

EDUCATIONAL POLICY: A REVIEW OF ITS NATURE, FORMS, PROCESSES, RATIONALE AND MISCONCEPTIONS

¹Sa'adu Isa Bashar and ²Aminu Malami Sifawa

^{1,2}Department of Education Foundations, Faculty of Education, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria
e-mail: ¹mmbashar1984@gmail.com

Abstract

Educational policies are the driving forces for actualizing the predetermined national goals. The success of educational policies translates in to the success of other sectors of the economy and vice-versa. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to add to the existing literature of educational policy by clarifying the concepts of policy and educational policy, highlighting the unique nature of good educational policies, the forms of educational policies, the processes of formulating quality educational policies, why quality educational policies need to be formulated, as well as the misconceptions that must be avoided by educational policy actors for making better and sound educational policies. The paper recommended that talented and skilled manpower, adequate funding, and accurate statistical data need to be injected in the policy making and implementation processes for achieving the entire national development goals.

Keywords: *Educational policy, Nature, Forms, Process, Rationale, Misconceptions.*

Introduction

Educational policies are the driving forces for actualizing the predetermined national objectives because all other policies of the sectors of the economy depend heavily on education to succeed (Falalu, 2020). Thus, the success of educational policies translates in to the success of other sectors of the economy and their failure implies the failure of the others (Rosha, 2022). The concept of policy has been defined by Wadi and Terry (1995) as a single or combination of decisions that may set out directions for guiding future decisions, initiating or delaying actions, or guiding the implementation of the earlier decisions, whether explicit or implicit. In the perception of Owolabi, (2005), a policy is a process of doing or performing a particular action with intention and thus one's involuntary action cannot be a policy. According to him, a policy must have certain elements such as the policy agents, policy action, and purposes. Manga, (2014) also looks at policy as an authoritative prescription issued by the government to guide the achievement of objectives. However, Musisi, (2015) is of the opinion that a policy is a broad statement that reflects future goals and aspirations and provides guidelines for carrying out those goals. In a nutshell, a policy could be any sort of action that is taken by an individual or authority to guide the operation of a given endeavor for the attainment of the determined goals (Manganese, 2015). Therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to add to the existing literature of educational policy by clarifying the concepts of educational policy, highlighting different forms of educational policies, the true nature of quality educational policies, the processes of formulating quality educational policies, why quality educational policies need to be formulated, and also clarify the misconceptions that ought to be avoided by the educational policy actors for making better and sound educational policies.

Concept of Educational Policy

Educational policy is a policy that is related to education or a policy that is directly meant for education (Roshia, 2022). This is because there are other policies that are not education-based policies such as health, agricultural, insurance, training and development, recruitment, human resource and others. All of these policies center on their specific areas of relevance but educational policy centers only on the area of education. Educational policy involves all authoritative prescriptions or decisions that are taken by the government to guide the activities of education for the realization of the desired goals (Falalu, 2020). That is why Manga, (2010) emphasized that educational policies cover all those binding prescriptions, principles or guidelines set aside by the government or authority in a logical way to guide the business of education towards the attainment of the desired goals. Educational policies therefore define in implicit or explicit terms the dos and don'ts in educational enterprises for the realization of goals.

Educational policies are the gross policies in which all other policies are embedded (Musisi, 2015). Figure 1 alludes to how other policies are aligned to educational policy:

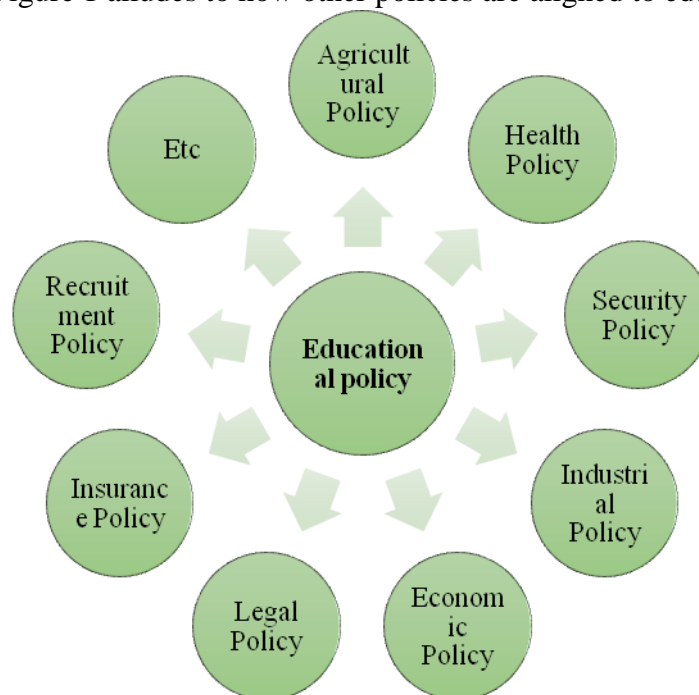


Figure 1: Educational Policy as an Embedded Policy

Nature of Effective Educational Policies

Quality educational policies are characterized with the following attributes as identified by Manette, (2014) Musisi, (2015); Falalu, (2020); and Manganese, (2015):

1. They are general or specific, broad or narrow, simple or complex, public or private, written or unwritten, implicit or explicit and qualitative or quantitative.
 2. They can be central or local, public or private, authorities or individuals, top or bottom.
 3. They are goal oriented-they aim at achieving some goals.
 4. They can be positive or negative. Beneficiaries of the policies may see them as positive or negative to them.
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5. They are legally coercive. Because most of the policies are being forced upon people.
6. They address specific problem. They normally focus on a particular area of concern.
7. They are closely related to decision making. This is because decision making is part and parcel of policy making.
8. They are means to an end not an end to themselves. They are not goals; however, goals are achieved through them.
9. They are nested with other policies. They are aligned with either national or international policies

Forms of Educational Policies

Educational policy is part and parcel of the general or public policies that are formulated by executives, legislators, judges, administrators among others. Owolabi, (2005); Musisi, (2015); Mangette, (2014); Falalu, (2020); and Manganese, (2015) identified eight (8) kinds of educational policies as follows:

Curricular policies: They are kind of policies in education that specify the aspects of school programs, activities and learning experiences that are to be taught by the teachers, learnt by the students and carried out in the schools. They therefore state clearly what the teachers should teach and what the students should learn. It is the curricular policies that typify the learning experiences that students must get for the attainment of the national desires. It could therefore be said that curricular policies shape the brains and minds of individuals towards meeting the present and future goals of the nation.

Pedagogical policies: Pedagogy is all about methods, skills and techniques of teaching. As the name suggests, pedagogical policies are the policies that primary dictate the methods of teaching children in the classroom environments. These policies are the ones the advocate for designing scheme of work and preparing lesson plan before getting in to classroom for teaching.

Resource policies: These policies are the ones that guide the provision of learning resources, instructional materials for the operation of teaching and learning. They dictate the kind of facilities to be provided in the school such as school buildings, furniture and fittings, libraries, laboratories, audio-visuals, textual materials, stationeries, chemicals and alike.

Distributional policies: To distribute means to divide something among the members of a group. From the name, distributional policies are those that explain how new resources or opportunities in education could be shared among the benefitting populace. For instance, there may be a policy in Universal Basic Education that may make provision for the construction of 10 blocks of 100 classes in each state of the federation. That one distributes that resource to the affected places or states.

Redistributive policies: To redistribute means to distribute again and again. When certain places that are supposed to enjoy certain educational opportunities or resources, it is the redistributive policies that will fight for those that had been denied the opportunity. In short, the redistributive policies aim at ensuring equality avoiding imbalances in the educational opportunities.

Regulatory policies: These are concerned with regulation and control of educational activities and programmes. For instance, those policies that stipulate the kind of training that the in service-teachers should attain could be one of such policies. These policies give teachers procedures to follow before going for further studies.

Constituent policies: These policies are concerned with setting up or reorganization of educational institutions. These dictate the kind of things that an institution should possess that will qualify it to be upgraded, degraded or maintain the status quo.

Institutional policies: These are the school-based policies. They usually emanate from the schools. In this kind of policy, the school manager or head teacher determines who will do what, what would be done, how shall it be done, and with what will it be done? All these institutional policies must have nested with the policy of the national curriculum.

Individual policies: At the individual level, a teacher may make a policy specifying what the students should do in order to achieve good learning provided that those things are in conformity with the institutional and national policies.

