

POLICY REFORM AND IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA: CRITICAL ISSUES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The need to provide the citizens with sound Educational, socio-economic and infrastructural facilities has continued to be a serious concern to countries all over the world, especially the developing nations, including Nigeria. To achieve this, various governments in Nigeria have continued to initiate and implement policies aimed at addressing these problems. This paper therefore set out to examine the problems of constant reforms and implementations of public policies especially in Educational sector in Nigeria. The objectives of this paper include: to find out the strategies adopted by government and its agencies in the implementation of Educational policies and to identify factors militating against their effective reform and implementation which leads to crises in Education. The paper contends that the continued use of neo top-bottom approach in policy reform and implementation mainly in Education sector has serious consequences for the realization of the desired objectives. The paper highlights the relevance and practical issues relating to citizens input in policy reform and implementation in their respective areas. The paper argued that education policy implementation agencies and government officials have not shown any commitment to the effective reform and implementation of public policies in education in Nigeria which would allow it achieves the desired result. The paper recommends that the institutional framework should be restructured for proper application of the strategies to avoid unnecessary political influence and neglect of the intending beneficiaries. The government should be more committed and see policy reforms and implementations in education as major tools for the development of educational system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Public policies, Reform, Implementation, Way Forward; Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria having been regarded all over the world as a leading nation in terms of Education, socio- economic and infrastructural development in the entire African continent, has over the years desired to develop the country in the areas of agriculture, education, health care, housing, transportation, communication, technology, infrastructure, commerce, banking, roads, and water among others. In a bid to achieve these needs that might exist at various points in time, government is always confronted with the need to reform existing policies to tackle them, aimed at achieving the desired growth and national development for the wellbeing of the citizens. In some situations, these problems are tackled as they arise to avoid degenerating to uncontrollable level of crises (Okoli and Onah, 2002).

Basically, since public policy is the action or proposed action of a government aimed towards achieving desired goals as stated by Ikelegbe (2006), it then means that public policy guides and determines present and future decision as well as private individuals or private business, institutional actions, decisions or behavior. As a result of the importance of government providing these facilities especially in the developing countries, the scope and level of public policy is pervasive and influential especially in third world countries such as Nigeria where the private sector is very weak, as such policies determine the activities of government in the provision of services designed to solve problems (Abah, 2010).

Mostly, even though the executive can initiate public policies, but to back it up with enabling laws, policies are made by legislative arm of the government in both the federal, state and local governments, while the implementation lies with the public bureaucracy (Ezeani,2006). While

various existing public policies have been initiated or reformed and implemented in Nigeria aimed at improving educational system and enhancing the living standard of the citizens, a close look at the country's developmental level has indicated that the country is unfortunately one of the least developed countries in the world despite her abundant natural and human resources. This situation is led ajar by the various reports that showed that Nigeria is so underdeveloped that over 70% of its population lack finance to take care of their immediate needs, lack food, shelter, access to health care services, education while child and maternal mortality rates have continued to grow, children of school age drop out of school for odd jobs, while the people do not have access to socioeconomic and infrastructural facilities despite the plethora of reformed development policies initiated and implemented in the past by various governments in the country as Nigerians are experiencing as of today. (World Bank Report, 2008).

This frightening situation prompted Obodoechi (2009) to argue that in Nigeria, some existing public policies such as 6-3-3-4 system of education are brilliantly reformed but their implementation turn out to be ineffective, thereby leading to the failure of such public policies to achieve their aims and objectives for which they were designed. Ozor (2004) on his part, assert that the ineffective reform and implementation of policies of UBE in Nigeria has continued to create a large gap between formulated and later reformed public policy goals and the achievement of those goals. Basically, there is usually wide gaps between reformed policy goals and the achievement of those goals as a result of ineffective implementation in almost all facets of public administration in Nigeria as noted by (Ozor, 2004; Mankinde, 2005). Initially, the emphasis in the literature of policy studies was more on the policy formulation stage. In contemporary times, however, emphasis has shifted to policy implementation following the realization that effective implementation of policies is not an automatic affair as noted by (Ikelegbe, 2006); Nweke, (2008) and Egonmwan, (2019). Furthermore, policy implementation has become of greater concern to its formulation particularly in developing nations like Nigeria where the government is increasingly looked upon by the citizens to effectively implement development policies and where, contrarily, ineffective implementation of policies has become very critical and worrisome especially in educational sector resulting to crisis. It is based on this that Ugo and Ukpere (2011) argued that an adequate solution to the problem of effective policy implementation failures in Nigeria must stem logically from a rigorous examination and analysis of its causes. This discussion is therefore set to look at policy reform and implementation as a major issue in public policy process, and to examine the role of public bureaucracy in effective policy implementation in Nigeria, and to equally x-ray the obstacles that inhibit the effective reform and implementation of educational policies in the country leading to policy crises and possibly to find the way forward. Against this background, some concepts need to be explained.

