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# Universal basic education policy implementation in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and sought to understand the degree of shared understanding among bureaucrats regarding the policy intent and the level of alignment articulated in the policy related to access to basic education in Nigeria. Bureaucrats in two geo-political zones and the Federal Capital Territory were interviewed to assess this shared understanding and its effect on the outcomes for UBE. The attainment of the UBE access goal was limited due to bureaucratic implementation issues. This study recommends an approach that may help operationalize improvement in access to basic education in Nigeria at the system level of implementation.

Keywords: Education for All, policy objectives, system implementation, bureaucratic alignment, Nigeria

# Introduction

Since colonial dispensation, education in Nigeria has played a unique role in the development of the nation. Adesina (1986) acknowledged that much has happened to the country's educational system — there have been changes, innovations, and reforms all aiming to make education accessible to citizens. The policy initiatives by the Nigerian government have focussed on education as an instrument par excellence for effective national development (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2008). The research reported in this paper investigated the bureaucratic mechanism system level of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy implementation in Nigeria towards achieving 'Education for All' by 2015. The purpose of this research was to assess the impact of the bureaucratic implementation process and its effect on access in terms of the enrollment, attendance, and progression of Nigerian children in the UBE program. This study was premised on the resolve of the federal government to eradicate illiteracy and improve education access in order for children to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, before proceeding to higher education.

Despite the interest placed on education, there remain some challenging and contentious issues dominating the education sector — one of which, according to Omoyale (1998); Bolaji and Illo (2007); and Bolaji, Olufowobi, and Oluwole (2013), is the lack of success in achieving education policy objectives in Nigeria since 1842. This informed the decision of the federal government of Nigeria to revamp and reinvigorate the agencies responsible for the implementation of the UBE policy. UBE in this study was the new education initiative of the government introduced in 1999, a response to the global UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2006) and the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA), of which Nigeria is a signatory (Okiy, 2004). The reform program aimed to remove distortions and inconsistencies in basic education delivery; reinforce the implementation of the policy; and provide greater access to, and ensure the quality of, basic education throughout Nigeria (National Population Commision [NPC], 2011). An understanding of the geo-political background of Nigeria is integral to appreciating the challenges of the policy implementation in this country.

The government's 1842 goal of reforming basic education in Nigeria has not been achieved. The lack of success has been attributed to the inept approach of the bureaucratic mechanism towards implementing educational policies (Adesina, 1986; Omoyale, 1998). Attesting to this was the launch of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program in 1955 and 1976. The 1955 policy initiative was to provide free and compulsory education. It operated according to peculiar regional circumstances. In the north, education was free, but neither universal nor compulsory. In the east, it was bandied as a vote-catching slogan, but quickly abandoned, apparently due to lack of 'resources,' since the term was interpreted narrowly to mean financial resources. In the western region, it laid the foundation for an educational road map for the other two regions established by the 1950 MacPherson Constitution (Bolaji & Illo, 2007; Obayan, 2011). The premium placed on education resulted in the citizens

of this region being the most educated. An overarching assessment of the policy a few years after implementation revealed that it had failed due to the lack of a structural mechanism for implementation to address the issues of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure and dearth of qualified teachers. The resultant effect was that school-age children did not have facilities to accommodate them.

The UPE policy of 1976 was launched across all the states of the federation and sought to address the inconsistencies in the 1955 educational policy. The 1976 policy was designed to expand access to education and increase the number of schools in the country. It also aimed to provide free education to all school-age children to bridge the education gap and reduce the rising levels of illiteracy in the country. The implementation was launched with much promise, yet failed to achieve its goal of eradicating illiteracy because of inadequate planning and lack of an implementing mechanism, as identified in the previous policy. For example, Fafunwa (2004) reported that when the schools were opened to register students, instead of the 2,300,000 children expected, 3,000,000 arrived. Other contributing factors identified by Fafunwa were the lack of qualified teachers and lack of consultation with local communities regarding providing education suited to children's particular circumstances. Aluede (2006) affirmed that the intent of the 1976 UPE was to make education free, compulsory and accessible to the citizenry. However, within a short period, the program was aborted due to poor implementation at its inception. Thus, the policies failed largely due to the challenge of implementation strategy and the bureaucracy's inability to turn policy into practice.

Over a decade has passed since the implementation of the UBE initiative, yet there has been little demonstrated success or achievement. Despite a significant increase in terms of funding, financing, time and energy invested in this program, coupled with international intervention to ensure effective and efficient implementation, the challenges have been great. Access to basic education among Nigerian school-age children remains at the low level of 60%; more than eight million children of school age (6-15 years) are still not in school. The hope of meeting the UN MDGs, remains an issue yet to be met (United States Agency for International Development [USAID]/ FGN, 2015).

