

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Empowering the youths for sustainable national development through vocational education in South West Nigeria

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This study investigated empowering the youths for sustainable national development through vocational education in South West zone of Nigeria. Three hypotheses were generated. The research design used for the study was the descriptive research design of the survey type. One thousand two hundred youths were selected through stratified random sampling technique from three randomly selected states in the zone. The research instrument used was a self-constructed instrument titled “Youth Empowerment and National Development Inventory” (YENDI). Face and content validities of the instrument were ensured and the reliability of the instrument was established at a value of 0.70 using the test re-test reliability method. The inferential statistical technique used for the data analysis in the study was Pearson Moment Correlation analysis. The result of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between capacity building (empowerment) and human capital formation; again, it was found that a strong correlation existed between capacity building and youth employability. It was further revealed that there was significant linkage between capacity building (empowerment) and social exclusion in South West Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended (among others) that vocational education must necessarily be central to any meaningful youth policy for human capital formation.

**Key words:** Capacity building, empowerment, national development, vocational education.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time of identity formation and self exploration related to developing views of personal, social, educational and vocational selves. According to Erickson cited by Santrock (2006), the period is a time when young adults try to find out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life. Thus they are confronted with many new roles and adult status such as vocational and romantic. Therefore, adolescents need to be allowed to explore different paths to attain a healthy identity, failure of which may result in identity confusion. This attests to why the area of youth counselling and vocational education is undergoing a rapid change across the globe, particularly among the advanced economies to meet the concerns of the adolescents mostly in the areas of educational and vocational opportunities.

This paper described an integrated approach for addressing the needs of youths and empowering them to

face the future with optimism through vocational guidance that will help them deal successfully with the life transitions they face in this era of mass unemployment. The question therefore is “Can Nigeria meet the challenges of her youths’ unemployment? The answer is yes, if all stakeholders are prepared to radically change the current development paradigm as well as the economic and social systems it has generated. The key lies in positioning a comprehensive youth agenda at the centre of the country’s development strategy. Globalization and the knowledge economy represent a golden opportunity for developing countries like Nigeria to exit from the poverty entrapment within a short time and

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with incredible ease. The young generation holds the key to this golden opportunity. But they also represent a huge security risk if not well prepared and provided with the platform to effectively play that role.

The signal is clear that mass poverty, a youth laden fast growing population, an escalating drug "industry" and an education system that falls short of preparing young people for real challenges, is certainly a perfect recipe for disaster. Nigeria population is now about 140 million (NPC, 2006) out of which the young people below the age of 14 years constitute 48%. This added to 3.1% of the population who are 65 years and above, making a catastrophic 10.5% dependence ratio in setting where the population is growing faster than the carrying capacity of the economy. Official figure shows that about 500,000 people join the labour market every year in Nigeria. Out of these, 50,000 people come from universities alone. However, a miserable 8,120 new jobs are created per year. Underdevelopment stands at a staggering 65% much of which is actually disguised by unemployment. At the current growth rate of 5.6% per annum (Cumin and Huglas, 2002), Nigeria's population is slated to hit 250 million in 2050. If this is not matched with rapid employment creation and supported by a labour force that is well prepared to compete for global employment opportunities, the country's demographic trend will precipitate a social and economic liability instead of functioning as a demographic bonus for sustainable development (NEEDS, 2005). It was observed and analyzed that if this trend continues till 2050, Nigeria will have about 1,950,000 new job seekers every year, with only 40,600 jobs created per annum. Moreover, this excludes the influx of foreign job seekers (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

The 2005/2006 national household survey indicated that young people constitute more than 50% of the country's work force, which stood at 20.9 million people. From this analysis, the youth (18 - 30 years old) accounted for 50.8% of the entire labour force, while 32.3% of the labour force is in the age bracket of 15 - 24 years (Colley, 2006). It is important to know the definition of "employment" or "unemployment" used by the statisticians in order to put things in a proper perspective. The standard definition (by who/which body) measures employment by "the portion of the workforce who works for an hour or more a week for pay or profit, or who works unpaid in a family business or farm". Imagine how much an average person can earn by working thirty-six hours a week in Nigeria. Good enough, National Bureau of Statistics (2006) observed that "the standard" unemployment rate does not provide a full picture of the supply and demand balance of the labour market. In other words, the problem could be worse than what these figures say. It is also important to note that of those who are considered unemployed, 71% are youths. And interesting still, the youths constitute 95% of persons with education level above secondary school but unemployed

and thus stand the risk of social exclusion or becoming socially disadvantaged later in life.

