

GOVERNANCE OF DIVERSITIES AND INDIGENIZATION POLICY IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: ITS IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The diverse nature of Nigeria is expected to be respected and channelled towards the national integration and development. And one of the essential tools to achieve it is education. Education is not only creates an opportunity for members of a society to refrain from engaging in act that will constitute a threat to its stability but also enhance their capacity to contribute to the national development. Education has the potential to inculcate youths with the ethos of a culture of peace, dedication and skills needed for national development. It is on this note that this study examines the perceptions of Nigerian students on the impact of the indigene policy on leadership aspirations, attitudes toward national unity, and views on fairness and equality in leadership. To achieve the objective of the study, primary source of data was employed. 200 respondents were sampled from 2 higher institutions were selected from Jigawa and Kwara States for the study. And simple percentage was used to analysis data collected. Based on data collected, the analysis reveals that a significant majority believe the policy is likely or very likely to influence their leadership aspirations and perceptions of national unity. Also, 87.5% of respondents view the indigene policy as negatively impacting their role as future leaders, perceiving leadership as more exclusive and regionally biased. The study concludes that while the indigene policy aims to promote local representation, it may inadvertently perpetuate further divisions which may affecting students' national outlook and aspirations. This analysis underscores the need for policy reforms that foster inclusive leadership and national unity while supporting local representation equitably in Nigeria's educational system.

INTRODUCTION

The diverse nature of Nigeria, in terms of multi-ethnicity and religious, are expected to be respected and channeled towards the national integration and development. Nations building becomes an essential way to harness difference ethnics groups for years have been a major challenge facing the country. The available record shows that Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups

which are divided along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. This invariably put Nigeria in the dilemma of creating a cohesive national identity in the face of this diversity.

The nationhood journey in Nigeria formally began in 1914, when British colonial authorities amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates into a single administrative entity. Before the amalgamation, the British colonial system had prioritized administrative convenience over existence way of life of each ethnic group in the country. They create a political unit without regard for the distinct ethnic and cultural identities of the various groups involved (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This merging of regions with differing governance structures, economic systems, and social norms laid the foundation for a deeply divided state which was inherited at independence in 1960.

At the time of independence, Nigeria adopted a federal system of government designed to accommodate its multiethnic makeup. However, the struggle for political and economic power among the different ethnic groups, specifically the three major one, the Hausa-Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West, and Igbo in the East, is antithetical to the stability and development of the country. These struggles escalated into a civil war from 1967 to 1970, following the attempt by the Eastern Region to secede from Nigeria and form the Republic of Biafra. Although the war ended in favor of national unity, it left lasting scars and intensified regional and ethnic grievances.

Since the civil war, efforts have been made to foster national unity and build a strong nation that all Nigerians will see as their project. And one of the essential tools to achieve this is education. Education is not only creates an opportunity for members of a society to refrain from engaging in act that will constitute a threat to its stability but also enhance their capacity to contribute to the national development. Education has the potential to inculcate youths with the ethos of a culture of peace, dedication and skills needed for national development. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) identifies education as an instrument for “national unity, integration, and socio-economic development” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Educational policies encourage the promotion of national identity by mandating the teaching of Nigerian history, local languages, and civic education, aiming to cultivate a shared sense of belonging and responsibility among diverse ethnic groups (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Equally, education enhances human capital development, a critical driver of national development. Human capital is linked to increased productivity, technological innovation, and economic growth (Adeyemi & Adu, 2010). Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, launched in 1999, aims to improve literacy and numeracy rates, thus equipping individuals with essential skills for economic participation and self-sufficiency. Improved educations outcomes help build a skilled workforce that can drive Nigeria's industrialization and reduce poverty and economic inequalities that threaten Nigeria's unity and development. The educational system strives to provide equitable opportunities for all, addressing regional and gender disparities in access to schooling (Adebayo, 2013). Bridging these inequalities fosters inclusive development,

where every Nigerian has the opportunity to participate in and contribute to national progress as well as development. Inclusive education also empowers marginalized groups, giving them a voice in political, social, and economic spheres, which strengthens democracy and promotes sustainable development (Olarinmoye, 2013).

