



## Assessment of Awareness of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the National Policy on Education Among Secondary School Teachers in Bayelsa State

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### Abstract

Education is universally acknowledged as a key driver of societal transformation, human capital development, and national progress. It promotes intellectual growth, civic responsibility, and socio-economic advancement. In Nigeria, education is both a constitutional right and a policy instrument for achieving national development goals. For education to fulfill its transformative purpose, it must operate within a robust legal framework that ensures equity, accountability, and quality assurance. Education laws such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the National Policy on Education (NPE) provide these frameworks. However, a persistent gap exists between policy formulation and practical implementation, particularly in teachers' awareness and application of these laws. This study examines the level of awareness and understanding of education laws among secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, emphasizing their role as frontline implementers of educational policies and custodians of professional ethics. Using a qualitative, document-based research design, this study analyzed legislative texts, policy frameworks, and relevant literature to assess the depth of teachers' legal awareness and the factors influencing it. Findings indicate that low legal literacy among teachers stems from inadequate legal education in teacher training programs, irregular sensitization efforts, and limited institutional engagement with education law. Consequently, teachers often struggle to uphold key provisions of the UBE Act, including compulsory attendance, inclusive education, and ethical conduct. The study recommends integrating education law into teacher education curricula, organizing regular legal awareness workshops, and promoting collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the TRCN, and school management boards. Strengthening teachers' legal literacy will enhance accountability, improve compliance, and promote a more equitable and effective educational system in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Education Law, Teachers' Awareness, Legal Literacy, Universal Basic Education Act, National Policy on Education

### Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as the most powerful tool for the transformation of individuals and societies. It equips learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal development, national integration, and global competitiveness. Education not only fosters intellectual growth but also promotes socio-economic advancement and democratic participation. In Nigeria, as in other nations, education is regarded as a fundamental right and a means of achieving national objectives. However, for education to function effectively as a developmental catalyst, it must be guided by structured frameworks including legislative instruments that govern its delivery. The intersection of education and law ensures that schools operate within a regulated environment that guarantees equity, accountability, and professionalism. Thus, the relationship between education and its governing legal structures forms the bedrock of this inquiry.

Education laws, as a subset of public law, consist of legal instruments, statutes, regulations, and policy frameworks formulated to guide the operation, administration, and professional standards of educational institutions. These laws define the rights, duties, and obligations of all stakeholders in the educational process, including teachers, learners, administrators, and the state. Legal frameworks such as the Universal Basic Education Act (2004), and National Policy on Education are pivotal to ensuring quality, access, equity, and the protection of educational rights. Biokoro (2019) notes that without a comprehensive legal structure, the education system becomes

vulnerable to inconsistencies, abuses, and inefficiencies. As such, education laws serve as the blueprint for maintaining the credibility and functionality of schools across Nigeria. Their relevance becomes more pronounced when examined in relation to those who operationalise them within the learning environment teachers.

Teachers, as the most immediate implementers of educational policies and custodians of instructional practices, play a critical role in the realization of legal and professional educational standards. They are charged not only with delivering content but also with upholding ethical conduct, protecting learners' rights, enforcing school regulations, and aligning their practice with national goals. The TRCN Act, for instance, mandates that every practicing teacher must be registered and certified, reflecting the professionalization of the field. However, as Nwachukwu (2023) posits, the efficacy of these legal instruments depends largely on the degree to which teachers are aware of and committed to their provisions. Ignorance of these laws may result in unintentional breaches, poor instructional leadership, and violations of students' rights. The teacher's role as a legal actor within the school system underpins the need for rigorous assessment of their awareness of such laws, particularly within the unique structure of Nigeria's secondary school system.

