

EDUCATION POLICY AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN EDO STATE: A STUDY OF SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between Education Policy and access to higher education in selected tertiary institutions in Edo State with emphasis on budget allocation, teachers' training, quality assurance/accreditation and access to higher education in selected tertiary institutions in Edo State, Nigeria. Focusing specifically on Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Edo State University Iyamoh and Edo State Polytechnic, Usen as study environment. The overarching objective is to evaluate how these Education policy elements influence educational outcomes and institutional performance. Grounded in the theory of resource dependency theory, institutional theory and social capital theory. The research employs a descriptive research design, using Taro Yamane formula, the sample size of this study is 184 participants from three institutions under studied. Findings reveal that There is a significant relationship between Education Policy and access to higher Education in Edo state. ($r = 0.83$) and there is a significant relationship between the effectiveness of Edo Best education policy and access to higher education in Edo state ($r = 0.91$). These results support the hypothesis that effective Education policy in these areas significantly enhances educational quality. Based on these findings, the study concludes that improved budget allocation, ongoing professional development for teachers, and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms are essential for advancing educational access in Edo State tertiary institutions. Recommendations include enhanced budgeting procedures, comprehensive faculty development programmes, and robust quality assurance frameworks to foster better educational outcomes.

Keywords: Policy, Education, Access, Higher institution and State.

Background to the Study

A key component of sustainable development is having access to higher education, which is a fundamental human right. Like many developing nations, Nigeria faces major challenges in guaranteeing equal access to higher education, despite efforts made by the government and many partners (Adewole, 2022). Research on education policy and access to higher education is essential, especially in Edo State where policies' ability to improve educational access and quality merits examination. Edo State has both federal and state Universities, such as the University of Benin (UNIBEN) which is a federal institution, Ambrose Alli University (AAU), a State-owned institution, Edo State University Iyamoh and Edo State, Polytechnic, Usen. Given this diversity, research on Education policy and access to higher education is crucial in understanding how different policies impact educational access and quality in State -run institutions. Nigeria, home to more than 200

million people, has a large population and has a number of difficulties in the field of education, from low teacher quality and low educational achievements to inadequate infrastructure and finance (UIS, 2020). Socioeconomic differences, geographical imbalances, and governance problems exacerbate these problems by contributing to the growing gaps in educational access and quality between urban and rural regions and between various socioeconomic classes (Obi, 2021). The Nigerian government has carried out a number of initiatives and programmes in the field of education over the years with the goal of expanding access to high-quality education for all students. For example, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 aims to guarantee basic education for all children between the ages of six and fifteen, free of charge. Edo State government led by the then Governor Godwin Obaseki has implemented the Edo Basic Education Sector Transformation (EDOBEST) programmes, which has made significant strides in enhancing access to quality education at the basic level. Launched in 2018, EDOBEST is aimed at transforming teaching and learning in Edo State's primary and junior secondary schools by incorporating technology and data-driven strategies to improve educational outcomes. The programmes focuses on teacher professional development, curriculum enhancement, monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure high standards in public schools. EDOBEST has been praised for increasing student enrollment and improving learning conditions through better classroom management and infrastructure improvements. Its role in enhancing the quality of education in Edo State highlights the potential impact of well-designed public policies. As it were, the EDOBEST has transformed learning outcomes for over 370,000 children across 1,029 public primary school and 232 junior secondary schools. Between 2018 and 2022 over 16,000 teachers (inexperienced and experienced) from the primary and junior secondary school system were re-trained to be technologically supported and empowered teachers. Since implementation over the years, the programme has developed a highly skilled teaching, supporting and motivating teachers to succeed in the classroom. It has also ensured that school management is data and technologically driven as schools have better managed and parents / pupils have attested to the far reaching impact of the reform on pupils academic performance and changed in behavior (Joan, 2021)

Before Nigeria became independent, when the country was still under colonial rule, the education system was disorganized, and policies around access to good education slowly developed over time. During this time, the colonial government's interests dominated education policy, and indigenous people had limited access to it, particularly in remote regions. Nigeria made a determined attempt to increase educational access and advance national development through a variety of governmental measures after gaining independence in 1960. A major turning point in the history of education in Nigeria was the 1969 National Policy on Education (NPE), which emphasized the importance of universal access, relevance, and quality in education. The aim of later policy measures, like the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programmes in 1976, was to reduce inequalities in access to basic education and increase enrollment rates. However, there were other obstacles to the execution of these policies, such as insufficient money, deficiencies in the

infrastructure, and ineffective administrative practices. Nigeria underwent several educational reforms during the 1990s and early 2000s aimed at addressing systemic issues and improving educational outcomes, for example, the 1999 launch of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes combined the Junior Secondary Education (JSE) and UPE programmes in an effort to close the gaps in basic education delivery. (Lawal Wahab 2011).

