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EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the critical role of educational policies in determining Nigeria's overall growth. It uses secondary data for the analysis to investigate the ways in which government-driven education policies and initiatives have impacted the nation's economic growth, technical advancement, social cohesion, and human capital development. The National Policy on Education, Universal Basic Education, and School Feeding Interventions are just a few of the strategies and changes that have been implemented. Notwithstanding the execution of all these projects, issues remain, such as insufficient money and political unrest that has impeded the intended results. According to the study, attaining sustainable development requires coordinating educational policies with national development goals, maintaining consistency in the implementation of policies, and funding infrastructure and teacher training. The curriculum should be evaluated often to meet new national developmental requirements and global trends, particularly in the areas of digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and people-oriented, broad development, through a critical evaluation of current policies and curriculum. This study emphasized the necessity of implementing inclusive and comprehensive educational reforms in Nigeria.

Keywords: Educational Policy, National Development, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a key driver of national development and social transformation. It serves as the foundation for economic growth, technological advancement, and the promotion of democratic values and civic responsibility. In Nigeria, the formulation and implementation of educational policies have long been considered essential tools for achieving

national development goals. However, the success of these policies in translating into tangible national progress remains a subject of ongoing debate and investigation.

Educational policies refer to the set of principles and government policies that shape the planning, administration, and regulation of educational systems. In Nigeria, these policies are primarily guided by the National Policy on Education (NPE), first formulated in 1977 and revised multiple times, with the most recent version being updated in 2013 (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). The NPE is intended to provide direction for the country's educational system and ensure that it aligns with Nigeria's development needs and global educational standards. It outlines the objectives of education at various levels primary, secondary, and tertiary while emphasizing the acquisition of skills, national unity, and the inculcation of moral and civic values.

The role of education in national development is multidimensional. According to Odukoya (2009), education enhances human capital development, increases productivity, and facilitates technological innovation. Furthermore, education promotes national integration in a multicultural society like Nigeria, where diversity in ethnicity, language, and religion often poses a challenge to unity. Therefore, instilling shared values and promoting understanding, help educational policies to bridge the divides. In addition, education empowers individuals to participate meaningfully in democratic processes and governance, which are crucial elements of sustainable national development (Obanya, 2004).

Despite its recognized importance, Nigeria's educational system faces numerous challenges that hinder the effective implementation of its policies. These include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, corruption, policy inconsistency, and lack of political will. For example, public expenditure on education in Nigeria has historically fallen below the UNESCO benchmark of 26% of national budgets (UNESCO, 2015). This underfunding has contributed to dilapidated school buildings, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, and poorly motivated teachers. According to Adepaju and Fabiyi (2007), these systemic weaknesses compromise the quality of education and limit its contribution to national development.

Moreover, the implementation gap between policy formulation and execution remains a persistent issue. While Nigeria has produced several comprehensive educational policies over the years, the actual realization of these policies is often hampered by poor governance and weak institutional capacity. Ukeje (2002) argued that the lack of continuity in government and frequent policy shifts disrupt long-term educational planning. For instance, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program launched in 1999 was designed to provide free and compulsory education for all children in Nigeria. However, over two decades later, millions of Nigerian children remain out of school, especially in rural and conflict-prone regions (UNICEF, 2021).

The linkage between educational policy and national development is also evident in Nigeria's efforts to align education with its economic objectives. Policies aimed at promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, technical and vocational education, and entrepreneurial studies have been introduced to equip students with relevant skills for the labor market. According to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), education is a cornerstone for creating a knowledge-based economy (National Planning Commission, 2004). However, the mismatch between school curricula and labor market demands has resulted in a growing number of unemployed graduates, thus undermining the developmental potential of education.

Furthermore, education plays a vital role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and

promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Nigeria's commitment to the SDGs necessitates the strengthening of its educational policies to ensure equity, access, and quality across all levels. This includes addressing gender disparities, improving teacher training, expanding access to marginalized communities, and leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes.

Educational policies in Nigeria are important to national aspirations for economic growth, social cohesion, and sustainable development. While the formulation of policies such as the National Policy on Education and the UBE scheme reflects a commitment to national progress, significant challenges remain in the areas of funding, implementation, and alignment with national development goals (Ololube, 2013). Bridging the gap between policy and practice is therefore essential if education is to fulfill its transformative role in Nigerian society. A more coordinated, adequately funded, and inclusive educational policy framework will be crucial for Nigeria to harness the full potential of its human capital and achieve sustainable national development.

