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**EXAMINING THE FREE FEE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC
PRIMARY EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study examined the free fee policy implementation in the public primary education management with focus on three key performance indicators namely: quality of education provision, pupils' enrolment and infrastructural facilities provision to establish whether the policy has brought to an end or a new beginning to public primary education challenges in Nigeria. Ebonyi State was used as the case study. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of all head teachers in public primary schools in Ebonyi State. Stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select 600 head teachers that formed the sample size of the study. The instrument for data collection was a 25 item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers and was duly validated with a reliability index of 'r' = 0.87 using the Cronbach Alpha statistical tool. Data collected was analyzed using the statistical method of mean and standard deviation for the research questions and t-test statistic for the hypotheses. One of the findings of the study was that enrolment into public primary schools was on the decrease in Ebonyi State. Based on the findings, the study concluded that if government does not give urgent attention to public primary education in Ebonyi State, there may

be a soon end of it. The study therefore recommended among others that government should ensure adequate provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Keywords: Education, Free fee policy, Management, Public, Primary School

Introduction

There is a universal agreement that primary education is the foundation laying level of education for all nations of the world because it provides the base on which the other levels of education stand (Egwu,2022). Consequently, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) affirms that primary education is key to the success or failure of the whole system of education and therefore, its quality cannot be compromised (FRN, 2014). Primary education in Nigeria is uniquely designed to house children from ages 6 to 12 and structured to last for a period of six years in school (FRN, 2014). The objectives of primary education includes among other things to inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively, laying a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking on children, promoting patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity, instilling social, moral norms and values in the child, developing in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment and providing opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable effective functionality within the limits of the child's ability (FRN,2014: 10). In view of the importance attached to primary education and the desire to actualize these noble aims and objectives, successive governments in Nigeria have formulated and implemented different innovative policies and intervention programmes aimed towards improving the management of primary education.

Policies are principles, rules and statements of intent guiding organizations or institutions for achieving specific set goals and objectives (Osokoya, 2011). Policies are official statements of government's intentions on different sectors stated in form of rules, regulations, laws, acts and ordinances (Asamonye et al., 2015). Educational policies help to bring to life the perspectives, realities and tools for negotiating the political order of education so as to achieve

the desired improvement in the education system in line with the changing society (Bolaji et al. 2015; Rueckert, 2019).

Nigeria has been identified with many brilliant educational policies that supposedly ought to have transported her on high developmental pedestal however, it does appear that there is no connection between the developmental indices and the educational policies implementation and this could be why some scholars insist that Nigeria needs to move beyond the level of policies formulation to the level of effective implementation of policies (Aduwa, 2020; Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013). The free fee policy (the main thrust of this study) remains one of the most outstanding government policies for managing primary education in Nigeria. Given the significance of education in national development, the government of Nigeria has been promoting the implementation of free fee policy in the management of her educational system especially at the primary education level (FRN, 2014). The Government of Nigeria has consistently maintained that one of the major reasons for adopting this policy thrust is to ensure that every limitation and impediment to sound and quality education is totally removed in order to enable every Nigerian child of school going age free access particularly to basic education. The free fee policy according to (Abiodun-Oyebanji et al, 2016) entails free tuition, free transportation, free uniform, free stationeries and other personal uses of the learners that will facilitate effective teaching and learning.

From historical context, there are evidences of government's several efforts at providing free primary education in Nigeria. The very first attempt in this regard was in 1955 when the western regional government under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced universal primary education (UPE) in western Nigeria. The eastern regional government not wanting to be left behind in that educational revolution keyed into the vision and introduced universal primary education (UPE) in eastern Nigeria in 1957. The UPE programme in the two regions was not without challenges which no doubt marred their continued existence.

The second attempt came on 30th September 1976 when General Olusegun Obasanjo, the then military head of government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, launched a UPE programme in Sokoto State. Unlike the 1950s programme that covered only two regions, this

one was more national in outlook covering all the states of the federation. Government worked very hard to ensure its successful implementation; however, the programme failed like the previous ones. Ogo and Ituma (2015) pointed to poor planning and implementation as the major cause of the failures. But despite that, the programme still remains a very giant landmark in the history of Nigerian government's efforts to tackle the problem of illiteracy.

