

# Implementation of Curriculum Policies at the Basic Education Level in Nigeria: A Panacea for Meeting the Needs of Contemporary Society

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## Abstract

Education is the instrument for human development. This has been the case since the formulation of the first National Development Plan that covered the post-independence period of 1962 – 1968. Besides, the focus of Nigeria’s educational policy on provision of formal education to every school level of gave rise to the introduction of the Universal Basic Education Programme in 1999. This belief was embodied in the National Policy in Education (FRN, 2014) that stipulated curriculum policies at the basic education level in Nigeria, therefore, the paper examined the concepts of implementation, curriculum, policy and Basic Education. It also examined the curriculum policies and provisions in basic education in Nigeria. The paper further discussed the problems of implementation of curriculum policies and provisions in basic education, as well as the way forward. Finally, the paper recommended that implementation of policy could meet vast needs of the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Implementation, Curriculum, Policies, Basic education, Society

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education represents a culminating point in the formulation of Nigeria’s education policy. Basic education features prominently in its 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (2014). Even before the detailed treatment in the policy document, it is made an item that provides that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities based on the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens at the primary as well as the secondary and tertiary levels. The National Policy on education provides for basic in a variety of forms for all citizens.

In this way, the current National Policy on Education goes beyond the formulation and enactment phase to the stage of curriculum structure and implementation. The goals of Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) are to:

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and literacy;
2. Providing free and compulsory, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
3. Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life-skills for laying a solid foundation lifelong learning;

4. Ensuring acquisition of ethical, moral and civic values through teaching of religion and national values;
5. Reducing drastically the incidence of early leaving from the formal school system;
6. Category for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches;
7. Provision of basic education that is relevant, dynamic, and global standard that will ensure socio-economic and national development of the country; and
8. Ensure that learners at the basic education level receive well rounded education.  
As a follow-up to the provision on the Basic Education curriculum, the structure of the

Basic Education curriculum was revised to cover three levels as follows:

- a. Lower Basic Education curriculum (Basic 1 – 3) for primary 1 – 3 (age 6 – 8 years);
- b. Middle Basic Education curriculum (Basic 4 – 6) for primary 4 – 6 (age 9 – 11); and
- c. Upper Basic Education curriculum (Basic 7 – 9)

For junior secondary school (J.S.S. 1 – 3) age 12 – 14, although, the policy provisions and curriculum structure for Basic Education are laudable, there are challenges that posed bottleneck to the implementation. Thus, in this paper the implementation issues of Basic Education curriculum in Nigeria are examined.

## CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

### a. Implementation

Implementation according to Ogunode et al (2020) is the systematic ways of carrying out policies and programmes with the aim of achieving the objectives of the programme. Ogunode et al (2020) further stressed that it is the act of executing organized plans and programmes within a time frame with the objective of realizing the aims of the projects or programmes. Implementation ensures that actions, plans, policies and programmes are carried out or specified. It is the transformation of education plan or policy into action. The implementation of BEC started in 2005. The BEC was approved by the National Council of Education (NCE) in 2005. Therefore, curriculum implementation is the translation of what has already been documented theoretically into practiced term (Oviawe, 2017). It is putting curriculum into concrete works for actual performance for the achievement of the goals for which curriculum is designed (Adeniyi, 2015).

### b. Curriculum

Etymological, the word curriculum comes from the Latin Word Curere, which means racetracks, racecourse, where race course is a track competition must follow to reach the expected destination in order to be rewarded. Eya (2009) conceived curriculum as a sequence of potential experiences designed by the school for the children and youths to be disciplined in-groups ways of thinking and acting. This view presents curriculum as the totality of all the experiences of the learner in school. In this regard, Agina – Obu (2016) referred that curriculum is a vehicle through which the school strives towards the achievement of educational goals whether they are those of the nation, state, local government or even community. This suggests that curriculum generally includes education and the activities that are planned to occur in school for which the school has the social responsibility. Therefore, curriculum is whatever is successfully conveyed to different degrees to different students by committed teachers using appropriate materials and actions of legitimated bodies of knowledge, skills, taste and property to set and reset, which are chosen for instruction after a series of re-election and command decision by those concerned. The definitions of curriculum generally include education and the activities that are planned to occur in school for which the school has the social responsibility. The activities according to Agina – Obu (2016:24, 25) are;

- Curriculum as a syllabus
- Curriculum as a list of subjects
- Curriculum as a teaching scheme
- Curriculum as broad – based experiences.

