

Educational Policy and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of the interplay between educational policy and national development in Nigeria. Drawing upon a sizable range of literature, it delves into the historical evolution of educational policies in Nigeria. The paper critically examines the challenges encountered in the implementation of educational policies in the country, including issues related to access, equity, quality, and relevance. Furthermore, it examines the linkages between education and key indicators of national development such as human capital development, economic growth, social cohesion and democratic governance. By synthesizing extant theoretical insights, the article provides further valuable viewpoints for policymakers, educators and generic stakeholders seeking to enhance the contribution of education to Nigeria's overall development agenda. Ultimately, the work underscores the importance of coherent, evidence-based educational policies in fostering sustainable national development in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Education, Educational policy, national policy, development, national development

Introduction

Educational policy plays unarguably, a pivotal role in shaping the development trajectory of any nation, and Nigeria is no exception (Okeke & Ifeagwazi, 2018). Since gaining independence in 1960 therefore, Nigeria has grappled with various challenges in its educational sector, ranging from inadequate infrastructure to outdated curricula (Okeke, 2014). However, amidst these challenges, educational policies have been formulated and implemented to address the diverse needs of the country's educational system and in the process have contributed to the course of national development. This paper accordingly aims to provide an analysis of the relationship between educational policy and national development in Nigeria by delving into the historical evolution of educational policies in the country and their impact on national development

Indeed, Nigeria's educational system has undergone significant transformations over the years, reflecting the country's socio-political and economic dynamics. The colonial era actually

laid the foundation for formal education in Nigeria, with the establishment of missionary schools and the introduction of Western education. However, the engendered educational system was largely elitist and did not adequately cater to the needs of the majority of the population (Ayling, 2016; Okeke & Chukwudebelu, 2014). Following independence in 1960, Nigeria embarked on a series of educational reforms aimed at expanding access to education and fostering national development.

One of the landmark policies during this period was the 6-3-3-4 system of education, which restructured the education system into six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education, and four years of tertiary education (Egugbo & Salami, 2021). This policy aimed to provide a more holistic and relevant education to Nigerian students, aligning with the country's developmental goals. Several decades after, how has the generic educational system fared and what has been the relationship between educational policy and national development in the country? These are the propelling research questions of this contribution.

Historical Evolution of Educational Policies in Nigeria

The historical evolution of educational policies in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of colonial influences, post-independence reforms, socio-political dynamics, and economic realities. From the pre-colonial era to the present day, education has been recognized as a crucial tool for individual empowerment, national development, and social cohesion. Understanding this evolution therefore entails examining key milestones, challenges, and shifts in educational policies over time. The historical evolution of what appositely was educational policy in Nigeria started in the pre-colonial era. At this period, education in Nigeria was predominantly informal, with knowledge transmitted orally within communities (Fafunwa, 2018). Education was primarily aimed at imparting practical skills, cultural values, and societal norms to the younger generation. Each ethnic group had its own indigenous educational system, which varied in content and structure (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

During the colonial era, the introduction of Western education in Nigeria can be traced back to the 19th century with the arrival of Christian missionaries, particularly in the southern region. The British colonial administration later established formal educational institutions to train local interpreters, clerks, and administrative staff to assist in colonial governance and facilitate trade. The 1882 Education Ordinance marked the beginning of formal education policy in Nigeria under colonial rule (Fafunwa, 2018; Oluwalola et al, 2022). This ordinance focused on promoting Western education but largely neglected indigenous systems. The colonial government aimed to produce a cadre of educated elites to serve its administrative needs and further its economic interests.

