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EDUCATIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

For many years in Nigeria, good educational policies are being formulated, but the problem is that only a few of these numerous policies are effectively implemented to the latter. To this end, there is no much and significant development to show for these policies so far. This out rightly suggests that, it is not mere formulation of policies that is the problem of Nigeria, but the problem of implementation of these policies, as it is only effective implementation of these brilliant policies that can bring about sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria. Looking at this background, this study discussed the factors that militate against effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria and suggests solutions to this recurring problem. Frequent changes in government, corruption, lack of human and material resources, not having standard leadership programme, tribalism and ethnic fractions and lack of political will to policy implementation are the absurdities of policy implementations. This paper is of the opinion that until educational policies in Nigeria are implemented, there will be no sustainable and attainable development. Based on this, there is need for our educational policy makers and implementers to have a change in attitude towards policies in Nigeria.

Keywords: Educational, Policy, Analysis, Implementation, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Nigeria is faced with many challenges. Oguejiofor (2004) noted that outside the geographical disadvantages and the unfortunate amalgamation by our colonial masters which has made peaceful coexistence and stability unrealistic, ranging from religious intolerance, kidnapping in major cities, cybercrimes among rising unemployed youths, the menace caused by the dreaded Boko-haram in the North and the rising unemployment rate hitting the country are serious problems affecting the country. Based on this, Achebe (1983) suggested that the problem of Nigeria is the problem of leadership. The country needs brilliant leaders that will not only make educational policies, but also the will power to implement their numerous policies for the development of the country.

Educational policy implementation has been described as a major problem confronting Nigeria in her efforts to achieve national development. Implementation often turns out to be the graveyard of many educational policies. From experience in this country, little attention is paid to the subject of Policy implementation by education policy makers. In most cases, it is often taken for granted that once a Policy is adopted by the government, it must be implemented and the desired objectives of the Policy achieved. It is sad to say that in this country little attention is paid to the problem of implementation of educational policies. Huge amount of resources are spent on designing, preparing plans of all kinds with little or no thought given to the complex chain of reciprocal interactions and variables required and this can be seen usually in the widening gap between intentions and results.

The need for enhancing the development process in Nigeria is becoming more crucial and urgent. The pace at which this can be realized is hinged on the ability of the government to formulate appropriate policies in education and at the same time implement these Policies effectively. But, it is so unfortunate that there is no significant evidence to show an improvement from where we were before and now, as Nigeria has continued to remain in the category of the least developed countries of the world.

This is a typical situation in Nigeria, where the intention of the designers of educational Policies are often underlined by constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration coupled with the prevalence of high level of corruption. The consequent failures that have affected major educational policies in developing countries especially Nigeria have helped to direct attention to the need for planning explicitly, management of policy implementation in which adequate attention is paid to such factors as political and institutional capacity to execute and operate development projects. It also led to the emergence of theories and models particularly during the period of the United Nation second development plan decade in 1970, when emphasis shifted from plan formulation to plan feasibility. These theoretical constructs have been designed to help policy makers, especially in the education system towards better understanding of the problems of policy implementation (Egonmwan, 2009),

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Concept of Educational Policy

It is pertinent to begin our discussion of educational policy implementation with various views of how people viewed, understood and perceived it. Different authors and definitions of educational policy abound and it may simply be futile to discover which is correct or appropriate. Though,

many scholars regard educational policy implementation as a separate activity which takes place after policy has been formulated. Although this view is held because there is little to appreciate of the fact that building support for policies is an integral part of designing them. This widely held view of separation of educational policy design from implementation has been attacked by scholars like Pressenca and Wildavsky (1973) as fatal from any sense of direction. They argued that the separation of policy formulation from implementation is fatal. It is not better than mindless implementation without a sense of direction, though we can isolate policy formulation and policy implementation for a separate discussion (Egonmwan, 2009).