Very interestingly again, in 1999, two decades after the UPE adventures, the federal government ushered in another revolutionary phase in the history of primary education by embarking on another great mission to eradicate illiteracy through launching a more robust, comprehensive and ambitious educational programme called the universal basic education (UBE) (Okoye, 2017). Surprisingly and coincidentally, this UBE programme was launched in Sokoto State on the same day and month the 1976 UPE Programme was launched and by the same person, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo though not as a military head of state that time, but as a civilian president. The uniqueness of this programme lied in the fact that it is not only free and compulsory, it extended to the junior secondary level, adult and non-formal education, out of school children and nomadic education. The UBE programme covered nine years of free and compulsory schooling comprising six years of primary education (the focus of this study) and three years of junior secondary education (FRN, 2014). It is indeed worthy of note that the free fee policy had been a major guiding compass in the management of public primary education in Ebonyi and Nigeria in general.

The term management according to (Uchendu, 2015; Okoji et al, 2014) is the process of planning, organizing, supervising, directing, coordinating, leading both human and material resources within an organization with the aim of achieving its goals and objectives within the set time. Management is the heart beat of every organization including education because it is the key determinant of the success or failure of organizations. The importance of education in national development explains its placement in the concurrent legislative list to enable all tiers of government-federal, state and local government council to participate in its management. Managing primary education requires effective planning through policy formulation and implementation. In this connection, after the launching of UBE in 1999,

the Federal Government established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to coordinate the implementation of the Programme at the state and local government levels through the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of each state and the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) in the various local government areas of the federation (World Bank, 2017). The Federal Government gives 2% of the consolidated revenue fund (CRF) as intervention to States for the implementation of the UBE programme (UBEC, 2014). In addition, the local government councils being the direct managers of primary education, contributes a huge percentage of their allocations to the funding of primary schools in their areas of jurisdiction (Odewale, 2019; Egberin, 2014). Besides these are also World Bank and UNICEF financial supports all geared towards achieving standard basic education that is free and available to all (Egberin, 2014; Igu et al, 2012).

The essence of all these financial supports was to ensure that the management of primary education is effective, efficient and goal directed. In essence, the funds should be able to ensure that there is adequate provision of infrastructural facilities, enriched curriculum, books and instructional materials, recruitment of qualified teachers, motivation, re-training and capacity development of teachers, regular supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the programme as achieving this will be a sure proof of effective policy implementation and the building of a world class primary education.

Drawing from literature, there are varied views and opinions on the implementation of the UBE policy especially as it pertains to the areas of quality educational provision, pupils' enrolment and infrastructural facilities provision. Igu (2009) submits that teachers are the most important factor in the teaching and learning process because they nurture and groom the minds of the learners. The critical roles of teachers are most appreciated when viewed from the context of Nigerian government's unwavering position that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2014). According to Irewole and Akinsuroju (2018), government believes that if the quality of teachers is good, their output will also be good hence the least qualification allowed for teaching in primary schools is the National Certificate in Education (NCE). To ensure quality maintenance in teachers, continuous professional development through capacity

building workshops, seminars and conferences must be provided on regular periodic basis and instructional materials made readily adequate and available (Musa & Sa'idu, 2018).

Unasi and Ogbodo (2019) maintained that the implementation of the free fee policy is government's step in the right direction as children from poor backgrounds who hitherto could not go to school, now have access to free basic education. Surprisingly however, regardless of government's efforts at providing free and compulsory basic education to all children, (Ogunniran, et al ,2019; Olarenwaju, 2018), reported that Nigeria has one of the largest out-of-school children population in the Sub-Saharan Africa and the world and this is indeed very worrisome.

It is generally believed that when school facilities are of good quality and quantity, teaching and learning will be more effective. Ogba and Igu (2019) found that quality and quantity of school physical facilities have direct influence on the attainment of goals of any educational programme. But unfortunately, reports from (Ogunniran, et al ,2019), as well as that of African Regional Studies Programme of the World, presents a sorry picture of the conditions in African primary schools - Nigeria inclusive. Unasi et al (2019) reported that physical facilities in public schools are grossly inadequate and in very poor state as most available classrooms are either dilapidated, uncompleted or with dusty floors. Speaking further, Tsafe (2013) maintained that a majority of the students are pairing on a chair and desk; some are sitting on the floor and windows despite the quarterly intervention of UBE Programme. These problems according to Okoroma (2017) are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the 1976 U.P.E. initiative. This indicates that the change in nomenclature from U.P.E. to U.B.E. in 1999 did not stem from lessons learned from the failure of the then U.P.E., as the quality of education at the primary level today is worse than the pre-1976 era (Iskan, et al, 2015). Findings from scholars (eg. Ben- George, 2018; Okoroma ,2017; Ubulom, et al, 2011) indicate that there are inconsistencies and lack of coherence between educational policies and implementation efforts in Nigeria leading to policy somersaults that continue to impede educational development and national growth. In the views of World Bank (2017), the established institutional framework does not ensure effective policy making and implementation as it observes that conflicts of jurisdiction