In addition, a major legislative change that addressed the financial issues tertiary institutions in Nigeria faced was the creation of the Education Trust Fund (ETF) which was later changed to Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in 2011. The TETFund offers intervention money to public tertiary institutions for staff training, research and infrastructure development, improving the calibre and applicability of higher education. In order to bridge the financing and infrastructural gaps in the education sector, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are crucial. One such project is the National Policy on Education (NPE) 2013 edition. PPPs are becoming more and more popular as a way to use the resources and knowledge of the private sector to raise the standard and accessibility of education. With programmes like the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) e-learning platform and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) offering other modalities of education delivery, the integration of technology into the educational system has also been a focal point of recent policy effort (Akagbo 2019)

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of higher education in fostering economic growth, social mobility and human development, Edo state continue to grapple with significant challenges in ensuring equitable access to higher education (Adeyemi, 2019). The Edo best education policy aimed promoting inclusivity and expanding access, has been criticize for inadequately addressing the needs of disadvantage groups especially those in the rural areas, low income earners, those with disability etc.

Some of the problems hindering access to higher education includes the following, limited availability and uneven distribution of higher education in Edo state, insufficient funding of higher education in Edo state, and inadequate infrastructure, High cost of tuition fee deterring prospective students from low income earner, inefficient admission process and lack of transparency leading to unequal opportunities etc. This research work focus on evaluating the effect of education policy and access to higher education in Edo state. Higher institution in the three senatorial district such as Edo State Polytechnic Usen , Edo South, Ambrose Alli University, Edo central and Edo State University Iyamoh , Edo North, are the study environment.

Notwithstanding several initiatives by the Federal Government of Nigeria such as the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1976, reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s, and recent efforts to increase educational funding and infrastructure, challenges persist, particularly in Edo State. It is difficult to improve educational access and quality when there are insufficient funding allotted, poor infrastructure, and no strong collaborations between the public and private sectors. Furthermore, a dearth of educators with the necessary training frequently compromises

the quality of teaching and learning at postsecondary institutions. (Adeyemi, 2019). Many Nigerian youths have been deprived access to higher education due to inconsistencies of education policies, poor family and financial background etc. Nigerian administrations have instituted a range of education policies and initiatives subsequent to their independence in 1960, with the goal of mitigating socio-economic gaps and increasing access to higher education (Okebukola, 2016).

However, obstacles like low finance, insufficient institutional capacity, political instability, and corruption have hampered the implementation of these programmes (Ogunsaju, 2020). As a result, there are differences in access, quality, and outcomes between various areas and socioeconomic levels, leading to a fragmented and unequal education system. It is on this premise that this study examined education policy and access to higher education in Edo State specifically the study examined the role of Edo best Education policy in increasing access to higher education in Edo state using Edo state polytechnic Usen in Edo south, Ambrose Alli University, in Edo central and Edo State University, Iyamoh in Edo North as a case study

In Edo State, the introduction of the Edo Basic Education Sector Transformation (EDOBEST) programme in 2018 sought to tackle some of these issues by focusing on improving teacher quality, incorporating technology in the classroom, and increasing accountability within the education system. While the EDOBEST programme has demonstrated some success in enhancing basic education, its impact on higher education and broader policy frameworks remains unclear. Furthermore, there is a need to evaluate the long-term sustainability of such programmes, particularly in light of the broader challenges facing Nigeria's educational sector, such as funding, infrastructure, and equity in access.