Despite the centrality of education in realizing nation building and national development, the implementation of policy of indigene and non-indigene in Nigeria's educational system constitute a threat to the realization of education potential to build nation efforts in Nigeria.

The reason is that the policy has significant implications for access to education, scholarships, and even job opportunities, affecting the country's future leaders. As Nigeria is home to diverse ethnic and regional identities, the indigene policy shapes the educational experiences of students in ways that influence their views on unity, equity, and governance. It is on this note that this study examines the impact of indigenization policy of state governments on potential of affected students' contribution to national development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The governance of diversities and indigenization policy in Nigerian educational system can be understood through various theoretical lenses. But for the purpose of this study, social identity will be adopted as theoretical framework. The theory providing a foundation to examine how the policy affects future leaders, that it is students, in terms of identity and their view of the society.

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive part of their identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. This theory is critical for understanding the impact of indigeneity policies, as they reinforce a sense of belonging (or exclusion) to specific ethnic or regional groups within the Nigerian state. For students classified as "non-indigenes," the policy may lead to a feeling of marginalization and exclusion, which in turn can influence how they view their role in national development. When educational policies prioritize certain groups over others, students may adopt narrower ethnic or regional identities rather than a unified national identity (Mustapha, 2006). Consequently, future leaders shaped by this environment may carry a predisposition toward loyalty to their ethnic or regional group, potentially limiting their commitment to a national agenda.

Social Identity Theory highlights how this policy fosters ethnic loyalty, potentially resulting in leaders with strong regional or ethnic ties over a national allegiance.

Conceptual Clarification

Governance of Diversity refers to the strategies, policies, and practices organizations or institution use to manage and promote diversity within their workforce or community. It encompasses the principles and frameworks that ensure fair representation, inclusion, and equitable treatment of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and cultural or religious beliefs

Governance of diversity refers to the frameworks, policies, and practices used by institutions and governments to manage cultural, ethnic, and social diversity within a society. In pluralistic societies, effective governance of diversity aims to balance the needs and rights of various groups while promoting social cohesion and equity. According to Vertovec (2015), diversity governance encompasses policies addressing inclusion, representation, and participation across different social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, and gender, in political and public life. Managing diversity is especially relevant in multi-ethnic nations, where policies that support pluralism and equitable access to resources help prevent marginalization and ensure that all groups contribute to national development.

Baines (2010) concludes that policies governing diversity require a delicate balance between integration and cultural preservation, as over-assimilation can lead to resistance and cultural erasure, while too much separation risks social fragmentation. Effective governance frameworks aim to foster a sense of belonging for all groups without diminishing cultural identities (Modood, 2013). As a result, the governance of diversity involves an ongoing process of negotiation, wherein institutions must continually adapt to changing social dynamics to maintain inclusivity and unity within diversity-rich societies.

Indigenization policy in Nigeria's education system refers to policies that prioritize local residents, or "indigenes," for access to educational opportunities, scholarships, and employment within their native states or regions. This policy framework is based on the idea of promoting local representation and preserving cultural ties, which, in theory, can contribute to regional development and increase access to resources for traditionally marginalized ethnic groups (Ekundayo, 2017). Advocates of indigenization argue that it helps ensure that the benefits of education, particularly in higher institutions and public sector jobs, are distributed within local communities rather than disproportionately benefiting non-locals. This policy reflects Nigeria's broader political efforts to address historic imbalances in resource distribution across ethnic and regional lines (Nwangwu & Onwuemele, 2019).

