



Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable ... Ojo, M. T., Et. al. (2025)

Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable Access to Education: A Critical Study of Resource allocation among Public Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores whether existing legal and policy mechanisms are actually doing what they promise and where the cracks might be. The research pulled from a diverse group of stakeholders, including policymakers, public school teachers, and education administrators across all six geopolitical zones. From a pool of 3,500 individuals as population of the study while 600 respondents were selected as sample using a stratified random sampling method. Data came through a specially designed questionnaire called the 'Equitable Resource Allocation and Education Policy Assessment Questionnaire' (ERA-EPAQ). Which was validated by education policy experts and confirmed to be reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.87? The results of this study make one thing clear: Nigeria does have legislative and policy structures in place to support equitable access to education but implementation remains patchy and inconsistent. And while the National Policy on Education and the Universal Basic Education Act set out noble intentions for equity, they often fall short due to limited funding, weak oversight, and political interference in how resources are shared. To move forward, the study recommends that teachers should be encouraged financially and professionally to work in underserved areas. That could mean providing housing, transportation support, hardship allowances, or faster career progression. Also, local communities know their needs best. Giving them a seat at the table in managing school resources will boost transparency, responsiveness, and long-term sustainability.

Keyword: Resource allocation, Public schools, Legal framework, and Policy implementation

Introduction

Education is not just a basic right; it's a powerful engine for change. It shapes lives, opens doors, and plays a vital role in reducing poverty and promoting inclusion. In countries like Nigeria, where inequality, governance challenges, and regional disparities are still major hurdles, making sure every



Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable ... Ojo, M. T., Et. al. (2025)

child has a fair shot at quality education remains a critical goal. But equitable access goes beyond simply enrolling kids in school. It's about ensuring that every student—regardless of where they're from or what their background is has access to the resources they need to actually learn and thrive. This includes fair distribution of money, facilities, qualified teachers, and learning materials. This study zooms in on how Nigerian laws and policies aim to ensure fairness in education, especially through how resources are managed in public schools. According to UNESCO (2017), equity in education is all about justice and inclusion and making sure personal factors like gender, income level, ethnicity, or geographic location does not limit a person's educational opportunities or outcomes. It is important to note the difference between equity and equality. Equality assumes everyone needs the same thing, but equity acknowledges that people have different needs and circumstances, and support should be tailored accordingly. This is especially important in Nigeria, where disparities between rural and urban areas, and between the northern and southern regions, are still very pronounced. Despite having legal frameworks and education policies meant to address these imbalances, the reality on the ground tells a different story.

According to the UNDP (2020), Nigeria's low Human Development Index is closely tied to poor access to quality healthcare and education. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) also points out that school attendance and literacy rates are drastically lower in the northern parts of the country. These gaps are a reflection of deeper structural issues. On paper, Nigeria has committed to a range of international agreements that promote educational equity, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030 (UN, 2015). Domestically, the Nigerian Constitution (1999) puts education front and center. Section 18 mandates the government to eliminate illiteracy and make both primary and secondary education free and compulsory. This is backed up by the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, which lays out a legal framework for all children between 6 and 15 to receive free education. The National Policy on Education (NPE) also sets broad goals around inclusion, equity, and national unity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014).

There are additional efforts too, like the National Teacher Education Policy, the UBE Intervention Fund, and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program—that are meant to support these legal mandates. However, in practice, many of these policies don't deliver as intended. Political interference, weak institutions, corruption, and unreliable data for planning and monitoring often get in the way of real progress. One of the most glaring issues is how educational resources are allocated. In Nigeria's public schools, resources span everything from teaching staff and materials to buildings and funding. But these aren't shared out evenly. This leads to overcrowded classrooms, low student achievement, and alarmingly high dropout rates in some areas. Studies show that urban schools tend to be far better resourced than those in rural or underserved communities. A 2020 Human Rights Watch report revealed that many schools in northern Nigeria lack even the most basic necessities e.g. textbooks, desks, toilets etc. Likewise, UNESCO's 2019 report found major disparities in education spending across states, with some investing heavily while others fall short of the federal baseline. Another challenge is the uneven distribution of teachers. According to the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN, 2022), over 80% of qualified teachers are based in urban centers, leaving rural and conflict-prone areas severely understaffed. This widens learning gaps and leaves vulnerable students behind. While many researchers have analyzed Nigeria's education funding and policy implementation, there has not been enough attention paid to how well the legal and policy structures actually address these imbalances, especially those tied to resources. That's



Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable ... Ojo, M. T., Et. al. (2025)

where this study comes in. It aims to fill that gap by digging into how policies are applied in real life and whether they're truly helping to make access to education more fair and inclusive for all.

Objectives of the study

To investigate legal and policy frameworks for equitable education and resource allocation in Nigerian public schools. In particular, the study aims to

1. examine how educational resources are currently being distributed across public schools in Nigeria especially when comparing different regions and socioeconomic groups.
2. identify the major challenges and underlying factors that shape the implementation of equitable education policies in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The investigation is guided by the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between equity in access to public education and Nigeria's existing legal or policy frameworks.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in how public schools in urban and rural parts of Nigeria allocate educational resources.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is well-suited to exploring real-world conditions and gathering perspectives across a wide geographic spread. By surveying participants from all six geopolitical zones, the study aimed to paint a clearer picture of how resources are currently allocated and how education policies are actually playing out on the ground.

