

Problems of Leadership and Administration of Primary Education Policies in Nigeria from 1970s to 2024

Evelyn Nmaugo, **EKECHUKWU**

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, P.M.B. 5047,
Port Harcourt

Email: evelynekechukwu73@gmail.com

Phone Number: 08037806462

Abstract

The quality and performance of students graduating from elementary school have raised concerns among parents, businesses, educational institutions, and society as large. Who has the responsibility: the educational administrators, the students, the political leaders or appointees, or society at large? This report examined the leadership and administration of primary education policy in Nigeria, reflecting on developments since the 1970s. It examined the causes, reasons, and timing of the failures in the formulation and execution of education policy in the nation. This is a thematic and analytical analysis of literature about the nation's educational policy throughout both military and democratic administrations. It is based on the Elite idea. Nonetheless, educational advancement in Nigeria has been impeded by several issues. Included among them are overpopulation, delays in policy implementation, insufficient statistical data, corruption, instability within the education system, insecurity, and inadequate educational facilities. Recommendations included the provision of all infrastructure necessary for accomplishing primary school goals and a comprehensive redesign of the teacher education curriculum.

Keywords: Problem, Leadership, Administration, Primary Education and Policies

Introduction

Basic education in Nigeria, formerly known as primary education (FRN, 2013), has significantly evolved since the establishment of the first primary school by missionaries in 1842. In the 1800s, the British colonial government integrated into the educational administration by formulating policies, one of which established a partnership between the state and the church in the 1920s. This collaboration facilitated the government's promotion of education to cultivate literate and clerical personnel for continued exploitation, while the church produced lay readers, catechists, teachers, and literate individuals for commercial enterprises (Kwaghbo *et. al.*, 2021). Prior to the 1842 ordinances, the Christina missionaries mostly controlled the school curriculum, determining the goals, syllabi, and pedagogical techniques. These constituted the educational ideology of the era for exploitation and evangelisation. The elementary education provided aimed to provide individuals with the skills to read, write, and do basic mathematics, along with instruction in religion. Since its origin, elementary education in Nigeria has seen significant transformations, particularly after independence when education became liberalised throughout the regions (Bello, 2008). The first decade after independence was characterised by military coups and counter coups, with regional governance and oversight of education. Subsequently, the nation saw the need for a national educational philosophy pertinent to its growth and infused with indigenous content (Ezegwu, 2023). Debie in Ella (2020) observed that this perceived need resulted in a national curriculum meeting convened in Lagos from September 8 to 12, 1969. The conference examined nine major areas within Nigeria's education system with the following primary goals;

- a. Formulation of national philosophy of education;
- b. outline the aim of primary education (now lower and middle basic);
- c. state the goals of secondary education;
- d. outline the goal of tertiary education;

- e. Stating the function of teacher education
- f. Summarising the purposes of technical education and science;
- g. Summarising the position of women's education;
- h. Providing education for living;
- i. Establishing control of public education

The conference's proposals prompted the Federal Government to engage in education at all levels after the conclusion of the civil war in 1970. According to Olumuyiwa et. al., (2014), the government's policy focus at that time was on curriculum development, centralisation of school control and management, the formulation and introduction of a National Policy on Education, and the provision of Universal Primary Education for all Nigerian children of school age. Educational policy is described as a planned framework that delineates the objectives, principles, and practices of the educational system. Chapman (2006) said that the policies implemented by an educational system are fundamentally determined by the governing authority. Beginning in 1970, the ruling military administration saw the need of implementing an educational system that would fulfil the nation's aspiration for a unified, robust, and self-sufficient society (FRN, 2013).

In light of the damage wrought by the civil war, the unification of education policy was seen sensible and essential for the necessary reconciliation, rebuilding, and unity at that time (Ezegwu, 2023). In June 1973, the Federal Ministry of Education convened a seminar on education, presided over by Chief Simon O. Adebo, which gathered education specialists from all regions of the country to follow the recommendations of the 1969 conference (Ella, 2020). The seminar was attended by representatives from Christianity and Islam, interested foreign agencies, and private individuals focused on the advancement of national educational goals.

