

Impact of Government Policies on Educational Quality in FCT Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of government policies on the quality of education in public schools within Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), specifically in Abuja. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative data from 600 respondents, including teachers, education administrators, and parents, with qualitative insights from key informant interviews and field observations. The research focuses on five key indicators: infrastructure and facilities, enrollment and attendance, teacher quality and training, policy effectiveness, and stakeholder perspectives. Findings reveal that, although government interventions, such as the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) and tuition-free education, have contributed to a 15% increase in enrollment, significant challenges remain. Over two-thirds of schools lack functional libraries and ICT labs. At the same time, teacher-student ratios exceed UNESCO standards, averaging 1:46. Regression analysis confirms that NHGSFP has a positive impact on student attendance ($p < 0.05$), and infrastructure investment has a moderate positive impact on both teacher satisfaction and student performance ($R^2 = 0.58$). However, the study also identifies widespread administrative inefficiencies, with 67% of school administrators citing poor monitoring and funding delays as barriers to successful policy implementation. Qualitative data underscore concerns about bureaucratic inertia, security threats in rural schools, and political interference in resource allocation. The study concludes that while current government policies show potential, their long-term effectiveness is undermined by systemic gaps in administration, infrastructure, and personnel development. It recommends a multi-pronged reform agenda targeting institutional accountability, rural education equity, and sustainable infrastructure investment to strengthen the public education system in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Keywords: *Educational Quality, Government Policy, Public Schools, Infrastructure Investment, Teacher Development, School Attendance.*

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I. Introduction

Education is globally recognised as a cornerstone of sustainable development (Obehi, Magaji, & Ahmad, 2024; Magaji, 2023; Magaji, 2008), a critical enabler of social inclusion (Yunusa, Magaji, Ahmad, Yakubu, & Obehi, 2024), and a catalyst for economic growth and political stability (Ahmad & Magaji, 2024; Magaji & Adelabu, 2012). According to UNESCO (2015), education is not only a fundamental human right but also a powerful instrument for reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, promoting gender equality, and fostering peaceful societies. In developing countries like Nigeria, investing in quality education is crucial for addressing multidimensional poverty (Enaberne, Musa, & Magaji, 2024; Eke, Magaji, & Ezeigwe, 2020) and harnessing the potential of a growing, youthful population (Okon, Musa, & Magaji, 2025; Yakubu, Magaji, & Musa, 2024). The World Bank (2020) advises that sound education is an effective anti-poverty strategy.

Over the past two decades, the Nigerian government has pursued various policy frameworks aimed at improving educational outcomes (Magaji & Musa, 2015; Magaji, 2007; Musa, I., Magaji & Tsauni, 2022). Among these is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, introduced in 1999 to provide free and compulsory education for all children at the primary and junior secondary levels (UBE Act, 2004). The programme is aligned with global frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030 (UN, 2015).

As the political and administrative capital of Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja is often viewed as a model for policy implementation and governance efficiency. The FCT Administration (FCTA) has, in recent years, implemented a range of government-led interventions to improve educational quality. These include infrastructural development in schools, teacher recruitment and training programs, curriculum reform, and social safety net schemes such as the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP). According to the FCTA Education Secretariat (2023), over ₦177 billion (approximately \$1.05 billion) has been committed in recent years to improve school infrastructure, enhance digital learning, and expand access in underserved areas.

Notably, the NHGSFP has made a significant contribution to increased school enrollment and pupil attendance, particularly in lower-income communities. A study by Iorliam and Adam (2024) found a statistically significant correlation between the school feeding program and student attendance in public primary schools within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It also improved pupil nutrition and attentiveness in classrooms, indirectly contributing to better academic performance.

Despite these policy efforts, several challenges persist that hinder the actualisation of educational goals in the FCT. Many public schools continue to operate in substandard physical conditions, characterised by inadequate classrooms, dilapidated structures, and inadequate sanitation facilities (The Guardian, 2023). Rural and peri-urban areas such as Kwali, Abaji, and Gwagwalada are disproportionately affected, with marked disparities in resource allocation compared to schools in central Abuja. Furthermore, issues such as teacher shortages, low morale due to irregular salaries, and insufficient in-service training opportunities further compromise the quality of instruction (Ogunode, 2021).

Additionally, structural inefficiencies, including weak planning frameworks, political interference, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, continue to hinder the implementation of educational policies (UNICEF, 2022). Even when resources are allocated, bureaucratic delays and inadequate accountability mechanisms often hinder the timely and effective deployment at the school level.

