of the freeness of the UBE, the extent to which the programme has stimulated educational consciousness among the population and the extent of the impactation of literacy, numeracy and communication skills in its products. The study surveyed the opinion of 200 Head teachers from the three education zones of the state. The instrument used for the study was a 21 item researcher-made questionnaire on UBE policy implementation gaps in Nigeria. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that the UBE programme has made modest achievements in reducing illiteracy, stimulated educational consciousness in the population, reduced financial burden on parents, reduced drop-out rate and increased transition rate to junior secondary school. But the gaps still left in the programme implementation include pupils being asked to pay for examination and handicraft. Uniform and mid-day meals are also not provided for. UBE products are still lacking in written communication and numerical competency. It was recommended that the funding of UBE should be the responsibility of all stakeholders and that special language and mathematics teachers should be provided to enhance the achievement of set objectives.

Bridging Policy Implementation Gaps in Nigeria Education System: A case study of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in Cross River State

Policy has been defined by Anderson in Ogbonnaya (2010) as a purposeful course of action in dealing with a matter of concern. Policy is also defined by Dror in Ogbonnaya (2003) as a major guideline for action. On his part, Haddad (1995) defines policy from public perspective as “what government wants to achieve and how she intends to achieve it”. Honig (2006) gives a more comprehensive definition of policy as a set of inter-related decision by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means for achieving them within a specific situation, where those decisions would in principle be within the powers of these actors. In a related study on administrative behaviour, Jacobson & Young (2013) see policy as any general rule that has been laid down by an organization to limit the discretion of subordinates or as rules promulgated by top management in an organization. Often times the line between policy and practice is not sharp unless the organization follow the practice of putting all its policies into writing.

No organized sector, public or private, can do without a policy framework to guide the activities or behaviour of actors in the system. This is because policy gives a sense of direction which determines the activities and action of the actors. It is for this reason that Nigeria, like other countries, has several national policies which are domiciled in government ministries or departments. Hence, there are the national policies on health, environment, agriculture, industry defence and education, among others.

The attempt to develop a national policy on education for Nigeria dates back to the 1969 Curriculum conference (Osam, 2013) in which a cross-section of Nigerians from various walks of life met for the first time after political independence in 1960 to thinker a way forward for the Nigerian education system which had hitherto been influenced by colonial education policy. The landmark-decisions reached in that conference, coupled with the presentation made by various states and interest groups thereafter gave rise to the first National Policy for Education in Nigeria in 1977 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). The policy has since then been very dynamic as it has been revised many times. The current (2008) being the 5th edition.

A retrospective view shows that there has been a number of policy attempts towards mass education in Nigeria. For example in 1955 the Western Region introduced free primary education, the Eastern Region followed suit in 1957. The Federal Government introduced the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and in 1999 introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE), which provides for nine years of free basic education for Nigeria (Ugwoke, Okpe, Agwara and Uzodimma (2012).

The UBE programme is Nigeria’s version of Education for All (EFA) which UNESCO (2005) sees as

the responsibility of a regular system for its children. The aim of EFA is to offer every individual a relevant education and an optimal opportunity for development. The concept of education for all or UBE is based on the fact that all children, and young people, despite their socio-economic and cultural background should have equal educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2009). Education for all or Universal Basic Education can be useful in guiding the development of policies and strategies that address the causes and consequences of discrimination, inequality and exclusion within the holistic framework of education for all (Mwangi & Orodho, 2014).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the implementation of some aspects of UBE policy in public primary schools in Nigeria, with Cross River State as a case study, with a view to determine the policy gaps left in the program implementation. Specifically the study will examine the extent of the freeness of the UBE programme, the extent to which the programme has stimulated educational consciousness among cross riverians and the level of the literacy, numeracy and communication skills acquired by the products of the UBE in Cross River State.

