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Research Article

A Comparative Study of Education Recovery Policies in Indonesia and Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe disruptions to education systems globally, especially in developing countries. This study compares education recovery policies in Indonesia and Nigeria, focusing on approaches to addressing learning loss among disadvantaged students. Using secondary data analysis and thematic content analysis, the study examined policy documents, reports, and academic literature from 2020 to 2023. The results show that both countries recognize the importance of supporting disadvantaged students, but their strategies differ due to differences in government structures, education investment, and socio-political contexts. Indonesia adopts a centralized approach, emphasizing curriculum reform and school autonomy, as seen in the "Sekolah Penggerak" initiative, while Nigeria relies on community-based initiatives and support from NGOs, such as the Learning Recovery and Accelerated Education Plan. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive policies that prioritize inclusive education and leverage community resources to ensure effective learning recovery.

Keywords: Disadvantaged Students; Education Recovery; Indonesia; Learning Loss; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis but also has serious consequences for the education sector, especially in developing and emerging countries. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) report that more than 1.6 billion students across more than 190 countries experienced disruptions in their education due to school closures—an unprecedented number in modern history. Countries with weak education systems, underdeveloped digital infrastructure, or a lack of resources have been hit hardest.

Indonesia and Nigeria are two developing countries with large populations and transforming economies, but they face many internal challenges, such as regional inequality, teacher shortages, and limited capacity to implement online learning (Melka, 2025; Abubakar, Fatimah, et. al., 2023; Kabara, & Enriquez, 2022). In this context, post-pandemic education recovery policies play an extremely important role, especially in preventing school dropouts, reducing motivation to learn, and avoiding loss of basic knowledge.

The concept of "learning loss" is understood as the decline in educational attainment and learning skills due to prolonged disruptions in education (Zhdanov et al., 2022; Schuurman et al., 2023). This situation does not affect all students equally. Students from disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, rural students, students with disabilities, or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are often more severely affected. They lack access to remote learning conditions, receive less support

at home, and face a higher risk of dropping out after schools reopen (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022).

In Nigeria, a survey by Ogenyi (2022) found that students did not have access to any form of learning during school closures. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, although the government introduced the "Belajar dari Rumah" (Learning from Home) program, its effectiveness was limited due to digital inequality and limited internet access in remote areas (Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

Education recovery policies play a key role in reestablishing learning environments and ensuring educational equity after the pandemic. These policies typically focus on three main pillars: (1) implementing compensatory learning programs and supporting students who have fallen behind; (2) promoting mental health and psychological support for students; and (3) improving technological infrastructure and flexible teaching methods (Keough, 2021). However, policies are not just technical interventions but also reflect how countries prioritize target groups, use resources, and develop sustainable strategies. Therefore, comparing policies between countries with similar contexts (economic, social, and educational), such as Indonesia and Nigeria, will provide insights into the effectiveness of policies as well as lessons for other developing countries, including Vietnam.

In the post-COVID-19 context, when learning loss is emerging as one of the most serious challenges facing the global education system (Pek et al., 2024), this study aims to compare education recovery policies in two prominent developing countries: Indonesia and Nigeria. These two countries are not only large in population size and geographically diverse, representing Southeast Asia and West Africa respectively, but also share many similarities in terms of their level of development, decentralized education structures, and profound impacts of the pandemic (Ogwuche, 2024).

The study focused on access and support for disadvantaged students, who are often the most affected by prolonged educational disruptions. The main research question was: How do post-COVID-19 education recovery policies in Indonesia and Nigeria differ in addressing learning loss among disadvantaged students?

To answer this question, the study pursued four specific objectives: first, to systematize education recovery policies in Indonesia and Nigeria for the period 2020–2023; second, to analyze the similarities and differences in the approaches to disadvantaged student groups in the two countries; third, to assess the coverage, sustainability, and appropriateness of policies within each specific country context; and finally, to propose policy recommendations based on the above analysis that can be referenced by other developing countries.