### **c. Policy**

It may be seen as decision governing objectives and the method of administration by which the operations of an organization are conducted (Adiele, 2020). Adiele (2020) further stressed that policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve natural outcomes, a statement of intent, implemented as a procedure or protocol. In this regard, Adiele et al (2017) presented educational policy as legal instrument that defines the goals and also provide guidelines for educational activities and practices vital for effective educational planning. Educational policy is operational guidelines which provide firm bases that will enable management, staff, and professionals to carry out government expectations of the school system along professional course of action. Terry in Okeroma (2006) considered policy as an overall guide that gives the general limits and direction in which administrative action will take place. He stressed that policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made but does not give the decision.

Moreover, Ikelogbe in Mukoro (2021) declared policy as the integrated course and programmes of action that government has set and the framework or guide it has designed to direct action and practices in certain problem area. In this regard, educational policies are initiatives mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system (Okeroma, 2006). This explains the general importance of educational policies and the need to ensure their careful formulation and implementation. Therefore, policies exist in virtually all areas and aspects of education, including size, minimum teaching qualification, medium of instruction, assessment of learning outcomes, funding of education, structure of educational system, governorship of schools, women education, admission into government-owned institutions, gifted and talented children education, curriculum, among others (Enyi, 2002). It suggests, therefore, that educational policy is a way of bringing sanity in our educational system by taking deliberate actions and decisions to address various educational issues and problems (Mukoro, 2021).

### **d. Basic Education**

The search for the real meaning of Basic Education continued worldwide until the famous Jomitiem World Conference on Education for all held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, where it was recommended that basic education should not be considered as a static term, but as a process to be determined by every nation according to her evolutionary development needs (Fowowe & Ishola, 2008). The Declaration and framework for Action emanating from the conference did not define basic education in terms of years of schooling rather it saw it as a close articulation of the formal, non-formal and informal approaches to and mechanism for the awakening and all round development of the human potential. Hence, in 1992 the scope of basic education in Nigeria was expanded to include pre-primary, primary, the first three years of secondary education (i.e. Junior Secondary School), mass literacy for adolescents, adults and women's education (Okoro, 2000). According to Mukoro (2021) the National Policy on Education presented Basic Education to cover Early Child Cared Development and Education, Pre-primary Education, Primary Education and Junior Secondary Education.

The Basic Education Programme in Nigeria according to Meduewesi in Fowowe and Ishola (2008) is aimed at equipping every individual child youth and adult with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable him or her develop to his or her fullest capacity, derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from his/her membership of the society and fulfil his or her civic obligation.

## Curriculum Policies and Provisions in Basic Education

The curriculum covers a period of 9 years of continuous schooling (i.e. 6 years primary and 3 years of JSS). These were done to make the country's educational system functional to enable it square up to the rapidly changing world particularly in the attainment of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For instance, the primary science and integrated science is now known as Basic Science and Technology, which cater adequately for the higher studies by providing a solid foundation on which to build upon and to inculcate in the child skills to face the challenges and possible hazards of the future. In each of the three levels, there were about twelve compulsory core subjects with one elective subject. English Studies, Mathematics, Social Studies, Civic Education, Computer Studies, Health and Physical Education, Religious Studies as well as French are among the compulsory subjects. Table 1 represent the new basic education curriculum for the primary and junior secondary schools.

