

Issues and Prospects

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Abstract

Nigeria as a growing nation can only meet up with other developed and industrialized nations when her educational system is fully developed. It is a fact that no nation grows educationally without adequate implementation of her educational policies since it is not enough just to make policies. This paper therefore attempts to look at the concept of educational policy, concept of educational policy implementation; concept of educational policy implementation in Nigeria; objectives of early childhood and primary education; challenges in implementing early childhood and primary education policy. The paper concludes by emphasizing that government should ensure an effective implementation of early childhood and primary education in Nigeria by training and retraining of care-givers and primary school teachers who are very vital parts of the education process. The paper therefore, recommends that government should implement policies for more efficient nursery and primary education system.

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of education of the child is the pre-school and primary education which forms an integral part of his or her early education which may be formal or informal, this is given in an educational institution to children aged 1 to 5 for Nursery education prior to their entering primary school at the age of 6 to 10/11 years (Nakpodia, 2011). This educational level of the child provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, emotional and social development of the pre-school and primary school child. If child education can provide these vital necessities which are fundamental in human life, it is not therefore unlikely that it has an important and strong relationship with the pupil's performance at the primary school level and secondary and tertiary levels (Nakpodia, 2003).

Maduwesi (2010) refers to early childhood care education as an education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside home where by young children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages; until the mandatory age of government approved formal schooling. FRN (2014) refers to early childhood care education (pre-primary education) as an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrolment in the primary school.

Education has been identified as a veritable tool for equipping citizens with relevant knowledge, skills and values so that they will be able to meet the needs of the contemporary society. Basic education which starts with primary level has a holistic mission and aims at not only preparing

informed citizens but also serve as an instrument for the social, economic and political development of any nation (Lawal, Olumuyima and Ekundayo, 2008).

Primary education is defined in National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) as an education given in a formal setting for children aged normally 6 to 11/12 years old. Education is the core of development and progress in any society. It is the level. That develops in the individual the capacity to read, write and calculate. As the largest sub-sector of the educational sector, UNESCO (2001) posits that it offers the unique opportunity to contribute through meeting the needs of the contemporary society through the education of the young ones. It is also one of the strongest predictor of poverty as noted by Bruns, Mingart & Rakotomalimal (2003).

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) is a policy document for different levels of education and the content on primary education is expected to lead to the acquisition of skills for strategic communication and functional literacy and innumeracy.

Concept of Educational Policy

Educational policy is the practical and operational guide which provides the bases for carrying out the visions, actions, intentions, goal and objectives of an educational system. It is authorities' statement or practical guide for the administration of schools made by legitimate authorities. Educational policies are formulated to speed up the growth of every nation. This is why no policy is made without, first and foremost, identifying and capturing the overall philosophy and goals of the nation (National Policy on Education, 2014). Government or those entrusted with the responsibilities of educational administration make educational policies. Ocho (2003) stated that educational policies are operational guidelines, which provide bases that will enable management, staff and professionals to carry out government expectations of the school system. This shows that policy has a duality of focus; first, it usually visualizes or stipulates what government intends to do (that is plan, intention, goals, and objectives), and how it tends to do those things it plans to do (that is effectuation, execution or implementation)" (Oriafo 2006:6). To this end, the primary role of any educational policy is to regulate and improve educational means, programmes, and outcome.

Concept of Education Policy Implementation

Educational policy implementation deals with the process of translating educational policies into specific courses of action. It is day to day carrying out of policy document. Educational policy formulation is not complete until such policies are implemented. Policy implementation seems to be the most difficult aspect of policy making and no policy formulated is operational without policy implementation. Every policy on achieve its aim and this is the ultimate work of policy implementation. Educational policy implementation should Evaluated accordingly either on the process of implementation or at end of it. This is to ensure that such a policy achieves what it sets out to achieve. In this way areas of improvement can be strengthened for effectiveness and efficiency.

Concept of Educational Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Educational policy implementation in Nigeria is assumed to be the responsibility of the civil servants. According to Ocho (2013), the bureaucrats, administrator, or civil servant normally uses established guidelines in carrying out this duty of policy implementation. In Nigeria, policy implementation involves major interest groups and stakeholders in education such as the federal and state ministry of education, the National Universities Commission, the National board for Technical Education, the National Commission for Colleges of Education, the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, the Post Primary School Management Board, the Local Govt Education Authorities, the National Council for Nomadic Education and National Business and Technical Education Board

among Others (Ogbonnaya, 2014). According to Oriafu (2006), implementation of policies in Nigeria is the responsibility of all stakeholders, ranging from students, teachers, parents, administrative staff (academic and non-academic), all curriculum workers as well as the staff of the various ministries to all parastatals, of education. The different boards, organs, stakeholders, agencies, and ministries are vested with the power of implementing educational policies made by the government. The importance of educational policy implementation cannot be over emphasized. It is established that for every one naira spent on effective educational planning and implementation, the nation; (i) saves unquantifiable amounts in time and resources, (ii) enjoys overall improvement in productivity and job opportunities, (iii) experiences considerable decline in crime rate; and (iv) begins to relish the fruition of social, economic, cultural, political, scientific and technological advancement.

