

Education Policy: Meaning, Importance and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper discussed the concept of education policies, the importance of education policies and the problems facing the implementation of education policies in Nigeria. The paper is a review study. The paper depends on secondary data that were collected from government documents, print resources and online publications. Content analysis was used to narrow the literature to the theme of the study. The paper identified the effective implementation of educational programmes, development of educational planning, attainment of quality education and elimination of resource wastage in education as import of education policies. Shortage of funds, inadequate infrastructure facilities, rapid growth of the Nation's population shortage of professional teachers, corruption and fault policy design, insecurity, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor governance and management and inflation were identified as challenges militating against effective implementation of education in Nigeria. The paper recommends that the Government should increase funding of education and priorities should be given to the funding of education policies in Nigeria. The government should reform all agencies saddled with the responsibilities of formulating and designing educational policies. The government should address the problem of corruption in educational administration via the deployment of ICT and artificial intelligence in the system. The government should provide adequate infrastructure facilities and employ more professional teachers in all educational institutions. Effective monitoring and evaluation should be institutionalized for the smooth implementation of education policies. Social problems breeding insecurities in Nigeria should be addressed to achieve peace and security across the country. Professionals in the field of policy analysis should be employed in the various Federal and state ministries of education.

Keywords: Education, education policy, challenges, corruption, insecurity.

Introduction:

Education is the unfolding of what is already enfolded in the man. It is the development from within the individual until the person becomes conscious of his unique existence and begins to seek his place in society (Peerzada, 2016). Education is a process through which a person is

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trained to develop his innate potential so that it can be fully expressed externally. Education is the gradual or progressive development of a person's innate powers or potential (Akpan, 2017).

Education concerns the individual and society. It is the act of systematic development or training of the mind, capabilities or character through instruction or study. Education varies as widely in its forms, philosophy, contents, and methods as there are different societies in the world. Education is a life-long process that has interpretation in purpose, type and level. It is a means of socializing people into the community, for upholding customs and traditions as well as for the modification or changing of same in conformity with existing ideologies, ideological expansion or reformation (NOUN, 2012). Education is a means of teaching or training people to be useful to themselves and the society they live (Sagaya, 2015). It is the key to upward mobility that leads to the progressive modernization of societies.

Education is an instrument for effecting national development. Education can be defined as the production and reproduction of knowledge of people's way of life (i.e. their culture) to preserve and maintain the social structure that will be able to guarantee social order and changes in society (NOUN, 2012). Education is said to be a means of developing human resources by cultivating appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes without which the nation cannot harness resources to industrialize and take part in the global knowledge economy (Durosaro, 2012). Education deals with the all-round development of the person. It, therefore, develops an individual into a well-educated, cultured, disciplined, employable and productive person. Education leads, guides and directs the learner to the acquisition of desirable knowledge, attitude, and healthy behaviour (Akpan, 2000). From the above, education is an organized system for passing instruction and imparting knowledge to learners in a recognized educational institution. Education is an instrument for training, developing the individual and for the transformation of the country. Education is an organized system that comprises teaching and learning for the development of an individual and society at large.

The realization of education objectives and goals depends on the availability of sound educational policies and educational planning. Realizing this every nation globally formulates and designs educational policies to guide the smooth implementation of her education programmes. Noun (2012) noted that the educational policy of Nigeria is a general statement containing principles, regulations and rules, that govern many of the decisions on how to educate children, where to get them educated, where to get them employed, who to teach them, how to finance their education, what to teach, how to impart skills, goals, objectives and even the philosophy. The National Policy on Education, revised in 1989, 1998, 2004 and 2013, contains every necessary ingredient for the achievement of the goals of the education system. The planning for the education system takes its root from the policy of education (NOUN, 2012).

Meaning of Educational Policy:

Educational policies are policies designed and formulated by the government for the administration and management of education in the local government, states and country. Educational policy is the policies approved by the government for directing the affairs of education (Ogunode, & Samuel, 2020). Educational policy of Nigeria is a general statement containing principles, regulations and rules that govern many of the decisions, on how to educate the citizens. It seeks to answer questions about the purpose of education, the objectives that it is designed to attain the methods for attaining them and the tools for measuring their success or failure (NOUN, 2012).