By examining the historical, political, and socioeconomic factors shaping educational policy in Edo State and Nigeria, this study aims to offer insights into the ongoing barriers to providing equitable, high-quality education. The findings will guide policymakers and stakeholders in crafting evidence-based policies that address these persistent challenges, particularly in teacher preparation, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and resource allocation, with a focus on the implications for both vulnerable communities and broader educational outcomes.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. What are the relationship between Education policy and access to higher Education in Edo state Nigeria?
2. What are the factors hindering Education policy and access to higher Education in Edo State?
3. How effective is the Edo best education policy in promoting access to higher education in Edo state?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine Education policy and access to higher Education using selected state owned tertiary institutions in Edo state Nigeria. Specifically, this study intends to;

1. Ascertain the relationship between Education Policy and access to higher Education in Edo state.
2. Evaluate the factors hindering education Policy and access to higher Education in Edo state.
3. Examine the effectiveness of Edo Best education policy in promoting access to higher education in Edo state.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were stated to test the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between Education Policy and access to higher Education in Edo State
2. There is no significant factors hindering education policy and access to higher education in Edo state.
3. There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of Edo Best education Policy and access to higher education in Edo state.

Conceptual Literature Review

Education Policy

Education policy is a type of Public policy that forms the backbone of governmental actions and interventions designed to address social issues and achieve specific objectives (Dye, 2012). In the realm of education, education policy encompasses a broad spectrum of measures, including laws, regulations, funding mechanisms, and programm initiatives, all of which play a crucial role in determining access to higher education (Lassibille & Tan, 2017). Nigeria's education system, like many others globally, relies heavily on public policy to tackle the challenges of providing equitable and high-quality education to its citizens. In recent years, the Nigerian government has sought to enhance educational outcomes and address persistent issues through various education-related initiatives. The National Policy on Education, published by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), outlines the government's educational goals and emphasizes values such as fairness, quality, and universal access. Additionally, programmes like the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme have been instrumental in improving access to education and upgrading facilities and resources in both secondary and postsecondary institutions (Anazodo & Amadi, 2018). Among the notable initiatives in Edo State is the EDOBEST policy, which aims to reform the state's education sector by focusing on key areas such as budget allocation, teacher training, and quality assurance/accreditation. This policy is designed to address the unique challenges faced by educational institutions in Edo State and enhance overall educational quality and access. Despite these efforts, Nigeria's education system continues to face numerous obstacles, including inadequate funding, infrastructure deficiencies, a shortage of qualified educators, and suboptimal academic performance (Ogunsaju, 2020). Education often receives a disproportionately small share of the

national budget, with financial constraints remaining a significant barrier to the effective implementation of educational programmes (Babalola, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed weaknesses in Nigeria's education system, highlighting the need for robust policy measures to ensure learning continuity and mitigate the pandemic's impact on educational access and quality (Olatunji, 2021). The closure of schools during the pandemic underscored the importance of digital infrastructure and technology-enabled learning programmes in facilitating distance education and maintaining academic progress.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a viable strategy to bridge financial gaps and improve educational access and quality in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2018). PPPs involve collaborations between public and private sector entities to deliver infrastructure projects or educational services (Frischmann, 2012). In the education sector, PPPs can take various forms, including providing instructional services, developing and maintaining school infrastructure, and implementing teacher training programmes (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014). Recent developments have highlighted the potential of PPPs to address major challenges in education. For instance, the Lagos State Government partnered with business sector organizations to create the EkoExcel initiative, which aims to enhance elementary education through teacher training, curriculum development, and facility improvements (Olasanmi, 2020). Similarly, the Bridge International Academies programme has expanded access to affordable, high-quality education in underserved areas across Nigeria through PPPs (Bridge International Academies, 2021). Teacher training is another critical component of education policy that impacts both the quality and accessibility of education. High-quality teacher preparation programs are essential for equipping educators with the skills to meet diverse student needs and promote effective learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, teacher training programs in Nigeria often face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity, and outdated teaching methods (Ololube, 2019).