Those involved in the implementation of educational policies should convert policies into workable blueprint. They should develop programmes for the implementation of policies. They should coordinate, monitor, assess, and appraise the implementation of educational policies in relationships with its main objectives. It is in implementing policy guideline that weakness or limitations of the current policy are discovered, suggestion made on how to improve the policy and adjustment effected. This is important because, as Oriafu (2006) argued, it is not expected that there should be problems in the planning and implementation of educational policies. Sometimes such corrections, criticisms, and recommendations give birth to new policies.

Objectives of Early Childhood and Primary Education

The objectives of early childhood education according to FRN (2014) are:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school.
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices).
4. Inculcate social norms
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.
6. Develop the sense of co-operation and team spirit,
7. Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits; and
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, and so on through play.

The achievement of the stated objectives of early childhood education and care in Nigeria is brought about the following means:

- Establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encouraging both community and private efforts in the provision in teaching education programmes for specialization in early childhood education.
- Ensure that the medium of instruction will principally be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment.
- Ensure that the main method of teaching in the childhood education centers will be through play, and that the curriculum of teacher education is appropriately oriented to achieve this.
- Regulating and controlling the operation of early childhood education to this end, the teacher pupil ratio is set at 1:25
- Setting and monitoring a minimum standard for early childcare centre's in the country.
- Ensuring full participation of government, communities and teachers' associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities.

The objectives of primary education are to:

- Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively
- Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking.
- Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity
- Instill social, moral norms and value in the child
- Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment and
- Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability

In pursuance of these objectives:

In order to facilitate the implementation of the policy on education FRN, (2014) outline the provision of the following educational services that:

- Teaching shall be participatory, exploratory, experimental, and child-centered
- The medium of instruction in the primary education shall be the language of immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period English shall be taught as a subject.
- From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects.
- Specialist teacher shall be provided for particular subjects such as: mathematics, Basic Science, Basic technology, physical and health education, language Arts (in relation to English, Arabic, French, Sign Language and Nigeria Languages). Music, Fine Arts, Home Economics and Agriculture.
- For effective teaching and learning at the primary level, the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:35.

Challenges In Implementing Early Childhood And Primary Education

According to Eriba (2011) the educational system has been in the state of permanent crisis that it has lost quality, efficacy and functionality over the years. Early childhood education in Nigeria is not left out in these challenges which tend to make the gains of education less spectacular. These challenges are:

- **Teacher/Pupil Ratio Syndrome:** the policy position teacher/pupil ratio is not implemented due to lack of supervision or monitoring. The teacher/pupil ratio of 1:25 with a helper/an assistant started in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2014) for the early childhood education. What we have in our early childhood education is nothing to write about; most of these classes have the ratio of 1:35 without any class help/assistance bearing in mind that children at this level are so restless, extremely active and full of energy to expand. They are still dependent on adults for almost all their basic needs-physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social skills. Therefore, they require their full attention and diverse activities to help to satisfy their basic needs.
- **Poor funding of early childhood education:** early childhood education is poorly funded which in turn affects the staffing, pupil/teacher ratio, it also affects the provision of infrastructure which will affect the quality of the output. Unlike the other nations that know the importance of preschool where funding of this is given a prime place in the nations.
- **Supervision of Early Childhood Education:** no educational plan however excellent it may be can be effectively implemented if the school supervision is ineffective, the issue of supervision of implementing early childhood care education in Nigerian. If success is to be

attained. There is need to point out that adequate facilities will eventually crumble if there is on supervision. Nwagbara (2003) and Ogunsaju (2006) identified supervision as an indispensable management key of any organization. This then means that supervision should of necessity be an integral part of early childhood education so that the goal(s) may be achieved.

- **Escalation of Early Childhood:** the official provision made in the National policy on education. (FGN, 2014) mandated the government to encourage private efforts in the provision of early childhood education in the country. According to Nwakaego (2007) and Nakpodia (2011) it is becoming customary to operate an early childhood institution in every household. Currently, early childhood education, institutions are located in various places and building – campuses premises of some industrial and business organizations, church premises, residential buildings some part are hired for the use of early childhood schools (Ejeh, 2006). The bad side of this proliferation of early institutions is that the issues of standard and regulations have been waved off. The end result is that the young minds are offered “substandard” and irregular education that cannot breed egalitarianism and self-reliant individuals of the society and leaders of tomorrow.
- **Poor Quality and Qualification of Teachers:** the quality of teachers determines the strength of any educational system and the value of the learners (Okoro, 2014). In Nigeria early childhood institutions today, the teacher quality is generally low. It is only a few of the nursery schools especially those owned by educational institutions, private wealthy individuals that can avoid to employ the service of university graduate teachers and NCE holders. Most institutions manage to employ NCE holders whom they underpay while others employ TC11 teachers while majority of these schools employ the service of secondary school leavers. In a situation where most of our teachers in our early childhood education centers are unqualified and unprofessional, there will be no effective teaching and learning.
- **Negligence on the part of government:** of all the effort the federal government has made in granting permission for private sectors to establish early childhood education they failed in making sure that this private sectors maintained the standard set by the government, there is no supervision as to ensure that the standard are maintained as such the programme has been barstardized, no wonder early childhood institution is been set-up even in an uncompleted buildings, under batcher, near market places and so on.