**Table 1: Structure of the New BEC**

BEC Levels	Compulsory Core	Elective Subject
Lower BEC (Primary 1-3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. One major Nigeria LANGUAGE (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa)</li> <li>3. Mathematics</li> <li>4. Basic Science and Technology</li> <li>5. Social Studies</li> <li>6. Civic Education</li> <li>7. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>8. Religious Studies (CRS or IS)</li> <li>9. Physical &amp; Health Education (PHE)</li> <li>10. Computer Studies/ICT</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Home Economics</li> <li>2. Arabic</li> <li>3. Agriculture</li> </ol> <p>NOTE: Must offer 1. Elective, but not more than 2</p>
MIDDLE BEC (Primary 4-6)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. One major Nigeria language (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa)</li> <li>3. Mathematics</li> <li>4. Basic Science and Technology</li> <li>5. Social studies</li> <li>6. Civic Education</li> <li>7. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>8. Religious Studies (CRS or IS)</li> <li>9. Physical &amp; Health Education (PHE)</li> <li>10. French Language</li> <li>11. Computer Studies/ICT</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agriculture</li> <li>2. Home Economics</li> <li>3. Arabic</li> </ol> <p>Note: must offer 1 elective, but not more than 2</p>
UPPER (JSS 1-3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. One major Nigeria language (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa).</li> <li>3. Mathematics</li> <li>4. Basic Science</li> <li>5. Basic Technology</li> <li>6. Social Studies</li> <li>7. Civic Education</li> <li>8. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>9. Religious Studies (CRS or IS)</li> <li>10. Physical &amp; Health Education (PHE)</li> <li>11. French Language</li> <li>12. Computer Studies/ICT</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agriculture</li> <li>2. Home Economics</li> <li>3. Arabic</li> <li>4. Business Studies</li> </ol> <p>Note: must offer 1 elective, but not more than 3</p>

## Structure of the Revised 9-Year Revised Basic Education Curriculum (BEC)

Below are the basic features of the revised 9-year revised basic education curriculum (BEC)

1. Reduction of subject overload without compromising quality in line with global best practice.
2. Elimination of subject matter overlap, repetitions and redundancies

3. Subjects are divided into core compulsory and elective subjects
4. Content organization are thematic and spiral
5. Systematic connection between primary and junior secondary school contents
6. Introduction of Technology, Vocational subjects, Business Studies, Agriculture, French and Religious Studies
7. Inclusion of contents on global issues.

**Assessment Policy for the revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC)**

1. Standardized school based continuous assessment
2. Pupils who successfully complete primary 6 will proceed to JSS 1. No placement test
3. Abolition of terminal examination for primary 6 pupils
4. Junior secondary certificate Examination is replaced with Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the end of the 9-year basic education.

**Table 2: Reviewed Structure of the New BEC**

<b>BEC Levels</b>	<b>Compulsory Core</b>	<b>Optional</b>
Lower BEC (Primary 1-3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. One major Nigeria Language (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa)</li> <li>4. Basic Science and Technology</li> <li>5. Religion and Value Education</li> <li>6. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>7. Pre vocational studies</li> </ol>	Arabic Business studies French
MIDDLE BEC (Primary 4-6)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. One major Nigeria Language (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa)</li> <li>4. Basic Science and Technology</li> <li>5. Religion and Value Education</li> <li>6. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>7. Pre vocational studies</li> <li>8. French Language</li> </ol>	Arabic Business Studies
UPPER (JSS 1-3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English Studies</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. One major Nigeria language (Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa).</li> <li>4. Basic Science and Technology</li> <li>5. Religion and Value Education</li> <li>6. Cultural &amp; Creative Arts</li> <li>7. Pre vocational studies</li> <li>8. French language</li> <li>9. Business studies</li> </ol>	Arabic

**Basic Education Implementation Guidelines**

Implementation involves a process of complementary activities towards translating objectives into concrete action. The implementation of the UBE programme requires collaborative efforts from local communities, local councils, states as well as parents, teachers, non-governmental organization

(HGO's) and community based organization (CBO's). So far the programme has focused and made progress in the development of infrastructure, the supply of teachers, and the improvement of growth. The programme has also succeeded in building partnership of educational development.

In area of quality education, a committee has been set up to review and enrich basic education curricula to meet individuals and natural needs. The UBE programme officials were also working with the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to review primary and junior secondary curricula. The aim is to remove aspect of the country's school curricula that are obsolete and accommodate new ideas that would enable students to function optimally in a fast changing world. The new curriculum is also expected to accommodate the non-formal sector, which includes mass literacy programmes and education for out – of – school children as well as the children of nomads, migrant farmers and fishermen.

More support for the UBE curricula review has been received from the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCCE) and the Research and Development components of the World Bank Assisted Primary Education Project II. The Federal Government is currently implementing a pivotal Teacher's training Programme (PTTP) to meet its teaching staff requirements. In addition, government provides free self – instruction course materials that have been developed by the experts for the programme.

