

Universal Basic Education and Educational Development in Okirika Local Government Area of Rivers State, 2010-2025

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Abstract

Education remains a fundamental driver of socio-economic development and human capital formation in Nigeria. Despite numerous reforms in the basic education sector, challenges persist in translating policy intentions into measurable outcomes at the grassroots level. This study critically examined how the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has influenced educational development in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State between 2010 and 2025. The study was guided by two objectives, two research questions, and two null hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance. It was anchored on Systems Theory and Good Governance Theory. The study adopted a survey research design, and data were collected through structured questionnaires and documentary sources. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics, specifically the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, were employed to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that although several UBE policies and programmes were implemented during the period under review, their impact on educational development was moderate. The programme contributed to increased enrolment and some infrastructural improvements; however, challenges such as inadequate classrooms, insufficient instructional materials, uneven teacher distribution, weak monitoring mechanisms, and funding constraints limited optimal outcomes. The results further indicated significant relationships between UBE implementation variables and key indicators of educational development, including access, quality, and infrastructural adequacy. The study concluded that while the UBE programme has made measurable contributions to educational development in Okrika, systemic weaknesses in governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and resource management constrained its full effectiveness. Sustainable improvement in basic education requires strengthened institutional capacity, transparent funding processes, and enhanced community participation. The study recommended improved and timely funding with strict accountability measures, enhanced teacher recruitment and professional development, strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems, increased stakeholder participation in school governance, and sustained infrastructural development supported by proper maintenance frameworks. This study contributes to knowledge by providing context-specific empirical evidence on UBE implementation within a decentralized education system and by integrating Systems Theory and Good Governance Theory to explain policy outcomes at the grassroots level. It enriches scholarly discourse on educational reform and public policy implementation while offering

practical insights for policymakers and education administrators seeking to improve basic education delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Universal Basic Education, Educational Development, Policy Implementation. Good Governance, Okrika System Theory.*

Introduction

The implementation of public policies is a central concern in governance, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, where a persistent gap exists between policy formulation and actual outcomes. Public policy encompasses a system of laws, regulations, actions, and resource allocations formulated and pursued by government institutions to address societal needs (Dye, 2017). It represents deliberate state interventions aimed at solving public problems and achieving development objectives. However, the ultimate success of policies is often determined not by their design but by how effectively they are implemented. Policy implementation is the stage where governmental intentions are translated into concrete programmes, projects, and activities intended to achieve stated goals. In many cases, institutional inefficiencies, political interference, and systemic weaknesses undermine this critical phase, limiting the transformative potential of public policy. In the education sector, effective policy implementation is even more crucial, given the recognized role of education as a driver of socio-economic development. Educational development refers to the systematic improvement of access, quality, equity, infrastructure, teacher capacity, curriculum delivery, and student learning outcomes within an educational system. It contributes significantly to human capital formation, poverty alleviation, and overall national productivity. In response to longstanding challenges such as low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, poor teacher quality, and regional disparities, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999. The programme was strengthened by the enactment of the UBE Act of 2004 and is coordinated by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in collaboration with State and Local Government Education Boards. The UBE initiative aims to provide free, compulsory, and universal basic education to children of school age, spanning early childhood care, primary, and junior secondary education. Its objectives include ensuring access to quality education, enhancing learning outcomes, and fostering grassroots educational development. Ideally, successful UBE implementation should ensure that trained teachers, instructional materials, and adequate infrastructure reach local communities. However, in practice, there is often a significant gap between policy intentions and measurable outcomes, particularly in local government areas such as Okrika. Grassroots development, as conceptualised by Todaro and Smith (2020), involves improving the living standards and socio-economic well-being of people at the community level. Education forms a key pillar of this development process, alongside health, infrastructure, employment, and participatory governance. In theory, UBE should function as an instrument for grassroots transformation, promoting inclusive access to quality education. In practice, however, local factors such as limited infrastructure, socio-economic barriers, and environmental constraints influence the programme's effectiveness. Nigeria's federal structure places local governments at the forefront of primary education administration (Nwankwo, 2014). These local authorities are critical actors in implementing UBE policies at the grassroots. Yet, structural and systemic limitations including dependence on federal allocations, limited fiscal autonomy, and bureaucratic inefficiency often impede effective service delivery (Ezeani, 2012). In Rivers State, and particularly in Okrika Local Government Area, these challenges are compounded by

geographical, socio-economic, and infrastructural disparities. Despite being in the oil-rich Niger Delta, Okrika continues to struggle with inadequacies in educational infrastructure, limited learning materials, and shortages of qualified teachers, particularly in riverine communities. Between 2010 and 2025, federal and state educational reforms, funding adjustments, and administrative initiatives have been introduced to improve the basic education sub-sector. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that the outcomes of these interventions in Okrika have not always aligned with their intended objectives. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) argue that policy implementation is not a purely technical exercise but a complex political and administrative endeavour influenced by institutional capacity, stakeholder coordination, and environmental factors. In Nigeria, inadequate funding, bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, weak monitoring, and limited community participation often constrain the effective execution of educational policies (Igbuzor, 2017). Moreover, policies designed without consideration of local socio-cultural and environmental contexts may fail to address community-specific challenges. Top-down approaches, lacking participatory engagement, often encounter resistance or indifference in local communities (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). Therefore, the success of UBE implementation in Okrika is closely tied to inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the local context. Weak institutional frameworks, unclear accountability lines, and overlapping responsibilities among federal, state, and local agencies further limit the effectiveness of educational policy implementation (Hill & Hupe, 2009). The 2010–2025 timeframe is significant because it spans multiple political administrations and reform phases, enabling a comprehensive analysis of continuity, changes, and long-term trends in UBE implementation in Okrika. This period allows the assessment of whether improvements in enrolment, infrastructure, teacher capacity, gender parity, and learning outcomes have translated into meaningful educational development. By situating this study within the socio-economic realities of Okrika, while engaging broader theoretical perspectives from public administration and development studies, this research highlights the role of informal institutions, community participation, and civil society in shaping educational outcomes. In essence, this study examines the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025, seeking to understand how policies, institutional arrangements, challenges, and community dynamics influence grassroots educational development. It contributes to the discourse on educational reform, governance effectiveness, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Identify the Universal Basic Education policies and programmes implemented in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025 and,
- ii. Examine the impact of Universal Basic Education implementation on access to and quality of basic education in Okrika.

