

Why Do Policies Fail in Nigeria?

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Abstract

Although initiating public policy is sometimes a difficult task, the overriding challenge is the institutional willpower to see through policy decisions. As a major factor behind successful public policy determinations in the Western world, institutional willpower is absolutely necessary if the developing world is to gain an equal degree of functionality and relevance in the implementation of public policy decisions. Educational policy is a crucial example. Since the colonial dispensation, the characteristic zeal with which Nigerians yearn for education has accounted for various policy initiatives by the Government, which regards education as an instrument par excellence for effective national development (NPE, 2008). Despite this heavy focus placed on education, the troublesome implementation of policy decisions remains one of the most contentious issues dominating the education sector. The implementation of the 'Universal Primary Education' policy, introduced in 1976, was engulfed by chaos during its execution, which invariably left many school-age children behind (Omoyale, 1998; Denga, 2000; Bolaji, 2004, 2014). The subsequent arrival in 1999 of the democratic dispensation witnessed the launch of a new scheme that came to be known as 'Universal Basic Education' (UBE). It is over a decade now since this new program was implemented, yet there has been little demonstrated achievement (Bolaji, 2014). Drawing on insight from recent investigations into the effectiveness of the Universal Basic Education Policy implementation, this paper seeks to offer answers to the question of why policy regularly fails in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria.

Keywords: policy, policy implementation, universal basic education, system level implementation

Introduction

Over the past several decades, political leaders and governments worldwide have assigned an increasingly central role to policy. Lennon (2009) opined that policy is recognised as a plan or course of action by a government, political party or business designed to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters. Virtually all aspects of societal enterprise are now the object of policy, a dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem (Plank, Sykes, & Schneider, 2009; Bolaji, 2014). Plank, Sykes and Schneider (2009) contend that education policy has assumed an increasingly pivotal role, scholars have attention on the adoption rules and regulations, and the awareness of the links between policies and pedagogical processes are increasing.

Similarly, Murphy, Mufti and Kassem (2008) agree that a sound understanding of policy processes is extremely important, especially for those with an interest in the development of societal educational policies. Policies are often designed to bring to life the perspectives, realities and tools for negotiating the political order of education and to improve education systems in a changing society. Cooper, Cibulka and Fusarelli (2008) consider policies to be instruments that can be channelled for the improvement of education and coherence in knowledge generation. A policy encapsulates a government's expressed intentions and official enactments, as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity. Thus, education policy refers to the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of an education system.

The conceptual clarification of the role of educational policy attests to Nigeria's commitment to policy initiatives for the collective will of citizens, and for the growth and national development of the country. The saying that no nation can rise above its educational development explains educational philosophy of the country which centres on building a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (NPE, 2008, p. 4). Bolaji and Isichei (2010) proposed that buttressing this educational philosophy are factors that impact on the creation of policies in Nigeria. More importantly, the notion of a 'good life' is equitable to educational attainment. The importance of educational attainment underlines the importance of several education policies that have been initiated since the colonial dispensation and are geared towards achieving the nation's education goals of equal opportunity. A brief history of Nigeria and its educational policies in since 1960 is relevant to this paper.

The Nigerian context

Nigeria is located in Western Africa on the Gulf of Guinea and has a total area of 923,768 km², making it the world's thirty-second largest country (Bolaji, 2014). It is comparable in size to Venezuela, is about twice the size of California, and is one-third of the size of Western Australia. Nigeria has a varied landscape, with the most expansive topographical region being that of the valleys of the Niger and Benue River. The country is comprised of three large ethnic groups: the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo. The country's official language is English, which is widely spoken, especially among educated people. Nigeria is a former British colony that has particular similarities in terms of educational structure with the Commonwealth of Nations. Nigeria gained her independence in 1960. The first, free and compulsory education policy was the Universal Primary Education Policy launched in 1976 (Bolaji, 2014).

