

## Confronting the Challenges in the Education Sector in Nigeria

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**Abstract: Objective:** In this study, we investigated the reason for the continuous cooperate agitations concerning the state of the educational system in Nigeria despite the unflinching efforts of policy makers to establishing better educational policies as they have been time and again formulated, reformulated and implemented; and at other times, replaced with others purported to be better with huge amount of resources sunk into it. It is imperative to note that education is an invaluable tool for the attainment of national development and Nigeria, as it is the world over, embraced it more than four decades ago. **Method:** This paper reviewed some conceptual issues affecting the educational system in Nigeria from its inception, examined the different polices that have been formulated and their implementation patterns. **Results:** The study discovered that frequent changes are often made on the educational policies with implementation patterns haphazardly done. This has resulted to a dichotomy in regional approaches to educational policy formulation and implementation. **Conclusion:** Although concerted efforts have been made overtime to bring about a functional educational policy so as to attain accelerated national development, these efforts have not been able to address the goals of the Nigerian educational system due to abrupt changes in policies without implementing them to a logical conclusion as to ascertain their merits and demerits. **Recommendations:** This paper, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian Government should carefully select a pragmatic policy which would run uniformly throughout the country. Also, that the culture of continuity be entrenched in the policy formulation and implementation processes. Again, proper policy implementation should be religiously followed using credible and relevant professionals who should be chosen without ethnic sentiments.

**Key words:** Challenges, Confronting, education sector, Nigeria.

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### I. Introduction

Education is the process of imparting knowledge, skill and judgment. Attesting to this assertion, the Dictionary.com adds that it is, "the act or process of acquiring general knowledge, developing the power of reasoning and judgment and generally, of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life". Fafunwa in Sowunmi (2013) defines education as, "freedom from ignorance, of ideas, of history and events of any sentiment of one's surrounding."

Formal education was introduced into Nigeria in the 1840s through trade links from Lagos, Calabar and other coastal cities. The Christian missionaries played major roles in not only setting up but operating the schools in all the southern part of Nigeria. The aim of education at that time was to enable the recipients read the Bible in the English Language. Imam, 2012. What the British Government did was to give grants to some mission schools instead of expanding the educational system entirely.

As formal education was taking its root in southern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria proscribed Western education. Northern leaders rather established Islamic schools that gave attention only to Islamic education. Thus, the educational pattern in Nigeria was lopsided-Western education on one hand, and Islamic education on the other. It should also be noted that, the kind of education introduced was limited to only the primary and secondary strata.

At the inception of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nigeria had only two tertiary educational institutions; namely, Yaba Higher College and the University of Ibadan founded in 1934 and 1948 respectively. The University of Ibadan, at its foundation, was only a college of the University of London until two years after Nigeria's independence that it became autonomous. The belief then was that Great Britain was not interested in educating Nigerians; hence, did not promote education in Nigeria.

However, after independence, more universities were established, like the University of Nigeria, the University of Ife, Amadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Lagos. From the 1970's upwards, more universities were set up; Polytechnics and some Monotechnics were also set up. According to Saint, Teresa, Hartnett and Strassner (2004), "... by 1984, Nigeria had established a well-regarded higher educational system, offering instructions of an international standard in a number of disciplinary areas. However, some decades after these escapade in education there is still much hue about fallen educational Standard, crisis in Nigerian education system and much more." This paper is therefore set to examine the challenges of the educational sector in Nigeria with a view to recommending approaches that could ameliorate this age-long quandary. Specifically, the paper will give a brief history of the Nigeria education system, examine education policies

from the inception of education in Nigeria, examine policy implementation and suggest the way forward to a sustainable educational system in Nigeria.

## **II. Conceptual Issues - A Review**

### **The National Policy on Education - an Overview**

The decision of drafting a policy on education in Nigeria actually commenced during the colonial era. According to Imam(2012), "The aims of education were to enable recipients learn to read the Bible in English, the local language, undertake gardening and agriculture as well as train local school masters, catechists and clergymen." Education policy in Nigeria has metamorphosized severally due to the desire for national development which is believed to be attainable through Western Education. Since 1944, Nigeria had prepared to set up an educational system that could be consistent with that of global standard. There was little agitation which led to the promulgation of the 1948 education ordinance which decentralized educational administration and, caused the colonial administration to review its ten (10) years educational plan for Nigeria. They also appointed a Director of Education and mapped out a clear cut procedure for assessing grants-in-aid by mission schools. (Fagbunmi, 2005).

However, the problem of educational dichotomy was still prevalent as they had different educational plans for the North and South. While the Southern education system formulated a policy to have a four (4) year junior primary, a four (4) year senior primary and a six (6) year secondary education system, the North had four (4) years junior primary, three (3) years middle school and six (6) years secondary education system. (Taiwo, 1980).

