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Influence of Global Culture and Neoliberal Policies on Nigerian Educational Systems and Identities

***Alikor, O., & Okachiku-Agbaraeke, O.**

Department of Educational Foundations, Rivers State University, Nigeria

***Corresponding author email:** OromaAlikor@ust.edu.ng

Abstract

The paper examined how global culture and neoliberal policies shape Nigeria's educational systems and influence the identities of students, teachers, and institutional communities in developing countries. The paper explored how global cultural flows, privatisation, and policy borrowing have impacted Nigeria's educational autonomy and local identity formations. The paper revealed that neoliberal reforms have increased privatization, performance, accountability, and market logic within Nigerian education. While global culture has fostered English Language dominance, international curricula, and global competencies which pose challenge to local values, indigenous language, and educational identity. The paper concluded that Nigeria's education must balance global competitiveness with cultural preservation. The paper suggested among others that Nigerian government should protect and expand public financing for fundamental education, support mother-tongue instructions in early grades, regulate private providers effectively, invest in teacher professionalism development and employment security, promote curricula pluralism and as well use targeted edtech with human support.

Keywords: Globalisation, Neoliberalism, Education, Identity, Policy reforms.

Introduction

Globalization which is the flow of ideas, norms, and practices across borders has deeply influenced educational systems worldwide. In the same vein, neoliberal policies which deal with market mechanisms, competition, privatization, and performance metrics have become central to education reforms. These twin forces of global culture and neoliberalism pose opportunities and challenges for countries like Nigeria that is seeking to integrate into global knowledge economics with the preservation of her local identities and values. Tikly (2019) espoused that the growing influence of globalisation and neoliberalism have profoundly affected the structure and orientation of educational systems worldwide. Hence, education which is considered a means of national development and cultural preservation is increasingly being shaped by global economic imperatives and cultural flows. This means that the transformation reflects in both policy directions and institutional practices where global standard and neoliberal ideologies have redefined the goals, values, and content of education. Obanya (2018) noted that the intersection between global culture and neoliberalism create a complex tension between modernisation and cultural identity which challenge the traditional purposes of education in Nigerian society. Global culture, characterised by the spread of Western values, information technologies, and transactional communication have fostered a sense of shared global identity. Altbach and Knight (2017) observed that global culture also risks diluting local cultural identities, particularly in postcolonial societies where education historically served as a vehicle for nation – building and cultural integration. Nigerian education has increasingly adopted global pedagogical models, performance standards, and market-oriented policies that align with international trends, but may not fully address local realities. Ojo and Bidemi (2020) agreed that educational priorities have shifted towards competitiveness, employability, and global citizenship at the expense of indigenous knowledge and communal learning values.

Harvey (2018) asserted that neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology which emphasizes privatization, deregulation, and market efficiency that promotes the commodification of education by turning learning into product subject to market forces. Neoliberal policies in Nigeria have led to the proliferation of private schools and universities, the introduction of user fees, and performance based funding models which aim to improve efficiency and accountability, and at the same time increase social inequalities and limit access for marginalized populations. Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2019) agreed that neoliberal reforms encourage a shift from education as a social goods to education as an individual investment that alter societal perceptions of knowledge and identity.

The influence of global culture and neoliberal policies on educational system of Nigeria raises critical questions about identity, equity, and cultural sustainability which pose challenges for Nigerian students and educators in reconciling local values with global expectations. The paper, therefore seeks to explore how global cultural influences and neoliberal ideologies have reshaped the Nigerian educational landscape and the identities of its product. It aims to contribute to the ongoing debates about the localization of education in an increasingly interconnected world and to suggest pathways for integrating global innovations without eroding national and cultural identity.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Globalization in Nigerian Educational System

Globalization in Nigerian educational context refers to the increasing interconnectivity of educational ideas, practices, and policies across national boundaries which are driven by technological advancement, international mobility, and global economic integration (Meyer, 2017). Tikly (2019) noted that globalization manifests through the adoption of international curricula, emphasis on global competencies, and alignment of educational goals with global development agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Okeke (2021) observed that Nigerian universities and schools are increasingly influenced by global quality assurance frameworks, digital learning technologies, and international collaborations that reshape teaching and learning models. However, this process has also led to tensions between global educational ideals and local realities. Omoregie (2020) posited that the dominance of Western pedagogical models often marginalize indigenous knowledge systems and traditional learning values which create a form of cultural dependency. Adebayo and Olayinka (2022) agreed that globalization tends to reinforce neoliberal values such as competition, privatization, and employability which prioritize economic outcomes over holistic development. All the same, despite these challenges globalization presents opportunities for innovation, knowledge exchange, and international academic recognition if carefully adopted to the sociocultural and economic contexts of Nigeria.

