



Original Article

## Repositioning University Education for Sustainable Youth Empowerment and National Development in Nigeria

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This paper reviews the processes of repositioning university education in Nigeria for sustainable youth empowerment and national development. Sustainable youth empowerment refers to the process whereby youths of a particular society are given a confidence boost in terms of structural and altitudinal changes in their society which would be to their benefit and also for the benefit of the next generation of youths in that society. National development refers to the all-round development of the sectors of life of a nation, including economic, financial, and ethnic development. The aim of this paper is to examine some ways through which university education can be carried out so as to bring about sustainable youth empowerment and national development and quality delivery can be achieved in Nigerian universities. This would further develop the students, enabling them to engage in activities that would have a positive effect on the economic and social aspects not just in Nigeria but also in the global community. Thus, the objective of this paper is to understand the dynamics of the concepts of sustainable youth empowerment and national development in relation to university education for the benefit of the nation and the global community. The paper addressed the use of entrepreneurship education, e-learning, and training in the proper use of ICT, amongst others as a method of shifting the focus of university education towards sustainable youth empowerment and national development. The challenges facing the repositioning of university education in order to achieve sustainable youth development and national development were discussed to include inadequate funding, mismanagement of Nigerian universities, and lack of adequate e-learning and ICT facilities, amongst others. It was concluded in this paper that it is a necessity for Nigerian universities to redirect their objectives towards achieving sustainable youth empowerment and national development, as this would bring about a better and sustainable society for present and future generations.

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## INTRODUCTION

It has often been said that youths are the leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, it is important that youths in a country are taught certain skills that would enable them to develop the nation. These skills would also enable them to stand out in the competitive job market. The economic situation in Nigeria is in a state of disaster and one cannot rely solely on a 9-5 job from the degrees they obtained from a university. The availability of jobs in the Nigerian job market is not equivalent to the number of youths that graduate from Nigerian universities every year. This challenge would no doubt bring about massive unemployment amongst the youths, which would further lead to an increase in crime rates amongst them, especially online fraudulent activities. Youths need to obtain skills that would be able to sustain them, despite the state of the economy. This self-dependency would no doubt boost the nation's economy and would certainly bring about national development. The world is gradually becoming a global village with the use of technology in every sector of life. This includes the teaching and learning process whereby ICT is utilised to teach students with the use of facilities known as e-learning facilities. E-learning practices within Nigerian universities would contribute to national development as students would be able to keep up with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century modern-day practices and would also be able to compete with their peers globally. The aim of this paper is to examine some

ways through which university education can be carried out so as to bring about sustainable youth empowerment and national development and how quality delivery can be achieved in Nigerian universities. Issues pertaining to the paper's topic may have been discussed in other platforms (seminars, workshops, etc..) but they have failed to carefully detail the essential tools to achieve sustainable youth empowerment and national development through the Nigerian system. This work aims to fill in this missing gap.

## EDUCATION

Education refers to the knowledge given to an individual to enable him/her to develop socially and mentally. It is a necessary tool that forms the basic foundation of societies. Todaro and Smith (2009) correctly stated that by it is crucial to a developing nation's capacity to absorb modern technology and achieve self-sustaining growth and development. This implies that technology and the way it is harnessed and utilised in a nation is a basic step for developing a powerful nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, it is clear that education is a necessity that no country can do without since those who lack knowledge and education may rob their country of the opportunity to flourish. The foundation of every economy is based on the education level, whether it is at the nursery, primary, secondary, or university (Adedigba, 2017). This indicates that quality education should be made a top priority in any nation that desires sound development. In the view

of Ikwuegbu and Nwaneri (2014), education is the process by which a person develops the numerous physical and social skills required by the society in which he or she is born to function. Notably, the aforementioned development of a person through education is a precondition for the development of a nation.

Okoro and Afuruobi (2014) also opined that education is a formal or informal process of assisting an individual in developing his capabilities using adequate guidance and direction. It is indicated that education develops one's capability to succeed in whatever field one envisions studying. Amadioha (2014) agreed with this by asserting that education is an organised system or process through which society develops its human resources by equipping them with desirable and worthwhile knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable them to run effectively, the socio-political and economic institutions as well as other facets of human endeavour for nation building and growth.