Despite this heavy focus placed on education, the troublesome implementation of policy decisions remains one of the most contentious issues dominating the Nigeria's education sector (Bolaji, 2004; Olufowobi, Oluwole, & Bolaji, 2013). The implementation of the 'Universal Primary Education' policy, introduced in 1976, was engulfed by chaos during its execution, which invariably left many school-aged children lagging behind in educational development (Adesina, 1986; Omoyale, 1998; Denga, 2000; Bolaji, 2004, 2014). The subsequent arrival in 1999 of the democratic dispensation showcased the launch of a new scheme that came to be known as 'Universal Basic Education' (UBE). Since this new program was implemented, there has been little achievement within the sector for over a decade (Bolaji, 2014). Drawing on insight from recent investigations into the implementation of the UBE Policy implementation, this paper uniquely seeks to investigate the question of why educational policies regularly fail especially, in the West Africa nation of Nigeria.

Research question

This study drawn on the following research questions to contribute to the international literature on why educational policies fail in Nigeria

- (i) In what way do the roles of bureaucrats affect policy implementation in Nigeria?
- (ii) How does the political influence in decision making process impacts on policy implementation in Nigeria?

The research questions will also guide the researcher in exploring and understanding the literature pertaining to the effect of economic, socio cultural and religious conditions on the policy implementation process of basic education in Nigeria.

Rationale of the study

The rationale for this study is premised on the need for the government of Nigeria to overcome the challenge of lack of institutional willpower to see through policy decisions. Taking into consideration the extent to which institutional will power has been a factor behind successful public policy determinations in the Western world. The significant issue considered in this study is how the Nigerian sub-Saharan Africa can gain an equal degree of functionality and relevance in the implementation of public policy decisions.

Theoretical framework: Gareth Morgan (1998)

The process of translating policy into actions often attracts greater attention because translation has been reported to lag behind policy expectations (Barrett, 2005). This necessitated the need to put forward theoretical frameworks and evaluation to ensure that policies are translated and executed as accurately as possible (Hyndman, Benson, & Telford, 2014).

The importance of translating research accurately provides the theoretical underpinnings for this study – that is centred on organisational theory—in particular the political institutional and bureaucratic concepts of implementation by Gareth Morgan (1998). Drawing on Morgan's (1998) organisational theory, the organization seeks to understand the relevance of setting clear and purposeful policy initiatives that provides adequate information to all that are involved in policy implementation. Clear and purposeful objectives enable policies to perform and achieve the set goals that are hallmark of an organisational practice. It has previously reported that the Nigeria's organisational structure of policy implementation is similar to the organisation advocated by Morgan (1998). Morgan's approach to understanding organisational bureaucracy in policy implementation studies can therefore comprehensive insight and provide useful information to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation in Nigeria. This paper draws upon drawn on Morgan's theory of organisational bureaucracy to explore how the interconnections and alliances between bureaucratic mechanisms, and educational agencies can inform how educational policies fail in Nigeria and the Africa region.

Policy implementation in Nigeria

The poor performance of the educational sector in Nigeria is alarming. Okoroma's (2006) findings blamed the distortions in the education system on ineffective implementation, which was engendered primarily by a lack of political will, lack of continuity of programs and corruption. The situation has hindered national development and, until urgent action is taken to review Nigeria's educational system, its national aspirations will continue to be compromised. Makinde (2005) stressed that there are various problems facing developing nations in terms of implementing policies. Apart from discussing the general overview of policy implementation problems in both developed and developing nations, Makinde's focus was on Nigeria, with a number of examples taken from the Nigerian experience. He cited the *Better Life Programme* and *Family Support Programme* embarked on by Nigeria's successive governments since independence. Some implementation problems identified in his study included corruption, lack of continuity in government policies, and inadequate human and material resources, all of which often led to an implementation gap—that is, a widening distance between the stated policy goals and the realisation of such planned goals. The study concluded that it is apparent that policies are regularly created in developing nations; however, most of the time, they do not achieve the desired results.

