



POLITICS IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: FREEDOM AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATIONS

Afatyo Iorwuese

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
Adasu University Makurdi

Abstract

This paper discussed freedom in the Nigerian educational system. Freedom in the Nigerian educational system remains a central determinant of quality, inclusiveness and democratic participation, especially when reforms and societal changes continue to reshape schooling. This paper explores the meaning and dimensions of freedom in education, emphasizing academic, administrative, intellectual, professional, religious and cultural liberties. It examines how freedom manifests across students, teachers, administrators, parents and communities, highlighting rights to expression, professional autonomy, institutional decision-making and stakeholder participation. The legal and policy foundations supporting educational freedom such as constitutional guarantees, the National Policy on Education and human rights instruments are reviewed to assess their effectiveness in practice. The study also outlines the benefits of freedom, including improved creativity, teacher motivation, institutional accountability and enhanced learning outcomes. However, significant challenges persist, including political interference, centralized curriculum control, underfunding, insecurity, cultural pressures and restricted student activism. Current realities in 2025, including digital academic freedom, policy reforms and regional disparities, reveal both progress and gaps. The paper proposed strategies for strengthening educational freedom through improved legislation, decentralization, adequate funding, enhanced safety and democratic school governance. The paper concluded that Freedom in the Nigerian educational system remains both a fundamental right and a condition for high-quality schooling. Ultimately, expanding educational freedom will shape a more innovative, accountable and equitable future for Nigerian learners. It was recommended among others that government should strengthen legal frameworks to limit political control over school administration by enforcing merit-based appointments and transparent oversight. This should be done through independent monitoring bodies. The expected result increased institutional autonomy and improved quality of educational decisions

Keywords: Freedom, Educational freedom, Nigerian educational system

Introduction

Freedom in education has become a central issue in contemporary discourse, especially in developing countries where educational reforms are rapidly reshaping the learning landscape. Globally, education systems are shifting toward models that prioritize inclusiveness, learner autonomy and democratic participation (UNESCO, 2021). In Nigeria, as the country moves into 2025, renewed attention is placed on how educational stakeholders' students,

teachers, parents, communities and policymakers, exercise freedom within the system to promote quality learning experiences. Examining this issue helps to understand the extent to which Nigerian schools encourage intellectual independence and respect for human dignity.

Freedom in education refers to the extent to which individuals and institutions within the educational system can make decisions without undue restrictions. It includes



academic freedom, learner autonomy, freedom of thought, freedom of access and the liberty of teachers to adopt creative pedagogies. The concept embodies the rights of learners to express ideas, engage in critical thinking, participate actively in learning and pursue knowledge without fear of discrimination. It also reflects institutional rights to shape curriculum content, determine teaching methods and manage internal governance. In essence, freedom in education highlights the balance between regulatory oversight and individual or institutional liberty (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2018).

The Nigerian educational system operates at multiple levels; basic, secondary as well as tertiary institutions are guided by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2019). The system is highly regulated by government ministries, agencies and commissions responsible for maintaining quality and standards. Despite these regulations, the Nigerian educational system has been undergoing reforms aimed at decentralizing, improved school autonomy, curriculum diversification and the promotion of learner-centered approaches (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2020).

Conceptual Clarification

The section discusses concept of freedom in educational context, educational system, forms of freedom within the Nigerian Educational System in the year 2020, legal and policy framework, benefits and challenges to freedom in the Nigerian Educational System.

Freedom in Educational Context

Freedom in education is defined as the capacity of learners, teachers and educational institutions to make choices that foster intellectual growth and promote democratic ideals (Adzongo, 2022). It includes academic freedom, which allows teachers and scholars to investigate, teach and publish without censorship or undue

interference (Okeke & Nwafor, 2020). It also includes learners' freedom to ask questions, explore ideas and contribute to the learning process. In modern educational theory, freedom is central to constructivist pedagogy, which argues that students learn best when they actively construct knowledge in an environment that encourages expression and autonomy (Mbah, 2021). Therefore, freedom in education is not the absence of rules; rather, it is the presence of enabling conditions that allow meaningful participation and intellectual exploration within clear moral and professional boundaries.