Under the post-independence era, following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the government embarked on various educational reforms aimed at addressing disparities, expanding access, and fostering national unity. The 1969 National Curriculum Conference emphasized the importance of education as an instrument for national development and social justice. It sought to provide free and compulsory primary education, promote adult literacy, and enhance vocational and technical training. It subsequently gave birth to a national policy on education (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020). Later decades saw the proliferation of educational institutions at all levels, driven by government initiatives and private investments. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and disparities in access persisted, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

The 1980s witnessed significant shifts in Nigeria's educational policies, influenced by economic austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions as part of the

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). This program advocated for fiscal discipline, deregulation, and privatization, leading to reduced government spending on education and the introduction of cost-sharing mechanisms. The implementation of SAP resulted in budget cuts, deteriorating education infrastructure and declining educational quality in public schools (Molokwu et al, 2022). It also led to the emergence of private educational institutions catering to affluent families who could afford higher fees. Consequently, inequalities in access and quality widened, exacerbating social tensions and undermining the goal of education as a vehicle for social mobility.

In the 21st century, successive Nigerian governments have made efforts to reform the education sector, with a focus on enhancing quality, relevance, and inclusivity. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in 1999 aimed to ensure nine years of free and compulsory education for all children, covering primary and junior secondary levels (Nweke et al, 2022). Additionally, initiatives such as the National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education and the establishment of specialized institutions for technical and vocational training reflect efforts to align education with the demands of the modern economy. Despite these reforms, persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, curriculum irrelevance and regional disparities continue to hinder progress in Nigeria's education sector. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed existing vulnerabilities, exacerbating inequalities in access to remote learning and highlighting the need for resilient and inclusive educational systems.

Indeed, the historical evolution of educational policies in Nigeria reflects a complex journey marked by colonial legacies, post-independence aspirations and contemporary socio-economic realities. While significant progress has been made in expanding access to education, addressing disparities and promoting inclusivity, persistent challenges remain. Moving forward, sustained investment, innovative reforms, and multi-stakeholder collaboration will be essential to realizing the full potential of education as a driver of individual opportunity and national development in Nigeria.

Specific Challenges in Educational Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Despite the foregoing scenario and the formulation of various educational policies, Nigeria's educational system continues to face numerous challenges that hinder its contribution to national development. In specificity, some of these challenges include:

1. **Inadequate Funding:** The educational sector in Nigeria is often underfunded, leading to a lack of resources for infrastructure development. Many schools in Nigeria still lack basic infrastructure such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, which hampers effective teaching and learning.
2. **Quality Assurance:** There is a significant disparity in the quality of education across different regions of Nigeria, with urban areas often having better educational facilities than rural areas. This inequality perpetuates social and economic disparities and hinders national development efforts.
3. **Curriculum Relevance:** The curriculum in Nigerian schools is often criticized for being outdated and not adequately preparing students for the demands of the modern workforce. There is a need for continuous review and updating of the curriculum to align with global trends and technological advancements.

Education and Key Indicators of National Development

Education stands as a cornerstone in the development journey of any nation, acting as both a catalyst and a consequence of progress. In the case of Nigeria, a country rich in human and natural resources, the linkages between education and key indicators of national development

such as human capital development, economic growth, social cohesion, and democratic governance are debatable. In this section, this paper delves into the intricate relationship between education and these vital aspects of Nigeria's development trajectory.

Human Capital Development: Human capital, comprising the knowledge, skills, and health of a population, is central to a nation's development (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2023). Education serves as the primary means to enhance human capital. In Nigeria, investing in education is imperative for nurturing a skilled workforce capable of driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity across various sectors. Quality education equips individuals with the competencies needed to adapt to evolving economic demands, thereby fostering human capital development. Moreover, education contributes to improved health outcomes through awareness programs and access to information, further augmenting human capital. Only strangers to the Nigerian realities would conclude that there are positive linkages between education and human capital development in Nigeria. The most critical health needs of Nigerians are still referred to foreign countries for solution while the medical schools in the nation remain palpably ill-equipped for the production of needed medical personnel. National educational policies have not helped matters in such regards.