The colonialists divided the country into three regions and by 1952 another education ordinance was promulgated to supersede that of 1948. The 1952 ordinance gave the newly created regions autonomy to develop their own educational policies. (Fafunwa, 2004). Thus, the western region promulgated its education law in 1955; the East and the North followed suit in 1956 and 1957 respectively. According to Imam (2012), there were variations in the definitions of the components of the education system in the various regions. For instance, the duration of primary education varied from region to region while the secondary components were similar. From the forgoing, it could be posited that the Nigerian educational system had a foundational problem with different regions doing what they thought best to do as was exhibited by the Western region, with the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1955. The Eastern region attempted to imitate the West but failed; thus, widening the gap between the Western and the other regions.

At independence, a new policy on education was formulated which according to Woolman (2001) was captioned *Toward the Development of Manpower for Economic Development and Africanization of the Civil Service in Nigeria*. Unfortunately, despite the Sir Eric Ashby Commission, set up to identify the future high level manpower needs of the country at the eve of independence, problem of the education sector was not fully addressed because the policy that was formulated then was faulty. The curriculum was said to be irrelevant and the teaching methods adopted were said to be obsolete. According to Rivomire (1998), "many graduates were dependent and low on initiative."

### **The National Policy on Education From 1960**

Having attained independence in 1960, by 1969, a national curriculum conference was convened. The outcome of the conference was the review of the educational system and its goal. The conference attempted to change the colonial orientation of the educational system in Nigeria and advocated to promote national consciousness and self reliance through the education process. (Imam, 2012). This was followed by another convergence of experts in education to deliberate on a truly Nigerian National Education Policy. This was done in a bid to consolidate on the gains of the curriculum conference. During that era, the Federal Government also took over mission schools. Fagbunmi (2005) noted that in 1976, each state promulgated an edict for the provision, management and regulation of education. The then nineteen states of the Federation amended the Federal Education Law (FEL) which created a uniform operation in terms of taking over of schools from individuals and voluntary agencies, the use of similar curriculum, the establishment of School Management Boards and the creation of unified teaching service.

The UPE scheme that was started in the Western region in 1955 was introduced by the Federal Government in 1976.

Children between the age brackets of Six (6) to twelve (12) years were given free education. The country operated a unified education system based on the 7-5-2-3 education system: Seven years primary education, five years of secondary education, two years higher school Certificate level and three years of University education.

### **The National Policy From 1977**

Still yearning for a functional policy on education another policy on education was formulated in 1977. Imam (2012) noted that the policy made education a Federal Government responsibility in terms of centralized control and funding. Nwagwu (2014) in Imam (2012) posited that the policy introduced the famous 6-3-3-4 educational system modeled after the American system of Six (6) years of primary education, three (3) years junior secondary education, three (3) years senior secondary education and four (4) years of University education.

With the introduction of a new constitution in 1979, the education system also experienced another drastic amends. The constitution brought about a division of the country into Federal, State and Local Governments - The Federal Republic of Nigeria. This new constitution again, affected the educational policy which according to Imam (2012), vested the Federal Government with the sole responsibility of university education, the State and Local Governments sharing the responsibilities of post primary, professional and technological education. Primary education was sponsored by both State and Local Governments while the Local Government was solely responsible for teachers' salaries.

With the introduction of UPE, school enrolment swelled in the South while the North was still lagging behind with their Islamic education. However, the tide in the funding of education took another turn in 1981. As soon as the National Policy on Education was revised in 1981 the issue of free primary education came to an end that same year because the Federal Government of Nigeria rescinded on its earlier decision to finance education due to the decline in oil revenue (Nwagwu, 2011). School fees were re-introduced and enrolment of pupils fell drastically. A major characteristic of the UPE was automatic promotion. However, as free education came to an end, the issue of automatic promotion also came to an end; pupils were then evaluated through continuous assessments and examinations.

### **The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is the most recent initiative in education. It is aimed at providing free, compulsory and continuous nine (9) years education from primaries one (1) to six (6) and three (3) years of junior secondary education for all school age children.

According to Nwaji (n.d), the UBE was a reformation of the UPE which first existed in the Western region in 1955. The UBE programme was launched on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 1999 during the regime of the then President of Nigeria, His Excellency, General Olusegun Obasanjo. The programme, however, could not take-off immediately after its launch because it appeared to lack legal backing. In both principle and practice, it could not be termed a new educational policy but an education programme provided within the context of the 6-3-3-4 policy on education. It is like a reinforcement of the 6-3-3-4 policy on education.