In practice, freedom operates within the structure of the educational system. At the school level, teachers exercise freedom through the adoption of innovative teaching strategies, integration of technology and creative classroom management approaches (Owolabi & Adediran, 2022). Students experience freedom through participation in classroom discussions, engagement in extracurricular activities and access to inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. Institutional freedom manifests in curriculum adaptation, school-based management and locally driven decision-making processes.

Educational System

An Educational System is the structured framework of institutions, policies, resources and practices a country uses to provide learning opportunities for her citizens. It also refers to the structured framework through which a society organizes teaching, learning and the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and competencies needed for personal and national development (Ivagher & Gire, 2021). In Nigeria, the educational system is guided by the National Policy on Education, which outlines the goals, levels, structures and guiding principles of learning nationwide. Scholars describe an



educational system as a coordinated network of institutions, processes and regulatory bodies that work together to produce learning outcomes that align with societal needs (Okeke & Aghaulor, 2021). This system encompasses curriculum design, teacher preparation, assessment procedures, governance structures and the legal frameworks that regulate school operations.

Within the Nigerian context, the educational system is organized into basic, post-basic and tertiary levels, each serving distinct purposes in human capital formation. The basic level provides foundational literacy and numeracy, the post-basic level supports career exploration and skills development, while the tertiary level drives advanced knowledge production and innovation. According to Adeyemi (2020), the effectiveness of any nation's educational system depends on the extent to which it promotes access, equity, accountability, flexibility and learner autonomy, features that are increasingly emphasized in modern educational reforms.

The Nigerian educational system in 2025 operates within a broader context of decentralization, where states, local governments and school-based management structures play more active roles in decision-making. This decentralization is intended to enhance school autonomy and improve responsiveness to local needs. Research shows that decentralized educational systems tend to promote greater freedom for teachers and administrators by reducing bureaucratic control and enabling more context-specific innovations in teaching and learning (Uchendu, Ossai, & Nwafor, 2019). As a result, schools gain more flexibility in curriculum adaptation, instructional methods and student support services.

Forms of Freedom Within the Nigerian Educational System in 2025

Freedom in Nigeria's educational system in 2025 manifests in multiple interconnected forms, each shaping how teaching, learning, governance and community participation occur. The following forms highlight how freedom is expressed within the educational landscape.

Academic Freedom: Academic freedom remains a cornerstone of educational development in 2025. It refers to the liberty granted to teachers, students and institutions to explore knowledge without undue interference (Owan & Agunwa, 2020). Academic freedom manifests in two major ways:

- i. **Freedom of teaching and learning:** Teachers have increased liberty to design learning experiences that suit the needs of diverse learners. This freedom is supported by national policies promoting learner-centered education and digital pedagogy. Scholars note that when teachers and learners have autonomy, the quality of engagement and learning outcomes improves significantly (Ekundayo & Lawal, 2019).
- ii. **Curriculum choices and instructional methods:** Schools now exercise greater flexibility in adapting curriculum content to local realities, especially within the basic education framework. According to Ofojebe and Eze (2021), curriculum flexibility promotes innovation and relevance in teaching. Teachers are free to adopt blended learning, project-based learning and digital resources to enhance lesson delivery. This freedom reduces monotony and encourages diversity in instructional practices.
- iii.



Student Freedom: In 2025, students in Nigeria experience growing levels of freedom, especially in expression and participation. A student-centered system encourages learners to contribute to their learning environment and develop confidence. Student freedom appears in the following forms:

- i. **Freedom of expression:** The National Policy on Education encourages schools to create safe spaces for students to express ideas, opinions and concerns. Scholars assert that freedom of expression supports democratic values and enhances students' socio-emotional development (Adeyemi, 2020). Students now participate more actively in class discussions, school debates and digital learning forums, allowing them to articulate their thoughts without fear.
- ii. **Participation in school governance:** Modern school administration increasingly recognizes the importance of students' involvement in decision-making. Research indicates that involving students in school governance strengthens accountability and improves school culture (Uchendu, Ossai, & Nwafor, 2019). Many Nigerian secondary schools now include students' representatives in committees related to discipline, welfare and extracurricular activities, giving learners a voice in shaping their school environment.

