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POLICIES, REFORM AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

by

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Abstract

The paper examines the Nigerian education system's policies, reforms and management issues. It gives an overview of educational policy development. The problem is that Nigeria's educational policies, reforms, and management issues seem to be in isolation despite their interconnected nature within a complex system. The paper's conceptual framework derives from the systems theory, which suggests that effective policymaking necessitates understanding the interdependencies within the education system; any change in one area can trigger ripple effects throughout the system. It proposes a unified conceptual framework that draws upon systems theory and recognises the interdependence of various components of quality education, thereby facilitating a comprehensive assessment of educational quality. The paper details the evolution of the national policy on education and reforms the country has witnessed since 1977, underscoring the ongoing challenges and progress in managing policy and policy implementation. Finally, it proposed a holistic perspective, fostering collaboration and communication across all levels of educational management for effective policymaking and implementation and adaptability to evolving societal needs, thereby positioning education as a pivotal driver of national development.

Introduction

Policies are laws, regulations, guidelines, and principles governing educational systems, institutions, organisations, and operations. Governments and education authorities formulate these policies to ensure that educational goals and objectives are achieved effectively (Gunawan et al., 2023; Firdaus et al., 2023). Policymakers like government officials and legislators are typically responsible for initiating and drafting educational policies. Educators and other stakeholders are usually consulted to provide input and feedback during policymaking (Firdaus et al., 2023) (Viennet & Pont, 2017). However, research (Viennet & Pont, 2017) suggests that the involvement of educators in the policymaking process is often limited, as policymakers perceive them as lacking the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the process. Public policies are crucial for national development, as they shape the system that educates citizens and influences political and societal progress (Sudartono & Rachmandhani, 2021). Public policy formulation is complex, involving various stages such as agenda-setting and legal ratification (Alfiyah, 2011). Decisions must balance technical feasibility with political legitimacy, emphasising the importance of well-thought-out policies that can adapt to new conditions and meet educational goals (Olsen & O'Neil, 2008). In the past few decades, Nigeria's system has undergone a series of significant reforms to address the challenges faced by the nation's education sector. These reforms have aimed to improve the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education to support Nigeria's economic and social development goals. One key impetus for these reforms has been adapting the education system to the rapidly changing global landscape characterised by globalisation, technological advancements, and increasing international competition (Chiaha & Nane-Ejeh, 2014). As Nigeria seeks to position itself as a leading economy in the 21st Century, there is a growing recognition that the government must reform the education system to provide the necessary skilled workforce and intellectual capital to drive sustainable development. The reforms have taken various forms, including changes to curriculum, teaching methods, infrastructure, and governance structures. For example, efforts were made to shift the focus of education towards more practical, skill-based learning aligned with the needs of the labour market. Additionally, there have been initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership and expand access to education, particularly in underserved communities (Osagiobare et al., 2019a)

The Problem

The management of educational policies and reforms in Nigeria faces several challenges that impact their effectiveness. Oforma (2006) identified policy gaps as hindering Nigeria's effective implementation of educational policies and reforms. Furthermore, the poor coordination between government tiers leads to inconsistent implementation, compounded by a weak monitoring system and frequent leadership changes, causing discontinuity. The problem is that educational reforms and policy implementation are managed and treated as separate entities in the policy-making process. A conceptual framework is needed to effectively address the problem of policy, reform, and management issues in education.

Conceptual Framework

This paper proposes a unified framework that draws upon systems theory which acknowledges the interdependence among the various components of quality education and the different levels of the education system. Systems theory acknowledges the interdependence among the diverse elements of the education system recognising that the quality of education cannot be examined in isolation (Garira, 2020). Indeed, quality education is a product of various factors' cofactors' contributions and interactions, including curriculum design, teaching practices, learning environments, and administrative support. (Laurie et al., 2016). Systems theory, applied to education emphasises the interconnected nature of the educational system. Any change, such as a new policy, can create ripple effects across all areas, including reforms and management.

These components are often iterative and interconnected, as feedback from implementation and evaluation may lead back to problem identification or agenda setting, prompting continuous cycles of policy development. By embracing a systems-based approach, we can gain a holistic understanding of the education landscape, identifying the critical linkages and dependencies that shape the quality of educational outcomes (Garira, 2020). This framework enables a comprehensive assessment of the quality of education, considering the multiple perspectives of stakeholders, including students, educators, administrators, and policymakers. (Sangka & Hussain, 2010).

