

## **EDUCATION POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

**QUAYE, REGINA MODUPE Ph.D.**

Department of Educational Foundation and Counselling  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

**&**

**ADENIGBAGBE, HENRY ADELOYE Ph.D.**

Department of Educational Foundation and Counselling  
University of Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of education policy in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. Education is widely recognized as a key driver of economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability. However, despite numerous policy interventions and reforms, the Nigerian education system continues to face significant challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and inconsistencies in policy implementation. This research investigates how existing education policies align with sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to assess the effectiveness of current education policies in achieving sustainable development outcomes. Findings reveal that while Nigeria has made commendable efforts in policy formulation, there is a substantial gap in practical execution and stakeholder engagement. The study concludes that aligning education policies with sustainable development principles, improving governance structures, and fostering public-private partnerships are critical steps toward realizing Nigeria's sustainable future. Recommendations are offered to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in bridging the gap between Sustainable policy intentions and development outcomes.

**Keyword:** Development, Equitable, Environment, Sustainable, Policy,

### **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental driver of sustainable development as it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for promoting economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. In the context of Nigeria, education plays a pivotal role in addressing the challenges of

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poverty, unemployment, inequality, and underdevelopment. The formulation and implementation of effective education policies are crucial in fostering national development goals and aligning with global commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2017).

Over the years, Nigeria has developed various education policies aimed at improving access, quality, and relevance of education at all levels. The National Policy on Education (NPE), first formulated in 1977 and revised multiple times, remains the cornerstone of educational planning and development in the country. However, despite the policy reforms and interventions, significant gaps persist in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. These gaps have hindered the achievement of sustainable development objectives, especially in rural and marginalized communities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Several challenges confront Nigeria's education sector, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and lack of alignment between policy design and local realities. These systemic issues compromise the ability of education policies to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. According to Okebukola (2015), the disconnect between education policy and practice in Nigeria often results in inconsistent learning outcomes and limited societal impact. This situation underscores the need for a more integrated approach to policy formulation and sustainable development planning.

Given the growing urgency of achieving sustainable development in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to evaluate how existing education policies are designed and implemented in relation to national and international development agendas. There is a need for evidence-based research that explores the nexus

between education policy and sustainable development to inform better policy decisions and improve outcomes. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of education policy in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria, with the goal of identifying effective strategies, highlighting policy gaps, and recommending actionable solutions for national progress.

### **Concept of Education Policy**

Education policy refers to the collection of laws, guidelines, and governmental initiatives aimed at directing the structure, content, and delivery of education within a country. It encompasses decisions made at various levels federal, state, and local regarding curriculum standards, teacher training, funding allocation, assessment systems, and access to education. According to Haddad and Demsky (2015), education policy serves as a strategic tool for achieving national goals and improving the quality of human capital, which is essential for socio-economic advancement. By shaping the direction and priorities of the education sector, policy frameworks act as blueprints that determine how educational institutions function and how educational outcomes are evaluated.

In the context of Nigeria, education policy plays a vital role in addressing national development challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and inequality. The National Policy on Education (NPE), first introduced in 1977 and revised multiple times, outlines Nigeria's vision for education as a tool for national development, emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning, functional education, and self-reliance (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). This policy aims to align the goals of the educational system with the broader objectives of sustainable development, including job creation, environmental responsibility, and social inclusion. However, despite its ambitious goals, implementation has

often been hampered by funding issues, infrastructural deficits, and governance inconsistencies.

Moreover, education policy is not just about formal documents or laws—it reflects the values, expectations, and visions a society holds for its future. As stated by Ball (2013), education policies are deeply political and ideological, often reflecting the power dynamics and socio-economic priorities of those in governance. In this light, education policy in Nigeria must be viewed not only as a bureaucratic exercise but also as a means of addressing equity, social justice, and sustainable development. By focusing on inclusive, quality, and context-sensitive education policies, Nigeria can better equip its citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in a rapidly changing global environment.

### **Concept of Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is broadly defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition, originally articulated by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, has become the cornerstone of global developmental strategies (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 2017). It emphasizes a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity, aiming to integrate these three dimensions into policymaking and implementation. In essence, sustainable development advocates for progress that is inclusive, equitable, and environmentally conscious.

From an educational standpoint, sustainable development goes beyond mere economic indicators and includes the enhancement of human capabilities and empowerment through access to quality education, health care, and

participatory governance. According to Sachs (2015), education plays a pivotal role in enabling people to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to build a sustainable future. This approach aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Hence, the role of education policy in shaping sustainable development outcomes cannot be overstated.