Ejere (2011) attested to the above position that, over the years, successive governments in Nigeria have not been lacking in creating effective educational policies, programs and initiatives, but in implementing and translating those policies. The effect of policy implementation and translation is to improve the quality and standards of services the government delivers to Nigerian people. Effective performance management systems and efficient monitoring and evaluation within government, can help to assess the progress made in the key educational policy priority areas, yet have not been implemented. Eboh (2011) reiterated that the Nigerian economic policy is at a critical juncture and there are many complicated challenges around which public debate is currently raging. These include questions about fiscal consolidation, the business environment, infrastructure development, budgeting and public spending, public subsidy and market deregulation, revenue allocation formula, minimum wage and education institutional reforms.

Achieving the desired goal of any public intention is the hallmark of policy realisation. It is widely claimed that achieving educational policy objectives lies in implementation—a determinant factor in assessing the effect of any public policy. In this sense, the bureaucratic structure in policy implementation plays a significant role in achieving the desired outcome in policy studies. Keiser (2011) acknowledged that bureaucratic alignment in policy realisation positively or negatively affects policy decisions. Bureaucracies play a central role in implementing public policy by applying programme rules to individual cases. In so doing, they create the policy that the public actually experiences. Therefore, an understanding of public policy requires an understanding of the determinants of bureaucratic behaviour, while the dominant paradigm for understanding bureaucratic behaviour focuses attention on how the incentive structures of elected officials create constrain of bureaucratic behaviour. Scholars have recently argued that policy analysts should refocus their attention on the central bureaucratic task of information processing to best understand why public bureaucracies implement policy the way they do (Workman, Jones & Jochim, 2010). Agencies charged with implementing programs are not monolithic black boxes, but are comprised of sub-units all with their own structures and cultures (Keiser, 2011). Okechukwu and Ikechukwu (2012) said that to understand why bureaucracies shape public policy the way they do through policy implementation is to pay attention to how different units within the bureaucracy respond differently to information.

Aminu, Tella and Mbaya (2012) emphasised that in Nigeria the term ‘bureaucracy’ is most frequently used to refer to organisations. This is because public bureaucracies are entrusted with public property, and charged with responsibilities for the specific method of allocating resources within a large organisation. A similar term might be ‘bureaucratic decision making’. Further, bureaucrats are also referred to as ‘civil servants’ that primarily operate to help formulate and implement the government’s policies. Understanding bureaucracy in the Nigerian context refers to all the organisations that exist as part of the government mechanism to implement policy decisions and deliver services that are valuable to citizens. Suleiman (2009) identified the civil service and public bureaucracy as components of the public sector in Nigeria. Therefore, the civil service is one of the agents of development in any nation. The transformation of any society or system depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of its civil service, and this is particularly the case in developing countries (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011). This indicates why society requires the civil service not only to implement development goals and administer government policies on a daily basis, but also to play significant roles in formulating development strategies, policies and programmes that will stimulate accelerated social and economic change. These desired changes are naturally expected to include a reduction of unemployment, an increase in social products and a more equitable redistribution of income. Yet these desires remain unfulfilled in the face of unemployment and poverty. In Nigeria today, the political influence in education policy implementation has negatively impact on the civil service system that is regarded as a contemporary institution with the purpose of creating an efficient way of organising any large human organisation. Ejere (2011) argued that civil servants attitudes and behaviour influences the direction of education policy outcomes in Nigeria.

