

## IMPLEMENTATION OF BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA'S PRIVATE SCHOOLS: ISSUES INVOLVED

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### ABSTRACT

Private schools are playing major role in the implementation of basic education curriculum in Nigeria. With the recent increase in the number of private schools in the country, particularly at basic education level, implementation of basic education curriculum seems to be fraught with ill practices that made it ineffective. The paper focused on issues involved in implementation of basic education curriculum in Nigeria's private schools. It therefore discussed the concept of curriculum implementation and major issues involved in the implementation of basic education curriculum in Nigeria's private schools, highlighting such issues as teacher quality, availability of basic curriculum materials, classroom practices among others. The paper finally suggested among others that education authorities at federal, state and local government levels should ensure compliance with existing regulation governing the establishment of private schools by any individual, group and organisation before and after setting up a school in the country.

**Key words:** Implementation, Basic Education Curriculum, Private schools

### INTRODUCTION

Education is rated amongst the top government priorities in Nigeria and as such the sector has continued to witness tremendous boost at all levels in the areas of policies, curriculum, funding, participation and structure. There are various departments, divisions, units and agencies at federal and state Ministries of Education or commissions charged with different responsibilities of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of educational programmes in the country. Education system in Nigeria has been plagued by many problems ranging from underfunding, inadequacy of qualified teachers, poor infrastructure, to poor remuneration, lack of motivation among others. According to Moja (2000), much of the difficulty facing education in Nigeria lies in the fact that the sector is poorly funded which results in shortages of material and human resources. Successive governments have initiated policies and programmes and reviewed the existing ones with a view to improving the quality of the entire system. However, much of these policies and programmes, despite their lofty goals, did not see the light of the day because of the ways and manners in which they were implemented.

Government's desire to provide quality and access to education at all levels is expressed in the national development plans and National Policy on Education. Following the country's return to democracy in 1999, government introduced many reforms in education. The three main patterns of educational reforms in Nigeria are access reforms, quality reforms and equity reforms (UBE, 2003). On the 30th September, 1999, the UBE programme was launched by the federal government as part of measures to address issues of access, equity and quality in education particularly at the primary level. Although formal education in Nigeria begun as private enterprise in the hands of missions, there are policy pronouncements recently directed

at encouraging private participation in education sector at all levels. The existence and proliferation of private schools in the country is the aftermath of our policies. Today, private schools thrive in a large number at all levels in the country attracting private individuals and organisations. Basic Education, according to National Policy on Education (2013), is the education given to children aged 0-15 years, comprising of Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE) for children aged 0-4 and 10 years of formal schooling. The education is provided in the public and private basic schools. In its efforts to promote quality basic education, government welcomes the establishment of private basic schools by voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals. Private schools are expected to implement same curriculum as public. Government plays prominent role by monitoring and setting up minimum standard for all the schools and development and dissemination of curriculum materials germane to successful implementation. Thus, the paper takes a critical look at practices and trends in curriculum implementation in private schools with a view to bring out areas that require attention for effective implementation of basic education curriculum.

#### CONCEPT OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Once a curriculum is developed, implementation of plan follows which involves giving it life by the practical task of making it work for a group of learners. Curriculum implementation simply refers to a process of executing the planned curriculum. It is the act of putting into practice a planned curriculum. Implementation is what actually happens in practice as compared to what was supposed to happen. Curriculum implementation includes the provision of organized assistance to staff in order to ensure that the newly developed curriculum and the most powerful instructional strategies are actually delivered at the classroom level. Curriculum implementation is the actual engagement of learners with planned learning opportunities. (Afangideh, 2009). Curriculum implementation is an important stage of curriculum process which involves the interaction between the learner, teacher, materials and other personnel directed toward the attainment of the desired objectives. The success of the implementation process depends heavily on the quality and quantity of teachers as the key implementers of the curriculum. Ekpo and Osam (2009) asserts that curriculum implementation occupies a strategic position as it links the design with evaluation stage.

Through implementation, the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, skills, knowledge, ideas and attitudes which at the same time enable him or her to function effectively in the society. The learner is therefore seen as the central figure of curriculum implementation process. The teacher, teaching method, and curriculum materials are among other factors influencing curriculum implementation in Nigeria.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The proliferation of private schools at all levels of education in Nigeria calls for critical examination of all operations in such schools particularly the curriculum implementation process. As governments at all levels helplessly watch public schools in collapsing and dilapidated conditions characterized by declining performance of students and teachers, the public are fast losing confidence in public institutions. This resulted into a boom in the establishment of all sorts of private schools with unprecedented patronage from general public. According to Omede (2015), the appearance of private practitioners in education in Nigeria has helped to launder the battered image of education in the country and restored public confidence. The author listed the achievement and benefits of private schools in Nigeria to include the following:

1. Providing admissions to many teeming applicants seeking admissions on a yearly basis (many Nigerians who can afford the fees they charge have been relieved in this area);
2. Restoring and sustaining quality (not because they have qualified staff in the right proportions but that they ensure what is to be done be done rightly and at the right time);
3. Restoring and sustaining discipline (among staff and students because they have they will power to do so added to the fact that they don't want their investment to collapse);
4. Effective monitoring and supervision of academic activities (the presence of the proprietor is regularly felt);
5. Running stable academic calendar. They rarely go on strike;
6. Demanding staff dedication and seriousness to duties;
7. Discouraging examination malpractice; and
8. Producing students that are globally competitive.