However, the indigenization policy has been criticized for fostering division, exclusion, and unequal access to education, especially for "non-indigenes" or individuals who reside outside their ancestral communities. Critics argue that the policy often leads to discrimination against individuals based solely on their place of origin rather than merit or residency, limiting social cohesion and potentially reinforcing ethnic divides in the country (Ojo & Akintoye, 2021). The policy has broader implications for national unity, as it may limit students' sense of national identity and discourage cross-cultural interactions, which are crucial for developing a more unified leadership class (Adamu & Ahmad, 2020). Overall, while indigenization aims to protect local interests, its unintended consequences pose challenges to inclusive and equitable education in Nigeria.

National development is a multifaceted concept encompassing economic growth, social progress, and improved quality of life for citizens. It involves efforts to enhance infrastructure, health, education, and governance, all aimed at creating a stable and prosperous society (Todaro & Smith, 2015). National development goes beyond economic indicators to include social equity and political stability, as these elements foster an environment in which individuals can achieve their potential. According to Sen (1999), development is deeply connected to the expansion of individuals' capabilities and freedoms, emphasizing the importance of education, healthcare, and political rights as essential components of national progress.

In developing nations like Nigeria, national development is often challenged by socio-political issues such as ethnic divisions, inadequate infrastructure, and economic inequality. Effective national development strategies require inclusive policies that address these disparities and foster unity among diverse groups (Ake, 2001). Scholars argue that fostering good governance, reducing poverty, and ensuring equitable access to resources are critical to sustainable national development (Todaro & Smith, 2015; Lewis, 2007). By investing in human capital, promoting social inclusivity, and strengthening institutions, countries can create conditions conducive to both economic growth and improved social welfare, ultimately achieving holistic national development.

Identity and Citizenship Crisis in Nigeria

The concepts of identity and citizenship crisis have garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in multi-ethnic and post-colonial contexts. In many societies, including Nigeria, identity-based conflicts often arise from discrepancies between ethnic affiliations and formal state citizenship, where individuals' sense of belonging conflicts with the state's definition of citizenship rights (Okpanachi, 2010). Studies suggest that colonial legacies, which frequently enforced arbitrary boundaries, have contributed to these crises by lumping together diverse ethnic groups without regard for their historical or cultural affiliations (Akinola, 2020). As a result, identity crises often manifest as a struggle between ethnic and national allegiances, creating tension over the allocation of resources, rights, and representation in government institutions.

Scholars have also highlighted how modern state policies contribute to exacerbating identity and citizenship crises. For instance, indigenization policies that privilege "indigenes" over "non-indigenes" have been shown to marginalize ethnic minorities or internal migrants within their own countries, leading to contested citizenship (Agbibo, 2013). In Nigeria, the categorization of citizens as indigenes or non-indigenes has contributed to a sense of exclusion among those labeled as non-indigenes, undermining national unity and social cohesion (Edewor et al., 2014). This system of preferential treatment based on ethnic or regional identity results in restricted access to education, employment, and political representation for non-indigenes, deepening divisions and fostering a crisis of belonging.

The citizenship and identity crisis has far-reaching implications for governance and democracy. Research indicates that when citizens feel disconnected from the state, often seeing it as favoring specific groups, they are less likely to engage constructively with state institutions and more likely to resort to alternative forms of social organization, including ethnically-based political or militia groups (Mustapha, 2006). This situation weakens the state's capacity for effective governance and limits the potential for equitable development. Addressing the identity and citizenship crisis thus requires inclusive policies that recognize and accommodate diversity, as well as reforms aimed at fostering a sense of shared national identity while respecting ethnic pluralism (Okpanachi, 2010). Such approaches are essential for promoting stable and inclusive societies that prioritize citizenship over ethnic or regional affiliations.

Nigerian leaders have attempted various strategies to foster national unity and balance power among ethnic groups. The government has expanded from the initial three regions to 36 states, hoping to create smaller administrative units and reduce ethnic tensions (Suberu, 2001). Additionally, the Federal Character Principle was introduced to ensure equitable representation in federal institutions, aiming to prevent any group from dominating the central government (Mustapha, 2006). Although these policies have reduced some regional tensions, they have also inadvertently institutionalized ethnicity as a basis for political organization.

