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EXTENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION BAORD'S IMPLIMENTATION OF POLICY GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the extent of universal basic education board's implementation of policy guidelines for successful operation of the universal basic education programme in Imo state. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 304 staff of IMSUBEB. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled 'State Universal Basic Education Board's Implementation of Policy guidelines for the operation of Universal Basic Education Questionnaire' which was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.88. The instrument was administered on the respondents by the researchers with the help of 10 research assistants. The data relating to research questions were answered using frequency count, and weighted response average while the hypothesis was tested using z-test. The findings of the study revealed among others that: Universal Basic Education Board performs to a high extent, the function of implementation of policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme. There was also a significant difference in the mean ratings of board members and head-teachers on the Board's implementation of policy guidelines of universal basic education operation in Imo state. It was therefore recommended that the UBE Board should continue and expand its capacity-building initiatives for staff through regular training and professional development programs in order to ensure that personnel remain up-to-date with the latest educational policies, management practices, and implementation strategies.

Keyword: Basic, Universal, Education, Policy, Implementation

Introduction

The Nigerian Federal Government launched the Universal Basic Education Programme in 1999 as a reform effort in the field of education. Its main objective was to improve the quality and accessibility of basic education in Nigeria while adhering to the objectives set forth in the 1990 Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), which was held in Jomtien, Thailand. The declaration's Article 1 made it clear that everyone, regardless of age, should have access to educational opportunities that meet their basic needs. This statement that all children should have access to a basic education by the year 2000 was reaffirmed during the 1990

World Summit for Children. As a result, Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme as an educational initiative with the goal of eliminating illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty.

Prior to the effort of Nigeria in introducing the UBE to adhere to the mandate of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), Nigeria had already made previous attempts to offer comprehensive education through several initiatives. Some of the several programmes that were implemented as Bassey, Ekpo and Edet (2018) noted include: the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the Western Region on January 17th, 1955; the implementation of UPE in the Eastern Region in February 1957; the implementation of UPE in Lagos (then Federal Territory) in January 1957; the publication of the National Policy on Education in 1977, which strongly emphasises the need for functional, universal, and high-quality education; and the launch of Universal Free Primary Education on September 6th, 1976. These diverse projects did not achieve their goals owing to several factors.

One of the contributing factors to the unsatisfactory achievement of the goals of UPE as established by Izuka, Agwagah and Okoye (2022) was the lack of sufficient public education and mobilisation, which hindered the full participation of the community. Nigerians who prioritise education started to lose confidence in the UPE scheme, criticising the government's attempt to fund the system, which many said was a disaster. The unforeseen outcomes of this abrupt educational expansion resulting from the UPE scheme revealed a significant scarcity of educational resources, such as physical space, a severe lack of teachers, and insufficient funding to support the implementation of the system (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Oorganiszation [UNESCO], 2020). Obiakor (2023) further asserted that parents and the general public began to express their dissatisfaction due to the financial burden imposed on them by a plan that claimed to provide free education for their children. Furthermore, the head-teachers and other teachers' morale saw a degree of deterioration. In addition, certain state governments reintroduced different types of levies on parents in an attempt to salvage the programme (Eunice and Tunji, 2019). Despite the optimistic enunciation of the great objectives and philosophy of the plan in the National Policy on Education issued in 1977, all of these challenges remained. The Federal government, cognizant of the difficulties and shortcomings of previous education reforms, anticipated the potential issues that may arise with the implementation of UBE. The need for enhancing the development process the UBE therefore, became more critical and urgent, if the objectives must be achieved.

The realisation of the objectives of the UBE plan depended primarily on the government's ability to develop suitable policies and, crucially, on the public bureaucracy's capacity to efficiently execute these policies (Affiong, 2019). This imperative has primarily emerged due to the fact that in Nigeria, a multitude of astute strategies have been devised and executed over time, nevertheless there is a lack of tangible and noteworthy progress to demonstrate their effectiveness. The

Nigerian government recognised that the key challenge with the UBE plan was not just the creation of policies, but rather their successful performance. Only policies that are effectively implemented can lead to national growth (The Guardian, 2017). The recognition of the factors accountable for the lack of success in previous education reforms and programmes led to the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) at the federal level, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) at the state level, and the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) at the local government level. The constitutional mandate assigned to the three levels of government in implementing the UBE policy was similar, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing the UBE objectives (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013). The federal government's responsibility in executing the UBE policy was to provide quality control, uphold consistent standards, and oversee the overall coordination of programme implementation.

