



Policy Implementation and Prospects for Effective Secondary School Administration in Enugu State, Nigeria

Asogwa Pamela Kosisochukwu

Department of Language Studies, Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu State, Nigeria

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Correspondence: Asogwa Pamela Kosisochukwu, Department of Language Studies, Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Effective secondary school administration in Nigeria depends less on the elegance of policy texts than on the fidelity with which those texts are translated into routine practice. This paper examines the implementation of education policy and the prospects for effective administration of public secondary schools in Enugu State. Drawing on Van Meter and Van Horn's implementation framework, Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy perspective, and an integrative review of empirical studies conducted in the state's six education zones, the analysis shows a persistent implementation gap. National instruments, the National Policy on Education, the Universal Basic Education Act, and emerging National Senior Secondary Education Commission minimum standards, are reasonably well articulated, yet school-level execution is constrained by unstable and poorly targeted funding, policy discontinuity across political cycles, weak instructional supervision, inadequate professional development, insecure school environments, and a dual governance structure that separates basic education from senior secondary management. Recent state reforms, including a large budgetary commitment to education, teacher professionalisation, and the Smart Green Schools programme, create genuine prospects, but they remain concentrated on basic education and risk leaving existing senior secondary schools under-resourced. The paper argues that effective administration will require policy stability, ring-fenced operational funding for existing secondary schools, transformational school leadership, continuous teacher development, integrated digital administration, and a single accountability chain from the Ministry of Education through the Post-Primary Schools Management Board to principals. Recommendations are offered for state government, school administrators, and development partners.

Keywords: policy implementation; secondary school administration; Enugu State; National Policy on Education; educational leadership; Universal Basic Education

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1. Introduction

Secondary education occupies a strategic position in Nigeria's education architecture. It is the stage at which learners consolidate the literacy, numeracy, civic, and scientific foundations of basic education and prepare either for tertiary study or for entry into the labour market (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013). The National Policy on Education (NPE) assigns secondary schools the tasks of providing functional skills, fostering national unity, and producing citizens who can think independently and respect the dignity of labour. Those ambitions are administratively demanding. They require principals who can interpret policy, allocate scarce resources, supervise instruction, manage staff, secure the school, and sustain productive relationships with communities and government agencies.

Enugu State, in Nigeria's South-East, organises public secondary education through six education zones and two principal agencies: the Post-Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB) for senior secondary schools and the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board (ENSUBEB) for the junior secondary segment of basic education. Research estimates place public secondary schools at approximately 292 to 314, with several thousand teachers

(Ekwe et al., 2023; Obi et al., 2025). The current transformation agenda has attracted national attention because education has received about one-third of recent state budgets and because Smart Green Schools are being built across political wards (Enugu State Government, 2025).

Yet a substantial body of local empirical work continues to report that policy implementation in Enugu's secondary schools is incomplete, uneven, and sometimes reversed. Asogwa and Vita-Agundu (2022) characterised the problem as a "policy implementation somersault," driven by inadequate funding, indiscipline, frequent policy changes, poor remuneration, weak leadership, low staff commitment, insecurity, unclear policy statements, and irregular supervision. Subsequent studies have corroborated elements of that diagnosis in quality assurance, leadership, instructional resources, safety, information management, and inclusive education (Anyanwu et al., 2024; Nneji, 2020; Obiakor, 2023; Odozor et al., 2025). The coexistence of ambitious new capital programmes with persistent operational deficits in existing secondary schools raises a policy question of first-order importance: under what conditions can education policy be implemented so that secondary school administration in Enugu State becomes consistently effective?

This article addresses that question through a critical policy analysis and integrative review rather than a new sample survey. It synthesises Enugu-based empirical studies, national policy documents, and implementation theory in order to clarify the governing policy architecture, identify constraints on school administration, assess emerging prospects, and propose an actionable agenda. The guiding questions are: What policies frame secondary school administration in Enugu State? What factors impede implementation? What prospects exist for more effective administration?

