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### MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION POLICY IN THE VILLAGES IN NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

This study examined the managerial structure of Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy embraced by the governments of African countries towards ensuring free, compulsory and uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education for every child of school-age by 2050. Previous studies on UBE policy implementation in Nigeria reported unequal educational participation among school-aged children in the villages or rural areas when compared with the urban school-aged students. This paper seeks to understand if management could be attributed as the reason for over 4.5 million out-of-school children in two regional rural areas in Nigeria. Data collection for this study was through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with 20 local education administrators in two rural areas. According to the analysed data, political issues and inadequate infrastructure facilities to support teaching and learning were major challenges for managing education. Recommendations have been provided to enhance equitable opportunity to education among the school-aged children in the rural areas in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Policy Implementation, Universal Basic Education, Rural, Educational Opportunity and Management.

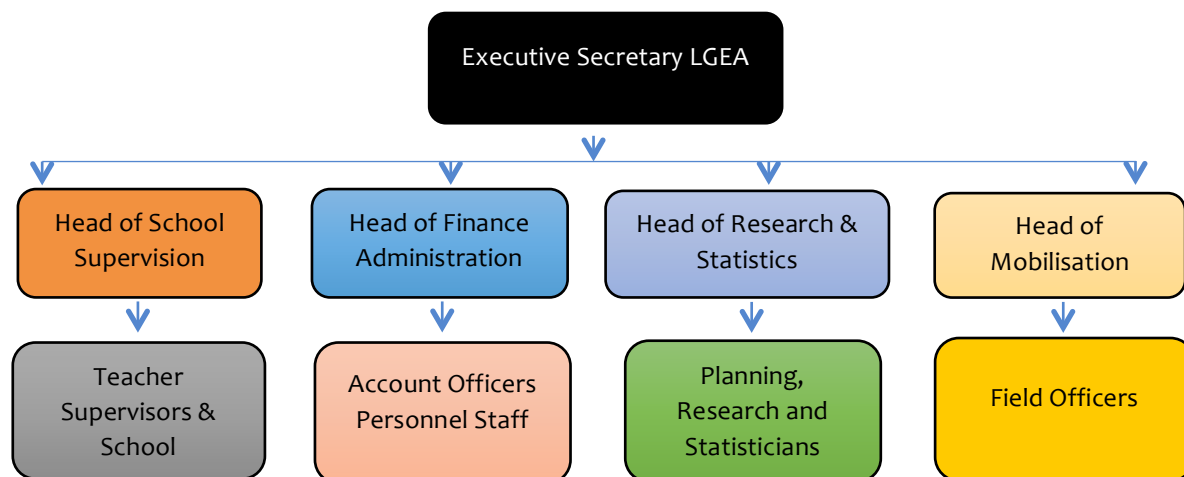
#### Introduction

This paper is an outcome of a larger study that examined the managerial structure of Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy in Nigeria. The UBE policy was introduced in 1999 and embraced by the governments of African countries towards ensuring free, compulsory and uninterrupted access to 9-year formal education for every child of school-age by 2050. Nigeria is one of those countries that started the implementation UBE policy in 2000. It is now over a decade in the implementation of the UBE program, yet the most populous and relatively wealthy nation across the Sub-Sahara Africa still struggles with the same problems that face other nations in the continent. These problems include: a rapidly increasing population, a slow growing economy and many unschooled children (Bolaji & Illo, 2007; Bolaji, 2014; Bolaji, Gray & Campbell-Evans, 2015). Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD Report, 2018), mentioned that

Nigeria has expanded its educational opportunities since gaining independence, yet unequal participation remains an issue among school-aged children in the country, especially in the villages. Prior to the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999, educational outcomes were at a low level in Nigeria. For example, the first nationwide “free and compulsory” primary schooling in the 1970s known as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was engulfed by confusion during its implementation and left behind many school-age children nationwide (Bolaji, 2014). The UBE reform was an initiative by the United Nations towards addressing the issue of the growing population of uneducated children in the developing countries. Nigeria was a signatory to this initiative known as the 1999 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA).

