

**POLICY SUMMERSAULT AND THE CHALLENGE OF
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA:
CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE**

Dr. Catherine Nkiruka Elechi
Department of Educational Foundations
Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Ebeano City,
PMB 01660 Enugu, Nigeria
08033634100
katelechi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Policy is a plan or course of action as of government, political party or business, intended to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters. Nigeria as a nation has set out its national goals which it believes to achieve using education as an instrument. This has led to the development of several educational policies ranging from UPE, NPE, UBE without achieving these goals. Any policy no matter how beautiful and well decorated will be a mere window dressing without appropriate implementation in order to achieve its goals. This paper examines the incidence of educational policies in Nigeria and the challenges to educational development. It examined the development and implementation of these policies and some problems associated with policy implementation in Nigeria. It also highlights on charting charting a course for the future. Certain recommendations were made which included that Educational policies should be made implementable, government should set out adequate machines for proper implementation of policies.

Introduction

Nigeria as a developing nation requires functional education to accelerate her development both economically, technologically and otherwise. That is why Fashina in Akindutire and Ayodele (2011) believed that education has or ought to have as its goals the liberation of the people, the construction of a free and non-exploitative society where human beings can realize their potentials. Over the past decades, policy makers at all levels of education system have expressed growing interest in measures to improve the quality of education in Nigeria.

Prior to independence of Nigeria in 1960, the British colonial education in Nigeria was the 8-5-2-3 system of education, eight years in primary school, five years in secondary school, two years in higher school and three years in the university. Apart from the fact that this system laid emphasis on academic, the educational opportunity within the system was restricted especially on the upper level of the system (Nwangwu, 2003). It was British grammar system of education trans-imposed in Nigeria without due consideration to the needs, interests environment and aspirations of the country. According to Ibukun and Aboluwodi (2010) the colonial education which was inherited by Nigeria was criticized for being too theoretical to be able to make meaningful impact on the life of Nigerians. Subjects taught in schools reflected the taste of the colonial education officials. It encouraged rote learning and rote do not produce critical mind. Arie in Nwangwu (2003) noted that memorizing factual information contributes little to the intellectual development of the learner and does little to improve his ability to solve problems, instead modern views of education lay emphasis on inquiry, discovery, problem solving, higher mental functions, synthesis and creativity.

In view of this, government in Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance within the realities of our environment and modern world. It was partly the above observation and partly to assert our educational independence that culminated in the 1969 conference to fashion out curriculum that responds to the needs of Nigerian society. After the national curriculum conference organized by Nigerian Educational Research council (NERC) now Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), a seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria was convened in 1973. The seminar which included voluntary agencies and external bodies deliberated on what a national policy on education for an independent and sovereign Nigeria should be.

The first major basic educational policy embarked upon by Nigeria government was the Universal Primary Education (UPE). This was sequel to the assembly of Heads of State of Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) that met in Addis Ababa in 1961, Avosch in Nwangwu (2003). These heads of state realizing the importance of education in the development of Africa formulated explicit and specific educational goals.

It is pertinent to mention that the first attempt to introduce UPE in Nigeria dates back to 1955 when the then Western region under the Action group government launched a scheme for the provision of six year free education for the children in the region within school age of 6-12 years. This was followed suit by the Eastern region in 1957.

In view of the fact that attempts to develop an educational plan for an independent Nigeria had been put in place and still the country and her educational system are still facing major challenges, this paper examines the educational policies, challenges to educational development and how to chart a course for the future.

Policy Making and Implementation

Policy is a familiar concept used on daily basis by virtually everybody. However, owing to the diversity of circumstances in which the term is applied, coupled with the fact that human beings by nature vary in their perception of things, there is a variety of meanings attached to the concept.

A policy is a plan or course of action as of government, political party or business, intended to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters (the free dictionary.com) policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve national outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent, and is implemented as a procedure or protocol. The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, as well as individuals (Wikipedia).

Policy is used mainly in reference to what government does in order to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry. This could be in form of actions taken in the course of distributing, regulating and redistributing resources in the society. However, these actions do not necessarily have to emanate exclusively from the government, as the citizenry can initiate them as well. Nevertheless, these peoples initiatives would have to be acted upon by the government before such actions could be appropriately labelled as public policy (Dlakwa in Philip and Peter 2013). The concept therefore is central to government, private organizations and individuals. When policy is considered on the platform of education, a nations policy on education could be defined as the

government official statement on national goals and the procedures for achieving same using education as an instrument (Nwangwu, 2003).

In a developing nation like Nigeria, public policy is very critical since it is the springboard for channeling development. In the Nigerian context however, more often than not public policies are easily made but the issue of proper implementation remains a great question to be answered.

Policy Summersault and the Challenge of Educational Development in Nigeria

Over the years, Nigeria as a nation has had several policies on education, in a bid to have a functional education that will make its citizens self-reliant and useful members of the society. The policies range from the colonial era, the 8-5-2-3 system, Universal Primary Education (UPE), National Policy on Education (NPE) known as 6-3-3-4 system to Universal Basic Education (UBE). The UPE was perhaps the first major basic educational policy embarked upon by Nigeria government. This was sequel to the assembly of Heads of State of Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) at Addis Ababa in 1961. The conference picked 1980 as a target year for all African countries to attain UPE. In response to this conference, Nigeria launched UPE in September 6th 1976.