Policies are written or unwritten statements that guide present and future thinking, initiatives, actions and decisions of managers. They are written when there are documents somewhere for reference purposes and are unwritten when they are made in the form of pronouncements i.e. policy statements by people in power or position of authority. Policies are guides that usually provide the latitude of operations of managers. It makes managers understand the extent to which they can go in the process of decision-making (NOUN, 2012). Ogbonnanya (2010) viewed educational policy as the specific goals arrived at that must be pursued through educational policies. It can refer to a proposal, an ongoing programme, the goals of a programme, or major decisions. Educational policy concerns the formulation of a decision, its implementation and evaluation.

Uchendu (2000) described policy as a fundamental process through which an institution attains stability and undertakes order changes as part of its ultimate goal. They are written when there are documents for reference purposes and are unwritten when made in the form of pronouncements, that is, policy statements by people in power and authority. In other words, policies are guides that usually provide latitude for operations (Besong et al., 2009).

Policies are written or unwritten statement that guides the present and future thinking initiatives. It directs the decisions of management (Babalola, 2003). NOUN (2010) observes that educational policies are crucial in the realization of the overall goals of the educational system and subsequently the national goals. Education policies constitute the guiding ways through which the education system is effectively operated. Education Policies address various issues in the educational system. Such issues include access to education; equity; equality and educational opportunities; structures; efficiency in education; funding etc. From above, education policies are planned and organized education rules, laws and regulations meant for educational planning, educational administration and implementation of education. Education policies are a set of rules, regulations and laws formulated and acknowledged by government laws to be used for administering and managing educational institutions and all issues relating to education.

Importance of Educational Policy:

There are many benefits of education policies to education development. Some of these benefits include the following:

- i. **Effective implementation of educational programmes:** Educational policy is very important in the realization of educational objectives. The educational policy serves as a direction and guide in piloting affairs of education. Ogunode & Samuel (2020) and Abdulkareem (1990) submitted that educational objectives cannot be fully achieved without effective and sound educational policy and educational planning. Educational policy is designed to aid the implementation of education programmes. The government designed and implemented educational programs to address educational problems. Education policies direct activities and actions that would lead to the attainment of educational programmes.
- ii. **Development educational planning:** Education policy aids educational planning and formulation of educational programmes. Education policy assisted in the smooth implementation of educational planning. It helps planners to allocate resources for the development of education. Education policies aid every level of state and local government to develop and plan their educational system. Ogunode

et al. (2022a) opined that education policy consists of the principles and policy decisions that influence the field of education, as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. Education governance may be shared between the local, state, and federal governments at varying levels

- iii. **Attainment quality education:** Education policies help to achieve quality education in the various educational institutions. Education policy sets standards and laws that ensure the attainment of quality education at all levels of the educational system. Educational policy is designed to equip the educational system with all that is necessary to launch Nigeria into the future, (politically, socially, morally and technologically). Educational policy is aimed at providing access to quality education for all Nigerians irrespective of the economic, political, or religious status of the parents (Ogunode et al., 2022b; Ogbonnaya, 2010).
- iv. **Elimination of resources wastage:** Education policy aid to reduce education resources wastage in education institutions. Ogunode et al. (2022b) submitted that educational policy is meant to address the issue of imbalance in the provision of education in different parts of the country concerning access, quality of resources and girls' education. Educational policy is formulated to serve as a blueprint for official action that impacts the general populace. The education policies outline the government's expectations, standards, aims and objectives as well as the requirements that are necessary to ensure quality service delivery. Educational resource wastage is curtailed with the help of educational policies and planning (Nwaka, 2018; Ogunode et al., 2022d).