Okotoni (2001) summarised the role of the federal bureaucracy as coordinating federal ministries, advising political officials, formulating and implementing government policies, gathering and supplying data for policymakers, and ensuring continuity of public relations services. All these roles are so crucial to the smooth running of any administration that one may conclude that bureaucracy is indispensable in educational policy formulation and implementation. Thus, to ensure that outcomes remained aligned with declared intentions and specified performance indicators, and to ensure that the implementation of transformation initiatives were translated into meaningful outcomes for the people of Nigeria, a bureaucratic structure was established by the Nigerian government to track the performance of all relevant stakeholders, ministries, departments and agencies. All these bureaucratic structures perform one basic function—to implement the basic education policy. Despite the important role of the civil servant in Nigeria in achieving many of the government’s policies and programmes, few of these policies and programmes are fully or successfully implemented or achieved. In numerous instances, many have been marred by poor implementation strategies (that is, bureaucratic procedures and political influence). This has occurred because the civil service has a way of placing obstacles in the way of policies that are being formulated by political officials, especially for policies about which they hold divergent opinions or that are not of direct benefit to them. This information was used in this study to understand the influence of politics in the decision making process of policy implementation and to inform reasons for policy failure in Nigeria.

Research method

Document analysis was the approach explored in this paper to understand why policies fail in Nigeria. The choice of document analysis was pertinent because the paper was primarily concerned with identifying and selecting relevant literature and evaluating evidence in academic research. Duffy (2005) stated that the document analysis approach is dynamic in nature because it can be used as the central or exclusive method of research. Johnson (1984) further explained that document analysis is useful in research that focuses on organisation policy or evaluating government reports. Hakim (2000) and Elton (2002) viewed document analysis as examining information that came into existence during a particular period of study. This study was undertaken in a spirit of critical enquiry, with the goal of determining the factors that have prevented the Africa continent from increasing the effectiveness of the policy implementation process in education system.

Data analysis, findings and discussion

The findings are discussed against the backdrop of the key information from the review of literature on the policy implementation in Nigeria, the theoretical framework, the findings from the recent research investigation on a decade implementation of UBE completed in 2014 and the EFA Report (2015). The issues as reflected in the findings are captured in three subsections as follows: power of control, rhetoric without willpower and unethical behaviour.

Power of control

The power of control, bureaucrats' motives, implementation mechanisms and compliance are some of the underlying issues affecting UBE policy implementation in Nigeria. This finding provides a way to begin understanding that bureaucracy is the barrier to implementation. The importance of bureaucratic structure to enable efficient and effective policy implementation cannot be over-emphasised. The argument is that the role of authority in relation to policy is essential for policy to be successful. Bolaji (2014) argued that the relationships between the bodies of UBE policy implementation in Nigeria are not consistent with the realisation of education outcomes as it relate to the implementation of basic education policy because of the issue of control. There is no clear, unambiguous and explicitly stated bureaucratic role defining the agencies of implementation (SUBEBs and MOEs) in the states with regard to UBE implementation. In this situation, achieving meaningful progress in basic education delivery is an illusion.

In support of these findings, Ejere (2011) and Santcross, Hinchliffe, Williams and Onibon (2009) admitted that public policy implementation is a function of government bureaucracy. The effectiveness of policy implementation is largely determined by the efficiency and competence of governmental implementing agencies. Nigeria does not possess the required - executive capacity to effectively implement the UBE programme because of the overlapping functions of bureaucratic agencies. The Nigerian education sector suffers from weak capacity at the institutional, organisational and individual levels. They observed that a weak institutional framework that has multiple agencies with overlapping roles and responsibilities remains unreformed. Policy actualisation needs more capable, powerful and productive civil servants with more quality and efficient operational abilities that are complementary in nature because the public judge a government from different aspects, and civil servants' attitudes and behaviour influence policy directly. The effect of overlapping bureaucracy has been responsible for the increase of school-age children living on the street—a situation on most major urban streets in Nigeria that has continued to attract global attention (Oloko, 1999; Aransola et al., 2009; Oni, 2011).

