

Comparative Analysis of the Nigerian Cultural and Education Policies: A Focus on Secondary Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the interrelationship between the Nigerian educational and cultural policies, with a particular focus on how both frameworks shape the content, values, and identity formation processes within secondary education. Education and culture are central to national development, serving as instruments for transmitting knowledge, skills, and shared values. Since independence, Nigerian educational policy has evolved through various reforms: from the 1977 National Policy on Education to the 2013 revision with the aim of promoting universal access, functional literacy, and self-reliance. Similarly, the Nigerian Cultural Policy emphasizes the preservation, promotion, and integration of cultural heritage into national life, recognizing culture as a catalyst for social cohesion and economic development. Through a qualitative and policy-based analysis, this study explores the convergences and divergences between the two policies, particularly their roles in shaping curriculum content, teacher development, language policy, and extracurricular activities in secondary schools. The study finds that the underrepresentation of cultural content in the secondary school curriculum limits the capacity of education to serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation and creative innovation. The paper concludes that a more integrated approach linking cultural education with formal schooling, can foster stronger national identity, enhance creativity, and promote socio-economic empowerment. It recommends a policy realignment that strengthens the cultural dimensions of education, improves teacher training in cultural studies, and expands partnerships between educational and cultural institutions. By balancing intellectual and cultural development, Nigeria can better harness its human and cultural capital for sustainable national growth and global relevance.

Keywords: Nigerian Cultural Policy, Secondary Education, National Development, Curriculum, Cultural Heritage, Policy Implementation

Introduction

Education and culture stand as two interdependent pillars that define the character, identity, and developmental trajectory of any nation. While many studies have explored the negative impacts of globalization on local cultures, highlighting the dominance of Western values and the erosion of traditional practices, few have truly analyzed how African communities respond to these upheavals or reinvent their knowledge in a globalized world (Ayeni & Lori, 2025). In Nigeria, a country of immense ethnic, linguistic, and artistic diversity; the symbiotic relationship between culture and education cannot be overstated. Both serve as instruments for nation-building, value transmission, and social integration (Obanya, 2021). The Nigerian Education Policy, particularly at the secondary level, and the Nigerian Cultural Policy were conceived to advance these shared national goals, yet they operate through distinct frameworks and priorities that reflect the nation's socio-political and economic realities.

The Nigerian Educational Policy, as articulated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), emphasizes the development of individuals who are intellectually sound, socially responsible, and economically productive. Adebayo & Adedeji, (2020) posit that, at the secondary level, the educational policy seeks to prepare students for higher education and the world of work by promoting critical thinking, creativity, and vocational competence. Conversely, the Nigerian Cultural Policy (Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1988; revised 2021) focuses on the preservation, promotion, and dynamic development of the nation's cultural heritage. To this end, Eze, (2022) avers that the cultural policy underscores the importance of cultural identity, indigenous knowledge systems, and creative industries as tools for national unity and sustainable development. Despite these complementary nature, there exists a persistent imbalance between the prioritization of education and culture in policy execution. Educational programs tend to receive greater attention in national budgeting and institutional development, while cultural initiatives are often marginalized or underfunded (Akinwale, 2020). This disparity reflects a broader global pattern where formal education is privileged over cultural transmission, leading to a gradual erosion of indigenous values and practices within modern learning environments. As such, a critical examination of both policies is imperative to identify pathways for integration where education not only transmits knowledge but also nurtures cultural consciousness and creativity among learners.

This study, therefore, undertakes a comparative analysis of the Nigerian Educational and Cultural Policies, focusing particularly on secondary education. It examines their objectives, implementation mechanisms, and the extent to which they intersect, interact or diverge in promoting national identity, creativity, and socio-economic development. By doing so, the paper aims to contribute to scholarly and policy-oriented debates on how a more culturally responsive educational framework can be achieved in Nigeria.

