



Planning and Implementation of Primary School Education Policies in Nigeria Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT:- The paper focused on planning and Implementation of primary school education policies in Nigeria: problems and solutions. The paper stressed on various definitions of planning, implementation and policy. It stressed much on various problems inhibiting policy implementation in our primary schools. The paper finally ended with some recommendations as solutions in solving the identified problems confronting educational policy implementation in our primary schools.

I. INTRODUCTION

Primary Education is the education children receive after the Nursery type of education. Primary education in Nigeria is giving to children between the ages of 6-12 years. Arising from the Supreme Court judgment in the on-shore /off shore suit No SC 28/2001 on 5th April, 2002, the federating states of Nigeria, are the principal stakeholders in matters of primary education (Tahir, 2005). The judgment imposed enormous responsibilities of primary school matters on every state in Nigeria. These responsibilities include: provision of teaching and non-teaching personnel, school facilities, instructional materials, educational services among others. Visits to these schools and observations reveal that all is not well with the primary education sub-system in Nigeria. Tahir (2005) asserted that the learning environments were not child- friendly as most of these schools were in deplorable conditions. He added that instructional materials and text books were not available in most of the schools.

However, and in spite of the ugly conditions in which these schools operate, the government appears committed to using primary education as veritable instrument for development. This is because a virile primary education is a precursor for sound secondary and tertiary education as well as continuing education.

The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National policy on Education (2004) admits as much and described it as the key to the success or failure of the whole system. In pursuance of the goals of providing a sound primary education, the policy provides among others that: (i) it shall be free, universal and compulsory. (ii) duration shall be six years (iii) it shall be for children aged 6 -11 plus (iv) educational services, (v) Teacher – pupils ratio shall be 1:35 and (vi) primary school leaving certificates shall be locally issued by the schools' head –teachers in order to achieve the objectives of primary education, Maduewesi (2005) posited that resources must be carefully managed. According to her, resource management involves adequate supplies and handling. To achieve success, she advocates cooperative management.

At this juncture; it may interest us to have some important definitions of key terms in this topic. To achieve the goals and objectives of primary education, planning is necessary. Planning according to Newman (1993) is the process of determining in advance, what is to be done, including classification of goals, establishment of policies, mapping out of programmes and campaigns and determining specific methods or procedures and fixing day to day schedules. Agabi (1995) sees planning as a conscious, deliberate systemic and rational decision making process, designed to influence future course of action in an organization or any field of human activity with the ultimate aim of making the most economical use of the limited resources. A plan is a product of planning process. It is a blue print for action towards organization goal attainment in the most effective and efficient manner.

UNESCO (1968) defines educational planning as the application to education itself of a rational scientific approach to examining ones alternatives choosing wisely among them, then processing systematically to implement the choices, thus made. It is in the same view that Comb (1972) sees educational planning as the application of rational systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of its students and society.

It is the responsibility of the government to see that educational policies are implemented to achieve results by providing enabling environments. Implementation of educational policies or plans means carrying out the decisions of government strictly so as to achieve the objectives of the plan.

The paper discussed the topic in three parts. Part one dwells on the critical factors influencing policy implementation in primary schools. Part two dwells on emerging problems facing primary schools and the third part dwells on solutions towards solving the identified problems.

Factors Influencing Policy Implementation in Primary Education in Nigeria.

Resource supplies and handling have been identified as the critical factors influencing policy implementation at this level of education.

1. **Teaching personnel supplies and retention:** Teaching personnel consists of the classroom teachers and the head-teachers. It is the policy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that the least formal paper qualification of a teacher shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E). Unfortunately, full compliance with the national policy expectations in terms of quantity and quality is yet to be realized in Nigeria. For instance Nwakpa (2005) found that some TC II and WAEC holders are still teaching in some primary schools in Ebonyi State, and also found the teacher-pupils ratio of 1:50 in Ebonyi State. In the same vein, Osadolor (2006) found that about 74% of the teaching personnel were qualified to teach in primary schools in Edo State of Nigeria, and discovered that teacher–pupil’s ratio was 1:90 as against the prescribed 1:35 by the policy.