The UBE program was designed to ensure nine uninterrupted years of formal education by providing free, compulsory education for every child of school-going age, reduce school dropout and improve education relevance, quality and efficiency among other objectives stipulated in the UBE Act of 2004 Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2004, p. 4). Based on the stated objectives, the UBE program was adequately supported and well-funded by the government of Nigeria and international agencies, such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the form of grants and loans to ensure the implementation of the reform. In 2013, the World Bank expenditure on education in Nigeria was over US\$300 million dollars (World Bank Report, 2013). OECD Report (2018) estimated over 5% of the organisation’s proceeds were expended on education in Nigeria excluding other international intervention supports in the provision of basic infrastructures and human capacity building resources. In addition to the international donors’ intervention programs, the basic education law enacted in 1999 made provisions for 2% of the consolidated revenue to be expended on the implementation of the UBE program (UBEC, 2004). This support was provided because the stated basic education reforms, in terms of structure and formulation, had realistic objectives, even when compared with developed countries such as Australia and Great Britain, whose educational policies are considered optimal (UBEC, 2004, p.5, Bolaji et al, 2015).

A critical look at the organisational structure of the commission at the local or district level revealed a hierarchical bureaucratic management of policy implementation (Figure 1). At the highest stratum was the Executive Secretary in charge of central administration and coordinating human resources, controlling financial expenditure, supplying learning resources, and monitoring curriculum innovation and adaptation processes. The Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) facilitated the implementation task at the grassroots level, including rural and very remote villages in Nigeria. This study sought to know how the organisational management of the commission at the local or district level impacted on the UBE implementation in rural areas towards achieving its goal and objectives. The significant issue considered by this study was to what extent this hierarchical bureaucracy has affected the implementation process in achieving the stated national objectives.



**Figure 1: Organisational chart of the UBE at the local education district level of policy implementation. Source: Bolaji, S.D. (2014) *Intent to Action: Overcoming Barriers to Universal Basic Education Policy Implementation in Nigeria*, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.**

Despite a significant increase in funding, financing, time and energy invested in this program, the management of UBE implementation in the village or rural areas has not met expectations. The UNESCO/FGN report (2014) and UNESCO (2015a) affirmed disparity in management of education in the villages when compared with the urban or metropolitan areas. As widely reported in the literature (Akyeampong, Sabates, Hunt & Anthony, 2009; Uzobo, Ogbanga & Jack-Jackson, 2014; Humphreys & Crawford, 2014) over 60% of rural school aged children are educationally disadvantaged. In the few villages where schools were “impoverished”, getting students to school was an issue. UNDP (2013) reports a marginal improvement in enrolment and attendance in schools across villages but adjudged the standard of education as poor due to ineffective managerial operation in those regions. Similarly, Olatunya, Oseni, Ogundele and Oyelami (2014) stressed that rural communities lacked adequate infrastructure and furniture for a purposeful learning engagement. Apart from the dilapidated state of the few existing rural schools, the system of collecting comprehensive, relevant data for planning was weak. Amongst other factors, the bureaucratic mechanism to ensure adequate compliance of the UBE program in the villages seems to lack the willpower to back the implementation of the policy (Olatunya, et al, 2014). It is concerning that the nuances of implementation of the education agenda in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which aimed to achieve compulsory universal basic education for all children by 2015 are yet to be resolved (Sustainable Development Goals, 2030; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). This study aims to reopen the discussion, on how better to engage the disengaged through effective management of the UBE policy implementation in the rural or village communities in Nigeria. This is important given the UBE goals have been shifted to 2050 (FGN/WENR Report, 2017; FGN/UN, 2017).

**Village: In the Nigerian Context**

A rural or remote setting generally refers to a small community with low population and considered to be under-developed (Shaw, 2010; Shaw, Wallace, Nair, & Barton-Johnson, 2006). Most countries in the world have rural and remote settlements. Nigeria is geographically and ethnically diverse, with over 52% of the population in rural and village settlements. In this study, a village in the African setting means a very remote or rural settlement with no infrastructure such as water, accessible roads, adequate housing and a lack of an enabling learning environment (Lemon, 2017). In many rural areas in Nigeria, schools are not within the reach of the children. In places where school is located, students would trek or walk 150km to get to school. Some

villages in Nigeria are only accessible via canoe and cycling, especially during the raining season when the road networks are always flooded. Schools in the villages are not well resourced, and in some instances, communities are considered lucky to have a school with two teachers responsible for all year levels 1-6 without support from a teaching assistant. Michiika Local Government of Adamawa States in the North-East of Nigeria presents a vivid picture of village settings where pupils learn under trees as their classrooms using wooden planks for desks and chairs of cement blocks (Lemon, 2017). In South-West region, Olatunya, et al (2014) echoed the unhealthy nature of the school environment characterised by open dumping and burning of refuse, lack of toilet facilities and water supply, and, dilapidated classrooms. School-aged children in rural settings are disadvantaged when compared to those in the urban areas in accessing educational opportunities (Kazeem, Jensen, Stokes, 2010, UNDP 2013, Bolaji, et al., 2016). The school-aged children in the rural communities who should have free and compulsory government basic education according to the UBE Act (UBEC, 2004) are worse off due to the implementation disorder reported by (Bolaji, 2014, Bolaji, 2003; Bolaji & Jegede, 2003).