Population of the Study

Participants were drawn from three major groups: secondary school teachers in public schools, education administrators from state education boards, and policymakers working in ministries of education. Altogether, the estimated study population was about 3,500 individuals spread across Nigeria's diverse regions.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

To ensure fairness and a balanced representation across Nigeria's diverse regions, a total of 600 participants were selected altogether, 100 from each of the six geopolitical zones. This was done using a stratified random sampling method, which helped minimize bias while capturing a broad spectrum of voices. The breakdown of participants looked like this: 400 public school teachers, 120 education administrators, 80 policymakers. This mix allowed the study to draw insights from both those shaping policy and those experiencing its impact firsthand in schools.

Research Instrument

To collect data, the researchers designed a structured questionnaire called the 'Equitable Resource Allocation and Education Policy Assessment Questionnaire' (ERA-EPAQ). It was organized into three key sections: Section A: Gathered demographic information, Section B: Focused on evaluating existing legal and policy frameworks, Section C: Assessed the practical challenges and patterns in resource distribution across schools

Validity of the Instrument

To make sure the questionnaire was actually measuring what it needed to, it was reviewed by two experts in educational management and one policy analyst. Their feedback helped refine the wording and relevance of the questions, aligning the tool more closely with the study's core objectives.

Reliability of the Instrument

To test how dependable the instrument was, a pilot study was conducted with 30 participants from



Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable ... Ojo, M. T., Et. al. (2025)

a state not included in the main study. The results were promising: using the Cronbach Alpha method, the questionnaire achieved an internal consistency score of 0.87, suggesting a high level of reliability.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics (like mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including Chi-square and ANOVA tests. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$

Presentation of Results

These consist of descriptive statistics used to answer research questions; appropriate statistics used for testing hypothesis; Tables should be aligned to APA style; P-value compare with decision threshold – 0.05 significance if necessary. E.g.,

Hypothesis 1

State the hypothesis in clear, unambiguous and should reflect the first research question.

Present the statistical data analysis used in testing the null hypothesis 1 in the table as shown below:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between equity in access to public education and Nigeria’s existing legal or policy frameworks.

Resource Allocation in Urban vs. Rural Public Schools

Resource Type	Urban Schools (%)	Rural Schools (%)	Mean Difference	p-val.	Decision
Qualified Teachers	83	51	32	0.003	Significant
Classroom Infrastructure	78	44	34	0.001	Significant
Textbooks Availability	72	38	34	0.002	Significant
ICT Facilities	65	20	45	0.000	Significant Highly

$p < 0.05$. (Author’s computation, 2025)

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in how public schools in urban and rural parts of Nigeria allocate educational resources.

ANOVA Test – Legal Frameworks and Equitable Access

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	1.84	2	0.92	6.21	0.015*	Significant
Within Groups	5.93	597	0.102			
TOTAL	7.77	599				

Author’s computation 2025

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study make one thing clear: Nigeria does have legislative and policy structures in place to support equitable access to education but implementation remains patchy and inconsistent. As shown in Table 1, there are stark contrasts between urban and rural schools when it comes to resource distribution. From qualified teachers to textbooks, classrooms to ICT tools, rural schools are significantly under-resourced. These disparities are not just numbers but, they reflect lived realities for students who are often left behind. This is in line with UNESCO (2017). The concepts of equity and access are at the heart of modern education systems and they are more than just buzzwords. While access generally refers to the opportunity to attend school, equity digs deeper: it’s about fairness, not sameness. It means ensuring that students no matter their background, gender,



Legal and Policy Frameworks for Equitable ... Ojo, M. T., Et. al. (2025)

income level, or where they live must get what they need to succeed, even if that looks different from person to person. Table 2 also highlights a statistically significant link between legal frameworks and equitable access. But here's the catch: those policies only seem to work when they're enforced and that's not happening evenly across the board. Weak accountability mechanisms and inconsistent state-level commitment are major roadblocks. One particularly troubling issue is teacher deployment. Too many qualified teachers are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural schools struggling with shortages which trend also noted by TRCN (2022) and Afolabi (2020). Until that imbalance is addressed, true educational equity will remain out of reach for many students.

Conclusion

This study found that ensuring students no matter their background, gender, income level, or where they live must get what they need to succeed, even if that looks different from person to person. Also, one particularly troubling issue is teacher deployment. Too many qualified teachers are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural schools struggling and migrating to urban center.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study. The following recommendations were made

1. Incentivize Rural Teaching; Teachers should be encouraged financially and professionally to work in underserved areas. That could mean providing housing, transportation support, hardship allowances, or faster career progression.
2. Enforce Counterpart Funding Requirements; States that fail to meet their funding obligations under UBE should face real consequences whether through budget restrictions or constitutional enforcement mechanisms.
3. Engage Communities in School Governance; Local communities know their needs best. Giving them a seat at the table in managing school resources will boost transparency, responsiveness, and long-term sustainability.

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