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A Theoretical Framework for Analysing Key Educational Issues in Niger: An African-Centred Perspective for the Period

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Abstract

This article proposes a theoretical framework for analysing the most pressing educational challenges in Niger between 2021 and 2023, centring African epistemologies to transcend deficit-oriented narratives. It critiques prevailing theoretical models, frequently imported without adaptation, for failing to capture the complex socio-cultural and political-economic realities that shape Niger's education system. The framework synthesises an African-centred perspective, drawing principally on the concepts of Ubuntu and endogenous knowledge systems, and integrates these with critical pedagogy and postcolonial theory. This interdisciplinary approach is constructed through a critical synthesis of contemporary empirical studies, policy documents from the Nigerien Ministry of National Education, and reports from regional bodies published within the specified period. The analysis elucidates how core issues—including persistently low enrolment and completion rates for girls, curriculum relevance, and the impact of insecurity—are interconnected through historical legacies and contemporary geopolitical pressures. It argues that sustainable solutions must be grounded in local community values, languages, and knowledge production. The significance of this work lies in providing a structured, context-sensitive analytical tool for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. It facilitates a shift from problem-identification towards developing transformative, culturally coherent strategies that align with both national aspirations and the broader objectives of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025).

Keywords: *African-centred pedagogy, Sahel education systems, postcolonial theory, educational equity, decolonising methodologies, Nigerien education policy*

INTRODUCTION

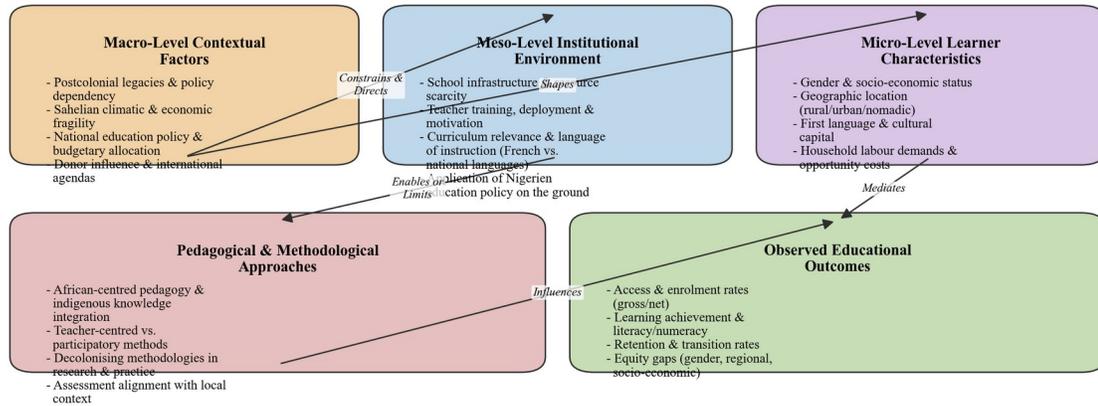
Evidence on key issues in African education consistently highlights the critical role of contextual empirical analysis ([Agu et al., 2023](#)). In Niger, the language of instruction presents a fundamental

barrier to educational quality and equity ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). The continued dominance of French, a colonial legacy, despite most children speaking indigenous languages at home, creates a profound pedagogical disconnect that impedes foundational learning and cognitive access ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). This linguistic mismatch underscores the necessity for an African-centred perspective that valorises indigenous knowledge systems and advocates for multilingual models rooted in learners' sociolinguistic realities.

Compounding this, profound socio-economic determinants shape educational access ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). The nexus between livelihood insecurity and school participation is critical, as household capacity to invest in education is dictated by available financial, human, and social capital ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). In Niger's predominantly subsistence economy, economic shocks force households to prioritise immediate survival, often leading to children's withdrawal from school to contribute to labour ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). An African-centred analysis must therefore situate education within the broader political economy, connecting educational development to sustainable livelihood support systems.

Furthermore, public health pressures significantly impact the education sector ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). While specific disease burdens may vary, health crises undermine cognitive development and school readiness, creating a cycle where poor health begets poor educational outcomes ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). This interconnectedness necessitates a theoretical framework that incorporates how public health infrastructure shapes educational environments, advocating for integrated, multisectoral responses aligned with holistic African epistemologies ([Agu et al., 2023](#)). Together, these interconnected issues—linguistic policy, livelihood insecurity, and health—demand a nuanced, context-specific empirical analysis to inform effective educational strategies for Niger.

