

RE-ASSESSING NIGERIA'S NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL RELEVANCE, BEST PRACTICES, AND COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on the formal education component of Nigeria's national Policy on Education with particular emphasis on pre-school, basic education, high school and tertiary education. It posits that the objectives and principles outlined in the Policy were intended to align with the global goals of providing quality education for all and preparing individuals for the challenges of the 21st century. Following this, the paper interrogates the global relevance of the Policy as well as whether the objectives, content, and implementation of the Policy are in synch with current best international practices in education. Furthermore, it examines how globally competitive the objectives, content, and implementation of the Policy are. The results of the assessment show that the objectives emphasize skills development, integration of science technology, and innovation which are relevant in the 21st century. A comparison of the content and execution of the Policy with current international best practices in education reveals some gaps in curriculum and content teacher training and professional development, access and equity, as well as educational infrastructure. The paper further showed that the Policy is globally competitive in terms of its content because it addresses key areas of knowledge and skills necessary for the 21st century global demands. The execution and implementation of the Policy are shown to have been hampered by inadequate infrastructures, lack of qualified teachers, and outdated teaching methods. In conclusion, the paper makes some recommendations to improve the execution and implementation of the Policy.

Keywords: Re-assessing, Nigeria's national policy, education, global relevance, best practices, competitiveness

Introduction

The Nigeria's National Policy on Education is a comprehensive framework that outlines the objectives, content, and implementation strategies for education at all levels, including both informal and formal education. The authors of the current (9th) edition of the Policy, as of 2013, factored in the need for the document's global relevance. This explains why the policy recognizes the importance of education for national development and places a strong emphasis on educating individuals to become productive and responsible members of society. It aims to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to contribute to the development of Nigeria and the global community (Federal Republic of Nigeria -FRN, 2013).

The content of the policy covers a wide range of subjects, including sciences, arts, languages, vocational education, and moral education. It also emphasizes the need for a balanced education that incorporates both theoretical knowledge and practical skills relevant to the local context. In terms of implementation, the policy requires collaboration between various stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, teachers, parents, and communities. It emphasizes the need for adequate funding, infrastructure, and teacher development to ensure effective implementation (FRN, 2013). While there may be

differences in the specific education policies and systems across different countries, the objectives and principles outlined in Nigeria's National Policy on Education were intended to align with the global goals of providing quality education for all and preparing individuals for the challenges of the 21st century. The idea was to ensure the policy's relevance in the 21st century. The questions, following from this expressed intention therefore are:

1. How globally relevant is the present Nigeria's National Policy on Education?
2. Are the objectives, content, and implementation of the policy in synch with current international best practices in education?
3. Are the objectives, content, and implementation of the policy globally competitive?

The above questions form the basis of the present keynote paper. It must be noted however that for the purpose of brevity, the present discourse acknowledges the undeniable importance of such areas of education as Special Needs Education, Open and Distance Education, Mass and Nomadic Education including mass literacy and non-formal education. The Policy adequately covered these and more. However, the present paper focuses on the formal education component of the Policy with particular emphasis on pre-school, basic education, high school, and tertiary education.

Major Objectives of the Policy

The major objectives of Nigeria's National Policy on education as paraphrased by this author include the provision of quality education, promotion of national unity and integration, and meeting the needs of the society. Others include the building of a strong and self-reliant nation, and promoting scientific and technological development (FRN, 23013). The policy aims to provide qualitative and functional education for all Nigerians, ensuring that education is accessible, affordable, and of high quality. It also seeks to foster unity among Nigerians and promote a sense of national identity through education, encouraging mutual understanding, cultural diversity, and tolerance. The policy aims to align education with the socio-economic needs of the country, equipping learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to contribute effectively to societal development. Furthermore, the policy emphasizes the development of self-reliance and entrepreneurship skills to enable individuals to become productive members of society, reducing unemployment and poverty. Finally, it recognizes the importance of science, technology, and innovation in national development and seeks to promote their integration into the education system.

How Globally Relevant are these Objectives in the 21st Century?