Holistic Processes of Educational Policy Making

To formulate quality educational policies, Manga, (2010); Falalu, (2020) and Musisi, (2015) have identified a sequence of policy making processes ranging from situation analysis, problem identification, formulation of policy options, evaluation of the policy options, selection of policy option, implementation, policy evaluation and policy review. These are depicted in figure 2 below:

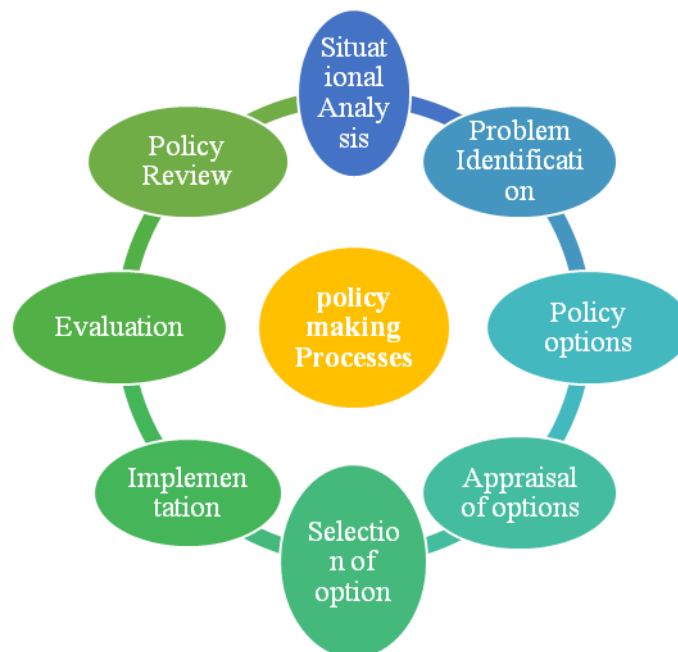


Figure 2: Chronological processes of policy making in education

Situation Analysis. This is all about analyzing the existing situation so as to determine the basic societal forces that individuals and educational institutions have to respond to. Those forces can be cultural, political, technological, economical, demographical, geographical or even educational. Here, the prominence is given to questions such as: is the existing situation favorable? Is the situation satisfactory? Is the situation conducive, rewarding or benefiting? If the answer is found to be positive, then there would be no need for making a policy but if the answer is negative, then the need for the policy emerges. This is to bring about go with the internal and perhaps external changes of the environment.

Problem identification. It is the situational analysis that will enable the identification of problem. That problem could be of connection with one or more areas of human endeavor. This identification will enable feasible assessment of the gravity of the problem in question and at the same time identify its face, nature and possible causes. Is the problem caused by politics, is the problem caused by technological changes, is the problem caused by economic factor, is the problem a religious one, is the problem an agricultural one? Etc.

Formulation of policy options. After analyzing the situation and coming out with the problem whose face, nature and causes might have been established, to follow next is generating variety of alternatives one or two of which will be used to solve the problem. According to Musisi, (2015), there are basic social, political and economic forces that create the desire for change in educational policies. For instance, due to global economics dynamics, the capacity of Africa's government to finance higher education is seriously threatened and this could make the providers of higher education to consider changing the existing policy. Alternative policy options will then be generated to cope with the economic situation. Educational policy options could therefore be made from both within and outside the educational system because the world is becoming a global village where innovations in one country can be replicated in the other country.

Evaluation of the policy options. After generating the policy options or alternatives, there comes the assessment of the validity and reliability or otherwise of each of the generated options with regards to its ability to meet the desired goal. Here, each of the options will be assessed to ensure its desirability, effectiveness, justification and affordability. The policy options could be appraised through public debates in mass media, informal debates, and debates by the officers in the ministry of education and others.

Selection of option. Since stakeholders in policy making have different interests, deliberations will be made and eventually one of the policy options will be selected. If therefore a given policy option is found to be more effective, more justifiable, more desirable and more affordable, that policy option will then be selected for implementation. However, the advantages and disadvantages of every alternative must be considered before selection.

Implementation. Implementation is simply the process of putting the selected policy option in to operation. This is otherwise called "the moment of truth" because it is the time of determining whether the option will work or not. The implementation could be made in both pilot and full format. Pilot implementation is to be firstly carried out experimentally on a given group so as to see whether the policy will work for the general public or not. After the pilot implementation, then comes full implementation whereby the policy is executed on a large scale.

