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Global Best Practices in the Implementation of Free and Compulsory Basic Education in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This article examines the extent to which the Free and Compulsory Basic Education Programme of the Akwa Ibom State Government meets minimum global best practices. The population for the study consisted of all heads of public primary and principals of public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, totalling 1,376. The stratified sampling technique was used in drawing a sample of 274 respondents for the study. Two research questions and two null hypotheses directed the study. "Best Practices in Implementation of Basic Education Questionnaire (BPIBEQ) was developed and used for data collection. The instrument was duly validated, and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha, with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics while the independent t-test was used in testing the null hypothesis at the .05 alpha level. Findings revealed, among others, a low extent in the provision of basic quality assurance measures and funding in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme in the state. Based on these findings, relevant implications were discussed and recommendations made for the improvement of the programme in line with global best practices.

Keywords: Basic, compulsory, education, practices, quality, assurance.

Introduction

Free and compulsory education highlights the fact that neither parents nor guardians nor even the state is entitled to treat as optional the decision whether the child should have access to education. Successful implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme calls for concerted effort and avowed commitment by all stakeholders. There is a big concern by stakeholders regarding the failure rate, which is unacceptably high, among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. This

portrays a seeming lack of management skills and capacities as well as a lack of teacher commitment and low staff morale in the field of teaching in the state.

According to a scholar, “UBE goals cannot be attained unless through proper management and implementation of planned policies” (Owan, 2018, p.204). These and other problems in the sector have raised serious concern about the quality of the free and compulsory basic education programme of the Akwa Ibom state government. After an extensive analysis of the successes and challenges facing the implementation of the UBE programme, some scholars (Arop et al., 2018) provided pertinent questions that should aid in determining whether stated UBE goals are attained. The questions are as follows: Are the entire citizens of the country conscious of education with a strong commitment towards its vigorous promotion? Is the education provided at either pre-primary, primary or junior secondary school levels compulsory? Is it free? Is every Nigerian child of school-going age in school? Are there still school drop-outs from the formal school system in Nigeria? Are young people who for one reason or another interrupted their schooling, given any complimentary education or opportunity for better livelihood? Are there appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills in young learners within the formal school system?

To ensure quality, free education entails several action plans. Unfortunately, the extent to which such action plans are demonstrated among different states indicates a lack of commitment, as revealed by some analyst (Akpan & Udongwo, 2020; Arop et al., 2018; Jerry & Adebisi, 2020; Sayuti et al., 2020). As a result of the poor managerial efforts by the government to ensure the smooth operation of lower and basic education in Akwa Ibom State, there have been serious fluctuations in the enrolment of learners from 2008 to 2016 (Ekaette et al., 2019, 2020). Based on these problems, it is pertinent to investigate the extent to which measures are provided to ensure that global best practices are guaranteed in the implementation of the programme.

The concept of global best practice and competitiveness has since received attention in the educational system. Global best practices, as it relates to pedagogy, facilitates both teachers' and students' propensity to compete favourably with their counterparts in various branches of knowledge/areas of specialization wherever they find themselves (Bassegy & Owan, 2019). Achieving quality in education has increasingly become crucial in the strategic improvement plans of developing countries. The act of promoting quality culture in the organization may be referred to as quality assurance. According to Bassegy et al. (2019), “quality assurances practices are a series of events, affairs, processes, services that are rendered to ensure that there is proper control, organization, and coordination of school activities to meet the expected quality (p.3).” The rationale behind quality assurance practice in schools is to ensure that planned

policies, programmes, and activities are driven to meet best practices (Looney & Clemson, 2018)

Previous empirical studies on UBE in Akwa Ibom State and beyond give the impression that the implementation of the programme is at the formative stages. For instance, Mndeme (2020) found that inadequate school infrastructures, inadequate and delayed capitation fund, the misconception of parents about free secondary education, reduction of community participation in various school projects, and high student enrollment are the challenges that influence the implementation of free secondary education. The research of Kephas et al. (2020) found out that implementation of free primary education is to the extent of tuition, activity, textbooks and stationery, non-teaching staff which do not attract user charges. However, examinations, extra tuition, employment of extra teachers, uniforms, lunch, and school infrastructure attract.