The following research questions are raised:

- i. What Universal Basic Education policies and programmes have been implemented in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025?
- ii. How has the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme affected access to and quality of basic education in Okrika?

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study.

H₀₁: There is no relationship between the Universal Basic Education policies and programmes

implemented and the level of educational development in Okrika Local Government Area.

Ho₂: There is no relationship between the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme and access to and quality of basic education in Okrika.

Theoretical Review

Systems Theory (Easton, 1953)

David Easton's Systems Theory, introduced in *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (1953), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing political systems as dynamic entities that interact continuously with their environments. Easton conceptualizes a political system as a network of interactions through which authoritative allocations of values—such as policies, laws, and regulations—are made and implemented within a society. This approach emphasizes the significance of understanding the political system's boundaries, inputs, outputs, conversion processes, feedback mechanisms, and adaptability in response to environmental changes.

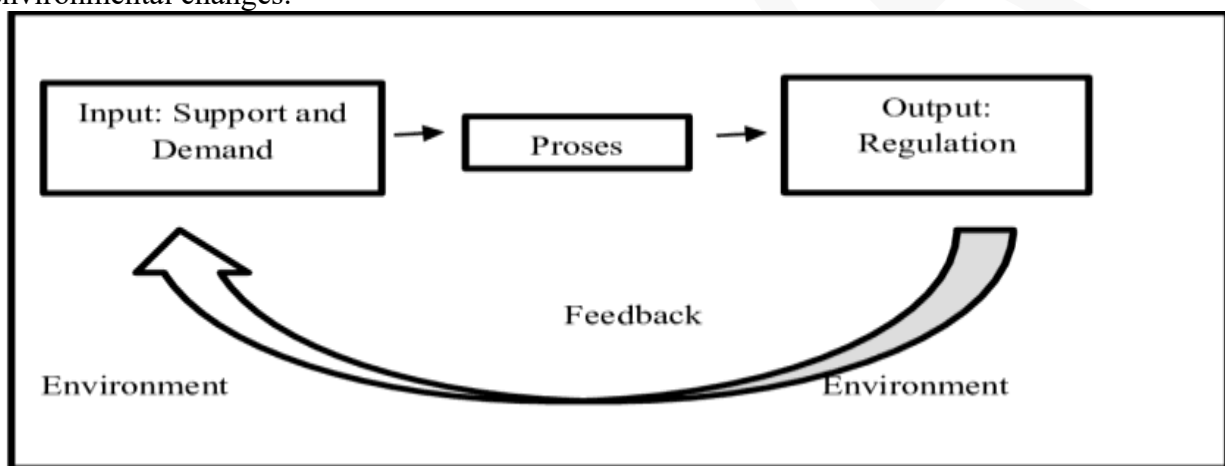


Figure 2.1 *Figure 1: Systems theory diagram*

Sources: Political systems theory David Easton

At its core, Easton's Systems Theory views political systems as open systems that constantly interact with their environment. Inputs represent the demands and supports from the environment, which the political system processes to produce outputs in the form of policies and decisions. In the context of UBE in Okrika, demands include calls for increased school enrolment, improved classroom infrastructure, teacher training, and learning resources. Supports comprise the compliance and cooperation of schools, local administrators, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders, which sustain the policy implementation process (Easton, 1965). The conversion process refers to how political systems transform inputs into outputs. Within UBE implementation, this process involves federal and state policy directives being operationalized by the local government, school administrators, and teaching staff. The effectiveness of this process determines the legitimacy and sustainability of educational policies. If the system fails to address the demands or loses the support of the community, the educational programme risks underperformance or collapse. Feedback mechanisms are vital for ensuring responsiveness. Feedback may include school inspection reports, student performance data, community complaints, or local monitoring of programme implementation. This feedback informs policymakers and administrators, enabling corrective adjustments to policy implementation strategies (Easton, 1965).

Easton's theory also stresses the importance of system boundaries, which delineate the political system from its environment while remaining permeable enough to allow the exchange of inputs and outputs. This ensures the system can respond effectively to external pressures, such as demographic changes, socio-economic shifts, and technological innovations affecting education.

Applications to UBE Implementation

In the context of UBE policy implementation in Okrika, Systems Theory allows scholars and policymakers to identify where the system may fail to process inputs effectively or where feedback mechanisms are inadequate. By analyzing the flow of demands and supports, conversion processes, and outputs, the theory highlights systemic gaps in educational policy delivery. For instance, delays in teacher recruitment, poor monitoring of school facilities, or insufficient community engagement can be traced as breakdowns in the input-output-feedback loop (Igbuzor, 2017). Moreover, Easton's emphasis on system adaptability underscores the need for continuous evaluation and reform. Educational systems in developing regions like Okrika face challenges such as insufficient infrastructure, fluctuating enrolment rates, and socio-political instability, necessitating policies that are flexible and responsive. Understanding the political system as a network of inputs and outputs helps diagnose bottlenecks in UBE delivery and suggests interventions, such as local capacity-building, participatory school governance, and technology-enabled monitoring (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). The theory also highlights the systemic consequences of policy failure. Unmet educational demands or ignored feedback can erode public support, reduce school attendance, and create distrust in government initiatives. Conversely, when feedback mechanisms are robust and responsive, UBE implementation can achieve its objectives of improving access, equity, and quality in basic education. Critiques of Systems Theory note that it can be overly mechanistic and abstract, underplaying historical, ideological, or power dynamics that shape policy outcomes. Additionally, it may not fully account for the agency of individual actors such as school principals or local education officers (Leftwich, 2006). Nonetheless, the theory remains a valuable framework for diagnosing and improving policy implementation processes, especially in decentralized educational systems.