Budget Allocation

In the context of education, budget allocation plays a critical role in public policy since it establishes the financial resources allotted to different facets of the education sector (Anazodo & Amadi, 2018). A sufficient budget is necessary to guarantee the delivery of high-quality education, which includes building and maintaining school facilities, hiring and preparing teachers, providing educational resources, and carrying out projects and programs. (Barrera-Orsorio, 2018). The consequences of budget allocation to the education sector for educational fairness, quality, and access have been a persistent source of concern in Nigeria. Budgetary allotments to the education sector have frequently fallen short of the suggested standards established by international organizations like UNESCO, despite the government's pledge to increase investment in the field (UIS, 2020). The education sector suffers greatly from inadequate funding for education, which exacerbates already-existing problems and impedes initiatives to raise student achievement. By limiting resources for infrastructure development, teacher recruitment and training, and the availability of instructional

materials and learning tools, inadequate funding compromises the quality of education (Ajayi, 2018). Because of this, a lot of Nigerian schools lack basic amenities including classrooms, libraries, labs, and sanitary facilities, which has an adverse effect on the quality of instruction and learning (Ogunsaju, 2020).

Furthermore, by disproportionately harming marginalized and neglected populations, such as low-income households and rural regions, poor budget allocation exacerbates educational inequities (Babalola, 2019). These areas' schools frequently experience more resource restrictions, which exacerbates socioeconomic inequality by causing differences in access to high-quality education (UIS, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent events have brought attention to the critical need to overcome financing gaps in Nigeria's education system. In order to maintain educational continuity during times of disruption, the pandemic highlighted the significance of making investments in digital infrastructure and technology-enabled learning solutions (Olatunji, 2021). But a lot of Nigerian schools don't have internet connection or even basic technology, which makes it harder for pupils to engage in distance learning activities and increases the digital gap (Olatunji, 2021). Policymakers must assure the efficient and effective use of resources and give education a higher priority when allocating budgetary funds to solve these issues. This calls for a multifaceted strategy that includes targeted expenditures in important areas including teacher preparation, infrastructure development, and technology integration, as well as increased revenue mobilization and budget transparency and accountability (Babalola, 2019). Furthermore, it is imperative to enhance collaborations with global grant makers, non-governmental organizations, and the private industry to harness supplementary assets and specialized knowledge to bolster educational programs (Anazodo & Amadi, 2018).

Public-Private Partnership

In nations like Nigeria where public resources are few and the demand for high-quality education is rising, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become a popular tactic for resolving the issues facing the education sector (Ajayi, 2018). PPPs are cooperative agreements between public and private sector organisations for the delivery of infrastructure projects or public services (Frischmann, 2012). PPPs in the context of education cover a broad variety of programs meant to increase access to high-quality education, upgrade infrastructure, improve the calibre of instruction, and encourage efficiency and innovation in the delivery of education (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014). The acknowledgement of the complementary roles that the public and private sectors may play in tackling educational difficulties has led to a development of PPPs in Nigeria's education sector in recent years. The collaboration between the Lagos State Government and businesses to start the Eko Excel initiative, which intends to raise the standard of elementary education via teacher preparation, curriculum development, and infrastructural improvements, is one such example (Olasanmi, 2020). In order to help public schools in Lagos State, the Eko Excel initiative has made use of the resources and

experience of private sector partners. This has improved learning results, student engagement, and the quality of instruction.

Parallel to this, programs such as the Bridge International Academies have shown how PPPs may increase access to reasonably priced, top-notch education in underprivileged areas of Nigeria (Bridge International Academies, 2021). In Nigeria, Bridge International Academies runs a network of affordable private schools that serves thousands of kids who would not otherwise have access to an education. Bridge International Academies has been able to remove obstacles to educational access and advance inclusive development in Nigeria by collaborating with local communities, governmental bodies, and nonprofit organizations. PPPs may have advantages, but they may also have drawbacks and give rise to issues with accountability, equality, and the commercialization of education (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014). PPPs' detractors contend that by promoting wealthy areas and ignoring the concerns of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, they might make inequality worse (Verger, 2016). Moreover, the commercialization of learning with an emphasis on profit-making rather than educational achievements may result from the presence of private sector players in education (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014).