As was enshrined in section 3 of the National policy on Education (FRN, 2004), the programme was supposed to be free, compulsory and universal. Parent's, guardians and other stakeholders in the education milieu were under obligation to send their children to school. To ensure that these standards were maintained, the compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act was promulgated. In part 1, sub section 2 and 3, of the policy, it was stipulated thus:

### **2. right of a child to compulsory, free universal basic education, etc.**

- (1) Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.
- (2) Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his-
  - (a) Primary school education
  - (b) Junior secondary educationby endeavoring to send the child to primary and junior secondary schools.
- (3) The stake holders in education in a Local Government Area, shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him under section 2 (2) of this Act.
- (4) A parent who contravenes section 2 (2) of this Act commits an offence and is liable-
  - (a) On first conviction, to be reprimanded;
  - (b) On second conviction, to a fine of N2, 000.000 imprisonment for a term of one month or both; and
  - (c) On subsequent conviction, to a fine of N5, 000.00 or imprisonment for a term of two months or both,

### **3. Services provided in public primary and junior secondary schools shall be free of charge.**

- (1) The services provided in public primary and junior secondary school shall be free of charge.
- (2) A person who receives or obtains any fee contrary to the provisions of sub section (1) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding N10,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of three months or both.

### **The National Policy on the Language of Instruction**

The English language was introduced into Nigeria through the missionaries from Britain. The aftermath of missionary activities was colonization. The colonialists needed a common language to effectively administer the country since Nigeria is a multilingual nation; thus, the introduction and use of the English language. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the English language continued to enjoy a prominent status because competence in the language had a lot of advantage. The English language represents a symbol of modernization and has a wider geographical spread than any of the indigenous languages in Nigeria. (Amakiri, 2006) and (Kachru, 1986). Today, the English language functions as the language of politics, business, education etc. David-west (1993) noted that "a credit in O'level English is a prerequisite to gaining admission into any tertiary institution. It is also introduced as a subject from first year in secondary school."

A Use of English course is compulsorily done by first year students in tertiary institutions. At all the levels of the education system in Nigeria, the English language is the language of instruction. However, the present National Policy on Education advocates the use of mother tongue in passing on instruction at the lower levels of the primary schools. The Federal Government in section 1, subsection 10 of the National Policy on Education, third edition stated that:

...Every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child 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. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and shall be compulsory in schools.

### **An Assessment of the Implementation of Education Policies in Nigeria**

Issues around implementation of policies are of great importance to policy formulation because the aim of policy formulation is to achieve stated objectives. Implementation involves putting into action policy decisions with the aim of achieving the goal of an institution. (Ibara, 2004). In practice, the standard of educational development of a nation is hinged on the gap between legal provisions and actualization in policy planning and implementation. According to Enaowho (1988), the growth and development of a country is tied to the level of implementation of its educational policy. In an article published by the Nigeria Association of Educational Administration and Planning (NAEAP), Fadipe (1988) observed that implementation of educational policy is government's decision, and is one of the crucial issues that dictate the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of public projects including education. However, in addressing the Nigerian situation, he observed that beautiful documents have been produced on the way forward in education but have been marred by deficiencies in implementation.

A big issue in policy implementation is that of unnecessary change and modification of policies without religiously implementing it to a logical conclusion. At present, the 6-3-3-4 system of education has been modified to 9-3-4 system without fully implementing and evaluating it to ascertain if it should be discontinued or modified. For instance, statistics from some schools across the country reveal that no streaming was done to place students appropriately into any of the locations stipulated on page 17 of the National Policy on Education. It was stipulated that students who failed the junior West African School Certificate Examination should be streamed into different levels in the 6-3-3-4 system. However, it was discovered that there were neither records nor formal machinery available to do the streaming. There were also no counselors to direct the children to alternative schools where necessary.

A frequent change in leadership is another factor negatively affecting educational policy implementation in Nigeria. This was well noted by Professor Ajayi, the erstwhile Provost of the Federal College of Education, Ogun State, Nigeria, when he expressed that he served as a provost of the college for eight (8) years under different regimes; namely, Babangida, Shonekan, Abacha, Abubakar and Obasanjo, between 1993 and 2001. These Heads of State had their conceptions about the educational policy and tried to implement it their own way devoid of already stated policies and implementation strategies.

According to Hungate in Amakiri (2005), "evaluation of policy implementation is indispensable to goal attainment because it is the means by which notions about excellence are operationalized. Formulated policies should be implemented according to stated plans. This is because policy formulation and implementation are two sides of the same coin." Educational policy is the technical process whereas the implementation is the administrative process which should be constantly adjudged by stipulated evaluative measures so as to ascertain its workability.

In principle, Nigeria is believed to be a sealer nation. The National Policy on Education (FRN,2004) stated that: "...there is need for equality of educational opportunities for all Nigerian children, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability."