Furthermore, Egbo (2021) revealed that factors inhibiting the programme include lack of funding of the programme by the government and other agencies, lapses and anomalies in the utilization of the intervention funds, incompetence to deliver effective and efficient teaching, lack of infrastructural and instructional materials in schools, inadequacy of statistical data, poor supervision and monitoring of the UBE schools and inadequacy of statutory allocation to meet the needs of the UBE programme. Ezeibe et al. (2021) show a generally negative correlation between school enrollment and child trafficking except for primary enrollment in Ebonyi ($r = 0.8669$) as well as secondary enrollment in Anambra ($r = 0.5922$) and Imo ($r = 0.038$). This demonstrates that the implementation of free education is associated with increased school enrollment and reduced child trafficking. The study argues that continuous implementation of a free education programme alongside other integrated multi-level approaches to social and economic inclusion, especially poverty reduction schemes, presents an opportunity for protecting children's rights, achieving inclusive education and reducing child trafficking.

In Cross River State, the research of Owan (2018) assessed the management of educational support services and the attainment of Universal Basic Education goals. The study revealed that the management of guidance/counselling services, staff development services, and ICT services are significantly related to the attainment of Universal Basic Education goals respectively. Etuk et al (2018) assessed the spatial distribution of available state-owned primary and secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state and the efficacy in supporting the government policy of free and compulsory education in the state. Statistical evidence revealed that the number of available public schools cannot make the free and compulsory education policy attainable, since private schools outnumber public schools. The study of Imeh (2019) showed that strategic capacity building has a significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction and

recommended that SUBEB management should strategically design and carry out capacity building programmes for teachers based on needs assessment for successful implementation of educational strategies.

The review of the empirical literature in Akwa Ibom State and beyond shows a consensus that there is poor implementation of the UBE programme. Different fingers are pointing at different factors that have been unattended to by the Government. However useful, the cited studies are quite different from the present study, which sought to also determine the extent to which global best practices are being followed in the implementation of the UBE programme. This study is very important because the use of universally agreed standards in the management of UBE would help in pushing the nation towards global competitiveness. It is also important to assess global best practices because they serve as blueprints guiding similar programmes internationally. Based on this background, the study was designed to examine the extent to which the free and compulsory basic education programme of the Akwa Ibom State government meets minimum global best practices. Specifically, the study sought to determine the state of quality assurance measures in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme, and to determine the state of funding of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom State.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed in this study:

1. What is the state of quality assurance measures in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme?
2. What is the extent of the funding of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of heads of primary schools and principals of secondary schools on quality assurance measures in the implementation of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of heads of primary schools and principals of secondary schools regarding the adequacy of funding of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The study adopted the quantitative research method in line with the descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of all heads of public primary and principals of public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. There are 1,143 public primary and 233 public secondary schools in the state, with the same number of school heads,

giving a total population of 1,376 respondents. The sample of the study stood at 274 respondents: 228 head teachers and 46 principals, representing 20% of the study population. The stratified sampling technique was used in drawing the sample of the study from the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State – Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene.

A structured instrument, “Best Practices in Implementation of Basic Education Questionnaire” (BPIBEQ) was developed and used in collecting data for the study. The questionnaire had two main sections - section A was used to elicit respondents’ demographic information; while section B was composed of 16 Likert scale items clustered into two domains. Each domain had eight items and response options ranged from Strongly Agree (4 points for positive items or 1 point for negative items) to Strongly Disagree (1 point for positive item or 4 points for negative items). The instrument was duly validated by five experts who scrutinized the items for relevance and clarity. A trial test was carried out using 30 primary school teachers who were part of the population but not the sample. The reliability test was performed using the Cronbach Alpha approach. The analysis gave a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating that the instrument was internally consistent for data collection. The data for this study were collected from primary sources through the administration of copies of the questionnaire. At the end of the exercise, all completed copies were retrieved for statistical analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods including mean, standard deviation and independent t-test were employed in the analysis of data. For the research questions, responses are considered high or otherwise if they are above or below the criterion mean of 3.00. The criterion mean of 3.00 was determined by finding the average of the Likert scale response options ($4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.50$) and adjusting for measurement errors. Thus, mean values from 2.5 to 2.99 are average, values below 2.5 are low, and values above 3.00 are considered as a high extent. The result of the analysis is presented in the following section.

