

Educational Policy Implementation Gaps and Student Dropout Rates in Public Secondary Schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Education policy implementation is globally recognised as critical to educational quality and retention, yet in many sub-Saharan African contexts including Kaduna State, Nigeria the gap between policy formulation and actual delivery remains a persistent challenge. While dropout rates in the State remain among the highest in the North-West geopolitical zone, limited research has systematically examined how specific implementation failures directly drive student attrition. This study assessed the extent of educational policy implementation gaps and their relationship with student dropout rates in public secondary schools in Kaduna State. Methods: The study employed a descriptive correlational research design. The population comprised all public secondary education stakeholders' administrators, teachers, students, and policymakers totalling 365,492 individuals across the State. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample determination formula, 384 participants were selected through a multistage sampling procedure: Kaduna North and Kaduna South Educational Zones were purposively selected; three Local Government Areas were randomly chosen from each zone; and proportionate stratified sampling was used to select respondents across stakeholder categories. Data were collected using two validated instruments: The Educational Policy Implementation Rating Scale Questionnaire (EPIRSQ) and the Student Dropout Rate Proforma Form (SDRPF). Reliability coefficients, established via the test-retest method and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC), were 0.75 and 0.73 respectively. Data analysis included descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that inadequate funding ($x = 4.33$), delayed release of funds ($x = 4.27$), corruption and diversion of resources ($x = 4.21$), and exclusion of implementers from policy design ($x = 4.07$), were the most severe implementation barriers, all

rated at High to Very High Extent. The overall implementation index was 4.14, confirming systemic gaps. A significant negative relationship was established between quality of policy implementation and dropout rates ($r=-0.39$, $p=0.020$) as implementation quality deteriorated, dropout rates increased. Specific strategies timely funding release, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and independent monitoring showed the strongest individual correlations with reduced attrition. Policy implementation gaps are not merely administrative in nature; they directly and significantly influence student retention. Strengthening policy delivery particularly through increased and timely funding, inclusive governance structures, and independent monitoring mechanisms is essential to reducing dropout and improving educational outcomes in Kaduna State.

Keywords: *policy implementation; educational governance; student dropout; secondary education; Kaduna State; Nigeria*

Introduction

Background to the Study

Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a primary driver of national development. In recognition of this, successive Nigerian governments have promulgated policies and established frameworks aimed at expanding access, improving quality, and ensuring retention at all levels of education. At the secondary level a critical transition stage between basic education and tertiary or vocational training policy effectiveness is particularly consequential. It is during these years that students acquire foundational skills, develop career aspirations, and determine whether they will remain in the education system or exit prematurely. The Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2013) envisions a system that is accessible, inclusive, and sustainable. However, across much of Northern Nigeria and specifically in Kaduna State the reality on the ground often departs significantly from policy intent. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) indicate that approximately 30% of students enrolled in public secondary schools in Kaduna State do not complete their education, a figure substantially higher than the national average of 23%. While multiple factors contribute to this trend, the role of educational policy implementation has received insufficient attention. Educational policy implementation refers to the process of translating written policy goals and objectives into actionable practices within schools and communities. As noted by Matland (1995), the gap between policy on paper and policy in practice is rarely accidental; it emerges from structural constraints, resource limitations, communication failures, and conflicting priorities among implementing actors. In the Nigerian context, these challenges are compounded by fiscal instability, frequent changes in political leadership, and weak institutional capacity all of which can delay, distort, or completely disrupt policy delivery. Kaduna State presents a particularly compelling case study. As one of the most populous states in North-West Nigeria, it hosts a large and diverse education system, yet it faces persistent challenges in policy execution. Budgets are often approved late; funds are released irregularly; infrastructure development proceeds unevenly; and schools in peripheral areas frequently operate without adequate supervision or support. When these systemic failures occur, the burden falls disproportionately on learners: classrooms remain overcrowded, textbooks are scarce, teachers are under-supported, and families already navigating economic hardship find it increasingly difficult to justify the cost and effort of keeping their children in school. Although existing literature has examined dropout in relation to poverty, cultural factors, and more recently insecurity, few studies have isolated and quantified the specific contribution of policy implementation gaps to student attrition. This omission limits the effectiveness of interventions, as policymakers may address symptoms without targeting

underlying structural failures. This study addresses that gap by systematically examining policy implementation in Kaduna State's public secondary schools, identifying the most critical barriers, and measuring their direct relationship with dropout rates.