Secondary schools, forming the bridge between basic and higher education, play a pivotal role in shaping learners' academic trajectories and preparing them for professional and civic life. These schools are expected to function according to national legal and policy frameworks that govern curriculum content, student assessment, classroom discipline, and administrative practices. Ekunda (2020) asserts that the administration and success of secondary education are intricately linked to the level of compliance with education laws by both school authorities and classroom teachers. Yet, the level to which these laws are internalized by teachers within secondary school environments remains a subject of concern. A failure to adequately understand or implement these laws can compromise educational delivery and institutional governance. Hence, the legal awareness of teachers in secondary schools forms a crucial area of exploration, particularly in sub national contexts where disparities in implementation may exist.

Bayelsa State, situated in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, offers a distinctive geographical, socio-political, and educational context for examining teachers' awareness of education laws. While education remains a statutory responsibility of both federal and state governments, the actual delivery and monitoring of educational services at the grassroots level often fall short of policy expectations. Obi and Obi (2014) highlight that regional disparities in educational performance and policy implementation frequently stem from limited awareness and enforcement of relevant laws. In Bayelsa State, secondary school teachers face challenges such as irregular training, inadequate access to legal documentation, and limited professional development opportunities in educational jurisprudence. These factors may result in diminished legal literacy, leading to systemic inefficiencies in classroom management, professional conduct, and student discipline.

An assessment of the level of awareness of education laws among teachers involves the systematic investigation of the depth, accuracy, and functional understanding of statutory provisions guiding educational practice. According to Adeoye (2019), such assessment is crucial for identifying knowledge gaps, informing policy interventions, and ensuring alignment between legal expectations and pedagogical realities. Teachers' legal awareness is not limited to theoretical knowledge but encompasses their ability to interpret, apply, and comply with specific regulations in real-time classroom and administrative contexts. In the case of Bayelsa State, such an assessment becomes vital in determining whether current teacher behaviours align with the principles of legality, accountability, and professional ethics. To achieve this, it is essential to analyse key sub-variables that collectively represent the architecture of education law in Nigeria.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act is a central legislative instrument designed to provide free, compulsory, and uninterrupted nine years of basic education for Nigerian children. Teachers, especially those in junior secondary schools, serve as frontline agents of this mandate. Yet, the level of awareness of the UBE Act among teachers remains under-researched. Ndupu (2020) argues that ignorance of the UBE provisions can lead to teacher apathy towards enrolment enforcement, poor implementation of inclusive education policies, and non-compliance with statutory teaching standards. In Bayelsa, where access and retention remain pressing challenges, the awareness of this Act among teachers is critical to achieving universal education objectives. This necessitates focused inquiry into how well teachers understand and internalise the core elements of the UBE Act.

Equally vital is the National Policy on Education (NPE), which serves as Nigeria's blueprint for educational goals, philosophies, curricula, and structural reforms. Teachers are expected to align their practices with the prescriptions

of this document. Fafunwa (2004) noted that the successful implementation of the NPE hinges on teachers' capacity to comprehend and translate policy objectives into classroom strategies. However, the level of such alignment depends on the degree to which teachers are familiar with the NPE's content and intent. In Bayelsa's secondary schools, where educational outcomes vary widely, the level of teachers' awareness of the NPE plays a determinative role in curricular delivery and student engagement. Understanding this relationship is essential in evaluating institutional responsiveness to national education policies.

### **Concept of Education Laws**

Education laws serve as the backbone of educational administration, standardization, and accountability in any nation. These legal frameworks are essential for ensuring that all stakeholders within the education system operate within defined parameters that uphold the rights of learners, the professional conduct of educators, and the accountability of governing bodies. Education law in Nigeria provides a systematized structure for the development, implementation, and regulation of educational policies, practices, and standards. Scholars such as Isa & Jailani (2014) have emphasized the need for continuous legal orientation and monitoring to guarantee that educational objectives are not merely theoretical but legally binding across various institutions. As educational challenges evolve, the relevance of legal frameworks becomes even more pronounced in upholding the quality and integrity of educational services.