Teacher Freedom: Teachers, being central to educational delivery, enjoy more professional liberties in 2025. These freedoms enhance their job satisfaction, motivation and classroom performance. Teacher freedom is expressed through:

- i. **Professional autonomy:** Teachers now have more discretion in planning lessons, assessing learning

and choosing pedagogical tools. Studies show that professional autonomy boosts teacher effectiveness and encourages instructional innovation (Adeniji & Omotayo, 2020). With increased access to digital resources and continuous professional development programmes, teachers can customize learning to match student needs.

- ii. **Union participation and collective bargaining:** Teacher unions remain strong platforms for advocating professional rights. Scholars affirm that unionism promotes fairness, protects educators' welfare and strengthens the teaching profession (Okeke & Aghaulor, 2021). In 2025, teachers actively engage in collective bargaining to negotiate working conditions, salaries and policy reforms, reinforcing their freedom to participate in professional advocacy.

Administrative Freedom: School administrators also benefit from increased autonomy, which enables them to manage institutions more effectively. Administrative freedom supports strategic planning, innovation and accountability. Administrative freedom includes:

- i. **Institutional decision-making:** Decentralization policies in Nigeria have allowed school heads more control over budgeting, resource allocation and staff supervision. Research indicates that autonomy in decision-making improves school performance and responsiveness to local needs (Ezeani & Igwe, 2019). Administrators in 2025 can make context-specific decisions that align with their school's goals and community expectations.
- ii. **Community engagement:** Administrators now have the



freedom to collaborate closely with community stakeholders. Studies show that community involvement enhances transparency and promotes shared responsibility in school governance (Nwogwugwu & Chukwu, 2022). Principals engage with School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), traditional leaders and civil society organizations to strengthen partnerships and mobilize resources.

Parental and Community Freedom:

Nigeria's education reforms also recognize parents and communities as essential partners in schooling. Freedom for these stakeholders supports a more participatory and democratic system. This freedom is demonstrated through:

- i. **Involvement in school policies:** Parents now have greater opportunities to contribute to decisions concerning discipline, curriculum enrichment, student welfare and school development. Scholars report that parental involvement leads to improved student outcomes and stronger school accountability (Obi & Okeke, 2021). Through PTAs, SBMCs and town-hall meetings, parents can voice opinions and participate in shaping school policies.
- ii. **Stakeholder participation in education:** Communities are increasingly engaged in providing resources, supporting school projects and monitoring educational quality. Research affirms that multi-stakeholder collaboration enhances effectiveness and ensures community ownership of education (Ede & Mmadu, 2022). In 2025, communities support literacy programmes, digital learning

centers, safety initiatives and school infrastructure projects.

Legal and Policy Framework Supporting Educational Freedom

Freedom in the Nigerian educational system in 2025 is grounded in several legal and policy instruments that guide how rights, responsibilities and academic liberties are exercised. The following frameworks shape how teachers, students, administrators and communities participate in the schooling process.

1. **Constitutional Provisions:** The 1999 Constitution (as amended) remains the foundational legal document supporting freedom in Nigerian education. It guarantees the right to freedom of expression, religion, association and peaceful assembly, all of which directly influence academic and institutional freedom. Ojo and Adeyemi (2019) affirms that constitutional rights strengthen democratic participation in education and protect individuals from undue interference. In 2025, these constitutional guarantees continue to provide the legal basis for academic discourse, school governance participation and stakeholder engagement.
2. **National Policy on Education (NPE):** The National Policy on Education also plays a vital role in supporting educational freedom. It emphasizes inclusiveness, learner-centered practices and institutional autonomy in planning and implementation. Scholars note that the NPE promotes flexibility in curriculum delivery and encourages schools to adapt teaching to community needs (Uchendu & Okoronkwo, 2021). In 2025, revisions to the NPE strengthen digital learning rights, professional autonomy for teachers and parental involvement in decision-making.



3. Policies Regulating Teacher/Learner Rights: Several policy documents including the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), Child Rights Act and Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act outline protections for teachers and learners. Research indicates that such policies enhance professional freedom, safety and welfare in schools (Okeke & Asiyai, 2020). In 2025, these regulations support teachers' right to collective bargaining, learners' right to expression, and institutional autonomy in implementing curriculum innovations.