between the three tiers of government undermine policy coordination. Supportively, (Yakwan and Alagi, 2015) maintain that the unsuccessful implementation of educational policies and programmes in Nigeria can be attributed to poor communication process, capability problem and dispositional conflicts. Akindutire et al., (2011), comes along that the major problem facing education in Nigeria is not the absence of informed, rational and thoughtful educational policy, but the lack of political will on the part of those charged with the responsibility of supervising the implementation of these policies. Nweke (2020) reported that Nigeria may be witnessing the end of public primary education; not in the sense that there will be no public schools but in the sense that there is stagnant or declining enrolment in public primary schools due to poor policy implementation. Lending further credence to this, Obasi,(2013) revealed that there is public indifference to public primary schools which practical reality shows in the unprecedented proliferation of private primary schools in the states of the federation even at the very heart of free education policy implementation. This finding substantiates the argument of (Odunsi, 2018) that unwholesome, low-cost private schools may be better able to meet the demand by low-income households for good-quality primary education than are the cash-strapped government schools. Connected to this is the issue of corruption. Aduwa and Omajuwa (2021) reported that corruption has hindered progress of policy implementation in the public primary schools in Nigeria as the politicians in the helm of affairs have educated many civil servants on how to embezzle public funds that are meant for certain projects in the primary education sector. The effects of corruption according to Nwankwo in Ekechukwu (2016) have resulted in putting the cart before the horse syndrome, manipulation of statistical data, depressing economy, inadequate finances, inadequate qualified manpower, power tussle and political instability. The above scenario cannot make for sustainable national development and without argument, the need for enhancing the development process in developing nations including Nigeria is ever becoming more critical and urgent. The pace at which this can be realized is hinged essentially on the ability of the government to formulate appropriate educational policies and more importantly, ensuring effective implementation of formulated policies.

A critical look at reviewed literature related to this study, showed that previous studies tended to concentrate generally on the problems of implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. No wonder, while the implementation of the free fee policy has been on for over two decades, there is little empirical evidence regarding its impact on the management of primary education in Nigeria thus, leaving a gap in knowledge and therein lays the problem of this study. This study therefore, attempts to fill this existing knowledge gap and contribute to literature by examining the free fee policy implementation in the management of public primary schools in Nigeria using Ebonyi State as a case study. The choice of Ebonyi State stems from the fact that she was recognized as one of the educationally disadvantaged states in Nigeria. She was also among the first States of the federation to key into the UBE programme at its launch. The researchers strongly feel that the State, having participated in the UBE programme since 1999, has fared well enough into it as to have outstanding evidences to adjudge its progress.

Research Questions

To navigate into the study, the following research questions were asked:

1. How has the free fee policy implementation influenced the quality of educational provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?
2. How has the free fee policy implementation influenced pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?
3. How has the free fee policy implementation influenced Physical facilities provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

Hypotheses

To further strengthen the findings of the research questions, two null hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female head teachers on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the influence of free fee policy implementation in the provision of facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. According to (Nkwocha, 2010; Meredith et al 2007), a descriptive survey research design is one that involves the collection of data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized as already occurred and as such the researcher cannot manipulate the outcome. This design was adopted because the variables in the study do not require any manipulation.