No matter how well a policy is formulated, unless the implementation is well articulated and coordinated, the policy is bound to fail. By the time the nation put in motion the machinery for implementation of UPE in 1976, the programme was confronted with problems that led to its collapse. According to Nwangwu (2003), there was an apparent lack of readiness, adequate and reliable projections on the part of the government. The collapse of UPE led to the emergence of 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1977 known as the NPE.

The genesis of the National Policy on Education could be traced to the proceedings and recommendations of the 1969 national curriculum conference. The policy provided that the first six years in primary school will be for general basic education. The tracking starts in junior secondary school where general education with pre-vocational subjects like metal works, typing and shorthand, automobile work, woodwork etc are introduced alongside with other subjects. At the end of junior secondary education, it is expected that those who are technically inclined must have acquired enough skills to be employable. The remaining three years which constitute the senior secondary education are for those who are academically oriented. It is also expected that at the end of studies at this level, students will be employable and/or continue at tertiary institutions. The next level is university education which lasts for four years.

According to Akudolu (2012), the NPE is the pivot of curriculum development in the country. It specifies the type and quality of instruction that should be provided so as to help learners at all levels of education to achieve the aims of permanent literacy, numeracy and effective citizenship. In this regard, curriculum development has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. The outcome of the seminar was a draft document which, after due comments were received from the states and other interest groups led to the final document, the National Policy on Education (NEP) first published in 1977 otherwise known as the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

The NPE since its inception has 2nd, 3rd and 4th editions in order to accommodate some policy innovations and changes. These innovations include:

- The lifting of the suspension order on open and Distance learning programme by government.
- Revitalization and expansion of the National Mathematical Centre (NMC).
- Establishment of Teachers Registration Council (TRC).
- Introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) into the school system.
- Prescription of French language in the primary and secondary school curriculum as a second official language.
- Prescription of minimum number of subjects to be taken by SSCE candidates.
- The integration of basic education in the programme of Quaranic schools, to ensure equal opportunity and effective implementation of UBE.
- Repositioning science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national education for optimum performance.
- General contextual change to reflect the state of professional practice in education, among others.

According to Odukoya (2009) for thirty years, the nation has been unable to successfully implement the NPE. The policy which came into existence in 1977 after four (4) years of deliberations at various levels appeared to have solutions to virtually all core educational problems. However, there are apparent serious problems in the area of implementation.

- i. In section 1 sub-section 5, the NPE states that Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen. It further stressed the

full integration of the individual into the community and the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. With an estimated human population of 140,003,542, illiteracy is still as high as 60% (Odukoya, 2009). There are thousands of educated but unemployed Nigerian youths who cannot pay taxes. These people cannot be described in the words of NPE as effective citizens.

- ii. Policy on Language: The policy talks about the importance of language. It says “government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interactions and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus every Nigerian child shall learn the language of the immediate environment.” In the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. French shall be a second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in schools.”

Thirty years after, French is only being learnt in a few public/private primary and secondary schools. Many Nigerian schools have no French teachers.

- iii. Policy on Pre-primary Education: This has also been poorly implemented. The policy states that “The responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number and supervise and control the quality of such institutions.

It is observed that only few tertiary institutions are offering courses in early-childhood education to produce adequate number of teachers at this level.

- iv. Policy on Teachers’ Registration Council (TRC): The NPE suggested that there should be TRC. Between 1977 and 1993 nothing was done to establish the TRC. In 1993 Decree 31 established the council. For another six years nothing was done to implement the provision of the Decree until 1999 when the first Registrar and Chief Executive of the council was appointed. To date only few teachers have been registered while many still do not know of its existence.

Other policies include; policy on Nomadic education, policy on mass literacy, adult and non-formal Education, policy on science and technology, policy on technical colleges and differential remuneration for graduates of polytechnics and universities, policy on private universities, policy of ICT.

Politics and frequent changes in government tend to negatively affect the implementation of NPE. Few years after independence, Nigeria has passed through different regimes. Each regime had their own conceptions and policies on education that they tried to implement during their own tenure. With such instability in the system of governance, one should not be surprised at the level of the crises the nations education system has witnessed over the years and the inconsistency and often contradictory nature of the educational policies and practices. It is one step forward and two steps backwards.

Presently, the Nigerian government has come up with another system of education tagged 9-3-4 system known as Universal Basic Education (UBE). The last one known as 6-3-3-4 was never fully implemented and now the 9-3-4 system.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is a nine (9) year basic educational programme, which was launched and executed by the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. Former president Olusegu Obasanjo flagged off UBE on 30th September 1999 in Sokoto. The UBE programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UBE Bill was signed into law on 26th May 2004. The UBE Act 2004 makes provision for basic education comprising Early childhood care education, six year primary education, three (3) year junior secondary education.

The objectives of UBE include:

1. Ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education.
2. The provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
3. Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
4. Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying solid foundation for life-long learning (UBEC).