In Imo state, the Board according the law enacted by the Imo state House of Assembly in 2005 on UPE, is headed by an Executive Chairman who is assisted by six Permanent Members, part-time Board Members, and the Board Secretary. It also includes the units as well as head-teachers and teachers under the board. In Imo state, as well as in most states in Nigeria, it is the function of the board to formulate and implement the policy guidelines for the successful operation of UPE in Imo state. Additionally, the board is tasked with the function of receiving grant from Universal Basic Education Commission and to allocate such grants to the local governments and other relevant agencies implementing UBE within the state.

Although the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) including that of Imo state (IMSUBEB) was established with clear objectives/policy, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme as Affiong (2019) noted, had substantial disruptions during transitions between governments, resulting in a lack of dedication and consistency over the years. Different governments have developed diverse and effective educational policies to address the potential failure of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which was on the brink of facing similar challenges as other education programmes. Changes in political regimes however, hindered or discouraged the political determination to implement these policies. There was no assurance of policy continuity due to the rapid and unstable changes in government, as each political participant was eager to benefit themselves before being replaced by another faction. These changes in political regimes severely affected the implementation of the UBE educational policy by SUBEB in Nigeria.

Again, the provision of funds to the educational sector from 1999 to 2019 has also been grossly and significantly insufficient (Ambe, Obeten, Onnoghen, and Ngban, 2021). From 2020 to 2024, the shortfalls in education programmes and strike actions depict that there has not been any significant changes in funding, even as no empirical evidence has been established. One could argue that, in addition to the actions and inactions of various political interests in the sector, the lack of financial resources became the main obstacle to the development of the

country's education system. The continuous decline in funding for the education sector in countries has significant implications on the ability of the state universal basic education board to carry out her functions. According to Nwachukwu, Ezeji and Ihoema (2023), in the case of the Imo State Universal Basic Education Board (IMSUBEB), it hindered the achievement of its educational policy goals and objectives. Additionally, the Imo State Universal Education Board (IMSUBEB) was faced with difficulties in providing the necessary manpower and resources required to carry out its functions in the management of the Universal Basic Education (UBE). Therefore, in the face of these challenges that befell the Board, it is crucial to assess the extent to which IMSUBEB implements the policy guidelines with respect to UBE programme in Imo state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent of universal basic education board's implementation of policy guidelines for successful operation of the universal basic education programme in Imo state. Specifically, the study determined the:

1. extent Universal Basic Education board implements the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state.
2. difference in the mean ratings of Universal Basic Education Board members and head-teachers on the extent of implementation of the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What is the extent Universal Basic Education board implements policy guideline in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Universal Basic Education Board members and head-teachers on the extent of implementation of the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state.

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Imo state, Nigeria. Imo State is situated in the South-East region of Nigeria. It has borders with Anambra State to the north, Rivers State to the west and south, and Abia State to the east. The population of this study comprised of 304 staff of IMSUBEB made up of 187 head-teachers and 117 board members. The sample size for the study was 304 which is the entire population. Therefore, all the 187 head-teachers and 117 board members was involved in the study.

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire titled 'State Universal Basic Education Board's Implementation of Policy guidelines for the operation of Universal Basic Education Questionnaire'. The instrument has two sections: section A and section B. Section A was designed to

collect demographic information like the staff job area (board member or head teacher) whereas section B in both instrument contained information on extent of IMSUBEB implementation of policy guidelines necessary in the management of universal basic education. The items were generated from the functions of the Universal Basic Education Board as stipulated in the Imo state law by which the board was established and from literature review. The section B was designed on a four point scale with response options namely:

Very high Extent (VHE) - 4 points
High Extent (HE) - 3 points
Low Extent (LE) - 2 points
Very Low Extent - 1 points

The questionnaire was validated by three experts from Department of Educational Foundations (education management and policy unit and measurement and evaluation unit), all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha method which yielded coefficient of internal consistency of 0.88. The instruments was administered on the respondents by the researcher with the help of 10 research assistants who are her colleagues and who were briefed on how to administer the questionnaire to the respondents. The instrument was administered face to face and collected on-the-spot. This allowed the staff of IMSUBEB to submit their response to each questionnaire and those who did not completely fill the questionnaire were not involved in the study. Data from the study was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Percentage and frequency count, and weighted response average was used to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using z-test. All the hypotheses were tested at .05 alpha level. In taken decision, for research questions, range of values indicated follows:

Nominal Value	Range of values	Decision
4	3.50 - 4.00	Very high Extent
3	2.50 – 3.49	High extent
2	1.50 – 2.49	Low extent
1	0.50 – 1.49	Very low extent

The criteria for rejecting or not rejecting the hypotheses was that, a null hypothesis was not rejected if the probability value (p-value) is greater than 0.05 ($P>0.05$) but was rejected where p value is less than or equal to 0.05 ($P\leq0.05$).