Policy evaluation. After implementing the policy, then comes evaluation so as to assess the impacts that the policy yielded. This is to also ascertain the strength and weaknesses of the policy for possible review. In this evaluation, there is the need to consider the "with-without" and the "before-after" situations. If the situation is found to be better and positive "with and after" the implementation of the policy, then the policy is effective but if the situation is found to be better "before and without" the policy, then the policy is not effective.

Policy review. It is at this stage that corrections will be made and new improvements will be made in the policy.

Rationales for Quality Educational Policies

Formulating quality educational policies is sine qua non. This could be attested by the rationales enumerated by Rosha, (2022); Manga, (2010) and Musisi, (2015) and Falalu, (2020) as follows:

Achieving the national goals. Educational policies are channels through which the objectives of education could be achieved. The achievement of the educational goals implies the achievement of the overall national goals since the objectives of the former are embedded in those of the latter. For instance, it is the goal of education to provide skilled manpower in the areas of agriculture, health, law, politics, engineering, teaching, industry and alike. If the skilled personnel are made through education, they will work towards the development of sectors in their respective domains hence the national goals concerning provision of food, effective health care services, legal services, political serenity, and the rest could be achieved. This therefore leads to national development.

Shaping the future of the nation. Through curricular policies, the future of the nation could be properly shaped towards the desired direction because they are the kind of policies that have the potentials of specifying the aspects of school programs, activities and learning experiences that should be taught, learnt and performed in the schools. They state clearly what the teachers should teach and what the students should learn. They also typify the learning experiences that students must get for the attainment of national desires.

Controlling the quality of education. It is the wish of educational policies to see that quality education is acquired by the teachers thereby imparting same to the students. This is because it is only when learners have quality education that they would be able to perform better in nation building. To meet this end, educational policies offer some regulatory policies that could be observed and followed by the practitioners of education for getting and providing qualitative education that could manifest itself through skills and technical know-how in dealing with issues of public concerns.

Solving critical problems. Since educational policies are goal oriented, they always aim at achieving some given goals that are of societal concern by outlining certain course of actions to be followed towards solving problems. Educational policies provide scientific frameworks or technicalities for getting rids of the societal problems for the realization of predetermined goals of the general society. Because it is only when problems are done-with the nation can attain meaning development.

Determining the outcomes and outputs of an education system. Educational policies are good enough in determining what outcome and output are to be met or produced. They easily predict the consequences or results of the entire activities of education. Musisi, (2015) sees policy outcomes as what happen to the target groups that are intended to be affected by the policy. These are the real results whether intended or unintended. Policy outcomes also measure the extent to which the policy achieved its objectives; are they fully achieved, partially achieved or not achieved at all. Policy outputs are the actual decisions made by the implementers. They therefore constitute what a government does which might be different from what it said it would do. So, both the outcomes and the outputs could be determined by the educational policies.

Distributing Educational Resources. Educational policies contribute significantly in ensuring proper distribution of available resources or educational opportunities among the beneficiaries. For instance, they can say that certain resources should be allocated to certain schools, certain places, certain people or certain level of education. This could

therefore bring about harmony and sense of understanding between or among the benefiting groups.

Identifying how to educate learning experiences could not be well-comprehended if appropriate methods and skills are not employed by teachers while imparting the knowledge to the students and if students did not understand what they were taught they would not be able to in to practice of they were taught and this digresses the development of a society. To ensure effective teaching through appropriate techniques and methods, pedagogical policies were initiated and advocated in education. They dictate various teaching methods and strategies that a teacher can use to ensure effective lesson delivery in the classrooms for proper students' understanding.

Effectiveness and efficiency in schools. Effectiveness is simply the degree to which goals are achieved while efficiency is achieving the goals using available minimum resources. Educational policies therefore help in determining the modus operandi for the practitioners of education so that minimum resources could be used to achieve the desired goals in educational enterprises.

Ensuring standard and uniformity of actions. This could be by preventing the substandard individuals from getting employed in to the system of education and by providing similar curriculum, same assessment procedures for both private and public educational institutions.