Meaning of Public Policy

Policy is seen as course or principle of action proposed or adopted by individuals, groups, organizations or government. Policy is seen as being central to the operation and activities of both private and public organizations. However, a policy option made by groups or individuals is educational, economic and infrastructural facilities despite the plethora of development policies initiated, later reformed and implemented in the past by various governments in the country (World Bank Report, 2008). Ozor (2004) expressed that the ineffective implementation of reformed policies especially in educational sector in Nigeria has continued to create a large gap between formulated and reformed public policy goals and the achievement of those goals, thereby resulting to policy implementation crises.

Effective Educational Policy Implementation:

The word effective refers to producing the results that is wanted or intended to producing a successful result. In the context of this paper, effective educational policy reform and implementation, entails changing old policies in education system that does not meet the people's desire and implementing it in such a way as to realize the goals and objectives for which the policy is intended. In this context, if a policy is effectively reformed and implemented, it would achieve the designed goals and objectives. Therefore, the basic focus of the government and its personnel especially those responsible for implementing educational policies should then be on how to effectively implement education policies reformed by government so as to achieve the desired standards (Effiong, 2013)

Education Policy Making In Nigeria.

Politics and policy making are interwoven and the study of politics is not complete without the examination of what government actually does, hence the study of the activities of government is an important aspect of political science; and therefore, the study of Government falls within the purview of public policy (Eugene, 2005). When public policy is studied, we therefore want to comprehend for instance the circumstances that make it difficult for government to implement its own policies and the wishes of the people and also want to understand the environmental factors that hinder the implementation of government policies, which are the constraints in policy implementation (Ozor, 2004). Ozor adds further that public policy therefore could be conceptualized as a long series of more or less related activities that government pursues at a particular time while public policy implementation has been described as one major problem confronting developing countries.

Public Policy Reform Process

Policy reform is a complex activity involving a pattern of actions, extending overtime and involving many decisions. As a course of action, it is useful to conceive policy reform as a process of activity involving a series of distinct stages which constitute what here refer to as the policy cycle, while Policy reform therefore, is a concentric or consequential pattern of changes of actions involving a number of functional categories of activities (Eugene, 2005). Ideally policy reform process starts with policy formulation, implementation, feedback (evaluation), however, before policy-making process swings into action, a policy problem has to be identified by policy makers. Policy problem is a condition or situation which generates a human need, deprivation or dissatisfaction, self-identified or identified by others for which relief is sought. Lending credence to this, Egonmwan (2019) conceptualizes a policy problem as a social situation which many people consider adverse or intolerable in its effects on a large number of people over a long period of time. Judging from this premise therefore, people anticipate or desire qualitative change whenever a policy problem is envisaged.

However, from social point of view, policy problem may vary from society to society because of the dynamism of human nature and in this regard, therefore, before a social problem can be said to be a policy problem, the following indicators need to feature prominently in such a problem. These indicators as highlighted by Egonmwan (2019) include:

That a large number of people are in unfortunate conditions, suffered deprivation, and are dissatisfied with an undesirable situation. These adverse conditions are recognized by some or a large number of people.

. In addition to those who suffered the unsatisfactory situation, the government is aware of the situation as they have responsibilities for coping with it.

. People outside the immediate social problems (third party) must show concern.