## The problem

With a history of lack of success in improving educational outcomes, the desire of the government to see to the implementation of the UBE led to the revamping and re-invigorating of the three agencies responsible for implementation: at the federal level, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC); the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB); and the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA; UBEC, 2004). The constitutional responsibility given to the three tiers of the government in implementing the UBE policy were similar, but all geared towards

achieving the UBE objectives. In agreement with this, the federal government's role in implementing the UBE was to ensure quality control, maintenance of uniform standards and general coordination of program implementation. The UBEC is the federal arm of the bureaucratic implementation of the UBE, and operates as an intervention to coordinate and monitor agencies to progressively improve the capacity of the states, local government agencies and communities to provide unfettered access to high quality basic education in Nigeria (UBEC, 2010).

However, it has been over a decade since the Nigerian government's reform of basic education occurred. The modest performance of basic education in Nigeria in terms of access — retention, completion, and achievement — in the past decade is cause for concern. The World Bank appraisal of the basic education reforms in Nigeria reached an overall unsatisfactory outcome, with risk to development outcomes significant and bank performance unsatisfactory because the performance of the borrower (Nigeria) was also rated as unsatisfactory (World Bank, 2008, 2015). Nigerian education's stagnation over recent years posed a challenge to the country's ability to fulfil the 2015 goal as stated in the UBE policy. The current exclusion of a large majority of young people from the system represents a waste of national resources, and constitutes an imminent threat to the stability of the country's already volatile political landscape (USAID/FNG, 2009). The overall appraisals of other international agencies also point to problems in the implementation strategy of UBE. The ratings in terms of relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness were unsatisfactory and negligible.

The donors' (World Bank, USAID, UNESCO, and UNICEF) remarks were centered on systematic implementation processes that were not systematic, thereby causing increased institutional confusion. Previous research has clearly shown that there is a problem with implementing the basic education program in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to access in UBE (Obayan, 2011; Ogunjimi, Ajibola, & Akah, 2009; Olarenwaju & Folorunsho, 2009). While the intentions and goals of the UBE policy are worthy, the implementation strategies have been inadequate (Olagunju, 2012). This study provided an opportunity to explore the challenges confronting the bureaucratic implementation process of basic education in Nigeria.

Previous studies have also shown that implementing educational reform programs designed to improve the quality of the education system in Nigeria have been more rhetorical than substantive in their effect on the organization of schools and society (Bolaji et al., 2013; Denga, 2000; Edukugho, 2006; Okiy, 2004). While schools and classrooms may change, the extent, and direction of change has not always been consistent with the intentions of policy initiatives (Ikoya & Ikoya, 2005).

## Purpose

This paper draws on data from a larger study on the bureaucratic structure of implementing the UBE program introduced in 1999 in relation to basic education in Nigeria (Bolaji, Gray, & Campbell-Evans, 2015), to investigate the bureaucratic implementation process of the UBE and its effect on access in terms of the enrollment, attendance and progression of Nigerian children in the UBE program. This paper presents data relevant to the degree of shared understanding of the policy and its implementation.

## Research questions

The research questions driving this study were:

1. To what extent did the bureaucrats responsible for UBE implementation hold a shared understanding of the policy intent?
2. How did the actions of the bureaucrats shape implementation of the UBE policy?

These research questions guided the exploration of issues facing the bureaucracy in implementing the basic education program in Nigeria, including the effect of organizational communication and interpersonal relationships on the implementation process. In addition, the research questions guided the analysis of the data to reveal the knowledge and skills of those charged with UBE policy implementation.

## Theoretical framework

Fenshaw's (2009) theory of organization bureaucracy provided a framework to explore the shared understanding of policy and its implementation. Through Fenshaw, it was possible to examine how bureaucratic decisions and actions in an organizational setting affected the process of implementation of the universal education program in Nigeria. This theory suggested an analysis of policy implementation, which occurred on three levels: federal, state, and local. At the highest stratum was the UBEC, in charge of central administration and coordinating human resources, controlling financial expenditure, supplying learning resources, and monitoring curriculum innovation and adaptation processes. At the state government level was the SUBEB, delegated with the management duties of supervising schools, teachers, and resource distribution to facilitate instruction and learning for students as stated assisted by the local government level (LGEA) responsible for implementation.

Fenshaw (2009, p. 2) asks five questions as a way of understanding the working of bureaucracy in any organization setting.

1. On which category of people would the policy focus?
2. How would the policy accommodate disadvantaged minorities in society?
3. What would be the role of authority in relation to the policy?
4. What would be the role of the bureaucratic mechanism in policy implementation?
5. How effective and efficient would be the mechanism for monitoring policy?

These questions guided the researchers to understand the hierarchical structure of the Nigerian system; federal, state, and local governments are jointly charged with the responsibility of implementation. Hence, the success and failure of the policy implementation is dependent upon the bureaucratic alignment across the three levels. In addition to Fenshaw (2009), the literature affirmed that bureaucratic organizations interact with their environment (Perrow, 1972; Rourke, 1984; Thompson, 2001). How the interaction occurs and its influence on bureaucratic decisions is mediated by the structure of the organization. This, in a sense, means that organizational structure influences what types of stimuli from the environment reach individual bureaucrats, and places constraints on bureaucratic decisions and actions (Scott, 1992).

