

## EVALUATION OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE NEWLY PROPOSED EDUCATION POLICY IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Policy making which entails programmes of action to engender development is a critical aspect of a nation's governance. Communication scholars have posited that the press, amongst its functions, is expected to perform the role of informing, educating, entertaining and persuading the public in that direction. Hence, this study evaluated the media coverage of the newly proposed 12-4 education policy in Nigeria to capture the level of media coverage in terms of the frequency, prominence and depth given to the policy. The study adopted content analysis of some selected newspapers covering February and March 2025 and it was anchored on the framing theory. The population of the study was 216 editions and 158 editions were purposively sampled from the Punch, the Nation, Tribune and Vanguard based on availability. The result of the study revealed that the frequency of reports on the newly proposed education policy in all the newspapers investigated was significantly low with only nine items (5.7%) from the units of analysis examined. The prominence given to the new education policy was also very low. Out of the nine items coded, The Nation (1 item, 4.8%) and Vanguard (1 item, 4.5%) placed the issue on their front pages while others used inside pages. While the depth of treatment given to the issue was equally poor because only one item each featured on full page from the Nation (5%) and Vanguard (4.5%). Others were on half page and less than a quarter pages. It was concluded that the newly proposed system of education has not been given adequate print media coverage. It was recommended that the media should wake up to their responsibilities in order to achieve success in respect to public mobilisation and sensitization for the new policy making and implementation.*

**Keywords:** *New Education System, Media Coverage, Education Policy, & Evaluation*

### INTRODUCTION

The press performs a vital role in the development of any given society (Abimbola 2015 & Adeyemo, 2015). Scholars have posited that the press, among its functions, is expected to perform the role of informing, educating and entertaining the public (Campbell, 2000; Baran, 2002; Bitner, 2005; Branston & Stafford, 2006 cited in Abimbola (2015). Suffice to say that the media are major players in respect to societal

development judging from the crucial functions they perform in the society which are information dissemination on issues of interest, education, entertainment and persuasion of audience for necessary action.

Policy making which entails programmes of action to engender development is a critical aspect of a nation's governance. The policies that are implemented by a country give direction to the development that can be experienced by such country whereby equal opportunities are given to all and the provision of necessary resources. Wallace (1992) avers that the media lie in the centre of existing relationships that appear between many interest groups with an intertwined policy development and implementation which could also be at local or institutional level.

It's important to say that the media are the mid-wives of every policy making and implementation in any nation. The media interact with stakeholders involved in the policy making and implementation. The media inform the public about all that goes on at the background and at the discussion tables before policies are birthed. Input from the public and other stakeholders are also garnered by the media and made such available to the decision makers and the implementers of the policies. Wallace (1992) corroborates this by saying that the media form a major communication channel between the various players and inform the public at large.

Furthermore, Zehra *et al.*, (2023) state that education policy making therefore is a complex process This is because it involves a great deal of efforts and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders such as the parents, the general public, students, the policy makers, educators and the media. Amongst the stakeholders, the focus of this study is the media. Zehra, et al. (2023) submit again that the media play a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy making in various fields, including education.

Adeyinka (1994) in this regard discloses that in every country of the world, there is a close relationship between education and economic development. It is a cyclic process everywhere. According to him, Japan provides a good example of a country that is rich because it has a sound system of education and literate citizens. Japan was also the last country in the world to enter industrial revolution. Once it started, it entered into it with full force and with that Japan happened to be one of the leading countries in the world in the production and exportation of electronic gadgets and different types of vehicles.

For an instance, Japan came out of the Second World War empty and defeated with its territory nearly cut down to half; its overcrowded population was left in despair and hunger; its economic life was paralysed; but because of workable educational policy that was put in place; within the next ten years of tireless efforts Japan was able to recover and became one of the leading economies in the world. This expression underscores the possibility and efficacy of well thought out educational policy for development drives.