Nigerian Education Policy: A Focus on Secondary Education

Education policy in Nigeria occupies a central role in the nation's pursuit of development and modernization. In a country characterized by rapid population growth, socio-economic disparities, and cultural diversity, education is regarded not only as a human right but as a strategic instrument for national transformation. An educational System that alienates it's citizens from the socio-cultural and environmental realities will leave an adverse effect of imbalance in the Psychology of the people (Ayeni & Ebong, 2016). The relationship between education and development is well established in global discourse, with education widely recognized as a major index of national progress (Odukoya, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). Accordingly, successive Nigerian governments have committed resources to expanding access to quality education as a means of promoting equity, reducing poverty, and enhancing human capital development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). Nigeria's education policy has undergone several reviews and reforms since the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system. The National Policy on Education (NPE), which outlines this structure, was first established in 1977 and has been revised multiple times to address emerging educational needs and challenges.

The most recent significant review occurred in 2013, when the NPE was revised to emphasize inclusivity, vocational orientation, and the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the learning process. This revision aimed to align Nigeria's education system with contemporary global standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, ongoing discussions and evaluations continue to shape educational policies in Nigeria, focusing on improving access, quality, and relevance in response to changing socio-economic conditions and global educational trends.

The secondary level is divided into two distinct but complementary phases: **Junior Secondary Education (JSE)** and **Senior Secondary Education (SSE)**. The junior secondary phase provides general and pre-vocational education, exposing students to a broad range of subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, Basic Science, Social Studies, and introductory vocational courses. This stage lasts for three years and serves as a foundation for the development of versatile, adaptive learners. The senior secondary phase, on the other hand, allows for greater specialization and depth, enabling students to pursue academic, vocational, or technical pathways depending on their interests and aptitudes (Obanya, 2021). The curriculum at the secondary level is designed to balance intellectual, moral, and practical development. It incorporates core subjects that ensure a uniform national standard, alongside electives that reflect local contexts and future career aspirations. By emphasizing both cognitive and experiential learning, the policy seeks to prepare students for the dual challenge of higher education and gainful employment in a competitive, knowledge-driven global economy (Adebayo & Adedeji, 2020).

Moreover, the Nigerian Education Policy envisions secondary education as a platform for nurturing responsible citizenship and social integration. It seeks to instill values such as discipline, civic responsibility, creativity, and national consciousness, aligning education with the cultural and developmental aspirations of the Nigerian state (FRN, 2013). In this regard, the policy recognizes the need for synergy between formal learning and indigenous cultural systems—a linkage that, if effectively implemented, can foster both academic excellence and cultural continuity.

Evolution of Secondary Education Policy in Nigeria

The development of secondary education policy in Nigeria has been a dynamic journey, shaped by the legacies of colonial rule, political transitions, economic realities, and global educational trends. Before Nigeria gained independence in 1960, secondary education was largely elitist and exclusionary, catering primarily to a privileged few who could afford missionary or government-assisted schools. The curricula were designed to prepare students for British-style examinations, such as the Cambridge School Certificate, with a focus on producing clerks, interpreters, and administrators to serve the colonial system rather than fostering a self-sustaining indigenous

knowledge base (Fafunwa, 2004). After independence, the Nigerian government recognized education as a cornerstone for national development and social mobility. In the 1960s and 1970s, significant efforts were made to expand access to secondary education. This included establishing more public schools and implementing free education policies in certain regions, notably in the Western Region under Chief Obafemi Awolowo's administration (Taiwo, 1980). This era reflected a national aspiration to democratize education and produce skilled manpower for a newly independent state.

A pivotal moment in Nigeria's educational history was the introduction of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977, which provided a unified framework for educational development across the country. The policy aimed to make secondary education more functional by emphasizing vocational and practical skills alongside academic subjects. This shift aligned with global educational reforms that promoted technical and vocational education as a means to reduce unemployment and foster industrial growth (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). However, the economic downturn of the 1980s, largely driven by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), had severe consequences for education. Government funding for schools declined significantly, leading to deteriorating infrastructure, poor teacher remuneration, and declining quality of instruction. The effects of these austerity measures are still felt today, as many public schools continue to struggle with inadequate resources (Odukoya, 2022).