One of the defining elements of education laws in Nigeria is their role in protecting the rights and responsibilities of learners and educators alike. Teachers, who stand at the centre of classroom engagement and learner development, are legally obligated to understand and operate within the statutory boundaries established by the government and professional bodies. According to Epelle and Kalu (2018), the effectiveness of a school is inextricably linked to the level to which legal frameworks are understood and implemented at all levels. Without proper awareness and adherence to these laws, the risks of rights violations, unethical practices, and policy non-compliance increase significantly. The legal frameworks serve not only as instruments of regulation but also as tools for empowering teachers to act ethically and within the provisions of established educational standards.

Education laws also encompass the institutional regulations that guide the establishment, funding, and governance of schools across different tiers of education. The Universal Basic Education Act, for example, does not merely mandate free education; it outlines specific responsibilities for teachers, school administrators, parents, and state authorities. Hollander (2021) maintains that legislative frameworks such as this are designed not only to guarantee access to education but also to ensure that its delivery meets nationally approved quality indicators. In this regard, education laws are not static but dynamic instruments that evolve with changes in societal needs, pedagogical advancements, and governance models.

### **Teachers in Secondary Schools**

Teachers in secondary schools hold a central position in the educational process, serving not only as facilitators of knowledge but also as role models, curriculum implementers, and guardians of educational standards. Their professional competence, ethical conduct, and awareness of legal responsibilities have a profound impact on the overall quality and effectiveness of secondary education. In the dynamic context of Nigeria's educational landscape, secondary school teachers are expected to engage students intellectually, manage classrooms efficiently, and comply with legal and policy frameworks that govern education. According to Usman (2015), the quality of instructional supervision, which is largely determined by the preparedness and awareness of teachers, has a direct bearing on students' academic performance and school effectiveness. The performance of secondary schools is often a reflection of the quality of their teaching workforce, highlighting the importance of strengthening teachers' professional and legal capacities.

Teachers at the secondary level operate within a highly structured and policy-driven environment that demands a thorough understanding of educational goals, legal mandates, and pedagogical strategies. These educators are not just conveyors of academic content; they are legally obligated to uphold the rights of learners, adhere to regulatory frameworks, and act within the confines of professional ethics. The lack of awareness or misinterpretation of education laws can lead to violations of students' rights, classroom mismanagement, and non-compliance with curriculum standards. Nworugu (2015) points out that teacher education programmes in Nigeria often do not provide sufficient training on legal and policy matters, leaving many in-service teachers unaware of the laws governing their practice. This deficiency in legal literacy has implications not only for instructional delivery but also for administrative discipline and the enforcement of ethical standards within schools.

In the context of public secondary schools, teachers are also key implementers of national curriculum objectives, which are often legally backed and subject to regulatory oversight. Their ability to translate policy into practice hinges on their understanding of the institutional and legal frameworks that define their duties. As noted by Ayodele (2007), when teachers are unaware of these foundational policies and regulations, they may unknowingly contravene established guidelines, thereby weakening the effectiveness of the educational system. In regions such as Bayelsa State, where infrastructural limitations and administrative bottlenecks are prevalent, ensuring that teachers possess adequate legal knowledge is crucial for sustaining quality and compliance in public secondary schools.

Beyond policy implementation, secondary school teachers play a significant role in shaping school culture, enforcing discipline, and promoting student welfare. These functions require not only pedagogical expertise but also legal awareness and sensitivity to students' rights and responsibilities. According to Nwachukwu (2023), teachers who demonstrate strong awareness of educational laws are more effective in maintaining order, fairness, and transparency in their classrooms. This awareness fosters a more secure and legally compliant school environment, where both teachers and students can thrive academically and ethically. As the custodians of young minds during one of the most formative phases of their educational journey, secondary school teachers must be fully empowered with the legal tools necessary for executing their roles effectively.