Large number of people should think that something should be done about the situation apart from merely recognizing the undesirable situation.

Conflicting interest and cognitive disagreement should be presented by different groups as this will motivate the government to step in and make necessary investigation and take appropriate action.

. Apart from objective situations, the values and perception of people also determine what a public problem is.

Further, Egonmwan reiterates that the value and perception of policy makers is one of the problems confronting policy making in any nation, and that the above condition is by no means exhaustive, but to a large extent capture the realities of Nigeria's social situation, adding however that whenever a policy problem is identified, it passes three main stages, which include: formulation, implementation and feedback (evaluation) stages; adding that at the level of policy formulation, the first thing is that when government decides what to be done and what is to be achieved, the process involves the following; a. Goal formulation involving multiple groups with varying conflicting objectives. b. Problem identification and definition as a result of partial ignorance of problem situation. c. Agenda setting/of objectives involving attempts by individuals and groups to influence policy decisions. d. Seeking of policy alternatives and evaluating such policy alternatives, that is,. Analysis of policy options. e. The policy choice. The above are classical policy formulation process. However, Adeyeye (2000) posits that policy formulation process involves the following; a. Determination of policy content b. Design of implementation strategy c. Monitoring, review and revision of policy. Once a policy choice is made and has passed through the normal process, that is legislative enactment, the stage of reality comes next. Implementation stage therefore is the ability of an organization to bring together men and materials in a cohesive organizational unit and motivate them in such a way as to carry out the organization's stated objectives. Therefore, when this formulated policy is not meeting public needs that there will be a call to reform the policy.

Crises That Leads to Educational Reform and Implementation in Nigeria.

In a normal situation, the government is known for its desires to reliably, efficiently, and effectively implement policies. However, while this is obtainable in developed countries, the reverse is the case in developing nations, such as Nigeria, as its operations and activities are very much fraught with some problems. Makinde, (2005); Nweke (2006) and Effiong (2013), contend that in Nigeria like most developing countries, the score cards of government on educational policies reform and implementation so far can be said to be far from being satisfactory due to several factors which has hindered them from achieving their aims and objectives, thereby leading to policy reformation.. Some of these factors (crises) include the following;

Ambiguous Goals

Ambiguous goal is one of the crises to effective implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Nweke (2008) contends that when policies are vague and unrealistic, they enhance the failure of such public policies, stressing that a policy that aims at achieving its goals should make such clear and realistic as clarity of policy goals are very important since it reduces conflict and confusion. In addition to goal clarity, education policy goals must be realistic and simple, showing the achievability of the desired goals. Nweke notes that most policies in education are made for purposes of the selfish interest of the political leaders and sometimes only to attract public acclaim and attention with less regard to their appropriateness in addressing given problems or the possibility of their effective practical implementation. The

above reasons prompted Okoli and Onah (2002) to note that most educational policy making objectives in Nigeria are directed towards 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, and for these, most education policies in Nigeria are either inappropriate or lack well defined objectives for their effective implementation. This situation results in policy reform.

Poor Ambitious Nature of some Education Policies

Another factor that constitutes an impediment for the effective implementation of education policy in Nigeria is over ambitious nature of some education policies. Some education policies actually tend to be over ambitious, sweeping and overly fundamental in nature. Mankind (2005) stressed that in most cases, the formulation of such over ambitious policies is not borne out of sincere effort to bring about rapid development but just to boost the ego of the political leaders to attract the admiration of the electorates. Example of such policies are policies that have their main objectives in the provision of free education or establishment of some educational projects which can be abandoned due to embezzlement or not relevant to all the citizens especially in some States of the federation. For such policies, the government will be aware that there are no adequate resources, both financial, material and human resources for the effective implementation. Such education policies have witnessed very ineffective implementation resulting in deterioration in quality and standard of service that some people prefer to send their children to private primary and secondary schools irrespective of the high cost in those private places. As a result of this, the public outcry will be for such un implementable policy to be reformed to achieve the citizen's expectations.

