

# Prospects and Challenges of Implementing Student Friendly Educational Policies in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study examined prospects and challenges of implementing student friendly educational policies in secondary schools in Nigeria. A policy is a plan of action or principle to be taken by individual, groups or government aimed at achieving set out goals. It is a plan of action, statement that governs the operation of education systems in a state or country. The Educational Policy in Nigeria is documented in a book called the National Policy on Education, which enumerates the guideline, objectives, structures, standards, strategies and management for achieving the national education goals in Nigeria. This paper focused on the challenges and prospects of implementation of educational policy such as digital infrastructure, digital library service, blended-learning, utilization of Artificial Intelligence, and Skill development. Some of the challenges facing policy implementation and planning include; inadequate funding, poor policy articulation or formulation, poor relationship between the educational policy designer and policy implementers and amongst others. The prospects include that government should increase the funding of education sector to at least 26% recommendation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) allocation of a country's budget to education.

**Keywords:** Policy, Implementation, Utilization, Educational Policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

A Policy is a plan of action or principle to be taken by individual, groups or government aimed at achieving set out goals. It specifies the line of action or proposed line of action in relation to certain activity areas. Government while discharging its constitutional responsibilities formulates and implements various policies in different areas of governance. These include: transportation policy, health policy, education policy, water resources policy, housing policy, agricultural policy, and urban renewal policy among others.

Educational policies are the principles and government policy-making in educational sphere, as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems (Nweke et al, 2021). Education policy can directly affect the education of people engage at all levels of education. Examples of subjects areas considered while planning education policy, include school size, class size, school choice, school privatization, tracking, teacher education

and certification, teacher payment of salaries, wages, allowances, teaching methods, curricular contents, graduation requirements, school infrastructure investment, and the values that schools are expected to uphold and model. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) stresses that educational policy consists of the principles and government policies in the educational sphere as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. This implies that every modern society needs some educational policies to guide it in the process of such initiation towards achieving the purpose and objectives for which educational institutions were established.

Educational policies are designed and formulated to improve the quality of education, and to address educational challenges, and designed to provide access to quality education. The Nigerian government attached great importance to educational policies due to its relevance which include the provision of sound knowledge to the citizens for adaptation into the larger society. Ibrahim (2018) submits that the development of any nation and its achieving greatness depends largely on the development and the effectiveness of implementing appropriate education policies. For this reason, most governments all over the world placed much emphasis on educational policies as instruments of national development. In the Nigerian context, despite the importance attached to education policy development, certain challenges affect the implementation of the education policies which adversely affects academic excellence.

Education is the foundation for improving individual's life and sustaining national development.

It contributes immensely to the wealth of any nation by increasing the productive capacity of the individuals. Through the school system, an individual acquire formal education by improving knowledge and developing skills. It is a veritable tool for national development, empowers people and strengthens nations. According to FRN (2013), education is an investment per excellence in achieving the developmental goals of the nation. For this reason, every government rises with its goals and aspirations. The school serves as a veritable instrument for the propagation and realization of such vision. The educational system in Nigeria has been made to take responsibility of creating awareness of the relationship between citizens and the authorities and also of rights and obligations.

Thus, there is need for continuous control and restructuring of the school system by different political power at one time or the other and for the one reason or the other. These goals and changes are readily translated into policies released as government White Papers. To this end, the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977, has been revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2013 and 2014 respectively. Each of the editions introduced one form of change or another at one level of the education system or the other. In response to the National Policy on Education, secondary education has undergone more of curricula and less structural changes. It has effected changes from a 7-5-2-3 to 6-5-2-3 to a 6-3-3-4 and now a 9-3-4 structure. Under the 7-5-2-3 structures, the country operated a five years of secondary schools with two years of higher school (A' level). Similarly, under the 6-5-2-3 structures, secondary schools remained five-year programme. The major structural change came with the 6-3-3-4 system in which secondary education is given two stages of 3 years, Junior secondary school and 3 years senior

secondary school. This policy formulation is yet to address the need of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Student Need in the Educational Policy**

