



Revisiting the Framework of Higher Education: A Case Study of Universities in South–South Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on revisiting the framework of higher education in Universities in South–South Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three hypotheses guided the study. The population comprised undergraduate students drawn from selected universities in South–South Nigeria, while a sample size of 250 students was used for the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Higher Education Framework Assessment Questionnaire (HEFAQ) consisting of 25 items measured on a 4-point rating scale of Very High, High, Low, and Very Low. The instrument was validated by three experts comprising two lecturers in Social Science Education and one lecturer in Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Delta, Agbor. Reliability was established using the test–retest method with 20 undergraduate students of Anambra State University, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Data were analysed using simple regression analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that curriculum reform significantly predicts students' academic performance, learning resources significantly predict students' learning effectiveness, and institutional policies significantly predict students' skill development in universities in South–South Nigeria. The study concluded that effective curriculum reform, adequate learning resources, and supportive institutional policies are essential for improving academic performance, enhancing learning effectiveness, and promoting skill development among university students.

Keywords: Curriculum reform, learning resources, institutional policies, academic performance, higher education framework.

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Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in national development, innovation, and the production of skilled manpower required for economic and social transformation. Universities, in particular, are expected to provide students with advanced knowledge, professional competencies, and critical thinking skills necessary for addressing complex societal challenges. Globally, higher education institutions are regarded as centres for knowledge generation, research advancement, and professional training that contribute significantly to socio-economic growth. In the Nigerian context, higher education has been recognized as a strategic instrument for promoting human capital development, technological innovation, and sustainable national progress. Universities are therefore expected to produce graduates who possess the intellectual capacity and practical skills needed to function effectively in a rapidly changing global environment. The concept of a higher education framework refers to the structural, institutional, and policy arrangements that guide the organization and delivery of teaching, learning, and research within universities. It encompasses curriculum structures, learning resources, institutional policies, governance systems, and other mechanisms that shape the educational environment. According to (Ayed Alshammari, 2025); (Amaral, 2022) the higher education framework consists of institutional structures and academic systems that regulate university functions and influence educational outcomes. Similarly, (Guo & Wang, 2025; (Harvey, 2024) explained that this framework represents the interconnected institutional components, policies, and resources that determine teaching effectiveness and support students' learning experiences. These perspectives suggest that an effective higher education framework is essential for achieving quality learning outcomes and meeting contemporary economic demands.

In Nigeria, the effectiveness of the higher education framework has attracted increasing attention due to concerns regarding declining academic standards, graduate unemployment, and a perceived mismatch between university training and labour market demands. Many scholars argue that structural components of Nigerian universities require urgent reforms to enhance the quality and relevance of education. Consequently, educational policies have increasingly focused on revisiting key institutional dimensions, notably curriculum structure, the availability of learning resources, and institutional policy guidelines. As a core element of this framework, curriculum reform represents the systematic process of reviewing, restructuring, and updating educational programmes to ensure they remain relevant to contemporary needs. According to (Suryana et al., 2026); (Saayir et al., 2026), curriculum reform is a strategic effort to modernize educational programmes by integrating new knowledge, skills, and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, (Dias-Oliveira et al., 2024; Daher-Armache et al., 2025) emphasized that continuous curriculum restructuring enhances students' critical thinking, academic achievement, and professional competence, ensuring that graduates acquire competencies suited for modern knowledge-driven economies.

Another crucial element is learning resources, which facilitate effective teaching and learning through instructional materials, technological tools, libraries, laboratories, and digital platforms. Adequate resources provide students with opportunities to explore knowledge and develop practical competencies. Arumuru and David (2024), alongside Yusuf and Song (2024), highlighted that digital and physical educational tools significantly enhance student engagement and academic achievement. In addition, empirical evidence from Edokpolor and Dumbiri (2019)