However, the realization of this objective has been quite difficult because the North is not following this policy provision. Girls who make up a large chunk of the population are denied access to Western education in the North. In addition, the curriculum in Northern schools is narrow and prepares students only for adaptation into their own communities, read the Quran and be able to observe Muslim religious rites. (Imam, 2012). According to Imam, Quranic schools do not provide a favourable environment for the inculcation of the right kind of values for the survival of the individual in the larger Nigerian society. This dichotomy is indeed a bane on the attainment of the above segment of the educational policy.

The universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme appears to be more inclusive than the UPE due to its emphasis on the inclusion of women and girls, the poor, street and working children, rural and remote population, nomads and migrant workers, children, refugees and the people with special needs. Also, there is the Basic Education Act (BEA) to enforce stipulated programmes. However, assessing the duration of the programme, can we really concur that this education programme has actually deviated positively from the norm? This is because the streets are still littered with children of all ages hawking and begging for alms. At the rural areas, migrant fishermen are moving from shore to shore with their entire family and the government has not done much to ensure that children of migrant fishermen attend school. (Amakiri, 2014). These are hard facts the government must address if they are sincere with the present educational policy.

In recent times, the government of many of the states is embarking on infrastructural development in schools but fail to see pupils carrying their personal chairs to same school without accompanying desk to write on. How can pupils read and write effectively without good chairs and desks? Babalola in Amakiri (2005) attributed this trend of affairs to the universalization of primary education by the Federal Government without proper planning. According to him, "... no sooner than the Federal Government took over the funding of education, their proportion of capital and recurrent allocation on education fell from 21% to 13% and total capital allocation fell from 7% to 4%. This resulted in inadequate supply of human and material resources". That is why the Governor of Rivers State noted in the second all progressive Governance lecture series that government have failed to provide education for all. As absurd as it may sound, he is part of the government of the day holding back teachers salaries as at when due.

As laudable as the Basic Education Act is, there has been no known record of any form of punishment meted out to defaulters. If there are, our streets would have been free of school age children during school hours, hawking. Quoting His Excellency, Governor Amaechi's lecture on Crisis in Nigeria Education Sector, "... 4.7% of children are out of school and the government is responsible for facilitating education - what are they doing?"

In section 1 subsection 10, the policy on education stated the importance of language and that "it is a means of promoting national cohesion and preserving Cultures... consequently, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment, three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the interest of national unity And also French, for smooth interaction with out neighbours"

The issue with this policy is that Nigeria is a pluralistic society it is therefore difficult to identify the language of the immediate environment. We should not also forget that the English Pidgin is one of the major Lingua Franca used in the country. Indeed, there appears to be confusion in the policy on language. In pointing out the flaws in the policy, Emenanjo (nd) questioned the rationale of using mother tongue initially in primary education, without using it throughout primary education if it is considered a very important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy and numeracy.

This paper is of the view that promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving cultures with just three Nigerian languages is not feasible in the face of more than four hundred (400) languages including English pidgin. Again, teachers are believed to be a core factor in the educational system; there is however, dearth of teachers in all the languages to be used as a medium of instruction. According to Emenanjo (nd), "... in 1988, the number of teachers required for the three major languages was 55,237 but only 6, 383 or 11.6% were available. More than two decades after, the story is not different. As for the teachers to teach in the language of the immediate environment, your guess could be as good as mine with no books to aid the learners." This confusion in the language of instruction is directly or indirectly responsible for the poor performance of students in the education sector.

### **III. Conclusion**

As a result of the benefits accruing from education as evidenced by the achievements made by more advanced countries in education, Nigeria has made concerted effort overtime to evolve a functional education policy as to attain accelerated national development. Although these efforts have channeled the country into the right perspective, they have not been able to address the goals of the Nigerian educational system due to abrupt changes in policies without implementing them to a logical conclusion as to ascertain their merits and demerits. Also, the dichotomy in the policy implementation pattern between the North and South has not made room for evolving an egalitarian society as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Political instability has stalled policy implementation in the country as successive governments always change the pattern of the educational system to meet their personal aspirations. If Nigeria would develop positively via education, government has to depoliticize education, so that relevant professionals can channel the course of education to the right direction.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that the goals and objectives of the educational system in Nigeria are attained for an accelerated national development:

- Nigerian Government should painstakingly select a credible education policy.
- Professionals should always be engaged in policy formulation and implementation.
- Policy implementation should be done religiously to a logical conclusion.
- The country should entrench the culture of continuity in all their policy frame works.
- The policy should run uniformly throughout the country.
- Education process in Nigeria should be studied in retrospect as to discover the pitfalls in order to make amends.
- Educational issues should not be politicized
- Living in an innovative times, policies made on education should allow schools the freedom to excel
- Policies should be all inclusive bearing in mind the people with special needs.

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