

## EDUCATION POLICY REFORMS AND ADMINISTRATION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN A DWINDLING ECONOMY

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### Abstract

Policy reform is a planned change to existing laws guiding the administration of an organization toward improving standards to achieve desired objectives. It provides limits and direction to bring about positive change in a system and for the organization to function effectively for growth and development. The school is a social system and has its set objectives like any other system guided by policies therefore, the tertiary education system is not spared from policy reforms. However, it is worrisome to observe that there are trending issues between government policy reforms on tertiary education and stakeholders of the educational system on funding, infrastructural provision, and staff welfare, resulting in incessant industrial actions. The paper critically reviewed both past and present policy reforms on tertiary education in Nigeria, the different models that were adopted, and how effective policies are been implemented. The paper equally analyzed the effectiveness of both current and past implementation strategies that were implored and their achievements in the administration of tertiary education in Nigeria. In conclusion, the paper posits that there is inconsistency and lack of commitment on the part of the government in policy reforms and therefore, suggests among others that policy reforms should be all-inclusive.

**Keywords:** Education Reforms, Education Administration, Education Policy, Tertiary Education

### Introduction

Education policy reforms in the true meaning of the word are aimed at improving existing frameworks in practices, procedures, and processes in achieving educational goals for the overall benefit of society. The assumption is that existing laws and regulations guiding the educational sector are at variance with current social political and economic realities to deliver the objectives of education. For clarity of the meaning of reform, the Oxford English Dictionary defined it; thus, the amendment, or altering for the better, of some faulty state of things, especially of a corrupt or oppressive political institution or practice; the removal of some abuse or wrong.

Reforms in the education section in the history and introduction of Western Education have taken different dimensions and shapes all in the spirit to add value and improve on the achievements of educational goals. Stakeholders of the educational sector in various platforms have agitated for a deal from the government at all levels to reform policies to improve standards. Dakuku, (2023) as reported in Premium Times, cried out and called for a state of emergency and a complete reset of education in Nigeria. This means a holistic reform program that will position our education sector as the engine for social and economic growth. According to him, the Asian Tigers; Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea, amongst others, can attribute their successes to the fact that they scaled up investments in education, as well as in research and development, that enhanced human capital development.

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### **Conceptual Clarification of Tertiary Education**

According to the World Bank (2021), tertiary education refers to all formal post-secondary education, including public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools. Or tertiary education refers to any type of education pursued beyond the high school level. This includes diplomas, undergraduate and graduate certificates, and associate's, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. In other words, what can be seen as tertiary education is any educational level following the completion of secondary education.

According to a document issued by the Federal Government, the goals of tertiary education encompass the development of relevant high-level manpower, the advanced development of the intellectual capability of individuals, and the acquisition of physical and intellectual skills (FRN, 2004). Others are to promote and encourage scholarship as well as community service. Tertiary educational institutions pursue these goals through teaching, research, generation, and dissemination of knowledge, which they achieve through a variety of programs such as certificates, diplomas, and undergraduate, and postgraduate courses (Thursday, 2014). Tertiary education is the third tier of education provided by both the private sector and governments of various levels in Nigeria. It is basically to provide solutions to societal problems through research and production of a workforce with the needed skills to function effectively in society.

### **Background Information on Tertiary Education Policy Reforms in Nigeria**

There have been a lot of reforms in the educational sector, both at the junior, senior, and tertiary levels. These reforms are aimed at fostering the frontiers for the expansion of education in Nigeria due to the rising demand for higher education. However, there is a sharp increase in the number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria both privately and government-owned, all to provide skills but sadly the needed objectives and gains are yet to be achieved failing to keep pace with the changing dynamics of the labor market and fast-paced economy (Taibat, 2020). According to Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills at the OECD, it is important to think more systematically about what we want to achieve from curriculum design, instead of continuing to add more "things" to what is being taught, as is the norm with many tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

She further stated that the higher education sector needs urgent improvement to ensure young Nigerians do not fall further behind their peers across the globe. An underperforming education system coupled with neglectful administration has failed millions of young people, and we need systematic change across the country to redress the problem. It is well due for institutions to look beyond providing students with a customary degree and instead begin to help them build a strong skill set to find suitable employment.

### **Review of Reforms in Tertiary Education**

UNESCO, (2015) educational policy consists of the principles and government policies in the educational sphere and the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems.

**National Policy on Education in Nigeria:** As stated in the national policy on education include the following:

- a free and democratic society.
- a just and egalitarian society.
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation and
- a great and dynamic economy and e) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens

Policy on Education was first published in 1977, and the 2nd and 3rd editions were published in 1981 and 1993 respectively in keeping with the dynamics of social change and the demands on education. The fourth edition was in 2004. This edition was necessitated by some policy innovations and changes, and the need to update the 3rd edition (1998). the fifth edition was published in 2007. The Reforms while the sixth edition in 2013. The sixth edition accommodated some recent developments.