The problem in the education system was evident, since the Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative failed in the Eastern area, and little evidence of Western educational reform was seen in the Northern region. The persistent inadequacy of educational directives and policies has resulted in less than complete implementation, and Nigerian leaders, particularly the military in the 1960s, appeared ill-equipped to rectify the colonial legacy affecting our educational system—encompassing curriculum, philosophy, administration, and infrastructural development. Nwanekezie (2022) said that Nigeria's educational institutions need devoted, visionary, and strategic leadership. Residual effects of the failure persist throughout the nation, as seen by the unanticipated alterations in leadership and policy within the education system. The educational appointees, school administrators, teachers, and students have a profound need for leaders who are constructive, supportive, and actively involved in advancing the goals and philosophy of our educational system (Alimi, 2013), which is focused on education pertinent to the nation's growth.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by question related to how, why and when problems of leaderships started as far as primary education is concerned in Nigeria from the 1970s to present. Actually, the decay of social cohesion and the need for national unity kick started subsequent educational reforms. The review ascertained the following:

- i. How leaders in the education sector selected within the period under review?
- ii. Why did the leader in the education sector failed to institute education relevant to the nation
- iii. When did the problem associated with indigenous leaders in education start?

Theoretical Basis of Pareto Vilfredo

The study is grounded in the elite theory posited by Pareto Vilfredo, Mills Wright, Mosca Gaetano, and Michels Robert, which asserts that public policy embodies the values and preferences of the elite (ruling class,

governing elites, dominant class, and powerful elite) rather than the demands of the populace (Ella, 2020). The idea comprises many propositions by distinct advocates highlighting how a minority in society exerts considerable influence and rules the majority. The theories assert that individuals are perpetually dominated by elites, characterised by the existence of power elites who use powerful figures, the distinction between the ruling and the ruled, and the need of oligarchy as dictated by the iron law. Yetkin (2008) defined elites as individuals who consolidate power and knowledge via institutions that include military, political, and economic players. They are constituents of the political class or governing elites who exert influence on governmental decisions. Educational policies are not formed by the populace; the sentiments and contributions of the public are disregarded. The elites formulate policies, while administrators and other public officials implement the decisions made by the elites. For instance, ministers of education, education commissioners, directors, and chairpersons of national and state education bodies.

Administering Education in Nigeria: The Post-Independence Experience

Education administration is described as the methodical organisation of people and material resources, together with educational programs, to attain educational goals (Nwankwoala, 2016). Prior to 1960, the findings of the Phelps-Stokes Commission highlighted the disparity between the policies and practices of colonial authorities and the educational expectations of Nigerians. Education at that time was mostly theoretical, aimed only at equipping Nigerians for white-collar employment, despite the nation's abundance of natural riches intended for the collective benefit of its populace. Fewer than 10 years post-independence, the impetus, while regionally driven, intensified to develop an educational system that would fulfil the nation's aspiration for cohesive, robust, and self-sufficient societal members (Amopho, 2020). The Northern, Western, and Eastern regions followed a separatist approach in their education programs. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative in the Western area, established in 1955, is recognised for its significant success. The hallmark of success was a comprehensive training program for educators, the

growth of teacher training facilities, and the building of new, well-equipped classroom blocks. This was accompanied by a substantial turnout of students for enrolment in elementary schools. In response to the progress of the Western area, the Eastern regional administration initiated the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1957. Despite the program's large scale and substantial financial investment required for its continuation, it had only limited success, lasting around two years. Fafunwa (1982) indicated that the financial burdens of construction were assumed by local administrations, who often struggled to fulfil the monetary demands of the initiative. The program saw a significant enrolment turnout, which may have contributed to its rapid demise, since the numbers exceeded the expectations of the governing authorities. The failure was attributed to inadequate preparation by the school officials. In the Northern region, Western education had not been firmly established; nonetheless, Islamic/Koranic schools were dispersed across the area. The Northern region lagged in Western education, resulting in less or no evidence of its accomplishment in that area. In several regions of Nigeria, the civil war that started in 1967 hindered educational advancement despite the existence of policies. The awareness for an appropriate curriculum for Nigerians persisted, culminating in a National Curriculum Conference in Lagos from September 8th to 12th, 1969, aimed at evaluating the existing curriculum and establishing new national educational objectives for Nigeria (NTI, 2000; Okoroma, 2006). The conference convened Nigerians from diverse backgrounds to develop a curriculum that is more relevant to Nigerian society. The communiqué was not an educational policy; rather, it resulted in the establishment of the first nationwide Policy on Education in 1977, after a nationwide conference convened by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973, headed by Chief S.O. Adebó. The National Policy on Education was founded on five principal objectives of Nigeria.