For avoidance of doubt, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) in the National Policy on Educated stated the objective of UBE as follows:

- a) developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- b) the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- c) reducing the incidence of pupils leaving school early from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
- d) catering through appropriate forms of complementary approaches for the promotion of basic education, for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling and
- e) ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communication and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying of a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The policy emphasized that UBE shall be free, universal and compulsory for all children.

Statement of problem

Since the launching of the UBE programme is September 1999, it has not been clear the extent to which the policy that gave birth to the programme has been implemented. More so, one hears pupils and parents complain of one demand or the other from schools implementing the UBE programme. Furthermore, despite the purportedly free UBE programme, one finds the number and population of fee-paying private schools still on the increase as revealed by the Cross River State Ministry of Education (2014). The above paradox necessitated the study to provide answers to the following questions:

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent is the UBE in Cross River State free?
- 2) To what extent has the UBE stimulated educational consciousness among the people of Cross River State?
- 3) What is the extent of impactation of literacy, numeracy and communication skills on the UBE products?

Research methodology

The study which uses descriptive survey method is domiciled in Cross River State. The state has eighteen Local Government councils with a total of 1045 public primary schools with an enrolment of about 350,000 pupils as at 2014. The state has a population of 3.5 million people based on the projection from the 2006 National Population Census (NPC, 2014). The state is divided into three education zones of Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. Population of the study comprised of all Head Teachers of the 1045 public primary schools in the state.

Sample

Samples comprise of 200 head teachers from the three education zone of the state. Each of the researchers went to schools and administered the questionnaire, did the oral interview and the practical observation of the sampled schools from the three education zones.

Instrumentation

Three research instrument, the questionnaire, oral interview and practical observation rating scale were employed in gathering information for the study. The questionnaire tagged "policy implementation gaps in UBE programme in Cross River State" was designed by the researchers and validated by two research experts from the Faculty of Education of Cross River University of Technology, Calabar. It was built on a four-point modified

Likert scale pattern. The instrument contained twenty-one items based on the three research questions that guided the study. The oral interview items and the observation rating scale were also based on the research questions formulated. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation.

Data analysis

Mean statistics is used for data analysis and interpretation of result.

Research question one

To what extent is the UBE programme in Cross River State free?

Table 1: Distribution of mean score of respondents on the extent of the free UBE programmes in CRS

S/N	Respondents No – 200	SA	A	D	SD	Efx	X	Remarks
1	UBE programme charges no tuition fee at all	312	300	30	7	649	3.25	A
2	In the UBE programme PTA levy is absolutely non-existent	292	240	40	27	599	2.99	A
3	UBE programme does not charge fee for examination	120	90	160	60	430	2.15	D
4	In the UBE programme pupils are given free books	340	234	40	17	631	3.15	A
5	Mid-day meal is provided free in UBE	80	105	210	40	435	2.18	D
6	In UBE pupils don't pay for handicraft	120	135	160	45	460	2.30	D
7	School uniform is free in UBE	72	36	160	90	358	1.79	D
8	In UBE programme Head Teachers receive imprest	320	150	80	30	580	2.50	A

Note A = Agree, D = Disagree

Data in table 1 show the extent to which UBE programme is free in Cross River State. Four items (1,2,4 and 8) have mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50, while four items (3,5,6 and 7) equally have mean scores of below 2.50. The result reveal that UBE programme is free in terms of tuition, PTA levy, free books and that Head Teachers are given grant to run the schools. Data also show that examination fees, and handicraft are paid for by parents. Parents are also responsible for their wards uniform while no midday meal is provided.

Research question two

To what extent has the UBE programme stimulated educational consciousness among people in CRS?