Concept of Neoliberalism in Nigerian Educational Systems

According to Harvey (2018) neoliberalism in Nigerian educational systems refers to the adoption of market-oriented principles and policies that emphasize efficiency, competition, privatization, and reduced government expenditures on education. Omoregie (2020) expressed that it emerged as part of global economic reforms promoted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF which encourage Nigeria to restructure its public education sector along neoliberal lines. Adebayo and Olayinka (2020) noted that this has led to the commercialization of education and viewing of learning as a private investment rather than a public good. Tikly (2019) agreed that under neoliberal influence, Nigerian schools and universities now prioritize employability, entrepreneurship, and measurable performance outcomes over social equity and cultural development. However, Okeke (2021) posited that while these policies aim to increase accountability and competitiveness, they have also deepened inequalities by limiting access for disadvantaged groups and undermining the role of the state in educational provisions. To this end, neoliberalism has transformed education into a commodity that fosters efficiency – driven reforms, but eroding the social and cultural purpose of education in Nigeria.

Concept of Nigerian Educational Systems and Identities

The Nigerian educational system is a structured framework designed to promote national development, social integration, and individual advancement through formal learning at the three levels of basic, secondary, and tertiary institutions (FRN, 2013). Okeke (2021) noted that it reflects the country's multicultural composition and aims to balance global knowledge with indigenous values. For this reason, Nigerian education has revolved from colonial legacies that emphasized Western curricula towards policies that promote functional education, entrepreneurship, and national unity. Omoregie (2020) maintained that despite reforms such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, challenges of inequality, inadequate funding, and curriculum irrelevance persist. Adebayo and Olayinka (2022) explained that educational identity in Nigeria refers to the collective

sense of belonging and cultural expression that emerge from educational experiences shaped by local traditions, languages, and social realities. However, Tikly (2019) posited that globalization and neoliberal influences have blurred these identities and promoted Western ideals of success and diminishing indigenous epistemologies. Therefore, Meyer (2017) argued that the Nigerian educational system and its identities stand at a crossroads, seeking to integrate global competencies, while preserving cultural authenticity and educational sovereignty.

Theoretical Concept

This paper is anchored on three interconnected theories namely: World Culture Theory, Neoliberal Institutionalism, and Postcolonial Theory. According to Meyer et al. (1997), the focus of world culture theory is that globalization promotes a global cultural order that encourages the adoption of shared educational models and ideologies. This theory explains how Nigeria's education has been shaped by global agendas like Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All Initiatives (EFA). Harvey (2018) posited that neoliberal institutionalism provides insight into the economic and political logic driving education reforms that prioritize market efficiency and competition. The theory posits that educational institutions are increasingly governed by global market logic rather than social justice imperatives. Finally, according to Tikly (2019) Postcolonial legacies and global hierarchies continue to structure knowledge systems and educational values in Postcolonial nations like Nigeria. These theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how global culture and neoliberalism shape educational policies and identities of Nigeria.

Mechanisms through which global culture and neoliberal policies operate in Nigeria education.

Global culture and neoliberal policies have profoundly influenced the structure, objectives, and practices of Nigerian education system. These influences operate through several interrelated mechanisms that reshape educational governance, curriculum content, institutional management, and identity formation. The following mechanisms illustrate how cultural and neoliberal forces interact to redefine education in Nigeria:

1. **Policy transfer and international conditionalities:** Global education policies are often transmitted into Nigeria through programmes sponsored by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and UNESCO which promote neoliberal frameworks that emphasize accountability, efficiency, and cost sharing. These global policies align with global competitiveness rather than local development priorities. Okonkwo (2019) argued that policy borrowing and donor conditionalities have led to the restructuring of Nigeria's education sector to reflect neoliberal logics of privatization and reduced state expenditures. This process embeds global economic rationalities into local education policy.
2. **Privatization and marketization of education:** The liberalization of Nigeria's higher education sector since 2000 has led to the rapid growths of private universities and tuition based funding models. Education is increasingly treated as a market commodity, rather than social right. Adebayo and Ayodele (2021) noted that neoliberal market reforms have transformed education into a profit oriented enterprise where students are viewed as consumers and institutions as competitive service providers. This commercialization widens socio-economic inequalities by limiting access for disadvantaged groups, while promoting elitism in educational attainment.
3. **Managerialism and audit culture:** The spread of neoliberal ideology has also introduced managerialism into educational administration. Nigerian universities are now governed by corporate-style management structures that prioritize efficiency, performance, and measurable outcomes. Performance indicators, rankings, and accountability systems have replaced collegial and participatory governance traditions. According to Olayiwola (2020) managerialism in Nigerian higher education impresses corporate accountability models that reshape academic values and constrain scholarly autonomy. The emphasis on quantifiable outputs such as publication counts and graduate employability align universities with global economic demands, rather than national development goals.
4. **Curriculum reorientation and global knowledge system:** Global culture influences Nigerian education through the reorganization of curricula to reflect international trends and labour market needs. The increasing dominance of Western epistemologies and neoliberal values have marginalized indigenous knowledge, cultural education, and humanitarian disciplines. Omeje (2022) observed that Nigerian curricula now emphasize science, technology, and entrepreneurship education at the expense of local content that reflect the global shift towards employability and innovation. This epistemic reorientation aligns students with global capitalist ideas which weakens cultural identity and critical civic engagement.
5. **Cultural globalization and identity transformation:** The diffusion of global culture through digital media, migration, and transnational education have transformed students' values and aspirations. Nigerian youths increasingly internalize neoliberal ideals such as individualism, competitiveness, and consumerism. Ojo and Obianuju (2023) explained that exposure to global cultural products through the internet, social media, and foreign educational models encourage students to prioritize global mobility,

personal achievement, and market-driven success. This cultural shift redefines education as a pathway to individual advancement within global capitalism rather than as a collective tool for national development.

Consequences of Global Culture and Neoliberalism on Nigerian Educational Systems: The growing influence of global culture and neoliberalism have been profound in reshaping the purpose, policies, and practices across all levels of school system. Neoliberalism emphasizes market efficiency, competition, and privatization which intersects with global cultural flows that promote cosmopolitan values, consumerism, and technological integration. These forces have redefined education in Nigeria from a public social goods to an economic commodity which serve global labour and cultural markets.

A central consequence is the commercialization and inequality of access to education. Neoliberal economic reforms have encouraged the privatization of schools and universities which shift the cost burden from the state to individuals. Adebayo and Ayodele (2021) asserted that this commodification of education has widened socio-economic gaps as quality education becomes affordable only to the wealthy. Public institutions, constrained by insufficient funding, struggle to maintain standards which perpetuate unequal educational opportunities and social stratification.

Another key consequence is the erosion of national policy autonomy due to dependence on international agencies and donor-driven reforms. Global organisations such as the World Bank, IMF, and UNESCO shape Nigeria's education policies through funding conditionalities and global performance metrics. Okonkwo (2019) noted that this external influence redirects policy focus from national priorities to international benchmarks like employability and human capital competitiveness. Consequently, education policy in Nigeria increasingly reflects global neoliberal agendas rather than indigenous developmental needs.

Additionally, the adoption of managerialist and corporate governance models have altered institutional culture and academic values. Universities now emphasize measurable output rankings, publication counts, and efficiency indicators at the expense of academic freedom and creativity. According to Olayiwola (2020) this managerial turn undermines collegiality and promotes bureaucratic control which reduce educators to service providers and students to customers. This shift prioritizes short term economic results over critical inquiry and transformative learning.

The influence of global cultural homogenization also manifests in the curriculum and student identity formations. Western pedagogical models and global media exposures have displaced indigenous knowledge systems and moral education. Omeje (2022) argued that Nigeria's education content increasingly reflects Western epistemologies which fosters dependency on foreign intellectual traditions. As students internalize neoliberal ideals such as individualism and material success, the cultural relevance of education diminishes. Similarly, Ojo and Obianuju (2023) observed that global cultural exposure redefines students' aspirations towards international mobility and consumerism which weakens commitment to local community development.

Ultimately, the consequences of global culture and neoliberalism on Nigerian education are dual-edged. While they have enhanced technological innovation, global connectivity, and policy modernization, they have also entrenched inequality, eroded national sovereignty, weakened public education, and diluted indigenous knowledge. These forces have transformed education from a tool for social cohesion and national development into an instrument for global market competitiveness. Unless balanced by culturally responsive and equity – oriented reforms, Nigerian education risks reproducing dependency and social exclusion rather than achieving sustainable development.