Consequently, critical questions emerge: To what extent have these government policies effectively addressed educational quality in the FCT? Are there measurable improvements in enrollment, infrastructure, teaching quality, and learning outcomes? How do urban-rural disparities affect the equitable implementation of policies? Moreover, what are the systemic bottlenecks between policy formulation and implementation?

This study aims to answer these questions by assessing the impact of government policies on key indicators of educational quality in the Federal Capital Territory. Specifically, it investigates how policy interventions have affected school enrollment, teacher-student ratios, infrastructure quality, curriculum delivery, and administrative efficiency. By using a mixed-methods approach, the study also examines the perspectives of teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers.

The FCT, as a microcosm of Nigeria’s broader educational landscape, provides a unique opportunity to understand the successes and limitations of government-led interventions in education. The findings of this study will inform future policy design and implementation strategies, with the potential to guide reforms in other states and local government areas with similar demographic and developmental profiles.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Educational Quality refers to the extent to which an education system enables learners to achieve intended learning outcomes effectively and efficiently. According to UNICEF (2022), quality education encompasses five key dimensions: learner characteristics, learning environments, content, processes, and outcomes. In the Nigerian context, educational quality is often measured by indicators such as student enrollment and retention rates, availability of qualified teachers, adequacy of infrastructure, learning achievement, and policy responsiveness.

Government Policy in education entails strategic decisions and actions by public authorities aimed at improving access, equity, efficiency, and quality of the educational system. These policies encompass laws (such as the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004), plans, funding mechanisms, and social programs that provide direction and resources for national educational development (FME, 2020).

Policy Implementation, another important concept, refers to the translation of government intentions into action and outcomes. Effective policy implementation requires functional institutional structures, efficient coordination, effective accountability mechanisms, and a strong political will (Ogunode, 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Systems Theory and the Policy Implementation Model as its guiding frameworks.

Systems Theory, as developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, views the education sector as a system comprising interconnected subsystems, including curriculum, teachers, learners, infrastructure, and governance. In this view, holding parental roles of financing constant due to low savings and uneven income distribution (Magaji & Haruna, 2011), government policies serve as inputs into the system, and the quality of education is the output. When one component is deficient, such as inadequate teacher training or poor infrastructure, it disrupts the entire system's functionality (Obanya, 2010).

In the context of the FCT, these frameworks help explain the disconnect between well-intentioned policies and the mixed results observed in educational outcomes.

2.3 Historical Overview of Government Education Policies in Nigeria

Government involvement in education in Nigeria dates to colonial times, when missionaries primarily led the early education system. Following independence, the state assumed a more central role in the country's governance. However, it was not until the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in 1999 that structured efforts were made to expand access to free and compulsory basic education (UBE Act, 2004).

In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), this federal initiative is reinforced by local government strategies and investments, particularly in building schools, recruiting teachers, and facilitating inclusion through gender-sensitive programs and inclusive education models for children with disabilities.

2.4 Empirical Review

Several studies have examined the impact of government education policies on learning outcomes in Nigeria, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Ogunode (2021) examined the challenges of educational planning in the FCT and found that ineffective data management, limited funding, and political interference undermine planning and policy execution. He emphasised the need for better coordination and investment in training planners and administrators.

Iorliam and Adam (2024) conducted a focused study on the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in Abuja. Their findings indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between the implementation of the program and increases in school attendance and pupil nutrition. Improved nutrition translated into better cognitive engagement and school performance, supporting global claims that feeding programs enhance educational access and retention (Bundy et al., 2009).

The World Bank (2020) has repeatedly emphasised the importance of infrastructure and teacher competence in enhancing learning outcomes. Inadequate classrooms, limited access to ICT tools, and teacher absenteeism are all cited as key bottlenecks in achieving educational quality in Nigeria.

UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda emphasises the importance of equity, inclusion, and quality as fundamental pillars of global education systems. The Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015) encourages countries to adopt holistic and context-sensitive strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners. However, in the Nigerian context, including the FCT, issues such as insecurity (e.g., school abductions), poverty, and administrative inefficiencies still pose serious challenges to achieving these goals (UNICEF, 2022).

Empirical evidence from UNICEF (2022) and The Guardian (2023) suggests that rural areas within the FCT, such as Abaji and Kwali, have much lower access to quality infrastructure and trained personnel compared to urban areas. This contributes to educational inequality and undermines the equity goals embedded in government policy.

