Trend Analysis of Fee-Free Policy on Quality of Universal Basic Education in South West, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated the impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education in South-West, Nigeria. The observed gap in quality of Universal Basic Education despite the fee-free basic education policy necessitated the study. The study was guided by one research question and one hypothesis. Descriptive research of survey type was used for the study. The population comprised all public primary school teachers and pupils in South-West, Nigeria. A sample of one thousand nine hundred and twenty (1,920) respondents including male and female teachers selected from the sampled States of Lagos, Ogun and Oyo. The instrument, Fee-free Policy Impact of Universal Basic Education Descriptive Questionnaire (FPIUBDQE) was used for data collection. Data on public primary school pupils' enrolment, teachers' population and school list for a period of 2000-2012 was also used. Simple Linear Regression Analysis and Descriptive Statistics were used for the hypothesis and the research question. The result shows a significant Impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education. However, the survey reveals an alarming ratio of teachers to pupils ranging from 1:50 to 1:76 in some schools in the sampled States. It was suggested among others that government should be more committed and consistent in their maintenance of high quality in delivery of education services in the UBE schools.

Keywords: Trend Analysis; Impact Assessment; Fee-free Policy; Quality of Universal Basic Education.

1. Introduction

Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched in Nigeria on 30th September 1999 to expand the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme and give Nigerian children functional basic education. There has therefore been emphasis on funding of the scheme to improve quality and ensure equity in basic education. Quality standards are the goals to which all learners, teachers, staff and those who lead and manage schools should aspire to achieve. They are sometimes erroneously referred to as minimum standards but these are actually quality standards that focus on improving learning outcomes. Quality assurance is about continual improvement so it should not be seen as being the ceiling for a

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school's ambition. Schools should aim at going beyond and above each standard. Quality standards include infrastructure, learners' achievement and behaviour, teaching and learning, leadership and management, care guidance and safety (Federal Ministry of Education 2015).

Otive-Igbuzor (2006) earlier notes that quality is at the heart of education since it determines how much and how well students learn and the extent to which their education achieves a range of personal, social and developmental goals. Adeyemi (2012) reports that the ,deplorable situation in public primary schools based on the inadequacies of government against the provision of the National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) is affecting public schools' population as children are now being enrolled in private institutions. Impliedly, most of our educated elites and average people patronise private basic centres in the name of quality.

Alabi (2012) doubts Nigeria's vision of getting all Nigerians educated owing to the issue of education quality especially inadequate teachers. Soyinka (2007) suggests in this regard that government improvement of the quality of education by focusing on the quality of teachers in the service as well as improving the infrastructure in the school. In this direction, Lagos State government invested significantly funds to improve the physical infrastructure of schools and in the procurement of core textbooks for all public schools students. The Lagos 'Eko' Project therefore complements the State government's efforts to provide qualitative education across the sector (Adekunle and Agbonlahor, 2016). The impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education is multi-dimensional. There are several ratios, each of which is influenced by an array of relevant factors. These influencing factors include availability and quality of materials or inputs, rate of capacity utilisation, the scale of aspiration, the nature of equipment, the attitude and skill level of the work force and motivation of the teachers interplaying with the effectiveness and efficiency of the management. The way in which these elements interact has an important impact on quality of Universal Basic Education. There is therefore the need to identify and favourably modify factors and situations that prompt quality of Universal Basic Education.

It has often been said that huts, under shady trees and some open places are still found to be centers of learning in some primary schools in the country. Urgent steps should therefore be taken to address the situation. It is important to check whether the actions taken to bring about improvement are having an impact and, if they are not, why not. Such interim reviews might lead to major adjustments to targets, activities and the reallocation of resources path-way through a school's annual review cycle. Alternatively, it might identify actions for the next development plan (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). There are many international treaties, conventions and declarations dealing with various aspects of education, they are generally silent about how well education system could and should be expected to perform (Otive-Igbuzor 2006). Throughout the world, educational systems have been accused of being extremely conservative social institutions that respond very slowly, if at all, to educational reforms, social changes and advances in technology. EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005) identifies five major factors that affect the quality of education: the learners, whose diversities must be recognised, the national economic and social context, materials and human resources, the teaching, the learning process, and the outcomes and benefits of education. Godfrey (n.d.) is of the opinion that the desire for better quality of education is a generally shared feelings in Nigeria as in many other countries. Though, quality production is the responsibility of all shareholders and the schools, in particular, play key role in the quality process.

