

GLOBALIZATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY REFORMS FOR QUALITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explored the intersection of globalization and higher education policy reforms in Nigeria, with a focus on quality inclusive education. The paper examined the relevance of globalization on higher education policy reforms for quality inclusive education and argues that this intersection has yielded numerous benefits, including increased access to information, improved technology, enhanced collaboration and exchange among institutions and countries, increased mobility, and international funding. The paper focuses on globalization, higher education, inclusive education, policy reforms and concluded that globalization plays a vital role in shaping higher educational policy reform for quality inclusive education in Nigeria. To deliver quality inclusive education, Nigerian higher educational system should balance the demands of globalization with local challenges, integrating international standards with context-specific solutions to create world-class, inclusive learning environments that drive national development and global relevance.

Key Words: Globalization, Higher Education, Inclusive Education, Policy Reforms.

Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with globalization transforming the way individuals and nations live, work, and learn. Globalization has significantly impacted higher education, with a growing number of students, academics, and institutions participating in international collaborations, exchanging ideas, and building networks. However, the benefits of globalization have not been evenly distributed, as many countries and institutions in the developing world continue to struggle in providing high-quality, inclusive education that prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century, particularly for the Fifth Industrial Revolution (5IR). Education is a critical component of a nation's economic and social development, promoting social mobility, economic growth, and innovation. Ololube et al. (2013) noted that the fundamental purpose of education is to pass on existing knowledge to new generations, introduce them to societal organization, equip them with skills for daily life and leisure, and instill sound morals. Education also enables younger generations to understand their heritage, participate productively in society, and contribute to the future (Briggs et al., 2012). Moreover, higher education draws inspiration from society and contributes to its growth, renewal, and development (Esu & Junaid, 2013).

In Nigeria, the higher education sector faces numerous challenges, including rising demand, limited resources, and shifting student demographics. In response, the Federal Republic of

Nigeria has implemented higher educational policy reforms aimed at enhancing the quality, accessibility, and relevance of its higher education systems. A key driver of these reforms is the need to promote quality inclusive education. According to Okuoyibo, 2001, as cited in Anugom & Mezieobi, 2017 inclusive education involves integrating students with disabilities into all aspects of general education, including school, classroom, and community planning. Quality inclusive education ensures that higher institutions meet certain academic standards, preparing students for the workforce and further study, while providing equal access to quality education regardless of background or socio-economic status. To achieve high-quality and inclusive higher education, prioritizing equity and access, academic excellence, cultural diversity and sensitivity, student support services, and community engagement is crucial. By collaborating, institutions globally can create a more just and equitable higher education system that prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century and promotes social mobility, economic growth, and development in this era of globalization.

Concept of Globalization

Globalization is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon driven by technological advancements, improved transportation and communication, and the growth of international trade and investment. This has led to increased social interactions and movements among diverse populations, demystifying myths and untested assumptions (Akani, 2012). As a process, globalization impacts various aspects of human life, including economic, cultural, political, environmental, and educational sectors. It is characterized by increasing global connectivity, integration, and interdependence. Ololube et al. (2013) posited that globalization fosters greater interdependence and mutual awareness among economic, political, and social units worldwide. It facilitates political, economic, cultural, and educational exchanges through government policies, corporate initiatives, international agreements, and civil society efforts.

Globalization promotes increased interaction among global regions and individuals, driven by technological progress, cultural exchange, and knowledge sharing (Ogbaji & Ike, 2014). Ultimately, globalization results in deeper interconnectivity and interdependence among global economies, societies, and cultures.