Implimentation Issues

Although Nigerian government has good intentions in fulfilling primary education objectives and has made considerable efforts aimed at implementing primary education policy, not much can be said to have been achieved. Among the obstacles are:

- ❖ **Poverty and economic constraints:** poverty is one of the key challenges in achieving primary education policy in Nigeria. Many families are unable to afford sending their children to school. Almost two-third of Nigerian citizens is living in poverty and their life expectancy stands at just 52 years (global Education first initiative, 2014). Householder poverty affects the willingness and ability of families to enrol their children in school and sustain their support until the children successfully complete their education. Even when they enrol some of them do not complete their primary education and this increase illiteracy rate. Add to the issue of poverty and poor economic background in early marriage and subsequent

teenage pregnancy which UNICEF (2004) noted has adversely affected attendance, retention, and achievement in schools.

- ❖ **Weak Government:** what a political leader of a country regards as key educational challenges determine main policy directions (UNICEF, 2014). The priority of government in the area of education is very important to what educational practitioners do. The ability of government to implement educational policy depends on political will and their ability to raise resources and disseminate them religiously. In the past educational policies of the government have not been consistent and this has affected management (Okwori & Ede, 2012).
- ❖ **Institution Issues:** much of the failure to progress towards UBE goals can be attributed to institutional issues (Admolekan, 2013; World Bank, 2008). The responsibilities between the three tiers of government and between government parastatals are largely undefined; leaving no government or agency clearly accountable for results, and even more complex due to the creation of new agencies and organizations.
- ❖ **Insufficient Infrastructure and Teaching Material:** the achievement of the primary educational objectives as stated in the NPE depends on so many facts such as infrastructure and teaching materials. In 1976 UPE programme was launched but could not achieve a lot as a result of inadequate infrastructure and teaching materials, even the few that was made available were unsafe and could not be maintained as this country Nigeria lacks maintenance culture. World Bank, (2008) indicates that more than half of primary schools need major rehabilitation, some schools do not have enough seats for children, some have damaged roof, some classroom buildings have fallen completely making children learn under shades and trees (Odoemenam & Ominiya, 2014). The teaching materials needed to aid learning are inadequate some schools don't even have any especially such schools in the remote areas. All these make schools unfriendly, erode quality, and affect attendance, retention and completion.
- ❖ **Lack of Financial Support:** effective implementation of the policy on primary education depends on adequate financial supports. Most schools have inadequate capacity and financial resources with which to manage primary education. In 2006, total public expenditure on education was estimated at 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 12.5 percent of total public spending. This is below the recommended education for all households of 20% (World Bank, 2013). World Bank (2008) stressed that if the available resources are not properly utilized it will affect the achievement of education goals and objectives.
- ❖ **Poor Quality Teachers:** poor quality teachers posed a challenge in policy implementation of primary education policy. This hinders student's enrollment and learning. Records from universal Basic Education Commission UBEC) in 2009-2010 indicated only 60% of primary school teachers are qualified. Even teachers with qualification do not have adequate professional knowledge and competence to teach. A teaching assessment conducted in 2010 illustrate that majority of qualified teachers had limited professional working knowledge (Global Education first Initiative, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The importance of a solid foundation in education is obvious. Early childhood and primary education is where the foundation is laid. Poor performance in other levels of academic can be traced to these

two foundational levels. So, a thorough knowledge of what and how education is been handled at this two levels is imperative. It is a worthwhile step in the right direction for the Nigerian government to have agreed to have full participation in the education of the early childhood and primary education. All Nigerian children deserved the best, and education is the only legacy that can be given to set them on the road to optimal development. To ensure an effective implementation of early childhood and primary education in Nigeria, training and retraining of care-givers and primary school teachers should be made vital parts of the education process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for state ministry of education officials to enforce regulations laid down by federal ministry of education as regards the provisions of early childhood and primary education for improvement.
2. Effective quality monitoring units should be set up by ministries of education and provide with necessary logistics support to ensure that minimum standards are maintained in both public and private pre-primary and primary institutions in Nigeria
3. Government should regulate salaries of all teachers on early childhood and primary education as well as school fees to encourage teachers and parents.
4. Regular suspension and monitoring with stiff penalties for offenders will help to maintain the teacher pupil ration.
5. Effective measures should be ensured in the training of early childhood and primary teachers through adequate scholarships, approving the mounting of such programmes in all universe institutes of education and colleges of education.
6. Teaching and learning materials like furniture for both teachers and pupils, television sets/computer systems, tables, toys and models, charts and well-draining and playing equipment like see-saw, merry-go-round, slides and so on, should be made a vital provision in all learning centre's for effective teaching and learning.

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