Furthermore, sustainable development encompasses both a process and a goal. It calls for institutional reforms, innovation in technology, and behaviour change among individuals and communities to support environmental sustainability and social cohesion. As Lele (2011) posits, sustainable development is context-specific and must be adapted to the unique socio-economic and ecological realities of different countries. In Nigeria, achieving sustainable development requires the alignment of national education policies with long-term development goals, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and lack of infrastructure. Therefore, integrating sustainability principles into policy frameworks is essential for driving holistic and lasting progress.

### **The Link between Education and Sustainable Development**

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone for achieving sustainable development. It serves as a catalyst for social, economic, and environmental transformation by equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for making informed decisions. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017), education for sustainable development (ESD) empowers learners to take

responsibility for creating a sustainable future. This underscores the importance of integrating sustainability principles into educational systems and policies.

Quality education plays a pivotal role in promoting economic sustainability by fostering human capital development. When individuals are educated, they are more likely to participate in productive employment, contribute to innovation, and drive economic growth. Human capital theory posits that investment in education enhances an individual's productivity, thereby contributing to national development (Becker, 1993). In Nigeria, the need for education policies that emphasize vocational and technical training is critical in reducing unemployment and boosting economic resilience.

Education also contributes to social sustainability by promoting equity, gender equality, cultural awareness, and social cohesion. It enables individuals to understand their rights and responsibilities, fostering inclusive societies. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing social inequalities, and education offers a pathway to reducing these disparities (Sen, 1999). For example, inclusive education policies that ensure equal access for girls, children with disabilities, and marginalized communities help build a more equitable and cohesive society in Nigeria.

Environmental sustainability is another dimension where education plays a vital role. Through environmental education, individuals become aware of ecological challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution. They are also taught sustainable practices like conservation, waste reduction, and renewable energy use. According to Tilbury (2011), education is key to fostering environmental stewardship and long-term ecological balance. In Nigeria, integrating environmental studies into school curricula can enhance students' consciousness about their roles in environmental protection.

Globally, frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasize inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. This goal specifically targets education as both an enabler and outcome of sustainable development (UN, 2015). Nationally, Nigeria's education policy has begun to align with SDG 4 through the introduction of sustainability-related subjects and the expansion of access to education. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and policy implementation gaps hinder progress.

The connection between education and sustainable development is multifaceted and essential. Education is not only a means of acquiring knowledge but also a powerful tool for transforming societies toward sustainability. For Nigeria to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it must prioritize educational reforms that embed sustainability principles at all levels. Strengthening education policies, improving teacher training, and investing in relevant infrastructure are necessary steps to ensure education fulfils its role in achieving sustainable development (World Bank, 2020).

## **Challenges of Education Policy Implementation in Nigeria**

### **1. Inadequate Funding**

A major challenge to the implementation of education policy in Nigeria is insufficient funding. Although the National Policy on Education outlines ambitious objectives, the financial resources allocated to the education sector are often inadequate to support effective execution. The UNESCO benchmark recommends allocating at least 15–20% of national budgets to education, but Nigeria consistently falls short of this target (UNESCO, 2019). As a result, schools face shortages of learning materials, dilapidated infrastructure,

overcrowded classrooms, and underpaid staff, which collectively undermine the goals of quality and inclusive education (Adebayo & Ogunyinka, 2019).

## **2. Poor Infrastructure and Learning Environment**

The learning environment in many Nigerian schools is un conducive due to poor infrastructure. Many public schools lack basic facilities such as desks, toilets, libraries, and electricity. This is particularly severe in rural and underserved areas, where students often learn under trees or in overcrowded classrooms. The poor state of infrastructure not only hampers student performance but also discourages school attendance and teacher motivation (Ajayi & Olaniyan, 2011). Without addressing infrastructure gaps, education policies remain ineffective despite their good intentions.

## **3. Shortage of Qualified Teachers**

The implementation of education policies is heavily dependent on the availability of well-trained teachers, yet Nigeria suffers from a persistent shortage of qualified educators, especially in science, technology, and vocational subjects. Many teachers lack the necessary pedagogical skills to deliver the curriculum effectively, and continuous professional development is often neglected (Obanya, 2014). This human resource gap results in poor instructional quality and limits the success of policies aimed at improving learning outcomes.

## **4. Political Instability and Policy Discontinuity**

Frequent changes in government have led to instability and discontinuity in education policy implementation in Nigeria. Each new administration often introduces its own education agenda without fully evaluating or building upon existing policies. This lack of consistency disrupts long-term planning and wastes resources already committed to previous programs. For instance, the inconsistency in the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE)

scheme has limited its effectiveness in delivering free and compulsory education across the country (Akinyemi & Abiodun, 2013).

