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Accessing the Impact of Policy Reforms on the Rights to Education: A Comparative Study of Emerging and Developed Economies (Nigeria and the U.S.)

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of education policy reforms on the right to education in emerging and developed economies, focusing on Nigeria and the United States. It analyzed how policy interventions shaped access to education, the quality of educational outcomes, and equity in both countries. The key research questions investigated the effectiveness of education reforms in improving access, addressing regional and socioeconomic disparities, and ensuring quality education. The study adopted a comparative case study methodology, analyzing secondary data, policy documents, and education statistics from both nations. Theoretical frameworks such as Human Capital Theory and a rights-based approach to education were used to evaluate the policies' impact. Findings revealed that while Nigeria made significant strides in increasing school enrollment through policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, it struggled with quality, funding, and regional disparities. In contrast, the U.S. achieved widespread access to education but faced persistent challenges related to racial and socioeconomic inequities, influenced by the shortcomings of standardized testing and uneven funding allocation. The study's implications suggested that addressing policy implementation, funding, and equity issues is essential for advancing the right to education. Recommendations were provided to strengthen reforms, improve funding mechanisms, and promote equitable access to quality education in both contexts.

Keywords: Education Policy Reforms; Right to Education; Nigeria, United States; Comparative Analysis.

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right, essential for the development of individuals and societies. The right to education is enshrined in several international agreements, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 26) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 2017). In addition, the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG 4) emphasize "inclusive and equitable quality education" as a key priority for global development (United Nations, 2015). Access to education, particularly in its early stages, is seen as critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring long-term social and economic development (World Bank, 2018). Education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate fully in society and the economy, driving national growth and social equity.

In emerging economies like Nigeria, educational policies have historically focused on expanding access to schooling, with reforms such as the *Universal Basic Education* (UBE) scheme (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). The goal has been to address literacy gaps, reduce school dropout rates, and bridge gender disparities in education. However, despite these efforts, Nigeria faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and regional disparities, particularly between the North and South (Obi & Uchendu, 2020).

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Conversely, the U.S. has a more established educational system, with policy reforms focusing on improving the quality and equity of education. Landmark reforms such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) have attempted to address achievement gaps, especially for racial minorities and economically disadvantaged groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). While the U.S. enjoys widespread access to education, issues of equity remain a significant concern, with disparities in academic performance and resources based on socioeconomic status and race (Reardon, 2019).

1.1. Research Problem

Both Nigeria and the U.S. face challenges in ensuring that all children have equal access to quality education. In Nigeria, despite progress in school enrollment rates, many students—particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas—lack access to basic educational resources (Olanrewaju, 2021). Gender disparities, cultural barriers, and economic constraints further exacerbate the problem, especially in the northern regions (Aja-Okorie & Akhigbe, 2021). On the other hand, the U.S. faces less of a problem with basic access but struggles with deep-rooted inequalities in educational outcomes, often influenced by racial and economic divides (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Policy reforms in both countries aim to address these disparities and improve educational access and quality. In Nigeria, initiatives like the UBE scheme and policies targeting gender and regional inequality have attempted to increase school attendance and completion rates (Adeyemi & Ekundayo, 2020). However, these efforts are often undermined by governance issues, insufficient funding, and poor policy implementation (Okeke & Nwabueze, 2022). In contrast, U.S. policies have focused on standardizing educational outcomes and improving teacher quality, yet they have often been criticized for failing to adequately address the root causes of inequality, such as poverty and racial segregation (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

1.2. Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What has been the impact of education policy reforms on access to education in Nigeria and the U.S.?
- How effective are these policy reforms in addressing issues of educational access and equity in both countries?
- What are the key differences in the policy approaches of an emerging economy like Nigeria and a developed one like the U.S., and what lessons can be drawn from each?

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the key policy reforms that have shaped access to education in Nigeria and the U.S.
- To conduct a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of these reforms in expanding educational opportunities and addressing disparities.
- To assess the socio-political and economic factors influencing the success or failure of these policy reforms in both countries.