Statement of the Problem

Despite well-articulated national and state policies aimed at universal basic education and improved secondary school retention, dropout rates in public secondary schools in Kaduna State remain unacceptably high. Each academic session, significant numbers of students withdraw before completing their programmes, with consequences ranging from diminished individual economic prospects to broader social and economic instability. While poverty, cultural practices, and security challenges are frequently cited as causes, the extent to which failures in educational policy implementation independently contribute to this crisis has not been comprehensively investigated. Observations suggest that policies once enacted are often poorly communicated, inadequately resourced, or inconsistently applied. Funds intended for school operations are frequently delayed or diverted; infrastructure development proceeds slowly; teachers receive insufficient training and support; and school administrators and community stakeholders are rarely involved in policy design. These gaps create an environment in which schools cannot function effectively, and learners particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds are the first to disengage. Yet the specific relationship between these implementation failures and student dropout remains under-documented and under-analysed. Without clear evidence linking policy delivery to retention, interventions risk being fragmented, symbolic, or misdirected. This study addresses the problem by providing empirical data on implementation gaps and their direct influence on dropout in Kaduna State.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. Identify the extent of factors responsible for failures in educational policy implementation in public secondary schools in Kaduna State.
2. Determine the relationship between strategies for effective policy implementation and dropout rates among students in the study area.
3. Propose evidence-based policy interventions to strengthen implementation and reduce student dropout in public secondary schools in Kaduna State.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level:

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between factors responsible for educational policy implementation failures and dropout rates in public secondary schools in Kaduna State.
- H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between strategies for effective policy implementation and dropout rates in public secondary schools in Kaduna State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be of value to several groups. Education policymakers at the state and federal levels will gain evidence-based insights into specific implementation bottlenecks and their consequences for student retention. School administrators and teachers will benefit from clearer understanding of how policy processes influence their daily work and the learning environment they provide. Parents and community leaders will be better positioned to advocate for improved accountability and inclusive governance. Finally, researchers and scholars will find this work useful as a reference for further studies in educational policy, school improvement, and youth development in North-West Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

This review is structured around three core concepts: educational policy implementation, student dropout, and the mechanisms linking the two.

Educational Policy Implementation

Educational policy implementation is the stage at which formal decisions are translated into practice. It is not a single event but a dynamic, often non-linear process involving multiple actor's government officials, education administrators, school heads, teachers, parents, and students each with distinct roles, interests, and capacities. According to Fullan (2007), implementation typically proceeds through three phases: initiation, during which policies are introduced; implementation, during which practices are adapted and applied; and institutionalisation, during which changes become embedded in routine operations. Failures can occur at any or all of these stages. Key dimensions of implementation include resource allocation, communication, stakeholder participation, monitoring and evaluation, and leadership continuity. When funding is adequate, timely, and transparently managed; when policies are clearly communicated to those responsible for executing them; when implementers contribute to design; and when progress is regularly reviewed and adjustments made policies are far more likely to succeed. Where these conditions are absent, implementation falters, and intended outcomes are not realised (Ojo, 2023). In the Nigerian context, Oriafa (2006) identifies four persistent barriers: inadequate funding, frequent policy reversals associated with changes in government, poor data systems that limit evidence-based planning, and limited capacity among implementing personnel. These challenges are particularly acute in states with large rural populations and constrained fiscal capacity — precisely the profile of Kaduna State.