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Policy implementation

Public policy is a course of action deliberately chosen by government to address a public problem (Dye, 2013). Implementation is the stage at which that course of action is converted into programmes, organisational routines, and street-level behaviour. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) defined implementation as "those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions" (p. 447). In education, implementation is not a mechanical transmission of circulars from a ministry to a school. It is a negotiated process involving resource flows, inter-organisational communication, the disposition of implementers, and the socio-political environment of the school (Fullan, 2016; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

Nigerian scholarship has long argued that many education failures are implementation failures rather than design failures (Okoroma, 2006). Okoroma identified lack of political will, programme discontinuity, and corruption as primary sources of distortion. Adepaju and Fabiyi (2007) reached a similar conclusion for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, citing inadequate funding, weak monitoring, and political interference.

2.2 Effective secondary school administration

School administration is the coordinated work through which principals plan, organise, staff, direct, and control school resources to achieve stated goals (Peretomode, 2014). Effectiveness is judged here by a safe climate, instructional coherence, staff commitment, accountable resource use, and improvement in teaching and learning. Enugu-based studies typically examine instructional supervision, personnel management, student services, community relations, records, and quality-assurance compliance (Chukwu & Okonkwo, 2024; Nneji, 2020). Administration is therefore both a managerial and an instructional function. A principal who keeps the timetable running but cannot supervise teaching, maintain records, or protect the school has not administered effectively in the sense used here.

2.3 Prospects

Prospects are feasible opportunities created by legal frameworks, fiscal commitments, and institutional reforms that can be scaled. In Enugu they include the elevated education budget share, teacher assessment and retraining, the Teachers Registration Council career-path agenda, National Senior Secondary Education Commission (NSSEC) minimum standards, and possible transfer of digital practices from Smart Green Schools into senior secondary administration (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2024; NSSEC, 2025). A prospect is not a guarantee. It is a window that can close if resources, leadership, and inspection are not aligned with the standard the policy announces.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Van Meter and Van Horn implementation model

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) proposed that implementation performance depends on six variable clusters: policy standards and objectives; resources; inter-organisational communication and enforcement; characteristics of implementing agencies; economic, social, and political conditions; and the disposition of implementers. In Nigeria's federal system, national standards must travel through ministries, parastatals, education zones, and schools. Ambiguous standards, delayed funding, weak inspection, and poorly prepared principals are predicted to produce deficit even when the policy text is sound. The model is particularly useful in Enugu because it separates the quality of the written standard from the quality of the implementing system, an important distinction where the NPE and NSSEC documents are comparatively clear but school-level conditions are not.

3.2 Street-level bureaucracy

Lipsky (2010) argued that public policy is made by front-line workers who exercise discretion under scarcity, ambiguous goals, and high demand. Enugu principals and teachers are classic street-level bureaucrats: they decide how circulars on assessment, attendance, guidance, inclusion, and security actually operate. Analysis that ignores this discretion over-predicts the power of ministry directives and under-predicts the importance of capacity and motivation. Combined classes, postponed practicals, informal levies, and selective reporting are not random acts of indiscipline; they are locally rational adaptations to chronic scarcity. The task of reform is to change the conditions under which that discretion is exercised.

3.3 Educational change theory

Fullan (2016) argued that educational change succeeds when moral purpose, capacity building, and coherence operate together. Reforms fail when they multiply initiatives without building school capacity, or when they substitute buildings for professional learning. The caution applies directly to Enugu's simultaneous pursuit of Smart Green Schools, teacher testing, unified examinations, private-school regulation, and senior secondary modernisation. Coherence means that a principal can see how each initiative contributes to a single instructional and administrative purpose. Without that, energy is consumed by compliance rather than by improvement.

4. The Policy Architecture of Secondary Education

4.1 National framework

The sixth edition of the National Policy on Education remains the principal normative document for the sector (FRN, 2013). It consolidates pre-primary, primary, and junior secondary education into a 10-year basic education cycle consistent with the UBE Act of 2004, and it treats senior secondary education as post-basic education and career development. Senior secondary education is expected to offer science and mathematics, technology, the humanities, and business studies, with a stipulated teacher–pupil ratio of 1:40 at the post-basic level. Government is required to regulate school establishment, supervise schools regularly, and ensure that approved curricula are followed (FRN, 2013).

Two later instruments are reshaping senior secondary education. NSSEC's National Minimum Standards set benchmarks for teacher numbers and qualifications, ratios, infrastructure, digital learning, technical and vocational education, inclusion, and governance, with a short state compliance window (NSSEC, 2025). The Federal Ministry of Education's Education for Renewed Hope roadmap for 2024–2027 restates priorities around access, quality, teacher professionalisation, and accountability (FME, 2024). Together these documents supply the “standards and objectives” variable in the Van Meter–Van Horn model. The remaining variables, resources, communication, agency capacity, and implementer disposition, are settled at state and school level.

