



Implementation of the National Policy on Equal Educational Opportunity in Secondary Schools in Onueke Education Zone

Okeh Edith Chigozie¹ and Nwite Onuma²

1, & 2, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

[1Edithchigozie57@gmail.com](mailto:Edithchigozie57@gmail.com) 08060147779, [2nwiteonuma@gmail.com](mailto:nwiteonuma@gmail.com) 08035831308

ABSTRACT

This study investigated Extent of Implementation of the National Policy on Equal Educational Opportunity in Secondary Schools in Onueke Education Zone. Two purposes, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 32,379 students in the 65 public senior secondary schools in Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State while the sample of the study comprised 395 students using Taro Yamane formular for finite population. Structured questionnaire tagged“Extent of Implementation of the National Policy on Equal Educational Opportunity in Secondary Schools Questionnaire” (EINPEEOSSQ), was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts, two of whom were from the Department of Educational Foundations and one from Measurement and Evaluation of Science Education Department, all in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The overall reliability coefficient yielded 0.80 using Cronbach Alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that: equity in educational provision are implemented to a high extent while gender equality in secondary schools in Onueke Education are implemented to a low extent. Based on the findings, the study recommended among other things that Government of Ebonyi State should provide resources and support for teachers to incorporate skill development into their curriculum effectively.

Keywords: Implementation, National Policy, Equal Education, Educational Opportunity, Secondary Schools

Introduction

Education is believed to be functional, qualitative and socio-personal in the sense that it must be tailored toward serving the society and the personality involved (Ozochi, 2020). It is the sum-total of all experiences that students receive either in the school or outside the school environment. Therefore, education is a lifelong process. Education is a process which goes on from birth to death. Education revolves around formal and non-formal process (Olaleye, 2019). Non-formal education is organized outside the school system and geared towards addressing the problems of specific target groups in the society, especially those adults and students who for one reason or the other had their basic education interrupted. National Policy on Education was launched in the year 1977 and was later revised in 1981. The policy became extremely necessary and more pressing in Nigeria following the National Curriculum Conference of 1969, where experts in the field of Education expressed dissatisfaction with the then existing education systems (6-5-4 system), which had become irrelevant to Nigeria National needs, aspirations and goals (Olaleye, 2019). Another world conference was held in Jomtem, Thailand from 5th -9th of March 1990 with a vision “Education For All” (EFA). Nigeria as a nation became encouraged to set up educational activities to achieve the goals. The guiding principles of EFA in Nigeria is to equip every citizen with knowledge to enable him/her derive maximum benefit from his/her membership in the society and of cause live a fulfilling life.

Consequently, in 1976, Universal Primary Education was introduced by the then Military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo. Universal Primary Education (UPE) is most often referred to as elementary education, which were from grade one to six. One of the major provisions in the education policy is that primary education should be free, compulsory and universal. Obadara, (2018) maintained that free universal basic education is education that provided for every Nigerian child that is of school-going age, out-of-school children, adolescents and adults (age15 and above), with the quest for developing strong consciousness for education and acquisition of appropriate level of numeracy, literacy, communication, and life skills, as well as ethical, moral and civic values (Egonmwan, 2018).

Therefore, everyone needs basic Education that will enable him or her to be self-reliant. Hence, this calls for, the need for effective implementation of equal educational opportunities as stipulated in National policy of Education (FRN, 2013). Implementation implies carrying out a designed programme according to how it was planned. Implementation in this context implies the process of carrying out objectives or a plan aim to actualized specific goals. It is the process of performing a task, an activity or programme. Egonmwan (2018) described implementation as the stage where the preparations made earlier, the plans, designs and analysis proposed are tested for effective outcome. So, effective implementation in the actualization of educational objectives account for effective educational administration (Aja, Egwu, Aja-Okorie, Ani, & Aniuta, 2018). Egwu (2019) noted that in the implementation of any Education-related programme, the class room teacher is always an important player in the programme implementation.

Equal education opportunity in Nigeria is a national policy that aims at ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to quality education (Egwu, 2019). The Nigerian government has taken steps to promote equal education

opportunity by implementing policies in Education program, which aims to provide free and compulsory basic education for all children. Equal educational opportunities is one of the contemporary controversies which have kept both philosophers and sociologists of education very busy in their search for solutions to some of the crises in education. Ordinarily, the desire for equal educational opportunity for all citizens is a very laudable one which should be supported by all those who are concerned with national development.