2. **Teacher Quality and Retention:** In Nigeria, education is perceived as an instrument “per excellence” for effecting National Development (FRN, 2004) while the belief and confidence in education as the process of unlocking the doors to development, it can also be hypothesized that the teacher holds the key to that door. It is agreed that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2004) also Adaralegbe (1985) asserted that the teacher is the key person in the nation education enterprise whose quality of training could mar or improve the education results.

Starting from the point of their admission, as they enter the teacher education, training programmes, the Nigeria teachers including those for the primary schools suffer from low morale. In the good old days training institutions had the opportunity to be involved in the process of selecting their prospective entrants for certain desirable qualities (Osadolor, 2006). To day, recruitment into the Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education is the prerogative of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). So far, majority of those recruited into the teacher education programmes are generally of poor quality (Udofot, 2005). He also posited that trainees with low academic qualifications and poor JAMB scores go into teacher education, perhaps because they lack alternative professional choices. Udofot further stressed other factors that contribute towards low quality of teachers are lack of built-in-incentives, inadequate scheduling of duties and lack of support from supervisors who ought to be seen as professional colleagues. Teachers in the system are traumatized and demotivated. In this regard, he concludes that even when they retire from service, some of them are not paid their retirement entitlements till they die. He added that this phenomenon does not only affect job performance but also his psyche, hence retaining teachers on their job is difficult. The situation is that teachers stay on the job while waiting for better alternation.

II. FACILITIES SHORTAGE

Facilities are the part of the major production variables in primary education. Facilities required at this level other than those included in educational services are furnished classrooms, science laboratories, workshops, sports equipment and even play ground. Over the years these kinds of facilities have dwindled in schools. Where they once existed they are not made available (Ajayi 2004). FRN (2004) in the National Policy in Education provides that Science, Agriculture, Home Economics and Computer Education be taught at primary level of education. But in many primary schools in Nigeria, particularly those located in the rural areas, facilities for instruction in those subject areas were never supplied adequately (Ajayi 2004).

Okecha (2006), reports that in Edo State of Nigeria, out of the 23,654 classrooms required for effective learning, only 1400 or 5.9% were made available. She added that, out of the required 473076 pair of seats and Desks, only 12,900 or 12% were supplied. Facilities supply has been very epileptic, while its management has been very porous in the primary schools. Facilities are seen as government property and are therefore handled poorly.

Nwakpa (2005) found gross inadequacies in the supply of laboratories, library; water closet, pit toilets, staff rooms, classroom in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. He further found that the few available school facilities were not adequately maintained by the concerned authorities.

The Emerging Problems/Challenges:

Nowadays, there are a number of factors, which pose threats and challenges to policy implementation of primary education in Nigeria. These problems or challenges include:

1. **Medium of instruction:** The FRN (2004) in the National Policy on Education provides that the medium of instruction at this level shall be the language of the immediate environment. But, unfortunately, what one observes as the practice is that the medium of instruction in the schools right from pre-primary level is English language. The language of the immediate environment is completely relegated. Unfortunately, even the parents appreciate the situation, hence English language has replaced local language in many homes in Nigeria. What a pity!

2. **Increasing Number of Private Schools:** In some decades ago, private primary schools were not popular because public primary schools then were performing very well in terms of academics and morality. But in the last few years, there has an upsurge of privately owned primary schools across the country, approved and unproved. Although the increasing number of privately owned schools could be seen as a vote against the public schools, the operation of these schools deserves attention. In private schools, most of which are not government approved, operate in uncompleted buildings where pupils are stocked in little spaces, ordinarily built as bedrooms.

Similarly, observations indicate that teachers in most private schools do not possess the qualifications stipulated by the policy. Thus, the inadequacies found in majority of these private primary schools are enough to attract serious government attention.