Conceptual Review

Universal Basic Education (UBE)

Universal Basic Education (UBE) represents a fundamental policy initiative aimed at providing free, compulsory, and continuous basic education for all children, regardless of socio-economic background, gender, or geographical location. The UBE programme, particularly in Nigeria, was formally established by the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, building on earlier primary education initiatives that dated back to the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme of 1976 (Okeke, 2015). The primary objective of UBE is to ensure that every child has access to a minimum level of education that encompasses early childhood care, primary education, and junior secondary education, thereby addressing issues of literacy, numeracy, and foundational knowledge necessary for further learning and socio-economic development (Ofoegbu, 2016). The implementation of UBE has been informed by global education agendas, including the Education for All (EFA) initiative and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which seek to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). UBE is conceived as a transformative strategy, designed to reduce educational disparities caused by poverty, gender, and regional inequities. In Nigeria, UBE targets children aged six to fifteen years, with the policy providing free tuition, instructional materials, and, in some cases, school feeding programs to

encourage enrolment and retention (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). This focus underscores the recognition that access to education alone is insufficient unless accompanied by supportive measures that remove socio-economic barriers.

Despite its ambitious framework, the implementation of UBE has faced significant challenges. Financial constraints remain a critical obstacle, with many states relying heavily on federal allocations through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) while struggling to provide counterpart funding (Jibowo, 2018). Corruption, inadequate monitoring, and delays in fund disbursement further exacerbate these challenges, affecting the quality and sustainability of the program. Additionally, disparities between urban and rural areas persist, as rural communities often experience insufficient school facilities, lack of qualified teachers, and limited access to instructional materials (Eze, 2019). These factors undermine the overall effectiveness of UBE in achieving its primary objectives of universal enrolment and retention. Gender equity is a central concern within UBE. Research indicates that, although enrolment of girls has improved over the years, retention and completion rates for female students remain lower than those for males in many regions, particularly in northern Nigeria (Abubakar & Bello, 2021). Cultural practices, early marriage, and household responsibilities contribute to this disparity. To mitigate such challenges, UBE policy incorporates gender-sensitive strategies, including scholarships, community awareness campaigns, and incentives for female student participation, reflecting an understanding that education is a critical tool for empowering girls and promoting gender equality (UNICEF, 2017). Teacher quality is another pivotal aspect of UBE implementation. Effective teaching is directly linked to student learning outcomes; however, the programme has been hindered by a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in science, mathematics, and English (Ogunleye, 2018). Teacher training, professional development, and motivation through appropriate remuneration and career growth opportunities are therefore essential for realizing UBE's educational goals. Additionally, curriculum relevance is an ongoing concern, as curricula must be adapted to local needs, technological advancements, and global trends to ensure that students are adequately prepared for secondary education and vocational or tertiary pathways (Adejumo, 2016). Community participation is recognised as a critical success factor for UBE. Local communities, parents, and traditional leaders play an important role in promoting enrolment, monitoring teacher performance, and maintaining school facilities (UBEC, 2019). Studies have shown that schools with active community engagement tend to have higher attendance rates, improved teacher accountability, and better overall educational outcomes (Ogunyemi & Adegbite, 2020). This participatory approach aligns with the principle that education is a shared societal responsibility and that sustainable improvements require collaboration between government, communities, and other stakeholders.

Finally, UBE's success is intrinsically linked to monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Regular assessment of enrolment, retention, learning outcomes, and infrastructural adequacy allows policymakers to identify gaps and implement corrective measures (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). The integration of data-driven decision-making ensures that limited resources are efficiently allocated, and strategic interventions are applied where most needed. It is evident that for UBE to fulfill its mandate of universal education, a holistic approach combining policy support, adequate funding, teacher quality, community involvement, and robust monitoring is indispensable. In conclusion, Universal Basic Education serves as a cornerstone for national educational development and social equity. While significant progress has been made in increasing enrolment and providing basic education to Nigerian children, persistent challenges related to funding, infrastructure, teacher quality, and socio-cultural barriers remain. Addressing

these challenges requires continuous policy refinement, community participation, and strategic investment. The effective implementation of UBE not only contributes to literacy and numeracy but also fosters human capital development, reduces poverty, and promotes sustainable socio-economic growth (Okeke, 2015; Ofoegbu, 2016; UNESCO, 2015).

Educational Development

Educational development encompasses the systematic improvement of educational systems, policies, and practices to enhance learning opportunities, outcomes, and societal advancement. It is widely recognized as a cornerstone for national development, human capital formation, and socio-economic progress. In the context of Nigeria, educational development has historically undergone several phases, from pre-colonial informal education, through colonial-era missionary and government schooling, to post-independence reforms aimed at universal access, quality improvement, and alignment with economic and technological imperatives (Fafunwa, 2016). The concept of educational development goes beyond mere access to schooling; it includes curriculum modernization, teacher training, infrastructural expansion, policy innovation, and the integration of technology and research into learning systems (Olatoye & Adeyemi, 2018). The development of education is closely linked to national goals and the capacity of a country to harness human resources for growth. In Nigeria, for instance, the National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes the role of education in fostering moral, social, cultural, and economic development, reflecting the understanding that an effective educational system is both a tool for personal empowerment and a driver of national progress (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). Educational development also entails balancing equity and efficiency, ensuring that marginalized populations, including children in rural areas, females, and children with disabilities, have opportunities to benefit from schooling (Okeke, 2017). Policies aimed at reducing educational disparities, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, illustrate how development strategies integrate both access and quality considerations.