Teachers Training

With substantial effects on educational access and quality, teacher preparation is an essential part of education policy (Darling-Hammond, 2017). To guarantee that teachers have the abilities to fulfill the varied demands of their pupils and promote successful learning outcomes, high-quality teacher preparation programs are crucial (Buchmann & Park, 2009). However, a number of issues, such as insufficient funding, lack of institutional capability, and antiquated teaching methods, have made teacher training programmes in Nigeria less successful (Ololube, 2019). Nigerian teacher preparation has received more attention in recent years due to an increasing understanding of its significance in raising student achievement. The Nigerian government has undertaken a number of measures to improve the calibre and professionalism of teachers, working with non-governmental organizations and foreign partners. To match teaching methods with growing educational trends and standards, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has created competency-based curricular frameworks and teacher training modules (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

In addition, the COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the significance of creative and flexible ways to teacher preparation in order to facilitate blended and distant learning settings. Due to the pandemic-related closure of schools and colleges, educators had to quickly adjust to digital technologies and online teaching modalities in order to maintain learning continuity (Olatunji, 2021). Teacher training programs have been crucial in providing educators with the knowledge, abilities, and resources they need to successfully handle these issues.

Notwithstanding these initiatives, there are still a number of structural issues with Nigerian teacher preparation that limit its efficacy and influence. Lack of trained instructors and educational materials is a significant issue, especially in underprivileged and rural regions. Many teacher preparation programs are unable to provide high-quality training programs because they do not have enough trained faculty members, current instructional materials, or contemporary teaching facilities (Adeolu & Eze, 2021).

Furthermore, conventional methods of teacher preparation frequently fall short of providing teachers with the sophisticated and dynamic training they need to meet the needs of the twenty-first century classroom. Adopting more student-centered, inquiry-based, and technologically enhanced instructional techniques that promote creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities is becoming increasingly evident (UNESCO, 2016).

Quality Assurance/Accreditation

In order to guarantee that postsecondary schools provide high-quality education, quality assurance and accreditation are essential. The goal of quality assurance is to uphold and improve the standards of educational services and programs using a variety of methods and procedures. On the other hand, accreditation is a formal assessment procedure carried out by outside organizations to ascertain if a program or educational institution satisfies predetermined standards and criteria for excellence. In the education sector, quality assurance and accreditation work together to support accountability, transparency, and ongoing development (Shah & Nair, 2020). Stakeholder involvement and outcomes-based methods have gained prominence in recent advancements in accrediting frameworks and quality assurance. The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), for instance, has updated its accreditation requirements, emphasizing program efficacy and student learning outcomes (NUC, 2019). In a similar vein, to guarantee relevance and responsiveness, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has pushed for the participation of companies, students, and other stakeholders in the accreditation process (INQAAHE, 2021). Aligned with worldwide trends in higher education quality assurance, these activities demonstrate a transition towards more inclusive and comprehensive approaches to accreditation and quality assurance (Altbach & Rumbley, 2020).

In Nigeria, regulatory organizations like the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the NUC are in charge of quality assurance and accreditation procedures. These organizations are in charge of creating standards, carrying out assessments, and accrediting postsecondary educational institutions and programs. The goal of recent initiatives has been to increase these agencies' ability to carry out their responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner (NUC, 2020). To assist ongoing improvement activities, for example, the NUC built quality assurance offices in institutions and developed capacity-building programs for accrediting assessors (NUC, 2018). Notwithstanding these developments, Nigeria still has difficulties putting quality assurance and accreditation systems in place. One significant issue is the growth of unreliable and unaccredited schools, which damages the

reputation of the higher education industry (Adeyemi & Olabode, 2019). Regulatory bodies have responded by stepping up enforcement actions and tightening certification requirements (NBTE, 2021). Furthermore, there are doubts regarding how well accrediting procedures handle new problems like internationalization and digital learning (Okereke, 2021). To improve the relevance, rigour, and responsiveness of quality assurance and certification systems, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, and other stakeholders must continue to collaborate in order to address these issues.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to how crucial flexibility and resilience are to QA and certification procedures. It is necessary to reevaluate current quality assurance frameworks in light of the fast transition to online and mixed learning modalities to make sure they are appropriate for digital settings (UNESCO, 2020). In its guidelines on quality assurance in online learning, for instance, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) highlights the need of adaptability, creativity, and student-centered methods (ENQA, 2020). In a similar vein, the NUC has published recommendations for e-learning program quality assurance, acknowledging the special opportunities and problems that come with online learning (NUC, 2020).

