

Lapses in Education Policy Formulation Processes in Nigeria: Implications for the Standard of Education

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Abstract

Nigeria's Education Policy is quite laudable yet her investments in education are not too rewarding considering the deteriorating educational standards. The poor performance of the education sector in Nigeria, which is evident in the falling in standard of education and poor quality, has become very worrisome. What is the problem? Is the educational policy formulation process faulty? What are the implications for educational standard? These are the issues explored in this paper, based on literature review approach. The findings blame the falling in the educational standard and poor quality on the ineffective implementation of education policy engendered primarily by lapses in the policy formulation process. These lapses include lack of indigenous education policy, lack of adequate implementation strategy, non-involvement of stakeholders, especially the teachers, in the policy formulation process, lack of continuity of the policy implementation and lack of political will. These lapses have serious effects on the implementation of education policy and consequently on the standard of Education in Nigeria. The paper recommends the discontinuation of the National Policy on Education fashioned after the American system and adopt an educational policy which takes into consideration the cultural values of Nigerian people and Nigeria environment. Adequate human and material resources that will facilitate proper and result oriented implementation should be put in place before the implementation begins. In addition, stakeholders, especially the teacher should be consulted and be involved in the educational policy formulation and education policy should be nurtured to maturity before summative evaluation is carried out. Sustained political will and eradication of corruption are necessary for effective policy implementation and should be maintained.

Key words: Policy formulation, policy implementation, standard of education, implications.

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of national and human development. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge, habits and inculcating cultural values for surviving in the changing world. The relationship between education and development has been established, such that education is now internationally accepted as a key development index (Imam [18]). No wonder the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted education as instrument par excellence for effecting national development (FRN [14]). But unfortunately, Education in Nigeria has been criticized by the stakeholders and educators of falling in standard and poor quality.

Many researchers have carried out research studies to determine whether educational standards were actually falling in Nigeria and at what level it was most grievous. They arrived at the conclusion that standards have fallen at all levels of education, with the tertiary level being most hit, followed by secondary, and least, primary level (Duze [12], Tanuti [31] and Ajoku [3]). Some of the reasons adduced to the falling in standard of education and poor quality by researchers include the foundation of western education in Nigeria that was laid by the British colonial government which was meant to enhance colonial and imperial interests, poor implementation of education policy engendered by the declining competence and commitment of teachers; inadequate provision of facilities; non-maintenance of available facilities; non-availability of personnel; lack of funds and administrative will; lack of interest and seriousness on the part of students which lead to examination malpractice; : indiscipline, Quest for paper qualification, Politicizing Education, and the lost glories of traditional education which flourished on the appropriate acquisition and utilization of skills (Duze [12], Adelaja [1], Imam [18] and Vanguard Media [35]). Vanguard Media [35] reported further that the government is not consistent in its policy change and policy makers don't do any in depth assessment before they arrive at their decisions.

The main elements of education are context, input, process and outcome. According to UNICEF [34], more directly, national policies for education provide an influential context. For example, goals and standards, curricula and teacher policies set the enabling conditions within which educational practice occurs. These contextual circumstances, according to UNICEF [34], have an important potential influence upon education quality. Inputs are the human and material resources available for successful implementation of education policy. These include the students, teachers, administrators, curriculum, teaching and learning materials and conducive environment. Process includes teaching and learning that take place both inside and outside the classroom while

the outcomes are measured in terms of students' academic achievement, changes in behaviours and attitudes of the learners and in a broader sense the benefits to the society. Unfortunately only the outcomes, especially students' academic achievement, have been used as the index to measure the standard of education.

Assessments of the standard and quality of education that ignore other elements of education are likely to be misleading. According to Afemikhe [5], educational standard has many dimensions and therefore pontificating on its falling can be misleading. This paper, therefore, explored the educational policy formulation processes in Nigeria, lapses in the policy formulation processes and their implications for the standard of education in Nigeria based on literature review approach.

Educational policy formulation in Nigeria

Education policy is high on the agenda of governments across the world. Attentions are usually on the outcomes of education policy and on their implications for economic prosperity and social citizenship. The philosophy or ideology of a government implicitly or explicitly determines the goals and specifies standards for different aspects of education. The aspirations and expectations of a given society are reflected in the general and specific objectives of its educational system.

Educational policies, according to Okoroma [26], are initiatives mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system. Wikipedia [37] defines education policy as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. A nation's policy on education, according to FRN [14], is government ways of realising that part of national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. FRN [14] stressed that no policy on education, however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals on the nation.