Concept Quality Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Quality in education refers to the degree of excellence that meets established standards, assessing programmes, activities, practices, processes, performance, and products (Mbaji & Ebirim, 2015). Quality education sets standards for educational inputs, processes, and outcomes, yielding desired results. Inclusive education provides individuals with disabilities equal opportunities for quality educational experiences in the same environment as their peers without disabilities (Anugom & Mezieobi, 2017). This approach advocates for unconditional mainstreaming of individuals with disabilities into regular education systems, regardless of disability nature or severity (Oluka & Egbo, 2014). Quality inclusive education offers high-standard lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals, valuing diversity and promoting equitable access. It is an educational approach that supports and values individuals' differences

in ability, language, culture, gender, or socio-economic background. By embracing diversity, quality inclusive education fosters a culture of inclusivity, equity, and excellence.

The goal of quality inclusive education is to create a learning environment that is equitable, effective, and inclusive for all students, enabling them to reach their full potential. According to Chilaka-Osuagwu (2017), an inclusive system provides quality education for all children, helping to break down discriminatory attitudes. Inclusive education offers learning opportunities without discrimination, valuing diversity and promoting equal access to resources. As Tight (2013) notes, inclusive education eliminates biases based on gender, race, or disability. By adapting learning environments to meet individual needs, quality inclusive education ensures all students feel valued and supported. This approach requires responsive curricula, culturally sensitive teaching practices, and collaboration among teachers, students, parents, and the community to drive student learning and hold educators accountable for outcomes. Ejiogu et al. (2017) emphasize that quality education should be relevant and participatory. Ultimately, quality inclusive education empowers individuals with the skills and abilities to contribute meaningfully to societal development.

Higher Education Policy in Nigeria

The concept of policy has been defined in various ways, reflecting the diverse goals and perspectives of those who shape it. At its core, policy informs decision-making (Ebirim & Duruchukwu, 2024). It can be understood as a guiding principle that directs a plan of action toward achieving a specific objective. Policy development involves making strategic organizational decisions and selecting among options based on their potential impact. Freedictionary.com (2014) explains policy as a deliberate plan or course of action adopted by governments, political parties, or businesses to influence decisions and shape outcomes. The

FAO Corporate Document Repository (2024) defines policy as a set of decisions aimed at achieving long-term goals or addressing specific challenges. In education, policy provides a framework for effective administration, management, and implementation of processes, programmes, and activities across all levels, including higher education. Higher education, a subset of tertiary education, encompasses university education, teacher training, technological education, and innovative enterprise institutions. According to Abraham et al. (2021) and Meenyinikor et al. (2014), higher education typically caters to young adults aged 18 and above. As the final stage of formal education, higher education comprises the post-secondary sector, offered in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and other tertiary institutions ((Igbokwe & Igbokwe, 2010, Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011). In Nigeria, higher education refers to post-basic education provided in various institutions, including universities, inter-university centers like the Nigeria French Language Village, innovation enterprise institutions, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotronics, and specialized institutions such as colleges of agriculture, schools of health technology, and the National Teachers' Institute (FRN, 2013).

Higher education policy in Nigeria outlines the intentions, expectations, goals, and standards for delivering quality inclusive higher education. The higher education policy plays a crucial role in promoting quality inclusive education in Nigeria (Ebirim & Mbaji, 2012; Meenyinikor et al., 2014). This policy aligns with the national policies and educational development frameworks outlined in the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In Nigerian educational system, higher education is the third tier, offered in various institutions, including universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education, and those providing distance learning programmes. The goals of higher education as stated by the FRN (2013, p.27) shall be pursued through:

“Quality student intake; Quality teaching and learning; Research and development; High standards in the quality of facilities, services, and resources; Staff welfare and development programmes; A practical-based curriculum relevant to labor market needs; Generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills, and competencies contributing to national and local economic goals, enabling students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy; Flexible learning modes, including full-time, part-time, block release, day-release, and sandwich programmes; Access to training funds, such as the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund); A well-structured, coordinated, and supervised Student Industrial Work Experience; Scheme (SIWES); Maintenance of minimum educational standards through regulatory agencies; An inclusive, credible admissions policy promoting national unity; Affordable, equitable access to tertiary education through scholarships and student loans; Inter-institutional cooperation and linkages; and Dedicated community services through extra-mural and extension services”.