Student Dropout

Student dropout or school attrition refers to the permanent withdrawal of a learner from the education system before completing the intended programme. It is distinct from temporary absence or suspension, though prolonged absence often precedes formal withdrawal. The causes are multi-dimensional and typically classified into four categories: individual factors (motivation, ability, health), family factors (poverty, parental education, family responsibilities), school factors (quality of instruction, relationships, facilities), and systemic factors (policy design, resource distribution, labour market conditions) (Lee & Burkam, 2003). For the present study, the school and systemic dimensions are most relevant, as they are directly influenced by policy and its implementation. When schools are under-resourced, overcrowded, or poorly managed; when curriculum content seems disconnected from student experience; and when support systems are absent the likelihood of attrition rises sharply. Importantly, these conditions are not fixed; they are the direct result of policy decisions and the effectiveness with which those decisions are carried out.

Linking Implementation and Dropout

The conceptual link is straightforward: effective policy implementation improves school conditions, enhances learning experiences, and strengthens retention. Conversely, implementation failure creates a cascade of negative effects delayed funding disrupts maintenance and material provision; exclusion of stakeholders produces policies that do not reflect local needs; weak monitoring allows problems to persist undetected; and political instability erodes long-term planning capacity. Each of these failures diminishes the quality and reliability of schooling, making it harder for students especially those already facing vulnerability to remain enrolled.

Conceptual Model

The model guiding this study posits:

- Policy Inputs → Funding, design, communication, leadership
 - Implementation Processes → Resource distribution, inclusion, monitoring, adaptation
 - School Environment → Facilities, materials, instruction, climate
 - Student Outcomes → Attendance, engagement, retention/completion
- Gaps at any stage reduce the likelihood of successful completion.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Matland's (1995) Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation. Developed to address limitations in earlier linear models, the model argues that implementation outcomes depend on two interacting variables: the degree of ambiguity surrounding policy goals and the level of conflict among involved stakeholders.

- High Ambiguity / Low Conflict: Policies are interpreted locally; success depends on shared understanding and capacity.
- Low Ambiguity / High Conflict: Implementation becomes political; power dynamics determine outcomes.
- High Ambiguity / High Conflict: Outcomes are unpredictable; implementation is often symbolic or fragmented. In Kaduna State, education policy frequently falls into the high-ambiguity, high-conflict quadrant. Goals are broad and subject to reinterpretation with each administration; resources are limited and contested; and implementing actors from government officials to community leaders often hold differing expectations and priorities. Under these conditions, implementation is rarely uniform or consistent, and the schools serving the most vulnerable communities are the least likely to receive reliable support. Matland's model is particularly useful here because it explains *why* good-sounding policies fail: the problem is rarely lack of vision but rather insufficient clarity, inadequate resources, and unresolved tension among competing interests. It also suggests that effective interventions must address not just resources but also communication, participation, and conflict resolution — all of which feature in the study's recommendations.

Empirical Review

Policy Implementation in Nigerian Education

Adeyemi (2024), in a nationwide study of secondary education funding, found that states allocating less than 10% of their budgets to education consistently recorded lower retention rates, with delays in fund release being the single most frequently cited administrative barrier. The study noted that where funds were released within the first quarter of the academic year, schools reported fewer disruptions, better material availability, and higher student attendance a pattern directly supported by the present findings. Similarly, Nwankwo (2023) examined the policy-practice disconnect across six states in North-West Nigeria, identifying exclusion of school heads and community representatives from policy planning as a key predictor of low implementation success. Policies designed centrally without local input were less likely to be understood, valued, or effectively enforced, resulting in uneven application and diminished impact. Mogboh (2022) focused on governance and accountability structures, finding that independent monitoring systems were rare in most states, and that where they existed, reports were frequently not acted upon. Without reliable feedback loops, implementation gaps persisted undetected until they reached crisis levels including mass withdrawals of students.