4.2 State-level institutional arrangement in Enugu

Implementation in Enugu is mediated by a divided institutional map. ENSUBEB administers the UBE segment, including junior secondary classes that often share campuses with senior secondary schools. PPSMB administers senior secondary schools. The Ministry of Education sets policy, licenses private providers, and coordinates quality assurance. Education zones provide an intermediate supervisory layer. This arrangement is legally intelligible, but it fragments responsibility. Obiakor (2023) noted that leadership commitment and interpersonal relationships among implementing officials largely determine UBE outcomes in the Enugu Education Zone, and that monitoring remains the weakest link. The same split has implications for secondary administration: a principal may be accountable to two boards for different arms of the same school, with different funding windows, inspection calendars, and personnel rules.

A transformation programme now sits on this structure. Smart Green Schools envisage 260 integrated basic-education campuses, one per ward, with digital classrooms, laboratories, ICT facilities, clinics, renewable energy, and learner support (Enugu State Government, 2025; Mbah & Huber, 2024). Complementary plans include smart senior secondary schools and revitalised technical institutions. Education's budget share has been defended at about 33 percent, above the UNESCO 15–20 percent benchmark, and has been accompanied by teacher assessment, digital-literacy training, and movement toward the national teacher career-path policy.

The reforms are significant but not self-executing. Reporting has documented incomplete sites, construction-quality concerns, teacher shortages, and a risk that new campuses draw attention while older public schools remain degraded. The relevant test for secondary administration is whether the new energy improves the daily work of principals in existing schools or creates a two-tier system in which new basic campuses are modern and existing senior secondary schools are residual.

5. Implementation Constraints and Implications for School Administration

5.1 Funding adequacy, timing, and targeting

Almost every Enugu-based study reviewed identifies funding as the binding constraint. Nneji (2020), surveying 307 principals, found insufficient funds and inadequate facilities to be the dominant obstacles, alongside strained community relations and enrolment pressure. Studies of instructional needs likewise report that principals lack facilities and professional-development budgets. Nationally, Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007) and Okoroma (2006) located the same problem at the heart of UBE and NPE implementation.

Recent budgets complicate a simple “no money” narrative. Large appropriations are tied mainly to new construction rather than to recurrent costs in existing secondary schools, teacher welfare, laboratory consumables, maintenance, security, guidance, and supervision. Resources must match standards in the categories principals actually control (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). Delayed releases and weak school-level financial autonomy convert approved policy into paper compliance. A budget line that does not reach the school before the examination timetable is not, for administrative purposes, a resource.

5.2 Policy discontinuity and political cycles

Asogwa and Vita-Agundu (2022) listed frequent policy changes among the causes of implementation somersault. Strong gubernatorial sponsorship can mobilise resources that routine bureaucracy cannot, but it can also personalise implementation and leave schools uncertain which circular still applies. Fullan (2016) warned that initiative overload without coherence produces ritual compliance. Principals then wait for the next directive rather than build durable internal systems. Policy stability should therefore be treated as an implementation resource in its own right.

5.3 Leadership style and implementer disposition

Implementer disposition is a core Van Meter–Van Horn variable. Odozor et al. (2025), studying administrators in the Nsukka Education Zone, found that transformational and transactional leadership positively influenced policy implementation, whereas autocratic leadership had little influence. Top-down decision-making hindered execution. Related work reported substantial teacher involvement in decision-making and recommended that principals institutionalise it (Ekwe et al., 2023). Administration is team work: assessment, examination integrity, and discipline cannot be carried by the principal alone.

Poor leadership style and low personnel commitment featured prominently in Asogwa and Vita-Agundu's (2022) list of somersault factors. Miserable remuneration and job insecurity help to explain that disposition. Where teachers perceive the reward system as unfair, they ration effort, the classic street-level response to chronic scarcity (Lipsky, 2010). Administration then becomes firefighting: attendance crises, examination malpractice, and conflict with communities replace instructional leadership.