The highest degree of insanity is to continue doing the same thing in the same way and expect to get different results. Putting the youths at the centre of Nigeria's development strategy in practice (not merely on paper or sloganeering) is an imperative that must be respected to successfully avert the impending crisis. There is the need to challenge the conventional wisdom that has traditionally informed the country's development paradigm and adopt new (and most likely, radical) paradigms and approaches.

### **Youth and the knowledge economy**

Like many other African countries with a high population growth rate, Nigeria particularly faces the challenge of converting the population boom into a demographic bonus instead of a disaster. In the 21st century, knowledge has taken over as the greatest factor of production, rendering to a secondary position the traditional factors of production (land, labour and capital). Economic structures and systems are now under rapid continuous changing consonance with the rapid turnover of knowledge. Economics that do well in this new global order are those that will succeed at creating knowledge based advantage. It empowers virtually anyone to participate in the mainstream global economy even if they do not have significant access to land, labour and "capital". In this new economic order, young people are taking the mantle jobs virtually overnight, of which India, Thailand, Singapore, USA, Hong Kong and China are clear examples (Leandim and Connily, 2006). Intrinsically, it seems that young people in Nigeria have all it takes to lead the way. This is the hope for Nigeria to escape the impending demographic trap and the rage of absolute poverty. All we have to do is ensure that at the earliest age possible, the youths are empowered through supportive frameworks to access and convert the ever-changing streams of knowledge into productive engagements that meet local needs and global markets.

In 1998, Osulale as cited by Famiwole et al. (2012) defined vocational education as technical or vocational training which is given in or outside the school. It is a systematic learning experience which is designed to fit an individual for gainful employment in recognized occupation or empowerment to create wealth. Vocational education can also be viewed as a type of education for choosing, preparing to enter into and progress in an occupation. It provides the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for effective employment and capacity building in specific occupations or jobs. According to Olaitan (1996), vocational education can be regarded as any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations. It is an education given to people who are to, or have chosen an occupation but

want to develop further knowledge and skills in such areas as Agriculture, Home Economics, Technical Education or Business and Trades. According to Okoro (1993), any education which is necessary for effective employment in an occupation is vocational. Its main function is to provide knowledge, develop skill, and inculcate the attitudes that are required for entry and progress in a career or for wealth creation through acquisition of work skills or saleable skill.

Vocational education is an instrument of positive change with various, divergent potentials for wealth creation, skill development, youth empowerment and capacity building. The UNDP (2009) defined capacity building as the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal framework, institutional development including participation (of women in particular), human resources development and strengthening of managerial system. Capacity building is a long term continuous process in which all stakeholders participate. The stakeholders may be ministries, state or local governments, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, academics and others. Capacity building includes all activities which can strengthen the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours of an individual and improve institutional structures and processes such that the organization can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way. It is much more than training. It includes mostly Human Resources Development, the process of empowering or equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively. Capacity building is a process of development and strengthening the skills, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt and thrive in the fast changing world. In which case, it is the element that gives mobility, flexibility and functionality of a programme or an organization to adapt to changing needs of the population that is served. Capacity building focuses on a series of action directed at helping participants in the development process of increasing their knowledge, skills and developmental changes aimed at preventing social exclusion and socially disadvantaged life. The focus of vocational education is capacity building towards self reliance of all vulnerable groups.

### **Purpose of the study**

This study found out the impact of empowerment through vocational education on the employability of Nigerian youths. It also investigated whether or not youth empowerment would assist them to explore their human capital potentials towards sustainable national development.

### **Research hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at

a 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and human capital formation.
2. There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and employability.
3. There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and social exclusion.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The researchers adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type. The design was considered appropriate as it permits a systematic analysis of the present situation in relation to existing variables. The population was made up of all youths in South West Nigeria. Three states were randomly selected for the study out of the six states that constitute the South west zone of Nigeria. A sample of one thousand, two hundred youths selected through stratified random technique were used for the study.

The research instrument was a self-designed questionnaire titled "Youth Empowerment and National Development Inventory" (YENDI). The instrument was divided into two parts, A and B. Part A consisted of the respondents' personal data while Part B consisted of items that elicited information from respondents on areas of capacity building, employability, human capital development and social exclusion. The face and content validities of the instrument were determined by experts in Test and Measurement from Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti while the reliability of the instrument was also established using test re-test method at interval of two weeks with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 obtained.