The overall philosophy of Nigeria as stated in FRN [14] is to

(a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice and

(b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

The national educational goals derived from the philosophy are:

(a) the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;

(b) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;

(c) the training of the mind in understanding of the world around; and

(d) the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The major statutory responsibilities of the Federal Government in the education sector are ones of policy formulation, co-ordination and monitoring. Both Federal and State Governments are legally empowered to establish parastatals, through which some of their responsibilities are discharged, and these are widely used at the federal level. The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education is the government body that directs education in Nigeria. It is statutorily responsible for formulating a National Policy on Education, which guides the nation in pursuit of its educational goals. It functions include:

- Formulating a national policy on education.
- Collecting and collating data for purposes of educational planning and financing.
- Maintaining uniform standards of education throughout the country.
- Controlling the quality of education in the country through the supervisory role of the Inspectorate Services Department within the Ministry.
- Harmonizing educational policies and procedures of all the states of the federation through the instrumentality of the National Council on Education.
- Effecting co-operation in educational matters on an international scale.
- Developing curricula and syllabuses at the national level in conjunction with other bodies (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [37])

The Federal Ministry of Education is advised by the National Council on Education, the highest policy-making body specifically for educational matters. The Council consists of the Federal Minister of Education and the State Commissioners for Education, and is in turn assisted by a Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE), composed of professional officers of the Federal and State Ministries of Education. The JCCE, with its own consultative Reference Committees is an important feedback mechanism for federal policy. The Federal Ministry of Education takes responsibility for policy co-ordination and all federal level activities on education. Policy decisions are reached by consensus in the National Council on Education for Implementation by the various states and local governments, but provisions are made for local adjustments to particular circumstances.

For instance, the basic policy relating to structure, curriculum and school year is determined nationally, while selections of staff and other specific resources are carried out at the state and local government levels. The National Council on Education is the government managing body monitoring the compliance with, and coordinating the implementation of, policies. The Council liaises with relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of policies on education nationwide. It produces and disseminates quarterly reports on the status of the implementation of new policies (VSO [36] and FGN [14]).

The process of Educational policy formulation as analysed above indicates that the stakeholders such as teachers are not involved in the process. It is only the ministers/commissioners of education and the professional officers of the Federal and State Ministries of Education that formulate the educational policy for the country.

Lapses in education policy formulation in Nigeria

The factors attributed to the poor implementation of education policy in Nigeria and which consequently resulted to the falling in standard of education are traceable to the lapses in education policy formulation processes. The lapses are discussed as follows:

Lack of indigenous education policy

Studies on historical analysis of education policy in Nigeria revealed that Nigerian government adopted British system of education during the post-colonial era without considering the cultural values, environment and the peculiarities of the country. According to Adiele [2], 'Nigerian leaders and educators were particularly worried that the British system of education laid emphasis on academic subjects; educational opportunity was restricted to few people and that the British grammar school system of education was trans-imposed on Nigeria without due consideration to the culture, environment and the aspirations of Nigeria as a country'. The colonial education emphasised spiritual purification of the learners and that was irrelevant to the needs and interests of Nigerian learner and the society. Good moral conduct which was the key aspect of traditional African education was completely ignored. The consequence of this is the gross examination malpractices in both internal and external examinations.

In an attempt to meet up with the challenges of globalisation and technological development, a new system of education tagged 6-3-3-4 was introduced early 1980s. This system intended building technical capacities in students and increased the quality of education, which would in return assist the country in its drive towards technological advancement and industrialization. According to Paul-Sewa [30], the 6-3-3-4 system of education which was introduced to replace the 6-5-4 system was designed to inject functionality into the Nigerian school system, by producing graduates who would be able to make use of their 3Hs- Hands, Head and the Heart. The educational system adopted the American 6 years of primary schools, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education (Nwagwu, [22]). Therefore, for this type of education the government was expected to provide adequate workshops, laboratories, Fine Art studio, and other necessary facilities, as well as quality teachers for effective learning and teaching in good classes. Introductory Technology was introduced at junior secondary level and all students were made to offer it. Instead of incorporating African indigenous technology into the school curriculum, modern machines and equipments that require electricity to function were imported for the teaching and learning of introductory technology without considering the state of Nigeria electric power sector and without considering provision of alternative source of power. Agande [5] reported that despite the Federal Government investment in the power sector only 25 percent of Nigerians had access to electricity. The report stated further that out of the estimated population of 160 million Nigerians only 40 million Nigerians enjoyed electricity. The implication of this is that majority of Nigerian citizens do not have access to electricity especially in the rural areas where majority of Nigerians live their lives. Besides, the expertise that would install the machinery imported and teach the subject areas of introductory technology such as woodworks, metalwork, technical drawing and basic electricity were not readily available. Thus, the aim of the policy experienced failure from its onset. This was due to the failure to consider Nigerian environment as regard the power sector and expertise required for the achievement of the objectives of the policy.