Challenges facing Education Policy:

There are many factors responsible poor implementation of education policies. Some of the factors include; shortage of funds, inadequate infrastructure facilities, rapid growth of the Nation's population, shortage of professional teachers, corruption, faculty policy design, insecurity, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor governance and management and inflation

- i. **Shortage of funds:** Shortage of funds is a very big problem hindering the effective implementation of educational policies globally, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for the implementation of educational policies is gross inadequate and this is affecting the implementation of educational policies. A lot of human and material resources are required for the effective implementation of educational policies. These resources are expensive to acquire and deploy in various educational institutions to aid the implementation of the policies. The inability of many developing countries to allocate 15%-20% of their total national budget to education as recommended by UNESCO has negatively impacted educational development and education policy implementation. Yaro (2017) and Ogunode & Samuel (2020) concluded that poor budgetary allocation to education and education policy implementation is a major challenge to the smooth implementation of the policies.
- ii. **Inadequate infrastructure facilities:** Infrastructure facilities are essential educational resources meant for the implementation of educational policies. Ogunode (2020) defined infrastructure facilities as those facilities aiding the

delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, road facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support the effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent the effective administration of educational institutions. The importance of school infrastructural facilities according to (Ogunode & Agwor (2021) in the realization of educational goals cannot be underestimated. School facilities aid the delivery of the teaching and learning process in the schools. The school offices provide a conducive working environment for teachers, the classrooms help the learners to learn while the school fence protects students, the teachers, and school administrators from criminals. The school plant protects the entire human resources from the sun, rain, heat cold, and snow. NOUN (2011) observed that there is an unprecedented infrastructural dilapidation at the national, state, local and institutional levels in Nigeria. It may be difficult to implement any educational policy or plan effectively with the situation on the ground. The school facilities and equipment are in total disrepair at all levels of education. The school buildings are collapsing, the ones still standing are either with leaking roofs or no windows and doors. Most schools have few good chairs and tables left for the use of teachers and ever-increasing enrolment. Many schools have no library, workshop or science laboratory. Students are only exposed to practical classes in the sciences when final examinations are approaching. Many schools are not connected to electricity and water, and even where they do, the services are either epileptic or hardly provided. The shortage of infrastructure facilities in educational institutions in Nigeria hinders the effective implementation of educational policies.

- iii. **Rapid Growth of the Nation's Population:** Another major problem militating against the effective implementation of educational policy is the constant increment in the general population in a country. The constant increment in the country's population affects the smooth execution of the policies because more human and material resources will be needed to cater for the educational needs of the learners. Increment in population will require expansion in facilities and human resources. NOUN (2012) asserted that the structure of the country's population has always shown a large youth base. This is the group that requires education at all levels and this gives rise to demand above the capacity of education. Nwadiani (2000) concluded that the inability to cope with the explosion of learners in the nation's school system could affect the implementation of education programmes and plans. Nwankwo (1981) also remarked that the result of the high rate of population growth is that bold educational targets and plans very quickly get out of hand. This is because various expansion targets and policy plans for their realization are often unrealistic because of the explosion in the youth population. Akpan (2017) opined that there is continued rapid growth in the population, particularly the population of children of school-going age. This has given rise to the demand by parents and their children for educational opportunities. This, however, affects educational planning in Nigeria. There is no prospect that the rise in the country's population will ever slow down. Hence effective planning of education becomes difficult. The

free and compulsory Universal Basic Education scheme, though aimed at eliminating or reducing illiteracy in the country has compounded the problem of increasing demand for education. The scheme provides that all children of school-going age should enrol in the basic education programme. But not enough secondary schools are provided for the graduates of this programme. Similarly, a large number of students graduate from secondary schools, but there are not enough tertiary institutions to admit those who want to further their education.