In Nigeria, most parents in the rural or village communities are very poor and live on less than an Australian dollar per day (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17015873>). As a result, families in the communities cannot afford to send their wards to school in the urban cities. According to Tulder (2008), Nigeria is among the developing countries where children are inadequately educated or receive no education at all. One in three children do not complete the fifth grade. Ako & Ojone (2018) stressed that any society that shows any level of adolescent/youth alienation from educational opportunities will inevitably have a high level of crime. The challenge of education in villages or rural communities is the cause of the social ills in Nigerian society (Famuyiwa-Alaka, Powell, Akogun, Musa, Mohammed & Sani, 2018). For instance, the menace of Boko Haram - a terrorist network in the rural setting of Northern Nigeria has been attributed to lack of educational engagement and alienation of uneducated group of young men and women in those regions (Lemon, 2017 Famuyiwa-Alaka, Powell, Akogun, Musa, Mohammed & Njobi, 2018). Thus, efficient management of the UBE initiative in the villages remains pivotal to the nation's development. This important fact led to the undertaking of this study.

### **Statement of problem**

A decade appraisal of UBE in Nigeria revealed a marginal improvement in the UBE implementation, but judged the quality of education as below standard in the villages (UNICEF Report, 2015; UNESCO Report, 2014; UNDP, 2013). This has disadvantaged over 4.7 million school aged children and limited learning engagement in the rural areas (UNICEF, 2015). Issues bothering on management, accessibility to schools, and inclusive learning engagement are factors identified for the growing disparities in the educational attainment between urban and rural areas in Nigeria (Kazeem et al., 2010). Previous studies have shown that there are issues with the management of policy implementation, particularly as it relates to implementation of the UBE policy initiative in Nigeria (Olarenwaju & Folorunsho, 2009; Ogunjimi, Ajibola & Akah, 2009; Obayan, 2011; Bolaji, et al, 2015; Bolaji, et al, 2016). While the intentions and goals of the UBE policy are worthy, the managerial strategies for policy implementation seems to be ineffective. As the country looks toward education for all in 2050, the need to ascertain the management of the educational initiative in rural or remote in the post 2015 UBE implementation necessitated the study.

## Research Questions

The two questions that guided this research were:

1. In what ways did the management of the UBE affect the implementation of the program in the rural areas in Nigeria?
2. How did actions of the bureaucrats impact on the implementation of the UBE program in the rural areas in Nigeria?

## Significance of the Study

The rationale for this study was premised on the resolve of the Nigerian federal government to bridge the gap of unequal disparity between the school-aged children in the urban and rural areas (Edukugho, 2006, UBEC-NAUPEB Report, 2006). Taking into consideration the specific objectives of UBE, the overarching question investigated by this study was the extent to which the bureaucratic alignment of implementation has impacted on the UBE implementation in the rural villages in Nigeria. This study is significant in light of the disparity in education as reported in UNESCO report (2014). The findings of this study contribute to an understanding of why progress towards the goals of implementing UBE policy in the villages has been slow in Nigeria. The findings of this study make a substantial contribution to the existing literature by providing much-needed knowledge on improving managerial efficiency of UBE initiative in the rural areas of Nigeria. This study affirmed the national ethos that education is central to alleviating poverty and achieving the MDGs in Nigeria in 2050 (FGN/WEBR, 2017; NPE, 2004).