Presentation of results

Research question 1: What is the state of quality assurance measures in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme?

In answering this research question, the mean rating of principals and headteachers presented in Table 1 was used. As shown in Table 1, the grand mean value indicates that on a general note there is a poor state of quality assurance measures in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom. Specifically, the only quality assurance indicator with a good outlook is the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. On the contrary, there is a poor state of other indicators such as routine school supervision, regular inspection of facilities, teachers

in sufficient quantity and quality, adequate infrastructural facilities, provision of instructional materials, the safety of pupils and students, and involvement of stakeholders.

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation of the state of quality assurance measures in the implementation of the free and compulsory basic education programme

Quality Assurance indicators	Headteachers	Principals	Extent	Comment
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	
Programme monitoring/evaluation	3.70 ± 1.03	3.60 ± 0.80	3.65 ± 0.92	Good
Routine school supervision	1.50 ± 0.96	1.60 ± 0.71	1.55 ± 0.84	Poor
Regular inspection of facilities	2.30 ± 1.10	2.10 ± 0.69	2.20 ± 0.90	Poor
Teachers in sufficient quantity and quality	2.20 ± 1.49	2.20 ± 0.75	2.20 ± 1.12	Poor
Adequate infrastructural facilities	2.70 ± 1.02	2.60 ± 1.23	2.65 ± 1.12	Poor
Provision of instructional materials	1.90 ± 1.39	1.70 ± 0.65	1.80 ± 1.02	Poor
Safety of pupils and students	2.20 ± 1.27	2.30 ± 1.03	2.25 ± 1.15	Poor
Involvement of stakeholders	2.30 ± 1.34	2.40 ± 0.69	2.35 ± 1.02	Poor
Grand mean ± Grand SD	2.35 ± 1.20	2.31 ± 0.82	2.33 ± 1.01	Poor

Cut-off mean value = 3.00

Research question 2: What is the extent of the funding of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom State?

This question was answered using the mean rating and standard deviation of principals and headteachers regarding the extent to which the funding for free and compulsory basic education is adequate. Generally, the result in table 2 revealed a low extent in the funding of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom State based on the perspective of principals and headteachers. Specifically, there was a high extent in the payment of examination fees for students and salaries for teachers; while there was the low extent in the prompt provision of subventions, adequacy of subventions, funding for the procurement of instructional materials, funding for the maintenance of facilities, provision of boarding fees for students who live in the dormitory, and teachers' motivation.

Table 2: Mean rating and standard deviation of the extent in the funding of the free and compulsory basic education programme in Akwa Ibom State

Adequacy of funding	Headteachers	Principals	Extent	Comment
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	
Subventions are paid to schools promptly.	1.70 ± 1.33	1.80 ± 1.10	1.75 ± 1.21	Low
The subventions are adequate for the running of the school.	1.50 ± 2.21	1.40 ± 1.83	1.45 ± 2.02	Low
Funds are made available for the procurement of instructional materials.	2.30 ± 1.20	2.20 ± 1.08	2.25 ± 1.14	Low
Funds are made available for the maintenance of facilities in the school.	1.80 ± 0.62	1.60 ± 1.01	1.70 ± 0.81	Low
Examination fees are paid promptly for students.	3.60 ± 1.33	3.50 ± 1.27	3.55 ± 1.30	High
Boarding fees are paid for students who live in the dormitory.	0.00 ± 1.74	0.00 ± 2.23	0.00 ± 1.99	Low
Teachers are paid their salary promptly.	2.90 ± 0.77	3.70 ± 1.31	3.30 ± 1.04	High
Teachers are adequately motivated.	2.60 ± 0.69	2.60 ± 0.93	2.60 ± 0.81	Low
Grand mean ± Grand SD	2.05 ± 1.23	2.10 ± 1.35	2.08 ± 1.29	Low

Cut-off mean = 3.00

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of heads of primary schools and principals of secondary schools on quality assurance measures in the implementation of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State.

This hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance using the independent t-test statistical technique. The result of the analysis presented in table 3 indicates no significant difference in the mean responses of the principals and headteachers on the state of quality assurance in the implementation of free and compulsory basic education. This is because the calculated t value of 0.263 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 272 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was, therefore, upheld.

Table 3: Independent t-test of the responses of headteachers and principals of public schools on quality assurance in the implementation of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	t-calc.	Sig.	Remark
Headteachers	228	2.35	1.2	0.263	.793	Not significant
Principals	46	2.31	0.82			

df = 272; t-crit = 1.96; Mean difference = 0.04

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of heads of primary schools and principals of secondary schools regarding the adequacy of funding of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State.

The independent t-test was used in testing the null hypothesis at the .05 alpha level. The result of the analysis presented in table 4 showed no significant difference in the mean responses of the principals and headteachers on the adequacy of funding of the free and compulsory education programme in the state. This is because the calculated t-value of 1.43 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at the .05 alpha level and 272 degrees of freedom. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 4: Independent t-test of the responses of headteachers and principals of public schools on the adequacy of funding of free and compulsory basic education in Akwa Ibom State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	t-calc.	p	Remark
Headteachers	228	2.05	1.23	1.43	0.154	NS
Principals	46	2.1	1.35			

df = 272; t-crit = 1.96; mean difference = 0.05

Discussion of the findings

This study has been able to establish that there is a poor outlook of the quality assurance practices and inadequate funding for the implementation of the free and compulsory education programme in Akwa Ibom State. This finding is not strange due to the reported low level in the routine school supervision, regular inspection of facilities, teachers in sufficient quantity and quality, adequate infrastructural facilities, provision of instructional materials, the safety of learners, and involvement of stakeholders. Furthermore, there is a low level in the provision of subventions,

adequacy of subventions, funding for the procurement of instructional materials, funding for the maintenance of facilities, provision of boarding fees for students who live in the dormitory, and teachers' motivation. This finding supports the position of previous studies (Etuk et al., 2018; Imeh, 2019; Owan, 2018) indicating/reporting poor implementation of the basic education programme due to myriad of problems.

Most notably, a recent study by Egbo (2021) revealed that factors inhibiting the programme include lack of funding of the programme by the government and other agencies; lapses and anomalies in the utilization of the intervention funds, incompetence to deliver effective and efficient teaching, lack of infrastructural and instructional materials in schools, the inadequacy of statistical data, poor supervision and monitoring of the UBE schools and inadequacy of statutory allocation to meet the needs of the UBE programme. To determine the consistency in the data collected, the views of the principals and headteachers (at secondary and primary schools) were compared. The results yielded no significant difference in the two areas assessed. This implies that the reported low levels in the quality assurance practices and funding of the programme is consistent among principals and teachers and does not discriminate across different observers.

Conclusion

The study utilized the quantitative research approach to present evidence on the state and extent of the provision of quality assurance measures and funding in the implementation of the programme. With principals and teachers as respondents, the study found partial fulfilment in the state of quality assurance and funding of the programme. Although the Akwa Ibom State Government has made some achievements in the area of free and compulsory basic education in the state, basic quality assurance indices are still lacking in the implementation of the programme. Funding in some key aspects of the programme was not adequately provided by the programme designers. This violates global best practices in the implementation of the basic education programme.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Routine supervision of schools should be carried out by appropriate educational agencies in the state to enhance effective teaching and learning.
2. More qualified teachers should be recruited into the teaching service by the Akwa Ibom State Government.
3. Instructional materials should be regularly supplied to schools by appropriate agencies to aid instruction.

4. Efforts should be made to pay subvention promptly to schools. Besides, the amount paid per pupil or student should be reviewed upward.
5. Teacher motivation should be prioritised to boost staff morale and facilitate effective job performance.

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