Non-involvement of the stakeholders in policy formulation process.

It should be noted that for policies to be successful they should involve target groups and they should allow for participatory system, whereby policy makers plan with the people rather than for the people in meeting their felt needs. Such participation will give the target groups a sense of belonging as well as get them committed to the successful implementation of the policy (Makinde [20]). Teachers are one of the major stakeholders in education industry and the chief implementers of education policy. They are the ones that translate education policy document into practice and ensure the realisation of the policy objectives.

However, in Nigeria, according to VSO [35] teachers' efforts are sometimes unsustainable, due to factors influencing motivation. VSO [35] stated that teachers' research in Nigeria reveals that teachers' level of motivation and morale is very low, due to various de-motivating factors. Among the factors as revealed by the research was that teachers feel ignored in the decision-making process and powerless in their efforts to improve the learning experience of their students, despite their desire and eagerness. VSO [35] stated further that Policy makers are putting demands and expectations on teachers to carry out new initiatives without their involvement. This not only creates the feeling of ignorance from above, but also presents many obstacles in the implementation of new plans.

Lack of proper Strategy for Implementation

Strategy for education policy implementation is a vital stage in educational policy formulation. It is the planning stage that comes between policy formulation and implementation. According to Okoroma [26], the problem of policy implementation is traceable to the planning stage which comes immediately after policy formulation. Okeke et al. [25] and Ukeje [33] 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. Educational planning in Nigeria has not been helpful in promoting quality education. Due to poor planning, the system has no clear cut direction. The National Policy on Education (NPE) is supposed to guide the operators of the system but it is short-sighted. It talks about the philosophy and objectives of Nigerian education at various levels but fails to proffer strategies for the implementation by the classroom teachers and how the students would know when they have reached acceptable level of performance.

Lack of Political will

Political Will, according to Egonmwan [13], is the key factor to government policy formulation strategies. The political environment has a strong influence on educational policy planning and implementation in any nation. Egonmwan [13] defined Political will as total political support for a policy by top government functionaries. It is a sustained commitment of government functionaries to invest the necessary resources to achieve specific objectives and a willingness to make and implement policy despite opposition by theoretical frameworks of policy formulation and implementation as stages and processes and by methodological distinctions between policy texts and policy discourse.

Nigerian Government has adopted education as a tool for national development (FRN [14]). However, political will has been lacking. Education is very poorly funded in Nigeria. Nigeria has, up till now, refused to comply with the UNESCO recommendation that at least 26 percent of every country's annual budget be spent on education. Nigerian Government spends less than 7 percent of her budget on education (Okecha [24]). According to .Igbuzor [17], the national expenditure on education cannot be computed because various states expenditure on education cannot be determined, in relation to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of national budgets. According to Paul-Sewa [30] 'the 6-3-3-4 system of education from inception was seen as a system in the right direction which could move the nation towards technological development and industrialization. However, because of the lack of commitment in the part of the government, the system have failed to catapult Nigeria into the realm of educationally and technologically advanced countries. Our leaders make promises that will never be fulfilled. Oladipo [29] noted that the challenges facing education is a general malaise that has to do with our politicising education. He stressed that by politicising education, by promising things that could really not be delivered; we compromise the standard of education.

Lack of continuity

The continue change in administrations which at the end lead to policy adjustment is considered as one of the major problems affecting policy implementation. This is because most programmes initiated by a particular administration are hardly completed by another administration after the termination of that government rather; the incoming government would come in with its own agenda. Inconsistent policy making is a problem in education, especially with a high turnover of education ministers. The 6-3-3-4 system of education was introduced in 1982 to replace the 6-5-4-system adopted from British system of education. The policy was changed about 24 years later and 9-3-4 system was introduced. Barely less than five years of implementation of 9-3-4 system of education, the incumbent Minister of Education, proposed to the National Assembly (NASS), the need to revert to the old system of 6-3-3-4, but with a modification that would include Early Childhood Education (ECE). In the manner of her predecessors, she also christened the system hence the name 1-6-3-3-4 (Vanguard Media [35]). This constant change of education policy has been source of worry to teachers.

According to VSO [36], teachers complained that Constant change of education ministers leads to constant change in education policy, which in practice is zero. Ministers are always changing, new policies are always made and teachers are just told and are expected to carry them out. Inconsistent and regular changes to education policies have caused havoc to the education sector and these changes are often not communicated to schools on time.

