

AN ASSESSMENT OF CHALLENGES MILITATING AGAINST NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN REGARD OF EDUCATION AND STRATEGIES MEASURES TO ADDRESS THEM

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Abstract

Nigeria's foreign policy has historically recognized education as a key instrument for national development, diplomacy, and human capital formation. Through bilateral agreements, international scholarships, and partnerships with global organizations, the country has made significant strides in expanding access to education and enhancing institutional capacity. However, several challenges, including inconsistent policies, inadequate funding, weak institutional frameworks, administrative inefficiencies, cultural barriers, limited skilled personnel, and political instability, have constrained the effectiveness of these initiatives. This study examines these challenges and identifies strategic measures to address them, including long-term policy frameworks, increased domestic investment, institutional capacity building, modernized administration, cross-cultural training, human resource development, and legal safeguards for continuity. The findings underscore the need for a more resilient and coordinated approach to ensure that Nigeria's foreign policy continues to foster sustainable educational development.

Keywords: Nigeria, foreign policy, education development, challenges, strategic measures, human capital, bilateral agreements

1.0 Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of national development, economic growth, and social transformation. For Nigeria, a country with a large and youthful population, education is not only a domestic priority but also a strategic instrument of foreign policy. Over the decades, Nigeria has leveraged its international engagements to enhance educational opportunities, strengthen human capital, and elevate its global standing. Bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) programme, have provided Nigerian students with access to higher education in countries such as China, Russia, Morocco, and Algeria. These programmes are designed to expose students to advanced knowledge, technical expertise, and professional competencies, which are critical for national development. Beyond scholarships, Nigeria's foreign policy has fostered partnerships with international organizations like UNESCO,

the World Bank, and UNICEF, providing technical support, funding, and policy guidance to improve education at home. Such collaborations have also contributed to curriculum development, teacher training, research capacity building, and institutional management reforms.

Despite these notable achievements, the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy in advancing educational development has been constrained by several persistent challenges. Inconsistent policy formulation and implementation across successive administrations has created uncertainty and fragmented programmes, while inadequate domestic funding limits the sustainability of international collaborations. Weak institutional frameworks, coupled with administrative inefficiencies in managing scholarship programmes, have further hampered the impact of foreign policy initiatives. Cultural and social barriers, including differences in language, academic culture, and societal expectations, have complicated the adaptation of students and faculty in international engagements.

Limited availability of skilled personnel in foreign service and educational administration, combined with political instability and shifting national priorities, has reduced continuity in policy implementation. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the major challenges militating against the effective use of foreign policy in education and to propose strategic measures that can strengthen the country's educational diplomacy. By exploring the intersection of policy, institutional capacity, funding, and international collaboration, this research highlights the need for a more resilient, coordinated, and strategically oriented approach to leveraging foreign policy for sustainable educational development in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

Nigeria's foreign policy has historically recognized education as a strategic instrument for national development, diplomacy, and global engagement. Through bilateral and multilateral partnerships, the country has sought to enhance human capital, improve institutional capacity, and provide citizens with access to international learning opportunities. Key initiatives include the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) programme, which enables Nigerian students to pursue higher education in countries such as China, Russia, Morocco, and Algeria, exposing them to advanced knowledge, technical skills, and professional competencies. Beyond scholarships, Nigeria engages with international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF to secure technical assistance, funding, and policy guidance aimed at improving domestic education standards. These engagements have contributed to curriculum reforms, teacher training, research collaboration, and the adoption of global best practices.

Nigeria's foreign policy in education faces challenges, including inconsistent policy implementation, weak institutional coordination, inadequate funding, administrative inefficiencies, and the risk of brain drain from students studying abroad. Despite these obstacles, the policy has achieved notable successes in promoting human capital development, enhancing global visibility of Nigerian institutions, and fostering diplomatic goodwill. Overall, Nigeria's foreign policy on education represents a deliberate effort to integrate domestic development goals

with international cooperation, positioning education as both a tool for national growth and a means of strengthening Nigeria's influence in global affairs.

3.0 Method

This study adopted a review research design, which is a qualitative approach suitable for examining existing literature, policies, reports, and documented evidence on Nigeria's foreign policy in education. The review method was chosen because the study seeks to assess challenges militating against the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy in education and to identify strategic measures for addressing these challenges by analyzing previously published studies, government reports, and international policy documents.

Research Design

The review model involves a systematic examination and synthesis of secondary data sources, including academic journal articles, books, policy briefs, government white papers, and reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic by highlighting recurring themes, trends, and gaps in the implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy related to education.

Population and Scope

The population of this review encompasses scholarly publications and official policy documents that focus on: Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in the education sector, Bilateral and multilateral educational agreements, Challenges affecting the implementation of educational diplomacy, Strategies and recommendations proposed by scholars and international agencies for enhancing educational development through foreign policy.

The scope of the study is limited to publications and policy documents from 2000 to 2025, providing contemporary insights into the evolving dynamics of Nigeria's foreign educational engagements. Both local (Nigerian-based) and international sources were included to ensure a balanced perspective on the challenges and proposed solutions.