We also looked at the organizational bureaucracy of the educational agency, in light of problems identified while discussing alternatives, such as how it can actually work. There were propositions, suggestions, and recommendations regarding how the implementation should look and what needed to be changed. The researchers sought to understand the relationship between political direction and policy implementation and resultant action.

As noted in previous studies, the policy implementation process in Nigeria is purely administrative. Once the policy has been enacted by the decision makers, power ultimately rests with bureaucratic structures that define clear policy objectives and are capable of hierarchically guiding the bureaucratic process of putting these objectives into action. This bureaucratic structure defines where the authority lies in policy implementation of basic education reform in Nigeria. This bureaucratic structure assisted us in understanding the effect of organizational communication and interpersonal relations and the degree of shared understanding of the agencies on policy implementation.

The conceptual model in Figure 1 reveals the critical issues explored in this study. This model served as a guide to understanding the challenges facing the policy implementation for basic education in Nigeria. This model assisted us in focusing on the essential components of the implementation processes of basic education, and in acquiring adequate knowledge of the timely and satisfactory performance of the related tasks.

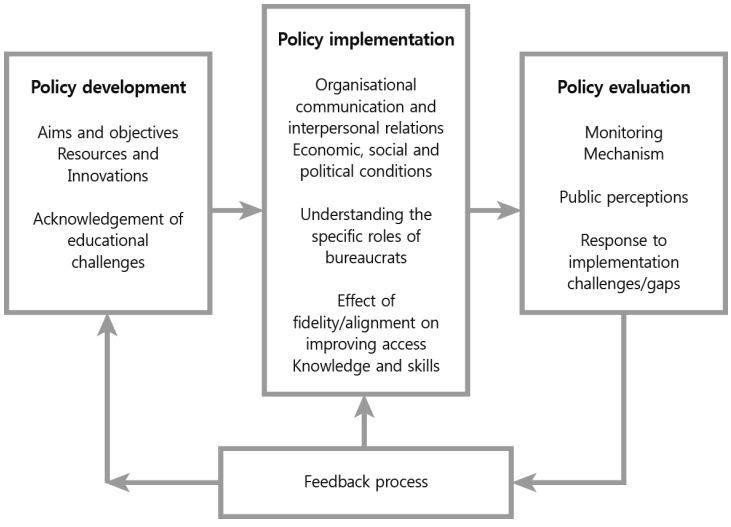


Figure 1. The model of the policy implementation process adapted for this study

Source: Van Meter & Van Horn (1975, p. 463).

# Methodology

This study used qualitative methods, drawing upon the phenomenological paradigm (Cresswell, 2013). Patton (1990) asserted that it is an approach for "naturalistic inquiry, inductive analysis, holistic perspective, qualitative data, personal contact, and insight, dynamic systems, unique case orientation, context sensitivity, emphatic neutrality, and design flexibility" (p. 67). This background informed the choice of the qualitative research approach to study the effect of bureaucratic mechanisms of policy implementation on access to basic education among Nigerian children. The research approach provided the opportunity to understand and report the reflections of bureaucrats across the states on the challenges of policy implementation through both descriptive and interpretive methods, which enabled different views to be expressed by the interviewees on UBE implementation in Nigeria.

This qualitative approach provided a much-needed clear understanding of education policy implementation and was essential to gaining insight into the peculiarity and uniqueness of UBE. It also provided a reflection on how policy ideas and expectations were disseminated, interpreted, and implemented by the bureaucrats informed by Fenshaw's (2009) five questions presented above. Fenshaw stressed the importance of an organizational approach to understanding the bureaucratic mechanism of policy implementation. This approach was taken to investigate the complex issue of implementing UBE.

## Data collection

The data for this study were collected through document analysis and interviews. The document analysis allowed the researchers to focus on past records of policy implementation documents, evaluation reports, statistical data on enrollment, and the implementation strategies of the program. It also provided additional evidence of the reliability of the interview data (Duffy, 2005; Elton, 2002; Hakim, 2000; Johnson, 1984).

Semi-structured interviews were a second approach through which data were collected for the study. This was assisted by reference to Fenshaw's (2009, p. 3) examining questions:

- How was the policy implemented?
- What was the mechanism for responding to implementation tasks?
- What effect did the level of fidelity of the bureaucrats have on access?
- What was the perceived level of knowledge of the bureaucrats in implementation?
- How have the bureaucrats interpreted and executed the policy?

Fenshaw's questions enabled us to shape questions about the role of each participant in UBE policy implementation. They also gave the researchers a framework to gain insight on matters such as who has the power of command for implementation tasks, and why there is a disparity in the level of implementation across the states.