1.3. Justification of the Study

The comparative study of Nigeria, an emerging economy, and the U.S., a developed economy, provides valuable insights into how different political and economic contexts influence educational policy and outcomes. By comparing these two countries, we can identify best practices that can be adapted or scaled to improve educational access globally. In Nigeria, where education reforms are still in their infancy, lessons from the U.S. on resource allocation, teacher training, and standardized testing could prove beneficial (Dike, 2020). Conversely, Nigeria's experience in addressing cultural and regional disparities in education may offer insights for the U.S., particularly in reaching underserved populations. Understanding the impact of policy reforms on access to education across different contexts is critical, as it allows policymakers and educators to design more inclusive and effective strategies that ensure all children, regardless of their background, have equal education opportunities. This research contributes to the global discourse on educational equity and informs future policy-making in both emerging and developed economies.

2. Theoretical Framework

In assessing the impact of policy reforms on the right to education in both emerging and developed economies, it is essential to ground the analysis in theoretical concepts that elucidate the relationship between education and socio-economic outcomes. Theories of education policy provide insight into how education reforms are shaped and their intended impact. Two key frameworks—the *Human Capital Theory* and the *Rights-Based Approach*—offer

complementary perspectives on the role of education in society. Furthermore, using a *Comparative Policy Analysis Framework* allows for the systematic evaluation of education policies across different economic contexts, specifically focusing on Nigeria and the United States.

2.1. Human Capital Theory: Education as a Means to Economic Development

Human Capital Theory, as originally articulated by economists such as Becker (1993) and Schultz (1961), posits that education is an investment in human capital, which enhances individual productivity and contributes to broader economic development. The theory asserts that individuals acquire knowledge and skills through education, which improves their ability to contribute to the labor market, ultimately resulting in higher earnings for individuals and economic growth for societies. In the context of education policy, governments adopt this framework by emphasizing the role of education in national development strategies. In both Nigeria and the U.S., education policies have been influenced by the belief that increasing access to education and improving quality will drive economic development and reduce poverty. For instance, Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) program is rooted in the belief that expanding educational access will increase the country's human capital, contributing to economic growth (Obanya, 2014). Similarly, the United States' Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights the importance of education in producing a competitive workforce for the global economy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016), reflecting the globalized nature of the labor market.

However, the application of Human Capital Theory differs significantly between developed and emerging economies. While Nigeria emphasizes expanding access to primary and secondary education, the U.S. has shifted toward policies aimed at improving the quality of education and ensuring that graduates are competitive in an increasingly globalized economy (Hanushek, 2016). Furthermore, in Nigeria, the challenge of retaining students in the education system and ensuring they acquire valuable skills remains a significant concern, which Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007) argue has been exacerbated by regional disparities and economic constraints.

2.2. Rights-Based Approach: Education as a Human Right

The Rights-Based Approach to education policy is rooted in the international legal framework that recognizes education as a fundamental human right. This perspective has been codified in various international declarations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). As Tomasevski (2003) notes, the Rights-Based Approach goes beyond the economic benefits of education, arguing that education is essential for the realization of other human rights, including the right to work, health, and participation in public life. This approach has profound implications for education policy reform, as it obliges states to provide free, compulsory, and quality education for all children. In emerging economies like Nigeria, the Right to Education is enshrined in the constitution, but the implementation of this right faces significant challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and regional disparities (Onwuameze, 2013). Despite Nigeria's commitment to providing basic education for all children, the reality is that millions of children, especially in rural areas, are still out of school (UNICEF, 2022), raising concerns about the equitable distribution of educational resources.

In the U.S., the Rights-Based Approach has also influenced policy, though to a lesser extent than in developing countries. The U.S. legal framework emphasizes equal access to education, particularly following the landmark Brown v. Board of Education ruling, which declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional (Kahlenberg, 2019). Orfield and Frankenberg (2014) argue that, more recently, U.S. education policy has focused on ensuring equity in educational outcomes for marginalized communities, including racial minorities and low-income students. Despite these legal frameworks, disparities in access and quality of education persist, reflecting broader socioeconomic inequalities (Reardon, 2016).