- iv. **Shortage of professional teachers:** Effective implementation of educational policies requires adequate professional teachers' deployment in the various educational institutions. Teachers are professionals in the field of education. They have undergone training and are certified to teach in the various educational institutions. Teachers are trained to impart knowledge and build the nation through the training of students in the schools. There are shortage of professional teachers in almost every form of the Nigerian educational system. NEEDS (2014), Hassan & Fatale (2022), Ingiagar et al. (2022), Muhammad et al. (2024) and Ogunode et al. (2024d) identified a shortage of academic staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions while Ejike & Ejike (2018) and World Bank (2017) concluded that public secondary schools in Nigeria are understaffed. Philip et al. (2015) maintained that the shortage of professional teachers in Basic schools and early child education in Nigeria has affected the smooth implementation of curriculum and educational policies. Generally, Ogunode et al. (2022b), and Ogunode et al. (2022c) lamented teachers in Nigerian educational institutions. There cannot be any meaningful implementation of educational policies with a shortage of professional teachers in the schools.
- v. **Corruption:** Corruption in public institutions and especially in education institutions is a major problem to effective education policy implementation in Nigeria. Budgetary allocation for the implementation of education programmes and policies is most often mismanaged and misappropriated. This affects the smooth implementation of education policies. For instance, the national feed programme of the Federal government of Nigeria, an educational programme and policy to aid enrolment and sustainable education in Nigeria funds were mismanaged and looted. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that a lot of funds were appropriated and looted in the implementation of the programme. Recently, Yakubu (2024) reported that the House of Representatives, during a plenary session, received a report from the Public Accounts Committee on the investigation into the disbursement and management of COVID-19 funds. The report covered the period between 2020 and 2022, during which the committee invited several 92 ministries, departments, and agencies. The investigation followed a motion debated in plenary on October 17, 2023, alleging mismanagement of COVID-19 intervention funds. The Recalled Salam-led committee commenced the public hearing on November 27, 2023, and invited the concerned MDAs for questioning. The reports reveal a trail of mismanagement, non-compliance, and outright violations of procurement laws and financial regulations by various MDAs and private sector beneficiaries. Also, Ogunode et al. (2022e) noted that the Safe Initiative School programme released funds for implementation was mismanaged. Lawal et al. (2024) maintained that the

school feeding initiative of the All Progressives Congress-led Federal Government was aimed at pushing back on the rather embarrassing growing proportion of out-of-school children, estimated to have reached 20 million children. But in about seven years of the initiative and over N200 billion worth of meals for schoolchildren, the attendance register of pupils is far from commensurate in several states nationwide. The report had mixed results of the initiative nationwide, with the common thread of misappropriation, inefficiency, and poor execution of the supposed laudable programme. Corruption has affected the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Funds meant for educational programme implementation were mismanaged and misappropriated according to (Ogunode et al. 2024b; Ogunode et al., 2021b).

- vi. **Faulty policy designed:** Many education policies are not subjected to model verification and analysis before being adopted as national education policies. Some policies are not handled by seasoned policy analysis experts and professionals. The inability to fully involve these experts sometimes may affect the formulation and designs of education policies. Christine & Hayatu (2014) observed that from the approach, the success of the implementation of education policy may be a mirage. The approach contradicted or violated the known rule of systematic planning. Ogunode & Samuel (2020) and Odukoya et al. (2018) opined that poor policy articulation or formulation is another problem responsible for the poor implementation of educational policies in Nigeria because of the poor capacity of educational policy designers and lack of exposure to new approaches and methods of formulating policies. The Federal Government is poor in articulating its educational policies. If the educational policies are not properly formulated or articulated, it will be difficult to implement such policies and this would result in changes in the policies. Akpan (2017) observed that sometimes educational planners in the country produce faulty educational plans with ambiguous goals and objectives. This makes it difficult for implementers to effectively execute the plan. Sometimes there are deviations from the original plan implementers as a result of faulty planning. This can happen if the implementers do not participate in the planning process.
- vii. **Insecurity:** Insecurity in educational institutions implies the human resources within the educational institutions are in a state of fear or threat and lack peace to carry out their respective function. It is a situation where school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students are in a state of fear (Ogunode et al., 2023). The insecurity challenge is another major problem facing education development in Nigeria, especially in the Southeast, North-central and North-west and North-east Nigeria. Bandits and Boko-haram in the North while IPOB in the South-east and other criminal elements groups. Insecurity has prevented the effective implementation of educational programmes and policies. Insecurity has led to the death of many school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students (Joseph et al., 2017; Ogunode & Ukozor (2022). Many teachers and students have been kidnapped. Many infrastructural facilities were destroyed by Boko Haram members. Secondary school programmes have been disrupted due to the closing down of schools in Northeast Nigeria (Usman, 2021; Ogunode &

Ahaotu, 2021). The Cable (2018) reported that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) says Boko Haram has killed 2,300 teachers in Nigeria's northeast since the start of the insurgency in 2009. In the 2018 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM), the UN agency noted that 19,000 teachers have been displaced in the region, affecting access to education. Insecurity has led to the displacement of people from their hometowns to other parts of the country. Insecurity has affected the smooth implementation of educational policies in Nigeria (Obi, 2015; Ogunode et al., 2021a).