However, Henri (2006) was able to trace back policy construct to 4000 years in the city of Babylon and was able to define it as a course of action adopted and pursued by the government toward the accomplishment of set objectives. In like manner, Ross (1969) suggested that policy should be seen as a long series of more or less related activities and their consequences for those concerned rather than as a discrete decision.

In like manner Anifowose and Enemu (2005) defined policy to mean the purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. They further stressed that, at a broader level, it is concerned with the relationship of government units to its environment. Dye (1979, p. 1) saw policy as “what government choose to do or not to do. He went further to explain that Government do many things, they regulate conflicts within society, they organize society to carry on conflicts within other societies, they distribute a great variety of symbolic rewards and material services to members of the society, most at times in form of taxes. Thus, policies may regulate behaviour, organize bureaucracies, distribute benefits, and extract taxes or all of these at once.

One crucial point to note from the above conceptualization is the concept of ‘non-decision’. The reason is that the decision of the government to ignore a problem or make changes in a policy decision because it tends to favour the perpetuation of the status quo. Secondly, there may be divergence between what government decide to do and what they actually do which captures reality in Nigeria context. Also contributing into the understanding of the concept of policy generally, Lowi (1970) emphasized the importance of the concept of coercion in thinking about policy. According to him, policy involves deliberate coercion or in other words statements intended to delineate the purpose, means, subject and objects of the exercise of coercion within the context of power relationships in organizational structure. Lindblom cited in Lowi (1970, p. 317) proffered a general meaning, he defined “policy as any output of any decision makers”.

Educational policies are set of ideas or plans that a group of people have officially agreed to follow in a certain circumstances or situation. It consists of the principles and government policies in the education system as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the purposes of education system. It focuses on the practical consequences of educational policy decisions and alternatives (Ololube, 2018a; Ololube et al., 2016). It is important activities of government. The reality however is that educational policy encompasses all the activities of government as it affects the education of members of the society. It also connotes official statements determining the plan of action or what the government wants to do in the education sector. It is indeed factual that the special character of these policies stem from the fact that, they are basically formulated by government authorities. This implies that those persons, who engage in the daily affairs of a political system, are recognized by most members of the system as having responsibility for these matters and take decision that are accepted as binding most of the time by most of the members, so long as they act within the limits of their role (Alasomuka & Ololube, 2020). The point is that, educational policy is a product of government process and activities; it

affects a large spectrum of issues and other sectors of the society which government have something to do.

Basu (2006) has identified certain elements that differentiate public policy especially educational policy from other policies, they include:

- Purposive or result oriented action rather than random behaviour is the hallmarks of Public policy;
- Public policy is based on law is authoritative. It has legal sanction behind it, which is potentially coercive in nature and is binding on all citizens;
- Public policy may be either positive or negative in form. Positively, it may involve some form of government action regarding any issues or problem, negatively, it may involve a decision by government officials not to take action on matter on which government opinion, attitude or action is asked for. Public policy refers to the action or decisional pattern by public administrator on particular issues over a period rather than their separate discrete decision.

As a Course of action, educational policy involves a number of activities that are carried out sequentially in district stages as follows:

- Goal formulation involving multiple group with varying and often conflicting objectives;
- Problem identification and definition;
- Agenda setting involving attempts by individuals and groups to influence policy decisions;
- Policy execution by administrators after formal adoption i.e. policy implementation;
- Policy evaluation that is concern with estimation, assessment or policy appraisal.

The Mystery of Implementation of Policy in Nigeria

A concern with educational implementation emerged as an outgrowth of the renewed interest in substance of policy among post behavioural era. Scholars such as Ololube (2018a, b) and Alasomuka and Ololube (2020) argued that it is imperative and legitimate for policy content to characterize policy making processes and progress.

Public policy implementation has been described as one of the major problem confronting developing countries. Egonmwan (2009) argued that relatively, the successful implementation of education policy is difficult in first world countries, it is more difficult in the third world countries, and may be most difficult in reform oriented governments in the thin world such as Africa and Latin America and most usually it is the problem of widening gap between intention and result. Weimer and Vinning (1992) buttressed this point, by drawing the analogy between implementation and marriage, that if policy adoption is courtship, the implementation is marriage.