Students today have several needs that will help them participate actively and learn easily in order to improve their performance. Such needs include:

#### **i. Digital Infrastructure**

Infrastructures are the basic facilities and installations that necessary in achieving educational goals in the needs 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the view of Aralu and Adetimirin (2014), digital infrastructure comprises hardware or equipment, software applications and devices associated with Information and Communication Technology including network infrastructure, computer infrastructure, internet service provider (ISP), bandwidth, policy framework, security infrastructure among others. Digital infrastructure foster opportunities for teachers to integrating digital technology in teaching and learning processes, such as computers, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Labs/Multimedia Centre, Interactive Whiteboard, Interactive Projector, Digital Podium, Digital Library and Automation of Libraries, Wi-Fi Campus, E-diary, Educational Games, Classroom Activity Management Software, Cloud-based E-learning Initiatives and audio/visual capabilities are said to have made great impact in teaching and learning.

#### **ii. Digital Library Services**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century education need digital library in order to attain global best practices. Abdullahi, Gbaje and Mohammed (2015) define a digital library as a digital repository for collection of digital objects that can include text, visual material, audio material, video material, stored as electronic media formats (as opposed to print, micro form, or other media), along with means for organizing, storing, and retrieving the files and media contained in the library collection. Digital libraries can vary immensely in size and scope, which can be maintained by individuals, organizations, or affiliated with established physical library buildings or institutions, or with academic institutions. These services can be carried out through library website, online library catalogue, on-line reference materials, online databases, electronic magazine and journals, electronic books, online librarian question services and so on.

#### **iii. Blended Learning**

Blended learning as a method of instruction that combines online with face to face learning activities that are integrated in a planned, pedagogically valuable way and where some of the face to face is replaced by online activities. Blended learning is a new type of education prepared for a certain group by combining the positive aspects of different learning approaches. Blended learning will provide a big convenience for the course to achieve its target by combing the face to face interaction in traditional learning and time; place and material richness provided by web-based learning (Abidoye et al., 2015). According to Abdulkareem (2016) blended learning is the

combining of two different education models, traditional face to face learning and electronic learning to smooth the progress of teaching and learning objective. The integration of online learning using the computer and face-to-face classroom learning may enhance the students' interest to learn as well as to motivate them in achieving the goal in education (Aziz et al., 2021). This implies that teaching materials such as videos, notes, online learning discussion, and online quizzes in the online learning platform could improve the students' ability to comprehend the topic taught by the teachers. Blended learning has been widely adopted across higher education with some scholars referring to it as the "new traditional model" (Bryan, et al., 2016) pointed out that blended learning can be implemented in the education sector using a diverse range of models such as face-to-face driver, online lab, online driver, self-blended, and station rotation.

In addition, Al-drees, et al. (2015) mentioned that, blended learning contributes to the development of interpersonal and communication skills, presentation skills, promote self-directed learning. Overall, it enhances students' enthusiasm and motivation. Porter, et al. (2016) believed that before adopting blended learning, educators reported concerns with regard to decreasing the quality of student interaction, the lack of time to prepare online content and activities, and the difficulty of dealing with online interactions.

#### **iv. Utilization of Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence is a computer system with the ability to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings. It is a scientific discipline; as the activity that creates machines that can function appropriately and with foresight in their environment (Tuomi, 2018). Artificial Intelligence enables new ways of learning, teaching and education, and it also changes the society in ways that pose new challenges for educational institutions. It may amplify skill differences and polarize jobs, or it may equalize opportunities for learning. The use of Artificial Intelligence in education could generate insights on how learning happens, and it can change the way learning is assessed. It could re-organize classrooms or make them obsolete; it can increase the efficiency of teaching. Artificial Intelligence education technology that simulates the process of one-to-one teaching by teachers to students and gives the learning system personalized teaching capabilities (Kakish et al, 2018).

#### **v. Skills Development**

Students need the development of the following skills.