- a. A free and democratic society;
- b. a just and egalitarian society;
- c. a unified, powerful and self-reliant country;

- d. a vast and dynamic economy;
- e. a land full of chances for all people.

Since the inception of the inaugural National Policy on Education in 1977, Nigeria has released multiple editions of the policy: the second edition in 1981, the third in 1988, the fourth in 2004, the fifth in 2007, and the sixth in 2013 (Ezeyi, *et. al.*, 2022). It is noteworthy that the fourth edition resulted from innovations and modifications in the third edition, while the sixth edition emerged from inventions and alterations in the fifth edition. The inaugural edition of 1977 introduced the 6-3-3-4 educational system, which remained in effect until 1999, when the universal basic education initiative was inaugurated by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto Caliphate; it was subsequently enacted as the UBE Act in 2004. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in its fourth National Policy on Education said that basic education should consist of a 9-year length, including 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary school, and that it shall be mandatory.

The FRN (2004) defined the objectives of elementary education (the first six years of schooling), including:

- a. To teach permanent literacy and numeracy and capacity to communicate effectively;
- b. To create a strong framework for scientific and critical thinking;
- c. To offer civic education as a platform for successful involvement in and contribution to the life of the society
- d. To shape the character and foster moral behaviour and sound attitude in the kid
- e. To enable in the child the capacity to fit the evolving surroundings.
- f. To provide the kid chances to acquire manipulative abilities that will help them to operate properly in the society within the boundaries of their potential.
- g. To provide the kid fundamental skills for continued educational development including trade and handicap preparation for the local crafts.

The policy outlined provisions for the curriculum, ancillary educational services, pedagogical approaches, classroom environment, gender-related issues, methods of summative assessment, and the utilisation of contemporary ICT tools, among others. The policy stance of elementary education is extensive. To attain these objectives, educational leaders must be focused, motivated, and tenacious in their pursuit of dispersed leadership. Despite the attractiveness of these objectives, leaders at various levels must approach them with unwavering seriousness.

In acknowledgement of the challenges posed by population growth to educational service delivery and the integration of emerging technologies in education, the sixth edition of the National Policy on Education established new guidelines for teacher education and training, modes of study, and curriculum. (Ezeyi *et. al.*, 2022). It thus included many current developments, including;

- a. To the removal of the monitoring order on open and remote learning by government
- b. To revitalisation and expression of the National Mathematics Centre (NMC) c. Teacher Registration Council (TRC) formation
- c. To introduce Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school system,
- d. Prescription of French Language in the primary and secondary school curriculum as a second official language and
- e. Integration of basic education in the program of school, to ensure equal opportunity and implementation of UBE.

All of these provisions have implications for primary education administration.

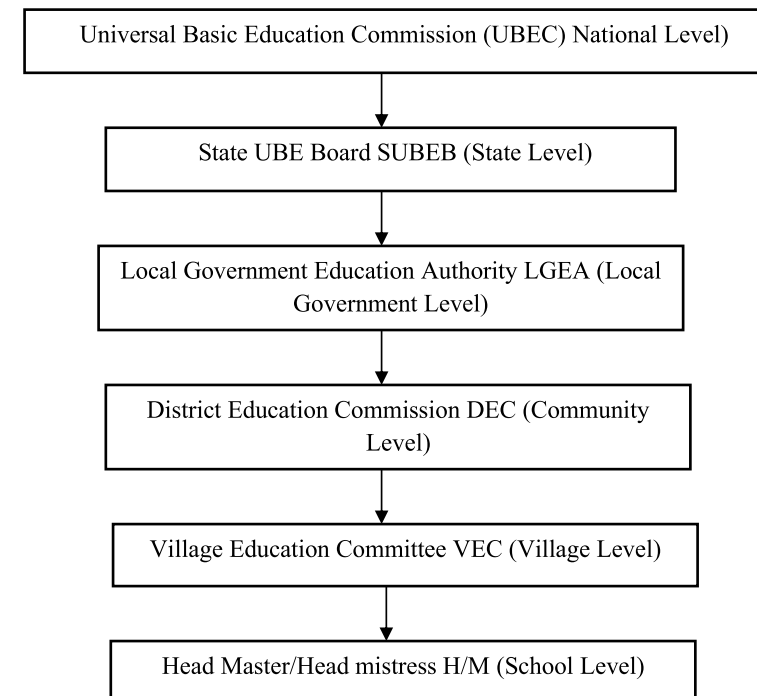
Leadership in Education

Leadership encompasses individuals and simultaneously represents a method of directing others towards the achievement of certain goals. Leadership serves as both the glue and catalyst that unites individuals—followers and citizens of a certain group, movement, organisation, or nation—and stimulates their drive to attain both personal and collective goals (Anazode *et. al.*, 2015). It is a process that includes influence (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, OECD, 2021). Yukl (2002) defined leadership as a social process in which one individual (or group) intentionally influences others (or groups) to organise activities and relationships within a group or organisation. In summary, the following attributes are ascribed to a leader.