The main contribution of this study lies in providing a systematic comparative analysis, based on rich secondary data, between two countries with very different geographical locations and socio-political contexts. At the same time, the study is expected to serve as a useful reference for policymakers, education experts, and international development organizations in designing comprehensive and targeted education recovery strategies for vulnerable students—the group most likely to be neglected in post-pandemic recovery efforts (Bartolic et al., 2022).

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a seismic event for the global education system. Beyond the numbers of students forced to leave school, a more serious issue is quietly unfolding learning loss. This concept is well established in international literature but continues to be expanded and clarified in the current context. According to Syabily

et al. (2024), learning loss is not merely "forgetting knowledge" but a deviation from the accumulation of knowledge, which can last for years or even a lifetime without appropriate interventions.

The impact of learning loss is unevenly distributed. Students who are already disadvantaged—those from poor households, living in remote areas, or with less educated parents—are more likely to fall behind. The World Bank (2022) estimates that the proportion of children in low-income countries who cannot read a simple text by age 10 has increased from 57% to 70% since the pandemic. This figure serves not only as a warning about learning outcomes but also as an indicator of deepening inequality.

In the face of widespread learning loss, identifying who needs support first is crucial. Recovery policies cannot be "one-size-fits-all." Instead, planners need to prioritize vulnerable students, but the definition of these groups and the approach to them can vary widely across different cultural and social contexts.

Cobian et al. (2024) emphasize that inclusive education is not just about bringing everyone into the classroom but about designing systems that accommodate diversity rather than forcing students to conform to a single norm. For Indonesia and Nigeria, two countries with deep ethnic, linguistic, and regional inequalities, this perspective is particularly important. Effective recovery policies are not only technically necessary but also sensitive to context. The theory of public policy analysis provides a suitable analytical framework for understanding how education recovery policies are designed and operated. According to Demir (2021), public policy is "whatever governments choose to do or not do," meaning that the absence of supportive policies is also a deliberate political choice.

In educational research, policy theory is often approached along three axes: (1) content analysis—what does the policy say, and who benefits? (2) process analysis—how is the policy formed, and who is involved in the process? (3) impact analysis—what results does the policy bring, and is it effective? Walt and Gilson (1994) proposed the "policy triangle" model, emphasizing that policy is not just a document but also the result of the interaction between context, actors, content, and process. When applying this model to the cases of Indonesia and Nigeria, many interesting aspects emerge, for example, the role of international organizations, pressure from civil society, and the influence of internal political contexts.

Since 2020, there has been extensive research, reporting, and policy analysis on post-pandemic education. However, much of this work has focused on school closures, the shift to online learning, and the broader implications for learning. Comparative studies of recovery policies, particularly in developing countries, remain limited, and many have been primarily descriptive.

A report by UNESCO (2023) analyzing the educational responses of more than 120 countries found that despite efforts to implement remote learning, disadvantaged students were largely left out. Only 20% of countries had specific strategies to support poor students, and less than 10% had formal remediation programs in place after schools reopened.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is recognized as one of the countries with many early recovery programs, but it also faces numerous obstacles in implementing them evenly across localities (Opabola et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Nigeria has a slower strategy but benefits from active participation by NGOs and community networks (Okoli & Iwuamadi, 2022).

It is worth noting that most current studies are limited to a single country or focus on "instant" responses rather than evaluating long-term recovery policy systems.

Comparative studies of policies between two countries with large populations, similar levels of development, but different geopolitics, such as Indonesia and Nigeria, remain few. This highlights the need for more comprehensive comparative analyses that not only describe individual country cases but also draw cross-contextual lessons to inform policymaking in diverse settings.

The comparison not only highlights differences in approaches and priorities for disadvantaged groups but also contributes to building a useful comparative database for education policy researchers in other developing countries. In the context of the global shift from "crisis response" to "sustainable reconstruction," it is increasingly important to draw lessons from countries with different implementation models.

3. Methods

This study applies thematic content analysis, a widely used technique in qualitative policy research, particularly effective when analyzing texts with deep argumentation and high political content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than simply counting keyword frequency, this method focuses on identifying patterns of meaning within the text, thereby clarifying implications, policy priorities, and how policymakers construct and present issues.