Implications for standard of education

The British system of education that was adopted by Nigerian Government during the post-colonial era emphasised religion rather than good moral conducts. The colonial education was at variance with the concept of education in Africa societies which emphasized love, care for one another and high morality. The teaching of good morals was part of our educational policy only in principle but instead religions were taught in our schools. According to Duze [12], the falling standard in education in Nigeria could be linked also to the lost glories of traditional education which inculcates among other things the very important values of hard-work, diligence, integrity, and high productivity. She stressed that when these are lacking in any production system, education inclusive, the results are often devastating leading especially to poor quality output and wastage which in themselves undermine capacity building and sustainable development. There is no respect for teachers and the school administration any longer, indiscipline among the students at all level of education has become the order of the day. Students are at liberty in the name of child/human rights. Teachers teach with fears of not been attacked by the students/parents and with little or no commitment. The consequence of this is falling in standard of education. Anho [9] puts it this way ‘the current educational administration and policies erode the powers of the secondary Staff to such degree that teachers are disempowered hence, indiscipline among students continues to gather momentum causing poor academic performances’.

Emphasis in paper certification was another area of Nigerian education policy that was inherited from the British educational system. According to Okolocha [28] the education reforms/policies of 1970s and 1980s which focused more on the acquisition of certificates instead of the needed vocational skills have caused many Nigerian youths and adults to move into the education industry in pursuit of certificates. As a result of this, the education industries grew rapidly in size in late 1970s and 80s. The growth, according to Teboho [32], was mainly in size and not in quality. Teboho [32] further stated that the education system of Nigeria and some other developing counties are still far from being ready for the challenges of preparing students for the contemporary global world. This emphasis on examination to judge educational results, performance and to obtain qualification for jobs in government and private sectors is still in use today. This is stated in the paragraph 28 of National Policy on Education 2004 as follows:

- a) The Junior School Certificate (JSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and examination conducted by state and federal examinations boards.
- b) The Senior School Certificate (SSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and a national examination.
- c) Nigeria shall use public examination bodies for conducting national examinations in order to ensure uniform standards at all level (FGN [15]).

The implication of the above is that for you to be accepted as Junior School/Senior School graduate, you must possess Junior School/Senior School certificate. Due to the emphasis on paper qualification and couple with lack of good moral upbringing and gross indiscipline in schools, students would want to get the certificate by all means. Hence they get involved in examination malpractices which are an evidence of falling in standard of education. Garba [15], stated that “due to emphasis on examination results and paper qualification as inherited from the colonial masters, the problem of examination malpractice is on the increase every year”.

Successful implementation of any curriculum depends on the cooperation of classroom teachers. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to involve teachers in policy formulation planning and development to facilitate successful implementation thereby improve the standard of education. Teachers possess firsthand knowledge of classroom teaching and learning, and their feedback and insights in curriculum decisions give rise to effective instruction. But unfortunately, according to VSO [36], teachers feel ill-informed on the matter of new policies on education, particularly in rural areas and they are expected to implement them with no prior notice and without proper information. Policies are put in place without prior notice or consultation, while communication is slow and inconsistent. Teachers and head teachers are often not familiar with all the new policies and reforms. This has serious impact on teachers’ levels of motivation and commitment to work.

Klein [19] argued, “Teachers have the real power to make or break decisions advocated at any level. Their decisions ultimately will determine the curriculum, regardless of all other levels of decision making’. Klein [19] stressed that if teachers are given an opportunity to be a part of decision-making processes that affect their

practice, they may be more inclined to implement the policies in their classrooms. This involvement is critical to the success of any policy. Equipping teachers to participate in the decision-making process not only prepares teachers to be better policy makers but also contributes to policy decisions that strengthen school and improve the quality and standard of education in Nigeria.

Adequate planning for implementation of education policy is very vital for the achievement of educational objectives. According to Corkery, Land, and Bossuyt, [11], lack of attention to implementation strategies during policy formulation results in shortages of required resources or an underestimation of the complexity of the policy. According to Egonmwan [13], policy formulation; implementation and monitoring are difficult in a situation where the policies and strategies for the implementation and monitoring are empirically not sound. Non-availability of committed and qualified teachers, lack of instructional materials that can facilitate good educational outcomes and lack of conducive learning environment that will make teaching and learning attractive to both the teachers and the students are the evidences of improper planning for implementation of education policy.