2.3. Comparative Policy Analysis Framework: Comparing Policy Reforms in Different Economic Contexts

A Comparative Policy Analysis Framework is essential for evaluating education reforms across different economic contexts, as it provides a systematic approach to identifying and comparing the objectives, processes, and outcomes of policy initiatives. According to Hudson and Lowe (2009), comparative policy analysis involves examining the interaction between policy actors, the institutional context in which policies are made, and the socio-economic factors that shape policy outcomes. When comparing education reforms in Nigeria and the U.S., several key dimensions should be analyzed:

Policy Objectives: In Nigeria, the primary objective of education reforms has been to increase access to basic education, with a focus on achieving universal primary education and closing gender gaps (Obanya, 2014). In contrast, U.S.

education reforms have increasingly emphasized educational equity and quality, aiming to address disparities in outcomes among different demographic groups (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Policy Implementation and Governance: The governance structures for education in both countries differ significantly. Nigeria's decentralized education system, where states are responsible for primary and secondary education, presents challenges in ensuring consistent implementation of national policies (Adepoju & Fabiyi, 2007). Meanwhile, the U.S. federal government plays a more limited role, with state and local governments exercising significant control over education, which has led to variations in education quality across states (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

Funding Mechanisms: In Nigeria, inadequate funding is a major barrier to the effective implementation of education reforms (Onwuameze, 2013). In contrast, the U.S. invests substantially in education, yet disparities in funding between school districts, particularly between affluent and impoverished areas, remain a significant challenge (Reardon, 2016). iv. Outcomes and Impact: Finally, the outcomes of education reforms in both countries need to be assessed in terms of their impact on educational access, quality, and equity. Despite policy reforms in Nigeria, millions of children remain out of school, particularly in rural areas (UNICEF, 2022). In the U.S., while access is nearly universal, significant disparities in educational outcomes persist along racial and socioeconomic lines (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

In applying this comparative policy analysis framework, this study will provide a subtle understanding of how education policy reforms function in different economic contexts, highlighting the successes and challenges in both Nigeria and the U.S.

2.4. Literature Review

The right to education is a universally recognized human right, established in various international frameworks and conventions. Globally, the significance of education extends beyond individual empowerment to the broader development of nations. Education is not only a tool for personal growth but also a means to achieve economic and social advancement. However, the realization of this right varies widely between developed and emerging economies, particularly in terms of policy reforms and their implementation. A comparative analysis of education policies in Nigeria, an emerging economy, and the United States, a developed economy, provides insight into the effectiveness of policy reforms and the challenges faced by each country. A global perspective on the right to education is rooted in international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 26 of the UDHR asserts that "everyone has the right to education," which should be free at least at the elementary level (United Nations, 1948). This declaration laid the foundation for subsequent global initiatives aimed at expanding access to education, including the Education for All (EFA) movement. Launched by UNESCO in 1990, EFA aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults by 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). Although significant progress has been made globally, disparities remain, particularly in low-income and developing nations, where access, quality, and infrastructure remain pressing issues (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

In Nigeria, education policy reforms have sought to address these challenges, with a focus on increasing access to basic education. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in 1999 was a landmark reform aimed at providing free and compulsory education for all children of primary and junior secondary school age (Ololube & Egbezor, 2012). The UBE replaced the previous Universal Primary Education (UPE) program, which had been less successful due to poor implementation and inadequate resources. Despite the UBE's ambitious goals, Nigeria continues to struggle with deep-rooted challenges, including inadequate funding, teacher shortages, and infrastructural deficits. For instance, in rural areas, particularly in the northern regions, many children remain out of school, with girls disproportionately affected due to cultural and socioeconomic barriers (Ede & Omodan, 2020).

In addition to UBE, Nigeria has also implemented various higher education reforms aimed at improving the quality and relevance of tertiary education. However, the Nigerian higher education sector is plagued by funding shortages, inadequate facilities, and an over-reliance on outdated curricula that do not align with current labor market demands (Okebukola, 2015). While the Nigerian government has made efforts to increase the number of universities and polytechnics, the rapid growth in student populations has outpaced available resources, leading to overcrowded classrooms and deteriorating educational quality (Onyebueke & Ezeonu, 2020).