The population of the study comprised of all head teachers in all public primary schools in Ebonyi State totalling 1,471 (Source: UBEB, 2021). Since Ebonyi State is stratified into three educational zones namely Abakaliki, Onueke and Afikpo education zones, the stratified simple random sampling technique was adopted to sample 600 head teachers (200 from each of the zones) for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a 25 item researcher designed and structured questionnaire titled: Free fee policy implementation and management of primary education questionnaire (FFPMPEQ). The questionnaire had two sections-A and B. Section A contained information on respondents' bio-data while section B contained items in three clusters. The instrument was structured on a 4-point likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA-4), Agree (A-3), Disagree (D-2) and Strongly Disagree (SD-1). The face and content validity were ascertained by three experts- two from Educational Management and the other from Measurement and Evaluation all from Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike Ebonyi State. The reliability index of the validated instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha statistical tool at $r = 0.87$ and considered high and good enough for the study. The study mean set for this study is 2.50. By implication, any mean value above 2.50 is accepted while any below 2.50 was rejected for analysis. The t-test statistic was used to analyse the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

How has the free fee policy implementation influenced the quality of educational provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 1.1 Mean and Standard deviation of the respondents on the influence of free fee policy implementation on the quality of educational provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State

N=588

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1	The minimum educational qualification of teachers in my school is NCE	3.40	0.74	Accepted(A)
2	There are enough teachers to teach all the subjects in my school	2.34	0.68	Not Accepted (NA)
3	The recommended 1:35 teacher/pupil ratio is maintained in all classes in my school	2.04	0.77	NA
4	There is adequacy of instructional materials for teaching and learning in my school	1.91	0.97	NA
5	Teachers in my school participate in periodic training and re-training programmes for teachers in Ebonyi State	3.06	0.75	A
6	Teachers in my school are properly motivated to be committed to effective implementation of the curriculum	1.92	0.97	NA
7	Newly recruited teachers are given orientation in my school	1.29	0.94	NA
8	There is effective supervision of instruction through the quality assurance agency	2.14	0.86	NA
	Grand Total	2.26	0.84	NA

Analysis of data as presented in Table 1.1 showed that items 1 and 5 obtained mean values above 2.50, which was the cut off mean

for the study indicated that the item statements were accepted by the respondents. However, items 2,3, 4, 6, 7 and 8, obtained mean values below 2.50 which indicated that those item statements were not accepted by the respondents. The grand mean of 2.26 which is below the cut off mean indicated that the respondents reacted negatively to the item statements in order to showcase their disagreement on the influence of free fee policy implementation on the quality of educational provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State. The overall standard deviation of 0.84, showed that the opinions of the respondents did not clearly deviate on the items.

Research Question 2

How has the free fee policy implementation influenced pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the respondents on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State

N=588

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
9	There is population explosion in my school	2.43	0.82	NA
10	There are overcrowded classrooms in my school	2.18	0.84	NA
11	My children and wards in primary school are enrolled in my school	2.22	0.90	NA
12	My teachers' children and wards are enrolled in my school	2.32	0.75	NA
13	Majority of the pupils in my school are the poor and indigent in the community	3.40	0.87	A
14	There is improvement in pupils' regular class attendance	2.26	0.66	NA
15	There is improvement in pupils' retention throughout the school year in my school.	1.86	0.84	NA
16	There is pressure on existing facilities in my school	2.23	0.90	NA
	Grand Total	2.36	0.82	NA

Data on Table 2 showed that the respondents generally rejected most of the item statements because their mean values were

below the cut off mean. For instance, items no.9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 16 obtained respectively mean values below 2.50. However, item no. 13 had a mean value above 2.50 showing the respondents' agreement with the statement. But with a grand mean of 2.36, it showed that the respondents did not accept that the free fee policy implementation has positively influenced pupils' enrolment in public primary schools. The standard deviation of 0.82 indicated the closeness of the respondents' opinions on the item statements which did not clearly deviate.

Research Question 3 How has the free fee policy implementation influenced Physical facilities provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

**Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the respondents on the influence of free fee policy implementation on the provision of physical facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State
N=588**

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
17	There are enough classroom blocks to accommodate all pupils in my school	2.56	0.87	A
18	Classroom blocks in my school are well renovated with good architectural design	2.16	0.86	NA
19	There are enough desks and chairs in good condition for pupils in all the classrooms in my school	2.44	0.81	NA
20	There are comfortable tables and chairs for teachers in my school.	2.16	0.87	NA
21	There is adequate state of the art recreational facilities for pupils use in my school	1.23	0.69	NA
22	There are modern toilet facilities for both pupils and teachers in my school	1.20	0.86	NA
23	There is well equipped library with relevant textbooks for pupils and teachers in my school	1.23	0.87	NA
24	There is adequate provision for portable water supply in my school	1.18	0.92	NA
25	There is a maintenance unit in my school for the facilities	1.12	0.92	NA
Grand Total		1.69	0.85	