Curriculum development constitutes a central pillar of educational development. A responsive curriculum reflects the changing needs of society, global trends, and technological advancements. In Nigeria, the shift from a purely academic-focused curriculum to one that incorporates vocational skills, entrepreneurship, and science and technology underscores the country's attempt to prepare students for a rapidly evolving labor market (Adejumo, 2016). Integrating practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving into curricula not only enhances employability but also fosters innovation and self-reliance among learners. Furthermore, curriculum development aligns educational outputs with national economic priorities, such as industrialization, agriculture, and digital transformation, demonstrating the interplay between education and broader development agendas. Teacher development is another critical dimension of educational advancement. Effective education systems depend on the availability of qualified, motivated, and professionally trained teachers. In Nigeria, teacher education has experienced significant reforms, including pre-service and in-service training, professional certification, and continuous professional development programs (Ogunleye, 2018). Despite these initiatives, challenges such as uneven distribution of teachers, inadequate remuneration, and limited access to professional growth opportunities persist, especially in rural and underserved regions (Eze, 2019). Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing educational quality and achieving measurable learning outcomes. Infrastructure development complements curriculum and teacher improvements in shaping educational advancement. The provision of adequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, ICT facilities, and recreational spaces contributes to an enabling learning

environment. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, inadequate infrastructure has been identified as a significant barrier to effective learning and school retention (Olatoye & Adeyemi, 2018). Government initiatives, donor-funded projects, and community partnerships have attempted to address these gaps, yet consistent maintenance and expansion remain necessary for sustaining educational development.

Educational development also requires strong governance and policy implementation frameworks. Policy coherence, efficient resource allocation, and effective monitoring mechanisms ensure that development strategies translate into tangible outcomes (Jibowo, 2018). In Nigeria, the interplay between federal, state, and local governments, as well as agencies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), underscores the importance of coordination in advancing educational objectives. Additionally, educational development strategies increasingly incorporate data-driven approaches, using enrolment statistics, learning assessments, and infrastructure audits to inform policy decisions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Technological integration represents a contemporary dimension of educational development. The adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching, learning, and administrative processes enhances accessibility, efficiency, and innovation. E-learning platforms, digital libraries, and educational software expand learning beyond traditional classrooms, bridging gaps in teacher availability and geographical access (UNESCO, 2015). Particularly in the wake of disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, technology-mediated learning has proven critical in maintaining continuity and promoting flexible education delivery. Community and stakeholder engagement is integral to sustainable educational development. Research indicates that schools with active involvement from parents, local leaders, and civil society organizations demonstrate higher enrolment, better student attendance, and improved accountability (Ogunyemi & Adegbite, 2020). Public-private partnerships and non-governmental interventions contribute to resource mobilization, teacher support, and infrastructural improvements, reinforcing the collective responsibility for educational advancement. Finally, educational development is closely tied to learning outcomes, economic productivity, and social transformation. A well-developed educational system produces literate, skilled, and responsible citizens capable of contributing to societal progress, reducing poverty, and promoting social cohesion. Studies have shown that countries that invest strategically in educational development tend to experience sustained economic growth, technological innovation, and improved quality of life (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). Conversely, underdeveloped educational systems perpetuate inequalities, unemployment, and socio-political instability, highlighting the centrality of education in national development agendas.

In conclusion, educational development represents a multifaceted process that involves curriculum innovation, teacher training, infrastructural expansion, policy coherence, technological integration, and community engagement. In Nigeria, despite significant progress in expanding access and improving educational frameworks, persistent challenges such as inequitable resource distribution, inadequate infrastructure, and teacher shortages continue to hinder optimal outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that aligns educational strategies with national development goals, emphasizes inclusivity and equity, and ensures continuous evaluation and improvement. Ultimately, sustained educational development contributes to human capital formation, socio-economic growth, and the realization of a more equitable and prosperous society (Fafunwa, 2016; Olatoye & Adeyemi, 2018; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018).

Access to Education

Access to education is a fundamental component of human development and a critical indicator of social equity and economic progress. It refers to the ability of individuals, particularly children, to enroll in and participate in formal educational opportunities without discrimination based on gender, socio-economic status, location, or disability. In the context of Nigeria, access to education has long been influenced by historical, socio-cultural, economic, and policy factors. Colonial-era education policies, missionary interventions, and post-independence government programs have shaped the current landscape of educational access, highlighting both achievements and persistent challenges (Fafunwa, 2016; Okeke, 2015). The Nigerian government has implemented various policies to enhance educational access, most notably the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which aims to provide free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education for all children aged six to fifteen years (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy seeks to eliminate barriers such as school fees, inadequate facilities, and long travel distances, which have historically limited school participation, especially for children in rural areas. In addition to UBE, interventions such as school feeding programs, provision of textbooks, and scholarship schemes for disadvantaged groups aim to improve enrollment and retention rates, thereby promoting equitable access to education (Ofoegbu, 2016). Despite these initiatives, access to education in Nigeria remains uneven. Geographical disparities are evident, with rural communities often experiencing lower enrollment rates compared to urban centers due to factors such as insufficient schools, poor infrastructure, and limited availability of qualified teachers (Eze, 2019). Northern regions, in particular, face additional socio-cultural challenges, including gender biases and early marriage, which disproportionately affect girls' access to schooling (Abubakar & Bello, 2021). Consequently, while national statistics indicate improvements in gross enrollment ratios, underlying disparities continue to reflect systemic inequalities that require targeted policy interventions. Socio-economic factors are among the most significant barriers to educational access. Children from low-income households frequently encounter indirect costs of schooling, such as uniforms, transportation, and learning materials, which can impede regular attendance (Jibowo, 2018). Poverty-induced child labor further reduces school participation, as children may be required to contribute to household income rather than attend classes. Policies aimed at alleviating these economic barriers, including conditional cash transfers, school feeding programs, and community-based support initiatives, have been implemented in some regions with measurable impact, yet nationwide coverage remains inconsistent. Gender is a critical determinant of educational access. While national enrollment figures suggest near parity between boys and girls at the primary level, retention and completion rates for girls lag behind in several states, particularly in northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2017). Socio-cultural practices, religious beliefs, and early marriage contribute to this gender gap, creating systemic barriers that undermine girls' education. Addressing these challenges requires multi-faceted strategies, including community sensitization, provision of gender-sensitive facilities, incentives for female students, and the recruitment of female teachers to foster a supportive learning environment. Disability-inclusive education is another important dimension of access. Children with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities are often marginalized due to inadequate facilities, lack of trained special educators, and societal stigma (Okeke, 2017). Inclusive education policies, adapted curricula, and specialized teacher training are necessary to ensure that children with disabilities can participate fully in the educational process. Globally, the Education for All (EFA)