The next programme in support of the 9-3-4 system to help in eradication of illiteracy is the Back to school programme in the South-East geopolitical zone Nigeria which was launched by the former government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Statistics showed that in the South-East Nigeria, boys were dropping out of school. Here the Back o School Programme (otherwise called Mmuta bu

Ike) was launched with fanfare. The overall objective of the programme was to get the boys back to the classroom instead of trading.

Three years down the line, not much has been heard of the policy. It is indeed doubtful if the present government of General Mohammed Buhari will have anything to do with it.

Correspondingly in the North the Almajiri school was targeted at getting children out of the streets, clear beggars and make them more responsible to the society. Beautiful policy no doubt, but the implementation and sustenance of the policy will be another question to answer.

Problems of Policy Implementation

It has been observed that despite the lofty and painstaking policies usually formulated in Nigeria, little or no tangible outcome have been achieved as they always tend to fall by the wayside. This is because the critical elements in both the internal and external environments and the implementation process account for the gap between goals and achievements. Nigeria has never lacked in planning but the problem has always been achieving results.

A lot of factors account for the implementation problems in Nigeria; they include

- Inadequate data
- Over-ambitious policy goals
- Policy instability
- Compromise and conflict during implementation
- Corruption
- Political instability
- Inadequate monitoring and evaluation machineries at local, state and federal level.

Charting a Course for the Future

Any policy no matter how beautiful and well decorated will be a mere window dressing without appropriate implementation. The cardinal problem of educational development in Nigeria is that we are long on policy but short on implementation. And the first roadmap to any successful educational policy will lie on the stability of the policy. Our educational policies must also be implementable.

In charting a course for the future, we must think of technical education. In countries all over the world from US to UK to Canada, emphasis is on technical education, the capacity to

develop the individual to be self-reliant. It is this middle level manpower that is driving the economics of all the developed world. According to Akudolu (2012) the breath-taking developments in information and communication technology with the resulting digital revolution have launched the world into the knowledge economy in which ideas and technology are used to promote socio-economic development through the generation and exploitation of knowledge.

Consequently, educations is all over the world are making frantic efforts to realign educational endeavours to equipping learners with the necessary skills and competencies for effective life in a knowledge dominated society. Since Nigeria philosophy of education presents education as an instrument for national development, curriculum development in Nigeria should be aimed at transporting the country from the old, industrial economy to the new knowledge-based economy.

To achieve this goal of education requires a paradigm shift from the present time bound model of education to a lifelong model of education. This is the model of education that is aimed at developing in the learner the ability to effectively create, acquire, use and transmit knowledge for the promotion of human activities in a knowledge dominated society. In this regard, emphasis in instructional aims is shifting from the acquisition of factual knowledge to the acquisition of tacit knowledge and generic skills while that of the instructional process is shifting from teaching for examination to teaching how to learn, how to communicate and how to perform effectively in a team work. By implication, curriculum development for a knowledge-based economy is based on the development of basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), thinking skills, interpersonal management and communication skills, social competencies and other personal qualities such as “responsibility; self-esteem, self-management and integrity” (Stinson in Akudolu, 2012). Obanya in Akudolu (2012) also expressed a similar view when he summarized the core generic skills curriculum requirements for the knowledge-based economy as knowledge, communication skills, adaptability, creativity, team spirit, literacy, ICT-fluency and life-long as well as life-wide learning.

The development of these 21st century required skills and competencies constitute a divining force for the emergent trend in the aim of education which is the preparation of learners for effective life in a knowledge-based economy that is known for its networked and volatile characteristics. The quest for the achievement of this aim of education in different learning contexts in Nigeria is resulting in the emerging issues in curriculum development in the country.

These issues among others are curriculum development in Education for peace, education for global citizenship, electronic learning, teacher education, gender studies as well as diversification and enrichment of learning content.

These issues need to be well addressed by policy makers and strategies for the implementation should be put in place. As earlier stated, our educational policies must be implementable. It is now left for the government to set in motion all machineries for proper implementation of our educational policies.

Conclusion

Education is an instrument for national development. Every nation requires functional education to accelerate her development and that is why policy makers at all levels of education system have expressed growing interest in measures to improve the quality of education. In Nigeria, government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individuals and those of the society in consonance with the realities of our environment and modern world.

Any policy no matter how beautiful and well decorated will be a mere window dressing without appropriate implementation. The cardinal problem of educational development in Nigeria is that we are long on policy but short on implementation. And the first roadmap to any successful educational policy will lie on the stability of the policy.

Recommendation

Based on this paper on policy summersault and challenge to educational development in Nigeria, it is recommended that

1. Any educational policy not fashioned after our needs and does not take the culture of the people into consideration should be discontinued.
2. Provision of qualitative education should be made compulsory and entrenched into the constitution in order to encourage result-oriented implementation.
3. Educational policies should be made implementable.
4. Government should set out adequate machineries for proper implementation of policies.
5. Sustained political and eradication of corruption are necessary for effective policy implementation.
6. Government should put in more efforts to Teacher education.

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