Economic factors have also played a critical role in Nigeria's nation-building challenges. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta shifted Nigeria's economic base, creating wealth but also exacerbating regional inequalities. The concentration of oil wealth has fueled conflict in the Delta, where local groups seek a greater share of the oil revenues and compensation for environmental degradation. These economic disparities, combined with the lack of development in some northern regions, contribute to ongoing conflicts and hinder the sense of national unity (Oluwole & Ogunmodede, 2021).

Religious divisions further complicate Nigeria's nation-building efforts. The country is roughly split between a predominantly Muslim North and a largely Christian South, with ongoing tensions in the Middle Belt. These differences are not just religious but also cultural and political, as many issues become polarized along religious lines (Suberu, 2001). This division has fueled ethno-religious violence, such as the Boko Haram insurgency, which challenges both the security and unity of Nigeria.

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Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from a sample of 200 students across State owns' institutions in Kwara and Jigawa States. This allow for a picture of the current perceptions and experiences of students regarding the non-indigene policy in the Nigerian educational system. The target population for the study are students who were schooling in higher institutions outside their state of origin.

The study was carried out in Jigawa State Polytechnic, and College of Education Ilorin. The study also adopted availability sampling techniques to select respondents for data collection. This method is found suitable since the criteria for selecting target population is to be indigen of all Nigerian states apart from the state where school is located. Therefore, the respondents who are available and accessible during the study will be involved. In lline with this, 100 respondents were selected from each of institution. This gives a total of sample size of 200.

Section A: Socio-Economic Characteristics Gender

Table 1: Gender and Age Distribution of Respondents

Sex	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	143	71.5
Female	57	28.5

Total	200	100
Age		
Under 18	34	17
18- 24	60	30
25 -34	73	36.5
35 and above	33	16.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

The survey sample predominantly comprises male respondents (78%) compared to female respondents (22%). Age: The age distribution shows that 56% of respondents fall within the 20-40 age range, 24% are between 41-60, and 20% are 61 years and above. Marital Status: Most respondents are married (64%), followed by singles (24%) and widowed/divorced individuals (12%). Educational Status: The majority of respondents have non-formal education (82%), while a smaller percentage have SSCE/Trade Test (12%) or NCE/ND/OND qualifications (6%). Socio-Cultural Context. The demographic profile of the respondents reflects traditional societal structures where men hold significant decision-making power within households and communities. The low educational attainment, especially with a high percentage having non-formal education, may indicate limited media literacy and critical thinking skills among the respondents.

Table 2: How familiar are you with the indigene and non-indigene policy in Nigeria's educational system?

Option	Respondents	Percentage
Very familiar	133	66.5
Somewhat familiar	58	29
Not familiar at all	9	4.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 2 above shows that out of 200 respondents in the option on familiarity with indigene and non-indigene policy in Nigeria's educational system, 66.5% of the respondents were very familiar with the policy, 29% of the respondents were somewhat familiar, while 4.5% of the respondents not familiar at all.

Table 3: To your knowledge, does the indigene policy affect students' access to educational resources in your institution?

Option	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	28	14
No	158	79
Not sure	14	7
Total	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 3 shows that out of 200 respondents, 79 % of the respondents are of opinion that in the option on familiarity with indigene and non-indigene policy in Nigeria's educational system, 66.5% of the respondents were very familiar with the policy, 29% of the respondents were somewhat familiar, while 4.5% of the respondents not familiar at all. This implies that the policy did not affect students' access to educational resources in their various institutions.