and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) frameworks emphasize inclusivity and equal access, reinforcing the importance of addressing disability-related barriers in Nigeria's education system (UNESCO, 2015).

Infrastructure and learning environment significantly influence access to education. Schools must be physically accessible, safe, and adequately equipped to accommodate learners. In Nigeria, inadequate classrooms, poor sanitation, insufficient water supply, and overcrowding continue to limit effective access, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities (Olatoye & Adeyemi, 2018). Investments in school construction, renovation, and provision of learning materials are therefore essential to improve enrollment, attendance, and learning experiences. Community involvement plays a pivotal role in promoting access to education. Parental engagement, local leadership support, and civil society advocacy contribute to improved enrollment, retention, and accountability (Ogunyemi & Adegbite, 2020). Schools with strong community support networks often demonstrate higher attendance rates, better teacher performance, and more inclusive practices. Public-private partnerships have also emerged as effective mechanisms for expanding educational access, leveraging additional resources to build schools, provide scholarships, and enhance learning infrastructure. Policy implementation and monitoring are critical for ensuring equitable access to education. Accurate data on enrollment, attendance, and dropouts enable governments and educational agencies to identify gaps, allocate resources efficiently, and design targeted interventions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Additionally, inter-sectoral collaboration between education, health, social welfare, and community development agencies strengthens the support systems necessary to sustain access, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations. In conclusion, access to education in Nigeria has improved through government initiatives, international support, and community engagement. However, persistent challenges related to geography, socio-economic status, gender disparities, disability, and infrastructural deficits continue to hinder equitable access. Comprehensive strategies that combine policy enforcement, targeted interventions, infrastructural development, community participation, and inclusive practices are essential for ensuring that all children can exercise their right to education. Expanding access is not only a moral and legal imperative but also a foundational step toward national development, social equity, and human capital formation (Fafunwa, 2016; UNESCO, 2015; Ofoegbu, 2016; UNICEF, 2017).

Quality of Education

Quality of education refers to the effectiveness of an educational system in delivering meaningful learning outcomes, equipping learners with knowledge, skills, and values, and preparing them to participate productively in society. It encompasses dimensions such as curriculum relevance, teaching effectiveness, learning resources, assessment mechanisms, and the overall learning environment. In Nigeria, ensuring quality education has been a longstanding challenge due to factors such as inadequate funding, poor teacher training, infrastructural deficits, and socio-economic disparities (Ogunleye, 2018; Fafunwa, 2016). Despite policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and the National Policy on Education, the translation of these policies into high-quality education for all remains uneven. Curriculum relevance is central to the quality of education. A well-structured curriculum ensures that learners acquire foundational literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and practical skills that are applicable to contemporary societal needs (Adejumo, 2016). In Nigeria, efforts have been made to revise curricula across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to incorporate vocational skills, entrepreneurship,

information and communication technology (ICT), and civic education. These reforms are intended to align educational outputs with labor market requirements and the broader socio-economic development goals of the nation. However, gaps persist in the implementation of these curricula, with many schools still relying on outdated materials and traditional rote-learning methods that limit conceptual understanding and innovation (Ofoegbu, 2016). Teacher quality directly influences educational outcomes and overall learning effectiveness. Effective teachers possess subject mastery, pedagogical skills, and the ability to motivate and engage learners. In Nigeria, shortages of qualified teachers, uneven distribution of personnel, and low morale due to inadequate remuneration continue to undermine educational quality (Eze, 2019). Teacher training programs, both pre-service and in-service, are critical for equipping educators with modern pedagogical skills, classroom management techniques, and the capacity to integrate technology into teaching (Ogunleye, 2018). Without competent and motivated teachers, other efforts to improve quality such as curriculum reforms and infrastructural development may have limited impact. Assessment and evaluation mechanisms are essential indicators of educational quality. Standardized examinations, continuous assessments, and learning diagnostics help determine whether students are meeting expected educational outcomes and guide teachers in instructional improvements (UNESCO, 2015). In Nigeria, the implementation of national assessments such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) serves as a benchmark for evaluating learning achievement. However, systemic issues such as examination malpractice, misalignment of curriculum and assessment, and overemphasis on certificate acquisition rather than holistic learning compromise the reliability of these metrics as true indicators of quality (Okeke, 2017). Infrastructure also plays a pivotal role in ensuring quality education. Adequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, ICT facilities, and recreational spaces provide the physical environment necessary for effective learning (Olatoye & Adeyemi, 2018). Many schools, especially in rural and underfunded areas, face overcrowded classrooms, lack of electricity, insufficient furniture, and absence of basic teaching aids, which hinder both teaching and learning processes. Investments in infrastructural development, alongside maintenance programs, are therefore vital to creating conducive learning environments that can support quality education. Access to instructional materials, textbooks, and technological tools further influences educational quality. Students without access to relevant learning resources are at a disadvantage, limiting their ability to engage with curriculum content and develop critical skills (UNICEF, 2017). Digital resources, e-learning platforms, and ICT integration provide opportunities to enhance learning quality, especially in contexts where teacher shortages or infrastructural limitations exist. However, adoption of technology in Nigerian schools remains uneven, often concentrated in urban centers, thereby reinforcing disparities in educational quality. Socio-economic and contextual factors also impact education quality. Poverty, malnutrition, and poor health among learners can affect cognitive development and school attendance, limiting the effectiveness of educational interventions (Jibowo, 2018). Cultural attitudes, parental involvement, and community support further shape the learning environment, highlighting that quality education requires a holistic approach that extends beyond classroom instruction. Schools with active community participation tend to demonstrate higher standards of teaching and learning, improved student discipline, and better retention of qualified teachers (Ogunyemi & Adegbite, 2020). Policy implementation is another determinant of educational quality. The translation of policy frameworks into operational programs requires adequate funding, governance, monitoring, and evaluation. In Nigeria, inconsistencies in policy execution, mismanagement of resources, and