Key findings from the analysed data on a decade of UBE implementation according to Bolaji (2014) is the fragmentation, conflicting roles and responsibilities of the bureaucracy in policy implementation. The large number of government agencies and directorates participating in implementing the UBE programme nationwide is bound to create coordination and communication problems. The level of alignment among implementation officials plays a central role in implementing public policy because it creates the policy that the public actually experiences. Based on the varying perspectives of the different tiers of government in policy implementation, the experience of how to implement government programmes for UBE has not been effective because of the struggle for supremacy. The reason according to the data is that the tasks often involved turning a policy idea into effective outcomes, and the skills and effort required to do this are not fully appreciated by the other tiers of government. This has caused UBE implementation to fall short of expectations. These defects in implementation rob the community of the full benefits of the UBE policy and waste community resources.

The literature in this study also ascertained that the efficiency of the government in realising policy objectives is the responsibility of the bureaucrats at all tiers of the government. In other words, policy actualisation needs more capable, powerful and productive civil servants with more quality and efficient operational abilities that are complementary in nature because the public judge a government from different aspects, and civil servants' attitudes and behaviour influence policy directly (Okechukwu & Ikechukwu, 2012; Keiser 2011; Workman et al. 2010; and FGN 2008).

An understanding of public policy requires an understanding of the determinants of bureaucratic behaviour because this behaviour helps policy analysts study how the level of alignment among bureaucratic officials aids or hinders implementation. The literature in this study also ascertained that the agencies charged with implementing programs are not monolithic black boxes, but are comprised of sub-units with their own structures and cultures. In order to understand why bureaucracies shape public policy the way they do through policy implementation, it is important to consider how different units in the bureaucracy respond differently to information in the task and political environment, and recognise that information is often ambiguous.

Rhetoric without willpower

Beyond the rhetoric of creating educational policy initiatives and establishing a bureaucratic mechanism to achieve a favourable educational policy outcome is the issue of leadership commitment and willpower to ensure that the education policy achieves its intent.

The best tools, templates and techniques make little difference without the commitment and will from the political administration. This reiterates the importance of leadership and willpower in implementing policy, and a culture of commitment and responsibility to ensure the actualisation of government decisions. These factors must be led from the top of the organisation. The findings from the data provided understanding of the effect of politics on the implementation of UBE policy in Nigeria. Politics and policy are two inseparable actions—while the former focuses on achieving and exercising control, the latter is the principle guiding what should be achieved. Both are rooted in management, financial and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach explicit goals. This reveals the negative effect that rhetoric without willpower has had on UBE implementation across the regions. Rhetoric without willpower has manifested in multiple actors working according to their own interest, rather than the collective interest, which could be termed ‘politicisation’ or ‘political interference’.

According to the findings, in the process of implementing UBE, myriad political wills of different stakeholders have come from the discussion of the overall effect that bureaucracy has had on UBE policy implementation. It provides clarification of why achieving successful outcomes in UBE has been problematic. In purpose and intent, the UBE policy is an achievable venture; however, bureaucratic challenges—otherwise known as power of control, rhetoric without willpower and unethical behaviour—limit the policy’s effectiveness. The consequences of these stakeholders’ actions have revealed the problems of lack of trust, politics affecting access to education, and politics influencing the appointment of bureaucrats during policy implementation. These varying political wills were not only exerted by many high-level bureaucrats, political office holders and political parties, but also by myriad local-level politicians and officials in local/district government administrations. Not all these political wills were focused on the same outcomes and, even if they were, numerous other factors affected the translation of policy intent into practice in UBE. This is a clear indication that diverse political wills can often be enacted in contradictory ways to affect policy intent and outcome. This indicates that politics were the bane of public policies and programmes in Nigeria. UBE is a well-formulated policy that is yet to be properly implemented to achieve its stated objectives because of the lack of political will to do so. With specific reference to the Nigerian education sector, policies change with every successive government—an example being the previous UPE programmes that suffered implementation failure, which were the forerunner to the UBE programme. This reiterates the position of the data analysed on the disparities in UBE implementation across the regions: the problem lies with the governor in each of the states—the priority and political will of the politicians.