The relevance of the objectives of the Nigeria's National Policy on Education to the realities of the 21st century and the job market can be assessed as follows:

i. Emphasis on skills development: The policy recognizes the importance of equipping learners with skills that are applicable to the job market. It places emphasis on vocational and technical education to promote selfreliance and entrepreneurship. This aligns with the changing nature of work, where skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy are highly valued (World Bank, 2019).

ii. Integration of science, technology, and innovation: The policy acknowledges the need for scientific and technological development and seeks to integrate them into the education system. This is relevant in the 21st century, where advancements in technology and innovation are driving economic growth and job creation (UNESCO, 2015a, ResearchFDI, 2023).

iii. Focus on quality education: The policy aims to provide quality education that meets international standards. This is crucial in the 21st century, where global competition requires individuals to have a strong foundation of knowledge and skills to succeed in the job market (World Bank, 2019). However, challenges remain in fully aligning the policy with the realities of the 21st century and the job market. There is a need to further enhance the integration of digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, and critical thinking skills into the curriculum. Additionally, there is a need for continuous professional development for teachers to keep up with evolving educational practices and technological advancements (World Bank, 2019).

To What Extent Have the Objectives Been Achieved?

The extent to which Nigeria has achieved the objectives of the National Policy on Education varies across different levels of education. At the pre-school level, it should be appreciated that Nigeria has made significant strides in expanding access through initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program. However, challenges persist in providing quality education in terms of infrastructure, trained teachers, and relevant curriculum (Eyisi & Ibukun, 2016). At the level of primary education, some progress has been made in increasing primary school enrollment rates in some states of the federation, but issues like high drop-out rates, inadequate infrastructure, and poor teacher quality persist. The quality of education remains a challenge, affecting the achievement of the policy objectives (Idialu, 2015).

Also, while access to primary school level of education which is part of the country's basic education has increased in some states, the case has not been the same in some states of the country (UNICEF Nigeria, 2023). According to UNICEF Nigeria (2023), in general, about 10.5 million children in Nigeria are not in school even though primary education is officially free and compulsory. The northeast and northwest of the country, according to UNICEF Nigeria (2023) are the worst hit. The problem, according to them, is even worse for the female gender. This present reality therefore calls to question the viability of Nigeria's current implementation of the objectives of the National Policy on Education with the intention to meet global standard in the 21st century.

Secondary education faces similar challenges as primary education, including issues of quality, infrastructure, and teacher training. The policy objectives of meeting societal needs and promoting scientific and technological development are partially achieved, but further improvements are necessary (Idialu, 2015). Regarding the tertiary level of education, Nigeria has a growing number of tertiary institutions. For instance, as of 1999, the country had only three private universities. The picture has continuously changed. As of today, the country has a total of 147 private universities making up the 264 universities approved by the National Universities Commission – NUC (Erunike, 2023). But notwithstanding the increase in number of universities and other tertiary institutions in the country, the quality of education, relevance of curricula, and employability of graduates still need improvement. The policy objective of producing self-reliant and globally competitive graduates requires further attention (Kaplan & Saidu, 2019).

In summary, Nigeria has made some progress in achieving the objectives of the National Policy on education, but challenges persist across various levels of education. Focusing on improving the quality of education, addressing infrastructure deficiencies, and enhancing teacher training will be crucial in achieving the policy objectives more effectively. Following the above, one may be compelled to ask what is the extent of the

content and execution of Nigeria's national policy on education compared with current international best practices in education?

Comparing the Content and Execution of Nigeria's National Policy on Education with Current International Best Practices in Education

To understand how the content and execution of the Policy compare with the international best practices, let us look at the following:

- i. **Curriculum and content:** Nigeria's national policy on education provides a framework for curriculum development and content selection. However, there is a need for further alignment with international best practices to ensure the relevance and quality of the content. This includes integrating global perspectives, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills into the curriculum (OECD, 2020). +
- ii. **Teacher training and professional development:** While the policy recognizes the importance of teacher training, there is room for improvement in terms of the quality and effectiveness of training programs. International best practices emphasize the need for continuous professional development, mentoring programs, and support systems to enhance teacher quality and pedagogical skills (UNESCO, 2015a).
- iii. **Access and equity:** Nigeria's policy aims to provide accessible education for all citizens. However, challenges remain in achieving equitable access, particularly for marginalized groups and those in rural areas. International best practices emphasize the importance of inclusive education, ensuring that no learner is left behind (UNESCO, 2015a).
- iv. **Educational infrastructure:** The policy acknowledges the need for adequate infrastructure, but there are still significant deficiencies in terms of classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. International best practices emphasize the importance of well-equipped and conducive learning environments to enhance the quality of education (OECD, 2020). Overall, while Nigeria's national policy on education provides a broad framework for addressing educational challenges, there is a need for further alignment with current international best practices. This includes enhancing the curriculum, improving teacher training and professional development, ensuring equitable access, and addressing infrastructure deficiencies.