weak oversight mechanisms have hindered improvements in educational quality (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Strengthening accountability systems, ensuring transparent resource allocation, and regular monitoring of educational outcomes are essential to sustain quality improvements. Finally, quality education is intrinsically linked to national development. An effective education system not only enhances individual cognitive and social skills but also contributes to economic productivity, innovation, and societal cohesion (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). High-quality education fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, which are necessary for participation in the global knowledge economy. Conversely, poor-quality education perpetuates inequality, unemployment, and social instability, underscoring the importance of sustained investments in teaching, learning materials, infrastructure, and policy enforcement.

In conclusion, the quality of education in Nigeria is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including curriculum relevance, teacher competence, assessment practices, infrastructure, access to resources, socio-economic conditions, and effective policy implementation. While significant efforts have been made through programs such as UBE, curricular reforms, and teacher development initiatives, persistent challenges continue to limit educational effectiveness. A comprehensive approach that integrates curriculum modernization, teacher capacity building, infrastructural improvement, technology integration, community engagement, and rigorous monitoring is critical to achieving sustainable quality education. Strengthening these dimensions not only enhances learning outcomes but also fosters human capital development, social equity, and national growth (Ogunleye, 2018; Ofoegbu, 2016; UNESCO, 2015; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018).

Method

The study adopted a survey research design to examine the influence of Universal Basic Education (UBE) on educational development in secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study was conducted in Okrika, a riverine community with distinct geographical, cultural, socio-economic, and educational characteristics. The population comprised 5,667 teachers and parents across eight public UBE junior secondary schools. Using Taro Yamane's formula at a 0.05 level of significance, a sample size of 374 respondents was determined. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents with relevant knowledge of the subject, while proportional distribution ensured adequate representation across the selected communities and schools. The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to principals, parents, and students, while secondary data were obtained from textbooks, scholarly journals, government reports, and other relevant publications. The questionnaire contained 28 items structured on a four-point Likert scale. Its validity was established through expert assessment, while reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. The study analysed the collected data using percentages, mean, and standard deviation, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the null hypotheses with SPSS version 27. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Questionnaires Administered and Retrieved with Percentages

Questionnaire Status Number		Percentage (%)
Administered	374	100
Retrieved	370	98.9
Not Retrieved	28	7.5
Total	374	100

The table shows that a total of 374 questionnaires were administered to respondents in the study area. Out of this number, 370 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, representing a very high response rate of 98.9%. Only 7.5% were recorded as not retrieved, although the figures suggest a possible recording inconsistency. Nevertheless, the high retrieval rate indicates strong participation and cooperation from respondents. This level of response is adequate and reliable for statistical analysis and valid research conclusions.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What Universal Basic Education policies and programmes have been implemented in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025?

S/N	Items	SA F(%)	A F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	Total	Mean	Std. Dev
1	UBE policies have improved access to basic education in Okrika.	110 (29.7%)	120 (32.4%)	80 (21.6%)	60 (16.2%)	370	3.15	1.03
2	UBE programmes have provided adequate learning materials and textbooks for students.	105 (28.4%)	115 (31.1%)	85 (23.0%)	65 (17.6%)	370	3.08	1.01
3	Teacher recruitment and training under UBE policies have enhanced teaching quality.	95 (25.7%)	120 (32.4%)	90 (24.3%)	65 (17.6%)	370	3.03	1.02
4	School enrolment and retention rates have increased due to UBE policies and programmes.	115 (31.1%)	125 (33.8%)	70 (18.9%)	60 (16.2%)	370	3.28	0.99
5	Community sensitization and engagement under UBE have positively impacted educational development.	100 (27.0%)	115 (31.1%)	80 (21.6%)	75 (20.3%)	370	3.13	1.04

Source: SPSS output, 2025

The table above indicates that respondents largely perceive UBE policies and programmes as positively affecting educational development in Okrika. For Item 1, 110 respondents (29.7%) strongly agreed and 120 (32.4%) agreed that access to basic education has improved, while only