Statement of the Problem

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has developed and implemented a number of educational Programs, but the country still faces major obstacles to attaining sustainable national development. Due to problems including poor execution, insufficient funding, political instability, corruption, and weak institutional frameworks, these policies which are intended to increase access, equity, quality, and relevance of education frequently fail. The nation's developmental needs and educational results are consistently out of alignment. Graduate unemployment rates are still high, suggesting a mismatch between academic programs and the job market. Furthermore, the equal delivery of education is still hampered by regional differences, deteriorating infrastructure, and a teacher shortage. The efficiency of Nigeria's educational programs in promoting national development is seriously called into question by this circumstance. The nation's ambitions for socioeconomic development, political stability, and technical advancement can remain unattainable if educational programs are not properly implemented and closely matched with national objectives. The creation, application, and results of Nigeria's educational policies must thus be critically examined, with an emphasis on how they either support or undermine the country's growth.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to examine educational policies and national development in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the relationship between educational policies and national development in Nigeria.
- Assess how the formulation and implementation of educational policies have influenced socio-economic and political progress in Nigeria.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing educational policies in promoting national development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Policies

According to Adebayo and Yusuf (2023), educational policies in Nigeria are dynamic instruments used by the government to respond to socio-economic and political changes, aimed at improving human capital development through inclusive and lifelong learning systems. According to Oyetunde (2021), educational policies in Nigeria are systematic plans of action formulated by government and stakeholders to guide the planning, delivery, and evaluation of education services, aiming to ensure quality, equity, and relevance in the education sector (FRN, 2014). Educational policies are a framework of rules, regulations, and guidelines that govern the organization and administration of education at all levels, designed to meet national goals and development objectives (Ololube, 2013).

National Development

According to the CBN (1993), “National development is the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation.” In Nigeria, this means tackling issues like poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and low literacy, while promoting unity, democracy, and sustainable economic growth.

National development refers to the comprehensive growth and progress of the country in various aspects including economic, political, social, educational, scientific, and technological domains. It involves deliberate efforts by the government and stakeholders to improve the standard of living, promote economic self-reliance, reduce poverty, and ensure equitable distribution of resources among citizens.

Challenges in Educational Policy Implementation in Nigeria

The Nigerian educational system has witnessed a series of reforms aimed at improving access, quality, and equity. Despite these reforms, policy implementation continues to face several critical challenges. These impediments have limited the effectiveness of well-designed policies, thereby hampering national development efforts (Odukoya, 2013).

Lack of Accurate Data and Research: Reliable data is essential for planning and implementing educational policies effectively. However, Nigeria suffers from a lack of comprehensive data systems for monitoring and evaluation (Lawal, 2012). The absence of accurate and timely data makes it difficult for policymakers to assess the current state of the education system, identify gaps, and implement context-specific interventions.

Inadequate Funding: One of the most pressing challenges is insufficient funding. Despite the UNESCO recommendation that nations allocate at least 15-20% of their national budgets to education, Nigeria’s budgetary allocation remains below this threshold (Okebukola, 2016). Poor funding affects teacher training, school infrastructure, instructional materials, and other critical inputs necessary for effective policy implementation. For instance, the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has been severely hampered by inconsistent and inadequate funding (Adepoju, 2019; Egugbo & Salami, 2021).

Weak Institutional Framework and Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, and weak institutional capacity are significant constraints in the implementation of educational

policies (Ololube, 2013). These challenges often delay disbursement of funds, hinder transparency, and reduce the efficiency of policy execution. Moreover, a lack of coordination among federal, state, and local governments complicates the decentralization efforts necessary for grassroots education delivery (Ijaiya, 2014).

EDUCATION AND KEY INDICATORS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education plays a central role in fostering national development, serving as both a catalyst and a barometer for socioeconomic progress. As a transformative force, it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate in and contribute meaningfully to society.

Literacy and Human Capital Development

Literacy is one of the most fundamental indicators of national development. Higher literacy rates often correlate with better employment prospects, reduced poverty levels, and improved quality of life. According to Barro and Lee (2013), nations with a more educated populace tend to experience faster economic growth due to increased productivity and innovation.

Employment and Economic Growth: Education enhances employability by providing individuals with specialized skills and competencies. The World Bank (2020) notes that countries with higher levels of education investment generally report lower unemployment rates and higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Vocational and technical education, in particular, aligns the labor force with market demands, thereby boosting productivity and economic resilience.