Okoro and Afuruobi (2014) asserted that education is a formal or informal process that aids a person in developing his abilities with the help of appropriate supervision and direction. This was acknowledged by Amadioha (2014), who claimed that education is a structured process through which society builds its human resources by empowering them with desirable and valuable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will enable them to operate successfully in social, political, and economic institutions as well as other facets of human endeavour for nation-building and growth. This implies that education can only go far and be properly available to the masses if a group of people are actively involved in the investment. Ezewuwa (2012) argued that education is what broadens minds, enables the mind, and gives people the tools they need to live productive lives in society. Ezewuwa also stated that education also gives people the ability to achieve great heights and do good deeds, but education also restores the unrealised dignity of man. Moreover, Obasanjo (2012) asserts that education also fosters a culture of productivity by enabling people to tap into their creative potential and apply those skills to improve their current knowledge and methods for carrying out particular tasks. This increases the effectiveness of individuals' contributions to society. This implies

that education can assist an individual in tapping into their latent potential for creativity and ingenuity so they can improve themselves and their society.

### **University Education**

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) posits in its National Policy on Education that the goals of higher education in Nigeria should contribute as much as possible to national development by enhancing and diversifying its initiatives aimed at producing highly skilled labour in line with the needs of the country. Thus, it can be inferred that university education is a doorway to national development and the students who engage in university education are the contributors to that development. Being the source of knowledge and skills for the generation of highly skilled labour, higher education is a key tool for fostering socioeconomic, political, and cultural progress (Emenalo, 2016). This implies that university education has a wide range of benefits to the nation and it starts from training the minds of the youths who attend universities. Tophat (2022) opined that all stages of education completed beyond secondary school, including undergraduate and graduate degrees, are referred to as post-secondary education, sometimes known as tertiary or university education. Similarly, The World Bank (2021) noted that university education refers to all official post-secondary education, including those offered by public and private universities, colleges, technical training facilities, and vocational schools. In order to promote sustainable living for all, reduce poverty, and promote growth, tertiary education is essential in any society.

Furthermore, Abdulkareem and Oyeniran (2011) maintain that the purpose of universities is to serve as centres for the advancement of science and technology, the training of entrepreneurs, and the creation of highly qualified graduates. This implies that university education has a great benefit to those who partake in it because they will grow in several ways that they can apply to their future and benefit the lives of others around them and beyond.

### **Sustainable Youth Empowerment**

Sustainable youth empowerment refers to the development of youths in a society which would

lead to self-reliance. It is an empowerment that would affect the lives of present and future generations in the area of employment and self-sufficiency, thereby leading to the economic growth of a society. Ndem et al. (2019) rightly said that Nigeria is endowed with human and material resources to empower its teeming youth for economic growth. Thus, it is necessary for Nigeria to take advantage of the growing population of its youth to ensure sustainable economic growth. This is done through sustainable youth empowerment. Alliyu (2013) maintains that youth empowerment is the process of providing graduates and young people, regardless of their field of study, with the information and skills necessary to launch businesses that generate money and address the nation's unemployment issue. This implies that youth empowerment is training youths to be independent and skilled enough to start businesses that can contribute to national development. Obiechina (2017) stated that in order to prepare children and young people for the current economic climate, they must cultivate analytical and critical thinking skills as well as attitudes that will enable them to be more adaptable and creative in the face of crises at the national and international levels. This indicates that youth empowerment will enable youth to survive and thrive in poor economic situations. Kaur (2019) opines that self-reliance is a firm belief in one's value and the sensation of being content with oneself and one's talents. Youth empowerment fosters self-reliance, which is important for young people, especially those who are just ending college studies. If properly led, independent learners typically excel in the classroom and beyond (Paso et al., 2017). This implies that independence can be utilised to bring out one's creativity and business sense. Harrison (2017) opined that one of the significant changes in the modern workplace is the demand by employers for fresh graduates to achieve high-value professional skills, advanced conceptual knowledge, and leadership qualities. Youth empowerment will assist in this aspect because it trains youth on various skills and attitudes that can be utilised in many situations.