as well as Adams et al. (2025) confirms that the adequacy and utilization of learning resources strongly predict teaching-learning effectiveness and prevent hindrances in students' academic performance. Beyond curriculum and resources, institutional policies regulate the administrative and academic operations of universities, guiding decision-making on academic standards, resource allocation, and student development. (Ashraf et al., 2025); (Cui et al., 2024) noted that institutional policies serve as formal regulatory frameworks that shape academic practices and institutional governance. Moreover, (Riahi et al., 2025); (Aldhafeeri & Alotaibi, 2022) explained that these policies provide the operational structure necessary for supporting teaching innovations and digital integration. These policies also play a vital role in promoting entrepreneurial competencies, problem-solving abilities, and experiential learning required for the modern labour market (Oise, Ejenarhome Otega Prospera, et al., 2025); (Oise, Oyedotun Samuel Abiodun, et al., 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies, universities in South-South Nigeria continue to face persistent structural and institutional challenges. These challenges include inadequate instructional facilities, limited access to modern learning technologies, outdated curriculum structures, and inconsistent policy implementation. Such constraints severely limit the ability of universities to provide students with the practical experiences and academic support necessary for optimal skill acquisition and academic success, highlighting a major disconnect between institutional ideals and practical realities (Udoinyang et al., 2026); (Dickson, 2024). While numerous studies have explored general aspects of higher education in Nigeria, a significant gap remains in the literature (Panakaje et al., 2024); (Fontalvo et al., 2025). Most previous research tends to evaluate these institutional factors in isolation, failing to comprehensively analyze how curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies collectively predict multi-dimensional student outcomes—namely academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development—within the specific socio-educational context of South-South Nigeria (Didi Syahrir et al., 2023); (Oise, Ejenarhome Otega Prosper, et al., 2025).

To address this empirical gap, the present study introduces a distinct novelty by simultaneously examining the predictive capacity of these three core framework components (curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies) on specific student outcomes (academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development) using an integrated model tailored to universities in South-South Nigeria. By doing so, this research provides holistic empirical evidence that can guide targeted institutional interventions and evidence-based higher education policymaking in the region. Driven by these imperatives, this study aims to revisit the framework of higher education in Nigerian universities. Specifically, the research objectives are: To determine the extent to which curriculum reform predicts students' academic performance in universities in South-South Nigeria; To examine the extent to which learning resources predict students' learning effectiveness among university students in South-South Nigeria; To determine the extent to which institutional policies predict students' skill development in universities in South-South Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain data from respondents and examine the predictive influence of curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies on students' academic outcomes in universities without manipulating any variable. The design also allowed the researcher to describe the relationships among the variables under investigation within the natural educational setting. The population of the study comprised undergraduate students drawn from selected universities in South-South Nigeria. From this population, a sample size of

250 undergraduate students was selected to participate in the study. The sample size was considered adequate to represent the population and provide reliable data for examining the predictive relationships among the variables under investigation. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Higher Education Framework Assessment Questionnaire (HEFAQ). The instrument consisted of 25 items designed to measure curriculum reform, learning resources, institutional policies, students' academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development in universities in South–South Nigeria. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point rating scale used to measure the extent to which each variable influences students' outcome. The response options were Very High (VH), High (H), Low (L), and Very Low (VL), weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The items were designed to elicit respondents' perceptions regarding the extent to which curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies influence students' academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by three experts. These included two lecturers in Social Science Education and one lecturer in Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria. Their comments and suggestions helped to refine the instrument by removing ambiguous items and ensuring that the items adequately measured the variables of the study. The corrections provided by the experts were incorporated into the final version of the instrument before it was administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test–retest method. The questionnaire containing the 25 items was administered to 20 undergraduate students of Anambra State University who were not part of the main study. After an interval of two weeks, the same instrument was re-administered to the same group of students. The scores obtained from the two administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the instrument possessed a high level of stability and was therefore considered reliable for the study.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of three trained research assistants who helped in administering and retrieving the questionnaires from the respondents. Permission was obtained from the relevant authorities in the selected universities before administering the instrument. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that the information provided would be treated with strict confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were not required to provide personal identifiers.

Results

The data collected were analysed using simple regression analysis to test the hypotheses and determine the predictive influence of curriculum reform, learning resources, and institutional policies on students' academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. This analytical procedure enabled the researcher to determine the extent to which the independent variables predicted the dependent variables in universities in South–South Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: Curriculum reform does not significantly predict students' academic performance in universities in South–South Nigeria.