Analysis of data as presented in Table 3 showed that only item no 17 with mean value of 2.56 was accepted by the respondents. All other items in the Table, obtained mean values below 2.50 and were not accepted. With a grand mean value of 1.69 and standard deviation of 0.85, it implied that the opinions of the respondents did not deviate in their responses. This result indicated that the respondents strongly agreed that the free fee policy implementation has not improved the provision of physical facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female head teachers on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 4: t-test analysis of the mean responses of male and female head teachers on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Df	t _{calc}	t _{crit}	sig@0.05	Decision
Male	1.42	0.75	248	586	0.51	1.960	Not Significant	Accept H ₀
Female	1.88	0.87	340					

Results of data in Table 4 shows that the t-calculated value of 0.51 was less than the t-critical value of 1.960, therefore, H₀₁ was not rejected meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female head teachers on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of head teachers in urban and rural areas on the influence of free fee policy implementation in the provision of facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 5: t-test analysis of the mean responses of head teachers in the urban and rural areas on the influence of free fee policy implementation in the provision of physical facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Df	t _{calc}	t _{crit}	sig @0.05	Decision
Urban	1.50	0.75	220	586	0.89	1.960	Not Significant	Accept H ₀
Rural	1.94	0.92	368					

Based on the result in Table 5, the t-calculated value of 0.89 is less than the critical value of 1.960, therefore, H₀ is not rejected. This means that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of head teachers in the urban and rural areas on the influence of free fee policy implementation on facilities provision in public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Discussion

The findings of this study from research question 1 showed that quality has not been compromised in the recruitment of teachers as the respondents generally accepted that the minimum qualification of teachers in their schools is NCE. Also, the respondents accepted that teachers in their schools participated in the training and re-training programmes periodically organized by government. This finding was very interesting because participating in such programmes will help in capacity building of teachers and make them to be updated with trends and innovations in teaching and learning pedagogy. These efforts of government to ensure that quality teachers are recruited and periodically retrained is quite commendable and further substantiates her belief that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2014). This finding agreed with the assertion of Irewole and Akinsuroju (2018) that government believes that if the quality of teachers is good, their output will also be good hence the least qualification allowed for teaching in primary schools is the National Certificate in Education (NCE). But then, the above two factors are not enough in themselves to make for quality educational provision. From the same Table 1, it was found that other quality indicators like number of subject teachers, teacher pupil ratio, availability and adequacy of instructional materials, teacher motivation, orientation course for newly recruited teachers and effective supervision of instruction were

negatively rated by the respondents. This finding was not good at all because if these key performance indicators are not improved on, the quality of educational provision in public primary schools will continue to wane down.

Findings of the study from Table 2 showed that pupils' enrolment into public primary schools in Ebonyi State was very discouraging as the head teachers responses revealed. The unimpressive responses of the head teachers on the influence of free fee policy implementation on pupils' enrolment is very disturbing as it leaves a bleak hope on the continuing existence of public primary schools in Ebonyi State. The worry was even more deepened with the finding that head teachers and teachers children and wards were not enrolled in the schools where they head and teach. This is indeed very bizarre and speaks volume on the extent of the loss of confidence in public primary schools. The study further found that public primary schools in Ebonyi State are populated by the poor and indigent pupils and that there is poor retention of pupils throughout a school year. This could mean that any poor parent who gets financial breakthrough would withdraw his or her ward from public school without delay. This finding agreed with Obasi (2013) who had earlier reported that there is public indifference to public primary schools which practical reality shows in the unprecedented proliferation of private primary schools in the states of the federation even at the very heart of free education policy implementation. It equally supported the report of Nweke (2020) that Nigeria may be witnessing the end of public primary education; not in the sense that there will be no public schools but in the sense that there is stagnant or declining enrolment in public primary schools due to poor policy implementation. This finding is indeed very disheartening and unfortunate for Nigeria's sustainable development. Furthermore, the finding that majority of the pupils in public primary schools in Ebonyi State are the poor and indigent could also be linked to poor class attendance because with the level of economic hardship in the country, many families are finding it very difficult to cope with the rising cost of living. It is very possible that these poor children may be sent out by their parents and guardians during school days and hours to hawk and sell items in order to support family upkeep. This finding equally lent support to the report of Ogunniran, et al (2019) that Nigeria still has one of the largest out-of-school children population in

the world. This is worrisome as it can be deduced that a significant percentage of these out of school children came from Ebonyi State.