## Theoretical framework

Management means a belief that managers have required skill sets and know how to effectively implement policy in any organisational setting. Aligned with the above statement, is the work of Diefenbach (2013) and Klikauer (2013) and their theory of organisational management that discusses the role of managers in education policy implementation. Through Diefenbach's work researchers understood the importance of managers in a bureaucratic setting and gained substantial knowledge of how bureaucrats or professional managers use concepts and methods in implementing policy decisions. Alluding to Diefenbach, Klikauer (2013) along with Locke & Spender (2011) see management as an essential ideological concept in organisational studies. The work of these scholars provided a new perspective in understanding the nuances of management. Klikauer discusses the tension of conflicts and power struggle associated with the concept of management often reported in policy implementation process in an organisation. According to Diefenbach and Klikauer, alignment or interpersonal relationship of people who are responsible for implementing policy decisions determines the direction of policy implementation. Both theorists stressed the need to look beyond the skill sets of the managers and focus on how their interpersonal relationship within the bureaucratic mechanism impacted on policy implementation. This aligned with the focus of one of the research questions that sought to understand how actions of the bureaucrats impacted on the implementation of the UBE policy in the rural area in Nigeria.

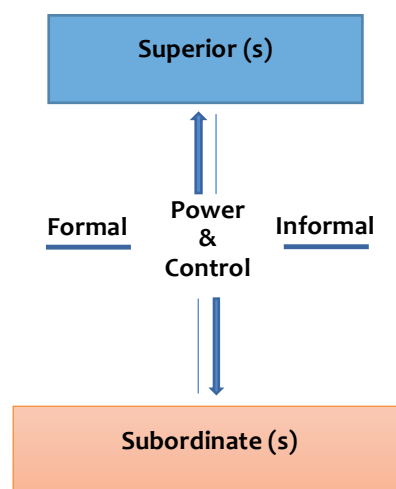
Another perspective to management framework is the issue of efficiency in policy implementation. Klikauer (2013) argues that people's perception of management is that of exploitative capitalism that promotes lack of accountability in an organisation. To him, this notion affects policy decisions and provides no accountability to know who should be held responsible when policy fails at the level of implementation. Klikauer (2013) argues the lack of accountability in organisational management manifests in a way that people are willing to set aside

organisational values, regulations and ethics when commanded by authority figures. He alludes to the possibility of the authority figures to make decisions that can cause harm to others in the case of implementing organisational objectives. According to Locke et al., (2011) maximising efficiency at a reasonable cost is an issue yet to be resolved in the management of policy implementation discourse. The question asked by Clegg (2014) is how does the notion of efficiency in management impact on education initiatives whose value is to impact knowledge to make the world a better place. This again raises the issue of value and ethics in the management of education initiatives, again was the focus of the first research question (RQ1) on management of education in the villages in Nigeria.

The theoretical frameworks help to understand that the world tends to become exposed to the totality of management absorbing everyone and everything in its path (Clegg, 2014; Klikauer, 2013, p.201). In all, researchers found Diefenbach (2013, 2009) and Klikauer's (2013) notions of hierarchy in organisation setting relevant to understanding the hierarchical structure of the agencies responsible for the implementation of basic education in Nigeria. The theory assisted the researchers to understand that the success and failure of policy implementation depends on the organisational structure of the UBE agency at the local community or district level revealed a hierarchical bureaucratic mechanism of policy implementation (Figure 1). Thus, the significant issue considered by this study was how this hierarchical bureaucracy affected the implementation process in achieving the stated national objectives at the local level.

Diefenbach's (2013, 2009) hierarchical structure of policy implementation in figure 2 enables the researchers to know that bureaucrats or people responsible for the policy implementation have required skill sets and are able to apply such to all areas of society on the grounds of superior ideology, expert training, and the exclusive possession of managerial knowledge necessary to efficiently run corporations, including education industry. This understanding helped the researchers to elicit information from participants on how the bureaucrats' skills, expertise and knowledge have impacted on their policy implementation drive. It also provided information on how politics and systems of government could impact on the efficiency level of the bureaucrats in implementing policy decisions.

***Model of social and interpersonal relationship in policy implementation***



**Figure 2: Adapted structure of organisational hierarchy and management of policy implementation (Diefenbach, 2013).**

Insight from Diefenbach (2013) and Klikauer (2013) assisted the researchers to understand how regional management of education in Nigeria can help to achieve a greater level of alignments among the bureaucrats for a successful policy implementation. This was the focus of the second research question (RQ2). This theoretical framing has helped to understand how access to education can help to eradicate poverty and improve well-being of families in the rural or villages against the centralised professional bureaucratic modes of organisation that currently being practised in the country. Therefore, this model of regional management can help to cope with the demand for effective and efficient educational administration in order to meet the rising population of school-aged children yet to access education in village or rural communities in the Nigeria.