Implementation scholars exhibit wide difference on a number of crucial issues. Where implementation starts or end is riot settled. While implementation is commonly referred to a stage, boundaries are not clear. Authors vary in their selection of critical factors affecting implementation. Criteria for evaluating implementation success are conflicting. Moreover, the simplest, most straight forward path for implementation has proven to be difficulty.

Nigeria is presently swimming in the ocean of abject poverty, absence of basic social amenities and painful level of under-development. All these problems are because we do not have good educational policies to remove the country from these dying situations, but because the policies are not fully implemented. Several studies have showed over the years that, the major problem we have with developmental growth in Nigeria is not policy making, but implementation. That has made Nigeria not to be on the fast lane of development. It is however a paradox that, most of these policies only exist on mere words and paper and are never implemented to actualized the objectives of such policies. The culture of poor or non-implementation of public policies is therefore in a very high degree in the country and virtually affects all levels of government.

A number of implementation scholars make a conceptual distinction between policy formulation and implementation, which for them means carrying our prior decision chronologically.

Obstacles to Effective Implementation of Educational Policy in Nigeria

Many scholars have identified factors that are significant in the analysis of educational policy implementation. The characteristics of implementing agencies, predisposition of implement and resources are crucial to policy implementation. Ololube (2018b) emphasized that the amount of interest, commitment and support evidenced by principal policy analysis and implementation actors have a major influence on the progress and success of it. As implementation studies have multiplied, the list variables affecting them have gotten longer. The most comprehensive treatment can be found in the work of Egonmwan (2009), who proposed the following factors:

- **The Context of Policy:** Implementation of educational policy involves various actors at various levels, each having a particular interest in the programme. Thus, the power base and strategies of actor involved in implementation can influence the course of implementation. The characteristics of the various institutions and regimes as well as compliance culture of the people equally influence the implementation process and response of the people.
- **Content of Policy:** The implementation of a programme is influenced by the interest affecting the content of a programme to the extent that policy implementation seeks to introduce changes in social, political and economic relationship. Those whose interests are threatened by such policy are bound to oppose it. And those who stand to gain from it are bound to press for it. Also policy implementation is affected by the degree of behavioral change programme envisages, for its intended beneficiaries.
- **Programme Implementers:** The more active, the expert and personnel possessed by the implementing agency, the greater the support of the political elites received by such agency and the greater access to resources it has, the more it is likely that such agency can implement programmes successfully.
- **Basically and very critical is that the bureaucracy in Nigeria operates under ineffective and corrupt political leadership.** The leadership corruption for instance, affects the content and quality of policy at formulation stages. For instance, policies are more often than not, made for purposes of the selfish and egoistic interest of the political leaders and sometimes only to attract public acclaim and attention with less regards to their appropriateness in addressing given problems or the possibility of their effective practical

implementation by the public bureaucracy. Indeed, most policy making goals in Nigeria are subjected to the personal rewards and interests of the political leaders and their colleagues with the result that a policy is judged more on its political merits with the real development need rarely factored into consideration. For these, most educational policies in Nigeria are either inappropriate or they lack well defined objectives for effective implementation. It is based on this, Okoli and Onah (2002) stated that educational policy implementation in Nigeria takes the form of learning process or trial and error.