However, educational policy can only be fruitful if all stakeholders are fully involved and engaged. According to Odu (2014), under the universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999, there were nine implementation guidelines and strategies to be vigorously pursued to facilitate the realisation of UBE objectives which included public enlightenment and social mobilisation for full community involvement; data collection and analysis; manning, monitoring and evaluation; teachers recruitment, training, retraining, and motivation; infrastructural facilities; enriched curricula, provision of textbooks and materials; and improved funding and management of the entire process.

A cursory look at the implementation guidelines pre-includes the functions of the media in the area of information, education, and persuasion. Public enlightenment and social mobilisation fall within the purview where the media can come in. Also, information dissemination and education as well as persuasion of the public concerning education policy and implementation are the major roles of the media. Zehra *et al.* (2023) assert that media coverage of education policy-making is an essential aspect to consider as this shapes public opinion, influences policymakers' decisions, and leads to changes in education policies. Corroborating this, Michelle and Megan (2007) submit that media and education are social institutions that play central roles in shaping the perceptions, beliefs, values, ideological stances, and arguably even the actions of citizens. Thus, media and education policy making as well as implementation are siamese twins.

Consequently, this study was an attempt to evaluate the performance of the media as part of their social responsibility to keep the public abreast of the on-going events in the environment especially the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria. The study focused on the print media and it evaluated four daily newspapers with at least two of them that have national coverage. The Punch, the Nation, Vanguard and Tribune were chosen for the study based on availability.

#### **THE MEDIA AND EDUCATION POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

The media influence on education policy making has been in the front burner of researches in recent years (Zehra *et al.*, 2023). The media coverage can affect policy making in diverse ways ranging from shaping public opinion, influencing policy makers' decisions and setting policy agenda. This is why Wallace (1992) submits that scholarly accounts in Britain concerning this process appear to have underplayed the role of the media. He adds that although conceptualisation of education policy is a complex process and it has become more sophisticated in recent years but the media still scarcely feature in it. This is to say that role of the press has been underplayed in education policy making.

In contrast, media coverage of education policy making has significant effect on some education policies that were made in some advanced countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America. For instance in America, Zhang & Wildavsky (2009) posit that media coverage greatly helped the 'No Child is Left Behind' Act (NCLB) by shaping public opinion and influencing policy makers' decision regarding the education policy. In the same vein, Cobs (2014) reports that the media coverage of Charter School Programmes in America influenced policy makers' decisions and the public opinion.

Equally, in the United Kingdom, the story of media coverage of education policy also yielded significant results. For example, media coverage of the recent controversy that has to do with the proposed changes in the funding of universities in England significantly influenced public opinion and policymakers' decisions, and this led to a reversal of some of the proposed changes (Archer, 2017). The literature review and the introduction of this study reveal the important place of the media in policy making and implementation.

In addition, Adeyemo (2015) in a study discovers that the newspapers that were understudied i.e the Punch and the Nation had a robust thematic content on education issue. He also reveals that both newspapers had weekly publication on education issues. This portends that the coverage of education issues in the dailies understudied were

frequent and one may expect that a sensitive issue like the proposed policy would have more coverage through the available weekly slots for education issues.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Framing theory**

The framing theory was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974. The concept of framing is related to agenda setting theory but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than a particular topic. It suggests how something is presented to the audience called the frame, influence the choice people make about how to process the information (Odu & Jacobs, 2017).

Framing in the media involves selection, emphasis and exclusion. It means that the media frame news by selecting certain aspects of events, emphasising and elaborating such aspects, while excluding others to achieve certain aims. For instance, according to Abimbola (2012), in reporting a crisis situation, a particular medium may decide to isolate certain aspects of the crisis, say the cause of the crisis, the gladiators in the crisis, the victim of the crisis or the future implication of the crisis; and emphasise any of these aspect by consistently elaborating it in order to create a particular impression in the minds of the audience. Media frames refer to patterns of representation and interpretation of symbols and things that organise a discourse and these enable reporters to sort and package the information effectively for their audience (Vraneski & Richter, 2002 cited in Abimbola, 2012).

Thus, framing was employed as the framework for this study because a major yardstick to measure press performance is how the selected newspapers framed their reports of the new education policy in respect to direction and balance.