Equal educational opportunity simply means equal access to formal education (Utibe, 2011). This equality is regardless of differences in location, sex, social standing, ethnicity and even religion.. National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) outline equal educational opportunities based on: lifelong and skills development, equity in educational provision, access to education, inclusive education at secondary schools and gender equality. But in the context of this study equity in educational provision and gender equality will be investigated.

Equity in educational resource provision is also a vital aspect of national policy on education in Nigeria schools. The goal is to ensure that all students have access to the same quality of resources, regardless of their background or location (Alabi, 2018). This includes providing equal access to textbooks, technology, facilities, and trained teachers. According to Anyabolu (2020) equity in education refers to the principle of ensuring fairness and impartiality in the distribution of educational opportunities, resources, and support mechanisms to all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities, or socio-economic status. It involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers that hinder equal access to quality education and striving to provide every student with the necessary tools and conditions to succeed (Okafor, 2021). Achieving equity in education involves promoting inclusivity, providing targeted support for marginalized groups, and addressing disparities to ensure that every learner has an equitable chance to achieve their full potential.

Gender equality pertains to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities afforded to individuals of all genders, particularly in the realms of education, employment, and societal participation (Udoka, 2021). It encompasses the elimination of discrimination, biases, and stereotypes based on gender, ensuring that all individuals have equal access to resources, decision-making processes, and avenues for personal and professional growth. Gender equality in education focuses on providing both boys and girls with equitable access to education, promoting gender-sensitive teaching practices, and challenging societal norms that perpetuate gender-based inequalities.

However, gender may play significant role in acquiring those skills which may cause basic school students to be self-reliant. Gender means the sex of an individual that is, male or female. Ezeano (2018) posit that, each person is controlled by his or her sex as this has a way of influencing them in developing strong consciousness for education which led to acquisition of skills and reduction in illiteracy level. Females are more submissive and also less competitive than boys. This is in consonance with the assertion of Ologho (2019) that, individuals differ in a number of ways, sex as a physical difference had been pin pointed as a factor in commitment towards education pursuit. Akagbogu (2018) reported that gender difference influences the nature of pupils/students' performance. She asserted that some research reports have substantial evidence which suggests that female as a group shows a small but significant supergiant over males in verbal ability. Ilogho (2018) also agreed with

this assertion that females have better study skills than the male students. This implies that females tend to work more conscientiously and have a stronger work ethic than males. They also tend to have better language abilities including easy writing skills, vocabulary and word fluency which form part of educational objectives that should be implemented. The involvement of quality teachers both in urban and rural areas in the implementation of the equal education opportunity is vital.

There is need to assess how far the objectives of equal education opportunities have been implemented in Ebonyi State. If the objectives of the programme have been fully implemented, there will be evidences in the positive attitudes of our children (Udoka, 2021). Looking around our streets, various workshops and our markets, children of school going ages are seen serving as apprentices at various workshops and some helping their parents at various markets, some roaming about, hawking and begging, even though the Federal Government has provided equal education opportunities for all children of school-going age. This observed behaviour is putting a question on the attainment of objectives (Egwu, 2019). More so, we frequently hear of kidnapping, ritual killings and human trafficking, pointing to the fact that our youths who should have partly benefited from the programme are still rebels in the society. Thus, there is need to assess the Implementation of National Policy on Equal Education in all Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problems

Failing to implement policies that promote equal educational opportunities have a negative impact on national development. When a significant portion of the population is unable to access quality education, it has hindered the country's ability to build a skilled and competitive workforce, ultimately stunting economic growth and development. Equal educational opportunities in secondary schools have far-reaching consequences that affect not only individual students but also the future of the nation as a whole. The exclusion of learners with disabilities and special needs remains a significant problem in achieving equal educational opportunities. Barriers related to physical accessibility, lack of specialized resources, and limited professional development for teachers hinder the inclusion of these students, denying them their right to quality education which has led to great falling standard of education.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the extent of Implementation of the National Policy on Equal Educational Opportunity in Secondary Schools in Onueke Education Zone. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the extent of implementation of equal access to education in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State
2. Determine the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State

Research Question

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does skill development implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State?

