

HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Youth empowerment is a structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of other people. It is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Youth empowerment and development are vital stages in life for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and live better, and possibly have a more fulfilling life. All of these, probably could be achieved through dynamic curriculum of the higher education.

Upon this backdrop, this study examined higher education curriculum and youth empowerment in Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive research design of the survey type. The population for the study consisted lecturers of higher education in Ekiti and Oyo states, Nigeria. The sample used for the study was 500 lecturers who were purposely selected from the institutions. The instrument titled Questionnaire on Higher Education Curriculum and Youth Empowerment (QHECYE) was used for the study. Data collected were analyzed using t-test statistics. All the hypotheses raised were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

The study revealed significant relationship between conventional and, National Open Universities curriculum, and entrepreneurship education, Technical/Vocational education and youth's empowerment. The study strongly recommended full implementation of improved, innovative and dynamic curriculum in higher education in Nigeria to promote youth empowerment and development through skill acquisition and training. Also, the curriculum should specified one skill acquisition for all higher education students before awarded certificates. This study strongly believed that improved implementation of the practical areas of the curriculum would bring the convectional higher education and ODL to the attainments of its potentials.

Key words: Higher Education, Curriculum, Youth empowerment, Open and Distance Learning

Introduction

Education may be regarded as a method of teaching people out of ignorance. It is a means of socializing human beings. It involves the bringing up of a child in the community and constantly training him/her to adjust himself/herself to the changes in his/her environment and around the world. The aim of education in Nigeria should revolve around youth empowerment. Schooling in Nigeria must prepare the young generations from the primary through secondary and tertiary education to tackle the problems of self-reliance rather than thinking of government employment.

One of the goals of Nigerian tertiary education is the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society (FRN, 2004). It is the statutory duty of the Nigerian higher education to groom the required human capital through relevant manpower training, abilities, attitudes, skills and knowledge (Babalola, 2007). An outstanding of human capital assumption is that after finishing formal tertiary education, graduates should be able to make a successful transition from these institutions of higher learning to become productive workers, self-reliant entrepreneurs, responsible parents, good citizens, selfless leaders, and live healthy lives.

It is assumed, also that after graduation, young people can develop additional skills through training and experience that could further enhance their opportunities, capabilities and second

chances in life. Our education system will fail if, while training our young men and women intellectually and as obedient citizens of the nation without training them on how to be self-reliant.

Youth development and empowerment are vital stages in life for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and live better, and possibly have a more fulfilling life. The human capital formed in youth is thus an important determinant of long term growth that a nation can invest on through proper and adequate training of the youth.

However, youth unemployment rate in Nigeria appears to be the highest in Africa with indicators at primary school leavers 14.7%, Secondary school leavers 53.6% and tertiary graduates 25.9% (FME, 2012). The implication is that over 74 million Nigerian youth out of 167 million are unemployed.

NIM (2007) said, in the face of the serious and growing threat of youth unemployment in Nigeria today, the need for the Nigerian youth of today to seek avenues for self-employment and self-fulfillment now seems impelling. However, this may be achieved perhaps through an improved Higher Education and Open and Distance Learning curriculum in conjunction with proper implementation.

However, rather than employees searching for jobs that are not there, it may be necessary to develop themselves and become employers of labour. No wonder, Oyedeji and Salau (2010) reinstated that something has to be done urgently in relation to prepare the youths for self reliance otherwise the situation may be out of control. Hence, curriculum is assumed to be an important and indispensable tool used in the process of educating and training individuals. It determines among other factors the quality of manpower that will be available in the life of a nation and the extent to which the youths can be empowered, independent and self-reliant. This study is therefore concerned with finding out the convectional and National Open Universities curriculum as a correlate of youth empowerment in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It is observed that, the rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria is alarming as the graduates that the higher institutions in the country are producing year in year out could not find any meaningful job to do because the government seems not to make enough provision for them to be employed and they cannot also do anything on their own to be independent. Also, the higher education curriculum seems to be training youths on how to eat fish and not how to catch fish hence, the need for the practical experience on skill acquisition to reduce unemployment. It also seems higher education curriculum trains youths in their cognitive domain and less training on the affective and psychomotor domains hence the resultant effect of no human feelings and jobless syndrome that perhaps leads to the current insecurity in Nigeria. This could be as a result of the way the curriculum is designed for the higher institutions. The purpose of this research is to examine higher education curriculum as correlates of youth empowerment in Nigeria.

The following hypotheses were generated to solve the problem of the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between higher education curriculum and youth empowerment in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment'
3. There is no significant relationship between vocational / technical skill and youth empowerment.
4. There is no significant relationship between Open and Distance Learning and youth empowerment

The following concepts are reviewed:

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Unemployment has been defined as situation where the people who are willing and able to work are unable to find any suitable job within the reasonable period of time. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria appears to be the highest in Africa.

There are 128 universities in Nigeria as at December, 2012, 81 polytechnics and 110 colleges of education. Despite the effort of the government to create about two million jobs per annum, most tertiary graduates stay far above the age of 35 years before entering their first job. Bello (2003) in Babalola (2007) reveals that unemployment incidence in Nigeria affects energetic youth within the ages of 20, 25 and 30 years more than any other age groups in Nigeria. This implies that many youths with dynamic resources wonder around without being gainfully engaged. With this huge human capital waste, the questions which always come to the mind is why do large numbers of university graduates go jobless for years, while labour complain of lack of skilled workers; and how can the higher institutions assist in training skilled graduates for the Nigerian economy? Perhaps the curriculum may have some loop holes in the training of these youths. These are questions that need to be answered by the researcher.

