

# **NIGERIAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM POLICY REVIEW FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: A CENTURY OF TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION (1925–2025)**

<sup>1</sup>Veronica Egonekwu Mogboh Ph.D and <sup>2</sup>Eneh Nnamdi Sunday Ph.D,

## **Article Info**

**Keywords:** Nigerian Education, System policy, effective education, Management, Transformation and innovation.

## **DOI**

10.5281/zenodo.15706314

## **Abstract**

This paper presents a comprehensive review of Nigeria's educational policy evolution over the past century, analyzing the trajectory from colonial educational ordinances to recent 21st-century reform frameworks. It critically examines the policies within the context of political transitions, regional autonomy, post-independence reconstruction, and global educational paradigms. Special focus is given to recent innovations aimed at inclusivity, digital transformation, and skills development, positioning the Nigerian education system for more effective management and socio-economic relevance. The study recommends strategic policy coherence, robust data infrastructure, and institutional accountability as foundational pillars for sustainable educational reform in Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Education remains the cornerstone of national development and a powerful catalyst for socio-economic transformation. In both emerging and advanced economies, robust educational systems are essential for fostering human capital development, innovation, and inclusive growth. In the context of Nigeria, a country marked by a rich cultural tapestry and complex political history, educational policy serves not only as a vehicle for literacy and enlightenment but also as a strategic tool for national integration, economic competitiveness, and global relevance (Adebayo & Olayemi, 2018).

During the last century, Nigeria's educational sector developed parallel to its broader national developments including both traditional and modern administrative changes. Nigerian educational policies have adapted to shifting sociocultural needs and international and domestic policy requirements. During the colonial period, the educational system focused on creating elite classes but was controlled by missionaries who placed Western ideas ahead of traditional Nigerian ways of understanding. The post-independence era included purposeful educational policies that promoted unity as well as solved manpower issues while expanding education opportunities for all (Akinfolarin & Akinwale, 2019).

<sup>12</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Godfrey Okoye University Enugu.

**E-mail:** nekwuvero@yahoo.ca, enehsunday5@gmail.com

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program introduced in Nigeria in 1999 became a critical turning point in national educational history after its reform into a program that supported the country's participation in both EFA and SDGs. The purpose of the program was to provide free basic education to all Nigerian children but limited effectiveness occurred because of insufficient infrastructure along with teacher shortages and weak system monitoring methods (Eze, 2019).

Education in Nigeria faces significant transformations as the country adapts to worldwide trends throughout technological innovation together with the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic specifically exposed the substantial digital gap across Nigeria's educational framework while demonstrating that technology adoption in educational procedures requires urgent implementation (Ngumbi, 2020). Online school platforms established successfully by urban educational institutions exposed existing educational inequalities further because numerous rural students without access faced circular disadvantages (Yusuf & Onifade, 2021).

The educational infrastructure experiences extreme stress due to two main factors: first is the growing number of young people in the country and second is the quick expansion of urban areas. A proper strategy for educational planning allows Nigeria to turn its youth population into economic advantages through demographic transformation (UNESCO, 2022). Educational policies require a shift from basic educational access to concentrate on developing high-quality programs that address issues of equity and relevance together with the ability to match current situations.

Nigeria's educational system will determine its future direction through carefully planned policies jointly with sustained funding as well as innovative teaching methods that maintain global standards. The system requires urgent policies about digital transformation together with inclusive education provisions teacher development assistance and public-private partnership promotion.

The analysis within this paper tracks Nigeria's educational policies from the start of 1925 through to 2025. The paper examines policy transformations through the assessment of drivers leading to changes and outcome analysis and presents strategic suggestions for designing a future-proof education system. The author uses recent literature as well as policy documents and empirical studies to generate findings that support better educational governance in Nigeria through informed decision-making.

### **Colonial Foundations and the Institutionalization of Formal Education (1925–1948)**

Formal education in Nigeria obtained its foundational roots during British colonial rule, especially during the time span of 1925 to 1948. During this time period, the British colonial administration executed systematic educational growth, which served both to administer the colony while controlling society and creating limited economic development. The colonial government started implementing controlled educational influence during this period by introducing several laws and administrative reforms that formed the basis for future Nigerian education development.