In contrast, the United States has a long history of policy reforms aimed at ensuring access to high-quality education. One of the most significant reforms was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which sought to reduce educational disparities by providing federal funding to schools, particularly those serving low-income students (McGuinn, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 built upon the ESEA by introducing accountability measures aimed at improving educational outcomes. NCLB required states to implement standardized testing to assess

student performance, with schools that failed to meet proficiency targets subject to corrective measures (Dee & Jacob, 2011). While NCLB was successful in raising awareness of the achievement gap, it was criticized for its overemphasis on testing and punitive measures. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted in 2015, replaced NCLB and gave states more flexibility in setting academic standards and assessing student performance (Klein, 2016). ESSA also placed a greater emphasis on equity by requiring schools to address the needs of disadvantaged students, including those with disabilities, English language learners, and students from low-income families. However, challenges remain in the U.S. education system, particularly concerning racial and socioeconomic disparities. Black and Hispanic students continue to lag behind their white counterparts in terms of academic achievement and graduation rates (Reardon, 2016). Moreover, funding inequalities persist, with schools in affluent areas receiving significantly more resources than those in low-income communities (Baker et al., 2018).

When comparing the education policy reforms of Nigeria and the U.S., several common issues emerge. Both countries face challenges related to equity in education and the adequacy of funding. In Nigeria, the disparity between the northern and southern regions exacerbates inequities in access to education, particularly for girls (Omotosho, 2019). In the U.S., racial and socioeconomic inequities remain a significant barrier to achieving educational equality. In both cases, policy reforms aimed at increasing access to education have had limited success in addressing the underlying structural issues that perpetuate inequality.

However, the unique challenges faced by each country reflect their different socioeconomic contexts. In Nigeria, the political commitment to education has been inconsistent, with frequent changes in leadership and policy priorities affecting the implementation of reforms (Adeyanju & Adepoju, 2019). Additionally, corruption and mismanagement of funds have hindered efforts to improve the education system. In contrast, the U.S. has a more stable political environment and a stronger institutional framework for implementing education reforms. Nonetheless, the U.S. struggles with issues of race and gender inequality, which continue to influence access to high-quality education (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Furthermore, the U.S. education system is highly decentralized, with significant variations in educational standards and funding across states (Lafortune et al., 2018). Therefore, while both Nigeria and the U.S. have implemented significant education policy reforms, their success has been limited by systemic challenges. Nigeria's education reforms have increased access to basic education, but issues of quality, funding, and regional disparities persist. In the U.S., reforms have focused on improving accountability and equity, but racial and socioeconomic disparities remain a major barrier. A comparative analysis of these two countries highlights the need for policy reforms that address the unique socioeconomic and political contexts of each country, while also focusing on equity, quality, and sustainable implementation.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach to assess the impact of policy reforms on the right to education in Nigeria and the United States. Comparative analysis allows for a systematic examination of similarities and differences between the two countries' education policies, focusing on the contextual factors that influence educational access, quality, and equity. The methodology involves analyzing key policy documents such as Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), along with other significant reforms. A secondary data review will be conducted using publicly available statistical data, including school enrollment rates, literacy levels, and educational attainment, to evaluate the outcomes of these policy reforms. Additionally, reports from international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank will provide further insights into the global perspective on education rights.

The choice of a comparative analysis is justified by the study's aim to explore how different socioeconomic and political contexts shape education policies and their effectiveness in ensuring the right to education. This methodology is particularly suited to addressing the research objectives, as it allows for the evaluation of policy reforms in both emerging and developed economies. In comparing Nigeria and the U.S., the study will highlight both common and unique challenges faced in implementing education reforms, offering valuable insights into how policy frameworks can be adapted to diverse contexts. This approach also enables a more nuanced understanding of how various factors—such as governance structures, resource availability, and societal inequalities—affect the implementation and outcomes of education reforms.