Economic Growth: Education plays a pivotal role in fostering economic growth by stimulating productivity, promoting innovation, and reducing poverty (Azzahra et al, 2024). In Nigeria, an educated populace is therefore vital for achieving sustainable economic development. Education enhances the employability of individuals, reduces unemployment rates, and fosters entrepreneurship, thereby fueling economic growth. Furthermore, investments in education facilitate the transition to a knowledge-based economy, where skilled labor drives productivity gains and technological advancements. As such, education is not only a tool for individual advancement but also a catalyst for broader economic prosperity. Nigeria's lingering economic challenges are accordingly substantially attributable to failures in the education sector and weaknesses in the area of educational policies.

Social Cohesion: Education serves as a cornerstone for fostering social cohesion and national unity (Komatsu, 2024). By promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual understanding, education can mitigate social divisions and promote a sense of belonging among diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Moreover, education equips individuals with critical thinking skills and civic knowledge necessary for active participation in democratic processes and civil society organizations. By fostering a shared sense of identity and citizenship, education can contribute to social stability and cohesion, thereby laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence and societal progress. Continuing inter-tribal animosities in Nigeria is therefore significantly owing to inadequacies in the area of education and the attendant policies

Democratic Governance: Education is indispensable for nurturing informed and active citizens who can effectively participate in democratic governance processes (Chando, 2021). In Nigeria therefore, a robust education system is essential for promoting democratic values, political awareness, and civic engagement. Education empowers citizens to critically evaluate government policies, hold elected officials accountable, and advocate for social justice and equality (Eden et al, 2024). Furthermore, an educated electorate is less susceptible to manipulation and misinformation, thereby strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions. By promoting a culture of transparency, accountability, and civic responsibility, education can play a crucial role in consolidating democratic governance in Nigeria. Between education and democratic governance in Nigeria there is currently a large degree of disarticulations as voter apathy remains the order of the day in Nigerian elections (Okafor et al, 2022).

In effect, the linkages between education and key indicators of national development in Nigeria are unstable. From human capital development to economic growth, social cohesion, and democratic governance, education has not profoundly served as linchpin for progress across various dimensions of development in Nigeria. The attendant scenario is fundamentally attributable to the unreliability of educational policies. Consequently, as the country continues its journey towards achieving sustainable national development, prioritizing investments in education is paramount. Essentially, by ensuring access to quality education for all citizens, Nigeria can unleash the full potential of its human capital, drive inclusive economic growth, foster social cohesion, and strengthen democratic governance, thus paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for the country.

Prospects for the Future

Despite the already identified challenges and the weaknesses of the applicable educational policies, there are several opportunities and prospects for improving the contribution of educational policy to national development in Nigeria. Emphases have to be strictly laid on the following areas:

1. **Increased Investment in Education:** Government must prioritize education funding and allocate a larger portion of the national budget to the educational sector. This will enable the provision of adequate resources for infrastructure and human capital development (capacity building) at the various levels of education.
2. **Curriculum Review and Innovation:** Continuous review and updating of the curriculum at all level of education to make it more relevant and responsive to the needs of the modern workforce and society are essential. Emphasizing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and integrating digital literacy into the curriculum can better prepare students for the future.
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between the government and private sector organizations can help address some of the challenges facing the educational sector in Nigeria. Public-private partnerships can facilitate the mobilization of resources and expertise to improve infrastructure.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the interplay between educational policy and national development in Nigeria. Relying upon a considerable scope of literature, it delved into the historical evolution of educational policies in the country. The work analyzed the challenges of implementing educational policies in the Nigerian state, including issues related to relevance, quality, access and equity. It further examined the linkages between education and key indicators of national development in Nigeria, bordering on human capital development, economic growth, social cohesion and democratic governance. By blending the existing theoretical insights, the paper provides additional invaluable perspectives for educational policymakers and general stakeholders attempting to improve upon the contribution of education to Nigeria's overall development agenda. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the imperativeness of coherent and purposeful educational policies in engendering sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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