Higher Education Policy Reforms for Quality Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Higher educational policy reform in Nigeria involves a systematic review, revision, and implementation of changes to governing policies, laws, and regulations. Abdulkareem and Fasasi (2014) submitted that reform entails changing and improving existing practices. In the context of higher education, policy reforms aim to enhance various aspects of educational programmes and actions. The primary objective of these reforms is to boost the quality, accessibility, and relevance of higher education, aligning it with the needs of individuals and society. In Nigeria, higher education policy reforms strive to create a more adaptable and responsive system, aligning with international best practices. Over the years, successive governments - colonial, military, and civilian - have worked towards achieving this goal. Key initiatives have included promoting institutional autonomy, system differentiation, strengthened governance, and quality assurance mechanisms for inclusive education. (Adesina, 2005). Furthermore, the government introduced significant reforms with the National Policy on Education in 1977, which has undergone revisions in 1981, 1988, 2004, 2007, and 2013. This policy outlines Nigerian vision for leveraging education as a tool for transforming the nation into a self-reliant, technologically advanced society through inclusive, quality education.

The National Policy on Education highlights the significance of quality inclusive education in achieving national objectives and leveraging technology to enhance its delivery. Nigerian higher educational policy reform aims to create a more effective and efficient system, ensuring equal access to education and opportunities for all individuals to contribute to national development. Key reforms in the higher education sector include the establishment of regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). Other notable initiatives include the introduction of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the revival of the National Open University of Nigeria, and the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning, and research. Additionally, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and Post UTME screening have been implemented. To ensure quality, the government has established a quality assurance framework and mandated professional qualifications for teachers. Furthermore, some Colleges of Education and Polytechnics have been licensed to award degrees, marking a significant reform in Nigerian higher education landscape (Babalola, 2007; Lawal, 2008, FRN, 2013;).

Relevance of Globalization on Higher Education Policy Reforms for Quality Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The relevance of globalization on higher education policy reform in Nigeria is profound, particularly in promoting quality inclusive education. As a multifaceted process, globalization significantly influences various aspects of human life, including higher education (Chinnammai, 2024). The advent of globalization has triggered numerous changes and adaptations, resulting in increased access to information, technological advancements, enhanced inter-institutional and international collaboration, heightened mobility, and global funding opportunities. Nigerian higher educational institutions can leverage globalization to access a vast array of global information and resources, thereby enhancing the quality of inclusive education. Access to diverse resources is crucial for achieving educational objectives (Ebirim et al., 2023). By tapping into global information and resources, Nigerian higher educational system can improve the quality of inclusive education, ensuring equal and unrestricted access to information for all students, regardless of status, background, language, or abilities. This unfettered access enables students and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of various subjects, ultimately leading to improved academic performance.

Globalization enables Nigerian higher educational institutions to consistently leverage advanced technology in various academic programmes and activities, thereby enhancing the learning experience. The integration of cutting-edge technology worldwide has led to the adoption of online and distance learning platforms, which can significantly improve access to quality education, promote equity, and increase the relevance of higher education in Nigeria. Nigerian students can now access digital libraries, reliable internet connectivity, and open educational resources with minimal disruptions, allowing them to acquire knowledge and stay current with the latest developments in their fields. Technology plays a vital supportive role in

both face-to-face and distance learning (UNESCO CFIT Project, 2016). By harnessing improved technology, students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly competitive and globalized world. Teachers can utilize diverse digital materials and resources to develop innovative and engaging pedagogies, making learning more effective and enjoyable. Furthermore, access to digital tools and platforms facilitates seamless collaboration and communication among students, teachers, and stakeholders, fostering a more collaborative and supportive learning environment that promotes quality inclusive education in Nigeria.

