

REVIEW OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA EDUCATION POLICIES (2024-2025)

Dr Ogechi U. Okafor
Uzonwa2015@gmail.com

Introduction:

Education is pivotal for Nigeria's national development, fostering a skilled workforce, social cohesion, and informed citizenry. Effective education policies are crucial for achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in addressing complex societal challenges. Therefore, education is crucial for sustainable development as it empowers individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to make informed decisions that benefit the environment, society, and economy, enabling them to actively contribute to a sustainable future by addressing issues through responsible actions. Education clearly needs well- designed programmes with clear mission, which must be developed by education policy makers, including Education Ministers, members of Governing Boards, and others, who need to understand the special needs and challenges that education faces in the Society. Nigeria's education system, managed under a federal structure, relies on the National Council of Education (NCE) for policy formulation, with the Federal Ministry of Education responsible for harmonization and standardization.

Key Responsibilities of the Federal Ministry of Education:

- Formulating national education policies.
- Collecting data for planning and financing.
- Maintaining uniform standards.
- Controlling quality through inspections.
- Harmonizing state policies.

- Facilitating international cooperation.
- Developing curricula and syllabi.

Policy Formulation and Implementation:

Educational development is guided by policy and regulated by the various designated agencies and commissions whose regulatory functions have led to norm setting, for educational establishments or initiatives under respective jurisdiction. The National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria is a set of guidelines for education management, administration, and implementation. It outlines the standards and requirements for education services in the country. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 2013 (Revised) laid Nigeria's philosophical foundation for basic education. This policy emphasizes the universal right to education, protected under Nigeria's Child Rights Act 2003 and the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act. Policy decisions, made after consultations, are implemented through guidelines, materials, and training provided by the NERDC and relevant panels.

Focus of This Review:

This review analyzes recent education policies, particularly the entry-level policies for early childhood education and the proposed 12-year basic education policy, and their implications for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality).

The Role of Policy and Politics:

Educational policy provides guidelines for decision-making, ensuring direction and achieving educational goals. However, political influence often leads to policy changes, leadership appointments based on political affiliations rather than expertise, and funding inconsistencies. This can negatively impact policy continuity and effective implementation.

Recent Policy Initiatives:

The Federal Government have in recent past unveiled a lot of policies in the education sector to reflect government commitment to empowering citizens with practical and relevant skills to meet the demands of the labour market and promote re-entry into schools. The current administration, recognizing the need for educational reform, is implementing the Ministerial Strategic Plan (MSP) 2024-2027, building on the previous MSP (2018-2022). These plans aim to address challenges like inadequate infrastructure, outdated curricula, insufficient teacher training and limited access to schools to curb the dropout rate. In order to realize the change in the above listed challenges, the main objective of the Roadmap 2024-2027 is to develop a plan that would: Reposition the education sector to enhance quality at all levels driven by well articulated policies and current strategic reform and renewal initiatives; Reinvigorate and strengthen the provision of vocational, technical and entrepreneurship education especially at the senior secondary level; Upgrade, revamp and build new educational infrastructures including schools, classrooms, libraries, workshops, laboratories, modern education media and special needs education centres for functional education delivery at all levels.

National Policy on Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE):

Early Childhood care development education (ECCDE) in Nigeria is provided nationwide in both public and private schools. The ECCD covers Creche, Nursery/Kindergarten for children aged 0-4 years old, while the one-year compulsory pre-primary education is for children aged 5 years, preparatory for primary education. ECCE programs and activities are important for children's holistic development, academic success, and future achievements.

The purpose of Early Childhood/Pre-primary education as expounded in the National Policy on Education (4th Edition 2004): Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; Prepare the child for the primary level of education; Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while in school, creativity, teamwork and learning of good habits.

Legislation concerning ECCDE: The UBE Act (2004) has an expanded scope which includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development.

The UBE Programme has made provision for every public primary school to have a Pre-Primary school linkage to cater for children aged 3-5 years. The act is silent on early childhood education and development in the age group 0-3 years.

COORDINATION: Federal and State Inspectorate Services, in collaboration with UBEC and SUBEBS (these two bodies, UBEC and SUBEBS, have statutory mandate for basic, i.e. primary and pre-primary, education). Other entities involved in the provision (e.g. municipalities, local governments) and main types of providers (e.g. public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.).

FUNDING: UBE Intervention Fund from the Federal Government of Nigeria's Consolidated Revenue Fund: b) Complementary funding from state and local governments, 5% of the Federal Government of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) matching grant to States (i.e. 36 States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to be allocated to Pre-Primary education for children age to 3-5 years per quarter among others.

CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL INDICATORS: Speech & Language; Skills. Motor Skills; Cognitive Skills; and Social-Emotional Skills.

EXPECTATIONS FOR A 3 YEAR OLD: The child should be able to have: 70-80% of speech is understandable; A vocabulary of 500-1000 words; Talks in complete sentences of 3-

5 words; Repeats words and sounds; Throws ball overhand; kicks a ball forward; Climbs up and down small slide by self; Stacks 5-7 blocks; draws a circle and square; Enjoys playing with play dough; Listens attentively to short stories for 10 minutes.; Matches an object to a picture Follows simple directions and routines; Enjoys playing alone but near other children; Enjoys playing with other children briefly.

EXPECTATIONS FOR A 4 YEAR OLD: The child should be able to: Speaks fairly well, using complex sentences; Asks and answers who, what, when, why questions Hops on one foot, jumps over object 5" high; Runs, jumps, hops, catches a ball, and pedals a tricycle; Stacks 10 or more blocks, threads small beads Enjoys playing with other children; Enjoys pretending, has long attention span; Continues one activity for 10-15 minutes; Dresses self without much assistance.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

To measure child development, these standard questionnaire questions were adopted from UNICEF to ask around these four different domains. This standardized questionnaire provides a valuable tool for measuring child development in a practical and efficient manner

Literacy-numeracy: The child should be able to perform at least two of the following: identify/name at least 10 letters of the alphabet; read at least 4 simple popular words; and/or know the name and recognize the symbols of all numbers from 1 to 10.

Physical: If the child can pick up a small object with two fingers, like a stick or rock from the ground, and/or the mother/primary caregiver does not indicate that the child is sometimes too sick to play, then the child is regarded as being developmentally on track in the physical domain.

Social-emotional: The child is considered developmentally on track if two of the following are true: The child gets along well with other children; the child does not kick, bite or hit other children; and the child does not get distracted easily.

Learning: If the child follows simple directions on how to do something correctly and/or when given something to do, and is able to do it independently. Response categories for all questions include yes, no and don't know.

However, in theory, Nigeria claims to be committed to the education of these children, but in practice, it has no serious plan for early childhood education in Nigerian public schools. In privately owned pre-primary schools, teachers with no training in ECCDE are often found in children classrooms while in pre-primary sections of government owned public schools, old female teachers with no qualification in ECDE are often seconded to children classrooms. Findings from various studies conducted by researchers in Nigeria have consistently confirmed this same situation (Amadi, 2013; Okewole, IlueziOgbedu, & Osinowo, 2013; Osho, Aliyu, Okolie, & Onifade; 2014). Notwithstanding, some private individuals and schools operating the ECCDE are doing very well by expanding and improving the facilities and equipment needed for early childhood development and education. The above can also be corroborated by an inventory of Early Childhood Care facilities in Nigeria conducted by FGN/NERDC/UNICEF in 2003, which showed that most of the early childhood care facilities are privately owned. According to Edirin (2024), one of the major objectives of ECCDE is that before society begins to have an influence on the child, the child should be made to utilise his senses to conceive and perceive how to positively influence society first.

Instructional materials like charts, television, computer, toys, and story books among others are not available for the implementation of early childhood care development education in most

schools in Nigeria. According to Aguh and Olutola (2023), early childhood education reduces the rate of school dropout, increases school achievement and helps to curb the rate of juvenile arrests in society. However, Aguh and Olutola assert that early childhood education is faced with a lot of bottlenecks that intend to hinder its effectiveness in Nigeria. These challenges comprise poor infrastructural facilities, poor remuneration of teachers' salaries, inadequate implementation of early childhood curriculum, employment of unqualified and incompetent teachers with little or no in-depth knowledge of early childhood Developmental Appropriate Practices, Teacher –child ratio; corruption, and poor funding of early childhood programs. Commenting further Aguh and Olutola stated that proliferation of early childhood according to National Policy on Education is a pertinent issue that has led to a poor standard and lack of proper regulation of early childhood institutions across the country, the language of the immediate environment as a medium of instruction is not strictly adhered to in most states in Nigeria among others.

Early childhood education Care Development and Education (ECCDE) is a key component of Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, which focus on quality education and gender equality. The investments can lead to healthier, better-educated children and a peaceful and prosperous future. Early childhood education aims to holistically develop a child's socio-economic, physical and emotional needs to create a solid and robust foundation for wellbeing and lifelong learning.

Implications for SDGs 4 and 5:

- **The policy is designed to:**
 - Contributes to access to quality education, socioeconomic mobility, gender equality, and skills development.
 - Promotes lifelong learning opportunities.