Research studies have shown that qualified teachers, availability of instructional materials and good and conducive school environment are necessary for the proper implementation of education policy and consequently high academic achievement of students (Akinfe, Olofinniyi and Fashiku, [7], and Akinsolu, [8]). Scarcity of these, according to Coombs [10], will constraint educational system from responding more fully to new demands.

It is obvious that education is not adequately funded in Nigeria. Students learn in dilapidated buildings without furniture to sit on, no functional libraries non laboratories, instructional materials such as textbooks are not available and no furniture for teachers to prepare for their lessons. Hence, in Nigeria, poor school environment, which has resulted from poor funding of education, has been one of the major problems to the achievement of the goals and objectives of education. Funding of education programmes, according to Akinditure, Ayodele and Osiki [6], was not only found to be inadequate, it was also based on the priority of the ruling government. Speaking at a forum on Education for All (EFA), Dr. Anwar Al-Said, head of the Education Unit of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, said in his report that political will is very crucial for any country to have its educational system improved and globally competitive (Neil [21]).

Research studies have shown that lack of political will has serious negative impact on the quality/standard of education in Nigeria. Gbenu [16] listed Inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities, teaching aids and instructional materials in schools, Poor remuneration of teachers and poor conditions of service which reduces their commitment to teaching and presence of a large number of untrained and unqualified teachers in the school system among others as challenges of quality/standard of education in Nigeria. All these are expected to be provided by the government at both federal and state level even before the implementation of education policy began.

Nigerian education system is characterised by constant change in educational policies. Educational policies have been changed over and over, even by the same leader in power. They have not always been given time to mature before their termination. The political climate in Nigeria has not been conducive enough to give room for continuity of good educational plan and policies because every successive political leader (civilian or military) wanted to be identified with new policies, thereby suspending the existing ones. According to Odukoya [23], frequent Changes in Policies, Politics and frequent changes in government tend to negatively affect the implementation of the National Policy on Education and consequently the standard of education.

Conclusion

The poor performance of the education sector in Nigeria, which is evident in the falling in standard of education and poor quality, has been attributed to ineffective implementation of education policy. This is engendered by the lapses in the education policy formulation process. These lapses include lack of indigenous education policy that takes into consideration cultural values and Nigerian environment, non-involvement of the stakeholders especially the teachers in the policy formulation process, lack of continuity of policy implementation whenever there is a change in government or administration and lack of political will by the government. These lapses have immense implications for every aspect of education (i.e the context, the input, the process and the outcome).

Recommendations:

Education has been described as the tool for human and society development and for education to carry out this assignment effectively; it must be of high quality and standard. It is therefore imperative to make these recommendations as if follow will lead to proper implementation of education policy and consequently improve the quality/standard of education in Nigeria.

Stakeholders, especially the teachers, must be involved in education policymaking, implementation and evaluation as a responsibility as well as a right. By listening to teachers, policy makers would receive first-hand information and experience from the grassroots that could help them tackle core issues in the education system – improve the standard and quality of Education. Stakeholders' involvement can be established through the formation of Education councils that will comprise of stakeholder, especially the teachers, and interest groups in education industry. These education councils will be national or state bodies that will be shadowed with the responsibility of providing their ministers and governments with policy advice on innovation in education policies.

Government should show better commitment to education by implementing the UNESCO recommendation of allocating 26 percent of total country annual budget to education. This will facilitate the procurement of all the necessary instructional materials and provision of conducive environment for proper teaching and learning. People with proven integrity should be appointed to handle education matters. Teachers should be motivated by improving their conditions of service through regular payment of salaries and promotions as at when due.

Adequate and efficient strategies for implantation of education policy must be put in place before the implementation begins. Adequate human and material resources that will ensure proper and result oriented implementation should be put in place. Well-trained teachers that are competent in the areas of subject matters and pedagogy should be employed and those who are in service should be regularly retrained and encouraged to go for seminars and conferences to update their knowledge.

Federal government should indigenised Nigeria educational system by formulating education policy that will take into consideration the cultural values, the peculiarities of the people and the Nigerian environment. In as much as the country is aspiring to meet up with general globalisation and specifically technological advancement, it is imperative to incorporate the Nigerian cultural values that emphasise the inculcation of good moral conduct and discipline. Failure to do this will reduce all the effort to meet up with globalisation to an effort in futility.

The efficacy of any policy cannot be ascertained until it is fully implemented to maturity or perhaps it is reviewed. The political leaders should stop politicising education in Nigeria and allow education policy that is in operation to be implemented to maturity. Evaluation of the policy should be carried out by experts to determine the alternative decisions to take. If in-depth evaluation of an education policy is carried out, the strength and weakness of such policy will be discovered and the right decisions concerning the policy will be taken.

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