In 1999, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy was introduced to provide nine years of compulsory education—comprising six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education. This policy aimed to ensure basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills for all Nigerian children, reflecting the government's commitment to the global Education for All (EFA) initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Adebayo and Adedeji, 2021).

The most recent reform, encapsulated in the 2013 National Policy on Education, continues to emphasize inclusivity, vocational orientation, and the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the learning process. This reflects Nigeria's attempt to align with 21st-century educational standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The policy envisions

secondary education not merely as a preparatory stage for higher learning but as a transformative phase that equips learners with the competencies required for both local and global competitiveness (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Objectives of Secondary Education

The National Policy on Education outlines four key objectives for secondary education in Nigeria, each aimed at fostering holistic development and preparing learners for both societal participation and higher academic pursuits. Firstly, secondary education seeks to prepare students for useful living in society by equipping them with essential life skills, values, and attitudes necessary for effective citizenship. This involves developing civic awareness, moral responsibility, and community-oriented behavior, while also nurturing entrepreneurial abilities that promote self-reliance and economic productivity. Secondly, the policy emphasizes preparation for higher education by ensuring that students acquire a strong academic foundation, critical thinking capacity, and intellectual curiosity required for tertiary studies and lifelong learning. Thirdly, it underscores the importance of vocational training by providing students with practical skills and competencies in diverse fields such as technology, agriculture, business, and information and communication technology (ICT), thereby aligning education with national labor market needs. Lastly, the policy prioritizes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, encouraging creativity, analytical reasoning, effective communication, and teamwork. These combined objectives reflect Nigeria's broader vision of an educational system that not only produces knowledgeable and skilled individuals but also cultivates socially responsible and innovative citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to national development.

Overview of the Nigerian National Policy on Education

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) represents the country's foremost blueprint for educational development, articulating the vision, structure, and strategies that govern learning from the foundational to tertiary levels. First formulated in 1977 and revised several times, in 1981, 1998, 2004, and most recently in 2013, the NPE continues to evolve in response to Nigeria's socio-economic realities and global educational trends (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013). The

policy underscores education as “an instrument par excellence for national development,” recognizing it as the primary means for promoting national integration, self-reliance, and technological advancement.

At the heart of the NPE lies the 6-3-3-4 system of education, which structures schooling into six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary education. The secondary education phase, comprising Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) occupies a pivotal position within this structure, serving as the bridge between foundational learning and higher education or vocational engagement. The JSS curriculum is designed to provide general education and early exposure to pre-vocational and pre-technical subjects, enabling students to discover their aptitudes and interests. The SSS curriculum, on the other hand, allows for specialization in science, arts, or commercial streams, equipping students with knowledge and skills relevant to their chosen career paths. This progressive structure reflects the NPE’s emphasis on flexibility, functional education, and lifelong learning (Okebukola, 2015). The NPE’s curricular philosophy is built around balance and inclusivity. It mandates that all students study a set of core subjects, English Language, Mathematics, one Nigerian language, and basic sciences, intended to cultivate literacy, numeracy, and civic understanding (Adebayo & Adedeji, 2020). Beyond these core areas, elective subjects allow students to pursue interests aligned with their strengths and career aspirations, fostering early specialization and adaptability. The inclusion of pre-vocational and vocational subjects at the JSS level also seeks to address unemployment by providing learners with practical skills that can support entrepreneurship or self-reliance. In this way, the NPE aligns formal education with national economic goals while promoting both intellectual and practical development. A critical component of the NPE is its attention to teacher education and professional development, recognizing that the quality of instruction is inseparable from the competence and welfare of educators. The policy stipulates that secondary school teachers should possess a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree in Education or a Postgraduate Diploma in Education. It also encourages continuous professional development through workshops, retraining programs, and exposure to new pedagogical techniques. In addition, the NPE emphasizes improved teacher welfare, advocating better remuneration, housing, and working conditions to attract and retain qualified personnel in the

teaching profession. These measures are meant to build a stable, motivated, and skilled teaching workforce capable of driving educational transformation.