There are several studies indicating the effectiveness and efficiency of operational and organisational structure of private school in Nigeria. For instance, Uyi, (2012) stated that some private schools have facilities and amenities which surpass those found at many public colleges and universities. There is no doubt private education practitioners are playing major role in provision of quality education in Nigeria.

However, there are issues retarding the good efforts of private education practitioners in Nigeria. According to Onyike in Ogbiji and Ogbiji (2014) the new crop of private schools which are owned mostly by individual investors, are fraught with inadequacies ranging from insufficient and substandard accommodation, lack of adequate facilities for teaching-learning, teaching staff insufficiency to poor curriculum implementation. There are different categories of private schools across the country and many of them operate in residential houses, uncompleted structures, shops, community halls and church premises, without the required human and material resources for effective teaching and learning to take place. There have been cases of private schools operating without license from educational authorities.

To assess the implementation of basic education in private schools, it is important to look at some key factors influencing the implementation of curriculum at the basic education level. There are various factors that influence the implementation of school curriculum. These factors among others include teacher quality; availability of curriculum materials, classroom practices and head teacher characteristics.

#### TEACHER QUALITY

The importance of teacher training to curriculum delivery in both private and public schools cannot be overemphasized. Through this training, individuals acquire the right knowledge, skills and attitude desirable for effective teaching and at the same time qualify as teachers. Teacher training can be grouped in to pre-service and in-service training. The later has been the most neglected predominantly in private schools in Nigeria. Despite the transitory nature of private school teachers, majority of them are not qualified thereby making teacher quality highly compromised. Onuka in Ogbiji Ogbiji (2014) found out that in Oyo state, Nigeria, private primary and secondary schools were lacking in quality of teachers and 60 percent of teachers in private schools were unqualified. This trend is endemic to education system generally and curriculum implementation in Nigeria. Omede (2015) posited that private schools in Nigeria employ and manage workers without due regard to quality and quantity. Most private schools in Nigeria, particularly at basic education level, employ fresh graduates who may or not have prerequisite qualification to teach. After their employment, most of these teachers leave later

due to lack of job security and meaningful opportunity for training as well as high exploitative tendencies of mostly privately owned enterprise. Unlike the public sector, private education practitioners provide little or no training opportunities for their workers which in turn made even those with teaching qualification not abreast of changes and development necessary for successful curriculum implementation.

With the caliber of teachers in most private basic schools in Nigeria, the chances of curriculum implementation is very slim. The problem of unqualified teacher has contributed significantly to ineffective curriculum implementation in this country. In any case, untrained, poorly trained, discontented and frustrated teachers cannot bring about the anticipated economic, cultural and moral change spelt out in the national aims and goals of education. The teachers' quality and attitude play a leading role in the implementation of changes in the curriculum. To this end, Ahmadi and Lukman (2015) stated that major setback in effective curriculum implementation is the problem of unqualified teachers especially specialist teacher in area like ICT and technical subjects.

#### AVAILABILITY OF CURRICULUM MATERIALS

The term curriculum material is used synonymously with teaching-learning materials germane to successful curriculum implementation. Onwuka (1996) refers to curriculum materials as educational materials as well as the teaching and learning materials, techniques and devices or instructional materials. The materials are regarded as vehicle for implementing reforms in education and can take many forms including traditional textbooks, e-books, online materials, physical facilities etc. Availability of these materials in schools generally has been a major bedeviling effective curriculum delivery both in private and public schools in Nigeria.

The curriculum is planned bearing in mind those materials germane to its successful implementation and subsequent attainment of desired outcomes. It would not be an overstatement of the fact that some private schools are better resourced than public schools. Educational facilities at all levels in Nigerian public schools are in terrible shape (Uyi, 2012). Provision of adequate educational facilities places private schools in a better position to implement the curriculum more effectively than the public. In a comparative study between private and public schools in Akwa Ibom, Nsikak-Abasi and Christopher (n.d.) concluded that students' academic performance, level of discipline, provision of facilities and curriculum implementation in private schools is by far better than that of the public schools.

However, the existence of unregistered private schools particularly at basic education level seems to have stained the good efforts of patriotic private education practitioners in the country. Proliferation of private schools in Nigeria in the recent past was marred by existence of unregistered private school operators who have no regard to national curriculum and standard. In many states today even registered private basic schools were being closed down by education authorities for failure to comply with established rules and regulations governing their operation. For example, Härmä and Adefisayo in Ashley, Mcloughlin, Aslam, Engel, Wales, Rawal, Batley, Kingdon, Nicolai & Rose, (2014) note that only 26 percent of private schools in Lagos, Nigeria are government approved. Describing the situation, Ashley et al. (2014) asserted that regulations governing basic standards for schools have been used by officials to extort bribes from the owners of unregistered schools in both Nigeria and India. The result in Nigeria has been the formation of defensive private school associations such as Association of Private School Owners of Nigeria (APSON) and National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools

(NAPPS). Implementation of curriculum is thus marred by these surmountable problems. When schools are lacking in curriculum materials, ignore standard and violate regulation governing school operation, curriculum implementation suffers the most.

#### CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The pedagogical knowledge of a teacher goes a long way in enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning process. Through this knowledge, teachers are expected to introduce and adopt classroom activities capable of changing the status quo typically dominant in the traditional classrooms. There are innovative classroom practices suggested for use by the teachers while implementing a document called curriculum. Patius (2014) refers to such practices as emerging practices that involve changes in what teachers and students do and learn in the classroom, which prepare students for lifelong learning in the information society. The methods that teachers employ to convey knowledge to the learner and the activities organized to direct learning in the classroom are important determinants of success of curriculum implementation. Commenting on the teacher effectiveness, Effanga in Efangideh (2009) opined that teachers should establish effective classroom climate, students' motivation, management of materials and supplies, physical conditions for instruction, use of time, routine and a monitoring system in the classroom for efficient instruction and quality education.

Private basic schools seem to have paid little or no attention to the training of teachers for better, improved and innovative practices for maximum performance of teachers and students. Given the lip service some private schools pay to quality of their teachers, little can be expected of them in terms of curriculum implementation. However, worthy of note is the fact that standard private schools have deployed better and improved instructional practices which in turn resulted in improved learning outcomes of their students. Ashley et al. (2014) stated that one of the prominent explanations frequently given to account for better educational outcomes in private schools is that they generally deploy better teaching practices. Thus, this category of private schools is likely to attain greater success in the implementation of curriculum.

#### HEAD TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

The role of head teacher in curriculum implementation cannot be over emphasized. The head teacher's characteristics influence the success of implementation process. Obanya (2004) recognized the role of school leadership in the implementation process when he defined implementation of curriculum as day-to-day activities which school management and classroom teachers undertake in the pursuit of the objective of any given curriculum. Ben-Yunusa (2008) identified the leadership qualities of head teacher which influence the degree of success of implementation to include the following:

1. Good human relationship;
2. Recognition of respect for one's dignity and that of others;
3. Objectivity in the treatment of issues;
4. Provide constructive criticism;
5. Willingness to assign duties to his/her staff and render assistance when the need arises;
6. Provide academic leadership; and
7. Set defined goals for the schools
8. Understand others and makes them feel free

To examine the implementation of basic education curriculum in private schools in Nigeria, one



may look to head teachers characteristics in all the categories of private schools. well performing private schools have well trained and experienced head teachers who monitor presence, retain the better teachers, and fire the less effective ones (Ashley et al., 2014). In contrast to head teachers in public schools, head teachers in private schools are more likely and able to take disciplinary action against shirking teachers. Uyi (2012) discovered that the better performance of the private school pupils was not as a result of more qualified teachers in the private schools but as a result of better supervision from the school heads, because adequate and thorough supervision cannot be compromised in any privately owned organization. Implementation of curriculum in such schools yields better result than in schools with poor of ineffective leadership.

However, failure to enforce standard and regulations as well as corruption by government officials has warranted the existence of mushroom private schools with people who know little or nothing in school management serving as head teachers (Uyi, 2012). Similarly, Akpofure and N'dupu in Olasunkanmi and Mabel (2012) reported that most principals in Lagos state (Nigeria) have not been adequately trained or exposed for the tasks they perform; such principals have lost the power to enforce discipline of both staff and students in the secondary schools. The characteristics of these head teachers affect curriculum implementation directly because they are lacking in critical qualities such as monitoring, supervision and provision of teaching and learning resources germane to implementation process.

## **CONCLUSION**

Private education providers are presently playing an important role in the development of education in Nigeria. The impact of private schools on education in Nigeria is observed in the area of improved performance of students, access to education among others. Education industry in Nigeria in the recent past has witnessed unprecedented expansion in the participation of private education practitioners. Some of these private schools are playing major role in the implementation of basic education curriculum. However, evidence from the literature showed that efforts toward provision of quality private education in Nigeria have being marred by illicit practices of unregistered private schools across the country. Major issues affecting curriculum implementation in private schools particularly at basic education level include unqualified teacher, non-adherence to standard and regulations, existence of mushroom schools etc.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The paper recommends the following for possible adoption:

- a. Education authorities at federal, state and local government levels should intensify efforts to ensure compliance to existing regulation governing the establishment of private schools by any individual, group and organisation before and after setting up a school in the country and enforce sanctions to defaulters;
- b. Ministries of education officials should monitor and ensure that only the approved national basic education curriculum is being implemented by the private schools;
- c. There should be penalty for both operators of unlicensed/unregistered schools and their accomplices among government officials; and

- d. Private school proprietors/proprietress should recruit only qualified teachers and make provision for staff development and in-service training in order to boost the knowledge, skills and expertise of their teachers for effective curriculum implementation

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