Undue Political Interference

Another constraint to effective educational policy implementation in Nigeria which most times call for policy reform is undue interference by government officials and political office holders. Though it is the duty of government to make policy, but it demands that after formulating the policy, the government should give the implementing agencies or personnel the free hand to implement such policies without unnecessary interference. Such control and directives are mostly motivated by personal, group or political interests. Once this is the case, the strategies and processes of the implementation is always altered which definitely result to unsuccessful policy outcome. This situation is getting worse as the headship of such agencies are appointed by the political office holders as political patronage, thereby totally neglecting experience, skills and commitment. This prompted Ugo and Ukpere (2011) to note that education policies in Nigeria are marred by political interest, thereby leading to poor policy implementation in education.

Paucity of Data and Reliable Statistics.

Education policy planning relies basically on data but in Nigeria like in other developing countries, accurate data is a very scarce commodity and since the success of any policy depends on the reliability of underlying data, such as population census, national income or output, available resources etc. it is difficult to come up with effective policy intentions with inaccurate data. The clearest illustration of the problem of data in Nigeria include the facts that since independence till date, nobody has been able to answer the simple question of how many are we in Nigeria, the out of school children and resources needed for successful educational development (Ugo , 2015). Ugo argued t hat a county that does not know its population would definitely not be in position to determine the other vital statistics necessary for planning; such as birth rate, death rate, number of school age and other demographic changes in the population

which are essential for planning. In Nigeria, a comprehensive national data base is lacking and conflicting statistics abound in Nigeria as a result of the lack of collaboration and coordination between various federal agencies involved in data collection in such circumstance, the planning exercise will be reduced to a mere guesswork.

Changes in Government

Changes in government have contributed significantly against the successful reformation and implementation of government policies in Nigeria. Ajakaiye (2003) states that frequent changes in government from incessant military coup in the past and frequent changes in the administration in the present democratic era contribute to no small measure the ineffective implementation of education policies, as each succeeding government administration would undo and reject what it met instead of the common slogan that government is a continuous process. Here though plans are made to accommodate little variations, in Nigeria, new administration finds it absolutely difficult to continue with the policies of the previous administration. For example, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu on assumption of office in May 2023, immediately announced the introduction of student's loan scheme policy which is yet to be implemented. President Buhari during his tenure introduced a school feeding programme aimed at alleviating hunger among school children while in schools, but this policy had negative impact in the lives of the citizenry as we are witnessing today. As a result, there is public outcry to revise the policy implemented because it is for the benefit of the rich class instead of the target population it is meant for.

Lack of Mass Commitment:

Ajakaiye argue that Education policies are initiated and implemented without consulting the people, hence the public apathy towards its implementation and since these policies are meant for the people but they are not even aware of the existence or objectives, they do not feel duty bound to contribute to its success, and this had led to the failure of most government policies in Nigeria, thereby demanding the reform of such policy, (Ajakaiye, 2003) and (Onokerhoraye ,2007).

Critical Issues in Policy Reformation and Implementation in Education in Nigeria

Literature that sought to analyze the critical issues in policy reformation and implementation in education in third world and indeed Nigeria are replete with the failure-prone policy process thesis (Omoke, 2008). It contends that the failure-prone policy process thesis therefore argues that policy makers in the developing nations are guilty of setting unrealistic goals. The thesis he says further argues that the policy formulation process engenders expectations among the people which can hardly be matched by the capacities of the system, stating that goals are unrealistic because they are set at very comprehensive levels as decision makers lack reliable information on which to base their calculations and sometimes, because the possibility of expressing alternative policy options is either suppressed or non-existent. Following this therefore, he is of the conviction that the fundamental problem of developing nations lies in the inability of their policy makers to make decisions that will induce development due to certain psychological and socio-structural inadequacies that inhibit them from bringing to bear the needed amount of knowledge and commitment to make proper judgments about the allocation of resources. With this view, it is fashionable for developing countries to opt for comprehensive or fundamental solutions to policy problems since the choice that these countries make as policies compound the failure of policy for two reasons; firstly, developing countries hardly possess governments with the policy making apparatus adequate to the task of producing a comprehensive policy. Secondly, this inadequacy is met with the introduction of policy

solutions from elsewhere, usually from advanced economies, whose solutions are hardly suitable to local problems.