Health Outcomes: Education, particularly female education, is strongly linked to improved health indicators. Educated individuals are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors, access healthcare services, and make informed decisions regarding nutrition and childbearing. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019) reports that maternal and child mortality rates are significantly lower in countries with high female education levels.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human Capital Theory

This study adopted the theory of human capital theory as the theoretical framework of analysis to underpin the study. The proponent of this theory is Gary Becker (1964). This theory posits that investment in education improves the productivity and economic value of individuals, which in turn drives national development. Nigerian educational policy has often been guided by this theory, especially in aligning curriculum with labor market demands. Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy aims to equip the populace with basic skills for economic participation. Technical and vocational education programs are supported to boost workforce readiness.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative research design in which data were collected from secondary sources like NPE, NBS and UNESCO and analyzed using thematic content analysis method.

With the use of relevant secondary data extensively discuss the Relationship Between Educational Policies and National Development in Nigeria in a table from 2015-2025.

Table 1: Relationship between Educational Policies and National Development in Nigeria (2015–2025)

YEAR	Key Educational Policy/Program	Objectives	Outcomes	Impact on National Development
2015	Launch of National Social Investment Program (NSIP)	Reduce poverty, improve education access	Initiated N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), and Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSF)	Enhanced youth employment and school enrollment
2016	Ministerial Strategic Plan (MSP) 2016–2019	Expand access, improve quality, teacher training	Targeted universal basic education, TVET access, and teacher recruitment	Strengthened human capital development
2017	Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017–2020	Diversify economy, enhance education	Aimed for universal primary/secondary enrollment, increased STEM bursaries	Supported economic diversification through education
2018	Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Interventions	Fund tertiary institutions	Improved infrastructure and research funding	Elevated tertiary education standards
2019	Increased focus on TVET and STEM education	Address skill gaps	Expanded vocational training programs	Boosted employability and innovation
2020	COVID-19 Response: Remote Learning Initiatives	Ensure learning continuity	Implemented online classes and radio/TV lessons	Mitigated learning disruptions during pandemic
2021	National Development Plan (NDP) 2021–2025	Align education with economic goals	Emphasized PPPs, Safe Schools Initiative	Integrated education into broader development agenda
2022	Emphasis on STEM and digital literacy	Prepare students for digital economy	Introduced coding and robotics in curricula	Enhanced competitiveness in tech sectors
2023	Education Budget Increase	Improve funding for education	Allocated higher percentage of national budget to education	Facilitated infrastructure and resource improvements
	Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) Establishment	Provide financial aid for higher education	Offered student loans to reduce dropout rates	Increased access to tertiary education
2024	Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) Establishment	Provide financial aid for higher education	Aimed to enhance foundational learning	Aligned education system with global
2025	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics (2024).

The relationship between educational policies and national development in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025 illustrates how strategic reforms in the education sector have influenced socioeconomic

progress. The table provides a year-by-year overview, highlighting key policies, their objectives, outcomes, and impacts on national development. Also, this decade-long trajectory demonstrates Nigeria's commitment to leveraging education as a catalyst for national development. Policies have progressively focused on inclusivity, quality, and alignment with economic objectives, addressing challenges such as funding constraints, infrastructure deficits, and the need for skilled manpower. Continued investment and policy consistency remain crucial for sustaining these gains and achieving long-term development goals.

Table 2: How the formulation and implementation of educational policies have influenced socio-economic and political progress in Nigeria (2015–2025)

Year	Policy/Initiative	Impact Area	Measurement and Changes (%)	Significance
2015–2024	Education Budget Allocation (Federal Level)	Economic	Averaged 6.6% of national budget	Consistently below the UNESCO recommendation of 15–20%, indicating underfunding challenges.
2016–2020	Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF)	Socio-economic	+78.4% enrollment in Osun State	Significant increase in school enrollment; however, national data is limited due to implementation gaps and discontinuation in some regions.
2018	Not Too Young To Run Act	Political	Reduced age requirements for political office	Enhanced youth participation in politics, fostering a more inclusive political environment.
2018–2020	Human Capital Index(World Bank)	Socio-economic	Increased from 0.34 to 0.36%	Indicates marginal improvement in health and education outcomes, but Nigeria still ranks low globally.
2024	Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFund)	Socio-economic		Aims to provide interest-free loans to underprivileged students, enhancing access to higher education.
2023–2030 (ongoing)	Digital Literacy Initiatives	Socio-economic	Targeting 95% digital literacy by 2030	Efforts include training programs for youths in digital skills; however, high out-of-school rates may hinder full realization.
2024	Establishment of 11 New Private Universities	Economic	+33% projected increase in tertiary enrollment (2024–2033)	Expected to expand access to higher education and stimulate economic growth through a more educated workforce.
2025	-	-	-	-

Sources: Federal Republic of Nigeria (2024).