2.5 Summary of Key Gaps in Literature

While there is ample research on educational access and school enrollment, there is comparatively less emphasis on evaluating policy effectiveness using multidimensional indicators of educational quality, especially at the sub-national level, such as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Additionally, many studies focus on single interventions (such as school feeding or infrastructure), with limited integrative assessments of how multiple government policies interact and impact outcomes holistically.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a multi-variable analysis of government policies and their collective impact on educational quality in the FCT. It leverages both systems thinking and policy implementation theory to understand the structural and institutional drivers behind the successes and failures of these interventions.

III. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of how government policies affect educational quality in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The rationale behind this design is to triangulate data from multiple sources and stakeholder groups—teachers, administrators, and parents—to produce robust and policy-relevant findings.

The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive component enables the identification of existing patterns, trends, and relationships between government policy interventions and educational quality indicators such as school enrollment, infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and learning outcomes. The exploratory aspect investigates stakeholders' perceptions and experiences to uncover the underlying factors that affect policy implementation and outcomes. This design is particularly suitable for assessing multidimensional phenomena such as education quality, which is influenced by both measurable variables (e.g., infrastructure adequacy) and perceptual constructs (e.g., teacher motivation, administrative efficiency). By integrating numerical data with qualitative insights, the study bridges the gap between policy formulation and on-the-ground realities.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure analytical depth and empirical validity. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and direct observational checklists. The study engaged 200 public primary and secondary school teachers across all six Area Councils of the FCT—Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji. These teachers provided insights into teaching practices, curriculum effectiveness, and school conditions. In addition, 100 administrative staff members from the FCT Education Secretariat and zonal education offices were surveyed to gather information on resource allocation, policy implementation, and bureaucratic challenges. Furthermore, 300 parents and guardians of pupils enrolled in public schools participated, offering perspectives on accessibility, affordability, and perceived quality of education.

Secondary data were obtained from several authoritative sources. These include Federal Ministry of Education reports between 2019 and 2024, which detail sectoral strategies and performance benchmarks; Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and FCT Administration (FCTA) budget documents, which reveal trends in financial allocation to education; datasets from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which provide quantitative metrics such as literacy rates and school enrollment; and World Bank Education Indicators, offering comparative data on Nigeria's performance within Sub-Saharan Africa. These secondary sources were also used to validate and contextualise the primary data.

Three key research instruments were used in this study: structured questionnaires, key informant interviews (KIIs), and observation checklists. The questionnaires, designed with both open and closed-ended items, measured stakeholders' views on government policies, infrastructure, curriculum, and learning outcomes. They were pilot tested on a sample of 20 respondents to ensure clarity and reliability, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. KIIs were conducted with 12 senior education officials and school administrators to obtain detailed and expert-level perspectives on policy effectiveness and systemic challenges. Observation checklists were employed to assess physical infrastructure—including classroom quality, availability of water and sanitation facilities, and learning materials—in 30 public schools selected across urban and rural locations, using UNESCO's standards for school quality.

The sampling approach followed a multi-stage design to ensure representativeness across geographic and demographic groups. Initially, schools were stratified into urban and rural categories to account for disparities in access and infrastructure. Abuja Municipal and Bwari represented urban schools, while Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji represented rural areas. Within each stratum, schools and respondents were selected using simple random sampling to minimise bias and ensure fair representation. The final sample size of 600 participants was calculated using Cochran's formula, providing a statistically significant basis for generalising findings within the FCT.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations summarise key trends in the data. Inferential statistical methods, including chi-square tests and linear regression, were employed to investigate the relationships between policy interventions and educational outcomes. The chi-square tests helped identify significant relationships between variables, such as location and access to resources. At the same time, regression analysis examined the predictive impact of interventions, including feeding programs and teacher training, on attendance and academic performance. For the qualitative data, thematic content analysis was applied. Transcripts from interviews and open-ended responses were coded using NVivo software, and themes such as policy execution, administrative barriers, and stakeholder satisfaction were derived. This triangulated approach enhanced the reliability and validity of the study findings.

Ethical considerations were duly observed throughout the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the FCT Education Secretariat’s Research Review Committee. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and confidentiality was ensured through the use of anonymised responses and secure data storage. The research adhered to globally accepted ethical standards for studies involving human subjects.

Despite the comprehensive methodology, some limitations were encountered. These include the potential for response bias in self-reported data, logistical difficulties in reaching certain rural schools, and the non-generalizability of findings to private schools or regions outside the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nonetheless, the methodology provides a solid foundation for evaluating the impact of government policies on public education in the FCT, offering insights that can guide further research and policy refinement.