4. Results and Discussion

The impact of education policy reforms in both Nigeria and the United States has been significant in expanding access to education, but the effectiveness of these reforms varies due to contextual, socioeconomic, and political factors. In

both countries, reforms have addressed systemic challenges, but gaps in policy implementation, quality of education, and equitable access remain.

In Nigeria, policy reforms such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 were designed to increase enrollment rates and ensure free access to basic education. According to Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2019), the UBE has improved school enrollment, particularly in rural areas, leading to a notable increase in literacy rates. However, challenges persist, especially in gender equity. Despite progress, gender disparities in education continue, with fewer girls attending school, particularly in the northern regions (Yakubu & Musa, 2020). This is compounded by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural resistance to female education (Edewor, 2019).

Another major issue in Nigeria is the uneven distribution of educational resources between regions. The northern part of the country has historically lagged behind in terms of education access compared to the southern region, where higher enrollment rates and literacy levels are observed (Mustapha, 2020). This disparity is driven by historical, political, and religious differences. While policy reforms aim to bridge this gap, corruption in the allocation of funds for educational infrastructure has impeded progress (Oluwatobi & Ogunrinola, 2020). The lack of adequate infrastructure, such as classrooms, teaching materials, and well-trained teachers, further complicates the realization of educational goals in many parts of Nigeria (Ogundare & Awolowo, 2021).

In the United States, educational policy reforms such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have sought to improve educational access and equity. According to Springer, Black, and Mitchell (2019), these reforms have largely succeeded in standardizing education and ensuring accountability in public schools. The focus has been on improving the quality of education, especially in underperforming schools, by holding teachers and administrators accountable through standardized testing.

However, the implementation of standardized testing has also created challenges. Critics argue that the reliance on test scores as a measure of success exacerbates the achievement gap between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Public vs. private schooling continues to play a significant role in educational inequality, with wealthier families able to afford private schooling or move to areas with better public schools, leaving disadvantaged students in underfunded schools (Reardon, 2021). This phenomenon perpetuates inequity, as students from lower-income backgrounds, particularly racial minorities, are concentrated in underperforming schools, creating a cycle of educational and economic disadvantage (Ladd & Fiske, 2020).

The U.S. education system, despite reforms aimed at increasing equity, faces ongoing challenges in addressing the racial and socioeconomic disparities in educational outcomes. African American and Latino students are disproportionately affected by poor school conditions and lower-quality teaching (Garcia, 2021). Moreover, the achievement gap between high-income and low-income students remains substantial, even with policy interventions like the ESSA, which sought to give states more control in addressing these disparities (Kraft, 2020). This gap highlights the persistent challenge of ensuring both access to education and the quality of education provided to all students, regardless of background.

When comparing policy effectiveness between Nigeria and the U.S., the differences in focus become apparent. In Nigeria, policy reforms have had a largely positive impact on increasing school enrollment, particularly in rural and underserved areas. According to Akinwale (2021), the focus of Nigerian education policy has been on expanding quantitative access—building more schools and enrolling more students. However, the quality of education remains a critical issue, with overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and inadequate learning materials being common (Adebayo, 2020). Student retention rates in Nigeria also remain low, particularly beyond the basic education level, due to economic pressures and the lack of post-basic education infrastructure (Ajayi, 2021).

In contrast, U.S. education policy has focused on improving qualitative aspects of education, such as teacher training, student achievement, and curriculum standards. The effectiveness of these reforms can be seen in the relatively high literacy rates and the widespread access to education across the country. However, as noted by Fuller (2019), issues of equity, particularly for minority and low-income students, continue to pose significant challenges. While the U.S. has managed to ensure near-universal access to primary and secondary education, the quality of education remains unevenly distributed.

A key lesson from the comparison is that Nigeria's focus on quantitative expansion has not been matched by efforts to improve educational quality. Nigeria's policy framework aims to get more children into school, but without sufficient investment in quality teaching, infrastructure, and support systems, the effectiveness of these reforms is limited (Ede & Fafunwa, 2021). In the U.S., the focus on qualitative reforms, such as improving standards and accountability, has helped

improve educational outcomes for many, but equity remains a critical issue that policy has not fully addressed (Carter, 2020).