## **Method**

This study used a qualitative research approach to elicit a deeper understanding of the implementation and management of UBE from the bureaucrats and stakeholders who were directly involved in the implementation of the policy in Nigeria. The rationale was premised on providing a clearer understanding of the systemic, detailed and complex understanding of the hierarchical organisational structure model of management approach that was employed. This approach also provided a reflection on how policy ideas and expectations were disseminated. By employing qualitative research, researchers had the opportunity to explore the research problem in detail because it examined the explanation and description of “*multiple perspectives; attending to the ways in which language as a social and cultural construction shapes, distorts and structures understandings*” (Patton 2015), and allowed us to experience and witness the description of the problem from the vantage viewpoint of the policy actors (p. 102; Bell 2010; Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Creswell, 2013). The assertions on the viability of a qualitative approach enabled researchers to engage in inductive analysis, holistic perspective, personal contact and insight, unique case orientation, context sensitivity, emphatic neutrality in eliciting information from the participants (Patton, 2015, p.67; Bell 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2015). This understanding informed the choice of the qualitative research approach to study the actions of bureaucrats in the implementation of UBE at both the Federal and District levels of policy implementation in Nigeria.

## **Research Design**

The research design was a qualitative case study in which data were collected through document analysis and interview. In this study, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at the local district levels who were responsible for implementing the UBE policy and interpreting the complex issue of implementing UBE at the system. As stated above, the study was on the bureaucrats and career officers with responsibility for implementation at the system level. Thus, teachers were not part of the study. The choice of document analysis for this study was important in order to understand the UBE initiative and its implementation. Altrichter & Holly (2011) stated that the document or diaries analysis approach is dynamic in nature because it can be used as the central or exclusive method of research and enable continuing analysis throughout duration of data collection. It can also be used to evaluate evidence gathered from interviews (Altrichter and Holly; 2011; Bell, 2010; Duffy, 2005). Document analysis is useful in research that focuses on organisation policy or evaluating government reports (Creswell, 2013; Johnson, 1984).

Documentary evidence was used in this study to ascertain whether all the interviewees' statements associated with UBE implementation were true. As mentioned, the documents analysed were the 2006 National Assessment of Universal Basic Education Programme (2009 final report), UBE Act and Other Related Matters (2004), Federal Government Approved

Guidelines for Disbursement of Fund (2006), UBEC Annual Reports (2009, 2010) and UBEC Reports Submitted to the Presidential Task Team on Education (2011). The following were the key areas of focus in these documents: teacher training programmes, federal teachers' scheme, infrastructure, instructional materials, self-help project scheme, "adopt-a-school" programme, curriculum development, continuous assessment and school food programme. The reasons for the implementation disorder in the rural villages became clear during the course of the documentary reviews (UBEC, 2014; 2011; NAUPEB, 2006).

The choice of qualitative interviews was appropriate for this study because of the "desire to hear from people directly how they interpret their experiences" (Heyl, 2001, p. 370). The process of gathering or eliciting information through a face-to-face approach to ascertain or verify opinion or belief relevant to fill a gap in knowledge is considered efficacious in qualitative research (Dunn, 2010). This understanding guided the researchers using semi-structured interview to elicit facts from twenty bureaucrats in charge of UBE implementation in two local education districts in two geo-political zones of the federation (North-Central and South-South region). The semi-structured interviews helped the researchers to elicit and analyse the bureaucrats' stories, actions, intentions, and perspectives of implementing the policy on implementation and (Cresswell, 2013; Bell, 2010; Patton, 2012, p. 341; Heyl, 2001).

**Table 1: Distribution of the Study Participants**

Key personnel interviewed	Number interviewed
LGEA:	
Executive Secretary (Technical Services)	4
Head of Finance and Administration	4
Head of Research and Statistics	4
Head of Mobilisation	4
Teacher Supervisors and School Inspectors	4

### **Data Analysis**

As stated in the above paragraph, the lead author interviewed 20 local education administrators in two rural areas in two geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. With support of the two other researchers, the transcription was critically examined and analysed thematically and iteratively the responses of the interviewees to the UBE policy implementation, to unveil factors that shaped the effectiveness of the policy implementation. The interview exposed how policy ideas and expectations were disseminated, interpreted and implemented among the bureaucrats responsible for policy implementation and the equitable access to the UBE programme in the Nigerian context, including rural village areas. The method of analysis aligns with understanding of the three critical processes of qualitative research methodology: preparing and organising the data; coding and recording, and the representing the data (Cresswell, 2013; Flick, 2014).