### **Level of Awareness of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act among Secondary School Teachers**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 stands as a pivotal legislative framework enacted to ensure equitable, free, and compulsory education for all Nigerian children at the primary and junior secondary levels. The Act delineates clear responsibilities for stakeholders, including parents, teachers, local authorities, and the federal government, and provides legal sanctions for defaulting parties. Despite its relevance, the level of awareness and practical engagement with the Act among secondary school teachers, particularly in states such as Bayelsa, remains insufficient. According to the Compendium of Education Sector Laws in Nigeria (Third Edition, Vol. 1), (2024) the UBE Act is designed not only to address access to education but to embed quality and inclusiveness within the national education system. However, the level to which secondary school teachers understand its provisions including the implications for enrolment enforcement, learner rights, and teaching obligations has yet to be fully ascertained. Legal awareness in this context is not simply a matter of knowing the law's existence but also interpreting and applying it to classroom realities and administrative decisions.

### **Policies of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act**

Free and compulsory basic education for all children of school-going age, Enforcement of compulsory school attendance, Establishment of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Creation of State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), Establishment of Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), Provision of adequate infrastructure and instructional materials, Deployment of qualified and trained teachers, Regular in-service training and professional development for teachers, Among others.

Teachers' limited awareness of the UBE Act often translates to ineffective implementation of compulsory education directives at the school level. Many educators, particularly in rural and under-resourced schools in Bayelsa State, are not adequately oriented on their statutory responsibilities under the Act. As observed by Deizighe (2024), low levels of legal awareness among teachers adversely impact classroom management, learner protection, and the enforcement of attendance policies. When teachers are not fully conversant with the legal expectation that every child within the defined age bracket must be enrolled and retained in school, they may fail to take appropriate actions in response to absenteeism, dropouts, or parental negligence. This ultimately undermines the goals of universal access and retention that the Act seeks to achieve. In addition, the role of teachers in supporting School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), as outlined in the Act, is often neglected due to their unfamiliarity with the law's participatory provisions.

Equally concerning is the disconnect between the legal framework of the UBE Act and its operationalisation within secondary school settings. While the Act primarily targets basic education, its relevance extends into the junior secondary segment of the Nigerian education structure, which is housed within secondary schools. Nwachukwu (2024) highlights that principals who are aware of educational laws demonstrate stronger administrative effectiveness, yet many classroom teachers remain uninformed about the laws guiding compulsory basic education. In Bayelsa, where systemic challenges such as resource constraints, teacher shortages, and community apathy persist, the absence of targeted legal orientation exacerbates these issues. Teachers who are unaware of the policy mandates embedded in the UBE Act may not prioritize early identification of at-risk learners

or implement proactive retention strategies. This reveals a critical need to bridge the knowledge gap between policy provisions and classroom practice.

Moreover, inadequate awareness of the UBE Act among secondary school teachers reflects broader shortcomings in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Legal literacy, though vital for enforcing statutory mandates, is rarely included in the training curriculum for educators. The study by Ayeerun and Unachukwu (2019) reveals that awareness of education laws has a significant influence on decision-making and school effectiveness, suggesting that teachers' legal understanding should not be optional but integral to their professional development. In the context of Bayelsa State, the integration of legal content such as the UBE Act into continuous teacher training can play a transformative role in reshaping attitudes and practices around learner enrolment, inclusive education, and the right to basic education. Teachers must be empowered to function as legally informed practitioners capable of upholding, interpreting, and enforcing educational rights within their classrooms and communities.

### **Level of Awareness of National Policy on Education among Secondary School Teachers**

The National Policy on Education (NPE) serves as the cornerstone of Nigeria's educational philosophy, outlining the goals, structure, and administrative principles guiding the entire system. The policy defines the objectives of education at all levels and provides a framework for curriculum development, teacher training, infrastructural provision, and educational governance. As articulated in the National Policy on Education (2024), the policy is premised on the integration of education into national development strategies and the cultivation of a united, productive, and morally sound citizenry. However, despite its centrality, there is growing concern that many secondary school teachers, particularly in regions such as Bayelsa State, are insufficiently aware of its provisions. This gap undermines the capacity of educators to align instructional practices and administrative duties with national objectives, leading to disjointed implementation and educational inconsistencies across schools.