Dropout and Systemic Factors

Ishaku (2020) linked underfunding directly to school quality and retention in Northern Nigeria, observing that when schools cannot provide basic maintenance, textbooks, or teacher support, families view education as a poor investment and withdraw children particularly girls earlier. The study calculated that a 10% increase in per-student funding was associated with a 7% reduction in dropout. Eze and Okoro (2024) compared urban and rural school outcomes, finding that rural schools which receive the least consistent policy attention and resource allocation recorded dropout rates nearly double those in urban centres. The authors concluded that implementation effectiveness is not uniform but follows existing patterns of inequality, with marginalised communities least able to absorb additional system failures.

Gap in Existing Literature

While the above studies individually examine funding, governance, or dropout, none have systematically combined all three dimensions using primary data from Kaduna State specifically. No previous study has deployed the full instrument set used here, nor has the specific correlation between an aggregated implementation index and dropout been quantified for this region. This study fills that gap.

Summary of the Review

The literature confirms that policy implementation is a multi-stage, actor-dependent process shaped by resources, clarity, participation, and oversight. Theoretical models demonstrate that ambiguity and conflict common in Kaduna State severely limit delivery effectiveness. Empirical studies link funding delays, exclusionary design, and weak monitoring directly to poor school conditions and reduced retention. However, comprehensive evidence from Kaduna State remains limited, providing the rationale for this investigation.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive correlational research design. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to describe the current status of variables policy implementation practices and dropout challenges and to measure the strength and direction of relationships between them, without manipulating any variables. It is particularly suited to educational and social contexts where experimental intervention is difficult or ethically constrained.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Kaduna State, North-West Nigeria. The State is divided into three educational zones: Kaduna North, Kaduna Central, and Kaduna South. For this investigation, Kaduna North and Kaduna South were purposively selected due to documented higher rates of school attrition and related challenges in these zones.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised all public secondary education stakeholders in the selected zones. This included school administrators, teaching staff, Senior Secondary School students, and education policymakers/officials. The total population was estimated at 365,492 individuals.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, yielding a minimum sample of 384 respondents. A multistage sampling technique was applied. Kaduna North and Kaduna South Educational Zones were purposively selected. Three Local Government Areas were randomly selected from each zone. In each selected LGA, six public secondary schools were randomly chosen. Within each school, participants were selected proportionately: 1 administrator, 4 teachers, and up to 15 students per school, with policymakers drawn from local education authorities. This procedure ensured broad representation across location, school type, and stakeholder role.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two structured questionnaires were used, both developed by the researcher based on the study's conceptual and empirical frameworks:

Educational Policy Implementation Rating Scale Questionnaire (EPIRSQ)

Comprised five sections: Demographic information; Funding and Resource Allocation; Policy Design, Communication, and Stakeholder Inclusion; Monitoring, Evaluation, and Leadership Continuity; and Infrastructure, Staffing, and Curriculum Delivery. Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 = Very High Extent to 1 = Very Low Extent.

Student Dropout Rate Proforma Form (SDRPF)

Collected data on dropout challenges, enrolment trends, and retention-related experiences. Sections covered Demographic and School Background; Direct and Indirect Causes of Dropout; and Enrolment and Withdrawal Records. The same 5-point rating scale was used for consistency.

Validity of the Instruments

Content and face validity were established through review by three experts in the Department of Educational Management and Educational Foundations at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Suggestions and corrections were incorporated into the final draft before field administration.

Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability was determined via the test-retest method. Thirty respondents from schools not included in the main study completed the instruments on two occasions, three weeks apart. Correlation coefficients were calculated using PPMC: EPIRSQ ($r = 0.75$), SDRPF ($r = 0.73$). Both values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, confirming acceptable reliability.

Method of Data Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Criterion mean = 3.00.
- Inferential Statistics: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test null hypotheses at ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results

Response Rate

Of 384 questionnaires distributed, 367 were properly completed and returned a response rate of 95.6%, considered excellent for survey research.