## Findings

The findings of this study were based on a document analysis and interviews. The two research questions guided the investigation of management of the UBE implementation in the rural the regional areas of Nigeria. The UBE documentary review mentioned in the second paragraph of research design affirmed the disorderliness or the inconsistency in the implementation of basic education in the rural villages in the two regional areas of the study. The documents exposed the disparity between urban and rural area in the implementation of basic education It addressed the needs of effective management of basic education in those regions for equitable access to educational opportunities for school-aged children in the rural villages in Nigeria.

Figure 2 below show the two regional zones of the study. There are six states in each regional area and a total of 12 states and 225 local districts in the two regions. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the regions and their local districts. As stated above, the study investigated two rural districts in each of the regional areas. The choice of the districts was based on their remoteness and the disfranchisement of school-aged children from accessing educational opportunities in those rural villages. For confidentiality, the two rural areas investigated in the study are represented with acronyms of NC and SS.



**Figure 2: Map of Nigeria, Bolaji, S.D. (2014) Intent to Action: Overcoming Barriers to Universal Basic Education Policy Implementation in Nigeria, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.**

**Table 2**

NC State	Local districts	SS State	Local district
Kogi State	21	Akwa Ibom	31
Kwara State	16	Bayelsa	08
Benue State	23	Delta	25
Taraba State	16	Edo	18
Plateau State	17	Rivers	23
Niger State	25	Cross Rivers	18

**Source: Education districts Bolaji, S.D. (2014) Intent to Action: Overcoming Barriers to Universal Basic Education Policy Implementation in Nigeria, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.**

As seen in table 1, there were 10 participants interviewed in the study across the two regions. The participants examined for the study were based on their roles and responsibilities stated in Figure 1. At the local government level, also known as the district level (Figure 1), the bureaucratic structure of basic education implementation included the executive secretary (ES), who oversaw

the implementation processes and to whom all units and departmental heads were answerable. The ES was a political position and the units were headed by the bureaucrats— otherwise known as career officers. The district bureaucrats served as the heads of departments in the following sections: Social Mobilisation; Planning, Research and Statistics; School Services; and Finance and Administration. The bureaucrats were responsible for implementing basic education at the district level. They were the communication channel for the state-level bureaucracy because they were closer to the grassroots—they were the link between the state and schools in each district. This administrative structure was typical to what operated in all 227 local districts that comprise the two regions and in all the 774 of Nigeria.

The general reflection of the participants across the two regions provided insights regarding the system level of policy implementation, which underpinned Diefenbach's (2013) management hypothesis that the career managers did have the required knowledge of policy initiative and roles in implementing government decisions. Similarly, Ejere's (2011) view is that policy managers are in a position to implement policy decisions. The analysed data also established that the managers understand the process through which UBE policy evolved, as well as the procedure for successive policy implementation and substantial knowledge of the UBE policy issue. The key issues that emerged from the analysed data were lack of willpower and lack of infrastructural facilities.

The 20 participants interviewed in the two regions had a common understanding of the issues affecting the implementation of basic education in the rural villages. The bureaucrats agreed that education was at an undesirable standard in the rural areas, and that despite government intervention, lack of control and monitoring, inadequate supervision, unequal access to education, and lack of infrastructure facilities and instructional materials. Other key factors perceived as constraints included issues of administrative consonance, political instability and paucity of funds. The participants also believed that the constitutional stipulation of education and lack of an implementation body for the education sector were issues affecting education before 1999 persist in the post implementation. Each participant's description of education revealed their in-depth of knowledge of the challenges to basic education UBE in the rural villages. The views of the participants in NC and SS were helpful in understanding the level of decline witnessed before the government intervention. The views of 10 SS Participants capture the shared understanding of the issues of administrative and political consonance in the management of education in the rural villages. According to SS participants:

*The challenge of administrative consonance as the major factor responsible for the decline in the state of education, with education policies often conceived as a political programme of the political party in power. This participant stated that the present policy on basic education was also politically driven. The political motive to implement policies on education was responsible for making policies on education unsuccessful.*  
(SS Participants)

The view of SS9 was crucial to understand the impact of political instability as a problem affecting UBE. According to the participant, the in the political institution in Nigeria has made implementation of education initiative problematic or not encouraging because priorities of the politicians were not in consonance with educational administration in the rural villages—they focused more on ventures that would bring in monetary gains for the government. The lack of willpower towards UBE implementation in the rural villages represents the key theme that emerged from the participants interviewed in the two regions of the federation.