The analysis process was conducted in three main steps. First, during the initial coding phase, each policy document or report was carefully read to identify passages containing information related to policy objectives, beneficiaries, types of support (such as compensatory learning, psychological support, technology, finance, etc.), and implementation and monitoring methods. These passages were then coded according to initial themes, such as "targeting disadvantaged students," "policy coverage," and "implementation gaps." Coding not only aids in classifying information but also uncovers the underlying logical structure within each policy document.

The next step is theme development. The codes are organized into broad themes that follow the three-tiered model of policy analysis proposed in the study: (1) political commitment, (2) inclusiveness, and (3) implementation. Themes are identified not simply based on their frequency in the text, but rather on their role in the argument structure, the level of emphasis, and their position within the overall policy system. This approach enables the researcher to uncover not only what is explicitly stated but also what is implied in each policy.

Finally, the study conducted a cross-case thematic comparison. Each main theme was placed side by side between Indonesia and Nigeria to compare similarities and differences. The objectives of this step were to clarify (1) whether the policy orientations are compatible, (2) whether the approaches to vulnerable students differ, and (3) the level of feasibility and clarity in practical implementation. More importantly, the comparison process did not stop at the content of policy documents but also considered the specific economic, social, and administrative contexts of each country, in order to avoid abstraction and voluntarism in the analysis.

In summary, the use of comparative qualitative methods combined with thematic content analysis has enabled the study to delve into the internal logic of policies, rather than merely listing actions or program names. In the context of abundant secondary data that is scattered and unsynchronized, this approach allows for the systematic and critical restructuring of information. At the same time, it provides a solid foundation for further analysis in the results and discussion sections of the article.

To ensure the reliability and credibility of the data, the study prioritized official policy documents, reports from reputable international organizations, and peer-reviewed

academic sources. Data selection was based on relevance to the research focus and recency (2021–2024), minimizing the risk of outdated or biased information.

4. Results

4.1. Key policies of Indonesia and Nigeria after the pandemic

a. Indonesia

From the early stages of the pandemic, Indonesia implemented the "Belajar dari Rumah" (Learning from Home) program in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and National Broadcasting (TVRI) to broadcast televised lectures to students at all levels of education (Ghivarianto, 2020). This was a temporary, emergency solution that helped maintain learning connectivity under conditions of social distancing. However, the program lacked personalization and was significantly limited in remote areas due to the lack of television signals and technical infrastructure.

According to Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim, "Our priority was to ensure that students did not lose their connection to learning, despite the challenges posed by remote areas and limited technology." From 2021 onwards, the Indonesian government shifted to the "Kurikulum Darurat" policy, a shortened and flexible version of the official curriculum. In parallel, the Ministry of Education has encouraged schools to develop their own learning recovery plans tailored to local conditions. The familiar Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) financial support package has also been adjusted to include internet costs, distance learning devices, and teacher training in using technology.

In 2022 marks the launch of the "Sekolah Penggerak" initiative, which focuses on enhancing school leadership capacity, innovating teaching methods, and measuring students' learning progress in real time. This policy represents a shift from a short-term response to long-term reconstruction and systematization of the education recovery strategy.

b. Nigeria

In contrast to Indonesia, Nigeria initially struggled to implement remote learning due to its highly decentralized education system and uneven infrastructure across states. During 2020–2021, each state adopted different strategies, resulting in a fragmented recovery policy. The "School-on-Air" program, broadcasting lessons via radio and television, was implemented in some large states such as Lagos but was not widespread enough to cover all students in the country (Ossai, 2022).

According to a UNICEF representative, "Reaching the most marginalized children, including those displaced by conflict and street children, remains a significant challenge. Community engagement and local partnerships have proven essential in delivering education services to these groups." Since late 2021, the Nigerian federal government, together with UNICEF and development partners, has launched the Education in Emergency Working Group (EiEWG). This initiative includes the development of remote learning materials, the organization of centralized remedial classes, and training teachers on psychosocial support. In addition, the government has issued a recovery policy called the "Learning Recovery and Accelerated Education Plan," which targets specific vulnerable groups of students such as street children, home-dwelling children, and students who have suffered prolonged disruptions to their education.