Table 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Options	Strongly Agree (percentage)	Agree (percentage)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (percentage)	Disagree (percentage)	Strongly Disagree (percentage)	Total number	Total percentage
The indigene policy provides equal opportunities for all Nigerian students.	34 (17)	23(11.5)	0 (0)	58 (29)	85 (42.5)	200	100
The indigene policy encourages regional bias in educational opportunities.	72(36)	64(32)	6 (3)	30(15)	28(14)	200	100
Non-indigenes are often excluded from scholarships and other benefits available to indigenes.	98(49)	65(32.5)	0 (0)	10 (5)	27 (13.5)	200	100
The policy promotes unity and inclusion within the educational system.	0(0)	76(38)	99(49.5)	5 (2.5)	20 (10)	200	100
I feel a sense of belonging in my current educational institution regardless of my indigene status.	88 (44)	68(34)	11(5.5)	13(6.5)	10(5)	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 4 shows that 42.5% of the respondents strongly disagree that the indigene policy provides equal opportunities for all Nigerian students. 29% of the respondents disagree with the statement. 11.5% agree while 17% strongly agree that the indigene policy provides equal opportunities for all Nigerian students while none of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement. This means that the indigene policy did not provide equal opportunities for all Nigerians students

The policy according to the finding also encourages regional bias in educational opportunities. 36% of the respondents strongly agree that the policy encourage regional bias in educational opportunities while 32 agree with the statement. 3% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement while 15% and 14% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed that the indigene policy encourages regional bias in educational opportunities

The study further reveals that 49% of the respondents strongly agree that non-indigenes are often excluded from scholarships and other benefits available to indigenes. 32.5% of the respondents also agree with the statement while 13.5% strongly disagree and 5% disagree with the statement. This implies that majority of the respondents believes that the policy often led to exclusion non-indigene from scholarships and other benefits available to indigenes.

The result of analysis reveals that 49.5% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree that the policy promotes unity and inclusion within the educational system. 38% of the respondents agree with the statement while 10% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. 2.5% of the respondents disagree that the policy promotes unity and inclusion within the educational system while none of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. This implies that majority of the respondents did not see the policy as instrument of promoting unity and inclusion within the educational system.

The result of analysis reveals that 44% of the respondents strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging in their current educational institution regardless of their indigene status, 34% of the respondents agree with the statement. 5.5% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement while 6.5% and 5% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree. This implies that majority of the respondents, despite the implementation of the policy, have sense of belonging in their educational institutions.

Table 5: How likely do you think the indigene policy affects students' leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity?

Options	Respondents	Percentage
Very likely	116	58
Likely	53	26.5
Unlikely	24	12
Not Sure	7	3.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 5 shows that out of 200 respondents, 58 % of the respondents are of opinion that in the indigene policy are very likely to affects students' leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity, 26.5% of the respondents were of opinion that that indigene policy is likely to affects leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity. 12% of the respondents are of opinion that indigene policy is unlikely to affects leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity while 3.5% of the respondents were not sure. This implies that majority of the respondents are opinion that indigene policy affects students' leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity.

Table 6: In your opinion, how does the indigene policy influence students' perceptions of their role as future leaders in Nigeria?

Options	Respondents	Percentage
Positively	15	7.5
Negatively	175	87.5
No significant	9	4.5
Not Sure	1	0.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 6 shows that out of 200 respondents, 87.5 % of the respondents are of opinion that in the indigene policy is negatively influence students' perceptions of their role as future leaders in Nigeria, 7.5% of the respondents were of opinion that that the indigene policy has positively influence students' perceptions of their role as future leaders in the country. 4.5% of the respondents are of opinion that the indigene policy has no significant influence Students' perceptions of their role as future leaders while 0.5% of the respondents is not sure of the influence. This implies that majority of the respondents hold the opinion that the indigene policy has negatively influence students' perceptions of their role as future leaders in Nigeria.