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent Universal Basic Education board implements policy guideline in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state?

Table 1: Extent of Implementation of Policy Guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme

S/N	Board Functions	Board Members		Head-Teachers		TOTAL		Decision
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
1	Formulate policies for managing Universal Basic Education	3.14	.99	2.50	1.30	2.89	1.16	High Extent
2	Implement the formulated policies for the success of the Universal Basic Education programme	3.20	.95	2.04	1.08	2.74	1.15	High Extent
3	Ensure that services provided in public schools are free	3.34	.95	2.11	1.09	2.85	1.17	High Extent
4	Ensure that parents in the state have their child(s) or ward(s) attend and complete basic education	2.33	1.345	1.61	.89	2.04	1.24	Low Extent
5	Reprimand parents who disregard the policy by having them pay their fine when their children or wards do not attend and complete UBE	2.31	1.31	2.08	1.14	2.22	1.25	Low Extent
6	Establish and ensure within each state, functional local government education authority which is subject to the supervision of the board	3.46	.82	2.91	.97	3.24	.92	High Extent
7	Ensure that decision of committee appointed by the board have no effect until it is ratified by the board	3.46	.82	2.91	.97	3.24	.92	High Extent
8	Ensure that the validity of the proceedings of the Board is not affected absence of board members	3.46	.82	2.91	.97	3.24	.92	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.09	.49	2.38	.50	**2.81**		**High Extent**

Table 1 shows that with grand mean of 3.09, board members agree that the Universal Basic Education Board performs the different functions regarding the implementation of policy guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state to a high extent. Head-teachers with a grand mean of 2.38 agree that the Universal Basic Education Board performs the different functions regarding the implementation of policy guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state to a low extent. The grand mean of 2.81 which falls within the range of values of 2.50 to

3.49 implies that the extent to which the Universal Basic Education Board implements policy guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state is high.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Universal Basic Education Board members and head-teachers on the extent of implementation of the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state.

Table 2: Z-test Test of Significance of Difference in the Mean Ratings on Usage of Head-Teachers and Board Members on Extent of Implementation of the Policy Guidelines for the Successful Operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P-value	Decision
Board Members	109	3.09	0.49	273	11.61	0.0001	Sig.
Head-Teachers	166	2.38	0.50				

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of Universal Basic Education Board members and head-teachers on the extent of implementation of the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme, t (273) = 11.61, P < 0.05. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected meaning that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of Universal Basic Education Board members and head-teachers on the extent of implementation of the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the Universal Basic Education Programme.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that the Universal Basic Education Board performs to a high extent, the function of implementation of policy guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state. The finding of the study can be hinged on the underlying factors that contribute to the effective functioning of the Board. One of the key factors likely contributing to the UBE Board's high performance is the presence of strong leadership and governance. Effective leaders within the Board are likely driving the successful implementation of policies by providing clear direction, fostering a culture of accountability, and ensuring that all staff are aligned with the Board's mission. Leadership that is committed to the goals of the UBE Programme can inspire and motivate staff, leading to more efficient and effective execution of their duties. This is in line with the findings of Arop, Owan and Ekpang (2018) that formulated policy of the UBE was very good including the strategies documented to attain stated objectives of the programme and that efforts are still being made by the Government and other stakeholders to improve the quality of education in Nigeria

Another probable reason for the Board's effectiveness is the continuous investment in capacity building and professional development for its staff. Training programs and workshops that focus on the latest educational policies, management practices, and implementation strategies ensure that staff members are well-equipped to carry out

their responsibilities. Such on-going development likely enhances their ability to implement policies effectively, as board members become more knowledgeable, skilled, and confident in their roles. The UBE Board's success in implementing policy guidelines may also be attributed to efficient resource management. Proper allocation and utilization of financial, material, and human resources ensure that schools under the UBE Programme are adequately supported. The ability to manage resources effectively, including timely disbursement of funds and provision of necessary materials, plays a crucial role in the smooth implementation of educational policies.