Benefits of Freedom in the Nigerian Educational System

The following benefits highlight the significance of freedom in the Nigerian educational system.

- 1 Promotes Creativity and Innovation: Freedom allows teachers and learners to experiment with new ideas, teaching methods and problem-solving strategies. Studies confirm that autonomy fosters innovation and enhances the adaptability of schools to changing conditions (Ekundayo & Lawal, 2019). In 2025, digital freedom further enables creativity through online collaboration, educational technology and flexible content delivery.
- 2 Enhances Student Learning and Engagement: When students have freedom of expression, choice and participation, they become more active and motivated learners. Research shows that student autonomy leads to higher engagement and improved academic outcomes (Adeyemi, 2020). Nigerian schools in 2025

benefit from inquiry-based learning, student clubs, debate forums and digital learning platforms that empower students to participate actively.

- 3 Supports Teacher Motivation and Effectiveness: Teacher autonomy over pedagogical decisions boosts job satisfaction and commitment. Scholars agree that teachers perform better when they feel trusted, respected and professionally empowered (Adeniji & Omotayo, 2020). In 2025, freedom in instructional methods, professional development opportunities and union participation strengthens teacher morale and effectiveness.

Challenges to Freedom in the Nigerian Educational System (2025)

Although educational freedom is increasingly recognized as essential for quality schooling, the Nigerian system in 2025 still grapples with the following challenges;

- 1 Inadequate Funding: Chronic underfunding remains a major challenge, affecting teacher welfare, infrastructure and academic freedom. Research indicates that insufficient funding restricts schools' ability to implement reforms and support learner-centered innovations (Ekundayo & Lawal, 2019).
- 2 Centralized Curriculum Control: The tight control exercised by federal agencies over curriculum reduces school flexibility. Scholars argue that centralized curriculum frameworks limit schools' ability to respond to local needs and emerging



learner interests (Uchendu & Okoronkwo, 2021).

- 3 Limited Professional Autonomy for Teachers: Teachers still face restrictions in choosing instructional methods, assessment strategies and learning materials. Scholars note that limited professional autonomy reduces creativity and job satisfaction (Adeniji & Omotayo, 2020).

Strategies for Enhancing Educational Freedom in Nigeria

Improving educational freedom requires deliberate policy actions, stakeholder commitment and long-term investment. Nwafor and Obi (2021:28) emphasize that the following strategies to enhance educational freedom in Nigeria;

1. Decentralizing Education Decision-Making: Schools and local governments should be given greater authority over curriculum adaptation, staffing and resource management to reflect local needs.
2. Increasing Funding and Resource Allocation: Adequate funding ensures infrastructure, teacher development and student support systems necessary for academic freedom to flourish.
3. Building Teacher Capacity: Regular training in pedagogy, digital literacy and learner centered strategies will empower teachers to exercise professional autonomy effectively.

Conclusion

Freedom in the Nigerian educational system remains both a fundamental right and a condition for high-quality schooling. While political interference, funding gaps and cultural barriers pose challenges, ongoing reforms in 2025 demonstrate a gradual shift toward more open, inclusive and democratic education. Strengthening legislation, decentralizing governance and

improving teacher empowerment are critical to deepening these gains. Ultimately, expanding educational freedom will shape a more innovative, accountable and equitable future for Nigerian learners.

Recommendation

Based on the discussion above the following recommendations are made;

1. The Federal and State Governments should allocate higher budgetary funds to education through statutory increases and strict financial tracking. Using needs-based resource distribution will ensure equitable access. The expected result is improved infrastructure, teacher support and enhanced educational freedom.
2. The Ministry of Education should decentralize curriculum implementation by allowing schools adapt content through local curriculum committees. This should be done with clear guidelines and monitoring. The expected result is flexible learning that meets community needs and encourages innovation.
3. School administrators and community leaders should promote inclusive policies by engaging diverse stakeholders in dialogue and reviewing restrictive norms. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns and policy harmonization. The expected result is a more tolerant environment that protects learner freedom.