### **Lack of Willpower**

One of the key issues that emerged from the analysed data across the two geo-political zones in Nigeria was the issue of government paying “lip-service” to education. The one commonality among the 20 participants was the perceived political undertone in the management of the UBE in the rural communities. The participants asserted that politicians believe that keeping young people or school-aged children in the villages or rural communities uneducated has political gain. According to participant in NC:

*Keeping uneducated population in villages... has political gains for the politicians... the issue of education problem lies with the governor... the priority and political will of the governor. We were in... recently and what we saw was an eyesore... dilapidated classroom... environment not conducive for learning and the governor would rather use the counterpart funds to oil their political wheels and political patronages instead of implementing the UBE policy. This action is detrimental to the development of education. (NC, participant)*

The participants in the South-South (SS) stressed the adverse effect of politics in UBE program in the region. In summary, the view of the participants is captured as follows:

*Politics is affecting us. For instance, when teachers are transferred to where they are most needed, they will contact people on the corridor of power [and] ... find their way back to the town which is already overstaffed, at the expense of rural areas which are short staffed. (SS, Participant)*

The overarching submission by the participants across the two regional areas was that political factors were responsible for the ineffectiveness in the implementation in the rural communities. According to the participants, political factors were in the form of overbearing influence of politicians in the appointment of career officers, undue favouritism in the promotion of staffs, allocation of teachers to remote villages and some unethical practices in the implementation of UBE in the regional areas. The reflection of the 20 managers has demonstrated the need for efficient management devoid of politics in implementing UBE policy in rural areas to be able to positively influence the lives of the school-age children on those regions.

### **Infrastructural facilities**

From the documentary evidence, the second key finding in the study was the lack of infrastructural facilities that could drive teaching and learning engagement. The analysed documents showed that, between 1999 and 2011, significant achievements were made in the provision of facilities (see table 1) to enable favourable learning outcomes in cross states and territories. Table 1 presents the areas of policy implementation in terms of infrastructure development and instructional materials in the urban cities not in the rural or villages. This is a clear indication that the villages are deliberately left out in the allocation of adequate learning resources. This document affirmed the position of the participants in the two regions that education in the remote villages was really a priority of the government (see NC Participants and SS Participants)

**Table 3: Urban education facilities provided 1999–2011**

Year	Deliverable	Quantity
1999–2011	New classrooms constructed	35,965
1999–2011	Renovated classrooms	57,038
1999–2011	Furniture for students and teachers	1,004,650
1999–2011	Toilets	12,347
1999–2011	Boreholes	825
1999–2011	Instructional materials	77,570,540

**Source: Adapted from the UBEC Report (2011, p. 12) submitted to the presidential task team on education.**

According to the interviewees, the developments in the provision of facilities were in the urban cities not the regional or rural areas where such facilities are needed. According to the NC participant:

*The enrolment is not poor, there are crowds in the classes and the infrastructures are not there. Please try to go round to see things yourself—you will see what we are talking about. You can imagine a building that came down just within two days of completion. Thank God it was a weekend ... there would have been casualties. (NC, participant)*

Excellent school facilities are basic ingredients for good education programs and are essential to achieving targets and improving literacy (Olatunya, et al. 2014; McGowan, 2007). However, the lack of facilities and lack of record of what is being spent on rural villages may indicate that policies in Nigeria often fail before implementation, not due to managerial operations.

## Discussion

The analysed data has shown that political will and insufficient facilities are the factors hindering the effectiveness of the management of the education policy implementation in Nigerian rural schooling contexts. The common problem facing developing countries is the issue of policy implementation (Okoroma, 2006; Makinde, 2005; Anderson, 2011). The data have attributed the poor management of the basic education program to the lack of political will. This outcome has deepened the researchers' understanding of the impact of political interference on policy implementation. As in many developing countries, policies in Nigeria usually emanate from the political system, rather than the demands of the citizens. This provides insight on why government policies that seek to benefit the public are not devoid of political encumbrances (Bolaji, Campbell-Evans and Gray, 2016; Bolaji, 2014).