### **National Development**

National development consists of various strategies and plans geared towards the widespread and

sustainable progression of a nation. It entails the development of societal facilities for the general welfare of nationals and includes development strategies in the various sectors of society including education, health, the economy, and the military, amongst others. National development, according to Babatola (2015), is the culmination of various stages of deliberate, calculated advancement and extension of the organised human society with the goal of achieving the advancement of an independent sovereign. This indicates that national development starts from the individual members of a society building themselves up which ultimately leads to societal growth. In the view of Imhonopi and Urim (2010), national development is the capacity of a country or country to enhance the social welfare of the populace, namely by providing social amenities like high-quality housing, power, and water that are pipe-borne. This implies that national development takes place with the government of that nation taking the first step. Utomi (2021) opines that any reform that does not prioritise teaching skills for job development will fail to advance the nation. This implies that education must be prioritised in national development because it is the starting point of self-development. Amadioha (2016) asserts that education should result in a country that is both free and contemporary. Economic growth should be a result of education in the modernisation of a country. This implies that it must develop a trained workforce with the necessary knowledge for research, resulting in economic growth and production. According to Scott (2017), there are significant obstacles preventing the successful integration of education for sustainable national development into many subject disciplines in higher education because of a crowded curriculum, the academic staff's perception that it is irrelevant, a lack of staff awareness and expertise, and a lack of institutional drive and commitment. More emphasis is being placed on education for sustainable national development in higher education curricula (Cotton, 2017). The difficulty of infusing the idea of sustainable development into the curriculum across numerous disciplines, according to Cotton (2017), is one of the biggest hurdles. It is thus a necessity to prioritise quality education and dedicate adequate time and resources to making sure it is received by all.



## WAYS TO REPOSITION UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Essentially, there are two ways of repositioning university education for sustainable youth empowerment and national development in Nigeria;

### Entrepreneurship Education

It is a system of education that focus on innovation, a sense of achievement, self-reliance, motivation, and risk-taking. The overlying effect is to ensure that the trained individual has the ability to participate in socio-economic development through the creation of small businesses. Entrepreneurship education creates wealth as the students are absorbed seamlessly into society. Maduiké and Maduiké (2013) opine that entrepreneurship education is the educational process that gives people the capacity and know-how to become independent and deal with the changing challenges presented by the harsh economy. It is observed that entrepreneurship education is vital in countries that have unstable economies. Otoja and Obodumu (2017) observe that the Nigerian public has expressed dissatisfaction with the role that admission to a university play in the advancement of both the individual and the country. Usman (2017) maintains that entrepreneurship education could help with this. This indicates that university education should not be the only priority, even if it is important because other valuable skills can be acquired through entrepreneurship education.

Oluchi and Ahmed 2017 claim that entrepreneurship education is a method for youth empowerment because it equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and capacities for self-employment, which promotes the generation of jobs among young people. Ofor-Douglas (2020a) said that this course gives students a chance to engage in trade and business, teaches them the value of a business, and gives them the tools they need to be autonomous, self-sufficient, and self-employed once they graduate from college. This indicates that entrepreneurship education is an opportunity for youth to develop themselves mentally and financially. Omozuawo and Ugheoke's (2020) and Onwuchekwa and Ahamefula's (2020) findings

state that acquiring entrepreneurship skills and competencies effectively can lead to the creation of wealth, jobs, the eradication of poverty, a decline in unemployment, the advancement of local technology, and an improvement in economic growth and development, respectively. This implies that entrepreneurship education is an important contributor to a nation's economic growth.