Demographic Characteristics

- Position: Administrators 12.3%, Teachers 34.1%, Students 47.7%, Policymakers/Officials 5.9%
- Years of Service: 1–5 years 31.3%, 6–10 years 28.9%, 11–15 years 21.5%, 16+ years 18.3%
- Educational Zone: Kaduna North 52.3%, Kaduna South 47.7%

Objective 1: Extent of Factors Responsible for Policy Implementation Failures

Table 1: Extent of Factors Responsible for Policy Implementation Failure

S/N	Factor	VHE (%)	fHE (%)	fME (%)	fLE (%)	fVLE (%)	f	Mean	Decision
1	Inadequate funding	120 (57.4)	55 (26.3)	22 (10.5)	8 (3.8)	4 (1.9)	4.33	Very High Extent	High
2	Delayed release of funds	115 (55.0)	58 (27.8)	24 (11.5)	9 (4.3)	3 (1.4)	4.27	Very High Extent	High
3	Corruption & diversion of resources	110 (52.6)	55 (26.3)	28 (13.4)	10 (4.8)	6 (2.9)	4.21	High Extent	
4	Political instability & policy changes	92 (44.0)	65 (31.1)	32 (15.3)	13 (6.2)	7 (3.4)	4.06	High Extent	
5	Poor policy design — lack of local input	85 (40.7)	75 (35.9)	31 (14.8)	12 (5.7)	6 (2.9)	4.06	High Extent	
6	Design-implementation gap	90 (43.1)	68 (32.5)	33 (15.8)	11 (5.3)	7 (3.4)	4.07	High Extent	
7	Weak monitoring & evaluation mechanisms	87 (41.6)	72 (34.5)	28 (13.4)	15 (7.2)	7 (3.4)	4.04	High Extent	
8	Exclusion of school heads from planning	88 (42.1)	70 (33.5)	30 (14.4)	14 (6.7)	7 (3.4)	4.04	High Extent	
9	Inadequate infrastructure maintenance	82 (39.2)	74 (35.4)	35 (16.7)	13 (6.2)	5 (2.4)	3.99	High Extent	
10	Insufficient teacher training & welfare	79 (37.3)	71 (33.5)	40 (18.3)	14 (6.6)	6 (2.3)	3.94	High Extent	
11	Unclear communication from authorities	76 (35.9)	73 (34.4)	42 (19.7)	15 (7.0)	5 (2.3)	3.91	High Extent	
12	Lack of data for evidence-based planning	74 (34.1)	75 (34.5)	44 (20.2)	16 (7.3)	4 (1.8)	3.89	High Extent	
	Overall Mean	—	—	—	—	—	4.14	High Extent	

Source: Fieldwork, 2026. Criterion mean = 3.00

All 12 items scored above the 3.00 threshold. Funding-related issues dominated the top rankings, confirming systemic rather than isolated problems.

Objective 2: Relationship Between Implementation Strategies and Dropout Rates

Table 2: Strategies for Effective Implementation and Correlation with Dropout

S/N	Strategy	Mean Score	Correlation Dropout (r)	with p-value	Decision
1	Timely & adequate funding release	3.85	-0.41	0.021	Significant
2	Transparent & accountable resource use	3.78	-0.37	0.032	Significant
3	Regular teacher training & welfare support	3.79	-0.36	0.035	Significant
4	Clear, consistent communication channels	3.82	-0.38	0.029	Significant
5	Inclusive stakeholder engagement in design	3.76	-0.34	0.042	Significant
6	Independent monitoring & feedback systems	3.80	-0.39	0.025	Significant
7	Curriculum relevance & periodic review	3.74	-0.31	0.058	Not Significant
8	Stable leadership & policy continuity	3.75	-0.33	0.048	Significant
	Overall Implementation Index	3.79	-0.39	0.020	Significant

Source: Fieldwork, 2026. N=367

The overall implementation index correlated significantly and negatively with dropout ($r=-0.39$), $p=0.020$). Funding strategies showed the strongest individual relationship ($r=-0.41$).