- a. Motivate people to reach specified objectives;
- b. inspire them to do so.
- c. Guide others as well as the job
- d. Show dedication to a plan of activity or course of study;
- e. have up-to-date knowledge; use authority in line;
- f. exhibit great degree of self-control; perceive issues holistically
- g. When needed, assign power (Nwanekezie, 2022).

The preamble of the National Policy on Education consistently describes education in Nigeria as an instrument "par excellence" for facilitating national development. Its significance is in the capacity to economically, socially, politically, technologically, and otherwise reshape society via the transformation of people. Okorosaye-Orubite (2019) defined education as a societal construct, tailored to address the distinct requirements of society at each given moment. The ultimate objective of education is societal transformation, although it may also confer certain advantages to

individuals who possess it, while most members of society remain unaware of these benefits. According to Adiele (2020), the substantial role of education necessitates dedicated leadership to manage the extensive administrative tasks required. Within several tiers of the leadership hierarchy, there are entities that oversee educational matters in Nigeria, including the House Committee on Education in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the individual State Houses of Assembly. The ministers and commissioners of education are present. Additional agencies and organisations with educational responsibilities include the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Teachers Institute (NTI), National University Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), West African Examination Council (WAEC), and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), among others (Duru, 2011). Okwori and Amenger (2014) delineated the framework of the Universal Basic Education as follows;



Each of the leadership cadres, agencies, commissions and committees from the top to the bottom were charged with specific set of responsibilities to education and primary education in particular, for the common good of Nigerians.

A Critical Review of Educational Policy, Implementation and Administration from 1970.

Nigeria's educational programs before to and shortly after independence remained aligned with the objectives and aspirations of the colonial authority. The primary characteristic of the first decade post-independence was the decentralisation of education, allowing regional administrations to create educational programs for their constituents, alongside the pervasive civil conflict. Aromolaran *et. al.*, (2017) asserted that the principal basic education policy initiated by the Nigerian government, specifically the military administration following the conclusion of the civil war in 1970, was the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme, which was regarded as successful in the western region and was anticipated to unify the education system. During a national curriculum meeting in 1969, the 6-3-3-4 educational system was presented, along with the national philosophy of education and objectives for elementary education, among other topics discussed (Ella, 2020). Nevertheless, the 1973 seminar accepted certain proposals or recommendations from the conference, yet none were implemented under the General Murtala Mohammed administration.

The evolution of the educational landscape during this period transformed the colonial orientation of the Nigerian educational system, fostering national consciousness and self-reliance. Education was pivotal in the Federal Government's efforts for reconciliation, reconstruction, and unification as it assumed control of mission schools, perceiving education as a significant governmental undertaking rather than a private enterprise (Truang, 2018). In 1976, the government issued a decree for the regulation of education, including its provision and management. Olumuyiwa *et. al.*, (2014) observed that the government demonstrated leadership in curriculum creation by establishing the Comparative Education Study and

Adaptation Centre at the University of Lagos. In 1977, the military authority under General Murtala Mohammed published the first white paper on the national education strategy, having taken into account the recommendations from the 1973 seminar. Each successive regime from General Yakuba Gowon's administration contributed to Nigeria's development of its educational philosophy.

The governmental transition may have impeded the expeditious execution of policies, proposals, and directives; however, General Obasanjo persisted with the policy initiatives of his predecessors. The administration established a seven-member implementation committee to convert the education policy into a functional blueprint and devise programs for its execution, among other objectives. The school system has transitioned from a 6-5-2-3 structure to a 6-3-3-4 framework (Ella, 2020).