According to the participants, political parties in each of the districts have the power to deliberate on the management of policy implementation. For example, the political party in control of SS was different from that of NC. While political control affects policy performance, the state governors seem to lack the political trust to achieve the goals of the UBE programme. According to the analysed data, Nigeria's EFA Development Index is less than 0.8. among the 16 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that are far from achieving the EFA goals. The country's basic education level was ranked 132 of 133 countries surveyed (Ejere, 2011; Jaiyeoba, 2007). The research participants and analysed document revealed that Nigeria has more rural primary-age

children out of school than any other country in the world (UNDP, 2013). Could this be, due to the unwillingness of the governments to implement UBE?

The fact that some schools in the urban, have surplus facilities and others rural villages lack them, is an indicator of poor educational planning in schools. For instance, the failure of the UPE policy of 1955 was a result of the dramatic increase in enrolment in schools that were not supported by a structural mechanism from the government to address issues of overcrowded classrooms and inadequate infrastructure. The UPE policy also left behind numerous school-aged children who could not be enrolled in the schools because of the lack of facilities to accommodate them. The challenges hindering the realisation of the UBE policy objectives are similar to those encountered by the UPE policy of 1955. The UBE policy is well articulated and designed to achieve greater access to, and quality of, basic education throughout Nigeria. It is an achievable program that could eradicate illiteracy among Nigerian school-aged children if well implemented. Achieving this objective is tied to the provision of enabling environment and facilities for meaningful learning engagement as suggested in the data. Jenkin, Frommer & Rubin (2006) and Powell, Davies, Bannister & Macrea (2009) supported the position of the interviewees that policymakers are aware that good implementation structure, good coordination and good communication are essential tools to achieve desired outcomes in any policy intention. This statement aligns with the second research question on the action of the bureaucrats towards UBE implementation. The word action in the study, connote the level of fidelity and communication protocols among the bureaucrats that could impact on policy decisions at the system level of implementation. Diefenbach (2013) model of social and interpersonal relationship in policy implementation guided the interpretation of the researchers in understanding the impact of bureaucrats on the UBE policy implementation. It was evident from the reflection of the bureaucrats that their actions have no positive impact on UBE implementation in the rural areas investigated in the study.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has shown that bureaucrats are government agents that have the capacity to determine the success of any government initiative. Diefenbach (2013) and Klikaer (2013) theory of organisational management that discusses the role of managers in education policy implementation, has deepened researchers understanding of the workings of the government on policy decisions. The two research questions that guided study have provided the overarching understanding why UBE policy implementation in the rural area was a not success story. The questions and the theoretical framework explored for the study enabled the researchers to elicit information on the structure of implementation and the level of fidelity of the bureaucrats towards UBE implementation in the rural setting of Nigeria. The study informed that Willpower within hierarchical structure at the system level of policy implementation and infrastructure deficits are two key issues impacting UBE implementation in the rural areas of the country.

Based on the analysed data, the study has shown that one value of history is to avoid the pitfalls that militated against the previous education policies in the implementation of the UBE program. This study has contributed to the existing understanding of policy initiatives and implementation programs in Nigeria and explored the issues that inhibit effective policy implementation at the system level. The data and analysis that underpins this study has provided the insight on the working of bureaucrats on policy implementation and efficacy of the processes of policy implementation in Nigeria. This study found that the low education participation among school-age children in the villages or rural areas of Nigeria was due to the lack of political will and infrastructural issues.

The following recommendations are essential to address both the bureaucratic and political issues that have made providing access in UBE policy implementation unrealisable:

- (i) Regional management of UBE implementation in the six geo-political zones of the country, against the current centralised system of administration. The regionalisation of UBE administration would facilitate appointment of bureaucrats with skills and knowledge of education administration to head the regions, supported by politicians operating education administration in the states.
- (ii) Community involvement through SBMC (School-Based Management Council) should be encouraged to enable efficient monitoring and supervision of basic education in every locality. This is because the few states that explored using SBMC to assist policy implementation recorded pockets of achievements in UBE implementation (Bolaji, et al, 2016; 2014).
- (iii) Review of education budget at the national level to give priority and transparency to provision of infrastructural facilities to rural areas. The regionalisation of education may offer better managerial outcomes than previous efforts of implementing the UPE and UBE in Nigerian rural schools.

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