80 (21.6%) disagreed and 60 (16.2%) strongly disagreed, giving a mean of 3.15 and standard deviation of 1.03. Item 2 shows that 105 respondents (28.4%) strongly agreed and 115 (31.1%) agreed that learning materials and textbooks were adequately provided, with 85 (23.0%) disagreeing and 65 (17.6%) strongly disagreeing, yielding a mean of 3.08 and standard deviation of 1.01. For Item 3, 95 respondents (25.7%) strongly agreed and 120 (32.4%) agreed that teacher recruitment and training enhanced teaching quality, while 90 (24.3%) disagreed and 65 (17.6%) strongly disagreed, giving a mean of 3.03 and standard deviation of 1.02. Item 4 indicates that 115 respondents (31.1%) strongly agreed and 125 (33.8%) agreed that school enrolment and retention improved, with 70 (18.9%) disagreeing and 60 (16.2%) strongly disagreeing, producing the highest mean of 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.99. Item 5 shows that 100 respondents (27.0%) strongly agreed and 115 (31.1%) agreed that community sensitization positively impacted educational development, with 80 (21.6%) disagreeing and 75 (20.3%) strongly disagreeing, giving a mean of 3.13 and standard deviation of 1.04. Overall, the data reflect a strong positive perception of UBE implementation, with most respondents recognizing improvements in access, teaching quality, enrolment, and community engagement. Standard deviations indicate moderate consistency in responses, confirming the reliability of the findings. These results demonstrate that UBE policies have contributed meaningfully to educational development in Okrika.

Table 2: Research question 2: How has the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme affected access to and quality of basic education in Okrika?

S/N	Items	SA F(%)	A F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	Total	Mean	Std. Dev
6	UBE policy implementation has improved basic school infrastructure in Okrika.	100 (27.0%)	120 (32.4%)	90 (24.3%)	60 (16.2%)	370	3.00	1.02
7	UBE programmes have enhanced access to clean water and sanitation in schools.	95 (25.7%)	110 (29.7%)	90 (24.3%)	75 (20.3%)	370	2.91	1.05
8	Roads and transportation to schools have improved due to UBE-related interventions.	105 (28.4%)	115 (31.1%)	75 (20.3%)	75 (20.3%)	370	3.05	1.01
9	Teacher recruitment, training, and student empowerment programmes under UBE have enhanced education quality.	90 (24.3%)	120 (32.4%)	85 (23.0%)	75 (20.3%)	370	2.97	1.04
10	UBE policies have contributed to increased enrolment and reduced dropout rates in Okrika schools.	110 (29.7%)	115 (31.1%)	75 (20.3%)	50 (13.5%)	370	3.18	0.98

Source: SPSS output, 2025

Table 2 shows that respondents generally perceive UBE policies as having a positive impact on access and quality of education in Okrika. For Item 6, 100 respondents (27.0%) strongly agreed and 120 (32.4%) agreed that basic school infrastructure improved, while 90 (24.3%) disagreed and 60 (16.2%) strongly disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.00 and standard deviation of 1.02. Item 7 indicates that 95 respondents (25.7%) strongly agreed and 110 (29.7%) agreed that access

to clean water and sanitation improved, with 90 (24.3%) disagreeing and 75 (20.3%) strongly disagreeing, yielding a mean of 2.91 and standard deviation of 1.05. For Item 8, 105 respondents (28.4%) strongly agreed and 115 (31.1%) agreed that roads and transportation to schools improved, while 75 (20.3%) disagreed and 75 (20.3%) strongly disagreed, producing a mean of 3.05 and standard deviation of 1.01. Item 9 shows that 90 respondents (24.3%) strongly agreed and 120 (32.4%) agreed that teacher recruitment, training, and student empowerment enhanced education quality, with 85 (23.0%) disagreeing and 75 (20.3%) strongly disagreeing, giving a mean of 2.97 and standard deviation of 1.04. Finally, Item 10 indicates that 110 respondents (29.7%) strongly agreed and 115 (31.1%) agreed that UBE policies increased enrolment and reduced dropouts, while 75 (20.3%) disagreed and 50 (13.5%) strongly disagreed, producing the highest mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.98. Overall, the data reveal that a significant majority of respondents perceive UBE policies as positively impacting school infrastructure, sanitation, transport, teacher quality, and student enrolment. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistency in positive experiences across respondents. These findings suggest that UBE interventions have contributed meaningfully to educational development in Okrika and highlight areas of success for future policy reinforcement.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no relationship between the Universal Basic Education policies and programmes implemented and the level of educational development in Okrika Local Government Area.

	Ho1 ind.	Ho1 dep.
Ho1 ind	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	370
Ho1 dep	Pearson Correlation	0.215*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003
	N	370

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS output, 2025

The correlation analysis in 12 indicates a positive relationship between Universal Basic Education (UBE) policies and programmes implemented (independent variable) and the level of educational development in Okrika Local Government Area (dependent variable). The Pearson correlation coefficient is $r = 0.215$, suggesting a weak-to-moderate positive association, meaning that improvements in UBE policies are associated with increases in educational development. The two-tailed significance value is $p = 0.003$, which is less than the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the observed relationship is statistically significant.

Decision Statement: Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between UBE policies and programmes implemented and the level of educational development in Okrika Local Government Area. Therefore, the implementation of UBE policies has contributed positively to educational outcomes, although the strength of the relationship is moderate, suggesting that other factors may also influence educational development.

H₀₂: There is no relationship between the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme and access to and quality of basic education in Okrika.

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

	Ho2 indp	Ho2 dep
Ho2 indp	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	370
Ho2 dep	Pearson Correlation	0.198*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	370

Source: SPSS output, 2025

The correlation analysis in shows a positive relationship ($r=0.198$ $r = 0.198$ $r=0.198$) between the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and access to and quality of basic education in Okrika. The positive correlation indicates that higher levels of UBE programme implementation are associated with improvements in educational access and quality. The two-tailed significance value is $p = 0.002$, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant.