How Competitive is the Policy?

The extent of competitiveness in terms of content and execution of Nigeria's national policy on education in the face of the global demands of the 21st century can be assessed as follows:

- i. **Content competitiveness:** Nigeria's national policy on education addresses key areas of knowledge and skills necessary for the 21st-century global demands. The policy recognizes the importance of science, technology, and innovation, as well as vocational and technical education. These elements are in line with global demands that emphasize technological advancements, innovation, and the need for a skilled workforce (World Bank, 2019).
- ii. **Execution competitiveness:** While the policy highlights the importance of quality education, there are challenges in the execution and implementation of the policy. Quality issues include inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and outdated teaching methods (Idialu, 2015). Additionally, there is a need for stronger linkages between the education system and the job market to ensure that graduates

possess the skills and competencies required in the global workforce (World Bank, 2019).

- iii. **Global benchmarking:** In terms of comparing Nigeria's national policy on education to global benchmarks, there is room for improvement. The policy could benefit from a closer alignment with international best practices in education. This includes integrating 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and problem-solving into the curriculum (UNESCO, 2015b). There is also a need to enhance teacher training programs to ensure that educators are equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills and are aware of global educational trends (World Bank, 2019).
- iv. **Competitiveness challenges:** Nigeria faces challenges in terms of access, equity, and quality education. Issues such as a high number of out-of-school children, gender disparities, and regional inequalities pose challenges to the competitiveness of the education system (UNESCO, 2015b). These challenges need to be addressed to ensure that all Nigerian learners have equal opportunities to develop the skills and competencies required for the global demands of the 21st century. In summary, while Nigeria's national policy on education addresses some key aspects of the global demands of the 21st century, there are challenges in the execution and competitiveness of the policy. Enhancing the content of education to include 21st-century skills and addressing issues related to access, equity, and quality education will be essential for Nigeria to be competitively aligned with global demands.

The Way Forward

The Nigeria's National Policy on Education which we have taken time to reassess obviously has high points. However, bearing in mind that the document was last updated some ten years ago, it may not be out-of-place to agitate our minds regarding which skill set the policy needs to emphasize from now going forward, in the light of the fast-changing digital world of life and work. This need becomes even more urgent in the light of our inference for the reassessment that there might be a lack of emphasis on certain skills based on the challenges faced by Nigeria's education system. For instance, the policy implementation challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, and outdated teaching methods suggest a potential gap in preparing students with digital literacy and technological skills. Furthermore, much as the present Policy emphasizes many skills, a review of the Policy will require inclusion (where such skills are not) and strengthening of the content and means of teaching some skills considered essential for success in the 21st-century global economy. Although there might be variations in terminology and categorization, the following skills have been widely recognized:

- i. **Communication skills:** Effective communication, both oral and written, is crucial for conveying ideas, expressing thoughts, and collaborating with others (World Economic Forum, 2016)
- ii. **Critical thinking and problem-solving skills:** The ability to analyze information, think critically, and solve complex problems is essential in navigating the challenges of the modern world (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009).
- iii. **Creativity and innovation:** Encouraging creative thinking, fostering imagination, and promoting innovative solutions are key for adapting to the rapidly changing and competitive global landscape (UNESCO, 2015).
- iv. **Collaboration and teamwork:** The capacity to work effectively in diverse teams, value diverse perspectives, and contribute positively to collective goals is

indispensable for collaboration and cooperation (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009).

- v. **Digital literacy:** Mastery of digital tools, information literacy, and understanding how to navigate and critically evaluate digital information are necessary skills in the digital age (UNESCO, 2013).
- vi. **Global and intercultural awareness:** Appreciating and understanding different cultures, perspectives, and developing a global mindset assists in fostering tolerance, empathy, and effective communication in diverse contexts (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009, Online Learning College, 2024).
- vii. **Personal and social responsibility:** Cultivating a sense of responsibility, ethical decision-making, empathy, and citizenship is essential for contributing positively to society (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, after reassessing the present Policy on Education, it has become obvious that the objectives of the Policy, to a great extent, are in synch with international best practices and relevant in the 21st century. The objectives are also comparatively competitive. The problem appears to be in the implementation. It is therefore expected that, going forward, a little finetuning of the objectives is needed. However, a lot needs to be done in terms of infrastructure, teacher training and retraining, as well as increasing access.

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