The Phelps-Stokes Commission reports from the early 1920s became significant because they shaped British educational policies across all of Africa. These reports established two fundamental premises, which stated that education needed to accommodate African circumstances and deliver development goals instead of following European educational concepts (Salami & Adeyemi, 2020).

The 1926 Education Ordinance established colonial authority in Nigerian education through a framework that aligned with the ideas from earlier decisions. The ordinance established colonial regulatory powers for schools and developed operational criteria for schools receiving financial assistance and pursued primary educational expansion through curriculum control designed for colonial administrative needs (Okonkwo, 2018). The 1926 ordinance served as an educational standardization tool; however, it encountered significant operational deficiencies in practice. The policy demonstrated its flaws by failing to provide systems that integrated traditional

African teachings and failing to create substantial local participation in governing education. Bureaucratic efficiency from the centralized model led to regional diversity minimization, and it strengthened the social hierarchies perpetuated through colonial administration (Idogho & Enoma 2021). Educational opportunities during this period ended up being distributed in an unequal manner, so the southern parts received more benefits because of stronger missionary influence and colonial administrative interests.

The 1948 Education Ordinance became a significant milestone because it introduced educational decentralization in governance systems. Under the 1948 Education Ordinance, the government formed both a Central Board of Education as well as four separate boards that governed the Western jurisdiction and Eastern jurisdiction and Northern regions and Lagos state. The development of regional governance emerged as a localized educational policy solution due to growing political awareness and nationalist agitation which boiled up during the era leading to Nigerian independence (Usman & Agbo, 2019). The decentralization process facilitated regional governments to use their understanding of local educational needs and cultural contexts for generating relevant curricula and school management.

The 1948 ordinance established principles that would determine Nigeria's education system becoming federal. This policy change brought forward a method where multiple parties could actively participate in decision-making although colonial authority continued to maintain ultimate control. The regional boards functioned in two ways by managing administrative issues while providing newly emerging Nigerian leaders with platforms to influence and shape public policies that strengthened educational links with national development objectives (Nwachukwu & Adebayo, 2021).

Secondary education institutions expanded under colonial management yet maintained their status as generally being accessible only to elite groups of students. The University College Ibadan gained its founding importance in 1948 when it became affiliated with the University of London. University College Ibadan became Nigeria's first tertiary institution due to colonial intentions of creating limited educated professionals for colonial department work (Ojo & Olanrewaju, 2020).

Although the colonial educational policies created institutional structures that would support future educational reforms, they also maintained defects which increased social inequalities while restricting professional mobility for most Nigerians. The principles of regional differentiation, formal administrative structures, and the idea of education as a public good were crystallized during this period and continue to influence Nigeria's educational governance today.

### **Regional Autonomy and Experimentalism (1951–1959)**

Nigeria entered the 1950s with two major changes taking place in its educational system: regional policymakers began experimenting while simultaneously pursuing native control of policy initiatives. Following the Education Ordinance of 1952 and Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 the Eastern Western and Northern Nigerian regional governments obtained major regulatory power. Based on these legal instruments education policy decentralization enabled regions to build separate education programs that matched their unique social political and cultural elements (Adebisi & Olanrewaju, 2018).

Each Nigerian region adopted ambitious education policies during this era to enhance literacy numbers gain political strength and stimulate socioeconomic development. Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his Action Group party led the Western Region to become a leader when they introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1955. Through its innovative policy, UPE aimed to extend both financial grants and mandatory primary education to every Nigerian child regardless of their gender parental status, or social position (Eze & Chukwuma, 2019). Through this change, the region developed enduring structures that would serve as building blocks for achieving widespread literacy throughout the area.

School enrollment numbers surged significantly within the Western Region after initiating the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program, especially among both female students and students from rural areas. The initiative triggered investments in teacher education built new classrooms and manufactured new textbooks (Okoh & Usman, 2020). Despite schoolroom congestion and deficient skilled teaching staff, the program established itself as an innovatively constructed social policy that implemented visionary reforms for social change. The program demonstrated that when political willpower collaborates with regional autonomy it results in immediate substantial education achievements (Alabi & Bamidele, 2021).