Table 1. Regression analysis of curriculum reform and students' academic performance in Universities in South-Nigeria (n = 250)

coefficients					
R	R square	Adjusted r square	Std. Error of the estimate		
0.396	0.157	0.154	2.247		
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	238.416	1	238.416	47.232	0.000
Residual	1252.584	248	5.050		
Total	1491.000	249			
Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized coefficients (beta)	Std. Error	Standardized coefficients (beta)	t	Sig
(Constant)	19.364	1.082		17.887	0.000
Curriculum Reform	0.487	0.071	0.396	6.872	0.000

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1 presents the regression analysis of curriculum reform and students' academic performance in universities in South-South Nigeria. The result shows an F-value of 47.232 with a p-value of 0.000. Testing the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that curriculum reform does not significantly predict students' academic performance among universities in South-South Nigeria is rejected. This result implies that curriculum reform significantly predicts academic performance among university students in South-South Nigeria. The R-square value of 0.157 indicates that 15.7% of the variance in students' academic performance is explained by curriculum reform, while the remaining 84.3% may be attributed to other variables not included in the model. Furthermore, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for curriculum reform is 0.487, indicating that a unit increase in curriculum reform would lead to a 0.487 increase in students' academic performance. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.396 with $t = 6.872$ indicates a moderate positive predictive influence. Therefore, curriculum reform significantly predicts students' academic performance in universities in South-South Nigeria at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2

Learning resources do not significantly predict students' learning effectiveness in universities in universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of Learning Resources and Students' Learning Effectiveness universities in South-South Nigeria (n = 250)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
0.334	0.112	0.108	2.286		
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig

R		R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
Regression	168.740	1	8.740	16	32.292	0.00
Residual	1296.660	248	229	5.		
Total	1465.400	249				
Coefficients						
Model	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.	
(Constant)	20.518	1.163		17.640	0.000	
Learning Resources	0.428	0.075	0.334	5.683	0.000	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 presents the regression analysis of learning resources and students' learning effectiveness universities in South–South Nigeria. The result shows an F-value of 32.292 with a p-value of 0.000. Testing the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that learning resources do not significantly predict students' learning effectiveness universities in South–South Nigeria is rejected. This finding implies that learning resources significantly predict students' learning effectiveness universities in South–South Nigeria. The R-square value of 0.112 indicates that 11.2% of the variance in students' learning effectiveness is explained by learning resources, while the remaining 88.8% may be attributed to other variables not included in the model. Furthermore, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for learning resources is 0.428, indicating that a unit increase in learning resources would lead to a 0.428 increase in students' learning effectiveness. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.334 with $t = 5.683$ indicates a moderate positive predictive influence. Therefore, learning resources significantly predict students' learning effectiveness universities in South–South Nigeria at the 0.05 level of significance

Hypothesis 3

Institutional policies do not significantly predict students' skill development universities in South–South Nigeria.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Institutional Policies and Students' Skill Development universities in South–South Nigeria (n = 250)

Universities in South-South Nigeria (n = 200)											
R		R Square		Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate					
0.412		0.170		0.167		2.214					
Model		Sum of Squares		Df		Mean Square		F		Sig.	

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
Regression	274.560	1	74.560	55.842	0.000
Residual	1219.440	248	.917		
Total	1494.000	249			
Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig
(Constant)	17.126	1.094		15.654	0.000
Institutional Policies	0.514	0.069	0.412	7.472	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 presents the regression analysis of institutional policies and students' skill development universities in South–South Nigeria. The result shows an F-value of 55.842 and a p-value of 0.000. Testing the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that institutional policies do not significantly predict students' skill development among tertiary institution students in South–South Nigeria is rejected. This finding implies that institutional policies significantly predict students' skill development universities in South–South Nigeria. The R-square value of 0.170 indicates that 17.0% of the variance in students' skill development is explained by institutional policies, while the remaining 83.0% may be attributed to other variables not included in the model. Furthermore, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for institutional policies is 0.514, indicating that a unit increase in institutional policies would lead to a 0.514 increase in students' skill development. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.412 with $t = 7.472$ indicates a moderate positive predictive influence. Therefore, institutional policies significantly predict students' skill development universities in South–South Nigeria at the 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that curriculum reform significantly predicts students' academic performance in universities in South–South Nigeria. The regression result indicated that curriculum reform had a moderate positive predictive influence on academic performance, suggesting that improvements or modifications in the curriculum contribute meaningfully to students' academic outcomes (Edvoll et al., 2026); (C.-H. Chen & Yang, 2019). This implies that when university curricula are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect contemporary knowledge, skills, and societal needs, students tend to achieve better academic results. This finding is consistent with the study of (Wilson et al., 2025); (Jeilani & Abubakar, 2025) who reported that

effective curriculum reforms and improved instructional practices significantly enhance students' academic achievement in Basic Science. Their study emphasized that curriculum improvement plays a critical role in strengthening learning outcomes and academic success. Similarly, (Ventista & Brown, 2023); (Goode et al., 2026), observed that curriculum development and reform in higher education institutions significantly influence students' learning experiences and academic performance. According to the authors, curriculum structures that incorporate modern learning approaches and relevant content improve students' competence and overall academic achievement (Herlinawati et al., 2024); (Dolmaci & Acar, 2025).

