



Politics of Educational Policies implementation for quality Secondary School Education in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study lays emphasis on thematic thrust of the politics of educational policies implementation for quality secondary school education in Rivers State. The study employed the descriptive survey design. The population comprised the two hundred and eleven (211) public junior secondary schools with their principals, and two hundred and ten (210) senior education officers from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and State Post Primary School Board. The stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of one hundred and sixty-four (164) respondents (84 principals and 80 education officers) representing 40% of the population. Simple percentages were used to analyze the data. The findings include that inconsistency in implementation of policies impact negatively on quality of secondary education, imbalance in prioritizing educational needs have negative impact on quality educational output in secondary education, among others. Based on the findings, the study recommends that involvement of school principals and education officers from the rank of Assistant director should be encouraged in the implementation of policies in Nigerian secondary schools, the government should show some level of consistency in the implementation of policies to promote advancement in quality of education in secondary education and educational policy administrators school minimize the frequency of changing educational policies.

Keywords: politics implementation, educational quality, policies, secondary school education.

Introduction

Education has been acknowledged as the most important instrument of change in both the intellectual and social outlook of any individual and society. In the words of Mead in Magnus (2012), education is the development of unity within the self and the ever expounding development of the self through social intersection. It is the most powerful tool for the political, social and economic transformation of any nation. To this end, policies are formulated to guide the activities of those involved in the administration of education in order to achieve the objectives of the Federal Government in education. According to Terry in Okoroma (2006:245), a policy 'defines the area in which decision are to be made but does not give the decision'. It gives focus to planned actions. Its effective implementation therefore is absolute important.

Education like most endeavours, can hardly be separated from politics. Man is a political being and education is managed, administered and propagated by man. Therefore, the 'things' of education are often times politically entangled even when the handlers or players seem to avoid being seen as politicians. Globally, and particularly in Nigeria, when the word 'politics' is associated with a concept, that concept is usually seen as not being safe from manipulations and inconsistencies. The National Policy on education is in the main, a political statement laced with philosophical ideas, policy-making and its implementation are all issues of politics. How? from the onset, educational policies usually emerge as formal government expressions to guide the education sector. The policies come into existence through the coming together and deliberation made through expert knowledge, persuasive skills and

influence of organized interest groups, academics (educationists), government officials, political office holders, and the mass made (Nwabochi, 2005). These various persons and groups come with varied ideologies and interests, the implementation of which eventually plays out on the educational setting where quality output is most required.

Statement of the Problem

As a political machinery, educational policies and its implementation in secondary education attract the attention of all stakeholders involved in education, and whose interest must be considered. In the process of doing this, the quality of education is most likely affected, unfortunately. Moreso, over the years experience has shown that formulated educational policies are ambiguous and vague, making it difficult for implementation to attain the expected quality education intended for self-reliance, useful living and higher education. in addition, factors such as leadership incessant curriculum adjustments, operations of the Ministry of Education and lack of continuity in governance have been identified as some of the key factors through which politics is played out in educational policies implementation. This study wonders if these or other issues are the basic causes of the lackluster attitudes employed by politicians to abate implementation of secondary school educational policies.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study was to investigate the politics of educational policies implementation for quality secondary school education in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following

objectives;

1. Examine the ways politics affects the implementation of educational policies for quality secondary school education in Rivers State.
2. Find out ways educational policies implementation can be depoliticized for quality secondary school education in Rivers State.
3. Determine the possible pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality secondary school education in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. In what ways has politics affected the implementation of educational policies for quality secondary school education in Rivers State?
2. In what ways can educational policies implementation be depoliticized for quality secondary school education in Rivers State?
3. What are the possible pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality secondary school education in Rivers State?

Concept of Quality in Secondary Education

Quality is an institutional value that remains central in the life of every system, and this accounts for the much importance attached to it. Okebukola in Chuu-Uzomah (2012) sees quality as fitness for purpose, that is, quality is when the product or service meets the customers' need, desires and requirements. The customers in this sense are the students whose needs are spelt out in the broad goals of secondary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education FRN (2012) – to prepare individuals for;

- a) Useful living within the society; and
- b) Higher education.