### **Quota System and Catchment Area Policy**

The high demand for higher education in Nigeria and to ensure equity and fairness in the provision of education for all regardless of state or religion led the federal government to establish a quota system policy. Ekundayo and Adedokun in Tykyaa and Pinga, (2022) assert that the quota system policy ensures equity and fairness in the admission processes. With the quota system policy, universities are under obligation to admit students not entirely on merit but on the quota of states as stipulated by the government. The quota system used during admission processes in most universities in Nigerian comprises academic merit which is determined by the University Matriculation Examination (UME) and is allotted 45%, educationally less privileged state is allotted 20%, catchment areas 25% and 10% to the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor (NUC, 1999).

**6-3-3-4 policy on education:** National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981:22) on tertiary education provides that education which is the post-secondary education given in the higher institution aims

- the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society at large;
- the development of the intellectual capabilities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments;
- the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop, and

- the acquisition of the objective view of local and external environments.

**University Autonomy Acts:** The Federal Government of Nigeria, as a response to the university community's demand for the democratization of public educational institutions, passed into law the University (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts 2003 (as amended), which provided improved autonomy for the university system. The objective of the Act is to give the university system the freedom to govern itself, appoint key officers, determine the conditions of service of staff, control students' admissions and academic curricula, control finances, and generally regulate themselves as independent legal entities without interference from the government and its agencies (Idowu, Segun and Ojo, 2017)

**Students Loan Act:** The Students Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act 2023 repealed the Nigerian Education Bank Act of 2004 and established the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELF) to provide interest-free loans for economically disadvantaged students, specifically covering tuition fees for those pursuing higher education in public schools

### **Education Policy Reforms and Administration in Higher Education in Nigeria.**

Educational administration is the management of a school system. It involves providing leadership for the education of students, developing curricula, implementing assessments, and managing human and material resources to achieve specific goals. It also includes the management of processes within a school system to ensure the achievement of particular outcomes. To ensure an effective school system in higher education, the skills acquired must align with the demands of the labour market hence stakeholders of the education system come up with reforms to shape education in Nigeria.

The school system is a social system with specific objectives. The process of achieving the objectives of the school system relies on quality administrative processes that require policy formulation and implementation. According to Eman and Jordan, (2019), the concept of the education process has been accompanied by the concept of school administration so that it expanded to include the administrative aspects and the technical aspects in an integrated form aimed at providing the means and the material and human resources and creating suitable working conditions that help to achieve the objectives of the educational process for which the school was established. In creating suitable working conditions, there must be the regulations that guide the school administrator to function optimally. The purpose, therefore, is to improve existing structural systems and the inclusion of innovative designs to guarantee an effective and efficient school system. It is also aimed at redefining and constantly renegotiating structural standards to cogitate the ever-changing educational standards for global competitiveness and alignment with the social demands of education.

Therefore, it suffices to posit that tertiary education cannot be effectively administered without sound policy reforms

### **Administrative Challenges in Implementing Education Policy Reforms in a Dwindling Economy**

Challenges are unsure realities identified in the management of a task that requires adequate skills and knowledge to unravel. It poses difficulty to resolve depending on the capacity of the individual and the availability of required facilities. In every human endeavor, Education no exception is faced with challenges to manage the advancement of education to achieve set objectives. It has been observed over the years that the implementation of education policy in Nigeria has become a troubling issue owing to a lack of transparency and sabotage from the operators of the education system.

Enyiazu, (2022) argued also that some good educational policies have been sabotaged at the implementation stage for several reasons: firstly, lawmakers often pass the budgets for the

implementation of the policies with personal strings attached to them. Secondly, even when the budgets are passed, the executive arm of government is often reluctant to release the funds to facilitate implementation. Lastly, the inadequate funds often released to the operators of the education system are not honestly and fully utilized to promote the cause of education.

It is of note that the inability to implement policy reforms has resulted in several issues affecting the growth and development of tertiary education in Nigeria, resulting in to drop in the academic quality of products. Most significantly, lack of funding poses the major constraints in the implementation of policy reforms in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Asiyai, (2013) opined that a significant constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints, making many academics and non-academics work under challenging circumstances.

In the same vein, Aigheyisi and Obhiosa, (2014) attributed the non-functionality of Nigeria's tertiary education system, and identified some factors responsible for the problem:

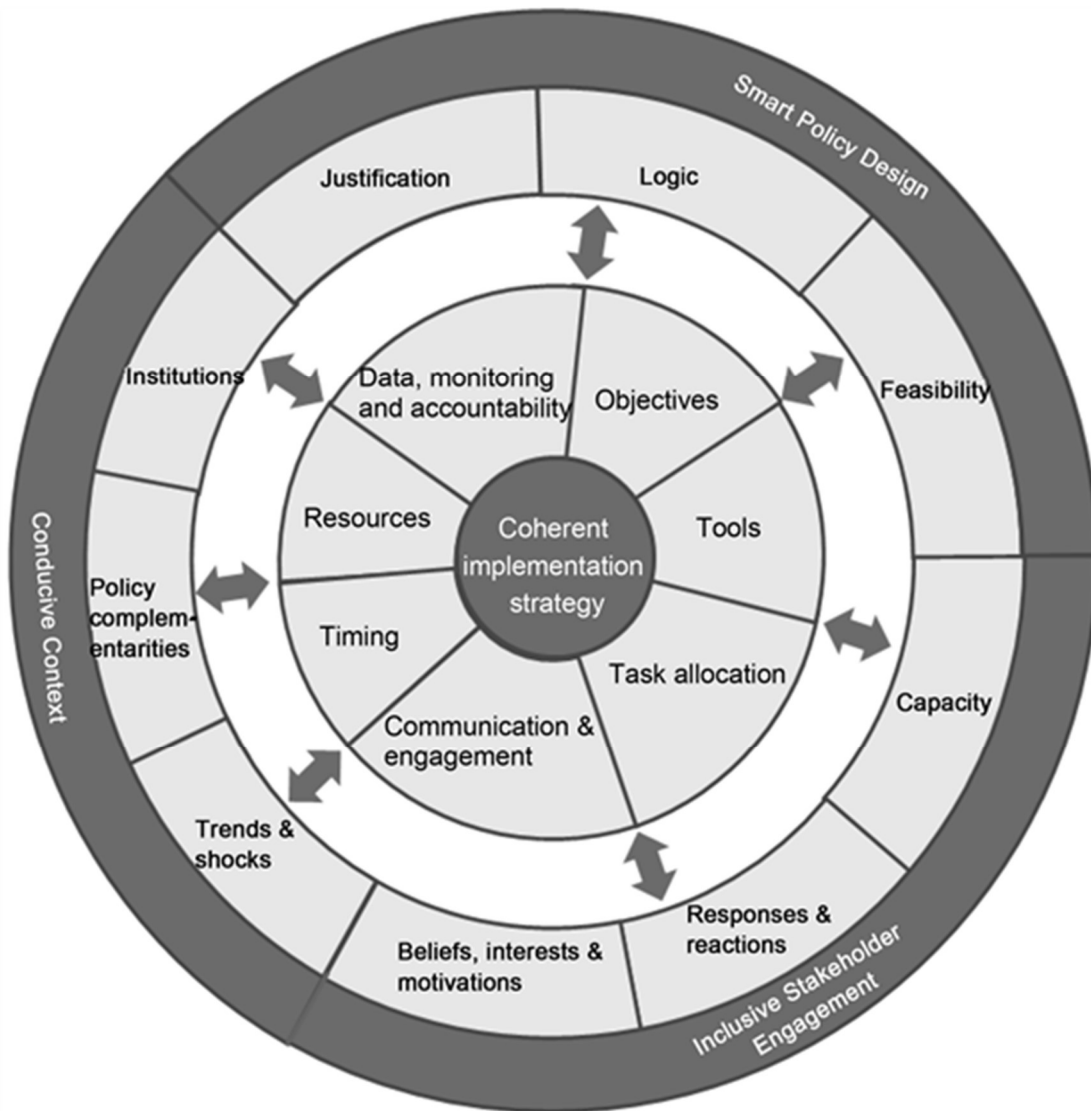
- weak commitment of the Nigerian government to the nation's tertiary education system;
- manifested in inadequate funding of the nation's higher institutions of learning;
- incessant strikes;
- poor implementation of educational policies by relevant authorities;
- inadequate skilled, qualified and experienced teachers in several departments in the institutions;
- the prevalence of corrupt practices in the higher institutions and
- weak educational foundation (at the primary and post-primary level)

Adesina (2012) noted that planned implementation is constrained by the following factors:

- over estimation of available resources: This is a situation where estimated resources are greater than the actual available resources to implement programme;
- under estimation of cost implementing a plan: this happens when cost estimated does not make adequate provisions for inflation and actual implementation costs becomes unmanageable;
- over reliance upon external assistance: plans that substantially rely upon assistance from foreign sources for their implementation run into hitches when such aid fails to come, and
- inaccurate statistical data: planning education requires accurate and up-to-date data plan that do not adequately provide for this usually have implementation problems

As of the time of this paper, 2024, Nigeria nation is experiencing a dwindling economy which is referred to as a depressed economy or recession economy due to negative activity based on the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate. There is an acquit, a spiraling currency crisis, and rising food insecurity. The inflation rate hits 29.9% triggered by an increase in food prices resulting in high cost-of-living. Given these economic indicators, education policy implementation becomes a problem and as such could spell doom for the nation's education sector





**Source:** OECD education working paper No. 162 (2017)

## Conclusion

Policy formulation in every aspect of governance in Nigeria has never posed any problem rather implementation. Policies are to guide and direct the administration of an institution to achieve targeted goals and the school system can only improve when policies are implemented. As enumerated above, several factors are responsible for the poor implementation of education policies which affects the effective administration of tertiary education in Nigeria leading to avoidable industrial actions and poor performance student outcomes. One underlying key factor is largely attributed to poor funding of tertiary education in Nigeria which hurts the growth and development of the education system and sadly, no effort is in sight to redirect this ugly trend in our school system

## The Way Forward

- The tertiary education system should be adequately funded to develop highly skilled manpower
- There should be a periodical review of policies to match the economic, social, and political needs of society
- There should be reliable data for the system to plan effectively.
- The government should involve all stakeholders in the process of policy formulation
- Tertiary education administrators should be appointed on merit based on competency and professionals in school administration

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