By 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) had been initiated, and the 1979 constitution was under progress, thus facilitating more opportunities for private school ownership. This resulted in the issue of accessing good education in the nation, as noted by Omede *et. al.*, (2019). Ella (2020) lamentably stated that it is disappointing that the UPE scheme, part of the foremost national education policy, failed to fulfil its objectives, goals, and aspirations despite the presence of the implementation committee. Greater part of the reasons for its failure can be blamed on the top/executive level of policy administration. It is often said that the dead fish always start to decay from the head; and this has been the major problem of the Nigeria educational system or policy administration. Experts account have revealed that the UPE scheme suffered population explosion in the country, poor planning and implementation, inadequate supervision, inadequacy of resources including professional teachers and infrastructure/facilities, lack of reliable data (Aromolaran *et. al.*, 2017; Odo & Belloh, 2023).

Ossai and Nwalado (2016) affirmed that the UPE scheme nationwide experienced problems of under-estimation of about 30 percent the turn-up number of children enrolment, acute shortage of classroom space or overcrowded classroom, shortage of teacher and equipment. The 1977 National Policy on Education officially specified that the teacher-pupils

ratio be 1:40, however the classrooms were overcrowded and this condition has lasted in several elementary schools until now. Teacher-pupils ratio was 1:86 due to shortage of classroom space. Basic condition of employment and working conditions for teachers were satisfactory. The shortage of instructors has led some students at teacher training institutes withdrawing to enter the workforce while still in training. These were serious indications of poor planning which may have arisen from inadequate or lack of reliable data. Daniel-Kalio (2018) noted that it was a sad remark that the scheme ended as a failed one in September, 1981.

The 6-3-3-4 educational system was not implemented until the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida in the late 1980s. The Alhaji Shedu Aliyu Shagari government, which inherited the foundational National Policy on Education and the 1979 Constitution, was brief, since it was supplanted by General Muhammadu Buhari in 1983. The 1979 constitution designated education in the concurrent list, granting authority to both Federal Ministers and state Commissioners, along with statutory bodies known as commissions, while local governments, through Educational Secretaries, manage primary education. Contrary to constitutional stipulations, there exists imbalance in educational access and elevated costs of higher education in the nation.

To ensure consistency in the execution of the national education strategy throughout the three tiers of government—federal, state, and local—the federal government employs its appointees at different levels, in accordance with criteria tailored to local requirements (requirements, 2014). The Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) is an appointed group that includes the Federal and State Directors of Education, Chief Executives of educational statutory entities, and Directors of University Institutes of Education. The selection to these positions is dictated by the ruling administration, resulting in significant volatility within the education system (Aromolaran *et. al.*, 2017). This is exacerbated by the issue of inadequate implementation processes, in which input from the current policy execution is distorted.

According to Tuang (2018), the national policy on education first

developed in 1977 has been severally revised in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2014 to make it relevant to the development needs of the country. Yet the problems of teacher-pupils ratio reflecting over population, lack of monitoring, supervision and evaluation system, politicization of education and poor state of education infrastructure in primary education persist. The military administrations that lasted more than a decade and half did not help matters as technocrats appointed into offices for administering education were not given free hand to operate. The failing standard of primary education as well as the UPE scheme brought about the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September, 1999 at Sokoto State (Ossai & Nwalodo, 2016; Ella, 2020). The UBE plan is likewise experiencing a fair portion of the troubles that impacted the UPE program. Ella (2020) therefore posed a hyperbolic question that if the adoption of UBE plan is the answer to Nigeria's educational challenges, why the many stakeholders/appointees of the government have demonstrated great incompetence to its logical execution. They all lack the political will to reform the system because of the fraudulent methods in their selection

Methodology: The study is a thematic and critical review of literature on leadership and its associated problems in administering educational policies at the primary education level. It adopted a qualitative approach to tracing the primary education from 1970-date.

Results: Primary education Nigeria has suffered policy summersault on account of change of government. There has been an observed trend of not having a square hole and sometimes lack of political will.

Time trend	Regime	Educational policy framework	Challenges
1971-1983	General Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Muhammed & General Olusegun Obasanjo	Seminar for National philosophy of education - Takeover of mission schools - Formation of first national policy on education - First indigenous constitution - Launch of the universal primary education (UPE) - Proposal for 6-3-3-4 system of education	- Over population - Crowded classroom - Lack of proper statistics - Lack of evaluation system - Non-implementation of education system
	Alhaji shehu Shagan Aliyu	- Provision of the national policy on education - Implementing the 1979 constitution	Lack of educational infrastructures
1984-1999	General Mohammedu Buhari; General Ibrahim Babangida; General Sari Abacha ; General Abdusellami Abukakar; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	- Revision of the National Policy on Education - Drafting of the 1999 constitution - Launch of the universal basic education	- Failure of UPE - Over population - Corruption - Poor financing
2000-2024	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Musa Yaradua/Dr. Goodluck Jonathan; President Mohammadu Buhari; Chief Ahmed Tinubu	- Signing of UBE Act	- Corruption - Poor financing - Over population - Lack of political will - Instability etc