For these reasons, quality in education need be planned, designed, implemented, evaluated, revised and continuously improved upon. The extent to which educational policy implementation paves way for quality output in secondary education is a necessary consideration. Quality need to be related to the purpose of the services provided otherwise it falls short of the name it bears. This purpose should ably be provided by the educational policies so implemented. The Nigerian educational system may have achieved relatively quantitative educational endeavours, but what is needed now and in the future is a quality education that can stand the test of time, globally. Oftentimes, the quality of education in Nigeria is tied to the academic performance of the students. This must not necessarily be so, rather competence in what one can do should be considered. In their supporting opinion, Aderounmu and Ehiametator in Nwabochi (2005:74) emphasize that;

The term 'quality' signifies a characteristic of excellence ... Excellence in education can be referred to as a desired level of competence required of a person who has gone through a course of education. It means that quality should not only be tied to success in such terminal and external examinations as West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), General Certificate of Examination (UTME), etc, but also on competence and skill exhibited by students who have received secondary education. meanwhile some scholars believe that poor performance is because of;

- a. Government policies and poor funding

- b. Poor quality of the teaching staff
- c. Non-committed attitude of students
- d. Social networks
- e. Constant adjustments in the curriculum
- f. Over politicization of education, among others.

There is a general view on the quality of output of secondary education especially public secondary schools. There is also a general outcry that the progressive development of education provided by the government leaves much to be desired. This must be as a result of some of the above factors which have contributed to the lower – than expected quality in secondary education. implementation of educational policies is expected to be carried out with quality output in focus otherwise, we miss the trade.

Concept of Implementation of Policies in Secondary Education

Implementation of educational policies means putting them into action, practicing what has been planned. It is the level where all relevant and necessary implementation of educational policies means putting them into action. practicing what has been planned. It is the level where all relevant and necessary administrative activities and techniques are used to achieve the desired aim(s). Implementation of any policy calls for a concerted effort of all concerned for a successful outcome. In education, success in implementation can only be rewarded when the right things are done at the right time.

Periodically, the Nigerian government adjusts the educational system to suit the demands of the society economically, socially and technically. For instance, in 1982, the government redesigned the education system to embrace a curriculum that is diversionary in nature, one that encourages not only academic but also technical and vocational subjects to empower the students for self-reliance. This is 'to align, in reality, with the National Policy on education for secondary education whose main objectives, abinitio, are to prepare individuals for a useful living within the society and to prepare them for higher education.

Also, not too recently the curriculum has been adjusted to include computer science entrepreneurial education as compulsory subjects for senior secondary school students. The 6-3-3-4 system of education makes the Junior Secondary Certificate the least educational qualification currently. Apart from the issue of curriculum, reviewed literature revealed that a number of factors have been responsible for the seeming politics in the implementation of educational policy.

In spite of the fact that the Federal Government through the National Policy on Education FGN, (2004:60) stated that. "education is an expensive social service and requires adequate financial provisions...", this is only a political statement that has never been implemented even by the initiators. Inadequate provision, of funds has always been among the chief culprit of factors militating against effective policy implementation. The UNESCO's recommend budgetary allocation for finance of secondary schools which is 26 of the national budget has remained only a paper directive. Worse still, Okeke (2007) laments that the political "heavyweights" and influential stakeholders in education use formal routes to adjust

budgetary decisions to favour them. In other words, it means that the efforts of the government to implement educational policies to the later develop stumbling blocks as other issues rather than education, take precedence.

Furthermore, the 3-3 policy of education which was introduced as a panacea to our dwindling secondary education system, suffered the fate of poor 'implementation. According to Okoroma's (2006) narration, 22 years later, it was found to be inadequate and non- developmental due to ineffective implementation. Also, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which later became operational in 1999 after its 'baptism' to Universal Basic Education (UBE) to dissociate it from the failures of the old name, yet not much difference was recorded due largely to inadequate teaching staff, inadequate educational facilities such as workshops, laboratories, teaching aids, and insufficient funds. The UBE is characterized by nine years of basic education (i.e. 6 years primary and 3 years secondary a result of Campaign promises by desperate politicians who even promise to build a bridge where there is no river.

School leadership has a significant part to play in the day to day implementation of educational policies. A leadership that is visionary provides insights to make people understand the future content and possible ways by which that content is created. Vision indeed is the heart of leadership as it transcends political interest. Magnus (2012) says a visionary leader in the education sector must be consistent in the implementation of policies. Quality leadership, he insists, must implement educational policies to its logical end. Not a situation where Okeke (2007) points out that legal and administrative tool of one era in government are carried over for application by the successors with totally altered aims and circumstances. This is mostly the bane of politics of educational policy implementation in secondary education in Nigeria, and by extension Rivers state.

Politics of Secondary Education Policy Implementation

Lack of continuity due to cabinet reshuffle has often times led to poor implementation of the best rational educational policies. It has led to premature termination of policies and abandonment of educational programmes. Politics in policies implementation actually steps in when priority is given to one sector or programme over the other or trying to tilt the balance to favour and give undue accolade to the government in power. A situation where every administration in government comes on board and tends to pursue its own policies in education, without recourse to the ones before its inception, spells doom for not only the quality of educational output but also for the progressive development of education in Nigeria, especially the secondary education. The resultant effect is the lip-service accorded to policy implementation which has impeded dangerously on the quality of education.