### **Policies of the National Policy on Education (NPE)**

Provision of free and compulsory basic education, Emphasis on early childhood care and education, Universal access to quality education at all levels, Promotion of functional education for skill acquisition, Implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into education, Inclusion of special needs education and inclusive practices, equal educational opportunities for all citizens irrespective of gender, religion, or disability.

One critical dimension of teacher awareness of the NPE is their understanding of the policy's structural framework, including the 6-3-3-4 system. This framework was introduced to reflect the developmental stages of learners and to equip them with relevant knowledge and vocational skills at each level. Yet, without a solid grasp of this structure, many teachers misinterpret the expectations assigned to each educational phase, thereby compromising curriculum delivery and assessment strategies. As noted in the analysis of the National Policy on Education (2024), the shift from history to social studies and the emphasis on science and technology education require that teachers possess policy literacy to adapt to curricular transformations effectively. In Bayelsa's secondary schools, where outdated teaching practices persist in certain localities, the low level of policy awareness hinders the realisation of this national restructuring, making it difficult to actualise the holistic educational goals envisioned in the NPE.

The NPE also outlines the need for inclusive education, gender equity, and the integration of special needs learners into mainstream education. Teachers are expected to foster inclusive classrooms, design differentiated learning experiences, and provide equitable opportunities for all students. However, when educators are unaware of these policy directives, their practices may inadvertently perpetuate exclusion, bias, or neglect. Nwachukwu (2024) asserts that schools with high administrative effectiveness often demonstrate staff familiarity with educational policies, including those advocating for equity and inclusion. In Bayelsa State, cultural and economic factors may influence access to education, teachers who lack awareness of the NPE's inclusive provisions are less likely to advocate for vulnerable learners. As a result, these students are at greater risk of marginalisation, and the national goal of education as a fundamental right for all remains unrealized.

Another significant area of the NPE where teacher awareness is imperative is in relation to the policy's emphasis on continuous assessment and formative evaluation. The NPE encourages teachers to move beyond high-stakes summative tests and engage students through regular, diagnostic, and supportive assessments. This approach aims to enhance learner participation, foster academic growth, and inform instructional adjustments. Yet, many teachers

continue to rely solely on outdated evaluation methods, primarily due to inadequate exposure to policy guidelines. According to Ayeerun and Unachukwu (2019), limited legal and policy awareness among school personnel leads to inconsistency in instructional supervision and weakens the implementation of national reforms. In the context of Bayelsa's public secondary schools, enhancing teachers' awareness of this component of the NPE is critical to promoting student-centred learning and ensuring that assessment practices reflect national quality standards.

### Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of any educational system is closely tied to the level to which its stakeholders particularly teachers are aware of and compliant with relevant legal and policy frameworks. In Nigeria, several education laws, including the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the National Policy on Education (NPE), have been enacted to guide the conduct, governance, and ethical practices within the education sector. These legal instruments serve as the backbone of educational accountability, ensuring professional standards, learner protection, and institutional integrity. Teachers, being the primary agents of curriculum delivery and student engagement, are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of these laws in order to uphold the statutory demands of their profession. However, it is uncertain whether teachers, especially those operating in secondary schools across Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa State, possess the requisite awareness to effectively implement and comply with these regulations. Teachers' low awareness of these laws undermines their capacity to function as both educators and ethical stewards of the schooling environment. The implications of such knowledge gaps extend beyond the classroom to affect school governance, educational quality, and the overall credibility of Nigeria's public education system. A comprehensive assessment is essential for identifying knowledge gaps, designing capacity-building programmes, and promoting a culture of legal consciousness and professionalism among teachers. It is within this context that the present study seeks to highlight the level of awareness of education laws among teachers in secondary schools in Bayelsa State, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on legal compliance, educational quality, and systemic improvement.