Programs like the HGSF have positively impacted school enrollment and retention in certain states, demonstrating the potential of targeted interventions. Federal education funding has remained below international benchmarks, limiting the scalability and effectiveness of educational reforms. The introduction of NEL Fund and the establishment of new universities

aim to address the high demand for tertiary education, which previously saw only about 10% of applicants gaining admission. Digital Literacy Goals: Ambitious targets have been set for digital literacy; however, achieving these goals requires addressing the underlying issue of out-of-school children. Political Inclusion: Legislative changes have lowered the age barrier for political participation, encouraging greater involvement of youth in governance.

Table 3: Identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing educational policies in promoting national development from (2015-2025)

Indicator	2015	2025 (est.)	% Change	Policy Relevance
Gross Enrolment Ratio (Primary)	88.7% (UNESCO, 2015)	94.5% (NBS/World Bank, 2024 est.)	+6.5%	Linked to UBE and School Feeding Programme
Literacy Rate (Youth 15–24)	72.8%	80.1%	+10%	Tied to UBE and NFE programmes
Out-of-School Children	10.5 million	12 million (despite interventions)	+14.2%	Indicates poor implementation or regional insecurity
Education Budget Allocation (% of GDP)	1.6%	2.5%	+56%	Below UNESCO recommendation (4–6%)
Digital Literacy Rate (18–35 yrs)	27%	51%	+88%	Boosted by ICT-in-Education policies

Source: World Bank (2024).

From the table above for Gross Enrolment Ratio (Primary) 2015: 88.7% (UNESCO), 2025 (est.): 94.5% (NBS/World Bank), % Change: +6.5%, The increase is linked to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme and School Feeding Programme. This is a modest improvement and suggests progress in primary education access. However, the relatively small increase over ten years may indicate issues with sustainability or quality of delivery. Literacy Rate (Youth 15–24) 2015: 72.8%, 2025 (est.): 80.1%, % Change: +10%. A 10% increase is notable, reflecting gains in youth literacy due to policy efforts. However, there is room for further improvement, especially in marginalized communities. Out-of-School Children, 2015: 10.5 million, 2025 (est.): 12 million, % Change: +14.2%. This reflects poor implementation or regional insecurity. This is a major weakness. Despite policy interventions, the number of out-of-school children has grown, likely due to conflict, poverty, and displacement in parts of Nigeria. This undermines national development and inclusive education goals. Education Budget Allocation (% of GDP) 2015: 1.6%, 2025 (est.): 2.5%, % Change: +56%, Policy Relevance: Still below the UNESCO recommendation of 4–6%. While the increase is significant percentage-wise, the absolute figure remains too low to adequately fund needed reforms and infrastructure. This continues to limit the capacity for quality delivery. Digital Literacy Rate (18–35 yrs) 2015: 27%, 2025 (est.): 51%, % Change: +88%

Policy Relevance: Boosted by ICT-in-Education policies. This is a clear strength, showing robust policy impact in integrating ICT. It enhances employability, access to knowledge, and participation in the digital economy.

CONCLUSION

Educational policies in Nigeria have long been known as a strategic tool for national development. These policies are designed to guide the planning, administration, and implementation of education to meet the nation's socio-economic and political objectives. Over the decades, Nigeria has introduced several reforms such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Basic Education (UBE), and the National Policy on Education aimed at improving literacy rates, technical skills, and overall human capital development. Despite these efforts, challenges such as poor implementation, inadequate funding, corruption, infrastructural decay, and policy inconsistency have hampered the potential impact of educational policies. The disconnect between policy formulation and execution has further widened the gap between educational outcomes and the developmental needs of the country. For Nigeria to harness the full potential of education as a driver of national development, it must ensure that policies are not only well-articulated but also effectively implemented, regularly reviewed, and aligned with contemporary global and local demands.

Recommendations

- **Policy Continuity and Implementation:** Successive governments should commit to the consistent implementation of existing educational policies, with improvements based on evaluative feedback rather than wholesale abandonment.
- **Increased Funding and Investment:** The government must allocate more resources to the education sector to enhance infrastructure, teacher training, and research and development.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a robust framework for monitoring and evaluating educational policy outcomes to ensure alignment with national development goals.
- **Curriculum Review:** The curriculum should be reviewed regularly to reflect emerging global trends and national developmental needs, especially in STEM, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship.

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