Research question 3 aimed to find out how the implementation of free fee policy has influenced the provision of infrastructural facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State. Findings from the data analysis in Table 3 revealed that public primary schools in Ebonyi State have adequate classroom blocks. The researchers believe that this finding is possible because the population of the pupils in public primary schools is not increasing as found from Table 2. The result further showed that facilities in public primary schools in Ebonyi State are not only in short supply but the available ones are not in good state. In particular, the findings of this study showed that classroom blocks were not renovated, desks and chairs were broken and not repaired, teachers did not have comfortable chairs and tables, and there was inadequacy of recreational facilities, no modern toilet facilities, no equipped library with relevant books, inadequacy of portable water supply and no maintenance unit. Parents would prefer to send their children and wards to schools with aesthetic values and beauty. This finding agreed with (Unasi et al, 2019;Tsafe, 2013) who had earlier reported that physical facilities in public schools were grossly inadequate and in very poor state as most available classrooms were either dilapidated, uncompleted or with dusty floors and pupils paired on chairs and desks or even sat on the floor. Indeed, the state of public primary schools as revealed by this study calls for a declaration of a state of emergency otherwise, there may be a soon end of the existence of public primary schools in Ebonyi State.

The results of the test analyses of the two null hypotheses in Tables 4 and 5 on gender and location which showed no significant differences in their mean responses only mean to emphasize the obvious that head teachers in public primary schools irrespective of gender or location are dissatisfied with the state of public primary schools in Ebonyi State. They believe that the free fee policy implementation has no positive influence on the development of public primary schools in Ebonyi State. It is indeed quite sad that the noble purpose of the free fee policy is not being realized in public primary schools in Ebonyi State. This study submitted that the enormous drawbacks that have bedevilled the effective implementation of the free fee

policy should be removed as fast as possible so that public primary education can fulfil its mandate.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have great implications for public primary education in Ebonyi State.

1. The financial provisions have not supported the effective implementation of the free fee policy in the management of primary schools
2. The soul of public primary education could well be on its way to extinction if nothing is urgently done to rescue it.
3. There is urgent need for a state of emergency to be declared on public primary education sector to avoid making the foundation of education in Ebonyi State shaky and weak.
4. The state of public primary schools encourages the proliferation of mushroom private schools and this will go down further to compromise quality in both public and private primary schools as most of the private schools may not afford to employ qualified teachers because of the huge financial cost.

Limitations of the Study

This study has its limitations. In the first place, it covered only Ebonyi State out of the 36 states of the federation. This is a geographical limitation as it did not give room for wider coverage. What obtains in Ebonyi State cannot be used for generalization. This limitation calls on future researchers in this area to widen the scope of geographical coverage. Another limitation to this study is the use of questionnaire with closed questions that limit the responses of the respondents. In this regard, the researchers suggest that future studies should in addition to the questionnaire incorporate qualitative method of using interview or focus group discussion for data collection as this will not only facilitate data triangulation, it will deepen the findings of the study. However, despite these noted limitations, this study has contributed to knowledge on specific areas in which government needs to act on to help the free fee policy to impact positively on the management of public primary education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Primary education is the foundation on which other levels of education are built on. It is important in every child's life. Government demonstrates her understanding of the importance of primary education in national development by making it free and compulsory. Since the achievement of the goals and objectives of primary education in Ebonyi State greatly depends on this key performance indicators-quality of educational provision, enrolment and facilities provision which unfortunately are at very low ebb; this study submits that these performance indicators should be given urgent necessary attention else, public primary education may find itself on the road to extinction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Government should make the teaching profession attractive by motivating teachers through improved remuneration and adequate provision of learning facilities.
2. Government should build more infrastructural facilities and renovate existing ones in public primary schools to improve their aesthetic values and attract more pupils.
3. Government should establish maintenance unit in all public primary schools to ensure regular routine checks, repair and maintenance of facilities.

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