A significant factor contributing to the Board's high performance is likely its robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. These systems enable the Board to track the progress of policy implementation, identify challenges early, and make necessary adjustments. Regular monitoring and evaluation ensure that the implementation process remains on track and that any deviations from the policy guidelines are promptly addressed. This proactive approach helps maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the UBE Programme. The findings of the study may also reflect the UBE Board's success in engaging with key stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents, and the broader community. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that there is buy-in and support for the policies being implemented. It also facilitates better communication and collaboration, which are essential for the successful execution of the Board's functions. By working closely with stakeholders, the Board can tailor its strategies to meet the specific needs of the community, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the UBE Programme.

The high performance of the UBE Board in policy implementation may also be linked to supportive government policies and adequate funding. When state and federal governments prioritize education and provide sufficient resources, the UBE Board is better equipped to implement its policies effectively. Government support can also manifest in the form of favorable policies that align with the UBE Programme's objectives, thereby creating an enabling environment for successful implementation. The Board's commitment to the educational goals of the UBE Programme could also likely be a driving force behind its success. This commitment may be reflected in the dedication of the Board's staff to ensuring that all children in Imo State have access to quality basic education. Such commitment often translates into a willingness to overcome challenges, innovate solutions, and persist in the face of obstacles, all of which contribute to the effective implementation of policy guidelines. The findings of the study support the findings of Obiakor (2023) that in policy implementation, the leadership commitment, and interpersonal relationships among the implementing officials largely determined the overall outcome of any government policy

Over time, the UBE Board may have accumulated significant institutional knowledge and experience in managing educational programmes. This experience allows the Board to anticipate potential challenges, apply best practices, and refine its implementation strategies. The depth of institutional knowledge can lead to more

informed decision-making and a more nuanced approach to policy implementation, further enhancing the Board's effectiveness. This agrees with the findings of Obiakor (2023) that school authorities has in-depth knowledge of implementation policy of Ube, School authorities could interpret and execute the policy as stated in the policy blueprint and that School authorities also have sufficient knowledge of their specific roles in the UBE implementation. The findings may also indicate strong community support and involvement in the UBE Programme. When local communities are actively engaged in the education process, they can provide valuable insights, additional resources, and support that facilitate the implementation of policies. Community involvement also promotes a sense of ownership and accountability, which can further enhance the success of the UBE Programme. Again, the finding of the study can be attributed to the UBE Board's ability to adapt and respond to changing circumstances, such as shifts in demographic trends or updates in educational policy, may be a key reason for its high performance. An adaptive approach allows the Board to modify its implementation strategies as needed, ensuring that they remain effective and relevant in a dynamic educational landscape.

Board members however agree that the Universal Basic Education Board performs the different functions regarding the implementation of policy guidelines in the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Imo state to a high extent whereas Head-teachers agreed that the Board performs such functions to a low extent. The significant difference can be attributed to the fact that board members have different roles and responsibilities within the UBE Board, which may influence their perspectives on the Board's performance of her function. For example, a member involved in financial management might focus more on budgetary aspects, while another in curriculum development might concentrate on educational content. These varied focuses can lead to differing assessments of the Board's overall effectiveness, depending on which aspects of the policy implementation they prioritize. Another reason could be due to Head-teachers and Board members having varying levels of access to information or data regarding the implementation of policies. Some members (head-teachers and board members) might be more informed about certain aspects of the Board's activities than others. Limited or selective access to information can lead to differing opinions on how well the Board is performing its functions, with some members perceiving success where others see gaps.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Board in Imo State is highly effective in implementing policy guidelines related to the management of the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP). This effectiveness suggests that the Board has established strong systems and processes that facilitate the successful execution of its mandate. The findings indicate that the UBE Board possesses strong institutional capacity, which includes competent leadership, efficient resource management, and well-trained personnel. These factors contribute significantly to the Board's

ability to implement educational policies effectively and achieve the objectives of the UBE Programme.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. The UBE Board should continue and expand its capacity-building initiatives for staff through regular training and professional development programs. This will ensure that personnel remain up-to-date with the latest educational policies, management practices, and implementation strategies. Continuous professional development will help maintain the high standard of policy implementation and equip staff with the necessary skills to address emerging challenges effectively.
2. The Board should deepen its engagement with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, and the wider community, by establishing more participatory platforms for input and feedback. Regular consultations and collaboration with these groups should be prioritized. Increased stakeholder engagement will ensure that the policies and strategies of the UBE Programme are more closely aligned with the needs and expectations of the community, leading to better support and cooperation in policy implementation.

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