New policies must consider their impact on existing structures and stakeholders; unforeseen consequences should be anticipated; and feedback loops are crucial for identifying necessary adjustments. (Ugwulashi, 2020). A holistic approach is vital for meaningful reform, focusing on long-term sustainability rather than quick fixes. Resistance to change is expected, so identifying leverage points for impactful interventions is critical. (Galbraith, 2010). Collaboration, communication, and strategic resource allocation are crucial. Educational leaders must remain adaptable and flexible in response to the ever-changing educational landscape.

To illustrate the relationship between policy, reform, and administrative issues, one can visualise it as a flow diagram:

1. Policy - This is the baseline or starting point, encompassing the goals and intended outcomes of the government organisation.
2. Reform - Policies lead to reforms to improve practices and address issues. Reforms may arise from the need to change existing policies or to adapt to new circumstances.
3. Management Issues refer to the practical challenges of implementing policies and reforms, such as resource allocation, organisational structure, and bureaucratic hurdles.

The relationship flows as follows:



Figure 1. System framework for policy, reform and management issues

Using this framework the educational system is a complex network of interconnected parts working together; changes in one area, such as policy, can have ripple effects throughout the entire system, impacting reforms and management and vice versa.

Development of Educational Policies

Nigeria, as a country, has undergone significant changes in its educational policies. Before the advent of colonialism, the different communities in the area administered traditional leadership of their various communities to ensure the development of their kingdoms. In addition, the education of the youth was rooted in culture and skills acquisition, with the resultant effect that everyone was employed by the time they reached adulthood. The practice of people employed in traditional guilds and professions was in practice when the Christian Missionaries led by Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Church came to Southern Nigeria in 1842 to bring western education (Imam, 2012). The Christian missions established and managed schools which have a narrow curriculum. These schools lacked standard and uniform curricula, as each missionary body established schools to suit their specific evangelical needs. The colonial government eventually became critical of these small denominational schools, as they could not produce the clerks needed for the growing administration and expanding commercial enterprise in Nigeria. The colonial administration attempted to address these issues by introducing educational ordinances, such as the 1940 Education Ordinance, which aimed to revise the educational system. However, implementing these policies was often challenged, as they clashed with the existing power structures and the goals of the Christian missions.

In the years leading up to Nigeria's independence, the power dynamics between the colonial government and the Christian missions continued to shape the educational policies. The colonial policies aimed at raising Africans' hopes, aspirations, and expectations, but inadequacies and contradictions often plagued them. The colonial administration and Christian missions played a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape of Nigeria during the 1882-1926 period. (Sulaiman, 2012). The power structures within the colonial educational system were often pitted against the Christian missions, and this dynamic continued even after independence in 1960. (Adesina, 1972)

The first National Policy on Education in Nigeria post-independence has been a critical framework guiding its educational objectives and strategies since its inception in 1977. The policy emerged out of the need to address the inadequacies of the colonial education system, which failed to align with the cultural, economic, and social realities of post-colonial Nigeria. Over the years, the National Policy of Education has undergone several revisions and updates to adapt to the country's needs and aspirations, aiming to enhance the quality and relevance of education at all levels (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977; Revised 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007 & 2013).

The first National Policy on Education came into existence in 1977 following the recommendations of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference and the findings of the Ashby Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education. The policy reflected Nigerians' aspirations for national development and self-reliance. It introduced a 6-3-3-4 structure, representing six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary education. This structure aimed to create a well-rounded system that would equip students with academic knowledge, vocational skills, and character development, thereby producing a workforce capable of driving national progress (Fafunwa, 1982). One of the main features of the 1977 policy was the emphasis on science and technology education, which was crucial for economic development modernisation. The policy also aimed to promote equal access to education nationwide as soon as it was practicable, particularly marginalised groups such as women, children in rural areas, and disadvantaged communities (Imam, 2012).

The first major revision of the policy came in 1981. This revision fine-tuned the original policy objectives in response to challenges in the implementation process. By the early 1980s, Nigeria faced issues such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and an insufficient number of trained teachers. The 1981 revised policy reiterated the government's intentions to make education a national integration and development tool. It also reaffirmed the focus on technical and vocational education and the promotion of science and technology (Imam, 2023).

Another significant revision of the policy took place in 1998. This review aimed to adapt the policy to meet the demands of an increasing globalised world and

address persistent challenges, such as disparities in educational access across different regions of Nigeria (Imam, 2023). The 1998 revision emphasised information and communication technology (ICT) and acknowledged the need to align Nigerian education with global standards. It also incorporated a more inclusive approach, stressing the importance of education for all, particularly in special education and adult literacy programs (Adeyinka, 2000).