Table 7: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Options	Strongly Agree (percentage)	Agree (percentage)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (percentage)	Disagree (percentage)	Strongly Disagree (percentage)	Total number	Total percentage
The indigene policy affects students' views on fairness and equality in leadership.	76(38)	88(44)	11(5.5)	15(7.5)	10(5)	200	100
Future leaders shaped by this policy may prioritize their regional interests over national interests.	90(45)	88(44)	0 (0)	10(5)	12(6)	200	100
The indigene policy hinders the development of a unified national identity among students.	80(40)	75(37.5)	5 (2.5)	25(12.5)	15 (7.5)	200	100
The policy promotes diverse leadership by ensuring local representation.	5 (2.5)	15(7.5)	98(49)	4 (2)	78(39)	200	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 7 reveals that 38% of the respondents strongly agree that the indigene policy affects students' views on fairness and equality in leadership. 44% of the respondents equally agree with the statement while 5.5% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement. 7.5% and 5% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. This implies that majority of the respondents are of opinion that the indigene policy affects students' views on fairness and equality in leadership.

45% of the respondents strongly agree that the future leaders shaped by this policy may prioritize their regional interests over national interests. 44% of the respondents agree with the statement while 5% disagree and 6% of the respondents strongly disagree that the future leaders shaped by this policy may prioritize their regional interests over national interests. This implies that majority of respondents agreed that the future leaders shaped by this policy may prioritize their regional interests over national interests.

On unification, the result of analysis reveals that 40% of the respondents strongly agree that the indigene policy hinders the development of a unified national identity among students while 37.5% agree with the statement. 2.5% of the respondents were neither agree nor disagree with the statement. 12.5% of respondents disagree and 7.5% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This implies that the indigene policy hinders the development of a unified national identity among students

On issue of promotion of diverse leadership by ensuring local representation, 49% of the respondents are neither agree nor disagree with the statement that the policy promotes diverse leadership by ensuring local representation. 39% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement while 2% disagree. 2.5% of the respondents and 7.5% of respondents strongly agree and agree with the statement. This implies that majority of the respondent did not agree that promotes diverse leadership by ensuring local representation.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis indicates that there is a high level of familiarity among Nigerian students regarding the indigene and non-indigene policy in Nigeria's educational system, with 66.5% being very familiar and 29% somewhat familiar. This familiarity may reflect students' awareness of the systemic divides and entitlements shaped by indigene status, which are well-documented in research on Nigeria's educational policies. According to Ejeke (2021), such policies have been instrumental in shaping students' perceptions and access to educational opportunities based on regional or ethnic affiliations, often leading to heightened awareness among students about how these policies impact their academic and career prospects. The data suggests that students are keenly aware of the indigene policy's implications, even if they may not fully agree with or endorse its practices.

When examining the perceived impact of the indigene policy on equality in educational access, the study found that a significant portion of respondents (71.5%) believe the policy does not provide equal opportunities for all students, with only 28.5% expressing some level of agreement that it does. This aligns with studies by scholars like Ibrahim and Erhun (2018), who argue that indigene policies often marginalize non-indigene students, limiting their educational prospects and undermining the principle of equal opportunity. Such policies may unintentionally reinforce educational disparities across regions, as students from non-indigene backgrounds are sometimes restricted from accessing certain resources, thus creating a system where regional biases permeate educational opportunities.

The analysis further reveals that a majority of respondents (68%) agree that the indigene policy promotes regional bias in educational opportunities, indicating that students perceive the policy as a contributor to regional favoritism rather than as an inclusive framework. This finding echoes the work of Afolabi (2020), who highlights how indigeneity in Nigerian educational policy often

favors local students, leading to the exclusion of students from other regions from scholarships, housing, and other benefits. Such biases create significant regional divides within educational institutions, potentially fostering divisions among students rather than a sense of national unity and inclusion, which is counterproductive to the goals of a unified national educational system.