Data Sources

Data were sourced from:

Academic Journals: Peer-reviewed journals focusing on education, international relations, foreign policy, and development studies.

Government Publications: Policy documents, white papers, and official reports from the Federal Ministry of Education, the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and agencies such as the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).

International Organizations: Reports and evaluations from UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and other bodies involved in education and development assistance.

Books and Monographs: Scholarly texts analyzing Nigeria's foreign policy and education development in Africa.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic approach:

1. Identification of Relevant Literature: Keywords such as "Nigeria foreign policy education," "Bilateral Education Agreement Nigeria, education diplomacy," and "challenges in educational development" were used to locate relevant materials from online databases and institutional repositories.
2. Screening for Relevance: Documents were screened for relevance to the research objectives, focusing on those that specifically discussed challenges in Nigeria's educational foreign policy and proposed strategies for improvement.
3. Extraction of Key Information: Data were extracted systematically from the selected sources, noting challenges identified, evidence of impact on educational outcomes, and recommended measures for strengthening foreign policy implementation.
4. Synthesis of Findings: Extracted information was analyzed thematically, grouping challenges and strategic measures into coherent categories to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Data Analysis

The thematic content analysis technique was employed to examine the literature. This involved

Categorizing recurring challenges into themes such as policy inconsistency, inadequate funding, weak institutional frameworks, administrative inefficiencies, cultural barriers, limited skilled personnel, and political instability.

Identifying proposed strategic measures in the literature that align with these challenges.

Comparing local and international perspectives to highlight convergent findings and practical recommendations for Nigeria's foreign policy in education.

Justification of the Review Method

The review model was considered appropriate for this study because it allows for a comprehensive evaluation of existing knowledge, without the constraints of primary data collection, which may be limited due to access to policymakers or international data. Additionally, the review model

provides a critical synthesis of policy documents and scholarly debates enabling the researcher to propose evidence-based strategic measures for improving the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy in education.

4.0 Results and Discussion on Challenges Militating against Nigeria's Foreign Policy in Educational Development

Inconsistent Policy Formulation and Implementation

A major challenge confronting Nigeria's foreign policy in educational development is the persistent inconsistency in policy formulation and implementation across successive administrations. Evidence from policy analyses indicates that Nigeria's foreign policy lacks continuity, as new governments often abandon or significantly modify existing frameworks without adequate evaluation (Adebajo, 2008; Folarin, 2013, Ogunode, 2026). This inconsistency creates a disconnect between policy intentions and outcomes, particularly in the education sector where long-term planning is critical. For instance, bilateral scholarship schemes and international academic exchange programmes require sustained commitment to yield meaningful results. However, abrupt policy shifts have led to irregular participation, delayed implementation, and in some cases, complete discontinuation of such programmes. As noted by Ogunnubi and Akinola (2017), the absence of a stable foreign policy direction weakens Nigeria's credibility in international partnerships, thereby reducing the effectiveness of educational cooperation initiatives.

Inadequate Funding and Overdependence on Foreign Aid

Nigeria's education sector continues to suffer from inadequate domestic funding, which undermines the country's ability to leverage foreign policy for sustainable educational development. Despite commitments to international benchmarks such as UNESCO's recommendation on education financing, Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education has remained relatively low (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Consequently, the country relies heavily on foreign aid, grants, and donor-funded programmes to support educational initiatives. While such support has contributed to improvements in access and infrastructure, overdependence on external funding exposes the sector to uncertainties associated with changing donor priorities and conditionalities (Adepoju & Fabiyi, 2007). Furthermore, the inability of the Nigerian government to provide counterpart funding often leads to incomplete or unsustainable projects. This funding gap limits Nigeria's bargaining power in international educational negotiations and weakens the overall impact of its foreign policy on education.

Weak Institutional Frameworks for Policy Coordination

The effectiveness of foreign policy in educational development is closely tied to the strength of institutional frameworks responsible for policy coordination and implementation. In Nigeria, institutions such as the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and the National Institute

for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) play critical advisory roles. However, studies reveal that these institutions are constrained by inadequate funding, limited research capacity, and weak inter-agency coordination (Onyia, 2015; Akinterinwa, 2004). As a result, policy decisions are often not grounded in rigorous empirical research or strategic foresight. Additionally, poor coordination among ministries particularly the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs leads to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in managing international educational programmes. This institutional weakness ultimately reduces the effectiveness of Nigeria's engagement in global education partnerships.

Administrative and Record Keeping Challenges in Bilateral Programmes

Nigeria's Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) programme, which serves as a major instrument of educational diplomacy, has been plagued by administrative inefficiencies. Reports from oversight agencies and media investigations highlight issues such as poor record keeping, delays in scholarship payments, lack of transparency in beneficiary selection, and inadequate communication with students studying abroad (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018; The Punch, 2021). These administrative lapses have caused significant hardship for beneficiaries, including financial distress and academic disruptions. In some cases, affected students have protested or appealed publicly for government intervention. Such challenges not only undermine the credibility of the BEA programme but also weaken Nigeria's reputation in international educational cooperation, thereby limiting the effectiveness of foreign policy in achieving educational objectives.