Globalization facilitates international collaboration and knowledge exchange among higher education institutions in Nigeria and their global counterparts, promoting quality inclusive education Mbaji, & Ebirim, (2015). Through partnerships with international institutions, Nigerian higher educational institutions can adopt best practices in teaching, research, and innovation, enhance staff capacity through training and development opportunities, develop globally relevant curricula, and establish quality assurance systems that meet international standards. Effective quality assurance mechanisms ensure standardized processes and practices in educational programmes, ultimately yielding high-quality outcomes (Mbaji & Ebirim, 2015). International collaboration enables Nigerian academics and researchers to network globally, engage in joint research projects, gain international recognition, attract global students, and boost their competitiveness in the international higher education market. Furthermore, such collaboration provides Nigerian students with opportunities to study abroad, broaden their perspectives, and enhance their employability, while also fostering innovation and entrepreneurship programmes in a quality inclusive environment.

Globalization facilitates increased mobility of students and academics across institutions and nations, enabling Nigerian students and academics to access high-quality education, cutting-edge facilities, and advanced technology not readily available in Nigeria. By studying abroad, Nigerian students and academics are exposed to diverse educational systems, teaching methods, and curricula, broadening their perspectives and developing new pedagogical skills. Osuala (2023) describes skill as the ability to apply acquired competences, attitudes, and behaviors in a field of study. Furthermore, skill involves understanding and adopting unique approaches to accomplish tasks and achieve goals (Ebirim et al., 2023). Student and academic mobility promotes cultural exchange, unity in diversity, and cross-cultural understanding, ultimately enriching quality inclusive education. Upon returning to Nigeria, students bring back innovative ideas, skills, and knowledge, enhancing the country's educational quality. Moreover, student mobility can foster inclusive education by providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities, to access quality education globally.

Globalization enables higher educational institutions in Nigeria to access international funding, which supports reforms and enhances educational quality. International funding facilitates improvements in infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum development, research, scholarships, partnerships, and educational governance, ultimately promoting equity and

access to resources. Ebirim and Duruchukwu (2024) expressed that funding is crucial for implementing action plans and monitoring progress in higher education planning and development. With international funding, Nigerian higher educational institutions can develop and implement innovative curricula that incorporate global best practices and standards, thereby improving higher educational relevance and quality. Furthermore, international funding supports efforts to strengthen educational governance by developing policies, laws, and regulations that promote transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. Additionally, it can be leveraged to support initiatives that promote educational equity, targeting disadvantaged groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds.

Conclusion

The relevance of globalization on higher educational policy reform for quality inclusive education in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Nigerian higher educational system must navigate the dual demands of globalization and local challenges to deliver quality inclusive education. By embracing a holistic approach that acknowledges the country's unique complexities, Nigerian tertiary institutions can foster inclusive learning environments that drive national development and global competitiveness. To achieve this, the system must harmonize international standards with local needs, integrating innovative approaches and context-specific solutions to create inclusive, world-class learning environments that propel national development and global relevance.

The Way Forward

1. The Nigerian government should develop a national quality assurance framework for recognition of prior learning, to ensure that students who have acquired knowledge and skills through non-formal means can have their learning recognized and accredited.
2. Nigerian government should promote the use of technology in education, to enhance access to education, and to support internationalization efforts. They should equally increase funding for higher education, to ensure that higher educational institutions have the adequate digital resources they need to provide quality inclusive education.
3. The Nigerian government should decentralize higher education governance to give institutions more autonomy and flexibility to respond to local and international needs. They should again develop a more responsive national framework for teacher training, to ensure that teachers acquired the proper skills required for quality inclusive education.
4. Nigerian higher institutions should invest in digital infrastructure and online learning platforms to increase access to higher education and improve the quality of education. They should evenly engage with their local communities to address societal needs, including providing training and services that address local challenges.
5. Nigerian higher institutions should prioritize entrepreneurship and innovation, including providing training and resources for students and staff to develop innovative ideas. They should equally prioritize research and development, including providing funding and resources for research projects, and promoting collaboration between universities and other industries.

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