### **Problems of Implementation of Curriculum Policies in Basic Education**

1. **Inadequate Funding:** Government budget is still not enough for the implementation of curriculum policies and provisions in basic education. The percentage of government budgetary allocation to education has been declining from 11.2% in 1999 to 8.7% in 2013 which still falls below the United Nations benchmark of 26%. This has resulted in low level of funding in the areas of human and material resources which in turn hinder curriculum development and implementation of curriculum policies and provisions in basic education (Oviawe, 2017).
2. **Dearth of Inadequate Skilful and Qualified Teachers:** The few available qualified teachers are isolated in policy decision making in curriculum policies and provisions in basic education. Obanya in Adeniyi (2015) stressed that the involvement of a teacher is crucial because, the teacher can fuel his/her experience about what and how to teach into the worth of the curriculum team and influence what goes into the curriculum to fit the basic education level.
3. **Lack of Motivation of Teachers who are to implement the Basic Education Curriculum Policies and Provisions:** Stenhouse in Oviawe (2017) posited that the absence of incentives is the cause for the teachers' rejection to take part in curriculum implementation. Incentive helps to influence and control teachers for the purpose of achieving educational goals. Teachers in Nigerian educational system are poorly motivated, this may be as a result of poor assimilation of the number of teachers required to implement the curriculum.
4. **Non-Pilot Testing of the Basic Education Curriculum Policies and Provisions:** In fact, non-pilot testing has resulted to inability to determine the applicability of the curriculum policies and provisions in basic education. Lack of pilot testing and studying may contribute to the failure of the basic education curriculum policies and provisions because the architect of the curriculum had very little times to consult widely with relevant stakeholders during the period of formulation (Chitate in Adiele, 2020).

5. **Poor Planning:** The will to conceive, plan and religiously implement a material basic education curriculum in a systematic manner has been lacking all the while. Nigerians are impatient to experiment hence no view policy is given time enough to get assimilated before it is jettisoned for a new one, which invariably would be ill-planned and ill-concerned (Oviawe, 2017).
6. **Lack of Political Will and Commitment from Political Leaders:** The formulation patterns of policies in Nigeria are never in short supply but rather implementation of such policies have always been an issue. This challenge is contingent on lack of commitment from the un-genuine leaders who make policies for their own selfish political or economic motives.

## WAY FORWARD

1. **Adequate Funding:** The phenomenon of low level of budgetary allocation to education which is below the recommended UNESCO, 26% of total budget pose challenges to the implementation of Basic Education curriculum policies and provisions. In this regard, government should as a matter of need exercise a proper selfishness in the allocation of funds to education realizing that investment in education is the most important way of promoting development. The minimum expenditure of 26% of annual budget recommended by UNESCO for developing nations should be our base line.
2. **Provision enabling facilities and equipment such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, equipment and tools which can facilitate the effective implementation of basic education curriculum:** It was mentioned in this paper that the absence of tools, equipment, facilities, laboratories and workshop hinders the implementation of basic education curriculum. Hence, the need arises for these facilities, tools, equipment and workshop to be put in place.

## CONCLUSION

A historical trace of Nigerian educational system has revealed poor implementation of the various educational policies. It can therefore be concluded, that the will to ensure basic education for its citizens is there but the implementation of the curriculum policies and provisions have become a perennial problem. There is need therefore to evaluate the basic education curriculum to ensure that there is proper implementation. Therefore, this paper examined the concept of implementation, curriculum, policies and basic education. It equally discussed the curriculum policies and provisions in basic education in Nigeria.

## Policy Recommendations

There is the need for the following policy recommendations:

- Government should ensure that the basic education curriculum and provisions are properly planned to ensure its success.
- Equipment and infrastructures, books, teaching materials, laboratories, libraries, classrooms, furniture, among others must be provided for smooth implementation of the basic education curriculum policies and provisions.
- The formulation and implementation of basic education curriculum policies and provisions should be depoliticized and implemented only by experts.
- Process for the evaluation of the basic education curriculum policies and provisions must be put in place to ensure smooth implementation as well as maintain quality and standard.

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