The study also revealed that learning resources significantly predict students' learning effectiveness in universities in South–South Nigeria. The regression analysis showed that the availability and utilization of learning resources had a positive influence on students' learning effectiveness. This indicates that adequate learning materials such as textbooks, digital resources, laboratories, and technological tools enhance students' understanding of course content and improve learning outcomes (Zou et al., 2025); (Chaves-Yuste & de-la-Peña, 2026). The result supports the findings of (Mukul & Büyüközkan, 2023); (Başgül & Coştu, 2025), who reported that the availability of adequate learning resources is a crucial factor influencing student learning outcomes and educational effectiveness. The authors emphasized that well-equipped learning environments enable students to engage more effectively in the learning process. In the same vein, (Eze et al., 2020); (Bali et al., 2024) found that the use of electronic learning infrastructures and digital resources significantly improves students' learning effectiveness in Nigerian universities. Their study indicated that the increased availability of technological learning tools promotes deeper engagement and better academic understanding among students.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that institutional policies significantly predict students' skill development in universities in South–South Nigeria (Falola et al., 2020). The result indicates that supportive institutional regulations, academic guidelines, and administrative frameworks play an important role in fostering students' acquisition of practical and professional skills. This suggests that when universities implement effective policies that support innovation, student engagement, and practical learning opportunities, students develop stronger competencies required for the modern workforce. This finding agrees with the study of (Scott et al., 2023); (Jiang et al., 2025); who reported that institutional strategies and policies significantly influence the development of students' digital competence and professional skills in higher education. The authors emphasized that well-structured institutional frameworks provide the necessary support for students' skill acquisition. Similarly, (Alyahyan & Düşteğör, 2020); (Du Plooy et al., 2024) found that institutional policies and faculty practices significantly predict students' learning behaviours and skill development in higher education institutions. Their study concluded that institutional environments that encourage supportive academic policies and effective faculty engagement contribute positively to students' competence development and learning outcomes (F.-Z. Chen et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The study revealed that curriculum reform significantly predicts students' academic performance in universities in South–South Nigeria. The findings indicate that continuous review and improvement of university curricula enhance students' academic outcomes by ensuring that course contents remain relevant to contemporary knowledge and societal needs. The study also established that learning resources significantly influence students' learning effectiveness. Adequate provision and effective utilization of instructional materials, digital technologies, and other learning facilities improve students' engagement and understanding of course content. Furthermore, the findings showed that institutional policies significantly predict students' skill

development. Supportive academic regulations and institutional frameworks create opportunities for students to acquire practical and professional competencies needed for academic and career success. Finally, the study highlights that strengthening curriculum reform, improving learning resources, and implementing supportive institutional policies are essential for enhancing academic performance, learning effectiveness, and skill development among university students in South–South Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made: Universities should regularly review and update their curricula to ensure that course contents remain relevant to current knowledge, societal needs, and labour market demands; University management should provide adequate learning resources such as modern libraries, digital technologies, and instructional facilities to improve students' learning effectiveness; Institutional policies should be strengthened to support students' skill development through practical learning experiences, research activities, and innovation-driven education; Government and educational regulatory bodies should provide adequate funding and policy support to universities to facilitate curriculum reform and the provision of modern learning resources.

Conflicts of interest

There were no conflicts of interest

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Author Contributions

E.R.N: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Data curation, Writing-original draft preparation. Visualization, Investigation, Supervision, Software, Validation, Writing-reviewing, and editing.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

The author acknowledges the use of generative artificial intelligence technologies in drafting parts of this article. Specifically, Google translate was employed to assist with text polishing and stylistic enhancement. No AI tools were used for generating core scientific data, formulating research hypotheses, or conducting data analysis. The author has verified all outputs and takes full accountability for the published work.

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