During the period of colonial rule, the Eastern Region started to advance educational progress through a slower-paced system of development. The region built up its teacher education systems and expanded its missionary school network by including practical vocational training programs in its academic curriculums. The Northern Region maintained a reserved approach by giving preference to Islamic education alongside Quranic studies and they carefully increased their Western-style school system through educational institutions based on Native Authority and teacher training colleges (Musa & Garba, 2022). Different approaches to education gained acceptance across the regions because of separate ideological sectors as well as specific historical religious and cultural aspects for each specific area.

The educational approach of the 1950s proved effective by demonstrating how local governance at the regional level functioned properly. Educational institutions granted power along with resources enabled sub-national bodies to present context-specific learning solutions that proved effective. The experimentations of regional governments during the 1950s have become an essential source for today's federalism talks and educational changes in Nigeria (Nwosu & Bello, 2021).

Educational policies during the post-independence era were rooted in the developments made in the 1950s. Education during this period evolved to represent three things: state pride, advanced political development, and national advancement goals. This period taught valuable lessons about planned inclusivity together with consistent funding support along with community involvement which continue to be crucial principles for Nigeria's contemporary educational policies.

### **Post-Independence Nationalization and Structural Reforms (1960–1999)**

Post-independence Nigeria sought to unify its fragmented educational landscape through centralized planning and national policy frameworks.

#### **Universal Primary Education (1976)**

The 1976 UPE initiative pursued its national expansion by replicating the successful Western Nigerian approach. Despite its positive goals, the policy encountered three major obstacles that continue to impact education in Nigeria. They include: deficient resources, unprepared faculty, and limited funding.

#### **National Policy on Education (1977)**

The 1977 **National Policy on Education (NPE)** introduced the now-famous **6-3-3-4** system, emphasizing functional and vocational education. This policy was Nigeria's first attempt at holistic curriculum reform tailored to national development goals, including self-reliance and technological advancement.

#### **Universal Basic Education (UBE), 1999**

As a response to the shortcomings of the UPE, the UBE policy was enacted in 1999 to provide **nine years of free, compulsory education**. It integrated primary and junior secondary education into a single framework, with renewed attention to literacy, numeracy, and civic education.

#### **Institutional Strengthening and the UBE Act (2004)**

The **2004 UBE Act** institutionalized the **Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)**, which became the regulatory and coordinating body for basic education. This move represented a transition from policy aspiration

to implementation infrastructure. It introduced performance-based disbursement, improved monitoring mechanisms, and minimum standards enforcement, signaling a new era of educational accountability and governance.

### **Recent Policy Innovations: Toward Inclusivity, Digitalization, and Skills Development (2023–2025)**

The post-2020 educational landscape in Nigeria reflects a paradigm shift toward inclusivity, innovation, and systemic restructuring to meet global standards.

#### **National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023)**

Ratified in 2024, this policy champions a rights-based approach to education, ensuring that learners with disabilities, linguistic minorities, and marginalized communities are accommodated within the mainstream school system. It positions Nigeria in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) on inclusive and equitable education.

#### **National Education Quality Assurance Policy (2023)**

Launched in 2025, this framework outlines clear quality benchmarks and performance indicators for school assessments, curriculum delivery, and teacher evaluation. It institutionalizes routine audits and establishes feedback loops for continuous improvement, fostering a culture of excellence and transparency.

### **Comprehensive Education Sector Reforms (DOTS, 2024)**

The DOTS Framework emerged under President Bola Tinubu as a thorough reform package which focuses on the following aspects:

- Data Repository: A national education database for evidence-driven policy and resource planning.
- Out of School Children Inclusion: Administrative efforts will work toward integrating out-of-school children through targeted re-enrolment programmes that include about ten million drop-out students.
- Teacher Training & Digital Pedagogy: Educational institutions focus on training teachers on how to implement digital skills along with blended learning and utilise AI assistance for teaching.
- Skills Acquisition and National Skills Framework: Aligning curriculum with emerging sectors such as green tech, software engineering, and vocational entrepreneurship.

Several educational programmes work toward creating a flexible continuous learning environment that is focused on the needs of the future.

#### **Policy Flexibility and Access Reform (2024)**

The Ministry of Education, led by Dr Morufu Olatunji Alausa, made progress toward equity by eliminating the 18-year restriction for university entry and setting 16 years as the minimum age while making exceptions for talented young individuals. The government seeks to eliminate systematic entry obstacles through this policy change while decreasing the number of overaged out-of-school youth.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The educational sector in Nigeria faces persistent complex problems despite multiple policy changes, strategic reforms and increased focus on education development. The barriers to quality access as well as sustainable national development and international competitiveness represent serious nationwide threats.