These interviews were conducted with the bureaucrats in charge of policy implementation in two geo-political zones of the federation. The interviews involved 30 officials of UBE at both the federal (Central) and state levels (SW and NC) of implementation: the UBEC's executive secretary, directors of implementation, chairperson, and officials in charge of implementation in the two states from the two geo-political zones of the federation, as well as the executive secretary of the local education district (see Table 1). These participants were selected because of their expertise, experience, position, and direct involvement in the implementation of UBE. Most importantly, the respondents were able to provide detailed information on the degree of shared understanding of the implementation.

Table 1. Distribution of the study participants

| Key personnel interviewed | Number interviewed |
|---|---|
| **UBEC-Central** | |
| Deputy executive director (Technical services) | 1 |
| Director of planning, research, and statistics | 1 |
| Director of social mobilization | 1 |
| Director of academic services | 1 |
| Director of quality assurance | 1 |
| Director of finance and administration | 1 |
| Total | 6 |
| **SUBEB-SW** | |
| Executive chairman | 1 |
| Director of school services | 1 |
| Director of social mobilization and orientation | 1 |
| Deputy director of social mobilization and orientation | 1 |
| Director of planning, research, and statistics | 1 |
| Director of standard and quality assurance | 1 |
| Director of administration and finance | 1 |
| State 1 LGEA supervisors | 6 |
| Total | 13 |
| **SUBEB-NC** | |
| Director of planning, research, and statistics | 1 |
| Director of standard and quality assurance | 1 |
| Director of junior secondary school | 1 |
| Director of social mobilization | 1 |
| Director of administration and finance | 1 |
| State 2 LGEA supervisors | 6 |
| Total | 11 |
| Grand total | 30 |

## Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed to assess the effect of the bureaucratic mechanism of policy implementation. In addition, the analysis considered the specific role of the individual in charge of policy implementation at the UBEC, SUBEB, and LGEA in two geo-political zones, as well as any other factors that affected the implementation of the policy. Data were analyzed from documents and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed in full. The analysis began by reading and re-reading the discussion transcripts so that the researchers became familiar with the data and could recognize the general key issues as they began to emerge. The main ideas emerging from each source were compared and

contrasted in order to extract major key issues. The method of analysis followed the guidance of Punch (2010) and Silverman (2011) and who suggested organizing excerpts from transcripts into categories and searching for patterns and connections within the categories to identify themes.

# Findings

This study examined the status of policy development and implementation. The data revealed issues affecting the implementation of UBE in the geographical regions included in the study. The data sets across the federal and state zones of the country attested to the fact that the UBE program had taken effect via a series of actions to enable implementation. One major achievement in its implementation was the establishment of a template that empowered the three tiers of government to exercise jurisdiction in matters relating to implementing basic education. As stated by the bureaucrats, the uniformity in the template sought to ensure that no state or district was left behind in providing education opportunities for its citizens.

This section presents the two main themes that emerged: shared understandings and implementation actions.

## Shared understandings

The overarching understanding derived from the analysed data revealed that the bureaucrats had in-depth knowledge to implement policy and could interpret and execute the policy as stated in the policy blueprint. The understanding of policy to practice in the data connotes the bureaucrats' knowledge or ability at interpreting/ analyzing policy in the direction of what the policy should be and the processes involved in achieving the desirable outcome. The view of the ten participants in SW expressed the general notion regarding their knowledge of turning policy into action in the state:

> It involves a series of actions and it is in stages. In the first one, the state has what is known as a state development plan; the local government have their own action plan and the schools also have their own, known as a post-school development plan. The stakeholders come together to deliberate on those action plans — what development do they wish to take place in the school this year? Stage two is now the implementation of the action plans. We have the stakeholders that are charged with the responsibilities of each of the actions — SUBEB at the state level, LGEA at the local level, the federal government, and the parents (SBMC) also have their roles to play in the implementation and development of the action plan. (SW participant)

Our findings showed that the bureaucrats also had sufficient knowledge of their specific roles in the UBE implementation. One of the participants from the North-Central

(NC) region explained the directorate roles in the implementation of the policy. This participant voiced the opinion of other participants with regard to their knowledge of policy and responsibility in implementing the UBE program:

> The social mobilization and communication department operates through what we call the 'school-based management committee,' and is like an observer. They look at the school, they report to us whether teaching is satisfactory or not, and things like that. And when policies are not acceptable, they give feedback to that department, and the department passes it on to the board. Like I said earlier on, [members of] the school management committee come up with their suggestions, they react to government policies and make their demands, and the government looks into them and does whatever it deems fit. We rely more on the information from the community. Like I said, they own their schools, they have our phone numbers and we rely on that, then we move there when there are complaints and, of course, we have constant dialogue. (NC participant)

However, the participants identified the challenge of a lack of alignment among the bureaucrats as an issue that has adversely affected the UBE policy in achieving the EFA goals in Nigeria. This issue, as reflected by the participants, is discussed next.