- viii. **Poor monitoring and evaluation:** Another problem with the effective implementation of educational policy is poor monitoring and evaluation. Ogunode et al. (2024a) monitoring and evaluation is a systematic process determining the progress of a programme to check if the programme implementation is achieving the planned result. It is a system that assesses the stage-by-stage progress made on a project or programme to determine if the programme or project is realizing its objectives. Monitoring and Evaluation aids effective implementation of educational policies in educational institutions. It appears that the Monitoring and Evaluation system designed for the implementation of educational policies most times are ineffective and weak. The weakness of monitoring and evaluation affects the implementation of the policies in various educational institutions. Akpan (2017) noted that the implementation of educational plans and policies in Nigeria is not appropriately monitored, supervised and evaluated. Whenever this is done, it is not painstaking it is haphazardly carried out. Sometimes no written report is sent to the appropriate authority for study which can help in the review of the plan if necessary. The success of any plan implementation depends on the effectiveness of the supervision and evaluation system put in place.
- ix. **Poor Governance and Management:** Poor administration and management of educational policies also affect the smooth implementation of the policies in the various educational institutions. NOUN (2012) maintained that in Nigeria, government and educational management structures are over-bureaucratic. The Federal Ministry of Education has the highest number of departments and agencies. In some situations, functions are duplicated, which could lead to confusion and conflict. Sometimes government activities are too centralized to give effective direction to policy implementation. All these could lead to ineffectiveness and lack of decisive action. Situations like this could lead to inconsistency in educational policies. According to Aghenta (2003), many educational plans have been abandoned before they are ready for implementation due to inconsistent directives and counter-directives from the government ministry and its many agencies. You will remember the policies of school takeover and hand-over between federal and state governments in the past, as well as between states and religious bodies.
- x. **Inflation:** Inflation has impacted negatively on education development in Nigeria. Inflation according to Ogunode & Ukozor (2023) is the continuous rise in the prices of goods and services over a while. Inflation occurs, according to Ogunode et al. (2024c) and Oladipupo & Oluwole (2008), when the amount budgeted for a particular project or programme can no longer implement the projects because of variation and varies in prices of human and materials resources that will be used to

complete the projects. The increment in the prices of goods and services affects the implementation of educational policies that involve constant procurement for implementation. NOUN (2012) noted that the problem of inflation and the unstable performance of the economy often impact the cost of education. The cost of providing educational facilities and equipment and the salaries and allowances of personnel to implement educational policies and plans is always rising (Akpan, 2017). Inflation in Nigeria affected the production of goods and services and this has led to an increment in the prices of educational resources needed for the implementation of various education policies and programmes.

Conclusion:

This paper critically examined the concept of education policies, the importance of education policies and the problems facing the implementation of education policies in Nigeria. Effective implementation of educational programmes, development of educational planning, attainment of quality education and elimination of resource wastage in education were identified as important to education in Nigeria. Shortage of funds, inadequate infrastructure facilities, rapid growth of the Nation's population and shortage of professional teachers, corruption and fault policy design, insecurity, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor governance and management and inflation were also identified as challenges militating against effective implementation of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

Based on the conclusion identified, the paper put the following as measures; the government should increase funding of education and priorities should be given to the funding of education policies in Nigeria. The government should reform all agencies saddled with the responsibilities of formulating and designing educational policies. The government should address the problem of corruption in educational administration via the deployment of ICT and artificial intelligence in the system. The government should provide adequate infrastructure facilities and employ more professional teachers in all educational institutions. Effective monitoring and evaluation should be institutionalized for the smooth implementation of education policies. Social problems breeding insecurities in Nigeria should be addressed to achieve peace and security across the country. Professionals in the field of policy analysis should be employed in the various Federal and state ministries of education.

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