3. **Politicization of the Primary Education:** The politicization of primary education in Nigeria in recent years has been identified as one of the factors giving rise to crises in the implementation process of primary education policies. In terms of control, the external bodies in charge of management of primary education are the State Ministries of Education through the offices of the Chief Inspectors of Education. There are other interventional bodies established to ameliorate the problems of the public primary school system. They include the Local Government Basic Education Board. As usual, appointments into the governing boards and councils of these bodies are often politicized. Serious considerations may be given to professionalism and competency at the Federal level. At the State and Local Government levels, appointments into these bodies are mainly based on political consideration. This is because the governing boards of these bodies are seen as the juicy; as a result, appointees into the boards are cronies of the state chief executives and party loyalists. The over bearing influence of government extends beyond the composition of these boards. It is visible in the recruitment and promotion of teachers. It should be noted that politics and intrigues can only breed incompetence and arises in the system management particularly at the schools level. In effect, policy implementation is in jeopardy,

4. **Admission and Graduation of Under Aged Children:** The required age of those entering primary school is also six years. But nowadays children aged 4-5 years are admitted into our private owned primary schools contrary to the government policy on primary education. Private owned primary schools no longer allow their pupils to spend up to six years but just five years or even four years. Thus, producing under-aged primary school graduates, that is pupils between the ages of 9 -10years. This phenomenon is a distortion of the policy and has serious educational implications for the management of the system. In this circumstance, teachers and school heads are being compelled to dish instructions to under –aged children.

5. **Examination Malpractices:** Certification at the primary schools is expected to be based only on Continuous Assessment and to be done locally by the head teachers of the schools. Unfortunately however, the prevailing practices are that certification is done on the basis of examination administered for the purpose by the state's ministry of education. Most times the conduct of these examinations are usually shroud with malpractices, a phenomenon which has rendered most Nigerian certificates worthless. Visits to examination centers or halls reveal massive examination malpractices in Nigeria primary schools. It is highly contended that no problem is as threatening to the primary education as that of examination malpractices. It shall be too devastating if the practices is not checked, controlled and eliminated at all cost at this level of education. This is because subsequent levels of education would be built on porous foundation.

Examination malpractice is a product of corruption and social decay of the Nigeria society. This situation has become a pull-down factor in the policy implementation efforts in the schools. As things are now there may be no immediate solution to this ugly phenomenon. This is because; teachers and even parents are collaborators in the shameful game of examination malpractice. The situation is likely to be worsened when

eventually head teachers start to issue certificates locally. At that time, certification especially favourable good grades are likely to be on “cash and carry” basis.

6. Yes, it is a fact that private sector participation in the provision of primary education is on the increase. As a private business, it is profit driven and client controlled. This situation coupled with the need to keep children busy beyond 1.00pm as their mothers remain at work has forced many private school owners to introduce after school lesson. Since after school lesson have become a veritable source of additional financial resources to the school and the teachers, many public schools in the urban areas have joined in the practice. Although the policy did not specify the number of hours which constitute a school day, the extension of the school day by a minimum of about two hours can be counter productive. As the popularity of “after school lessons” increases in the primary schools, there is need for a more result oriented management approach in the circumstance. This should be with a view to enhancing productivity and protecting the physiological and psychological development of the child.
7. **Foreign Language Orientation:** A growing practice in some primary schools particularly those founded to meet the needs of children of the elites, is the teaching of many foreign languages. In these schools, apart from English, French German, Dutch, Italian languages are taught at the expense of our local languages, which the national policy on education stressed should be properly taught and used as a medium of instruction.

In this country, people emulate elites a lot, rightly or wrongly. Therefore, in the near future, it is envisaged that management of primary schools will be contending with the burden of making provisions for instructions in foreign languages. The schools will be compelled to do so in order to remain relevant in the contemporary society.