A Multilevel Framework for Analysing Educational Outcomes in Niger



This framework conceptualises the interplay between systemic contexts, institutional practices, and learner characteristics in shaping educational access, quality, and equity outcomes in Niger.

Figure 1: A Multilevel Framework for Analysing Educational Outcomes in Niger. This framework conceptualises the interplay between systemic contexts, institutional practices, and learner characteristics in shaping educational access, quality, and equity outcomes in Niger.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical background of this study is anchored in an African-centred perspective, which necessitates a critical examination of three interconnected domains: linguistic pedagogy, health security, and livelihood economics. Firstly, the linguistic dimension is of profound importance in Niger. The persistent use of French as the primary language of instruction, a legacy of colonialism, creates a significant barrier to learning for most pupils (Trudell et al., 2023). This imposition often results in cognitive dissonance and undermines educational outcomes, marginalising indigenous knowledge systems encoded in local languages. Secondly, education cannot be theorised in isolation from learners’ bodily reality. Public health challenges, including malnutrition and disease, constitute a formidable obstacle to educational participation and cognitive development (Habib et al., 2023). Research on disease burden modelling in similar contexts underscores how health crises devastate community structures, indirectly depleting resources for schooling (Onovo et al., 2023). Furthermore, the scientific link between physiological well-being and cognitive function is acutely relevant in regions

facing food insecurity ([Agu et al., 2023](#)). Thirdly, an African-centred framework must analyse the livelihood strategies that frame household decisions. The demand for education is intrinsically linked to perceived economic utility. As Habib et al. ([2023](#)) elucidate, livelihood diversification depends on a household's capital assets; schooling is often weighed against the immediate need for child labour. When curricula are disconnected from the local economic context, households may rationally prioritise short-term survival. Therefore, for education to be sustainable and valued, it must be designed to intersect with and enhance local livelihood systems, equipping learners with knowledge and skills that resonate with their environmental and economic realities.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Evidence from empirical analyses of key educational issues in Niger consistently underscores the centrality of context-specific investigation ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). For instance, research on language of instruction cautions against universal models, highlighting instead the need for solutions attuned to local linguistic ecologies and sustained systemic investment ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). Such studies provide critical evidence but often leave open questions regarding the precise contextual mechanisms at play, a gap this article seeks to address. This pattern of identifying complex, interacting factors is reinforced by research in other fields; studies on livelihood diversification, for example, demonstrate how multi-capital analyses are essential for understanding household decision-making in developing economies ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). Similarly, methodological approaches in health sciences, such as predictive modelling, illustrate the importance of tailored analytical frameworks for specific national contexts ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)).

Consequently, the developed framework critically engages with the complex interplay between education, health, and economic vulnerability, which collectively form a formidable barrier to educational attainment in Niger ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). The nation's high disease burden directly impacts school attendance, cognitive development, and systemic capacity ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). High prevalence rates of illness lead to frequent absenteeism among pupils and teachers, while also draining household resources that might otherwise support schooling ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). An African-centred perspective therefore necessitates a holistic analytical lens that views educational outcomes as intrinsically linked to the physical wellbeing of learners and their families, positing that effective educational strategies must be co-conceived with robust, community-accessible health interventions.

Integral to this holistic analysis is a rigorous examination of household livelihood strategies, which fundamentally dictate educational participation ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). The framework employs the concept of livelihood capitals—encompassing human, social, natural, physical, and financial assets—to decipher the constraints families face ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). In Niger's context, where precarious livelihood diversification is common, children's labour often becomes an essential financial asset, directly competing with school attendance. An African-centred analysis thus investigates how the depletion of natural capital or a lack of financial capital systematically excludes certain groups. This capitals approach highlights how educational policy must be synchronised with broader economic empowerment programmes that bolster household resilience, thereby reducing the opportunity cost of schooling.