Levelling the education system: Educational policies help in diversifying the education system into different levels. For instance, the Nigerian educational policy catered for preprimary education, primary education, secondary education and tertiary education. Each level of education aims at realizing certain goals embedded in it.

Securing the practitioners of education. Educational policies help in protecting members of educational organizations in their attempts to enforce directives impartially and equally to all their members and or to all members of the society. They also provide for job security and defend the employees from harassment by public figures who may want to bend the rules and regulations for their personal whims.

Implementation of educational plans. Educational policy helps in defining parameters that could be employed for implementing the plans of education. This is because educational planners mostly may need to see the initial policy so as to be able to decide what to do next to implement it. This implementation could start from a feasibility or pilot study then see how best it could be implemented in a more viable manner for achieving the desired goal.

Resolving and preventing conflicts. Educational policies provide help in preventing or resolving conflicts between and among various interest groups that are found in the educational organizations. They spell out the duties, responsibilities, powers and positions of each individual in the organization so that one's actions could not interfere with that of another.

Misconceptions to Avoid for Quality Educational Policy Making

Misconceptions are wrong perceptions, negative thoughts or understanding about a given phenomenon. In educational policy making, misconceptions are the negative notions, judgements, or thoughts that some policy actors have while formulating and assessing an educational policy. Those misconceptions affect the effectiveness of the policies. The following are the kinds of misconceptions identified by Musisi, (2015) as well as Falalu, (2020):

Time to act misconception: Some policy actors tend to rush in formulating an education policy thinking that a policy should not take long time due to some alternatives that are being weighed. This is a wrong ideology that has to be avoided because a good policy requires ample time so that a lot of information and sufficient evidences could be generated and this allows the policy makers to think properly in to what should be done for the realization of the educational objectives.

Go slow misconception: Some policy actors have a thinking that a policy should not just be instantly changed in its entirety (even though there is the need for changing it) rather incremental changes could be slowly and gradually inserted in the existing one until it is finally overwhelmed. This misconception primarily posits that a policy change must be made on a slow process. This is a wrong idea which has to be avoided because provided the new policy is found to be sound for its implementation, then its full implementation should be made and at the same time putting a stop to the exiting one.

Nothing is new misconception: Some people see nothing new in formulating a new policy. To them, once a given policy is found good and already implemented, it should be allowed to remain forever. Therefore, there is no need for formulating new policy rather the authorities concern should search for ways of improving or modifying the existing ones based on the needs instead of scrapping them and bringing new ones. This is a wrong perception which needs to be avoided provided that quality and effectiveness are needed in educational policies because societies go with innovations and changes in time and that human beings too are dynamic in nature. There is need for incorporating new changes in the policies to meet up the global challenges.

Magic wand misconception: This is a misconception that a policy can solve all problems that are available in the society. Some people believe that educational policies are panacea or final solution to all the societal problems. This seems to equate educational policies with a magic. This thinking has to be avoided in policy making and that people must be made to understand that not every problem has an educational policy solution.

Misconception of fallible changes: To be fallible means to be full of failure or error. Some people think that educational policies are not error-free and therefore always require changes to make it infallible. This misconception calls for making frequent changes in policy. This perception ought to be discarded because there were many changes in educational policies that had not been able to stand the test of time. To correct this delusion, there is the need for policy technocrats to assess and acknowledge the strength of the empirical ground upon which the change of educational policies should be made not just be made any how any time without backing rationale.

Conclusion

The paper elaborated on various issues of importance in educational policy making. It perceived educational policy as an embedded tool through which different goals of human endeavor can be achieved. The paper defined the concepts of policy and educational policy and at the same time highlighted different types of educational policies, nature of educational policies, basic process that are involved in educational policy making, the importance of educational policies in nation building, and finally discussed some misconceptions that must be avoided by educational policy makers for making a better and sound policy.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is the need for employing standard procedures in the formulation and implementation of the educational policies perhaps by employing highly-talented and skilled technocrats who will do the job effectively.
2. Government at all level should ensure adequate funding of educational policies because without funding the policy demands could not be realized.
3. There is the need for the members of the society to assist the policy actors with factual data whenever the need for doing so arises because without accurate statistical data proper policy making and implementation could not be possible.
4. There is the need for frequent review of our educational policies so as to determine what to improve, where to improve, how to improve and when to improve.

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