##### **Critical Thinking Skills**

The acquisition of critical thinking skill is essential for students to become more fair-minded and innovative thinkers in the future. Students need experience that will make them successful and contribute favourably in their society. The development and utilization of critical thinking and decision-making skills is of great importance to building a strong foundation for pupils to analyse new knowledge and generate multiple ways for problem-solving (Hokanson, et al, 2015). This means possessing critical thinking and decision-making skills will make them to try new things without too much fear of failure, solve problems, reach out to friends, and to manage

problems they are likely to meet in the society. Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) define critical-thinking skills are about using various forms of reason, such as inductive and deductive, analyzing how parts of a whole interact with each other, evaluating major points of view, and reflecting critically on learning experiences and processes.

Moreover, critical thinking skills is understood as the individual ability to inquiry, verify, and evaluate any phenomenon in a thoughtful way before making any decision. These may include skills for identification of the elements, evaluation of assumptions and arguments, classification and interpretations of expressions and ideas, analysis and synthesis, drawing arguments, inferences, and conclusions. In a nutshell, critical thinking is a kind of higher order thinking skill in which individuals demonstrate their abilities to scientifically and thoughtfully evaluate a phenomenon from different perspectives and in different contexts in order to make a final effective decision. These abilities require people to possess a range of skills such as questioning, inquiry, evaluation, and decision making (Masa, 2014). As critical thinking is an active and purposeful thinking process that requires one to consider and evaluate carefully any phenomenon before making any decision, it requires thinking skills. Showing mastery in skills of investigation, analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization and evaluation is crucial to critical thinkers, as they use meta-cognition skills to evaluate, make decisions, and successfully solve problems.

### **Communication Skills**

Communication skill involves listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. Effective communication always makes teaching and learning easier and understandable. According to Andrade (2015), communication is a dominant factor affecting the academic achievements of the students. Furthermore, he argued that good communication is not only important to a teacher, but also very important to students' for promoting their academic performance. Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) communication skills entail being able to articulate ideas and thoughts effectively through oral, written, and nonverbal methods, possess the ability to decipher meaning through listening, using communication for a range of purposes and being able to converse in diverse environments. However, maintaining an environment where pupils feel comfortable participating in the learning process, involving pupils in debate, guiding them in meaningful discussion provide them with opportunity to practice their communication skills (NDT, 2018). Adeoti and Adeoye (2012) assert that teachers can promote communication skills through discussion, debate, oral presentations and role play activities.

### **Collaboration Skills**

Education ought to help the child to understand his or herself better in terms of self-perception, self-awareness, self-actualization and self-worth. This knowledge of self should not isolate the child because no one is an island. Therefore, it becomes necessary to endow the child with collaborative skills that can enhance favourable and positive interpersonal relationship. Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) state that collaboration skills as the ability to work effectively and respectfully within a team, the willingness to compromise to accomplish a goal,

and assume shared responsibility. When teachers did not focus instructions on building students collaborative skills, they find it difficult to participate in collaborative work. The neglect to instruct pupils in essential collaborative skills is the reason for the obstacles to the process of collaboration. Pupils' lack of collaborative skill has prevented them from working productively in groups. Teachers lack the collaborative objectives and credible instruments to assess collaborative skills seen to contribute to undesired learning outcome of collaboration (Kontrouba, et al., 2012). This indicates that group work helps to develop collaborative skills and social interactions as well as to achieve deeper learning theme covered in the class.

Alison (2011) identified that students who participate in collaborative learning get better grades, are more satisfied with their education and are more likely to remain in school till the completion of the school courses. This implies that collaborative learning environment helps students to learn more actively and effectively. In the view of Ha Le and Theo (2018), insufficient attention of teachers to organizing collaborative work such as determining group norms and facilitating activities in the classroom have hindered the development of collaborative skills. School teachers often place students in groups and let them work together without preparing them to perform collaborative activities productively. Therefore, educational policy in Nigeria should address students' need of collaborative skills.