4.2. Similarities and differences in policy

Both Indonesia and Nigeria have acknowledged that vulnerable students are a priority group in post-pandemic recovery policies. However, the ways in which these groups are identified and reached differ significantly between the two countries.

Indonesia's policies focus primarily on students in remote and poor areas. Official documents often use the term *anak dari keluarga kurang mampu* (children from low-income families) as an indicator of priority groups. However, policies rarely explicitly mention children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, or children with special educational needs, a gap noted in recent studies on indigenous children and inclusive education in Indonesia (Azzasyofia, Fouché, & Beddoe, 2024).

In contrast, Nigeria has developed a more nuanced and explicit framework for identifying priority groups. National and state policies frequently refer to groups such as street children, homebound children, girls, children affected by armed conflict, and students with disabilities (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2023). This reflects the complex social context of Nigeria, where education has been disrupted not only by the pandemic but also by violence, conflict, and internal displacement.

4.3. Form of intervention

Indonesia has implemented a variety of interventions to restore learning, including structured remedial learning in schools upon reopening, the use of diagnostic assessments to identify learning loss, increased technology support through the BOS program, and teacher training in the use of learning management systems (LMS). However, these measures are highly dependent on the autonomy of individual schools, resulting in large regional disparities, especially between urban and rural areas.

Nigeria, meanwhile, has taken a different approach, focusing on Accelerated Learning Programs and psychosocial support. Compensatory classes are often organized by local communities, with direct support from NGOs. Some states have established day-long learning recovery centers where students learn basic skills in groups rather than through a rigid subject-based curriculum.

While Nigeria lacks the widespread education technology infrastructure found in Indonesia, it benefits from a vibrant community system and active civil society organizations, which have enabled many hard-to-reach student groups to receive support for their learning recovery.

4.4. Sustainability and inclusiveness

Indonesia is shifting toward more systemic and long-term policies. The maintenance and expansion of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, a flexible curriculum framework, demonstrate that the country views the pandemic as an opportunity to undertake comprehensive education reform (Adnyana, 2023). However, concerns remain about the effectiveness of implementation in less developed regions, where monitoring mechanisms are weak and strong decentralization to schools is not accompanied by adequate resources.

In contrast, Nigeria's policies, while fragmented and inconsistent across states, include several highly inclusive grassroots approaches. Community engagement, temporary learning centers, and partnerships with NGOs have helped these policies reach the most vulnerable student groups. The biggest limitation is sustainability: as international organizations withdraw funding, the support system risks weakening without localization of policy and financing.

4.5. Suitability for disadvantaged students

From the preliminary analysis, some initial observations can be drawn about the suitability of education recovery policies in the two countries for disadvantaged student groups. In Indonesia, policy implementation is relatively systematic, clearly structured, and strongly led by the Ministry of Education. However, policies still tend to be "poor-focused" and do not fully cover other forms of vulnerability such as disability or migration. Inequalities in capacity between localities result in inconsistent policy implementation.

In contrast, Nigeria, while lacking systematization, has demonstrated greater flexibility and inclusiveness in its approach. Thanks to the intermediary role of civil society organizations, policies are more accessible to hard-to-reach communities and more responsive to real-world needs. However, dependence on international funding and the lack of federal-local coordination mechanisms remain major barriers to sustainability.

Overall, both countries are in the process of moving from short-term responses to long-term policy. The key question is whether current efforts will be sustained once the crisis has passed and whether vulnerable groups will truly be at the center of education recovery strategies (Table 1).

Table 1. Policy comparison table

Criteria	Indonesia	Nigeria
Approach	Focused and led by the Ministry of Education	Decentralized, community-based and NGO-based
Typical policy	Merdeka Belajar, Sekolah Penggerak, Kurikulum Darurat	FACTS, EdoBEST, Learning Recovery Plan
Priority Objects	Poor students, remote areas	Street children, homeless, girls, disabled, conflict affected
Form of intervention	Make-up classes, technology support, teacher training	Accelerated learning, psychological support, temporary learning center
Sustainability	Systematized, but lacking oversight	Flexible, but dependent on international funding
Inclusiveness	Restrictions on groups outside the "poor" standard	Diverse, but lacking uniformity across states

Sources: Author's work

5. Discussion

Despite being in the same group of developing countries, Indonesia and Nigeria have responded to the post-COVID-19 education crisis with distinctly different strategies. These differences are not simply a result of governance capacity or technological readiness but also reflect policy thinking, decentralization mechanisms, and the roles of social actors.