Despite its comprehensive vision, the NPE faces persistent implementation challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Chief among these is inadequate funding, which manifests in poorly maintained infrastructure, insufficient learning materials, and limited investment in teacher development. Teacher shortages, particularly in rural areas, exacerbate educational inequality and compromise instructional quality. Furthermore, the relevance of the curriculum has been questioned, with critics arguing that it does not sufficiently align with the skills demanded by the contemporary labor market or the realities of a digital economy (Okoli, 2018). Issues of access and equity also remain unresolved, as students from disadvantaged or remote communities continue to experience limited opportunities for quality secondary education. Compounding these structural problems are examination malpractices, which undermine the integrity of the educational system and erode confidence in academic achievement.

Overall, the Nigerian National Policy on Education embodies a well-conceived framework aimed at transforming education into a tool for national development and social integration. However, the persistent gap between policy and practice underscores the need for stronger institutional capacity, sustainable funding mechanisms, and a renewed commitment to educational accountability. A more holistic and culture-responsive implementation of the NPE would ensure that secondary education not only prepares students for higher learning but also empowers them as active, creative contributors to Nigeria's socio-economic and cultural advancement.

Overview of the Nigerian Cultural Policy

Nigeria's cultural policy represents a vital national framework designed to harness the power of culture for social cohesion, economic development, and international diplomacy. As one of the most culturally diverse nations in Africa with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages Nigeria's identity and unity depend heavily on the preservation and promotion of its cultural heritage (Eboh, 2017). The Nigerian Cultural Policy, first articulated in 1988 and revised in subsequent years, positions culture not merely as an aesthetic expression but as a dynamic force for nation-building, moral regeneration, and sustainable development (Federal Ministry of Information and Culture

[FMIC], 2009). The policy envisions culture as both the foundation and the reflection of national identity, emphasizing that no meaningful development can occur without cultural consciousness and participation (Adebayo, 2016).

The objectives of the Nigerian Cultural Policy are multidimensional and interlinked. At its core, it seeks to promote cultural awareness and understanding, ensuring that citizens appreciate the values, traditions, and histories that define Nigeria's collective identity. By fostering a sense of pride and belonging, the policy aims to strengthen national unity amid diversity. Equally central is the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage, encompassing Nigeria's tangible and intangible assets from languages, festivals, and crafts to sacred sites and oral traditions. Through these efforts, the policy safeguards the cultural continuity that connects past generations with the present and the future (Ekpo, 2015). Another significant objective is the development of cultural and creative industries as engines of economic growth and employment. Nigeria's vibrant film industry (Nollywood), music scene, fashion sector, and traditional crafts are vital components of this cultural economy. By supporting entrepreneurship within these creative sectors, the policy recognizes culture's potential as both a social resource and an economic commodity. Furthermore, the policy advances cultural diplomacy and international cooperation, leveraging Nigeria's heritage to enhance its global image, build soft power, and foster intercultural dialogue. Finally, the policy underscores the integration of culture into national development planning, ensuring that cultural values, expressions, and innovations inform economic, educational, and social strategies (FMIC, 2009).

In practical terms, the implementation of the cultural policy is driven by key government institutions and agencies. The National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) plays a central role in promoting and preserving Nigerian culture through festivals, exhibitions, and research. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) is tasked with conserving historical sites, artifacts, and monuments, while the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) supports the development of the film industry, particularly Nollywood, which stands today as the world's second-largest film producer. These institutions, through policy coordination and community-based initiatives, operationalize the vision of cultural preservation and creative development (Olaolu, 2020).