The adoption of foreign solutions to policies in third world countries undermines the capacity of local intellectual resources to act on local problems, which deepens the underdevelopment of local talents and deprives them of the opportunity to master the problems on their own terms. Typical examples of such many white elephant projects, such as high institutions both public and private which different levels of government proposes to establish even when the existing ones are not adequately developed or funded. It is a fact that policy failure in Nigeria is much more pronounced at the implementation stage which according to Egonmwan (2019) asserts that the possibility of carrying through with policy and implementing policy choices is circumscribed by administrative, economic, and political constraints.

An administrative constraint includes among others; lack of trained experts to administer the complex policies and projects which comprehensive goals and plans demand and the negative consequences of the conflict of roles between elected political office holders and appointed officials in the civil service bureaucracy. Egonmwan (2019) adds that lack of adequate funds to execute a well-planned or designed education policy agenda also account for the failure of policies in education in developing countries thereby leading to policy reform. Contributing, Zupi (2007), attributed this fact to government indebtedness and the reluctance of international financial institutions to sustain the profligacy and indiscipline which led to the indebtedness, coupled with the fact that funds from donor agencies are attached with severe conditionality. Adding to this, Egonmwan, argues that the capacity of developing countries to source funds internally is severely limited, and that another important critical issue of education policy implementation in the third world is political consideration, stating that many of these countries belong to soft States. To Egonmwan these States suffer from severe/acute social indiscipline, such as corruption, arbitrary enforcement of the law and abuse of power. A case in point was during the tenure of Governor Umahi 2015-2023 in Ebonyi State, who most times diverts funds from foreign donor agencies to other projects instead of educational sector to which the money was meant for thereby resulting to abandonment of useful educational projects that could have reform education enterprise in the State.

The way-Forward

- Public policy institutions and agencies should be strengthened through the appointment of experienced leaders devoid of political patronage to enhance effectiveness
- The intending beneficiaries of education policies in Nigeria should be directly involved in the formulation and implementation of policies geared towards solving their problems. This will add local content and build ownership among the beneficiaries rather than seeing them as mere recipients. It will as well eliminate the present strategy where few elites appoint their cronies to represent the opinion of the people without their consent.
- Education policies should be formulated with clear and precise goals, to make them easy to realize their intended objectives
- Government should reduce the influence of external forces in the formulation of its Education policies as such external directives may not work in Nigerian environment due to the differences in Nigerian socio-cultural background.
- The complex web of relationship that exists within political system should be reduced to the barest minimum to engender trust and eliminate unnecessary rancor, bitterness and competition among the implementation agencies

- Government officials and its political office holders should desist from interfering in the implementation processes of education policies and allow those saddled with the responsibility to discharge their duties in accordance with the stated strategies.
- Nigeria should intensify their efforts to eliminate corruption in every sector of the society especially as it concerns education, as it is an evil wind that blows no one any good. When this is achieved, the judicious utilization of the monies mapped out for the implementation of education policies would be effectively and efficiently used for the overall benefit of the citizens, rather than to the benefit of the privileged few
- The culture of discontinuity of education policies due to changes in government or change in the leadership of organizations should be stopped both at the federal, state and local government levels. This can be achieved through laws that will guarantee continuity of developmental policies in all tiers of government irrespective of changes in government or organizations

Conclusion

The major responsibility of every government is to promote growth and development to improve the living standard of its citizens. Realizing these objectives demand that government does not only reform and implement policies but effectively implement such formulated policies to achieve the desired goals and objectives. Obviously, the Nigerian government has variously formulated and implemented various education policies aimed at achieving this. The implementation of these policies has always been confronted by several crises which usually left these policies ending up without achieving their targeted objectives. This has created a wide gap between the development goals of education policies at the formulation stage and the realization of such goals on implementation. This has generated hue and cry from different quarters against the government's inability to effectively implement its policies in the country. In this regard those charged with the responsibility of implementing these policies should have a rethink if the country should redeem fallen standard in education as well as their battered image and take up its position as one of the most promising developed countries in the world for which nature has placed on it, judging from it endowed abundant human and natural resource

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