The nexus between education policy and access to Higher education

A variety of political, economic, social, and cultural issues impact the intricate and diverse link between public policy and educational access. Good public policy is essential in determining the accessibility, cost, and calibre of educational opportunities, which in turn affects people's capacity to get and utilize education (Heyneman & Lee, 2015). Public policy decisions in Nigeria have a significant effect on social cohesion and socioeconomic growth as well as educational results, equity, and access. Allocating resources is one of the main ways that public policy influences access to education. Budgetary choices impact how much money is available for education, encompassing expenditures on infrastructure, pay for teachers, educational resources, and student assistance programs (Barrera-Osorio, 2018). To guarantee that educational institutions have the resources necessary to deliver high-quality instruction and meet the varied requirements of students, adequate and fair budget allocation is crucial (Okebukola, 2016). However, financial limitations and conflicting goals sometimes cause education to receive inadequate funding, which results in differences in access and quality (Ogunsaju, 2020).

Through lobbying campaigns, international agreements, and policy reforms, there have been recent initiatives to increase the budget allocation for education in Nigeria. In a same vein, programs like the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) have been set up to give higher education institutions more money for staff training, research, and infrastructure development (Anazodo & Amadi, 2018). Even while these initiatives are a start in the right direction towards improving educational access and quality, problems like corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability still make it difficult to use educational resources effectively (Babalola, 2019).

Promoting public-private partnerships (PPPs) is another way that public policy affects access to education. PPPs entail partnerships between public and private sector groups to provide programs,

infrastructure, and educational services (Frischmann, 2012). PPPs provide potential benefits such as increasing educational accessibility, utilizing resources and knowledge from the private sector, and encouraging creativity and efficiency in the delivery of education (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014). However, governance frameworks, legal frameworks, and the alignment of interests between public and private partners all affect how effective PPPs are in the education sector (Chakroun & Kevy, 2019).

To increase educational access and quality in Nigeria, recent research has emphasised the significance of evidence-based policy reforms and focused investments in teacher preparation (Adeolu & Eze, 2021). Through focused training, mentorship, and support programs, efforts like the Teacher Professional Development program which the Nigerian government created in partnership with foreign partners aim to improve teacher effectiveness and instructional quality (Adeolu & Eze, 2021). Nigeria can develop a highly qualified and driven teaching staff that may lead to good educational transformation and better student results by investing in cutting-edge training methods, bolstering institutional capacity, and encouraging cooperation among stakeholders. In Nigeria, the link between public policy and educational access is complex and impacted by a number of variables, such as teacher preparation programs, resource distribution, and public-private partnerships. With ramifications for socioeconomic growth and social cohesion, effective public policy is essential in determining educational access, equity, and results. Nigeria can establish an education system that is more inclusive and equitable, empowers individuals, promotes social cohesion, and propels sustainable development by giving priority to education investment, supporting evidence-based policy initiatives, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

A number of ideas, including the theories of social capital, institutional theory, and resource dependency, were reviewed in relation to this study. However, social capital theory was better suitable for the research overall.

According to Coleman's 1988 exposition of **social capital theory**, social interactions, networks, and trust are essential for promoting cooperation and accomplishing common goals. Social capital theory is a useful tool for understanding how community collaborations, stakeholder participation, and interpersonal relationships advance educational fairness, access, and quality. Social capital theory clarifies the role that social networks play in promoting resource sharing, knowledge sharing, and group action among many stakeholders in the context of education. Schools, communities, and educational institutions are frequently centers of social interaction where people meet, share ideas, and work together on projects that enhance student performance. In order to handle difficult educational difficulties, these social networks make it possible to mobilize resources, knowledge, and support from a variety of players, including parents, educators, legislators, and community leaders. In order to improve educational opportunities and meet community needs, schools work in cooperation with local companies, organizations, and individuals to form community

partnerships, which are a major example of social capital in education. These collaborations take advantage of the assets and proficiencies of many parties to provide comprehensive and long-lasting answers to problems in education. For instance, schools may collaborate with nonprofit groups to offer kids academic help, mental health services, or after-school activities.