Agabi (1999) decrying the effect of cabinet reshuffle on educational policy implementation, recounts the history of Nigeria's educational planning and policy implementation as it has fared since 1942. The educational development plan of 1942 which was meant for implementation between 1944 and 1954 was abandoned to give way for 1946-1956 Development and Welfare plan. The implementation of this too was interrupted by the 1951 Macpherson constitution which produced the revised 1951-1956 plan. Then came the first

National Development Plan, which could not successfully be implemented due to the 1962

Western and census crises; the election disturbances of 1964 and 1965, the military takeover of 1966 and the Nigerian Civil war of 1967-1970. History is still replete of these interruptions in the implementation of well-prepared educational policies by each incoming government. Even with a seemingly uninterrupted democratic government since 1999 till date, there has been unstable implementation of educational policies as each successive government uses educational matters as campaign agenda.

This lack of sustainability in the education sector where policies are shoved aside by new ministers of education due to lack of blueprint to work with, is almost becoming a tradition. A typical case was the reversal of a reform like the private-public partnership in the management of Unity Schools by one time Minister of Education which was initiated by his predecessor. For Magnus (2012), this lack of continuity and sustainability in educational policies has continued to be a problem against the backdrop of using education to achieve the desired transformation of the country. How long did the system last? and what gains have been achieved before being modified? It is on record that this same system has sustained United States of America and Japan as the industrial giants of the world. No doubt, the Nigerian government is usually quick at imitating countries in adopting good policies, but lacks the spirit of sustenance, the doggedness and political will at seeing such policies produce tangible and lasting results.

The study therefore poses the following research questions;

1. In what ways has politics influenced the implementation of educational policies in secondary education?
2. In what ways can educational policies implementation be depoliticized to enhance quality educational output in secondary education?
3. What are the possible pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality educational output in secondary education?

Method

The study used the descriptive survey design. The population comprised the two hundred and eleven (211) public junior secondary schools and their principals, and two hundred and ten (210) senior education officers from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and State Post Primary School Board. The Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample size of eighty-four (84) principals (40%) and eighty (80) education officers (40%), totaling one hundred and sixty-four (164). A validated 18 – item questionnaire titled, Politics of Educational Policies Implementation for Quality Education Questionnaire (PEPIQEQ) was the instrument used for data collection. The test-retest was used to establish the instrument at a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the collected data. Item statements with more than 50% were accepted in favour while below 50% were not considered.

Results

Research Question 1: In what ways has politics influenced the implementation of educational policies in secondary education in Rivers State?

Table 1: Total number and percentage scores of respondents' opinions on ways politics influences the implementation of educational policies in secondary education in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Agreed	Disagreed
1	Appointment of school heads.	148(90)	16(10)
2.	Insincere political will of government.	132(8)	32(20)
3.	Activities of P.T.A	34(21)	130(79)
4.	Changes in governance.	145(88)	19(12)
5.	Misappropriation of funds.	5(3)	159(97)
6.	Postings/transfers by school board.	145(88)	19(12)

Legend: N = 164; Percentages in brackets.

The respondents in table 1 agreed that politics influences policy implementation through appointment of school heads (90) insincere political will of government (80) changes in governance (88) and postings/transfers by school Boards (88).

Research Question 2: In what ways can educational policies implementation be depoliticized to enhance quality educational output in secondary education?

Table 2: Total number and percentage scores of respondents' opinions on the ways educational policies implementation can be depoliticized to enhance quality educational output in secondary education in Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Agreed	Disagreed
1	Giving priority attention to educational matters.	160(98)	4(2)
2.	Maintaining continuity in educational policies	164(100)	-
3.	Involving only experts in educational planning process.	134(82)	30(18)
4.	Involving also policy implementers in the planning process.	157(96)	7(4)
5.	Sincerity in the execution of educational policies.	164(100)	-
6.	Strictly matching actions with plans.	164(100)	-

Legend applies.

Data on table 2 show that the respondents agreed that educational policies implementation can be depoliticized to enhance quality educational output in secondary education by the government giving priority attention to educational matters (98%), maintaining continuity in education policies (100%), involving only experts in educational planning process (82%), involving also policy implementers in the planning process (96), sincerity in the execution of

educational policies (100%) and strictly matching actions with plan (100%).

Research Question 3: What are the possible pitfalls of policies in the implementation of educational policies for quality education output in secondary education in Rivers State?