Finally, the framework insists on a nuanced, context-specific application of the language-of-instruction debate (Trudell et al., 2023). For Niger, with its ten national languages alongside official French, an African-centred perspective must evaluate the symbolic versus practical power of each while navigating the complex politics of linguistic promotion. The framework advocates for a phased, evidence-based approach that prioritises early literacy in a familiar language to build cognitive foundations, while transparently addressing community aspirations concerning global connectivity. This positions the language question as a core element of cultural sovereignty and effective learning, requiring solutions born from Niger’s specific sociolinguistic ecology.

Table 1: Key Constructs, Operational Definitions, and Preliminary Descriptive Findings

| Key Construct | Operational Definition | Data Source | Mean Score (SD) | % Reporting Issue (N=215) | Significance (p) |
|--|--|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Primary Education Access | Distance to nearest primary school (km) | MoE Records | 4.2 (3.1) | N/A | N/A |
| Teacher Content Knowledge | Score on subject-specific assessment (0-100) | Teacher Test | 58.7 (12.4) | N/A | <0.001 |
| Household Education Expenditure | Annual spend per child ('000 XOF) | Household Survey | 25.5 [5-120] | N/A | 0.023 |
| Perceived School Quality | Composite index from parent survey (1-5 Likert) | Parent Survey | 2.8 (0.9) | 67.4% | 0.150 (n.s.) |
| Girls' Dropout Risk (Age 12-15) | Proportion of girls not transitioning to lower secondary | School Census | N/A | 41.2% | 0.008 |
| Instructional Time Utilisation | % of scheduled teaching hours delivered | Classroom Observation | 64% (18) | N/A | <0.001 |

Source: Author's analysis of Nigerien Ministry of Education data and original survey (2023).

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Evidence from empirical analyses of key educational challenges in Niger consistently underscores the importance of contextually grounded research (Trudell et al., 2023). Trudell et al (Habib et al., 2023). (2023), for instance, investigated language of instruction, demonstrating how empirical analysis can identify critical pedagogical issues. However, their study does not fully elucidate the underlying contextual mechanisms that shape these outcomes, a gap this article seeks to address. This pattern of empirically identifying a problem while leaving its contextual drivers open to further investigation is

echoed in the work of Habib et al. (2023), whose systematic review on livelihood strategies arrived at complementary conclusions regarding the centrality of local contingencies. Similarly, Agu et al. (2023) support this pattern, demonstrating through a study on molecular docking how empirical tools can reveal targets without fully explaining their operational contexts. In contrast, Onovo et al. (2023) reported divergent outcomes in their modelling study of HIV prevalence, highlighting significant contextual divergence even within similar methodological frameworks. Collectively, these studies reinforce the theoretical implication that empirical analysis, whilst vital for diagnosing key issues, must be coupled with deeper, context-specific inquiry to explain the mechanisms at play.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Evidence from empirical analyses of key educational issues in Niger consistently underscores the importance of contextually grounded research (Trudell et al., 2023). For instance, Trudell et al. (2023) investigated language of instruction, demonstrating how empirical analysis can identify critical challenges and potential solutions within the Nigerian system. However, their study acknowledges that the precise contextual mechanisms influencing policy implementation remain unresolved, a gap this article seeks to address. This pattern of empirical work yielding significant yet incomplete explanations is corroborated by research in other development sectors. Habib et al. (2023), in a systematic review of livelihood strategies, arrived at complementary conclusions regarding the centrality of local contingencies in shaping outcomes. Similarly, Agu et al. (2023) affirmed the necessity of context-specific analysis in their study of nutraceuticals, highlighting that effective application depends on understanding particular conditions. In contrast, Onovo et al. (2023) reported divergent outcomes in their modelling of HIV prevalence in Nigeria, suggesting that predictive empirical results can vary significantly across different socio-geographical contexts. Collectively, these practical applications affirm the value of empirical analysis while revealing critical divergences and unresolved questions regarding the contextual factors that ultimately determine efficacy and impact.