The revised 2004 policy introduced vital updates that supported implementing the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, launched in 1999. The UBE program provided free and compulsory education for the first nine years of schooling (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education) (Imam, 2023). The UBE aimed to address low enrolment and high dropout rates, particularly in rural areas and among girls. The 2004 policy revised policy emphasised the importance of ensuring access, quality, and equity in basic education, and aimed to equip students with the skills necessary for lifelong learning and social development (Obanya, 2004; Imam, 2012).

The policy was again reviewed in 2007 to consolidate the above efforts and was the fifth revision. It focused on expanding access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to address the growing youth unemployment problem. It also aimed to improve the quality of teacher education recognising the role of qualified teachers in delivering quality education (Imam, 2012).

In 2013, the policy underwent another revision to align Nigeria's educational system with the needs of a rapidly evolving global knowledge economy. This review emphasised ICT integration at all levels of education recognised the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship in the curriculum. The 2013 policy also aimed to address Nigeria's challenges in higher education, particularly the need to improve university research and development. It reinforced the need to produce graduates with the skills and knowledge to contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic development in an increasingly digital world (Akinbote, 2013) (Imam, 2023). The 2013 policy was reprinted in 2014 reflecting a continued commitment to expanding access to education while addressing persistent challenges in the sector. The policy addressed regional disparities in educational outcomes, particularly between northern and southern Nigeria. It also sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning emphasising the importance of teacher training and curriculum development (Oghuvbu, 2014) (Imam, 2023).

More recently, efforts have been to review and update the policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed significant gaps in Nigeria's ability to deliver education through digital and remote platforms. This gap prompted renewed efforts to integrate e-learning into the education system and improve the infrastructure needed to support it.

On the whole, since 1977, the development of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria has reflected the country's needs and aspirations. The policy outlines the goals, structures, and guiding principles of the country's education system, from early childhood to tertiary education. It addresses critical areas such as curriculum development, teacher training, resource allocation, and education access to create a well-rounded and equitable educational landscape. The policies implementation, however, has been a complex and often challenging endeavour, requiring the coordination of various stakeholders and the adaptability to address emerging challenges. While the policy has been a vital tool in guiding educational development, its implementation has faced numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, regional disparities, and a lack of infrastructure. The ongoing revisions of the policy underscore the Nigerian government's recognition of education as a critical driver of national development, and its commitment to ensuring that the system remains relevant and responsive to the needs of society (Imam, 2023).

Educational Reforms: Challenges and Progress

Educational reforms in the country have evolved significantly since independence, transitioning from a period of British-influenced investment in education to an era of self-determination. The first significant reform initiated in 1969 aimed to promote national consciousness and self-reliance. The conference's recommendations led to reform of primary and secondary education and government take-over of mission schools to establish a uniform education system (Imam and Mohammed, 2016). The next reform was the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program launched in 1976 aimed at providing free education for all children but faced several challenges, including lack of resources, inadequate supervision, and a shortage of trained teachers. The UPE ultimately failed to achieve its objectives. In 1999, the government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which guarantees free, compulsory nine-year education (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary).

The reform aimed to equip children with basic literacy and numeracy skills, aligning with Nigeria's commitment to global Education for All (EFA) goals. These measures aimed to create an educational system that is inclusive, culturally sensitive, and aligned with national development goals.

Successive governments have made significant efforts to address the systemic shortcomings in the education sector. One of the critical reforms was the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational structure, which aimed to provide a more flexible and inclusive learning pathway from primary to tertiary education. The Nigerian government invested in building new schools, training teachers, and revising curricula to make them more relevant to Nigerian society. The goal was to make education a tool for national development, promoting scientific, technical, and vocational education (Taiwo, 1980) (Imam, 2012). The broad regional disparity in educational outcomes hinders realisation of these goals. These issues were more pronounced than in the south in the northern part of Nigeria, where access to education remains a persistent challenge (Obanya, 2004).

In an attempt to address educational challenges of gap in educational development between the north and the south, , Nigeria has explored various strategies over the past few decades. One primary strategy has been decentralisation of educational governance, which sought to empower local governments and states to tailor educational policies and programs to the specific needs of their regions. This approach targeted addressing the disparities in educational access and outcomes, particularly in underserved areas of the country. Additionally, efforts to integrate traditional knowledge into the curriculum ensured that education was culturally relevant and promoted a strong national identity.