Based on the analysed data, the political structure in a nation determines the direction of policy implementation. The focus of the parties in Nigeria has been to foster control and maintain hegemony in their respective states. More important is the fact that the political parties in each of the states have the power to deliberate on the system of administration to employ for policy implementation. The analysed documents in this study revealed that Nigeria’s EFA Development Index is less than 0.8. Nigeria is among 16 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that are far from achieving the EFA goals. The country’s basic education level was ranked 132 of 133 countries surveyed. The poor performance of the basic education programme in Nigeria, in terms of achieving its specified objectives, has arisen primarily from implementation failure that is attributed to the lack of political will. This study provides a way to begin understanding that political institutional political institutional and bureaucratic concepts of implementation by Gareth Morgan (1998), which stressed the importance of bureaucratic organisation to enable efficient and effective policy implementation. The problem of political will is due to the different political parties in control of the states. This is supported by the literature explored in this study that the UBE, like UPE before it, has experienced implementation difficulties as a result of lack of political will on behalf of state governments (Ejere, 2011; Jaiyeoba, 2007; Nation, 2008).

According to Bolaji (2014), the will without intention has had a strong effect on UBE implementation, and has informed the lack of trust from citizens towards the government initiative. Nigeria is struggling as a result of the influence of poor governance in the education sector. Poor governance, according to the findings, means significantly slow progress towards EFA and undermines the quality of basic education services. This also informs the understanding that, like in many developing countries, policies in Nigeria usually emanate from the political system, rather than the demands of the citizens. The analysed data revealed that Nigeria has more primary-age children out of school than any other country in the world, due to the unwillingness of the state governments to implement UBE. Lack of political will and commitment at all levels of government has also manifested in ineffective political leadership, commitment and firm resolve, which are essential for the programme to succeed.

The literature concurred that the state governments that were expected to play a pivotal role in implementing the UBE programme were yet to give sufficient attention to effect the UBE implementation decisions (Ajayi, 2007; Edho, 2009; Egonmwan, 2002; Omokhodion, 2008; UNESCO, 2009).

The slogan 'Education for All' remains a myth, not a reality, in Nigeria because the government has not accomplished enough to sensitise people to the UBE programme and law. Despite the availability of public policies that aim to improve living standards for Nigerians, the state lacks the political will to positively realise such policy objectives. Although the objectives of government policies seek to benefit the public, the cable that holds the top echelon of government hostage jeopardises the implementation of public policies, education inclusive. It appears to suggest that policies or programmes that do not involve the targeted beneficiaries in their formulation and execution will struggle to be sustained. This is because the target groups are hardly involved in policy design or implementation—they are onlookers, rather than participants. Nation (2008), Egbulefu (2009), Eminue (2005) and Anifowose and Enemu (2008) agreed that programme sustainability is problematic with uncommitted or disinterested targets, which is typical of the UBE policy in Nigeria.

Nigerian education system and unethical behaviour

As stated in the earlier part of this discussion, the negative implications of political will without intention have encouraged the unethical behaviour revealed by this study. Numerous mismanagements were observed, especially in the area of funds allocated to the implementation programme. Instances of diverting the funds intended for the UBE project to personal use were daily occurrences among public officials (Bolaji, 2014). Some officials of SUBEB—like others in public offices across the country—would delay or even deny teachers access to services if the teacher refused to offer gratification. Teachers' files could be declared missing, but resurfaced after they had tipped the officer in charge (Bolaji, 2014). This corrupt attitude of office holders often discouraged teachers and created unnecessary bottlenecks and hindrances to UBE's success.