In conclusion, social capital theory provides insightful understandings of the functions of social networks, trust, and connections in advancing educational fairness, access, and quality. Educational institutions may use the potential of social capital to build inclusive, supportive, and vibrant learning environments for all students by promoting social networks, cultivating community partnerships, and including stakeholders in decision-making processes. Acknowledging the value of social capital in education and making investments in methods to foster and capitalize on social relationships may help advance educational justice, excellence, and social cohesion in local communities globally.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In order to look at education policy and access to higher education in Edo State, Nigeria, this study used a descriptive survey research approach. In order to characterize events and pinpoint patterns, trends, and correlations between variables, a descriptive approach enables the methodical gathering, examination, and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2014). The study used this methodology in an effort to give a thorough knowledge of the variables affecting educational policy and access to higher education in the context of public policy initiatives.

Population of Study

According to the ICT department of Ambrose Alli University (AAU) in Ekpoma, Edo State, the 2023/2024 academic session statistics on the University's population shows that there are roughly 28,000 students registered there. Information from the open registry of the school puts the total staff strength of the school at 2000 (academics and non-academic staff).

Information from the students affairs department reveal that the total number of students as at 2023/2024 academic session in Edo State University Iyamoh, in Edo State, is about 2000 students while records from the office of the registrar as at the end of 2023/2024 put the number of staff at 550. Also the number of Staff in Edo State Polytechnic as at September 2024 is 630 (open registry Edo State polytechnic Usen), while the polytechnic have about ten thousand students (10000) according to data from the school ICT department.

The table 3.1 present lists the personnel and students in the study environment.

Table 3.1: Population Distribution of Staff and Students in the study environment

Institutions	Population Group	Population Size	Percentage %
Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma	Students	28,000	64.5%

Institutions	Population Group	Population Size	Percentage %
Edo State University, Iyamoh	Staff	2,000	4.6%
	Students	2,000	4.6%
Edo State Polytechnic Usen	Staff	550	1.7%
	Students	10,000	23.1%
	Staff	630	1.5%
Total		43180	100

Source: Field survey 2024

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, which is appropriate for estimating sample sizes in large populations (Yamane, 1967). The formula is given as:

$$\text{Formula} = n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (43180)

e = desired level of precision (0.05)

$$n = \frac{43180}{1 + 43180 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{43180}{1 + 43180 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{43180}{1 + 234.25}$$

$$n = \frac{43180}{235.25}$$

n=183.5. which is approximately 184

Therefore, the sample size n is approximately 184 respondents.

Sampling Procedure

First, The purposive random sampling process was used to select three higher institutions in Edo State which are Ambrose Alli University (AAU) , Edo State University, Iyamoh, and Edo State polytechnic Usen. This enabled the researcher to explore and enhance the validity of the research.

Secondly the stratified sampling technique was employ to enable the researcher to group the participants into various strata for the study. This enabled the researcher to divide the population into various faculty, departments, ranks etc. Based on the population numbers of staff and students in the study environment , the sample was distributed proportionately between them, taking into account the total sample size of n≈184 obtained using the Taro Yamane formula.

Allocation of Sample Size

- **Total population (students + staff) in AAU:** 28,000 (students) + 2,000 (staff) = 30,000
- **Total population (students + staff) in Edo university Iyamoh** = 2550
- **Total population(students + staff) in Edo state polytechnic=10630)**

Sample size for AAU = $\frac{30,000}{43180} \times 184 \approx 128$

Sample size for Edo University = $\frac{2550}{43180} \times 184 \approx 11$

Sample size for Edo State polytechnic = $\frac{10630}{43180} \times 184 \approx 45$

Breakdown by Institution

Ambrose Alli University (AAU)

- **Students:** $\frac{28,000}{30,000} \times 128 \approx 119$
- **Staff:** $\frac{2,000}{30,000} \times 128 \approx 9$

Edo State University, Iyamoh

- **Students:** $\frac{2000}{2650} \times 11 \approx 8.3$
- **Staff:** $\frac{650}{2650} \times 11 \approx 2.7$

Edo State Polytechnic, Usen

- **Students:** $\frac{10000}{10630} \times 45 \approx 42.3$
- **Staff:** $\frac{630}{10630} \times 45 \approx 3.0$

Sources of Data

The sources of data for the study were mainly from the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data include, surveys and interviews with academic staff, administrative personnel, and students at the chosen postsecondary institutions. The secondary sources include information extracted from publications and other government sources.