Reference

- Adebayo, F. A., & Ogunyemi, B. (2020). *Educational reforms and school autonomy in Nigeria: Implications for quality improvement*. *Journal of Educational Development*, 15(2), 45–58.
- Adeniji, A. A., & Omotayo, H. O. (2020). *Teacher autonomy and instructional effectiveness in*



- Nigerian secondary schools. African Journal of Pedagogy*, 8(1), 112–125.
- Adeyemi, T. O. (2020). *Learner participation and school effectiveness in Nigeria. International Journal of Educational Policy Studies*, 12(3), 87–102.
- Afolabi, F., & Okeke, C. (2020). *Supervision practices and quality assurance in developing countries. Journal of Educational Supervision*, 5(1), 33–47.
- Ede, E. O., & Mmadu, F. O. (2022). *Stakeholder involvement and democratic school governance in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration*, 10(1), 54–71.
- Ekundayo, H. T., & Lawal, B. O. (2019). *School autonomy, teacher creativity, and learning outcomes in Nigerian schools. Journal of Innovative Education*, 14(2), 66–78.
- Ezeani, N. S., & Igwe, U. M. (2019). *School-based management and institutional accountability in Nigerian education. West African Journal of Educational Management*, 18(1), 1–17.
- Ezenwaji, J. O., & Chukwu, L. C. (2022). *Human rights compliance and educational practices in Nigeria. African Human Rights Review*, 6(3), 140–158.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2019). *National policy on education* (6th ed.). NERDC Press.
- Ivagher, E. D. & Gire, A. F. (2021). *Fundamental issues in educational planning*. Makurdi; Eagle Prints.
- Mbah, C. E. (2021). *Constructivist learning and student autonomy in contemporary classrooms. International Journal of Learning Sciences*, 5(1), 77–91.
- Nwafor, S. O., & Obi, F. E. (2021). *Political interference and challenges to educational governance in Nigeria. African Journal of Educational Policy*, 9(1), 101–118.
- Nwogwugwu, U. C., & Chukwu, P. (2022). *Cultural diversity and freedom of expression in Nigerian schools. Journal of Multicultural Education Studies*, 11(2), 89–104.
- Obi, T., & Okeke, C. N. (2021). *Parental involvement and school accountability in basic education. Journal of Home-School Partnerships*, 3(1), 25–39.
- Ofojebe, W. N., & Eze, R. A. (2021). *Curriculum flexibility and relevance in basic education. Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 28(1), 55–70.
- Ojo, S. A., & Adeyemi, G. M. (2019). *Constitutional provisions and the protection of educational rights in Nigeria. African Journal of Law and Education*, 4(2), 11–30.
- Okeke, C. I., & Aghaulor, B. (2021). *Educational systems and governance reforms in Africa. Journal of Comparative Education*, 16(4), 215–230.



- Okeke, C. I., & Asiyai, R. I. (2020). *Teacher rights, welfare, and professional standards in Nigeria. Journal of Professional Teaching Standards*, 7(1), 44–57.
- Okeke, C. I., & Nwafor, S. O. (2020). *Academic freedom and higher education development in Nigeria. International Journal of Educational Freedom*, 2(1), 1–17.
- Olaniyan, D. A., & Okemakinde, T. (2018). *Freedom in education and challenges of modern school systems. Journal of Educational Thought*, 7(3), 62–79.
- Owan, V. J., & Agunwa, J. N. (2020). *Academic freedom and intellectual development in African schools. International Journal of Pedagogical Innovations*, 4(2), 23–38.
- Owolabi, T. O., & Adediran, K. A. (2022). *Teacher creativity and technological integration in Nigerian classrooms. Journal of Digital Literacy in Education*, 3(1), 55–70.
- Uchendu, C. C., & Okoronkwo, N. O. (2021). *Curriculum decentralization and school autonomy in Nigeria. Journal of Curriculum and Instructional Leadership*, 11(1), 70–85.
- Uchendu, C. C., Ossai, A., & Nwafor, S. O. (2019). *Decentralization and school governance: Implications for educational freedom. Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 9(2), 88–103.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UNESCO Publishing.