*Control and conflict.* The bureaucratic challenge to UBE implementation was obvious in the manner in which the implementers approached the implementation process. There was a battle for control within the bureaucratic echelon that impeded the board of implementation's service delivery, responsiveness, and agility. The coherence of vision and commitment to implementing the government's intention — which should be the crucial element in driving change — was lacking with the UBE policy implementation. The challenge of control was noticeable in the overlapping bureaucracy — a situation in which both the SUBEBs and Ministries of Education (MOEs) in the states oversaw the implementation of UBE tasks, which should be the sole responsibility of the SUBEB. Exercising jurisdiction over UBE implementation by SUBEB officials was met with great resistance from the state MOE officials.

The UBE implementation in North-Central was a failure because of this issue of friction, which arose because the UBE bureaucratic structure was ambiguous in terms of the structure of control. There was no direct statement or constitutional guideline suggesting that the state SUBEBs were under the supervision or dictate of the MOEs across states. However, the policy encouraged a complementary role between the SUBEBs and MOEs, where deemed necessary, but not against the overriding interest of the SUBEBs. The UBE Act stated that the UBE recognizes the constitutional right of SUBEBs and LGEAs to manage basic education, and the federal government as an intervening agency to assist and/or act in partnership with the states and local governments (UBEC-ACT, 2004).

The bureaucratic structure of policy implementation has directorate divisions, with each division having a specific role and responsibility to perform in order to

ensure UBE is adequately implemented. However, the struggle to outwit one another has made UBE implementation very slow. This creates a situation in which one division begins an implementation task ahead of the expected timeframe in order to give the impression of being the best directorate, while other divisions are looked down upon. This was obvious in the perceived relationship that existed between the federal, state, and district levels. The theories explored in this study underscore the bureaucratic paradigm of policy implementation in Nigeria, which gives credence of might or supremacy to the federal, state, and district governments in ascending order. This 'battle of supremacy' created a gap between the tiers. The district/local government thought that, because they were closer to the grassroots and knew the societal expectations of education provision, their recommendations sent to the state and federal governments on UBE should be given due consideration; however, the reverse seemed to be the case.

This indicates why directives to the districts across the region have not been treated with a level of urgency. The FCT participant cited control of school supplies as an issue across the regions.

> ... there are issues with UBE implementation in states, which centered on control and rivalry in monitoring and supervising UBE across the states. The issue of control is at all levels, from the top down to the local districts ... [and includes] undue interference and unnecessary issues of who should be in control. This was evident in the awarding contracting and distribution of school supplies... . and complaints about irrelevance of books. They cannot have different publishers for different classes and we centralized it because states were doing things that were unconventional, where they photocopied books of publishers just to placate their political friends. At times, publishers do go to states to mount pressure, urging them to write letters to UBEC to purchase from them after the states must have submitted their attestation letters with the name of a certain publisher already. (FCT participant)

North Central participants saw the manifestation of the challenge of control in the regulating examinations across the board in the regions. For instance, it was the responsibility of SUBEB to conduct unified examinations for all schools in the regions. However, this was not the case because of interference from the Commissioners for Education (COEs).

> There is a controversy: the primary schools tried to provide accommodation for the junior secondary school classes, which has been incorporated into UBE, but the Honorable Commissioner of Education said he does not recognize [the] UBE policy of no more common entrance examination in primary six ... which runs contrary to the UBE edict. In fact, UBE have been made for the poor ones, which is the case in NC. (NC participant)

From the findings across the three geo-political regions in Nigeria, it was clear that competition rather than cooperation, caused by overlapping bureaucracy and

lack of shared goals, adversely resulted in lop-sided policy implementation, poor monitoring and supervision, and questionable behavior of the bureaucrats. In policy implementation, the leadership commitment, and interpersonal relationships among the implementing officials largely determined the overall outcome of any government policy (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011). Of interest across the regions is the pace at which directorates within the same SUBEB tend to outwit or outdo one another in implementation tasks. The question is how has this affected the UBE policy implementation?

The data show that the mistrust created by rivalry and supremacy has negatively affected the implementation task. However, the magnitude of conflict varies across the states. In SW, it is a lack of trust centered on authority to control implementation between the state and the district officials. This, to a large extent, affected the UBE implementation in the region. This conflict between the directorates is because some consider themselves more superior, with greater ability to implement policy objectives. In NC, the different groups try to outwit each other during UBE implementation because of the internal wrangling among the bureaucrats in the LGEAs over the appointment of the administrative head, otherwise known as Executive Secretary (ES). The reflection of the participants in SW, NC, and FCT give credence to the discussion.

> ... Lack of cooperation among the directorates at the SUBEB as an issue that adversely affected UBE implementation in the regions ... part of the Directorates of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) responsibility was to advise the Directorates of Physical Planning, Research, and School Services (PPR&S) on school planning or where to locate schools, as stated in the UBE policy. This advice was often not considered. For example, it is of no use for the Directorate of Planning, Research, and Statistics to build schools in the bush indiscriminately because a commissioner comes from there, or it is a top-notch constituency. It is the M&E that we say, we need buildings here, this school is overcrowded, etc. We make reports of these things, but because we are teachers, I do not think it carries meaning for them. (NC participant)

This view of the FCT participant confirmed the problem of power of control in NC, which adversely affected the level of UBE policy achieved in the state.