Actually, the problems facing the primary level of education are multifarious. Some of them include;

- i. **Corruption in the Education System:** Corruption is the scourge afflicting every industry in Nigeria. This has been characterised as the exploitation of delegated authority for personal benefit. Corruption leads to the misallocation of funds intended for education, the recruitment of unsuitable individuals to positions, and the usurpation of excessive authority by individuals who use their political connections to combat those who want to expose them.
- ii. **Discontinuity of educational initiatives by succeeding administrations/political leaders:** Education, the foundation of development, is compromised for political interests, since new administrations often prioritise their intentions for the populace

above the advancement of education. Education has been politicised, resulting in new authorities in the education sector, such as ministers, commissioners, and education secretary, altering the policies of previous governments. These often lead to the squander of public resources that might have been allocated to other societal needs.

- iii. **Gradual pace of curriculum transformation and innovation:** Nigeria exhibits a sluggish adoption of contemporary advancements in education. It is disheartening to recognise that a significant percentage of our educated populace cannot compete well on an international scale, with the exception of a select few with exceptional talent. Public primary educational institutions are the most adversely affected, since many kids in primary/basic six struggle with reading and have a lack of competency in numeracy abilities. This also impacts the quality of secondary school certificate holders and graduates from our universities. The technology used for educating 21st-century learners is deficient in our institutions.
- iv. **Role conflict in policies/school management:** Nigerian policies and supporting laws, Acts, or Decrees have loopholes that facilitate evasion by political leaders in the administration of education at the lower and middle basic levels. Basic education, which is assumed to be a federal initiative, lacks substantial oversight from state and local governments, particularly in instances when anticipated funding is absent. Conflicts arise among federal, state, and local governments on their duties in the administration of public schools. The absence of accurate data for planning purposes is a significant impediment to effective planning in Nigeria, contributing to failures in education policy due to insufficient records of teachers, students, facilities, or funding. It is important to acknowledge that corruption thrives under these circumstances. Numerous occurrences transpire inside schools that are unobserved by education secretaries, commissioners, and ministers of education.

- v. Inadequate teacher welfare: Educators, as professionals pivotal in shaping presidents, governors, local government chairpersons, ministers, commissioners, education secretaries, and heads of government agencies and parastatals, ought to receive substantial remuneration and generous allowances to support their housing, transportation, healthcare, and sustenance. Regrettably, it is disheartening to acknowledge that they rank among the lowest compensated individuals in both public and private schools. In some schools, essential infrastructure such as chairs, tables, and stationery is not supplied to support their operations.
- vi. Insufficient educational institutions to handle population growth: Undoubtedly, Nigeria's population is escalating at a geometric rate, and there is a lack of efficient birth control measures in the nation. An increasing number of children are eligible for formal basic education each year, although the establishment of schools does not correspond proportionately. The outcomes are congested classrooms in which little or no learning occurs. It is a possible incubator for juvenile misbehaviour, aberrant behaviours, and violence, among other issues.

Conclusion

The implementation of primary education policies in Nigeria has evolved through various developmental phases, including the colonial era, the early post-independence period, and the era of coordinated national efforts to harness education for national development. Since 1970, elementary education has functioned under various designations and leadership, transitioning from military to democratic management. Either the policies are inadequately formulated, or they are not executed and assessed, beginning with the first national policy on education. Numerous issues have arisen from leadership due to overpopulation, corruption, inadequate statistical data for planning, insufficient educational infrastructure, and insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discourse, it can be recommended that:

- i. Corrupt leaders in the education sector at different levels should answer for their inability to meet obligations, including the non-implementation of educational policies, in line with the relevant laws of the nation.
- ii. The present administration has to ensure that leaders and appointees in the education sector have all the resources, including infrastructure for education.
- iii. Educational institutions have to change their curriculum for teacher preparation so that they may properly prepare teachers for national development.
- iv. Candidates having degrees in education such NCE, B.Ed., and PGDE should form the foundation of appointments of educational leaders.

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