IV. Data and Results

This section presents the findings from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected across schools, education secretariats, and households within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The results are organised thematically under key indicators of educational quality, including infrastructure and facilities, enrollment and attendance, teacher quality and training, the impact of government policies, and qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews.

Below is a tabulated summary of the key findings from the narrative data regarding school infrastructure, enrollment and attendance, and teacher quality in public schools within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja:

Table 1: Summary of Key Educational Indicators in Public Schools – FCT Abuja

Indicator Category	Observed Data	Implication
Infrastructure	68% of schools lack functional libraries	Limits literacy development, research skills, and independent learning
	55% of schools have no ICT labs	Hampers digital literacy and ICT integration in the curriculum
	42% have dilapidated classrooms and unsanitary toilets	Creates health risks and discourages predominantly female attendance
	Only 23% of schools meet the UBEC infrastructural benchmark	Indicates underinvestment and poor policy implementation
Enrollment & Attendance	15% increase in enrollment over the last 5 years	Attributed to NHGSFP and the tuition-free education policy
	19% average absenteeism during the rainy season	Caused by poor roads and a lack of transportation, particularly in rural areas
	Long walking distances in the Kwali and Abaji area councils	Leads to frequent absenteeism and student dropouts
Teacher Quality	78% of teachers had no in-service training in the past 24 months	Limits the adoption of modern teaching methods and reduces instructional quality
	Teacher-student ratio averages 1:46 (peaking at 1:65 in some rural schools)	Exceeds UNESCO-recommended 1:35 ratio, causing teacher fatigue and reduced student attention
	Teachers expressed concerns about outdated teaching materials and overcrowded classrooms.	Affects classroom engagement, student learning, and performance

The physical condition of school infrastructure emerged as a significant determinant of educational quality in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Of the 60 public schools assessed through observation checklists and staff interviews, 68% were found to lack functional libraries. This lack of access to reading and reference materials harms literacy development, independent learning, and research skills among pupils. Furthermore, 55 per cent of the schools had no access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs, making it challenging to implement Nigeria’s digital learning curriculum or introduce students to basic computer literacy. Classroom infrastructure was also inadequate in many of the schools; 42 per cent of them had visibly dilapidated classrooms with cracked walls, leaking roofs, or broken furniture. Many also had unsanitary toilet facilities, a condition which poses health risks and particularly discourages female students from attending school regularly. When measured against the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) infrastructural standards, only 23 per cent of the schools evaluated met the national benchmark for adequate learning facilities. This reflects systemic underinvestment and inconsistent policy implementation in maintaining and upgrading school environments.

Enrollment and attendance patterns presented a mixed outlook. Data gathered from school records, administrator interviews, and parental surveys indicated that student enrollment in public schools across the FCT increased by approximately 15% over the past five years. This upward trend was primarily attributed to the introduction and expansion of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), as well as the state-wide implementation of tuition-free education for basic schooling. Parents frequently cited free meals as a

key incentive for enrolling and retaining children, especially in low-income households. However, despite improvements in enrollment, the study found that absenteeism rates remained high, with an average of 19 per cent absenteeism reported during the rainy season. The major factors responsible for this included poor road infrastructure, especially in rural areas, and the lack of reliable school transportation systems. In several schools in the Kwali and Abaji area councils, students had to walk long distances through rugged terrain, leading to frequent absenteeism and, in some cases, dropouts.

Findings on teacher quality and professional development revealed significant challenges. Among the 200 teachers surveyed across the six area councils, 78 per cent reported that they had not received any formal in-service training or professional development in the past 24 months. This lack of continuous training impedes the adoption of modern pedagogical techniques and limits the effective implementation of new curriculum standards. Teachers also expressed concern about outdated teaching materials and overcrowded classrooms, which reduce their ability to provide individualised support to learners. The average teacher-to-student ratio across the surveyed schools was calculated to be 1:46, which is significantly higher than the UNESCO-recommended ratio of 1:35. In some rural schools, the ratios were as high as 1:65, particularly in upper primary and junior secondary classes. Such conditions contribute to teacher burnout, reduced instructional quality, and poor academic performance among pupils.