First, the structure of government and the centralization of policymaking create different bases for action. Indonesia has an education system with a relatively unified central direction, especially through the prominent role of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This allows for rapid policy implementation and a nationally oriented strategy, such as the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* or

Kurikulum Merdeka program. Nigeria, on the other hand, has a strong federal structure, with states having a high level of educational autonomy, which makes policy fragmented and inconsistent across the country.

Second, system capacity and the level of public investment in education also play significant roles. According to The Global Economy (2022), education spending as a percentage of GDP in Indonesia has consistently remained around 1.28% (The Global Economy, 2022a), while in Nigeria it is significantly lower at around 0.8% (The Global Economy, 2022b). This directly affects the capacity to implement recovery programs, from printing learning materials and organizing compensatory classes to training teachers. However, paradoxically, Nigeria, despite its limited public budget, has promoted a strong role for civil society, helping to reach vulnerable groups of students that the government cannot access.

Finally, the socio-cultural conflict context is a factor that cannot be ignored. Indonesia entered the pandemic with a relatively stable political situation, little armed conflict in society, and a high level of consensus on education. In contrast, Nigeria is simultaneously facing a pandemic, an economic crisis, and security instability due to armed conflict in the North and rebel groups (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). Therefore, education policy in Nigeria not only reflects learning needs but also serves as a tool for psychological support, social stability, and child protection in emergency situations.

Education policy cannot be separated from the broader context of a country. Every policy is made and implemented within a particular political–economic–social "biosphere" where priorities compete for resources. The difference between Indonesia and Nigeria shows that good policy is not necessarily one with a large budget but one that can operate effectively within the constraints of each country's reality.

In Indonesia, political stability and the central role of the state allow for a highly structured, planned, and in-depth education policy. However, policy tends to be "top-down," prone to bureaucracy, and lacking flexibility in reaching diverse disadvantaged groups. Indonesia focuses heavily on financial and regional factors as key indicators of inequality (Irawan et al., 2024). On the other hand, Nigeria, despite being under pressure from conflict and lacking financial resources, has the capacity to mobilize civil society and NGOs—a factor that Indonesia is quite reluctant to engage with. Nigeria's decentralized education system and challenges in policy implementation have been noted by Jacob and Samuel (2020), who highlight the crucial role of civil society in filling gaps.

In addition, perceptions of educational equity influence policy design. Indonesia's approach, while systematic, still tends to overlook certain vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities or migrants. Nigeria approaches equity in a "multidimensional" way: gender, religion, language, residential circumstances, and even psychological experiences. Nigeria's approach, while not systematic, represents a genuine attempt to address the social nature of learning loss, which technical policies often ignore. The importance of collaborative and participatory approaches during the pandemic has been emphasized by Suyuthi, Mumtahanah, and Wahyudi (2023), supporting the flexible and community-driven strategies seen in Nigeria.

From the comparison between Indonesia and Nigeria, several important lessons can be drawn for other developing countries. First, education recovery is not only about getting students back into the classroom but also about restoring learning motivation, foundational skills, and mental health, especially for disadvantaged students. Vietnam has also experienced a prolonged period of online learning, the consequences of which have not yet been fully quantified. Therefore, lessons from Nigeria suggest that greater

attention should be paid to psychosocial support, particularly in contexts where many children have experienced severe disruptions to their education.

Second, policy flexibility is vital. Central policies need to allow space for schools, localities, and communities to adapt to reality, rather than forcing them into a rigid mold. Indonesia's "proactive school" model is a good example, but it must be accompanied by support mechanisms so that schools can be truly proactive, not just on paper (Mahanani et al., 2022).