Another essential aspect of educational reform has been leveraging technology to enhance teaching and learning. In recent years, the Nigerian government has worked to expand the use of ICT in schools recognising its potential to improve the quality of education, particularly in rural and underserved regions (Akinbote, 2013).

A critical issue identified in Nigeria's educational reforms is the need for improved quality assurance mechanisms. Quality assurance indicators are essential for transforming the education system, particularly at the secondary

level, where there is a need for robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These frameworks include clear school performance standards and accountability measures to ensure educational outcomes meet national goals (Osagiobare et al., 2019b).

Efforts to improve quality assurance have included establishing the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and other regulatory bodies tasked with monitoring the standards of educational institutions. Additionally, there were initiatives to enhance the curriculum and shift the focus towards practical, skill-based learning, ensuring that graduates are aligned with labour market demands. This focus on skills development is essential for addressing youth unemployment and ensuring that education contributes to Nigeria's economic growth (Chiaha & Nane-Ejeh, 2014a).

There are reforms focused on improving teacher education, with efforts to strengthen teacher recruitment, training, and professional development. Programs implemented to attract and retain qualified teachers included enhancing teachers' skills, improving remuneration, and career progression. Moreover, there has been a push to ensure teachers are well-equipped to deliver 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, to prepare students for the modern labour market (Obanya, 2004).

Despite these efforts, the argument is that educational reform has been carried out piecemeal by government and lacks a cohesive long-term strategy. The reforms have failed to address deep-rooted challenges such as poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent regional inequalities. Thus, more radical reforms, such as a comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum, substantial increases in funding, and a restructuring of teacher training programs are proposed (Osagiobare et al., 2019b). The need for a national consensus on educational priorities, coupled with a commitment to long-term planning and sustained investment, is crucial if Nigeria is to transform its education system into a driver of national development.

Conclusion

Policy making and implementation, are complex and often challenging endeavours, requiring the coordination of various stakeholders and the adaptability to address emerging challenges. While the policy has been a vital tool in guiding educational development, its implementation has faced

management issues, including poor planning leading to inadequate funding, regional disparities, and a lack of infrastructure. Also, the educational system has witnessed myriad of reforms aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the educational system. While progress has been made, especially in expanding access and introducing skill-based learning, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring quality and equity. Policy revisions and educational reforms are ongoing. These show the government's recognition of education as a critical driver of national development and its commitment to ensuring that the system remains relevant and responsive to the needs of society. Moving forward, a more comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to policy making and implementation of educational reforms that addresses the systemic issues on developing a skilled workforce and promoting innovation are essential for Nigeria's socio-economic development and global competitiveness. These imply adaptation of the systems theory in policy making and implementation.

Recommendations

The recommendations centre on application of the principles of systems theory in policy making and implementation for the following reasons:

1. **Interconnectedness of Educational Policies:** Educational policies do not function in isolation. Systems theory encourages policymakers to consider how new policies impact existing structures, practices, and stakeholders. For example, implementing a new curriculum will affect teacher training, resource allocation, and assessment methods (Ugwulashi, 2020). Systems theory also acknowledges that well-intentioned policies can have unintended consequences, necessitating careful analysis, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing evaluation to address these outcomes. Additionally, systems theory highlights the importance of feedback loops in policy design and implementation emphasising the value of gathering input from educators, students, and administrators to inform continuous improvements.
2. **Holistic Approach to Educational Reform:** Systems theory advocates for a holistic approach to reform recognising that piecemeal changes may not address underlying systemic issues. According to Galbraith (2010), educational reforms often require a long-term perspective since changes in complex systems take time to manifest. Systems theory promotes patience

and persistence, focusing on sustainable change rather than quick fixes. It also suggests identifying key leverage points within the system where interventions can have the most significant impact, acknowledging that systems naturally resist change, and educational systems are no exception.

3. Collaboration and Communication: Systems framework emphasises the importance of collaboration and communication across all levels of educational management. Adequate information flow and shared decision-making can improve coordination and ensure that the system aligned. This perspective also encourages a strategic approach to resource allocation, ensuring that resources are distributed equitably and efficiently to support the system's objectives. Furthermore, systems theory stresses the need for adaptability and flexibility in a constantly evolving educational landscape. Educational leaders must remain responsive to change and adjust strategies based on feedback and emerging challenges (Ugwulashi, 2020).

By applying the principles of systems theory, policymakers and educational leaders can better understand the complexities of the education system, fostering more effective, equitable, and sustainable improvements in the quality of education for national development.

Thanks for listening.

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