> According to an FCT participant:
> There is friction between the Ministries of Education and SUBEB in NC. This is due to political frictions. They ought to work together. I know the Chairman of SUBEB and Commissioner for Education in NC, and I do encourage them to work together, so NC is not a good example of UBE's implementation. (FCT participant)

*Lopsided implementation.* Across the three regions, the control and conflict struggle left the EFA and the UBE policy an issue of no significant value within the context of societal expectations. The lack of administrative alignment left the issue of the

EFA in 2015 unresolved and aborted the UBE policy that was designed to facilitate increasing enrollment and access to education opportunities across the regions. The participants expressed this concern in the following way:

> Despite the fact that we have child-friendly schools, the materials are there, the enrollment rate is not affected as expected, except secondary schools these days. The transition rate is increasing, I can say that. (SW participant)

> I can't feel the improvement of enrollment in the villages and less developed areas where there are little or no private schools ... At least, I could remember teachers run after school-age children 15 to 16 years ago to come and enroll in schools, in order to safeguard their job and avoid being retrenched by the government due to the high ratio of teachers to pupils. There are low increments in the number of enrollments now in school ... . (NC participant)

These findings revealed a bureaucratic bottleneck in the ability of the state implementation officials to reach a level of compromise with the Ministry of Education in their respective regions that made the UBE policy impossible.

*Monitoring and supervision.* The ineffectiveness of UBE has resulted from inadequate monitoring and supervision during implementation. The findings ascertained that a lack of monitoring and supervision has affected the level of advocacy and public enlightenment of the government intentions to provide free and compulsory basic education, especially in the remote regions of Nigeria. The data identified the factors creating this, such as a lack of logistics, insensitivity of officials to the importance of UBE policy supervision and lack of funds to remunerate the officers responsible for monitoring UBE programs in rural areas.

One notable issue across the regions was that the supervision and monitoring of the UBE program was seriously lacking. This seemed to be responsible for the questionable practices recorded in the implementation programs, especially in the area of school supplies. The lack of alignment between the bureaucratic officials made monitoring UBE a cumbersome task because of the geographical structure or location of schools. Some schools even within a district/local government were not easily accessible, especially during the rainy season, because of the poor condition of the roads. In some instances, it took close to three days to reach a school for supervision; in another instance, monitoring officials had to paddle a canoe to reach schools in the riverine districts.

The view of bureaucrat in SW is relevant to place the issue of monitoring in proper perspective:

> ... the constraint is the issue of roads when you put teachers in some areas. For example, where they have to go by boat ... I know of two communities like that, even in a district in SW. In those areas the quality of houses are not acceptable to teachers we post there, so they just have to manage ... [they] come back home and they continue to complain of risks. This means that, without adequate logistics, school monitoring may not be effective. (SW)

The education bureaucracy in Nigeria was not achieving its stated objectives, and the problem in the system was growing deeper due to the lack of an adequate mechanism for effective monitoring and supervision. UBE policy monitoring and supervision was weak and the task was huge. The constraints on effective supervision and monitoring of the UBE scheme could be attributed to the inadequate vehicles for monitoring, inadequate number of qualified monitoring officers, inadequate office accommodation, lack of funds, lack of transport and time factors. In this study, educational supervision was concerned with those activities that maintain and promote the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools.

Supervision is an action directed towards improving the teaching-learning process. Supervision is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of the UBE scheme. The focus on supervision is because there has been no inspection and supervision of schools during the decade of UBE. Supervision of schools is the heart of quality assurance in education. Again, this is where the work of districts and SBMC becomes relevant. The available literature also ascertained that a problem affecting UBE is that of effective supervision and monitoring (Adeyanju, 2010; Anaduaka & Okafor, 2013; Ezekwesili, 2013; National Population Commission [NPC], 2011; Ochoyi & Danlandi, 2009). However, as long as there is lack of synergy among the officials within and across districts, little or no effect will be achieved in terms of monitoring and logistics.

## Implementation actions

The challenge of insincerity among the implementing officials across the regions was another notable problem facing the UBE policy. The data identified this challenge as a factor that hampered the effectiveness of implementation in terms of school supplies. There were accusations and counter-accusations by the interviewees on the issue of textbooks, and the facts remain unclear. For instance, based on observations of school supplies — especially the textbooks that littered the SUBEB offices in the two regions — we asked why the books that were meant to be distributed to the schools had not been delivered. The bureaucrats stated that they had not been distributed because they were not relevant to the curriculum. Another factor for delay in delivering books to the schools was the bureaucracy encountered at the district level when collecting the books from the SUBEB. Issues of inconsistency with publishers and practice among the policy implementers were identified as challenges regarding school supplies. It was very interesting to note that the books that were not relevant to the curriculum and not meant to be sold find their way to the bookshops.