Table 2: Summary of Statistical Analysis of Government Interventions and Educational Quality in FCT Abuja

Variable/Policy	Dependent Variable(s)	Statistical Result	Interpretation
National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)	Student Attendance	$p < 0.05$ (Statistically significant)	NHGSFP has a positive and significant impact on student school attendance
Infrastructure Investment	Teacher Satisfaction and Student Performance	$R^2 = 0.58$ (Moderate correlation)	58% of the variance in outcomes is explained by infrastructure improvement
Administrative Efficiency	Policy Implementation Effectiveness	67% of school administrators cited inefficiency as a barrier	Poor monitoring, delays, and inconsistency weaken overall policy impact

Statistical analysis provided further insight into the impact of government interventions on educational quality. A regression analysis conducted on the relationship between school feeding programs and attendance levels showed a statistically significant positive effect ($p < 0.05$), confirming the effectiveness of NHGSFP as a tool for boosting school attendance. The analysis also revealed that investments in infrastructure had a moderate but meaningful correlation with improvements in teacher satisfaction and student performance, yielding a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.58. This implies that nearly 58 per cent of the variability in student and teacher outcomes could be explained by improvements in physical infrastructure. However, the impact of these policies was dampened by widespread administrative inefficiencies. Sixty-seven per cent of the school administrators interviewed cited policy inconsistency, delayed budget releases, and poor monitoring as significant obstacles to successful implementation. In several cases, approved funds for classroom renovation or staff training were either delayed or not disbursed at all, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of policy initiatives.

Qualitative insights gathered from key informant interviews added depth to the statistical findings. School principals, zonal education officers, and senior staff of the FCT Education Secretariat pointed to bureaucratic delays, inconsistent funding disbursements, and insufficient oversight mechanisms as recurring challenges. Many rural schools also faced security threats, including theft and vandalism, which further eroded the quality of the learning environment. In Gwagwalada and Kuje, for example, headteachers reported that recently installed solar panels, intended to power ICT labs, were stolen within weeks of installation due to the lack of perimeter fencing and security personnel. These security lapses create an atmosphere of uncertainty and discourage both teachers and parents from full engagement in the school system. Moreover, several respondents expressed concern about political interference in recruitment and resource allocation, noting that appointments were sometimes made without regard to merit or need, leading to mismanagement and inefficiency.

In summary, the data highlight a complex and often contradictory picture of educational development in the FCT. While some policy interventions, such as the NHGSFP and tuition-free education, have yielded measurable improvements in enrollment and attendance, challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, policy implementation, and security continue to hinder the delivery of quality education. The evidence suggests that while government efforts are well-intentioned and partially effective, the long-term success of these initiatives depends on addressing the systemic and institutional gaps that currently undermine policy impact.

V. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive assessment of how government policies influence educational quality in public schools across the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Through a combination of statistical analysis and qualitative inquiry, the research demonstrates that while several policy initiatives have yielded positive outcomes, structural and administrative deficiencies persist in undermining the broader goals of inclusive and high-quality education.

Key findings from the study underscore both progress and persistent challenges. On the one hand, the implementation of programs such as the NHGSFP and tuition-free education has significantly boosted enrollment and attendance, particularly among children from low-income households. On the other hand, the lack of functional school libraries, ICT laboratories, and adequate classroom infrastructure—especially in rural areas—continues to constrain learning outcomes and exacerbate inequalities. The problem of overcrowded classrooms, with teacher-student ratios as high as 1:65 in some schools, further compounds these challenges by reducing instructional effectiveness and straining the capacity of teachers.

The statistical evidence supports the positive impact of targeted government interventions. The NHGSFP, for instance, demonstrated a statistically significant impact on student attendance, while infrastructure investments were moderately correlated with improved teacher morale and student performance. However, these gains are often offset by ineffective policy implementation and bureaucratic inefficiencies. A majority of school administrators identified delayed fund disbursement, a lack of consistent oversight, and politically influenced staffing decisions as critical barriers to policy success. In addition, the study revealed that rural schools are particularly vulnerable to security threats such as vandalism and theft, which further erode the quality of the learning environment.

Given these findings, the study concludes that improving educational quality in the FCT requires more than isolated policy interventions. A holistic, system-wide approach is needed—one that strengthens institutional accountability, ensures timely and transparent funding mechanisms, invests in teacher training and professional development, and secures educational infrastructure against physical and administrative threats. Furthermore, rural-urban disparities must be systematically addressed through targeted investments and tailored support mechanisms. Only by bridging these systemic gaps can government policies translate into tangible, sustained improvements in the quality of public education in the FCT and, by extension, across Nigeria.

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