- Another factor that hinders educational policy implementation is the over ambitious nature of some government policy. According to (Mankinde, 2005), some policies in Nigeria are over ambitious, sweeping and over fundamental in nature. It is sad to say that, the formulation of such over ambitious policies is not borne out of their sincere effort to bring socio-economic growth and development, but to boost the ego of the political leaders. An example of such over ambitious policies is policies having as their basic objectives the provision of free meal to school children at the primary level. For such policies, there is usually poor funding for the public bureaucracy to effectively implement them. For instance, the policy of free meal by the government of the day has witnessed such a very weak implementation which has incurred public criticisms..
- Most of the agencies or institutions that are entrusted with the task of implementing government policies do not possess the requisite manpower, knowledge and financial resources to implement these policies effectively. On the area of poor funding, Government does not allocate enough funds in the budget for the implementation of such Projects (Kelegbe, 2006; Dick, 2003). To effectively implement education policies in Nigeria, the implementing agency needs adequate funds to timely manage but this is not the case in Nigeria, rather the reason for the failure of certain government policies to achieve desirable ends, (Ololube, 2018a,b). Though, government in their benevolence can give out sufficient funds to execute a policy, but the corrupt activities within public bureaucratic organization do not allow for the judicious use of such funds to effectively implement such policies. Still on this, coupled with inadequate funding government policies implementation has been hit by inadequate manpower resources and public institutions in Nigeria do not, indeed have adequate qualified manpower, professionals, technical or managerial competence and expertise (Aluko & Adeso, 2002). This is counterproductive as the capabilities of government in terms of expertise and skills determine to a large extent the success or failure of implementation of policy in Nigeria (Ololube et al., 2016). It is noteworthy that inadequacy of personnel as it relates to expertise and skilled manpower is as a result of the recruitment policies in Nigeria. The application of the principle of Quota System or Federal Character results to employing people into position when they do not meet up the requirements and skills.
- Also, the difficulty of putting personal interest aside, tribalism and influence of primordial values in the conduct of official business by bureaucrats is another serious issue when it comes to educational policy implementation in Nigeria. In this context, if the bureaucrats are not disposed to a particular policy that is formulated, they will not approach the implementation of that policy with zeal and enthusiasm. Kelegbe (2006), in this respect said that, positive effects will induce enthusiastic implementation while the contrary may mean that implementation may be resisted, thwarted and even sabotaged, The zeal with which bureaucrats in Nigeria implements education policy depends on how

they see the policy as affecting their personal, ethnic and organizational interest and aspiration (Makinde, 2005).

- Another limiting factor to effective educational policy implementation in the country is the undue pervasive political interference and influence on the public bureaucracy (Amucheaz, 1980). In the context of Nigeria, political leaders are the ones who formulate, control and also implement the policies. This is not wise as such control and implementation are done selfishly and of personal interest. This is more so as in extreme cases of such political control in Nigeria, the bureaucrats are not even allowed to take actions on routine administrative matters without consultation and consent of the political authorities. This has resulted to too much time and energy wastage on implementation of policies in Nigeria. Very worrisome is the fact that the political influence on the bureaucracy is becoming tighter as promotion to top position in any public school is based on political patronage or loyalty and not on the basis of relevant, experience or seniority.
- Abrogation of a policy affects their implementation in Nigeria. It is observed that new political leadership is concerned with making its own impression on public programmes and projects. For this, certain policies or programmes which are already being effectively implemented are shelved by the succeeding administration (Nnamdi, 2001). President, Governors, Ministers, and Chairmen in Nigeria exhibits the tendency to link their administration with distinct social and economic policies or programmes. Consequently the policies of preceding administration are rarely pursued by succeeding ones and such selfish style of administration help to explain why so little attention is paid to the issues of maintenance of Projects or programmes created or initiated by preceding regime. An instance of this tendency for a succeeding regime to discontinue the Implementation of the policy of a predecessor was the down-playing of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy of General Olusegun Obasanjo by Alhaji Shehu Shagari who succeeded him In Nigeria, Educational policy formulators focus on very few variables that influence the problem identified. In most cases, they focus on only the political and economic variables failing to include the social, administrative and external environmental factors and variables. Hence, right from the start, the policies are formulated with deficiencies.
- Again, there is lack of participation by the target group. By participation, we mean the target group which is meant for, is given much room to contribute in policy formulation and implementation. However, in Nigeria and most African countries the target group is usually left out at the policy formulation stage. Only high officials of the government and policy actors are made to participate. The policy so defined, therefore fails to be client-oriented and gets out of touch from the local people. Ownership of the policy becomes difficult (Ololube, 2018a).