While this issue of the school supplies was yet to be resolved, the federal government's determination to ensure that the UBE program was a success in all ramifications endeared the security operatives to arrest syndicates selling free textbooks that were meant for students in four major states of the federation. According to UBEC Reports, the investigation conducted on this practice implicated the SUBEB officials who were responsible for implementing the policy. The Minister of State for

Education's supervisory role included monitoring the distribution of books. The UBEC affirmed that the officials responsible for basic education implementation were involved in selling the free textbooks meant for the students across the states of the federation:

> The Minister of State for Education regretted that State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) workers were involved in selling books meant for free distribution. He said that beginning from now, independent monitors would be drafted to monitor the distribution of textbooks to individual schools across the country. The minister added that the Federal Ministry of Education and security partners would work hard towards ensuring that all saboteurs in the book distribution chain face justice. (UBEC, 2010)

Numerous examples of mismanagement were observed, especially in the area of funds allocated to the implementation program in this study. Instances of diverting the funds intended for the UBE project to personal use were daily occurrences among public officials. 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 resurface after they tipped the officer in charge. This corrupt behavior of office holders often discouraged teachers and created unnecessary bottlenecks and hindrances to UBE's success. Bureaucrats, teachers, and school administrators joined politicians in this unethical practice, which has restricted the supposed efforts to curb corruption.

Meanwhile, in the state SUBEBs, there was evidence of the awarding of 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 literature explored in this study also pointed to corruption and misappropriation of public funds as factors derailing basic education implementation (Ezekwesili, 2013; Olarenwaju, 2013; Smith 2007).

To provide unfettered access to education effectively under the UBE policy, a number of policy goals must be met. The model of policy implementation (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975) adapted for this study is relevant to ensuring that every child of school age has access to education, particularly in terms of implementing and evaluating policy decisions.

*Implementation goal.* The bureaucratic structure of implementing UBE policy decisions in Nigeria affects the implementation task due to the top-down hierarchical organizational behavior, with layers of bureaucracy between the federal, state, and district levels. Apart from the fact that the bureaucratic structure makes responses to implementation tasks very slow, it also gives room for a lack of alignment and unhealthy interpersonal relationships, which inhibit implementation communication and understanding of policy matters. The data collected in this study affirmed the challenge of alignment within the structure of implementation. Despite bureaucrats'

understanding of policy intentions, the problem of communication within the organizational structure was a major factor affecting the success in implementing the UBE objectives. The policy is clear enough that the bureaucrats understand their roles in UBE implementation. However, lack of alignment towards implementation and poor communication is responsible for the slow pace in implementing government decisions, as seen in the distribution of school supplies and lack of appropriate and relevant textbooks. According to the data, attaining school supplies has been a serious task, with the loose supervision of school materials creating room for the unethical practice reported in CS, where books intended for schools were found in private bookshops across the states.

> Yes, they bring the books [but they are] not enough and not relevant. And when they ask you to come to SUBEB for the books, before you get the books, you have to pay the storekeeper, or else you will not get the books. And here in our LGEA, our storekeeper will have to invite the schools several times for the books because there is no transport for us to take it down to schools. And they often bring different books in different academic sessions. Today they bring Oxford, tomorrow it is Macmillan, and they will tell you it is free and you will see that the books are inadequate. The books that are not meant to be sold find their way to the bookshops. (CS participant)

*Evaluation goal.* As stated in the findings, the monitoring mechanism of UBE policy implementation has been very weak. Ensuring adequate compliance to the rules and regulations of implementing policy decisions has not been achieved because of a lack of supervision and monitoring. The bureaucrats at GT (Federal Capital) noted that, since the introduction of UBE in 1999, no study of this nature has been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of UBE policy implementation. Our findings revealed that the challenge of public perception and lack of response to policy decisions are issues that are yet to be addressed in the UBE. Few of the achievements recorded in UBE have been attributed to the effort of SBMC, which has served as the link between the SUBEB and the school. The districts that are responsible for this initiative gave excuses based on lack of logistics and remunerations for monitoring of schools, especially schools in rural areas, considering that most of these schools are in locations that are difficult to access due to the poor condition of roads.

It has been established that the barriers to UBE implementation are within the implementation and evaluation goals, as identified in the implementation model. The hierarchical structure of implementing UBE policy in Nigeria, as stated in the model, revealed that the layers of bureaucracy and duplication of bureaucratic functions are major factors responsible for the issues that have prevented effective policy implementation. Such issues include lack of alignment, poor interpersonal relationships, politics, lack of monitoring, and poor public perception. The model of implementation is the most appropriate for policy implementation of UBE in Nigeria, with emphasis on the implementation and evaluation issues raised in this study (see Figure 1).

## Conclusion

This study has shown that bureaucrats are the bedrock of successful policy initiative because they are the link between the government and schools. It has revealed that, for any policy of the government to be successful, the level of involvement of the system level of implementation is crucial. The small achievements recorded in terms of infrastructure in schools across the states show that bureaucrats' roles cannot be jettisoned in the implementation of any policy. Thus, achieving or improving access in UBE policy implementation is tied to addressing the problems with implementation and evaluation, as stated above. This synthesis assisted the conceptualization of the policy implementation process and its effect on achieving access in the UBE policy. The researchers have drawn on Fenshaw's (2009) concepts to understand the degree of shared understandings and implementation actions within a bureaucratic paradigm of implementation.