Cultural festivals and programs have become vibrant expressions of policy in action. Events such as the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), the Abuja International Film Festival, and the Lagos Book and Art Festival serve as platforms for artistic expression, intercultural dialogue, and tourism promotion. Beyond their entertainment value, these festivals embody cultural diplomacy by attracting international participants and showcasing Nigeria's creative potential to global audiences. They also contribute significantly to cultural tourism, a sector with growing economic promise (Eboh, 2017). The government has complemented these initiatives with funding and infrastructural support for cultural projects, including the restoration of heritage sites, documentation of indigenous knowledge systems, and production of cultural documentaries. Moreover, the policy encourages public-private partnerships that bring together government agencies, corporations, and cultural organizations to finance and manage creative enterprises. Such collaborations have been instrumental in the expansion of Nollywood and the rise of the Afrobeats music industry, demonstrating how culture can generate employment, attract investment, and shape national branding (Akindele, 2019).

A crucial aspect of the cultural policy's long-term vision is the integration of cultural education into school curricula. This initiative ensures that Nigerian children are introduced to their cultural roots early, fostering respect for diversity and nurturing future custodians of national heritage. By aligning cultural education with formal learning, the policy bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, encouraging young people to view culture as both identity and innovation. Educators are thus encouraged to integrate both indigenous myths and modern media narratives within school curricula to promote cultural literacy and ethical awareness (Ayeni et al., 2025). The impact of the Nigerian Cultural Policy has been far-reaching. It has strengthened cultural diversity, promoted inclusivity, and elevated the profile of Nigerian arts and heritage at home and abroad. Cultural industries such as Nollywood and the Nigerian music scene now contribute billions of naira to the economy and serve as major platforms for youth employment and international recognition (UNESCO, 2021). Additionally, Nigeria's cultural diplomacy efforts have led to the global recognition of sites such as the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and the Alok Monoliths in Ikom, both listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These successes highlight how culture functions as a catalyst for development, tourism, and national pride.

Despite its achievements, however, the cultural policy faces challenges, including inconsistent funding, weak institutional coordination, and limited enforcement mechanisms. To fully realize its potential, Nigeria must strengthen inter-agency collaboration, prioritize cultural education, and establish sustainable frameworks for financing cultural initiatives. A more integrated approach—linking education, culture, and innovation—would not only preserve Nigeria’s heritage but also position culture as a strategic asset in the country’s quest for inclusive and sustainable development.

Comparative analysis of Nigerian Cultural Policy and Secondary Education

The connection between Nigeria’s Cultural Policy and secondary education reveals an enduring quest to balance intellectual advancement with cultural consciousness. Both frameworks the National Policy on Education and the Nigerian Cultural Policy share a unified vision: to nurture citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also deeply rooted in their cultural identity. In practice, however, the synergy between the two remains uneven, often challenged by issues of implementation, prioritization, and systemic bias toward Western-oriented education. At the curriculum level, the Cultural Policy encourages the inclusion of Nigerian history, languages, literature, traditional arts, and crafts. These subjects are designed to help students connect with their heritage and develop a sense of identity. Yet, this integration remains inconsistent. In many schools, cultural education is confined to isolated subjects like Social Studies or Language Arts rather than infused across disciplines. Similarly, while the language policy mandates the teaching of at least one indigenous language at the secondary level, its implementation varies widely. Some schools sustain robust indigenous language programs, while others treat them as optional or secondary to English instruction. Beyond the classroom, cultural education often thrives in extracurricular spaces. Many secondary schools organize cultural days, traditional dance groups, drama clubs, and art exhibitions that provide students with experiential learning and cultural expression. These activities help reinforce national pride, community belonging, and intergenerational continuity—objectives central to the Nigerian Cultural Policy. However, the success of cultural integration in education depends heavily on teacher competence and preparation. The National Policy on Education emphasizes the need for professional and continuous teacher development, yet most teacher-training programs still lack a strong focus on cultural education. As a result, many teachers are ill-equipped to teach

indigenous knowledge systems or to contextualize cultural values within modern pedagogical frameworks.