Decision Statement: Since the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (H₀₂) is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the implementation of the UBE programme and access to and quality of basic education in Okrika Local Government Area. Therefore, the UBE programme has positively influenced both educational access and quality, although the strength of the relationship is moderate, suggesting that other factors may also contribute to these outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

What Universal Basic Education policies and programmes implemented in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025?

This subsection discusses the findings relating to the first research question, which examined the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policies and programmes implemented in Okrika Local Government Area between 2010 and 2025 and their implications for educational development. The discussion is based on the empirical evidence presented in Table 4.8 and the test of Hypothesis One, and is further supported by secondary data reviewed in Chapter Two of the study. The findings from Table 4.8 indicate that several UBE policies and programmes have been implemented in Okrika during the period under review. These include initiatives aimed at improving access to basic education, provision of learning materials, recruitment and training of teachers, enhancement of school enrolment and retention, and community sensitisation programmes. The responses from the 370 respondents show a generally positive perception of these interventions. For instance, a combined majority of respondents strongly agreed and agreed that access to basic education has improved due to UBE policies, with a mean score of 3.15 and a standard deviation of 1.03. This suggests that UBE policies have contributed to reducing barriers to school participation in Okrika, particularly among school-age children. Similarly, the

provision of learning materials and textbooks under UBE programmes recorded a mean score of 3.08 with a standard deviation of 1.01, indicating that respondents largely perceived improvements in instructional support. Although some respondents disagreed, the dominant response reflects that UBE interventions have enhanced the availability of basic learning resources in schools across the local government area. Teacher recruitment and training under UBE policies also recorded a mean score of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting that efforts to improve teaching quality through staffing and capacity building have been moderately successful. The findings further show that school enrolment and retention experienced the highest level of agreement among respondents, with a mean score of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This implies that one of the most visible outcomes of UBE implementation in Okrika has been increased enrolment and reduced dropout rates. Community sensitisation and engagement initiatives also recorded a positive mean score of 3.13 with a standard deviation of 1.04, indicating that awareness campaigns and stakeholder involvement have played a role in supporting educational development.

The test of Hypothesis One further strengthens these findings. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.215$ with a p-value of 0.003, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that there is no significant relationship between UBE policies and programmes implemented and the level of educational development in Okrika Local Government Area, was rejected. This implies that UBE policies and programmes implemented between 2010 and 2025 have a statistically significant relationship with educational development in the study area, although the strength of the relationship is weak to moderate. These findings are consistent with the secondary data reviewed in Chapter Two. Studies such as those by Adejumo (2016), Ogunleye (2018), and Eze (2019) emphasise that effective implementation of education policies enhances access, enrolment, and learning outcomes, particularly when supported by institutional commitment. The results from Okrika corroborate these studies by demonstrating that UBE policies have contributed to educational development at the grassroots level. However, the moderate strength of the relationship also reflects the concerns raised by scholars such as Okeke (2017) and Ogunyemi and Adegbite (2020), who argue that policy outcomes are often constrained by implementation challenges. Overall, the findings confirm that UBE policies have been implemented in Okrika and have contributed positively to educational development, though not without limitations.

The implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme on access and quality of basic education in Okrika

This subsection addresses the second research question, which examined the effect of UBE programme implementation on access to and quality of basic education in Okrika. The discussion is based on the data presented in Table 2 and the test of Hypothesis Two, supported by relevant literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The findings from Table 2 indicate that the implementation of the UBE programme has had a generally positive effect on both access to and quality of basic education in Okrika. Improvements in basic school infrastructure recorded a mean score of 3.00 with a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting that respondents acknowledged some level of infrastructural enhancement in schools. Access to clean water and sanitation facilities recorded a mean score of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 1.05, indicating moderate improvement, although challenges remain. Roads and transportation to schools showed a mean score of 3.05 with a standard deviation of 1.01, suggesting that UBE-related interventions have contributed to improved physical access to schools. Teacher recruitment, training, and student empowerment

programmes recorded a mean score of 2.97 and a standard deviation of 1.04, reflecting moderate improvements in education quality. The highest mean score in this category was recorded for increased enrolment and reduced dropout rates, with a mean of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.98, reinforcing the view that UBE implementation has encouraged school participation. The hypothesis test supports these findings. The Pearson correlation coefficient for Hypothesis Two was $r = 0.198$ with a p-value of 0.002. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{02}), which states that there is no significant relationship between UBE implementation and access to and quality of basic education in Okrika, was rejected. This indicates a statistically significant relationship between UBE implementation and improvements in access and quality of education. These findings align with Chapter Two literature, which highlights that UBE implementation improves enrolment, learning environments, and teaching quality when properly executed. UNESCO (2015) and the Federal Ministry of Education (2020) similarly report that UBE interventions have improved access and reduced dropout rates across Nigeria. The Okrika findings therefore confirm earlier empirical studies, while also reflecting the persistent quality-related challenges noted by scholars such as Jibowo (2018), particularly in rural and riverine communities.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Universal Basic Education (UBE) policies and programmes had been implemented in Okrika Local Government Area and had contributed positively to educational development. The findings established that UBE implementation was significantly related to improved access, enrolment, retention, infrastructure, learning resources, and aspects of education quality. The significant relationships recorded for the two hypotheses confirmed that UBE interventions had produced measurable educational benefits in the study area, although the relationships were relatively weak to moderate. The study therefore concluded that sustained funding, effective monitoring, improved infrastructure, and stronger implementation mechanisms were necessary to consolidate and further improve UBE outcomes in Okrika.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government at the federal and state levels should strengthen the implementation of Universal Basic Education policies in Okrika by ensuring consistent monitoring and effective coordination between education agencies to sustain gains in access and enrolment.
2. Adequate funding should be prioritised for the provision and maintenance of infrastructural and instructional resources, including classrooms, furniture, learning materials, and basic utilities, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

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