Further, according to Garba (2010), entrepreneurship education is a tactic or tool for diverting the necessary energies of Nigerian students away from paid employment and toward self-employment. Young person who works for themselves would undoubtedly have few worries because they would be in charge of their business and could set their own hours. Youths would be able to develop a set of abilities through entrepreneurship education that would be useful in the future if the economy falters or if there is a situation of widespread unemployment in the nation. Additionally, their financial situation would be helped by their propensity for business. Research by Mahajar and Yunus (2012) indicates that institutions' ability to support students' entrepreneurship growth depends on their ability to offer entrepreneurial curriculum materials that have a substantial impact on their propensity to acquire critical thinking skills. This implies that for entrepreneurship education to be successful, the universities in existence need to plan for it with a suitable curriculum. In order to promote the repositioning of higher education for national development and long-term youth empowerment, Nigerian universities must therefore include entrepreneurial-based courses in their curricula.

### E-learning

E-learning is an internet-based standardised teaching method by the use of electronic resources such as computers, tablets and smartphones. It can also be termed as a transfer of knowledge and ideas by a well-structured network. Bennett (2020) sees e-learning as a formalised teaching-based learning system that makes use of electronic resources. According to Ofor-Douglas (2020b), e-learning can be compared to the internet, and ICT helps to improve the teaching and learning process in a classroom setting. With the help of the internet, the globe has progressively transformed into a global

village, and technology use is now ingrained in practically every aspect of daily life. Because tasks are completed more quickly and easily, this has significantly enhanced how people live. It is thus essential to actively incorporate e-learning into the Nigerian university curriculum and ensure it is applied to all fields of study including entrepreneurship education.

According to Wani (2013), e-learning is the process of extending learning or providing instructional resource-sharing opportunities outside of a classroom, building, or site using video, audio, computer, multimedia communications, or some combination of these with other conventional delivery methods. This indicates that there should be an adequate provision for e-learning devices in universities, especially for the benefit of the indigent. E-learning, according to Kalivani (2014), is a potential strategy for raising educational standards and learning efficiency. Akhtar (2010) opines that teaching in a technologically enhanced learning environment raises students' achievement levels. This implies that teaching and learning are easier with e-learning and promote efficiency and produce quality results. Consequently, Universities and other academic institutions must engage in creative and innovative research, as well as innovative teaching and learning strategies, in order to develop a paradigm shift model that will address the many different spheres required to resolve the complex, intersectional crises affecting Nigeria and the world to which the pandemic has further drawn attention (Zhang et al., 2020).

## CHALLENGES

The following serve as challenges to repositioning university education for sustainable youth empowerment and national development through the processes of e-learning and entrepreneurship education:

### Lack of Funds

This is a situation whereby funds needed to sustain the university are not available or adequate. Akoko (2014) rightly stated that the availability of funds in every educational programme is a critical factor in achieving the functionality of such a programme. Chijioko et al. (2017) maintained that funding is an

essential ingredient that contributes to the success of university education all over the world. Strike actions by ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) due to the lack of funds allocated to their university is a major example of what inadequate funds can do to the university. This further leads to the closure of schools, and the student's academic calendars get delayed. An inadequacy/lack of funds would also hinder the acquisition of facilities needed to enhance learning and development within the university. Timi-Johnson and Abam (2017) opined that the funds allocated to tertiary education have not significantly increased to meet the growing demand for infrastructure for conducive learning, research, and development and increase in students' enrolment. Hostel, library, and learning facilities, especially e-learning facilities and facilities that would aid practical entrepreneurship education, require funds to be acquired and maintained. In essence, the foundation of education is frail when education (university education inclusive) is not well funded, and the products of the such foundation are weak intellectually (Okorie, 2020).

### Lack of Facilities

Another major problem that may serve as an impediment to the repositioning of Nigerian universities through e-learning and entrepreneurship education is inadequate facilities. Okolocha and Okolocha (2012) rightly stated that Nigerian tertiary institutions do not have the necessary equipment and facilities to equip the students with the necessary skills and competencies. Despite the overwhelming benefits and contributions of e-learning to modern-day university education, it should be recognised that the upswing in access and use of technologies and the internet is not evenly distributed across all countries (Kirkwood & Price, 2016). Nwana (2012) agreed with this when he opined that there is an acute shortage of e-learning materials such as online/ internet-connected computers, email facilities, multimedia television, multimedia computer and digital library. In relation to entrepreneurship education, Oliobi (2017) rightly observed that facilities and workshops for the practice of trade and entrepreneurship education were found to be very inadequate. Atakpa (2016) asserted that the deplorable or complete absence of

infrastructural facilities had constituted the poor development of entrepreneurship education in institutions of learning.