5.4 Supervision, inspection, and quality assurance

Policy standards are inert without monitoring. Quality-assurance studies in Enugu public secondary schools find that policies are relatively well communicated but only moderately implemented in training, resources, and supervision; classroom observation and performance monitoring vary widely. Obiakor (2023) recommended intensified monitoring of UBE in the Enugu Education Zone. Challenges in implementing NPE guidance-service provisions have been traced to government, administration, and counsellor-level constraints (Odo, 2023). Inspection exists as an organisational form more often than as a developmental practice. A visit that produces a report without a funded follow-up does not close the implementation gap.

5.5 Infrastructure, ICT, and administrative technology

Effective administration now depends on digital records, data, and communication. Research finds low use of emerging technologies for record keeping and staff personnel administration in Enugu secondary schools (Chukwu & Okonkwo, 2024), even though principals' information communication management predicts effective administration. Constraints include hardware, power, funding, training, and resistance to change. Physical security infrastructure is more common than technology-based systems (Anyanwu et al., 2024).

The implication is double-edged. Smart Green Schools show that the state can specify a high-technology model, yet many existing senior secondary schools still administer with paper files and irregular power. Without an interoperability strategy, digital modernisation will deepen inequality between new campuses and older secondary schools.

5.6 Insecurity, enrolment pressure, and school climate

Insecurity appears in multiple Enugu studies as a drag on administration (Anyanwu et al., 2024; Asogwa & Vita-Agundu, 2022). Principals must manage cult-related violence, community disputes, and everyday safety. Nneji (2020) also identified enrolment pressure as a stressor. When numbers rise faster than classrooms and teachers, energy shifts from improvement to crowd control. A school that is unsafe or overcrowded cannot implement guidance, inclusion, or laboratory policy in any meaningful sense.

5.7 Inclusive education and guidance services

The NPE and inclusive-education policy require schools to serve learners with disabilities and to provide guidance services. Enugu evidence indicates inadequate implementation, insufficient teaching aids, limited administrative support, and weak teacher training. Guidance-service implementation is similarly constrained (Odo, 2023). These gaps test whether administration delivers the whole policy or merely keeps the timetable running. Inclusive and guidance provisions are not optional add-ons; they are part of the standard against which effective administration should be judged.

6. Prospects for Effective Secondary School Administration

Constraints do not exhaust the story. Several developments create a realistic, if conditional, prospect of improvement.

6.1 Fiscal prioritisation and political attention

A sustained education budget share near one-third of state expenditure, if protected from mid-year virement and paired with transparent procurement, can finance the operational inputs principals need (Enugu State Government, 2025). Gubernatorial attention reduces the “lack of political will” identified by Okoroma (2006). The prospect depends on rebalancing capital and recurrent spending so existing secondary schools are not residual claimants. Political attention that builds campuses but does not maintain laboratories will reproduce the implementation gap in a more expensive form.

6.2 Teacher professionalisation and capacity building

Teacher assessment, digital-literacy training, and the teacher career-path policy create a platform for rebuilding implementer disposition (Enugu State Government, 2025). Fullan (2016) treated capacity building as the centre of successful change. Training that is continuous, school-based, and tied to supervision can give principals a professional community capable of carrying policy. Merit-based recruitment of counsellors and ICT staff can relieve specialist shortages, if posts are filled in senior secondary schools, not only in new basic campuses.

6.3 Leadership development and participatory administration

The link between transformational leadership and policy implementation in the Nsukka zone is a practical prospect (Odozor et al., 2025). Principal preparation, mentoring, and performance agreements that reward instructional leadership can shift practice. Teacher involvement, already reported at a relatively high level (Ekwe et al., 2023), can be standardised through academic boards and school-based management committees with bounded authority. Leadership development is cheaper than construction and more closely aligned with the disposition variable that implementation theory treats as decisive.

6.4 National minimum standards and external accountability

NSSEC minimum standards supply the clear policy statements whose absence Asogwa and Vita-Agundu (2022) identified as a somersault factor (NSSEC, 2025). Combined with the FME roadmap’s accountability emphasis (FME, 2024), they allow a shift from episodic inspection to a predictable quality-assurance cycle, if the state domesticates the standards, funds the gaps, and publishes school-level compliance data. Public dashboards convert inspection from a private bureaucratic event into an accountability instrument.