Authorities should recognise the school as the essential unit of change if we really want to bring about quality improvement in education. Nations have wasted billion of dollars on many poorly conceived but politically popular reforms which in the end failed to produce an impact at the most critical level: the school and more so the classroom. The purpose of reform policies should be to create the kinds of institutional arrangement and organisational structures necessary to promote educational excellence. There should therefore be a provision of high quality staff development that is necessary to produce effective schools.

Gbadamosi and Akinloye (2018) suggest that government should be more committed and consistent in their maintenance of high quality in delivery of education services in the UBE schools by

putting in place continuous professional development programme towards upgrading teachers' skills to handle current challenges of UBE scheme. They further note that for a   successful Universal Basic Education Programme, there must be provision of instructional materials in quality and quantum which demand an integrated approach involving the government, the school (through sourcing efforts), the teacher (through improvisation demanding creative and innovative efforts) and the pupils (by bringing materials available in the local area).

Ajayi in his (2012) study reveals how majority of urban schools not only suffer from shortage of teachers but also in the quality of teachers. Commenting on state of free education in Malawi, News and Views on Africa from Africa (2011) notes that government introduced free primary education in 1994, the number of students jumped to over three million, there were no classroom for the pupils, no teaching and learning materials and no qualified teachers to teach the newly inflated classes. The government had no choice but to recruit unqualified and untrained teachers.

As an index of quality, Ajibade (2005) reiterates the importance of teachers' training before they could be qualified to bear the title of professionals. The need to train and retrain teachers may not be too obvious to those outside the field of education, those who believe that teaching in the formal school setting can be done by anybody interested in teaching and that it needs no special training. The falling standard of education attributed to acute shortage of qualified teachers at the primary school level is no longer news. Teacher recruitment for primary schools should therefore be handled by professionals.

In a report by Adegbite (2018) Federal Capital Territory Administration has reaffirmed its commitment to encourage training and retraining of teachers with the view to ensuring continuous improvement of quality of education sector in the territory. He further notes that new teaching methods, instructional materials and even curricula to accommodate societal changes were being developed and updated regularly. Teacher training is one of the pillars that support a functional and result oriented educational system.

Nigeria needs an overhaul of its educational system as it concerns teaching and learning. Quality intakes need to be made in teacher training institutions as a first step towards quality teacher's education. Their curriculum should be fashioned to emphasize pedagogical and nationalistic perspective. Serving teachers should be treated with respect and honour by the authorities and be given attractive emolument without adding regular, and effective external supervision of school and teachers needs be put in place to ensure that they are not only teaching, they are teaching what they should teach and teaching the way to teach (Ajayi and Olaniyi 2016).

Adeyemi & Nwosu (2010) report the average ratio of 1 teacher to 48 pupils in public primary schools in Ogun State as against the universal standard of 1 teacher to 35 pupils (FRN 2013). Class population is a strong factor in the issue of class control and management and effective teaching and learning. Adeyemi and Ositoye (2010) establish a negative relationship between poor facilities and quality performance when they reported a study conducted by World Bank (2009) which reveals the state of primary education in Sub-Sahara faced with erosion of quality, low cognitive achievement among pupils due mainly to poor supply to school of key inputs, especially books and other learning materials.