### **Poor Maintenance and Security of Facilities**

The facilities within the university need adequate and routine maintenance. Consequently, university workers may misuse the university's physical and material resources, either intentionally or inadvertently, or owing to a lack of technical knowledge. There may also be a lack of maintenance and overuse of university facilities (Ofor-Douglas, 2022). Ofor-Douglas (2021a) rightly stated that e-learning facilities require maintenance as they are machines. Irregular or lack of maintenance of these facilities may lead to their malfunction; thus, e-learning would not be able to take place effectively. There also needs to be adequate provision for university facilities, especially e-learning facilities, as they are prone to theft, considering their expensive nature. Materials used for entrepreneurship education need some adequate maintenance and security as well.

### **Tribalism/Favouritism**

Tribalism/favouritism is a major hindrance to quality university education in Nigeria. Ofor-Douglas (2021b) noted that tribalism/favouritism is a major problem in Nigerian universities as it affects employment into high positions in the university, admission of students from states other than the state where the university is situated, high level of employment of indigenes from a particular tribe to lecture, and much more. Thus, lecturers who are highly qualified in the areas of e-learning and entrepreneurship education may not be hired, and unqualified lecturers would be absorbed into the universities to teach the unsuspecting students.

### **Poor ICT Training**

ICT materials require technical know-how in order to utilise them properly. In a situation whereby teachers/lecturers do not understand how to use these ICT materials, e-learning cannot take place effectively. Delemaina (2011) maintained that the professional development of teachers (lecturers) has a significant contribution in orientating teachers (lecturers) to focus on the attainment of high-quality academic performance. Chigozie-Okwum (2018)

opines that when teachers are digitally literate and trained to use ICT, these approaches can lead to higher skills that will, in turn, empower them to impact quality and creative knowledge and options for learners to express their understandings and leave them better prepared to deal with the on-going technological changes in society and workplace. Teachers need to be trained and retrained on how to effectively utilise e-learning materials including projectors, e-learning software, and smart boards. They also need to be trained in the use of Microsoft software such as Word, Excel and, most importantly, PowerPoint. Ojo and Olaniyan (2018) observed that teachers (lecturers) participation in training programmes such as seminars and workshops would impart positively on the school (students and the administration of the school).

### **Lack of Practical Entrepreneurship Teachings**

Entrepreneurship education should have become more practical work because it is often said, "practice makes perfect". Morrison et al. (2014) rightly said that entrepreneurship education programs in universities and colleges of education seem to concentrate on bookwork rather than developing practical skills. Where practical skills are not developed, such skills are not diversified. They are rather homogeneous creating room for high competitiveness of graduates in the labour market. Practical teachings in entrepreneurship education would enable the students to practicalise and perfect their skills, and this would allow for efficiency amongst graduates in their various skill sets.

### **Inadequate/ Expensive Seminars and Workshops**

Seminars and workshops are avenues for motivating students and giving them ideas on how to improve their skills. There is however, an inadequate occurrence of seminars and workshops in Nigerian universities and some students fail to attend these meetings as they feel they would not gain much due to past experiences with seminars and workshops that were expensive to attend but not worthwhile. Seminars and workshops and other student meeting avenues need to be regularly organised to enable the students to share and exchange entrepreneurial ideas as this would improve these ideas, and they should

be able to meet professional entrepreneurs in their various fields and skills who would give those tips and ideas on how to improve their various entrepreneurship goals. These meetings should also be of low cost so as to encourage students to attend them