Table 3: Table number percentage scores of respondents' opinions on the possible pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality educational output in secondary education in Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Agreed	Disagreed
1	Inconsistency in implementation of policies.	145(88)	19(12)
2.	Slows down the pace of advancement in secondary education.	150(91)	14(9)
3.	Causes abandonment of education programmes.	130(79)	34(21)
4.	Premature termination of policies.	135(82)	29(18)
5.	Aims of policies are obstructed.	140(85)	24(15)
6.	Discourages an otherwise strong school leadership in implementation of school policies.	104(63)	60(37)

Legend applies

Table 3 shows the number and percentage scores of the opinion of respondents on the possible pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality educational output in secondary education in Rivers State. They agreed that the possible pitfall are; inconsistency in implementation of policies (88%), slows down the pace of advancement in secondary education (91%), causes abandonment of educational programmes (79%), causes premature termination of policies (82%), aims of policies are obstructed (85%), and discourages on otherwise strong school leadership in implementation of school policies (63%).

Discussion

Education and the implementation of its policies are indeed in the forefront of state (government) affairs (Okeke, 2018) and this accounts for the inescapable influence of politics in educational policy matters. This influence creeps in through appointment of school heads as well as postings/transfers by school Boards as indicated in the finding on table 1. Are these issues treated on merit or based on political leanings?

Most times the latter takes precedence surreptitiously, especially as 'connections and god-fatherism' come into play, and that, is politics. In a related study, Kaegon (2015) admittedly describes it as nepotism and other 'Nigerian factors' (politics) which influence who gets what and who is posted where, at the detriment of leadership-managerial skills consideration. Insincere political will of government and changes in governance are findings that corroborate with the study by Maduagwu (2006). He avers that in Nigeria, the programmes of each exiting governments go with them as another government with new policies takes over. He maintains that the political will of the government in power comes to bare when every successive administration tends to pursue its own policies towards education thereby causing discontinuity in the flow of implementation of policies. Okeke (2007) and the quarter of Okoli, Ugwumba, Iwejuo & Kalu (2015) in their separate submissions also confirm that lack of political will or political determination of the government is among the political factors that affect the actual carrying out (implementation) of programmes and policies in secondary

education in Nigeria.

The findings on the ways of depoliticizing the implementation of educational policies to enhance quality education output in secondary education indicate that this can be done by giving priority attention to educational matters, maintaining continuity in educational policies involving experts in educational planning as well as the implementers in the planning process. Magnus (2012) supports continuity in educational policies as doing otherwise creates problems especially as education is used as a tool to achieve national transformation. Ochai and Agbe (2012) confirm in their study that involvement of relevant personnel (stakeholders), that is, educational planners and implementers, is a great necessity in achieving effective implementation of educational objectives. There is need for absolute and dogged sincerity in the execution of educational policies so that actions match strictly to laid down plans.

Inconsistency in implementation of policies causes abandonment of educational programmes and premature termination of policies, resulting in reduction (slow down) of the pace of advancement in secondary education. One step forward and two steps syndrome in policy implementation cannot encourage growth. Maduagwu (2006) supports these findings, noting that the disconnect in educational policies of one administration (government) to another, has led to these pitfalls. He reiterates that 'politics of education is the major idea behind these changes otherwise what prevents one idea from continuing until the ideas are 'accomplished' (p.126). Here, the implication of these pitfalls could lead to discouragement of inflow of foreign aids to secondary education on the long run.

Finally, one of the pitfalls of politics in the implementation of educational policies for quality educational output is the discouragement of an otherwise strong school leadership in implementation of school policies. Usually, a strong school leadership would carry out its functions committedly to the latter, no matter whose OX is gored, but when politics steps in, the enthusiasm to implement as desired, is weakened. In realization of this, Okeke (2007) advises secondary school leaders and significant others, to be conversant with the political milieu on which the education sub-government operates, as well as the administrative politics and the obvious realities of political forces in the management of secondary education. Armed with this knowledge, they can effectively work smart and achieve desired school goals and possibly minimize the undesirable effect on quality educational output in secondary education.

Conclusion

The secondary education occupies a very crucial level in education and what affects it spreads to other levels. The various ways in which politics has influenced and played out in the implementation of its policies is as crucial as the measures adopted to play down on its effects so that the quality of educational output will not be affected. Consistency in implementation of policies by various administrations, not losing sight of changes in education, will go a long way to curbing the influence of politics in implementation of educational policies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following;

1. Appointment of school heads as well as postings by school Board should be devoid of political

considerations, instead, let merit, consideration for school needs (development) and fair play, take the centre stage.

2. Giving priority to educational matters over politics is important as this will enable the stakeholders in the implementation process to remain focused and not deviate from led down plans.
3. There has been a lot of disconnect in the implementation of educational policies by various administrations due to changes in governance. There is a great need for the government to encourage consistency in the implementation of educational policies to impact positively in the enhancement of quality education in secondary schools in Rivers State, and Nigeria at large.
4. Educational policy makers should minimize the frequency of changing educational policies as premature termination of policies disrupts the flow of the implementation process and abandonment of educational programmes.

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