The (UNESCO/IIEP 2009) report uses a framework for understanding, monitoring and improving education quality that identifies five dimensions associated with quality. The framework provides a means for organising and understanding the different variables of education quality and its views of education quality encompasses access, teaching and learning process and outcomes influenced by the context and inputs available. This study investigated the impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education in South-West, Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

Universal Basic Education was launched in 1999 in Nigeria to give quality basic education to the recipients to make them useful to themselves and the society. Similar programmes introduced in the past did not last because of the problem of inadequate planning. This assessment is therefore desirable for implementation adjustment and remedial measures to safe the huge investment in the scheme. The study

provided a ground to make an appraisal of the new initiative, UBE scheme to assess the impact of the colossal investment in the scheme to establish the extent of quality via number of school, class population, teacher population, teacher certification and school average. This is with a view to establishing the extent to which fee-free policy had impacted on quality of Universal Basic Education in South-West, Nigeria.

Research Question
To what extent has fee-free policy improved the quality of Universal Basic Education in UBE schools?
Statement of the Hypothesis
There is no significant impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education
Methodology
A descriptive research of survey type was used for the study. The target population comprised of all the pupils and teachers in all the public primary schools in South-West, Nigeria. A sample of one thousand, nine hundred and twenty (1,920) respondents including male and female teachers were selected using multi-stage and simple random sampling techniques. Three (3) States were selected from the six (6) States in South-West, Nigeria which resulted in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo. 30% of the Local Government Areas of the three (3) States was selected. This gave us twenty-four (24) Local Government Areas and from each, four (4) public primary schools were selected. From the resulting ninety-six (96) schools, twenty (20) public primary school teachers were selected. What informed the choice of teachers is that teachers are parents and are in the best position to give information concerning their children. Section D of the instrument, Fee-free Policy Impact of Universal Basic Education Descriptive Questionnaire (FPIUBEDQ) was adopted from Akinloye (2017) for use. Specialists in the areas of educational management and psychometrics worked on the instrument for content validity. The Crombach-Alpha used to analyse the responses of the sample selected for pre test study indicated a result of 0.82 which was found to be significant. Data on public primary school pupils' enrolment, teachers' population and school list for a period of 2000-2012 were collected from Universal Basic Education Boards of the sampled States for analysis. The researchers and the three research assistants engaged visited various schools of participants and sought permission from the authorities for their involvement in the study. The administration of the instruments was carried out within a time-span of six weeks. The instruments was administered on the one thousand, nine hundred and twenty (1,920) teachers in the sampled schools but only one thousand, seven hundred and sixty-seven (1,767) were adequately filled and returned. Simple Linear Regression was used to analyse data gathered using teacher rating for the hypothesis and in answering the research question, descriptive statistics was used.

3. Results
Research Question
To what extent has fee-free policy improved the quality of Universal Basic Education in UBE schools? Quality of Universal Basic Education on the basis of the fee-free policy was measured using teacher-pupil ratio, school population, facilities provision and teacher certification in the sampled States.

Table 1: Quality of Universal Basic Education in UBE Schools in the Sampled States

Academic Session	Total Number of Primary Sch.	Pupils' Enrolment / Population	Teacher population	Average Teacher- Pupil Ratio	Average Sch. Population
2000/2001	3,961	1,704,179	52,495	1:33	430
2001/2002	3,975	1,686,561	53,405	1:32	424
2002/2003	3,984	1,776,730	51,704	1:34	446
2003/2004	4,053	1,799,065	55,170	1:33	444
2004/2005	4,198	1,794,600	62,569	1:29	428
2005/2006	4,301	1,842,871	61,509	1:30	429
2006/2007	4,400	1,952,231	61,580	1:32	444
2007/2008	4,403	1,986,834	62,282	1:32	451
2008/2009	4,436	2,020,505	60,897	1:33	456
2009/2010	4,529	2,001,366	58,994	1:34	442
2010/2011	4,573	2,015,342	58,014	1:35	441
2011/2012	4,597	2,083,429	56,553	1:39	453