Socioeconomic factors play a critical role in the outcomes of education policy reforms in both Nigeria and the U.S. In Nigeria, the lower level of economic development means that educational reforms must contend with broader challenges of poverty, regional inequality, and political instability (Okafor & Onyekwere, 2021). These factors significantly affect the ability of reforms to reach all students effectively. In contrast, while the U.S. is a highly developed economy, socioeconomic inequalities, particularly along racial lines, have meant that reforms aimed at improving access and quality have not fully closed the achievement gap (Johnson, 2020). In both countries, it is clear that economic development levels significantly impact the success of education policy reforms, though in different ways.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of policy reforms in Nigeria and the U.S. reveals that while both countries have made strides in increasing access to education, they continue to face challenges in ensuring that reforms lead to equitable and high-quality educational outcomes. For Nigeria, the challenge is primarily one of resource allocation and effective implementation, while for the U.S., the challenge lies in addressing deep-seated social and economic inequalities that continue to affect educational access and quality.

5. Conclusion

In concluding this comparative study on the impact of policy reforms on the right to education in Nigeria and the United States, it is essential to synthesize the key findings and reflect on the broader implications for policy-makers, particularly in emerging and developed economies. The analysis has revealed significant insights into how different socio-economic and political contexts shape educational policy outcomes, offering a critical foundation for future research in this area.

In Nigeria, policy reforms such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program have made significant strides in increasing access to education, especially at the primary and secondary levels. These reforms have led to substantial improvements in school enrollment rates across the country. Recent research by Onuka and Akomolafe (2023) highlights the role of UBE in expanding access to formal education, particularly in rural areas where school attendance was historically low. However, despite these gains, Nigeria still faces considerable challenges in terms of educational quality and infrastructure. For instance, Adeyemi (2022) found that many public schools suffer from overcrowding, insufficient teaching materials, and a lack of trained teachers, which compromises the quality of education. Furthermore, regional disparities remain a major issue, with northern Nigeria still lagging in terms of literacy rates and school completion, as noted by Mohammed and Aliyu (2021). These infrastructural and socio-cultural barriers hinder the overall effectiveness of policy reforms, making it clear that while access has improved, the quality of education has not kept pace with the increasing demand.

On the other hand, the U.S. has experienced a different set of challenges in its education system. Policy reforms like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have ensured widespread access to education, with nearly universal school attendance for children across the country. According to Thompson and Garcia (2023), these reforms have helped to maintain high enrollment rates and improve overall accountability within schools. However, issues of equity and quality continue to persist, especially for marginalized groups such as African Americans, Hispanic populations, and students from low-income families. Reardon et al. (2022) argue that the achievement gap between affluent and disadvantaged students remains a significant concern, with standardized testing and school funding inequalities disproportionately affecting students from marginalized communities. Moreover, while policies have focused on ensuring that schools meet basic standards, the quality of education varies considerably, with some schools providing excellent education while others struggle due to underfunding and lack of resources (Ladson-Billings, 2022).

The implications of these findings are crucial for policymakers in both emerging and developed economies. In Nigeria, there is an urgent need to shift the focus from merely increasing access to education towards improving the quality of education. Policymakers must invest more in teacher training, infrastructure, and educational resources to ensure that students not only attend school but receive a high standard of education. For example, Akpan (2021) suggests that public-private partnerships could play a significant role in addressing infrastructural deficiencies in Nigerian schools. Furthermore, targeted interventions are needed to address regional disparities, particularly in the northern regions, where educational attainment remains low. As Yusuf and Adamu (2023) emphasize, policymakers should consider localized solutions that take into account the unique cultural and socio-economic challenges of different regions. In the U.S., policymakers must continue to address the persistent inequities that exist within the education system. While reforms have successfully ensured access, the focus now should be on bridging the quality gap, particularly for

marginalized groups. Closing the achievement gap will require a rethinking of current funding models, as school funding remains heavily dependent on local property taxes, which exacerbates inequalities (Rothstein, 2022). Additionally, alternative assessment models that move beyond standardized testing should be considered, as noted by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2023), to better reflect the diverse learning needs of students from different backgrounds.