### **5. Corruption and Mismanagement**

Corruption is another major barrier to successful policy implementation in Nigeria's education sector. Funds earmarked for education projects are often misappropriated or poorly managed due to weak oversight and accountability mechanisms. This has led to numerous abandoned projects, ghost teachers on payrolls, and inflated procurement costs (Transparency International, 2020). Such practices erode public trust and contribute to the persistent underperformance of the sector despite ongoing reforms.

### **6. Low Community and Stakeholder Involvement**

Successful education policy implementation requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, including parents, communities, teachers, and civil society. In Nigeria, however, policy decisions are often top-down, with little input from grassroots actors who are most affected. This lack of ownership and consultation leads to resistance, poor community support, and a disconnect between policy goals and local realities (Okoroma, 2006). Encouraging participatory policy processes could enhance accountability and ensure that education policies address the actual needs of the people.

### **Education policy and sustainable development in Nigeria**

Education policy plays a crucial role in shaping the future of a nation, and in Nigeria, it is increasingly being viewed as a strategic tool for sustainable development. Education is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical enabler of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes the need for education to be functional, relevant, and capable of addressing national

development goals (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). The policy outlines objectives such as equipping students with relevant knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to society, promoting national unity, and encouraging innovation all essential components of sustainability.

Sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be achieved without aligning education policies with the broader goals of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO, 2017). In this regard, Nigeria’s education policy has increasingly incorporated principles of inclusive education, environmental education, and vocational training to address youth unemployment and enhance community resilience. However, the pace of implementation remains a significant challenge due to systemic issues such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and lack of qualified teachers (Adebayo & Ogunyinka, 2019).

Despite the ambitious policy frameworks, the impact of Nigeria’s education policy on sustainable development outcomes has been limited by inconsistencies in implementation and political will. Education policies in Nigeria have often been influenced by changes in government, leading to frequent policy reversals and disruptions. For example, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, launched in 1999 to provide free and compulsory basic education, has struggled with challenges related to teacher shortages, low enrollment in rural areas, and weak monitoring systems (Ajayi & Olaniyan, 2011). These issues hinder the realization of education’s full potential in driving sustainable development.

Moreover, the mismatch between curriculum content and the needs of the modern economy poses another serious concern. While the education policy outlines goals related to entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and environmental sustainability, the actual curricula at many institutions remain outdated and overly theoretical. This gap undermines the employability of graduates and weakens the country's capacity to adapt to the rapidly changing global economy (Obanya, 2014). To contribute effectively to sustainable development, education must be reoriented to address real-world challenges and instill skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation.

In recent years, some efforts have been made to integrate sustainability education into the curriculum, particularly through Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programs. These initiatives aim to foster awareness and action among students and communities about issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable resource use (UNESCO, 2019). However, the success of such programs in Nigeria is often constrained by lack of coordination between policymakers and educators, insufficient training for teachers, and low public awareness. This underlines the need for a more coherent and participatory approach to education policy formulation and execution.

To advance sustainable development through education, Nigeria must prioritize long-term planning, adequate funding, and inclusive stakeholder engagement in education policy-making. Strengthening accountability, updating curricula to reflect global trends, and promoting equitable access to quality education especially for marginalized groups are essential steps toward achieving SDG 4 and the broader sustainable development agenda. With a population of over 200 million people, of which a significant portion is youth, the role of

education policy in securing Nigeria's sustainable future cannot be overstated (World Bank, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Education policy plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. A well-structured and effectively implemented education policy serves as a foundation for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for promoting economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. However, despite numerous policy frameworks and reforms, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, lack of political will, and inconsistent policy implementation continue to hinder progress. For education to truly contribute to sustainable development, there must be a deliberate alignment between policy goals and sustainable development objectives, coupled with robust monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and long-term commitment. Strengthening Nigeria's education system through inclusive and forward-thinking policies is essential for building a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. The Nigerian government should ensure consistent implementation of education policies by strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at all levels of the education sector.
2. Education policymakers should align national education policies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and quality education for all.
3. Curriculum developers should integrate sustainability education into school curricula to promote awareness of environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic empowerment among students.

4. Teachers and educational institutions should be equipped with adequate training and resources to effectively deliver sustainability-oriented education and foster critical thinking.
5. Stakeholders in the education sector should collaborate with private organizations, NGOs, and international bodies to mobilize funding and technical support for sustainable education initiatives.
6. The Ministry of Education should prioritize inclusive education policies that address the needs of marginalized groups, such as girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural communities.
7. Legislators and political leaders should demonstrate greater political will by enacting and supporting laws that protect the right to quality education and ensure long-term policy continuity.
8. Community leaders and parents should be actively involved in promoting educational development and sustainability goals at the grassroots level.

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