According to analysed data books meant for distribution to the schools for UBE policy implementation were often insufficient or irrelevant. Data evidence revealed that when LGEA officials went to SUBEB for the books, they had to pay the storekeeper or not receive the required books. Another hidden cost is school administrators demanding bribes in order to register a child in school (Bolaji, 2014). Instances of diverting the funds intended for the UBE project to personal use were daily occurrences among public officials. There were cases of corruption in the form of awarding contracts without following due process; promoting staff; dispensation of justice; misuse of public offices, positions and privileges; embezzlement of public funds; book publishing; publications; documents; valuable security and accounts. The state control over UBE policy implementation is a cause for concern because of cases of misappropriation of both political office holders and implementers. The UBE policy was inaugurated to increase access to basic education, and there were demands for more teachers in all states of the federation. The federal government responded to this by providing funds to recruit more qualified teachers; however, some state governors used these funds for electioneering purposes.

The literature explored in this study also pointed to corruption and misappropriation of public funds as factors derailing UBE policy implementation. Corruption in Nigeria has been widely studied, and the subject receives a large amount of international attention, often because Nigeria consistently ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International. With the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission recently estimating that US\$500 billion was stolen or lost between 1960 and 2007 in Nigeria, this reputation is not undeserved (Achebe, 1983; daCosta, 2008; Diamond, 1993, pp. 215-225; Smith 2007; Ezekwesili, 2013; Olagunju, 2013; Olarenwaju, 2013).

Corruption is a major threat to the present education policy and should be decisively investigated if the UBE programme is to be achieved. It has adversely affected infrastructure, funding, standards of education and every sector of society in general. Corruption penetrates the implementation process, which has mutated public policies and made the desired goals unachievable. Most public policies are being formulated with funds appropriated for their implementation, but corruption has continued to disrupt the implementation process—it is a social malaise that has permeated every policy. Due to corruption, Nigerians are still affected by poverty, despite efforts being made to alleviate it. The resources appropriated for the implementation of public policies are criminally diverted to private ends, hence frustrating the implementation process. Paki and Inokoba (2006); Kanu and Aknwa (2012); Etuk, Ering and Ajake (2012); Osondu (2012); Onuoha (2012) and Olagunju (2012) affirmed that most Nigerian public policies only exist as avenues through which corrupt politicians drain state resources.

As a result of the state enjoying autonomy and independence, those who control state power use it to enrich themselves, which is detrimental to policy implementation. It is instructive to know that the unethical behaviour explored in this study is one of the major issues affecting education policy implementation in Nigeria.

Conclusion and implications

The findings from the data were analysed and interpreted in relation to the literature review, and then generalised to develop the conceptual understanding that informed the conclusions. The conclusions are based on the two main research questions of this study. According to analysed data, the implementation of the policy intentions of the government resides not at the school level, but at the system level. This paper has provided unique insight by reporting on key reasons why policies fail in Nigeria. Achieving desirable educational policy outcomes depends largely on having focused, responsible and purposeful political leaders at the heads of the various government tiers (federal, state and local/district government). Honest and dedicated bureaucratic leaders at the board levels of education/organisation bureaucracies are also required. The democratic process in Nigeria should be a platform to aid and hasten visionary and purposeful leaders who will be more inclined to ensure that policies effectively address societal problems in Nigeria. This paper highlights that bureaucratic and political issues remain a significant challenge during policy implementation in Nigeria. It is necessary to ensure that bureaucrats have dedication and commitment to avoid conflicting interests, - and to significantly diminish unethical tendencies of use of funding when implementing policies.

Allowing bureaucrats to exercise control and authority over implementation tasks means there should be a conscious effort by the government to reduce political influence over bureaucratic activities in Nigeria. Such a solution will help the bureaucrats in authority to exercise improved control and authority and function freely to apply some basic ideals of organisational theory during administrative processes and procedures. Also, it will help to overcome bureaucratic issues that responsible for the uneven implementation of the UBE policy across all the states in Nigeria. This would enable all stakeholders at the level of policy formulation to develop a response to the policy and achieve its purpose. This is important to address the institutional willpower to see through policy decisions if Nigeria as an emerging economy in Africa-sub region is to gain an equal degree of functionality and relevance in the implementation of public policy decisions.

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