6.5 Digital administration, community partnership, and safety

Because information communication management already predicts effective administration, modest investments in power, connectivity, and student information systems offer high returns. The Smart Schools technology stack should be treated as a state standard to be adapted, using offline-first records where broadband is unreliable. Asogwa and Vita-Agundu (2022) identified stakeholder funding as a leading prospect. Alumni associations, town unions, and faith-based organisations have historically equipped schools in the South-East. The state should set

transparent rules so that such contributions complement public funding and do not recreate informal levies. Community-based and technology-supported school security, if converted into school-level protocols, can reduce the insecurity tax on administration (Anyanwu et al., 2024). Principals need a single reporting channel, trained guards under clear rules, and maintenance budgets for existing physical infrastructure.

7. Discussion

Read through Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), Enugu's secondary education policy is strongest on standards and weakest on the alignment of resources, communication, agency capacity, and implementer disposition. The NPE, UBE framework, and NSSEC standards describe what schools should look like. The implementing system is bifurcated, inspection is irregular, and resources reaching existing secondary schools do not match the standards those schools are judged against.

Lipsky's (2010) perspective explains why principals produce "policy somersault" even when they understand the policy. Discretion is used to keep schools open: combined classes, postponed practicals, informal levies, and selective reporting. Those adaptations are locally rational and systemically corrosive, and they explain why policy communication can be adequate while training, resources, and supervision remain only moderate. Reform that issues another circular without changing scarcity will be absorbed into the same coping repertoire.

Fullan's (2016) change theory clarifies the present risk. Enugu has unusual political energy for education, concentrated on a visible basic-education model. Secondary administration will improve if Smart Schools are treated as the first phase of a whole-system rebuild that includes senior secondary leadership, laboratories, guidance, and digital administration. It will stall if existing secondary schools become a residual system. Comparative Nigerian evidence supports this reading. Okoroma (2006) showed that implementation failure has repeatedly undone national education ambitions. Adepaju and Fabiyi (2007) showed that UBE access gains can coexist with weak administration when monitoring and counterpart funding fail. Enugu is not exempt. The difference will be whether policy stability, targeted recurrent funding, and leadership capacity are treated as infrastructure equal in status to buildings.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Policy implementation is the decisive variable in the quest for effective secondary school administration in Enugu State. The state's policy texts are broadly consistent with national and global commitments to quality, equity, and relevance. Empirical studies conducted across the six education zones nevertheless document a durable implementation gap expressed in funding mismatches, leadership weaknesses, irregular supervision, insecure and overcrowded environments, limited digital administration, and fragmented governance. Recent reforms create a genuine prospect of closing that gap, provided they are extended from capital projects in basic education to the operating systems of senior secondary schools.

The following recommendations follow from the analysis.

First, the state government should adopt a dual-track financing rule: every major capital announcement should be paired with a published operational grant for existing public secondary schools covering maintenance, laboratories, security, guidance, and school-level professional development. Budget reports should show releases to schools, not only ministerial appropriations.

Second, the Ministry of Education should domesticate NSSEC minimum standards within a multi-year closing-the-gap plan and publish an annual school-level compliance dashboard. Inspection should combine risk-based external review with structured internal supervision.

Third, PPSMB and ENSUBEB should negotiate a joint protocol for shared campuses so that principals are not subjected to conflicting personnel, funding, and reporting regimes. In the medium term, the state should consider a unified secondary-education service with a single accountability chain.

Fourth, principal preparation should be professionalised. Appointment and continuation in office should depend on instructional leadership, financial probity, and an inclusive school climate, supported by mentoring and induction grounded in transformational practice (Odozor et al., 2025).

Fifth, teacher development should be school-based, continuous, and aligned with the career-path policy, with attention to STEM practicals, inclusive pedagogy, guidance, and digital records. Remuneration and promotion should reward verified performance.

Sixth, Smart Green School technology standards should be distilled into a minimum digital-administration package for every public secondary school: unique learner identifiers, an offline-capable information system, connectivity, and power backup. Security policy should integrate physical infrastructure with community measures (Anyanwu et al., 2024).

Seventh, policy stability should be treated as a policy objective. New initiatives should pass an implementation impact assessment that specifies school-level tasks, funding, training, and inspection metrics before launch.

If these measures are pursued with the same political energy now devoted to new campuses, Enugu State can convert an ambitious policy moment into durable administrative capacity. If they are not, the state will add another chapter to Nigeria's long record of well-written education policies and poorly administered schools.

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