Cultural and Social Barriers to International Educational Cooperation

Cultural and social factors also pose significant challenges to the implementation of international educational programmes in Nigeria. Differences in language, religious beliefs, educational practices, and societal expectations can hinder effective collaboration between Nigerian institutions and their foreign counterparts (Crossley & Watson, 2003). In some cases, imported educational models fail to align with local realities, resulting in poor adaptation and limited impact. For example, curriculum frameworks or teaching methodologies introduced through international partnerships may not adequately reflect Nigeria's socio-cultural context, thereby reducing their effectiveness. Furthermore, societal perceptions and resistance to foreign influences can affect the acceptance and sustainability of such programmes. These barriers highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches in the design and implementation of international educational initiatives.

Limited Skilled Human Resources for Policy Engagement

Another critical challenge is the shortage of skilled human resources required for effective foreign policy engagement in education. Nigeria's diplomatic and educational institutions often lack adequately trained personnel with expertise in international education policy, negotiation, and programme management (Folarin, 2013; Ogunnubi, 2018, Ogunode, Ayoko, Ukozor, & Devi,

2026). This capacity gap limits the country's ability to effectively negotiate bilateral agreements, manage international partnerships, and monitor programme implementation. In many cases, officials responsible for educational diplomacy may not possess the specialized knowledge required to align international opportunities with national educational priorities. Nigeria is unable to fully maximize the benefits of its foreign policy engagements in the education sector.

Political Instability and Shifting National Priorities

Political instability and frequent changes in national priorities have also contributed to the challenges facing Nigeria's foreign policy in educational development. Foreign policy decisions in Nigeria are often influenced by the political agenda of the ruling administration, leading to abrupt changes in direction (Adebajo, 2008). This lack of continuity affects long-term educational programmes that require sustained commitment and stable policy environments. As observed by Akinterinwa (2004), Nigeria's foreign policy has historically been reactive rather than strategic, with limited emphasis on long-term planning. The prioritization of short-term political gains over long-term developmental goals undermines the effectiveness of international educational cooperation and reduces the confidence of foreign partners in Nigeria's commitment to sustained engagement.

B- Strategic measures to address the challenges facing Nigeria's foreign policy in educational development:

To address the inconsistencies in policy formulation and implementation, Nigeria must develop a comprehensive, long-term education diplomacy framework that transcends political administrations. This framework should clearly define objectives, responsibilities, and timelines for international educational engagements to ensure continuity and predictability. Strengthening domestic funding mechanisms is also critical, as over-reliance on foreign aid makes educational programmes vulnerable to external shocks. By increasing national budgetary allocations to education and creating dedicated trust funds for scholarships, the government can reduce dependency and ensure sustainability.

Improving institutional capacity and coordination is another essential measure. Ministries and agencies responsible for foreign policy and education should be empowered with skilled personnel, adequate resources, and robust monitoring mechanisms to implement, evaluate, and adapt international education programmes effectively. Addressing administrative challenges in programmes like the Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA) requires modernized record-keeping systems, transparent communication channels, and timely disbursement of funds to students abroad. This will enhance credibility and efficiency in Nigeria's international educational engagements.

To overcome cultural and social barriers, Nigeria should invest in cross-cultural orientation and preparatory training for students and staff participating in international programmes. This ensures that participants can adapt effectively to foreign educational environments, fostering meaningful

cooperation and learning outcomes. Developing specialized human resources in diplomacy and educational administration is also crucial. By training more skilled negotiators, education diplomats, and programme managers, Nigeria can engage more effectively with international partners, enhancing the impact of its foreign policy initiatives.

To mitigate the effects of political instability and shifting national priorities, Nigeria should establish bipartisan or multi-year agreements for education cooperation that remain insulated from changes in government. Long-term treaties and partnerships, coupled with legal frameworks, can guarantee continuity, protect investments, and secure educational opportunities for students regardless of political changes. By implementing these strategic measures, Nigeria can strengthen its foreign policy in education, safeguard human capital development, and maximize the benefits of international cooperation.

4.0 Conclusion

Nigeria's foreign policy has yielded notable successes in the education sector, including increased access to international scholarships, knowledge transfer, human capital development, and strengthened global partnerships. However, challenges such as inconsistent policies, inadequate funding, weak institutions, administrative gaps, cultural barriers, limited expertise, and political instability continue to impede the full realization of these objectives.

To overcome these constraints, strategic measures are necessary, including the formulation of long-term policy frameworks, increased domestic investment, capacity building, administrative modernization, cross-cultural preparation, human resource development, and legal safeguards for continuity. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can maximize the benefits of its educational diplomacy, strengthen its human capital, and ensure sustainable development in the education sector.

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