## **NIGERIAN PREVIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

The educational systems adopted in Nigeria have moved from one system to another depending on the need to adopt and change them. It is important to consider a brief explanation of some of these systems:

### **THE 8-6-2-3 SYSTEM**

According to Adeyinka (1994), this system of education consisted of 8 years of primary education, 6 years of secondary schooling, and 2 years of Higher School Certificate (HSC) and 3 years of university education. In the early years of colonisation, this was the type of education system that was adopted particularly by the British West African states- Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia. This system was in use till around 1955 when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced in the Western Region. The number of years that were spent in the primary and secondary schools were reduced and hence the introduction of 6-5-2-3 system of education.

### **THE 6-5-2-3 SYSTEM**

This system of education was in practice in the late years of colonisation and the early years of independence. This was also adopted in the British and other Europeans (particularly French) colonial and ex-colonial territories - Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Togo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, etc. The 6-5-2-3 system was common in most part of the country from about 1955 when the UPE was introduced in the Western region and this was in place till the introduction of a new National Policy of Education in 1977. The 6-3-3-4 system was introduced by the new policy but it did not take effect until September 1981.

### **THE 6-3-3-4 SYSTEM**

The 6-3-3-4 system of education emphasised that students were expected to spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in the junior secondary school, 3 years in the senior secondary school and 4 years in the university. This system was a leaf borrowed from Asia- Japan and the United States of America. The focus of this system of education is self-employment. It was intended that the product of such system would be fully armed with necessary skills to enable them set up their own business or project instead of looking for jobs after graduation.

Meanwhile, in 1999 there was a little adjustment made in which the 6 years of primary school was merged with the first 3 years of the secondary school to form 9 years of Basic school and some subjects were also introduced. Moreover, in the senior secondary school, some trade subjects were introduced to enhance self-reliance and reduce unemployment among school graduates.

### **THE NEWLY PROPOSED 12-4 SYSTEM**

The newly proposed policy of 12-4 which is to replace the 9-3-4 system was recently announced by the Minister of Education Dr. Tunji Alausa on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 at an extraordinary National Council on Education meant for 2025. The NEC is the highest policy making body in the education sector in Nigeria (Agbajileke, 2025).

Moreover, the new policy among other things aims at reducing drop-out rates by eliminating financial and systemic barriers that currently prevent students from completing secondary education; the 12 years will ensure a standardised curriculum that is uniformly implemented throughout the country; it will also facilitate early exposure to vocationally and entrepreneurial skill to prepare students for higher learning and employment; the students will be exposed to extended period of compulsory education which will make them better equipped with relevant skills for work life; the system will also reduce child labour and other social vices arising from premature school dropouts; provision of uninterrupted learning up to the age of 16 which is now the minimum benchmark for tertiary education admission; and to align with the universal best practices in education (Agbajileke, 2025).

A careful evaluation of the above systems of education would suggest that the policy makers aimed at improving the quality of products of the education systems. The first and the second systems of education have been criticised by education scholars for the fact that they only tended to produce graduates who at the end of the day looked for white collar jobs and they were not able to employ themselves. Unlike the 6-3-3-4 system of education that emphasised pragmatism and possibly the newly proposed system that would focus more on self-reliance and entrepreneurship. It is expedient therefore that the media give necessary promotion and mobilisation in the course of policy planning and implementation. Corroborating the importance of the media, Zehra *et al.* (2023) aver that the media can serve as a watchdog in highlighting areas of concerns or success in education policies, and also providing a platform for the public to voice their opinions and concerns about such policies.