The researchers administered the instrument personally with the help of research assistants and their responses were collected immediately. The data collected were subjected to inferential analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

### **RESULTS**

**H-1:** There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and human capital formation.

Table 1 shows r-calculated to be 0.485 while r-tab was 0.195. The hypothesis was rejected since the r-calculated was higher than the r-table. Thus, there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and human capital formation.

**H-2:** There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and employability.

Table 2 shows that r-calculated (0.505) was higher than the r-table (0.195), thus the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and employability.

**H-3:** There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and social exclusion.

**Table 1.** Correlation between youth empowerment and human capital formation.

Variable	N	r-cal	r-tab
Youth empowerment	1200	0.485	0.195
Human capital formation	1200		

$P < 0.05$ .

**Table 2.** Correlation between youth empowerment and employability.

Variable	N	r-cal	r-tab
Youth empowerment	1200	0.505	0.195
Youth employability	1200		

$P < 0.05$ .

**Table 3.** Correlation between youth empowerment and social exclusion.

Variable	N	r-cal	r-tab
Youth empowerment	1200	0.460	0.195
Social exclusion	1200		

$P < 0.05$ .

Table 3 revealed that r-cal of 0.460 was greater than r-tab of 0.195. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and social exclusion.

## DISCUSSION

The result of hypothesis 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between capacity building and human capital formation. Human capital formation has economic benefits in increasing employability, in private earning and social benefit in increasing civic participation. Investing in social capital increases the productivity of an individual and a group. Investing early in disadvantaged youths is more beneficial, both economically and socially. This finding supports the work of Burchard et al. (2002) which shows that investment in human capital stimulates economic growth by improving the quality of labour supply and it also saves social costs.

Empowering the youth is indeed one of the key responses for Nigerians to tackle the challenges created by rapidly changing social, economic, technological and demographic environments. Changing contexts makes investing in human capital more pressing than ever as Leandmin et al. (2006) in /their work also address the issue of human capital in a "knowledge society", which focuses on the achievements of European education

systems and explores the development of the qualifications structure of the Europe labour force. They asserted that a knowledge intensive economy entails wage inequality leading to increasing inequalities between less and better skilled new entrants to the labour market.

The result of hypothesis 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between capacity building (empowerment) and youth employability. Skill formation in the new economy now stresses building competencies in the personal realm of self-improvement and impression management. This finding is in agreement with the submission of Brand (2000) that empowering the individual is not simply a matter of providing the right incentives for personal investment and guaranteeing returns, but also providing the individual with the means to effectively adapt to change. An education curriculum that insists on cognitive and social skills enables the individuals to handle a broad range of issues. Hence, youth capacity building presents the youth effectively available for employment in the labour market.

The result of the finding from hypothesis 3 reveals that there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and social exclusion. It means that to prevent social exclusion, national empowerment for the youths through vocational training should be given priority as this will help the young people develop the confidence, resilience and skills needed to be involved and be a productive citizen. This finding agrees with Byrne (1999), who is of the opinion that young people without steady jobs face future threats that include long-term unemployment, family disintegration, houselessness, and other obstacles, as well as inability to make the transition from full-time schooling to the full-time paid work place. All these are indices of social exclusion or disadvantaged life style which is however dangerous for the development of any nation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of youth unemployment has been growing steadily in the past years and it is now one of the key issues in the contemporary time. At the same time, it has become a matter of national concern. Except that the education and empowerment of young people is given prime attention for an efficient and equitable development of human capital, no success would be recorded in terms of national development.

It should therefore be noted that for meaningful vocational development, vocational education must necessarily be central to any meaningful youth policy as the potential benefits of youth development cannot be overestimated, and failure to provide adequate education to the young ones would, in the long run, result into the most costly policy failure. An underperforming education system can only produce an underperforming society. A system where many children fail to even complete

compulsory elementary education not only represents enormous wastage but a substantial cost for the society.

Again, effectively empowering the individual to explore his or her human capital should be a matter of providing the right incentives and return a concept that applies quality to all other stakeholders in the educational system. This demands an integral and coordinated educational strategy for employability. It is necessary to promote effective universal access to early quality childhood education and care for all pre-school children on comparable standards in Nigeria. Also develop a wide strategy to eliminate child poverty, identify efficient income transfers to families in need using gender equality as leverage to fight social exclusion through vocational education.

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