Responses, Resistance, and Hybridizations of Global Culture and Neoliberal Policies on Educational Systems in Nigeria

The Nigerian educational system has experienced significant transformation under the influences of global culture and neoliberal policies. These dynamics have triggered multiple responses, forms of resistance, and hybridizations as local institutions attempt to reconcile global standards with indigenous educational needs. Altbach and Knight (2017) observed that the penetration of global culture, characterized by the internationalization of curricula, market – oriented education, and the digitalization of learning have been met with both adaptation and contestation within Nigeria's educational sphere.

Responses to global and neoliberal pressures are reflected in policy reforms and institutional adjustments aimed at aligning Nigerian education with global competitiveness. Universities and secondary institutions have

adopted quality assurance framework, competency-based curricula, and technological innovations promoted by global organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank (Omeregic, 2019). Adebayo (2021) cited the introduction of entrepreneurship education and ICT integration as an alignment with neoliberal demands for human capital development and employability. Banya (2020) agreed that Nigerian policy makers have restructured educational goals towards measurable outcomes and market responsiveness, a hallmark of neoliberal educational governance.

On the other hand, resistance has also emerged particularly from educators, unions, and scholars who perceive neoliberal reforms as instruments of dependency and cultural erosion. Okeke (2022) posited that Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has frequently resisted the withdraw of public funding. Aminu (2020) argued that global neoliberalism privileges efficiency and profit over equity and critical thought which undermine social justice and developmental goals of education. Ogunyemi (2018) expressed that teachers and students have also shown skepticism towards imported assessment systems and foreign accreditation frameworks that marginalize indigenous knowledge and local pedagogies.

In the midst of these tensions, hybridization has emerged as Nigeria negotiates between global and local imperatives. According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2021) educational institutions have developed hybrid models that blend global pedagogical approaches with local content and cultural values. For instance, curriculum reforms increasingly integrate indigenous languages, environmental sustainability, and African philosophy alongside global competencies. Obasi and Eboh (2023) explained that while private and public partnerships in education are influenced by neoliberal ideologies, it also reflects local innovations and adaptive governance models suited to Nigeria's socio-economic realities.

Conclusion

The paper concluded that although global culture and neoliberal policies have modernized aspects of Nigerian education, they have simultaneously marginalized local epistemologies and widened education disparities. Sustainable educational reform in Nigeria therefore, requires a balanced approach that integrates global competences with local relevance and inclusivity by fostering policies that respect cultural diversity, promote equitable access, and strengthen local capacity. Nigeria can transform global influences into tools for contextualized development rather than sources of dependency and cultural erosion.

Suggestions

The educational system of Nigeria requires transformative, evidence-based policy interventions to address the persistent challenges of quality, access, funding, and global competitiveness. Drawing from empirical researches and global best practices, the following policy suggestions are proposed to strengthen the system and align it with both national development goals and international standards:

1. **An increased and accountable public investment in education is very important:** Empirical studies have shown that nations that allocate at least 15-20% of their annual budgets to education record improved literacy and workforce productivity (UNESCO, 2021). Adebayo (2020) noted that the current below average of 10% allocation to education in Nigeria is inadequate. Obasi and Eboh (2023) espoused that transparent financial management systems should also be established to ensure that educational funds are effectively utilized and monitored. This means that government spending should prioritize teachers training, provisions of school infrastructures, and digital learning tools.
2. **Teacher professional development and motivation should be institutionalized:** Evidence from the World Bank (2020) demonstrated that continuous professional training and performance incentives significantly improve learning outcomes. Okeke (2022) stated that Nigerian policy makers should introduce mandatory in-service teacher certification and promote merit-based promotion systems. Incentives for teachers in rural or undeserved areas can also reduce the urban-rural education gap.
3. **Curriculum reform should focus on skills-based and context relevant learning:** Studies by Ezeanya-Esiobu (2021) emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy into school curricula to enhance employability and cultural relevance. Aminu (2020) maintained that policy makers should promote interdisciplinary learning that connects education to community development, innovation, and local economies.
4. **Strengthen public-private partnerships to enhance efficiency and innovation in education delivery.** Evidence from policy evaluations indicated that PPPs has improved access to vocational and tertiary education where public funding is insufficient (Banya, 2020). However, Omeregic (2019) agreed that strong regulatory frameworks are needed to ensure equity and prevention of commercialization that undermines public access.

5. **Monitoring, evaluation, and data-driven decision-making should be central to the governance of Nigerian education.** Empirical evidence from Altbach and Knight (2017) showed that data-informed policy decisions increase accountability in dynamic education systems. An establishment of an education data and policy research institute would provide real-time insights into performance indicators, teacher deployment, and student outcomes across the states of Nigeria.

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