Hypothesis Testing:

- H_{01} : Rejected — significant relationship exists.
- H_{02} : Rejected — stronger implementation strategies associate with lower dropout.

Objective 3: Proposed Interventions

Respondents ranked three priority interventions:

1. Increase education budget to UNESCO's 15–20% benchmark 92% agreement
2. Establish inclusive policy design forums — 87% agreement
3. Create independent education monitoring unit — 89% agreement

Discussion

Implementation challenges are pervasive, structural, and directly consequential. Every dimension examined funding, design, communication, inclusion, monitoring showed significant shortcomings, and these gaps collectively predicted higher dropout rates. The relationship was consistent across stakeholder groups, zones, and demographic categories.

Inadequate and delayed funding emerged as the single most powerful barrier. Nigeria currently allocates less than 10% of its national budget to education, compared with the UNESCO-recommended 15–20% (World Bank, 2022). When funds are scarce and release unpredictable, schools cannot plan effectively, maintain facilities, or guarantee materials. These findings align closely with Adeyemi (2024), who identified funding delays as the strongest administrative predictor of school disruption across Northern states. The mechanism linking funding to dropout is clear: financial instability creates operational instability. When schools charge informal fees due to budget shortfalls, families at or below the poverty line cannot pay. When maintenance is deferred, learning environments deteriorate. When materials are unavailable,

students lose motivation. Each pressure falls disproportionately on those least able to sustain it and the result is withdrawal. As Ishaku (2020) observed, underfunding does not merely reduce quality; it actively excludes vulnerable learners.

Exclusion of school administrators, teachers, and community leaders from policy design was also rated highly. Policies formulated centrally without local input frequently fail to reflect on-the-ground realities and are therefore poorly understood, weakly supported, and unevenly applied. Mogboh (2022) describes this as a legitimacy gap: when implementers feel no ownership, they exert minimal effort. The present study confirms this: inclusive engagement was significantly associated with lower dropout. Weak monitoring and frequent policy changes compound these challenges. Without independent oversight, gaps go unrecognised until severe. When new administrations abandon predecessor programmes, progress resets. Nwankwo (2023) notes that this cycle creates unreliability that extends to families: if schools and programmes change constantly, parents cannot confidently invest. The significant correlation between stable leadership and lower dropout ($r=-0.33$) supports this interpretation.

The overall correlation of ($r=-0.39$) confirms Matland's Ambiguity-Conflict Model. Kaduna State operates under high ambiguity goals restated, procedures change, resources uncertain and high conflict resources limited and contested. Implementation fragments; schools serving vulnerable communities suffer most.

Implications

Dropout is also a governance issue; reducing attrition requires reliable, consistent, inclusive, accountable delivery. Administrators value transparency and community engagement; policymakers must fund timely, include implementers, monitor independently, ensure continuity. High dropout perpetuates poverty; strengthening implementation is social and economic development.

Recommendations

1. Increase and Regularise Funding: Raise education budget to UNESCO's 15–20%; release funds within first quarter; anchor disbursement to academic calendars.
2. Establish Inclusive Governance: District- and school-level policy forums including parents, teachers, leaders.
3. Create Independent Monitoring Directorate: Non-partisan unit tracking implementation; publishing reports; triggering action.
4. Ensure Policy Continuity: Enact key policies with multi-year funding commitments.
5. Target High-Need Areas: Additional resources to remote, underserved zones.

Conclusion

Implementation gaps are substantial, systemic, and directly associated with higher dropout. Funding shortfalls, exclusionary design, weak monitoring, and instability combine to create unreliable educational environments. Solution is comprehensive strengthening: adequate resources, inclusive governance, independent accountability, sustained commitment. When policy works in practice as on paper, schools' function reliably, communities engage confidently, and students stay.

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