8. **Dwindling Collaborative Efforts:** The management of the schools is not the sole responsibility of the head teachers and their colleagues. It was in this regard that the Parents – Teachers-Association, school committee Board of Governors were formed and encouraged as collaborative out fits in school management. The FRN (2004) gave impetus to this when it stated that government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and organization”. Until in the recent years, these collaborative out fits were used to source for resources for schools. This was to ensure the provision of teachers where they were found to be under supplied or inadequate, and in some schools, dilapidating buildings were rehabilitated, while obsolete equipment were replaced. The efforts of these bodies were even noticeable in private schools, which ought to have been seen as the exclusive ventures of their proprietors. We cannot challenge the fact that there can never be a healthy understanding, obligation and commitment to schools progress on the part of parents, without involving them meaningfully in the decision making process.

This is the dilemma of the present day primary education management. Imana (2003) confirmed that the PTA which used to be the platform for cross fertilization of ideas concerning the school and the children are fast diminishing in the system. He added that parents’ responses in PTA meetings were generally poor nowadays.

9. **Indiscipline in schools:** There are a lot of problems relating to indiscipline in Nigeria primary schools. Edem (1982) states that indiscipline is a violation of school rules and regulations, and it is capable of obstructing the smooth and the orderly function of the school system. From the above definition, it is an obvious fact that the major cause of lack of smooth and orderly functions in our primary schools is indiscipline among pupils and teachers of these schools.

Issues and problems in our primary schools relating to indiscipline range from examination malpractice, absenteeism, poor teaching, idleness, poor supervision of academic activities by the head teachers, lateness, loitering among others. These are very serious problems that work against full implementation of primary education policies in Nigeria.

Solution/Recommendations

The following recommendations will serve as panacea solution to all the problems facing primary education policies implementation in Nigeria.

- 1) Every State Government in Nigeria should provide adequate human resources (teachers) to match with the teeming school population orchestrated by the policy of free and compulsory primary education.
- 2) Every State Government in Nigeria should see that adequate school facilities are provided to enhance teaching and learning.
- 3) Every primary school head teacher should see that thorough internal school supervision is carried out periodically in order to make teachers to work very hard.
- 4) External supervision should be made effective to ensure that schools are properly managed by the concerned authorities.

- 5) All hands must be on deck to see that examination malpractice is totally checked, controlled and brought to the lowest elbow or barest minimum if not eliminated completely.
- 6) Absenteeism especially on the part of teachers should be checked by ensuring that those who do not come to school are adequately surcharged and quarried by the concerned authorities, while pupils could be subjected to serious manual work or and suspension. Suspended pupils should be made to bring their parents with a letter of undertaking.
- 7) Head teachers found wanting could be demoted, suspended punished, withdrawn and redeployed to school board.
- 8) Since a free education is a capital intensive project, the concerned authorities should prepare to map out adequate financial outlet for the implementation of the programme, if we want the policy to succeed.
- 9) The ministries of education in various states of the federation should ensure that every private owned primary school is compelled to obey all the stipulated policies concerning primary education in Nigeria, while the recalcitrant ones should be closed down on the ground of disobedience. A servant cannot be greater than his master. Thus, no private owned primary school is greater than the government. After all laws are made for people to obey or face the wrath of the law.

III. CONCLUSION

The paper dealt with planning and implementation of primary school education policies in Nigeria, problems and solutions. Of course, shortage in facilities supply is an impediment to the success of implementation of policy on primary education matters. Also poor maintenance of the four available educational resources in our primary schools is a very big bottleneck to the success of implementation of educational policies, so the few available resources should be maintained adequately. All the stakeholders in primary education should cooperate adequately in all matters concerning primary schools in Nigeria in order to see that the goals of primary education are achieved. Finally, the recommended solutions in this paper if judiciously and religiously respected, all the cobwebs surrounding implementation of primary education policies in Nigeria will be brought under control.

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