### **THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Within the few days of the announcement of the change from 6-3-3-4 system of education to 12-4 system, educators and researchers as well as other stakeholders have been lending their voices to highlight some of the possible challenges that the new policy might likely confront. These problems according to the stakeholders include: lack of qualified teachers, funding, infrastructure, among others. However, little

attention has been given to the problem of inadequate information and education functions of the media. Undoubtedly, the media are crucial players in education policy making and policy implementation. It is against this backdrop that this paper investigated the extent of the media coverage of the newly proposed policy of education. This is a formative evaluation of the media coverage of the performance of the media bearing in mind that the introduction of the policy is still fresh but in the long run the research will form part of the basis for summative evaluation of the new education policy when eventually implemented.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to evaluate the media coverage of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria. The specific objectives included:

- i. To examine the frequency of media coverage of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria.
- ii. To investigate the prominence of the media coverage of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria.
- iii. To ascertain the depth of the media treatment of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What is the frequency of media coverage given to the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the prominence given by the media to the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?
- iii. What is the depth of the media treatment of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative research design in collecting relevant data. Specifically, content analysis was used to study the contents of the selected newspapers during the period of investigation. The population of the study was 216 editions and 158 editions were purposively sampled from the Punch, the Nation, Tribune and Vanguard based on availability covering the period between 6<sup>th</sup> to 28th February and March 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> 2025. The choice of the newspapers was also subject to the availability of the newspapers. However, at least two of the newspapers were national in outlook. The units of analysis included news stories, feature articles, editorials comments, cartoons, opinion articles, text messages to the editor, and pictures. Issues relating to the newly proposed system of education were accessed for analyses. The categories of analysis also included frequency of reports, prominence of reports and depth of treatments of reports. Moreover, quantitative data were presented in tables of frequency count and simple percentages, and a discussion and interpretation of the data followed each table with its accompanying figures, based on each research question.

### DATA ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Analysis of available and unavailable editions of the newspapers used

SN	Newspaper	February Editions		March Editions		Total	
		Available	Not	Available	Not	Available	Not

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		Copies	Available Copies	Copies	Available Copies	in Feb. & March	Available in Feb. & March
1.	The Punch	22	1	18	13	40	14
2.	The Nation	21	2	20	11	41	13
3.	Tribune	23	-	14	17	37	17
4.	Vanguard	22	1	18	13	40	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>58</b>

The total edition between 6<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> Feb. and 1<sup>st</sup> -31<sup>st</sup> March was 216 copies but for unavailability of some copies, the researchers used 158 (73.15%) copies which was still a good number to work with.

Research Question 1: What is the frequency of media coverage given to the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?

Table 2: Frequency of Media Coverage of the newly Proposed Education Policy in Nigeria

Newspaper	February 2025	March 2025	Total
The Punch	1 (4.5%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (7.5%)
The Nation	3 (14.3%)		3 (14.3%)
Tribune	2 (8.7%)		2 (8.7%)
Vanguard	1 (4.5%)		1 (4.5%)
Total	07 (8.0%)	02 (2.9%)	9 (5.7%)

Source: Content Analysis, April 2025

According to the data in Table 2, out of a total of 9 items that were coded on the newly proposed education system in Nigeria, 3 (7.5%) were from the Punch newspaper, 3 (14.3%) were from the Nation; Tribune newspaper accounted for 2 (8.7%) while Vanguard accounted for 1(4.5%). These data simply show that the Punch and the Nation newspapers had the highest number of coded items on the newly proposed education system in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the prominence given by the media to the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?

Table 3: Prominence given to the Proposed Education Policy in Nigeria

Newspaper	February 2025			March 2025			Total
	Front Page	Inside Page	Back Page	Front Page	Inside Page	Back Page	
The Punch	-	1 (4.5%)	-	-	2(11.1%)	-	3 (7.5%)
The Nation	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	-	-	1 (05%)	-	3 (7.3%)
Tribune	-	2 (8.7%)	-	-	-	-	2 (5.4%)

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Vanguard	1 (4.5%)	-	-	-	-	-	1 (2.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 (2.3%)</b>	<b>4 (4.5%)</b>	-	-	<b>3 (4.3%)</b>		<b>9 (5.7%)</b>

Source: Content Analysis, April 2025

At a glance, the data in Table 3 reveals that out of a total of nine items that were coded on the prominence given to the newly proposed education system in Nigeria, the Punch newspaper had 1 item (4.5%) on the inside page in February and two items (11.1%) on the inside pages in the month of March; the Nation featured three items in the two months under consideration i.e. one item (4.8%) on the front page and one item (4.8%) on the inside pages in February while in March it featured another on the inside page. Also, Tribune newspaper accounted for two items (8.7%) in February only and none in March while Vanguard accounted for only one item (4.5%) which appeared on its front page in February. Moreover, these data depict that the Nation and Vanguard newspapers gave more prominence to the new education policy with placement on their front pages. The Nation and the Punch reported more but only that the Punch reported it more on its inside pages. Also, the Vanguard had the lowest report but the only report was on the front page.