THE PROPOSED 12 YEAR BASIC EDUCATION POLICY

The 12 year basic education policy was a recent proposal put forth by the Honourable Minister of Education, Dr. Tunji Alausa to the National Council of Education, the highest policymaking authority in Nigeria's educational sector for a transformative shift in Nigeria's educational framework to a 12-year uninterrupted basic education model. A 12-year basic education model will ensure a continuous, uninterrupted curriculum, promoting better standardisation and fostering quality assurance in the education system. The 12-year basic education policy in Nigeria aims to improve access to education, reduce poverty, and prepare students for the workforce. This initiative aims to integrate junior and senior secondary education into a cohesive programme, eliminating external certification examinations between these stages. The primary objective is to align Nigeria's educational system with global standards according to Mr Alausa. This proposal seeks to transform the current 9-3-4 educational framework into a 12-4 system. Under this new model, it is expected that a child will spend a total of twelve years in basic education before advancing directly to tertiary education, where a minimum of four years will be required. If this proposal receive approval, it would mark the fourth educational model adopted by Nigeria since gaining independence in 1960. Firstly, the 6-5-4 system was implemented, which required six years of primary education, followed by five years of secondary education, and then a minimum of four years in a tertiary institution. In 1983, this system was succeeded by the 6-3-3-4 model, which was later replaced by the 9-3-4 system in 2006, leading to the current proposal for the 12-4 model. According to Owaduge (2025) the reform aims to

enhance literacy, vocational training, digital skills, and workforce readiness, aligning with global educational standards.

Onuoha (2025) in his publication revealed that the UBE basic education structure appears to have already satisfied the global standard, typified by UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) model. According to ISCED, basic education typically includes:

- Primary Education (ISCED Level 1): six years, focusing on fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Lower Secondary Education (ISCED Level 2): three years and building upon primary education and introducing more subject-oriented curricula.

So, the ISCED model generally defines basic education as lasting nine years. Onuoha therefore, wonders which other global standard the proposed Nigerian education structure is targeting to comply with.

Commenting further Onuoha asserts that common framework provided by the ISCED, basic education structures still vary globally. In many countries, basic education is considered to encompass both primary and lower secondary education, totalling around nine years. However, the definition and duration can vary based on national policies and educational objectives. For example the USA educational system is the 6-3-3-4 model of education. Grades 1-6 is the elementary, Grades 7-9 is the middle school, grades 10-12 is the High school and 4 years in the college.

The current state of Nigeria's education system demands far more than a mere adjustment in the duration that students spend at various educational levels. What is truly essential is a holistic overhaul of the entire educational framework to effectively confront the pressing challenges that have long been undermining the quality and accessibility of

education in the country. Among these challenges are the alarming decline in educational standards, the obsolescence of the curriculum, and the chronic shortage of instructional materials that hinder effective teaching and learning.

The 12-year education policy in Nigeria faces challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of qualified teachers curriculum adjustment to ensure smooth transition. Funding: Inadequate funding for schools and universities and Budget limitations for education technology.

Infrastructure : poor facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of essential learning resources; Inadequate number of schools and classrooms to accommodate students; Poor network infrastructure; lack of qualified teachers, poor management and control of teacher education programs, and improper placement of teachers.

Other challenges include: Corruption; Lack of continuity in governance; Poor supervision; Political interference; Strike actions; Brain-drain; Poor research; Weak administrators; Lack of motivation of teachers and Dilapidated/obsolete school facilities and equipment

- **Implications of 12-Year Policy on sustainable Development goals 4 and 5:**

Despite the policy shortcomings, it places some advantages on the educational system of our country, such as:

- Increases access to education, promotes gender equality and ensures more girls complete school and contribute to the society;
- Enhances learning outcomes and promotes lifelong learning.
- Empowers girls and breaks gender stereotypes.
- Contributes to social development through reduction in school dropout rate that will reduce child labour and crime among young people.

- Assess approach will exit from continuous and competency based evaluation to critical thinking and problem solving.

Key Challenges of the Policies:

- Inadequate funding.
- Poor infrastructure.
- Lack of qualified teachers.
- Political interference.
- Corruption.
- Lack of continuity in governance.
- Curriculum adjustment
- Inadequate monitoring and supervision
- Teacher Recruitment

Recommendations:

- Increase funding for education and ensure transparent allocation.
- Invest in infrastructure development and maintenance.
- Improve teacher training and recruitment.
- Minimize political interference in education.
- Strengthen regulatory frameworks and oversight.
- Ensure policy continuity.
- Focus on holistic reform, not just structural changes.
- Inclusive practices

By addressing these challenges and implementing effective policies, Nigeria can achieve its educational goals and contribute to sustainable development.