### Summary of the Study

This study examined secondary school teachers' level of awareness of two fundamental policy instruments guiding Nigeria's educational system: The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the National Policy on Education (NPE). The findings indicate that teacher awareness of these documents is not simply a theoretical concern but a critical factor influencing the success of Nigeria's universal education agenda. The UBE Act outlines mandatory provisions for ensuring equitable access to basic education, yet many teachers in Bayelsa State demonstrate limited knowledge of its content, implications, and enforcement mechanisms. This lack of legal awareness poses challenges for effective policy implementation, learner protection, and institutional accountability. Insights from Harrison (2017) emphasize that improving school quality in developing contexts requires strengthening governance structures alongside enhancing teacher competence. In Bayelsa State, where school access remains uneven and dropout rates are still an issue, the teachers' limited knowledge of the UBE Act contributes to ongoing disparities. A well-informed teaching workforce is therefore essential for aligning school practices with national educational standards and closing gaps in policy enforcement.

The study similarly explored the level of teacher awareness of the National Policy on Education. The NPE is a comprehensive guideline covering curriculum design, assessment practices, inclusive education, administrative responsibilities, and national development goals. The evidence shows that teachers' familiarity with the policy remains inconsistent, affecting their ability to interpret curriculum mandates, implement inclusive practices, and maintain compliance with federal education standards. This observation aligns with Nwachukwu (2024), who reported a positive correlation between teachers' legal and policy literacy and overall school effectiveness. A significant dimension of the NPE highlighted in this study is the integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into the secondary school curriculum. The policy emphasises the need for students to acquire practical, entrepreneurial, and employability skills. However, insufficient teacher awareness has resulted in vocational programmes being poorly implemented or completely marginalised. This situation is particularly problematic in Bayelsa State, where youth unemployment and skills shortages remain pressing socio-economic concerns. As noted by Nwachukwu (2024), an organisational culture aligned with policy directives enhances administrative effectiveness and contributes to broader national development priorities.

The overall findings show that teacher awareness is constrained by inadequate orientation programmes, limited access to official policy documents, and poor dissemination channels. The review further identified disparities between urban and rural teachers in terms of access to training and learning materials. Where training exists, it tends to be irregular, unsystematic, and without meaningful follow-up mechanisms. This gap between teacher

awareness and actual implementation reflects a deeper structural issue within the state's educational administration.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal widespread gaps in teachers' knowledge of the UBE Act and the National Policy on Education, both of which are central to Nigeria's educational planning and implementation framework. The lack of a structured results section in past studies has contributed to inconsistency in documenting the extent of teacher awareness, thereby giving many reports the appearance of general reviews rather than evidence-driven analyses. This study addressed that weakness by identifying specific areas where teachers fall short, such as inadequate comprehension of the UBE Act, poor familiarity with the provisions of the NPE, and minimal understanding of the TVET requirements within the national education framework. Evidence from the reviewed literature shows that teacher awareness does not consistently translate into classroom or administrative action, highlighting a major gap between knowledge and implementation. Factors such as poor access to official documents, reliance on second-hand information, limited orientation, and uneven training across rural and urban locations contribute significantly to this gap. These issues undermine the credibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness of secondary education in Bayelsa State and weaken progress toward national education objectives. The study therefore concludes that improving teacher legal literacy is central to enhancing policy implementation, strengthening governance structures, and promoting learner-centred, inclusive, and skill-driven education. Ensuring that teachers understand the guiding laws and policies is fundamental to building a more equitable and functional educational system in Bayelsa State.

### Recommendations

Based on the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Teachers should receive regular and well-organized training each year so they can fully understand the UBE Act and the NPE.
2. Schools should provide teachers with easy access to updated copies of these policies in both print and digital forms.
3. Supervisors should check regularly to ensure teachers are not only aware of the policies but are also applying them correctly in their work.
4. Special training programmes should be created to support teachers in rural areas so they have the same opportunities as those in urban schools.
5. Teachers should be trained in TVET so they can effectively teach practical and entrepreneurial skills to students.

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