2. To what extent does equity in educational resource provision implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which access to education is implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which gender equality is implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive survey design is the plan of study which enables the researcher to collect data from a well-defined population and systematically selected segments of the population in order to determine the attributes of the population. This study was carried out in Onueke Education Zone, out of the three Education Zones in Ebonyi State. Onueke Education Zone is made up of four local government areas: Ezza North LGA, Ezza South LGA, Ikwo LGA and Ishielu LGA. Onueke Education Zone is bounded in the East by Cross River State, in the West by Onicha Local Government, in the North by Abakaliki LGA, while in the South by Afikpo LGA. The people of the state are mainly Igbos by their cultural background. There are Information Communication Technology centers and public library in the area as well as many primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the area. The choice of the area for the study is based on the researcher's interest and zeal to contribute towards the improvement of Equal Educational Opportunity in Public Secondary Schools with regards healthy school climate. The population of the study was 32,379 students in the 65 public secondary schools in Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State. There are 11419 male students and 20960 female students (Source: Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS) Department Secondary Education Board, Abakaliki 2023/2024 school year). The sample for the study was 395 respondents made up of male and female students using Taro Yamane formular, for finite population. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw the sample of female and male students in the Zone. That means that sample of male and female students were; 139 male and female students 256 totaling 395 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a structure questionnaire tagged "Extent of Implementation of the National Policy on Equal Educational Opportunity in Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire. (EINPEEOSSQ). A four-point rating scale as stated below; Very High Extent (VHE) 4 Points, High Extent (HE) 3 Points, Low Extent (LE) 2 Points and Very Low Extent (VLE) 1 Point. The instrument was face validated by three (3) experts: two from the Department of Educational Foundations (Educational Administration and Planning) and one from the Department of Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation) Unit; all from the Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The validated instrument was trial tested on thirty (30) students in Abakaliki Education Zone in Ebonyi State which was not part of the study area to ensure its reliability. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha technique was used for its analysis. The Cronbach Alpha was adopted because the items were not dichotomously scored. Reliability coefficients for the cluster were as follows: cluster A: 0.746 and Cluster B: 0.843, these gave an overall reliability score of 0.802. The result indicated that the instrument was reliable and therefore considered appropriate for use. Research questions 1-2 were answered on individual item basis using mean and standard

deviation. In answering the research questions 1-2, data collected from respondents were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) using mean and standard deviation. In taking decision, range values adopted were. That is 1.00-1.49 for VLE, 1.50 – 2.49 for LE, 2.50 – 3.49 for HE and 3.50 -4. 00 for VHE. In testing the hypotheses, t-test was used to test the entire null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Then the t-cal. was compared with t-tables, where the t.cal was less than the t-tables, the hypothesis was accepted (ie not significant) and where the t-cal was greater than the t-table, the hypothesis was rejected (i.e significant).

Results

Research Question 1:

To what extent do access to education are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent of implementation of access to education in secondary schools in Onueke education zone of Ebonyi State

S/No.	To what extent are the following items that will lead to full access to secondary education:	N	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Free tuition fees	360	2.93	0.44	HE
2	Free books	360	2.83	0.52	HE
3	Free school uniform	360	2.00	0.51	
4	Free meal	360	2.16	0.52	LE
5	Free transportation	360	2.03	0.60	LE
6	Free hostel accommodations	360	2.13	0.49	LE
Grand mean (x)			2.35		LE

Source: Researcher’s Field Work, 2024

Data in Table 1 revealed that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 which are on free tuition fees, free books, free school uniform, free meal, free transportation and free hostel accommodations had mean scores of 2.93, 2.83, 2.00, 2.16, 2.03 and 2.13 with a standard deviation of scores of 0.44, 0.52, 0.52, 0.60 and 0. 49 respectively. In the whole items, item 1 and 2 recorded high extent with a mean score of 2.93 and 2.83. While 4 to 6 recorded low extent. The mean of means for the cluster is 2.35; this is between 1.50 and 2.49 and corresponds to Low Extent (LE).

Research Question 2:

To what extent do gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education zone of Ebonyi State

S/No	To what extent are the female students treated equally with the male students in the following areas?	N	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
8	Senior prefect position	360	2.03	0.54	LE
9	Classroom prefect position	360	2.20	0.54	LE
10	Games prefect	360	2.06	0.68	LE
11	Social prefect	360	2.06	0.44	LE

12	Labour prefect position	360	2.16	0.52	LE
13	Chaplain prefect	360	2.13	0.76	LE
Grand mean (x)			2.16		LE

Source: Researcher’s Field Work, 2024

The results in Table 2 revealed that the respondents on items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 with mean scores of 2.03, 2.20, 2.06, 2.06, 2.16 and 2.13 with standard deviation of 0.54, 0.54, 0.68, 0.44, 0.52 and 0.76 respectively, indicates that to a low extent accepted that female students treated equally with the male students in the area senior prefect position, classroom prefect position, games, social prefect, labour prefect position and chaplain prefect. Based on the overall of the means value for the cluster is 2.15 which is between 1.50 and 2.49 and corresponds to Low Extent.

Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which access education are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State.

Table 3: t-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which access education are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State.

Items	Category of Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crt	Decision
1	Male	133	2.92	0.38	358	0.27	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.93	0.47				
2	Male	133	2.75	0.52	358	2.06	1.96	Significant
	Female	227	2.87	0.51				
3	Male	133	1.93	0.53	358	1.90	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.03	0.50				
4	Male	133	2.16	0.56	358	0.03	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.16	0.49				
5	Male	133	1.94	0.58	358	2.07	1.96	Significant
	Female	227	2.08	0.61				
6	Male	133	2.08	0.50	358	1.47	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.16	0.49				
Average						0.84	1.96	Not Significant

Source: Researcher’s Field Work, 2024

The result of t-test analysis presented in Table 3 indicate that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which access education are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State. This is because from the table, each of the items obtained a t-calculated value that was less than the t-critical of 1.96. The average t-calculated value of 0.84 was also less than the average t-critical value of 1.96. Based on this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which access education are implemented

in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State, is upheld. Only item 2 and 5 recorded significant.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State.

Table 4:t-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State

Items	Category respondents	of N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crt	Decision
7	Male	133	2.13	0.41	358	2.73	1.96	Significant
	Female	227	1.97	0.42				
8	Male	133	2.24	0.37	358	1.29	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.17	0.34				
9	Male	133	2.05	0.36	358	0.29	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.07	0.36				
10	Male	133	2.06	0.47	358	0.03	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.06	0.47				
11	Male	133	2.16	0.36	358	0.03	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.16	0.35				
12	Male	133	2.15	0.52	358	0.32	1.96	Not Significant
	Female	227	2.12	0.54				
Average						0.47	1.96	Not Significant

Source: Researcher’s Field Work, 2024

Data in Table 4 indicate that the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State was not significant, as the t-calculated of 0.47 was less than t-critical of 1.96. This is because from the table, each of the items obtained a t-calculated value that was less than the t-critical value of 1.96. This means that the male and female students were of the same opinion on the extent to which gender equality are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State. Only item 18 recorded Significant.

Discussion

The results of data analysis presented in Table 1 revealed that the respondents, to a low extent, accepted that: provision are made for free school uniform, free meal, free transportation and free hostel accommodations. The respondents also to a high extent agreed that there is education access on free tuition fees and free books for students’ effective learning. While the result of the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which access education are implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State. This finding is in consonance with that of Onele, 2019) who asserted that access to education in secondary schools encompasses the fundamental principle that every student, regardless of their

background, have the opportunity to pursue further learning and personal development but most time this access are denied. The extent of the implementation of access to education in secondary schools in Ebonyi State is a critical issue that directly impacts the nation's development and the future prospects of its youth. While there have been notable efforts to improve access to education, significant challenges still remain.

Result as presented in Table 2 indicated that to a low extent accepted that female students treated equally with the male students in the area senior prefect position, classroom prefect position, games, social prefect, labour prefect position and chaplain prefect while the result of the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which gender. The finding is in agreement with Ezeano (2018) who asserted that gender means the sex of an individual that is, a male or female. Ezeano posit that, each person is controlled by his or her sex as this has a way of influencing them in developing strong consciousness for education which led to acquisition of skills and reduction in illiteracy level.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: Extent to which equity in educational provision are implemented in secondary schools are to a high extent while aspect of implementation of access to education in secondary schools and gender equality is implemented in secondary schools in Onueke education of Ebonyi State are to low high extent and needed more infrastructure, transportation, and outreach programs to expand access to education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made as the way forward;

1. Government of Ebonyi State should invest more on infrastructure, transportation, and outreach programs to expand access to education for marginalized and underserved communities
2. Government should develop and implement initiatives that promote gender equality in education, including empowering girls to pursue their subject and leadership roles, promoting positive gender norms and attitude. And also provide training and resources for teachers to create inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

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