Research Question 3: What is the depth of treatment of the newly proposed education policy in Nigeria?

Table 4: Depth of Treatment of the Proposed Education Policy in Nigeria

Newspaper	February 2025				March 2025				Total
	Full Page	Half Page	Quarter Page	Less Than Quarter Page	Full Page	Half Page	Quarter Page	Less Than Quarter Page	
The Punch	-	-	-	1 (4.5%)	-			2 (11.1%)	3(7.5%)
The Nation	-	1 (4.8%)	-	1 (4.8%)	1(5%)			-	3 (7.3%)
Tribune	-	1 (4.3%)	-	1 (4.3%)	-			-	2 (5.4%)
Vanguard	1 (4.5%)	-	-	-	-			-	1 (2.5%)
Total	-	2 (2.3%)	-	4 (4.5%)	1 (1.4%)			2 (2.8%)	9 (5.7%)

Source: Content Analysis April 2025

Observations from Table 4 shows that out of nine coded items on the depth of treatment given to the newly proposed education system in Nigeria, the Punch had one item (4.5%) on less than a quarter pages in February and two items (11.1%) on less than a quarter pages in March; the Nation had one item on half page (4.8%) and another on less than a quarter pages (4.8%) in February while in March it also had one item (5%) on full page; Tribune had two items, one on half page (4.3%) and another on less than a quarter page (4.3%) in February alone while Vanguard had one item (4.5%) on full

page in February only. These data reveal that the Nation gave more prominence to the newly proposed education system more than any other newspapers while Vanguard also did with fewer reports.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the study shows that frequency of reports on the newly proposed education policy in all the newspapers investigated was significantly low with only nine items from the units of analysis examined between February and March 2025.

Also according to the study, the prominence given to the new education policy was very low. Out of the nine items coded, The Nation and Vanguard newspapers place the issue on their front pages while others used inside pages.

The depth of treatment given to the newly proposed education system was equally poor because only two items from two of the newspapers were on full page while one other was on half page and all other items appeared on less than a quarter page.

Moreso, the problems the new policy may likely be confronted with as expressed from different quarters may not be lack of infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, funding, and a host of others but lack of adequate mobilisation and education of stakeholders. Hence, the success of this new policy even though it is well conceived may be hampered by inadequate sensitisation of all stakeholders especially by the media.

Comparing the results to some other news stories on the pages of the all the papers investigated, it was discovered that political crises in Rivers State and the National Assembly crisis on sexual harassment were treated to a great extent. However, the findings were in contrast with earlier research findings that there were more media reports on education policies in United Kingdom and the United States of America and that the media coverage of education policy making had significant effect on some education policies that were made (Zehra *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, this study has also aptly underscored the framing theory whereby the media are involved in selection, emphasis and exclusion of some issues. It follows that the media frame news by selecting certain aspects of events, emphasising and elaborating such aspects, while excluding others to achieve certain aims. In all the four newspapers studied, there were daily and weekly allocation of space for education issues. However, in spite of these allocations, only a few items on the newly proposed education policy made the contents of the newspapers in respect to education issues

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, this study has provided evidence that the media especially the print media have failed to give adequate media coverage to the newly proposed system of education. It reveals that little attention has been given to the problem of inadequate information and education functions of the media in terms of the frequency of reportage, the prominence, and depth of treatment of the items of coverage in the first two months of the announcement of the proposed education system. This may not help the proposed system of education because of the need for all stakeholders to be properly educated and informed about the benefits and expectations of the system.

It was therefore recommended that the media should wake up to their responsibilities as the watchdog of the society and significant players in shaping public opinion and influencing policy making and implementation in various fields, including education.

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