Inadequate funding combined with financial leakages presents one of the major obstacles that needs resolution. The public sector devotes insufficient education funds compared to UNESCO-recommended spending levels of 15–20% of the national budget (UNESCO, 2022). Funds that should be distributed end up delayed in time, and systematic corruption causes leaks and misappropriation that results in project discontinuation and unfulfilled payrolls while leaving education facilities in neglectful condition (Akinyemi & Ogunleye, 2021). The system faces a series of adverse consequences due to the failure to establish permanent funding systems, which creates problems for infrastructure development, learning material acquisition and teacher education improvement.



The outcomes of national education are made more challenging by how educational quality varies between urban and rural settings. Urban educational facilities typically exceed rural facilities in terms of equipment quality and human capital as well as technological capabilities. The educational environment in distant regions consists of busy classrooms alongside distant schools that lack sufficient water and electric resources (Olowu & Ezeani, 2020). The educational disparity maintains social inequalities while damaging the prospect of inclusive education, primarily against girls, along with nomadic populations and disabled children.

The problem of insufficient teachers together with educator migration has developed into a dangerous crisis. Nigeria experiences an extreme shortage of trained teaching personnel that exceeds the national increase in students who require instruction, particularly in science-based subject areas including technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The combination of reduced pay and poor working environments with limited professional advancement causes numerous qualified instructors to pursue positions either overseas or outside their educational field (Bello & Ayinde, 2022). When teaching experts leave their positions, the education sector becomes depleted of trained staff, which has negative effects on classroom learning standards.

A significant problem exists regarding the digital divide. The incomplete digital infrastructure prevents education institutions from implementing technology solutions, which affects teaching and learning in rural regions in particular. The recent growth in distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak masks the systematic inconsistencies that persist regarding internet availability, electronic devices and information and communication technology fluency in different regions. The implementation of blended learning frameworks and digital competency training becomes difficult because of this problem, which prevents learners from acquiring the necessary skills for modern work requirements (Okafor & Ijeoma, 2021).

The difficulties create vital openings to achieve substantial changes. A promising development exists through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Strategic alliances between public institutions and private businesses enable the education system to receive necessary funding and innovative solutions that boost productivity focused on school-building projects as well as technical training and modern digital education initiatives. Modern business entities dedicate company social responsibility funds toward educational programmes through scholarship programmes, technical aid and instructional material donations.

The establishment of international alliances creates vital access to new possibilities. Through its participation in UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda and the World Bank's Education for All programme, Nigeria acquires technical help, research information and financial support. These partnerships facilitate the educational reconstruction of teaching curricula along with training programmes and the improvement of assessment procedures.

Technology-based learning solutions function as an advanced method to lead educational change. The combination of mobile learning technology with virtual classrooms and artificial intelligence in the education sector enables Nigeria to bypass legacy obstacles when delivering education to underserved areas. Funding investments toward ICT infrastructure together with digital skills training and local content development will boost learning results at the same time it will enhance the operational efficiency of the system.

The education system of Nigeria faces tough issues but remains solvable based on available solutions. Strategic education policies combined with interdepartmental teamwork and boundless dedication to both innovation and inclusion will enable Nigeria to create an education system suitable for modern times.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The development of Nigeria's education policy underwent various phases, starting from colonial times through regional experimentation into national reform until it faced contemporary issues. The educational systems have gained ground in accessing wider populations and making institutional changes, yet essential factors, including

limited resources, staffing issues and building defects, cause stunted educational expansion. Higher education results from future-ready systems require an inclusive education system, which must be built based on the following recommendations:

1. All education policies should be unified throughout national levels, including federal, state, and local administration, to achieve national education goals.
2. The government should focus on building education bureaus' capabilities to establish better governance as well as service delivery and accountability systems.
3. Enhancing financial support for teacher professional development together with their welfare and recruitment practices will create an inspired and competent teaching staff.
4. Schools should implement modern tools and digital devices that enhance learning processes, particularly in places without enough resources.
5. A trustworthy funding mechanism should be established which provides reliable support to schools and educational programmes.

Innovative actions combined with continued dedication will transform the education sector of Nigeria into an influential tool for national advancement.

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