Results And Discussions

The study's hypotheses led to the following conclusions, which were then discussed. As a result, while hypothesis I claims that there is no significant relationship between education policy and access to higher education in Edo State. Findings reveals that there is a strong and positive relationship between education policy and access to higher Education in the three state owned tertiary institution investigated. In particular, the Pearson correlation for Edo University Uzairue was 0.92 and for AAU it was 0.95. With a p-value of 0.00, which denotes statistical significance, the cumulative correlation for the three tertiary institutions was 0.83. The results of the study support those of Nwangwu (2014), who discovered that effective implementation of public policy at public service is essential for high-quality service since it directly affects the availability of resources . The study's positive correlation

supports this claim by showing a link between improved education policy and access to higher education in Nigeria.

According to Hypothesis II, there are several factors hindering education policy and access to higher education. According to Nwangwu (2014), funding allocation to universities is essential for the delivery of high quality education since it directly affects the availability of resources like labs, libraries, and teaching materials. This shows that funding is a major factor that affects education policies and access to higher education. The results show a highly substantial positive correlation between Education policy on funding and access to higher education in Edo State. The Pearson correlation was 0.93 for Edo University, Uzairue, 0.95 for AAU and 0.93 for Edo state polytechnic Usen. For all the institutions under study, the cumulative correlation was 0.73, showing statistical significance with a p-value of 0.00. This result is consistent with that of Darling-Hammond (2017), who discovered that Government inability to invest in educational development for educators greatly impedes on their ability to instruct students and, as a result, reduces student learning outcomes. The study's positive connection supports their conclusions, indicating that highly qualified educators are a contributing factor to improved educational quality.

The third hypothesis contends that there is no meaningful connection between the effectiveness of Edo Best education policy and access to high-education in Edo state. And accreditation or quality assurance. The findings of the research demonstrated a highly substantial positive correlation between accesses to higher Education at both institutions. The Pearson correlation was 0.94 for AAU and 0.87 for Uzairue. There was statistical significance as the cumulative correlation for the institutions was 0.91 and the p-value was 0.00. findings, which indicated that accreditation guarantees that educational institutions satisfy particular quality requirements and improves educational outcomes,

Summary of Findings

Broad objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between Education Policy and access to higher education in selected tertiary institutions in Edo State with emphasis on Edo Best Education policy. The purpose of this study was to look at the connections between EDOBEST policy on funding allocation, teacher preparation, accreditation and quality assurance, and accessibility to higher Education at Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Edo State University, Iyamoh and Edo State Polytechnic, Usen. Based on survey data from instructors and students, the study used correlation analysis and descriptive statistics to investigate these links. Finding revealed that :

1. There is a significant relationship between Education Policy and access to higher Education in Edo state. ($r = 0.83$)
2. poor budget allocation, weak or bad policy on funding allocation, teacher preparation, accreditation and quality assurance, are factors that determine Education policies and access to higher Education in Edo state($r = 0.73$).
3. There is a significant relationship between the effectiveness of Edo Best education policy and access to higher education in Edo state ($r = 0.91$),.

. Conclusion

The results clearly show that funding allocation, teacher preparation, and quality control/accreditation play a major role in ensuring that students in the three institutions have access to higher Education. The study's findings confirm how crucial it is to support educational excellence with sufficient funding, continual professional development for teachers, and strong quality assurance procedures. All of these elements work together to promote higher Education, which is essential for both personal growth and the advancement of the country.

The study's high positive correlations show that these investments have observable positive effects on educational performance. Establishments that place a high priority on financial support, ongoing teacher professional development, and stringent quality assurance procedures are better equipped to provide a top-notch education and successfully get students ready for whatever lies ahead.

Recommendations

The results suggest the following changes to improve the access to higher Education in the three institutions and other higher education:

- 1 Distribute resources to academic departments in a way that takes into account their goals and needs.
- 2 Look for outside funds and collaborations to improve instructional resources and augment institutional budgets. Teachers' Ongoing Professional Development
- 3 Edo government leaders and Nigeria in general should develop the necessary political will for education at all level.

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