Table 2: Distribution of mean scores on the level of educational consciousness on account of UBE in CRS

S/N	Respondents No – 200	SA	A	D	SD	Efx	X	Remarks
9	UBE has greatly stimulated interest in education among people of CRS	320	300	30	5	655	3.27	A
10	UBE programme has greatly increased school enrolment in CRS	280	270	52	14	616	3.06	A
11	Parents are now more conscious of children education	160	390	20	10	580	2.90	A
12	Pupils are now more interested in schooling	160	480	0	0	640	3.20	A
13	UBE has drastically reduced dropout rate from school	160	450	10	0	620	3.10	A
14	UBE has brought about increase in the number of primary schools	40	390	80	20	530	2.65	A
15	It has greatly increased transition rate from primary to secondary school	120	390	60	10	580	2.90	A
16	UBE has brought about opening of many private schools.	320	180	60	20	580	2.90	A
17	It has brought about massive teacher training and re-training	200	390	20	0	610	3.05	A

Data in table 2 show respondents opinion on the extent to which UBE programme has stimulated educational awareness among Cross Riverians. All items indicated by numbers 9-17 receive mean score above the cut-off point of 2.50. This revealed that the respondents are fully aware of the high level of educational consciousness of cross Riverians as a result of the UBE programme.

Research question three

What is the extent of the impactation of literacy, numeracy and communication skills on the UBE products?

Table 3: Distribution of mean score of respondents on the extent of impactation of literacy, numeracy and communication skills on UBE products

S/N	Respondents No – 200	SA	A	D	SD	Efx	X	Remarks
18	UBE has greatly reduced illiteracy rate in CRS	280	390	0	0	670	3.35	A
19	All UBE graduates at primary six level can read and write well	80	180	140	40	440	2.20	D
20	All UBE products at primary six level in CRS can verbally communicate effectively in English Language	480	240	0	0	720	3.60	A
21	All UBE products at primary six level have attained adequate level of numeracy	80	180	140	40	440	2.20	D

Data in table 3 show respondents opinion on the impact of UBE on literacy, numeracy and communication skills on its products. Two items (18 & 20) received mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50 while items 19 & 21 received mean score of less than 2.50. The result revealed that UBE programme in CRS has drastically reduced illiteracy and improved effective verbal communication in English language. Conversely written communication and adequate numeracy level are stills areas of challenge in the UBE program in the state.

Discussion of findings

This study aimed at identifying policy gaps (if any) in the implementation of the Nigerian UBE programme with regards to freeness, stimulation of educational consciousness and impactation of literacy, numeracy and verbal communication skills in Cross River State. From the three research questions posed and the concomitant twenty-one questionnaire items generated and analyzed from two-hundred respondents, the success and gaps in the implementation of UBE policy became obvious. On the freeness, UBE neither charges tuition fee nor Parent Teacher Association (PTA) levy. Books are issued free of charge to pupils just as the Head Teachers get a paltry imprest for running the schools. The gaps in its freeness are payment for examination and handicraft by pupils as well as the parents taking responsibility for uniform and feeding of their (wards see table one above for data).

In the area of stimulating educational consciousness, data reveal that UBE has fared very well as it has greatly increased school enrolment, stimulated parents consciousness about their children's education and as well stimulated children's interest in education. It has also reduced dropout rate from school, increased transition rate to secondary school and brought about massive teacher training as well as giving vent to the opening of private schools.

On the expected skills from UBE products, data on table three show that UBE programme has greatly reduced illiteracy level and as well enhanced verbal communication skills among primary school leavers in English Language. The areas of challenge are in terms of written communication and proficiency in numeracy.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study it is concluded that UBE programme is actually on course in Nigeria. It has recorded modest achievement in its freeness, stimulation of educational consciousness and impactation of skills. It is however still lacking in terms of absolute freeness, written communication and numeracy.

Recommendations

To make the UBE fully attain its set goals in the areas under study, it is hereby recommend as follows.

Government should make education for all to be the responsibility of all. This will reduce the financial burden of funding UBE on government as parents and the private sector will have their own part to play for the success of the programme. To ensure adequate skill acquisition of the products, there should be adequate monitoring and supervision of schools by officials from the Ministry of Education and inspectorate department. Head Teachers should be more alive to their responsibility of supervising teachers in their work. Special mathematics teachers should be trained for primary schools to stimulate pupils' interest in the learning of numbers. Parents should be educated to provide reading facilities for their children at home to complement learning from school.

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