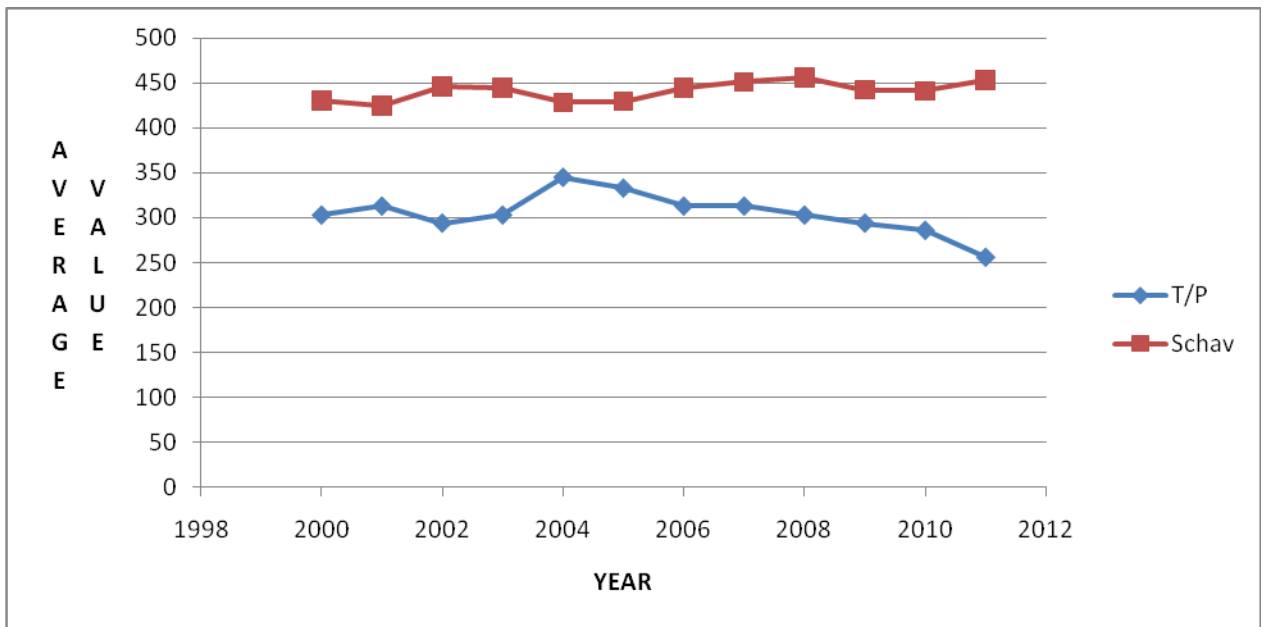*Source: Lagos, Ogun and Oyo SUBEBs & Field work*

Fig 1.1 Quality of Universal Basic Education

Table 1 and figure 1 reveal an average value of teacher-pupil ratio and increase in the number of schools during the years under review which indicate how government is working to improve the quality of education in the sampled States. Teacher-pupil ratio is below the official ratio of 1:35 in primary school (FGN 2013) except during 2011/2012 session when the ratio is above the number recommended. The class population is okay for class control and management and effective teaching and learning process. However, the wave-like trend of school average shows inconsistency in government commitment to maintaining high quality in delivery of education services in the UBE schools. The same analysis reveals that out of 53,503 public primary school teachers in the sampled States, 18,621; 34 per cent had National Certificate of Education while 14,619; 27 per cent had Grade 11 certificate. 36 per cent of the teachers had higher certificate with or without teaching qualifications. This analysis indicates that the highest percentage of teachers in the sampled States had NCE which is in conformity with the recommendation of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013).