Third, civil society and community organizations are valuable resources that need to be properly recognized. When the state cannot reach everyone, especially students with complex circumstances such as migrants, ethnic minorities, and long-term out-of-school children, the involvement of communities, religious organizations, and volunteer groups is essential. Lessons from Nigeria highlight this, and Vietnam can certainly learn from these experiences to better connect stakeholders and implement effective learning recovery programs (Mbiti, 2016).

Implications for Other Developing Countries

The comparative analysis of Indonesia and Nigeria's education recovery policies highlights several key insights for other developing countries seeking to enhance their post-pandemic education systems.

First, adopting a context-sensitive approach is crucial. Countries should not rely solely on a centralized, top-down model if local contexts vary significantly. Instead, they should incorporate community engagement and grassroots initiatives, especially when dealing with vulnerable student populations. The Nigerian model of leveraging NGOs and community networks is a noteworthy example.

Second, policy inclusiveness should extend beyond economic indicators. As seen in Nigeria, a multidimensional approach considering gender, location, disability, and mental health can help address diverse learning needs more comprehensively. In contrast, Indonesia's focus primarily on financial and regional disparities may overlook other vulnerabilities.

Third, long-term sustainability requires a balance between government-led efforts and community-based support. While international funding is helpful in the short term, building locally driven initiatives ensure continuity once external assistance wanes. Countries like Vietnam can learn from this by combining state-led frameworks with community participation to maintain educational resilience.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on comparing post-COVID-19 education recovery policies in two developing countries, Indonesia and Nigeria, with a particular emphasis on reaching and supporting vulnerable students, the group most affected by prolonged disruptions in education, also known as learning loss. This is not merely a technical comparison between the two education systems but also an attempt to examine deeply how each country has responded to the crisis, prioritized, and implemented recovery strategies within the constraints of socio-economic conditions.

The analysis shows that both countries are aware of the urgency of policy interventions to restore their post-pandemic education systems. However, the paths they have chosen to reflect their own institutional and policy thinking. Indonesia has pursued systemic reforms from the center, strengthening the curriculum, empowering schools, and gradually integrating flexible education models such as *Kurikulum Merdeka* and

Sekolah Penggerak. Meanwhile, Nigeria has relied on a community-based approach, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and leveraging its network of civil society organizations to fill the educational "ditches" where students are most likely to be left behind.

Structurally, Indonesia's policies are coherent, systematic, and long-term oriented. However, over-reliance on the internal capacity of individual schools can lead to inequities in implementation, especially in under-resourced areas. Nigeria, despite lacking a unified framework and relying heavily on non-state funding, has shown considerable flexibility in reaching disadvantaged groups, something that not all systems can achieve. This raises an important question for policy design: does financial and systemic adequacy always equate to equality and effective access?

From these differences, a common conclusion can be drawn: an effective education policy is not necessarily technically or budgetarily perfect, but rather the ability to understand reality, identify the right priority groups, and implement flexibly within existing constraints. This is what both Indonesia and Nigeria are striving to realize, each in its own way.

This study also has certain limitations, stemming from the use of entirely secondary data. First, the reliability of the information depends on the level of openness and transparency in policy announcements by state agencies and international organizations. It is possible that some important documents have not been published or are no longer updated. Second, because no field surveys were conducted, the study could not capture the actual experiences of students, teachers, or education managers, those who are directly affected by and implement the policies. This partly limits the ability to assess the real impact of recovery measures. Finally, the analysis of only two countries, although both are typical representatives of Southeast Asia and West Africa, limits the generalizability of the conclusions when applied to educational systems that differ in structure or level of development.

To overcome the above limitations and deepen the topic, further research can focus on three main directions. First, conducting field surveys through semi-structured interviews or quantitative surveys to clarify the experiences of learners and teachers with recovery policies. Second, expanding the scope of the study to include many other countries, grouped by national income or technology readiness, and then identifying appropriate policy models for each group. Third, tracking the long-term impact of policies on indicators such as learning outcomes, dropout rates, and the ability to continue to higher education, to assess the sustainability of current strategies.

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