Comparatively, while the Educational Policy is structured and formal, concerned with academic standards, teacher training, and curriculum uniformity the Cultural Policy operates more flexibly, emphasizing cultural festivals, heritage preservation, and institutional partnerships. Both policies overlap in their reliance on technology and public participation to promote cultural awareness. Yet, despite their shared intentions, the educational sector often receives more funding and visibility, leaving the cultural sector under-resourced and undervalued. The marginalization of cultural education undermines a vital source of national cohesion and creativity. Cultural heritage, when properly harnessed, can serve as both an educational and economic resource strengthening identity, creating employment, and fostering patriotism. Countries such as Singapore, China, and South Africa have demonstrated how cultural heritage management can yield social and economic dividends. Nigeria, too, possesses the potential to achieve similar outcomes if its educational and cultural policies are better aligned and implemented with equal commitment. In essence, both the Nigerian Cultural Policy and the Policy on Education seek to produce citizens who can think critically, act responsibly, and remain connected to their cultural roots. The challenge lies not in the absence of policy, but in ensuring that the nation's classrooms, teachers, and institutions embody the cultural values they are meant to preserve. A revitalized synergy between education and culture could transform Nigeria's secondary schools into vibrant spaces where knowledge meets identity—where learning, creativity, and heritage coexist as instruments of national renewal.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Educational Policy and the Nigerian Cultural Policy collectively shape the nation's intellectual, cultural, and developmental trajectory. While both seek to promote cultural awareness, unity, and civic participation, their approaches and priorities differ. The Educational Policy emphasizes structured learning, critical thinking, vocational training, and preparation for higher education, focusing on intellectual and professional capacity building. Conversely, the Cultural Policy is devoted to preserving Nigeria's diverse heritage through the promotion of indigenous languages, cultural industries, and international cultural engagement. Despite their shared objectives,

both policies face persistent challenges such as weak implementation, inadequate funding, and the dominance of Western-oriented curricula that often marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. These constraints limit their transformative potential in fostering a holistic model of national development. In conclusion, education and culture remain interdependent pillars of Nigeria's progress. A balanced integration of both where education transmits cultural values and culture enriches educational content—can strengthen national identity, stimulate creative industries, and advance socio-economic growth. Nigeria's future development depends on bridging the gap between policy intent and practice, ensuring that both education and culture are strategically aligned as complementary forces in nation-building.

Recommendations

To improve secondary education in Nigeria while honoring cultural values, several practical recommendations can be made. First, integrating cultural education into the curriculum is essential. This means developing modules that focus on local histories, languages, arts, and traditions. By doing this, students will not only learn academic content but also gain a deeper appreciation of their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity. Another important aspect is promoting teacher training on cultural sensitivity. Professional development programs should equip teachers with skills to understand and incorporate diverse cultural backgrounds into their teaching. This will enhance classroom engagement, improve student retention, and ultimately lead to better academic performance. Community involvement is also crucial. Schools should actively seek partnerships with local communities, cultural organizations, and artisans. By collaborating with these groups, schools can create programs that reflect local values and practices, providing students with real-world learning experiences that connect education with their cultural environment.

Utilizing technology for cultural exchange can broaden students' perspectives. Schools should adopt digital platforms that allow students to connect with peers from different regions and cultures. This interaction can promote understanding and appreciation of diversity and enhance learning through collaborative projects. Regular policy review and feedback mechanisms are necessary to ensure that educational reforms remain relevant. Establishing a systematic approach for assessing the impact of

education policies on cultural integration can involve feedback from educators, students, and community stakeholders. This responsiveness will help the government tailor educational reforms to meet the population's needs. Lastly, focusing on vocational and practical skills within the curriculum is vital. By aligning education with market demands and local economic needs, students will be better prepared for the workforce. This not only enhances employability but also contributes to community development by equipping students with applicable skills.

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