The findings from this study identified the bureaucratic mechanism of the UBE policy implementation as the major hindrance that affected the realization of the EFA 2015 goals. The lack of understanding, clarity of boundaries, poor monitoring mechanism, and questionable behavior of the implementing officials capture the bureaucratic challenges of implementing the UBE policy intention, which have negatively affected access in terms of the enrollment, attendance, and progression of Nigerian children in the UBE program. This affirms that the primary goal of introducing UBE — to enhance access to education in response to the UN's MDGs (MDGs, 2006) and the Jomentien Declaration on education, of which Nigeria is a signatory (Okiy, 2004) — is yet to be realized. The findings in this study revealed that the bureaucratic operations of implementing UBE have not been effective in addressing lack of access to education (Akowe, 2011; Bolaji, 2014; NPC, 2011; UNESCO, 2012).

The bureaucratic structure of implementing UBE policy decisions in Nigeria affects the implementation task due to the top-down hierarchical organizational behavior, with layers of bureaucracy between the federal, state, and district levels. Apart from the fact that the bureaucratic structure makes responses to implementation tasks very slow, it also gives room for lack of alignment and antagonistic interpersonal relationships, which inhibit implementation communication and understanding of policy matters. The data collected in this study affirmed the challenge of alignment and shared understandings within the structure of implementation.

Despite bureaucrats' individual understanding of policy intentions, the problem of communication within the organizational structure was a major factor affecting the success in implementing the UBE objectives. More specifically, we found that the level of alignment that manifested in the form of power of control and supremacy struggle among the bureaucrats was responsible for the uneven implementation of the UBE policy across all the states in Nigeria. It provided clarification why achieving successful outcomes in UBE has been problematic. The UBE policy, in its purpose and intent, seems to be an achievable venture, except for this bureaucratic

challenge. The power of control, race to outwit one another in implementing policy decisions, and rivalry for supremacy were the bureaucratic bottlenecks that had any significant impact on access. We found that the important roles of the bureaucrats in Nigeria in achieving many of the government's policies and programs, especially in education, cannot be overemphasized. However, their effect has been limited because of the lack of alignment that seems to affect the bureaucrats' disposition to the UBE.

The bureaucrats' disposition placed obstacles in the way of the policies being formulated by the policymakers, especially those policies that were not of direct benefit to bureaucrats, or about which the bureaucrats held divergent opinions. As such, the power of control, race to outwit, and supremacy struggle identified in this study were tactics employed to thwart UBE policy implementation. The findings revealed that the bureaucrats were not always altruistic or acting according to professional norms because of their many conflicting roles. It is critical in Nigeria to separate personal interest, prejudice, and the influence of primordial values in the conduct of official business by bureaucrats.

The intent of the UBE policy initiative was to ensure that all school-age children in Nigeria attained uninterrupted access to education. This study's data established that lack of alignment of the bureaucrats responsible for implementing the policy negatively affected the realization of access to education. Bureaucratic issues occurred in the form of control, as in whose jurisdiction it was to implement UBE: the SUBEBs or the MOEs in all the states. Overlapping bureaucracy without direct constitutional guidelines about where authority lay in implementing government decisions on UBE made access to education unachievable. The lack of alignment in this study was in the form of an unhealthy class struggle among the bureaucrats. This manifested in a situation where some individuals considered themselves superior in terms of implementing policy objectives. Thus, the implementation of the policy intentions of the government resides not at the school level, but at the system level of policy implementation. This study shows that providing access in the UBE policy depends largely on having focused, responsible, and purposeful bureaucrats at the heads of the various government tiers (federal, state, and local/district government) and honest and dedicated bureaucratic leaders at the board levels of education/organization bureaucracies.

Our findings suggest that the way forward to overcome the bureaucratic issues that have made providing access in UBE policy implementation unrealizable is to review the constitution to give the federal government the exclusive right to administer UBE in Nigeria. This will ensure that the current overlapping bureaucracy in UBE administration in the states and LGEAs will be eliminated. A review of the constitution would also enable the federal government to create regional offices in the six geo-political zones of the country, against the current state. It would facilitate effective monitoring and supervision of policy implementation tasks. The regionalization of UBE administration would ensure that bureaucrats with skills and knowledge of education administration were appointed to head the regions, supported by politicians

operating education administration in the states. The need to make education accessible to all school-age citizens in Nigeria is becoming increasingly critical and urgent because no nation can rise above its educational attainment. The pace at which this can be realized is hinged on the ability of the government and capability of the bureaucrats to implement the UBE policy effectively. Adherence to the recommendations of this study regarding ways to avoid these factors will ensure the development of Nigeria towards providing important education opportunities to its citizens.

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