Hypothesis

There is no significant impact of fee-free policy on quality of Universal Basic Education

Table 2 : *Model Summary of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Contribution of Fee-free Policy to the Prediction of Quality of Universal Basic Education*

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2086.481	1	2086.481	133.305	.000
Residual	27625.676	1765	15.652		
Total	29712.157	1766			
Model Summary	R = .265				
	R Square = .070				
	Adjusted R Square = .070				

a. Dependent Variable: Quality of Universal Basic Education

b. Predictors: (Constant), Fee-free policy

The results in Table 2 indicates that fee-free policy significantly predicted quality of Universal Basic Education (R = .265; R^2 = .070; Adj R^2 = .070; $F_{(1,1765)}$ = 133.305; $p < .05$). Fee-free policy accounted for only 7.00 percent of the variance in quality of Universal Basic Education. The hypothesis which stated that fee-free policy will not have any significant impact on quality of Universal Basic Education was therefore rejected by this finding. The implication of this finding is that fee-free policy has significant impact on quality of Universal Basic Education.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study reveals that fee-free policy had significant impact on quality of Universal Basic Education. Therefore, by the finding, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding from the answer to the research question based on the extent to which fee-free policy has improved the quality of Universal Basic Education reveals an average value of teacher-pupil ratio and number of schools during the years under review which indicates how government is working to improve the quality of education in the sampled State. Teacher-pupil ratio is below the official ratio of 1:35 (FRN 2013) in primary schools except in 2011/2012 session when it is above the number recommended. The finding is plausible since academic achievement is often dependent on a number of variables including quality of teaching and learning, learning environment, availability and use of teaching-learning resources and a host of others. In support of this finding, Nigeria's report on the development of education (FME 2008) states that qualitative reform of Nigerian education cannot be attained without highly qualified, competent and motivated teachers to actualize the vision and goals of education for individual, community and national development. Data on public primary school teachers in the sampled States indicates that the highest percentage of the teachers had NCE which is in conformity with the National Policy on Education (FRN 2013). A survey of public primary schools in South-West, Nigeria conducted by Akinloye (2017) reveals renovation of classrooms and construction of new classrooms and libraries in the sampled States. He notes that the construction of classrooms and libraries in schools will to a large extent have positive impact on quality of Universal Basic Education. However, the survey further reveals an alarming rate of teacher-pupil ratio which is far and above the official ratio of 1 teacher to 35 pupils in the classroom. In some primary schools, the ratio ranges from 1 teacher to 50 pupils to 1 teacher to 76 pupils. This occurred mainly in the cities in Ogun and Oyo States while it is not limited to the city centres in Lagos State. This may not be unconnected with the sample used and the time of study. It could also be as a result of improper adherence to the process of school mapping or politicisation of the process. The situation will have negative impact on classroom control and discipline and general teaching-learning process. Good as teacher-pupil ratio, it only gives information that the number of pupils assigned to a teacher to handle on the average is congruent or otherwise with the official or conventional number. It is an index used on the assumption that all members of teaching staff will perform their duty. The teacher-pupil ratio will remain the same whether the whole work force carries out its teaching assignment or not. Therefore, efforts should be geared towards teacher supervision for quality teaching. In this direction Akinsolu, Egbebi and Ojeniyi (2017) reiterate that supervision should be the main weapon employed to bring about persistent improvement of quality education service delivery in the conventional schools during teaching and learning process. Serving teachers should be treated with respect and honour by the authorities and be given attractive emolument without adding, regular and effective external supervision of school and teachers needs be put in place to ensure that they are not only teaching, they are teaching what they should teach and teaching the way to teach (Ajayi and Olaniyi 2016).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that fee-free policy had significant impact on quality of Universal Basic Education and data collected on teachers' and pupils' population band number of schools reveals an average value of teacher-pupil ratio and number of schools during the years under review.

Recommendations

Government should be more committed and consistent in their maintenance of high quality in delivery of education services in the UBE schools by putting in place continuous professional development programme towards upgrading teachers' skills to handle current challenges of UBE scheme.

Government must put in place plans to further increase the number of schools to cope with enrolment of pupils which is increasing at an alarming rate.

The process of school mapping and location strategies should be employed for proper distribution of pupils into schools to reduce the distance pupils have to cover from home to school and comply with the official teacher-pupil ratio of 1-35 to improve teaching-learning effectiveness.

Good as teacher-pupil ratio, it will remain the same whether the whole work force carries out its assignment or not, therefore, teacher supervision is essential for the effective performance of the Universal Basic Education.

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