### **Inadequate and Outdated Curriculum**

The Lagos Business School (2022) rightly stated that the fact that the academic program at Nigerian educational institutions is older than the nation itself is no longer a surprise. A curriculum which does not provide adequate entrepreneurship education can lead students to be regular in the workforce and have little or no skills in fields of work they take an interest in. It may also lead to mass unemployment as there would be an overflow of youths that are not self-dependent and self-employed

### **Lack of Proper Management of Funding**

It is not a surprise to note that there is a lack of proper management of funds within Nigerian universities due to the reoccurring incidences of corruption within the Nigerian university system. This problem has hindered the growth and development of e-learning and entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities as adequate funds are required for the provision of facilities for both e-learning and entrepreneurship education. An effective finance policy will give a guide to the school managers to control and regulate the process of managing the funds with regards to receipting, revenue and expenditures, capital and recruitment, cash book, and impress book (Mestry and Bisschoff, 2009)

### **Lack of Supervision**

The problem of lack of supervision within Nigerian universities needs to be addressed if Nigeria aims to achieve sustainable youth empowerment and national development. Adinoyi (2017) in Ofor-Douglas (2019) cited that excessive financial misappropriations, fund misuse, embezzlements, unaccountability of existing funding sources, and violations of project implementation norms have caused the mismanagement of funds to deeply affect the tertiary education sector. Ochenyor (2016) maintained that sorting or extortions are a form of academic corruption which occur in diverse ways.

All this is a result of a lack of proper supervision on the part of the university management on corrupt practices within the university. Where there is no proper supervision, corruption has a free way to dismantle the teaching and learning process, thereby hindering quality university education.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper is a timely effort to reveal that Nigerian universities are in dire need of repositioning so as to promote and enhance youth empowerment and national development. Nigeria is currently facing economic problems, with the standard of living becoming extremely high. Thus, it is a necessity for the federal government and university administration to improve university policies that would enhance youth empowerment and sustainable national development. This would lead to the self-employment of youths, a massive reduction of the country's unemployment rate, unity amongst different tribes and ethnic groups, and a massive reduction of crime in the country. The paper discussed various challenges facing the repositioning of Nigerian universities to achieve sustainable youth empowerment and national development. These challenges may be resolved with the following solutions:

- The provision of adequate funding for university education in Nigeria needs to be of utmost importance to the federal government. An increase in the funds allocated to the educational sector is thus highly recommended. Funds can also be sourced from NGOs and TETFund.
- To promote youth empowerment and financial independence for Nigerian students, technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education must be enhanced. Facilities for entrepreneurship education should be adequately provided by the university in order to develop various skills among university students.
- The federal government needs to provide funds for the development of e-learning within Nigerian universities as this would enable the students to compete with their peers globally. Proper maintenance and adequate security for



ICT facilities should also be provided for the students.

- Tribalism and other forms of favouritism within the university should be avoided. An impartial monitoring council that the university administration selects should properly supervise activities within the university to drive away any ethnic and tribalistic extremists within the university to promote sustainable national development.
  - The university administration needs to ensure that there is constant training and retraining of academic staff in the university in the area of e-learning so that they are up to date with modern teaching methods.
  - Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities should be taught through more practical lessons rather than theoretical lessons. Field trips, excursions and internships where students would practicalise their entrepreneurial skills should be encouraged by the university.
  - Seminars, conferences, and workshops spearheaded by top entrepreneurs should be continuously held within the university to encourage entrepreneurship spirit among the students.
  - There is a need to review, update and enhance the university curriculum in Nigeria to include ICT and entrepreneurship education in order to meet up with 21<sup>st</sup>-century global standards and to ensure quality university education in Nigeria.
  - The federal government and university administration need to enforce strict guidelines for the management of university funds as well as protocols for strict punishment for corrupt university staff that is found guilty of embezzling or mismanaging university funds. Bribery among students and lecturers should also be frowned upon.
10. The university administration needs to monitor each faculty and department in the university and ensure that there is an availability of adequate staff, especially the academic staff, to efficiently cater to the educational needs of all the students they admit.

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