Lastly, while the policy may create barriers, it is noteworthy that the analysis shows a majority of students still feel a sense of belonging in their educational institutions despite the indigene policy, with 44% strongly agreeing and 34% agreeing with this sentiment. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that students can still develop a strong sense of identity and community within their educational environment, even when external policies may not be inclusive. Scholars like Onyemachi (2021) argue that students often form support systems and social networks that mitigate the effects of exclusionary policies. This sense of belonging could indicate resilience among students, who may find ways to thrive and build community despite policies that favor regional identities.

The analysis suggests that the majority of respondents (84.5%) believe that Nigeria's indigene policy has a considerable impact on students' leadership aspirations and attitudes toward national unity, with 58% perceiving it as "very likely" to affect these aspects. This aligns with research indicating that identity-based policies can influence students' ambitions and perspectives on leadership by fostering an "us versus them" mentality within educational contexts (Afolabi, 2020). They argue that such policies can lead to a more fragmented view of leadership, where students may feel that their ambitions are limited by policies favoring individuals based on regional or ethnic identity, affecting their willingness to pursue leadership roles intended to serve all Nigerians equally.

A significant portion of respondents (87.5%) perceive the indigene policy as negatively impacting their views on their future roles as national leaders. This finding supports the argument by Adeoye and Ibrahim (2019) that policies based on indigeneity may limit students' broader civic ambitions, as they feel that the system implicitly devalues inclusivity in leadership. With such policies, students may develop a perception of leadership as a role primarily for people within their local or ethnic groups rather than as a role of national significance. This perspective can potentially hinder the development of leaders with a broad sense of responsibility for national unity, fostering instead a focus on local or regional concerns.

Moreover, the analysis reveals that a strong majority (82%) of respondents agree that the indigene policy affects students' views on fairness and equality in leadership, with 38% strongly agreeing. Studies have shown that policies perceived as exclusionary can shape students' beliefs about the fairness of the systems they live in (Obinna & Chika, 2018). Such perceptions of unfairness may lead students to feel marginalized or to view leadership as an exclusive right rather than a collective responsibility. These findings underscore the long-term implications of

such policies on attitudes toward equality in leadership, as students carry these perspectives into their adult lives and potentially into future leadership roles.

Finally, the data shows that a majority (89%) believe that the indigene policy could lead future leaders to prioritize regional over national interests, which raises concerns about the policy's influence on students' national identity. According to Ejeke (2021), such policies may lead to the fragmentation of national identity, as students associate leadership with regional or ethnic loyalties. Furthermore, the finding that 49% neither agree nor disagree with the idea that the policy promotes diverse leadership by ensuring local representation suggests that the indigene policy may not effectively foster the inclusive leadership it intends to create. Instead, the policy may contribute to a leadership model that reinforces regional divisions, potentially hindering the development of a unified and inclusive national identity in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that Nigeria's indigene policy significantly influences students' leadership aspirations, perceptions of fairness in leadership, and attitudes toward national unity. The majority of respondents believe the policy limits leadership roles to those with local or ethnic or regional affiliations, fostering a sense of exclusivity that undermines students' confidence in their ability to contribute to national leadership. This perception likely affects students' ambitions and discourages them from embracing roles that promote inclusive and representative leadership. Additionally, the policy appears to cultivate views of leadership as regionally biased rather than a collective, nationally oriented responsibility, which could impact future governance.

Furthermore, the indigene policy may inadvertently prioritize regional interests over a unified national identity among students, as many respondents believe it hinders the development of a cohesive national outlook. While the policy aims to ensure local representation, it may be creating division rather than fostering unity. These findings suggest that reforms are needed to promote both inclusivity and unity within Nigeria's educational system. Policymakers should consider adjusting the indigene policy to create an environment that encourages leadership roles accessible to all

Recommendation

The papers, thus, recommends amendment of the indigene policy to allow non-indigene students equal access to leadership opportunities, scholarships, and other resources. This reform would promote inclusivity, and ensure students from different parts of the country prioritize national interests over state or ethnic identity in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country irrespective of their state of origin.

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