Ways to Achieve Effective Educational Policy Implementation in Nigeria

After several considerations and discussions, it is imperative to sort out ways to effectively implement educational policies in Nigeria. Below are some of the ways to effectively implement government formulated educational policies.

The culture of not continuing with previous policies by past regimes should be totally discouraged. This can be effectively done if the National Assembly should enact a law that will guarantee continuity of policies and projects by the outgoing leaders. For this will mean growth

and development in the country education sector. This is very important because, even though a government come and go, policies will continue to be effectively implemented.

There is need to have a focused, articulated and purposeful political leaders at the head of every government (either at the Federal, State and Local level). It is expected that the democratization process in Nigeria will aid and hasten the coming into existence of such visionary and purposeful leadership that will be more inclined to developing appropriate educational policies to address the problems in Nigeria.

Also, Government should embark on programmes that will be aimed at improving the working conditions of educational institutions' leaders as this will help to build their desire and enthusiasm to implement government policies. This can be done by improving their pay packages, giving them conducive environment to operative without interference and also allow proper use of allocated fund for implementing policies.

In formulating an educational policy, the policy formulators require a good understanding of the problems and needs of the people. This will help to implement a policy properly knowing fully well their problems and their needs.

There is need for leaders of government to reduce their interference and infiltration into bureaucratic activities in the school system in. This will certainly ensure that bureaucrats in authority are allowed to exercise their control, make decisions and be able to function freely, applying some basic ideals of Weberian model of bureaucracy in their administrative process and procedures (Resyin, 2006). There should also be provision for adequate monitoring of policies and projects; this will properly implement public policies. Poorly monitored projects will only yield undesired outcomes of these policies leading to constant underdevelopment of the country.

CONCLUSION

The aim of every government is to make sure that every citizen enjoys the dividends of democracy and improved of standard of living resulting from good policy implementation in the education sector. Having this in mind will mean that government should not only focus on formulation of policies, but very importantly on the implementation of policies. With the number of educational policies formulated since the inception of this country, several policies have been implemented and it is expected that, these policies should have brought about tremendous growth in our country in the area of social, economic and political development. But, unfortunately that has not been the on for Nigeria since we started making policies.

Essentially, success in implementation of educational policies must-be evaluated within the context of particular problems and critical factors affecting implementation varies and success prone policies are not also obvious. Effective implementation is said to be partially Pre-ordained by good leadership that can be significant political hidden hand that guides disorganized any desperate interest to converge in support of implementing policy. External monitoring of the implementation process is also a crucial variable when it comes to effective implementation of Policy.

Effective and successful educational policy implementation is very important to the development of a nation (Egeran, 2011), it is the foundation that facilitates socio-economic and political progress of Nigeria and this can only be obtainable through a continuous political commitment and clear definition of responsibilities and coordination, but also through genuine commitment to completely eradicate, corruption in the education sector in the country.

Base on all these obstacles affecting educational policy implementation in Nigeria, it is crystal clear to assert that policy implementation in education sector in Nigeria is seriously undermined by the government's attitude to policy implementation, lack of resources, corruption, sectionalism, tribalism and even misplacement of priorities. This calls for a change in attitude on the part of those who are entrusted with the implementation of policy in the Nigeria's education system. The time is now.

Suggestions

Based on the identified realities about educational policy implementation in Nigeria, the following suggestions are made:

- There should be legislation on the continuity of previous government policies by incoming government.
- The wit to make good decisions, formulate and implement policies is the exclusive ingenuity of visionary leadership. So, there should be leaders who have focus, vision and mission to deliver the dividends of good governance in government offices.
- There should be a legislation to reduce interference on the implementation process of people-oriented policies. This will enable educational policy makers /implementers operate at their best.
- There should be need for proper monitoring and supervision. The government should ensure that monitors and supervisors of educational policies/projects are men and women of integrity that cannot compromise standard.

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