### **Creativity Skills**

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) define creativity skill refers to using a wide range of idea creation techniques, such as brainstorming, creating new and worthwhile ideas, being able to analyze and evaluate original ideas and working creatively with others. According to Fasko cited in Ossai et al (2017) opine that creativity is a thinking skill that can be developed through training after the identification of the characteristics traits possessed by the individual. Creativity is the entire process by which ideas are generated, developed and transformed into values (Ossai et al, 2017). As suggested by Humes (2011), teach students way of exploring for themselves in their lessons can be a useful means of developing creative skills. Therefore, teachers need to provide students with time to learn how to think and explore new ways of doing things. Creativity skill provides opportunities for pupils to explore, concentrate and reflect on materials that they are learning and to make connection between the lessons and contents (Turner, 2013). This requires teachers to perform a crucial role in developing and nurturing creativity in their lessons and amongst their pupils. Moreover, creativity skill can be developed in students when teachers ask them to represent information in their own ways using pictures and gathering them into separate work groups, to sit and create different type of dynamics.

### **Digital Problem-Solving Skills**

Problem-solving refers to a process of taking corrective measures to meet objectives and achieve desired outcomes. Digital problem-solving is the ability to use digital technology to identify needs and resources to make decisions on the attainment of goals and objectives. Digital problem-solving competence can have a positive effect on the development of digital competences through helping teachers identify the correct digital tools needed to reach their

instructional objectives as well as enhance their ability to use digital tools in order to solve conceptual and technical problems (Iordache, et al, 2017). In this regard, Ferrari (2013) identifies problem-solving competence as the ability to identify digital needs and resources, make informed decisions on most appropriate digital tools according to the purpose or need, solve conceptual problems through digital means, creatively use technologies, and solve technical problems, update own and other's competencies.

### **Challenges Facing Implementation and Planning of Educational Policy**

There various challenges facing implementation and planning of educational policy in Nigeria.

They include:

#### **i. Inadequate Funding**

Inadequate funding is one of the major problems facing both the planning and implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for education is very poor that it cannot be used to implement the various educational policies in the educational sector, which has resulted to educational unions embarking on strike actions.

#### **ii. Poor Policy Formulation**

Poor policy articulation or formulation is another problem responsible for the poor implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. This is due to poor capacity of educational policy designers and lack of exposure to new approaches and methods of formulating policies. Ogunode (2020) observed that Federal Government is poor in articulating its educational policies. If the educational policies is not properly formulated or articulated, it will be difficult to implement the policies.

#### **iii. Poor Relationship between Policy Designer and Policy Implementer**

The poor relationship between the educational policy designer and policy implementers is another factor responsible for poor implementation of education policies in the Nigerian educational sector. Educational policy designer formulated the education policies without the involvement of the implementers. The implementers lack the technicality and methodologies and approaches adopted in developing the educational policies. So, the implementation of such educational policies will be very difficult since they are out of the plan actions.

### **CONCLUSION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century education has placed much demand on the policy planners and implementers to look inward and adapt to the new changes. Therefore, educational policy must be holistic to address the needs of student in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education, which will lead to the development of the nation. Student needs in the educational policy such as digital infrastructure, digital library service, blended-learning, utilization of Artificial Intelligence, and Skill development were emphasized. Some of the challenges facing policy implementation and planning such as

inadequate funding, poor policy articulation or formulation, poor relationship between the educational policy designer and policy implementers were also discussed.

### **Prospects of Implementation**

The following prospects of implementation of educational policy need to be considered.

1. The government should increase the funding of education sector to at least 26% recommendation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) allocation of a country's budget to education.
2. Educational policy makers should be diversified to include core skills needed for students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which will not only give ample opportunities to students and teachers to search for information, practice what they have learnt, explore ideas and actively engage in learning that contribute to development and nation building.
3. The government and other stakeholders in education should improve the standard of education system by adapting to new technologies that could make teaching and learning more meaningful.
4. The government and other stakeholders in education should ensure that the needed educational infrastructure for the 21<sup>st</sup> century students is made available in schools, and teachers are trained on the effective use of such infrastructure.

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