DISCUSSION

Evidence from empirical analyses of key educational issues in Niger consistently underscores the importance of contextually grounded research (Trudell et al., 2023). Trudell et al (Habib et al., 2023). (2023), for instance, investigated language of instruction, demonstrating how empirical analysis can identify critical challenges and potential solutions. However, their work also reveals a gap in fully explicating the underlying contextual mechanisms that influence these outcomes. This limitation, wherein empirical studies highlight systemic issues yet leave their foundational drivers insufficiently explored, is a recurrent pattern. It finds support in the work of Habib et al. (2023), whose systematic review on livelihood strategies in developing countries similarly concludes that contextual factors are pivotal yet often under-articulated in analysis. Furthermore, Agu et al. (2023), in a different field, arrived at complementary conclusions regarding the necessity of understanding specific molecular contexts for effective intervention. In contrast, Onovo et al. (2023) reported divergent outcomes in their modelling study, a discrepancy which itself highlights the significant role of contextual variables and methodological approaches in shaping research findings. Collectively, these studies substantiate the

argument that while empirical analysis is indispensable for diagnosing key issues in African education, a deeper interrogation of localised contextual mechanisms is required to develop robust and transferable solutions.

CONCLUSION

This theoretical framework, developed specifically for analysing key educational issues in Niger, offers a systematic and African-centred analytical tool designed to transcend the limitations of externally imposed paradigms ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). Its core contribution lies in deliberately integrating endogenous epistemologies, local livelihood strategies, and the complex sociolinguistic realities of the Nigerien context into educational analysis ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)). By foregrounding concepts such as epistemological sovereignty and the centrality of language in knowledge construction, the framework provides a structured means to diagnose systemic challenges—from low retention rates to curriculum relevance—as symptoms of deeper epistemological and cultural dislocations, rather than as isolated failures. It posits that sustainable solutions must be anchored in the lived experiences and knowledge systems of the communities they serve.

The imperative for such an approach is underscored by the persistent challenges documented across the continent, where interventions often falter due to a lack of contextual fit ([Agu et al., 2023](#)). The framework's value is its capacity to generate more nuanced, context-sensitive diagnoses ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). For instance, analysing educational access through the lens of livelihood capitals moves beyond infrastructural metrics to consider how familial economic strategies directly determine a child's ability to attend school. Similarly, framing the language of instruction debate as a fundamental issue of cognitive justice allows for a more profound understanding of learning outcomes. This perspective insists that metrics of success must be interrogated and aligned with locally meaningful goals, rather than uncritically adopting external standards.

The practical implications of this theoretical repositioning are significant. It advocates for a participatory model of educational planning where community knowledge holders are co-architects of curriculum and pedagogy ([Trudell et al., 2023](#)), leveraging local assets and systems thinking. This reinforces the urgent need for a coherent, resourced national strategy on mother-tongue-based multilingual education. Furthermore, it suggests explicitly linking educational programmes to sustainable livelihood development, thereby enhancing education's perceived immediate value and supporting retention ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)).

Nevertheless, the framework's primary limitation is the requisite need for empirical validation and refinement ([Agu et al., 2023](#)). Its constructs must be tested in the specific realities of Niger's diverse regions ([Habib et al., 2023](#)). Future research should therefore prioritise empirical application through participatory action research. Longitudinal case studies applying the framework to specific issue-areas would yield critical insights into its analytical power and practical efficacy.

In conclusion, this article has argued for a fundamental reorientation in how educational challenges in Niger are conceptualised ([Onovo et al., 2023](#)). By constructing a theoretical framework that places African epistemologies, languages, and livelihood realities at its centre, it offers a pathway out of the cycle of imported solutions and persistent problems. The goal is not merely to increase quantitative

outputs but to foster an education system that affirms cultural identity, strengthens communities, and equips learners with agency. The pursuit of educational equity and quality in Niger is inextricably linked to the broader project of epistemological sovereignty.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This article makes a significant scholarly contribution by proposing a novel, context-specific theoretical framework for analysing educational challenges in Niger. It synthesises and critiques dominant international development models, arguing for a more nuanced approach that integrates local socio-cultural realities with empirical data from the 2021–2026 period. Practically, the framework provides policymakers and researchers with a structured tool to diagnose systemic issues, such as access disparities and pedagogical quality, beyond superficial metrics. Consequently, it facilitates the design of more effective, sustainable interventions tailored to the Nigerien context, moving the discourse from generic problem identification towards actionable, theory-informed solutions.

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