Looking forward, there are several directions that future research could take to build upon the findings of this study. One area for further exploration is the long-term impact of education reforms on educational outcomes, such as graduation rates, employment opportunities, and income levels. While this study has primarily focused on access and quality, future research could examine the broader socio-economic benefits of education reforms in both Nigeria and the U.S. In particular, a longitudinal study comparing educational attainment and career success between countries with varying levels of policy intervention could yield valuable insights (Walker & Watkins, 2023).

Another potential research direction involves exploring the intersection of education policy and technology. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital learning, and future studies could investigate how policy reforms can integrate technology to improve both access and quality in education. In Nigeria, the digital divide remains a significant barrier to achieving equitable educational outcomes, and further research could explore the potential of e-learning solutions in addressing this gap (Ogunyemi, 2023). Similarly, in the U.S., technology can be leveraged to provide more personalized and inclusive learning experiences, especially for students with diverse learning needs (Selwyn, 2023).

Finally, comparative studies of education reforms in other emerging and developed economies could provide a broader understanding of how different policy approaches impact the right to education globally. For example, comparing Nigeria and the U.S. with countries like Brazil, India, or Finland could offer new perspectives on best practices and challenges in ensuring equitable and quality education for all. Nevertheless, while both Nigeria and the U.S. have made progress in increasing access to education through policy reforms, significant challenges remain in terms of quality and equity. Policymakers in both countries must continue to refine and implement strategies that address these issues to ensure that the right to education is not only guaranteed but also meaningful for all students. By focusing on both access and quality, future reforms can contribute to more equitable and sustainable educational outcomes.

5.1. Recommendations

Based on the limitations and findings of the study, the following recommendations are provided:

- For Nigeria

Strengthening Policy Implementation Mechanisms:

- Establish stronger oversight bodies to monitor and evaluate education policy implementation at both national and regional levels.
- Improve coordination between federal, state, and local governments to ensure policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) are implemented consistently and transparently.
- Increase the involvement of civil society organizations and community stakeholders in monitoring educational outcomes and holding policymakers accountable.

Improving Funding and Infrastructure:

- Increase government budget allocation for education to meet the UNESCO recommendation of 15-20% of national budget expenditure. Prioritize investments in basic infrastructure such as classrooms, teaching materials, and sanitation facilities.
- Attract private sector partnerships to supplement government funding for education. Provide tax incentives and other benefits to encourage corporate investment in education infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions.
- Create more accessible funding channels for teacher training, curriculum development, and the provision of technology in schools to enhance learning outcomes.

- Addressing Regional Disparities

Develop targeted policies and action plans to address educational inequalities in Nigeria's northern regions, where access to education is significantly lower due to socio-political factors.

Provide incentives for teachers and educational professionals to work in rural and conflict-affected areas through higher wages, housing allowances, and professional development opportunities.

Implement culturally appropriate educational programs, including language-based instruction, to ensure children from diverse ethnic backgrounds have access to quality education.

- For the U.S.

Addressing Racial and Socioeconomic Inequities in Education:

- Enforce stricter regulations to prevent school funding inequalities by ensuring that public schools in lower-income communities receive equitable financial resources. Introduce more federal funding for schools serving disadvantaged populations.
- Expand programs like free school meals, after-school tutoring, and mentorship opportunities in underprivileged areas to reduce the achievement gap between different racial and socioeconomic groups.
- Promote policies aimed at desegregating schools and improving access to advanced placement (AP) programs and other high-quality educational opportunities for minority students.

Rethinking Standardized Testing and Promoting Alternative Assessments:

- Reduce the over-reliance on standardized tests for student assessment and school funding decisions. Promote formative assessments, project-based learning, and continuous evaluation models that cater to diverse learning styles and abilities.
- Encourage schools to implement competency-based education (CBE) models that assess students on mastery of subjects rather than time spent in class or test performance.
- Develop new metrics to measure educational success, focusing on holistic student development, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, rather than rote memorization.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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