The findings from Federal Ministry of Education(2006) confirms that growing unemployment among recent graduates, especially at the tertiary level, stems in part, from the mismatch between

educational output and requirements of the labour market. Hence skill mismatch is a major concern in Nigeria where tertiary education graduates acquire skills that are not demanded by the labour market

Another important factor for unemployment in Nigeria is the wrong impression of students about the place of technical and vocational education. There is an enduring societal bias against technical and vocational education. Consequently, a large number of job seekers lack practical skills that could enhance self-employment. That is why, rather than providing jobs for others, the graduate unemployed persons keep depending on the government and the non vibrant private sector for job offers (Usoro, 2000).

Open and Distance Learning

UNESCO defined Open learning and distance education as approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. For many students, open and distance learning (ODL) is a way of combining work and family responsibilities with educational opportunities. Distance education (sometimes referred to as distributed learning or distance learning) is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone geographically removed from the learner, with all or most of the communication between teachers and learners being conducted through electronic or print mediums. The 'open' nature of distance learning might be formally institutionalized in such policies as open admissions, and freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn. The openness of distance learning is also seen in relatively flexible organizational structures, delivery and communication patterns as well as the use of various technologies to support learning. Haaveshi(2005) stated that Open and distance learning methods and programmes have been identified to make valuable contributions to the socio-economic development of countries that offer such programmes, hence it is a powerful tool for achieving any country educational and training needs and a potent instrument in creating a learning society capable of bringing about scientific, technological, social and economic development. No wonder, Nigerian Educational system adopted ODL as second chance to assist those who could not secure admission to higher institutions and for drops –out due to financial constraints. Mudasiru O. Y. (2006) described Open and distance education as that, that provided needed access for Nigerian who are presently disadvantaged through the conventional educational system. However, the enthusiasm shown by government towards ODL and steps taken so far can only be sustained through proper planning and monitored implementation.

A case study of Namibia revealed that Government and educational institutions realized that open and distance learning is potent instrument in creating a learning society capable of bringing about social and economic improvement. Through collaboration and sharing of resources and expertise there is a change in the mindset of the population. Also, Distance education in Africa most importantly Nigeria and other continents has been instrumental in lowering illiteracy rate, and more importantly turning about dropout rates into drop-in rates(Haaveshi 2005, Rashid A & kester O. 2004). *Ojo, Ogidan and Olakulehin* (2006) study opined that the fact that many recipients confirmed that more of ODL institutions are needed suggests that the people are of the opinions that it is an effective approach to higher education in Nigeria . The study concluded that open and distance learning institutions are highly effective in considering the purpose of establishing them within the general framework of the education system. Adebayo(2007) paper recommended the identified challenges such as electricity, teachers and facilities that should be addressed for full implementation of ODL in Nigeria. Dele, Osiki and Mpine(2011) paper identified mentoring as an issue which should serve as signposts for distance education marathon journey to the 'promised land, since mentoring does not only benefit the mentee but in the process of mentoring, even the quality and performance level of the mentor in all ramifications, are also being constantly improved. While Valentine(2011) identified that instructor needs to improve their delivery and adapt their teaching methods to the distance learning format. David and Felix(2006) study revealed that students hold favourable opinions and perceptions towards Open and Distance Learning and its potential.

Government of Bihar stated that the basic problem of the youths is not unemployment but the unemployability of the turn – out graduates, hence identified some strategies to empower the youths as follows: Skill development centres at villages, Reach the Unreached” in terms of Education and Skill through Open and Distance Learning, Private sector involvement in training and re-training of employees and creating more job opportunities, to create a pool of skilled manpower in numbers with adequate skill that meet the employment requirements across the various sectors of the national economy and traditional education should be supplemented with skill-based studies.

Implicit in the above submission, is that education should not be for the cognitive development alone but all round development in the area of psychomotor and the labour need.

Research Method

This study employed the descriptive design of the survey type. The population for this study consists of all the lecturers in the higher institution in Ekiti and Oyo states, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 500 lecturers from the higher institutions of Ekiti and Oyo states. An instrument designated Curriculum and Youth Empowerment (CYE) was used. Face and content validity was used to attest its validity. The reliability coefficient was 0.85 using test re-test. Data collected were analyzed using t-test.

Results and Discussion

All the research hypotheses were tested using t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between higher education curriculum and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

Table 1: Relationship between Higher Education Curriculum and Youth Empowerment.

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-tab	Df
Higher education curriculum	444	0.888	0.886	0.051	0.050	443
Youth empowerment	445	0.890	0.888			444

$$P > 0.05$$

Since t-cal is greater than t-tab we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there exist a significant relationship between Higher Education Curriculum and Youths Empowerment .

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and entrepreneurship education.

Table 2: Relationship between Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Education.

Variable	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-tab	Df
Youth Empowerment	445	0.890	0.888	0.052	0.050	444
Entrepreneurship skill	447	0.894	0.889			445

$$P > 0.05$$

Since t-cal is greater than t-tab we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant relationship between the Youth empowerment and the entrepreneur skill.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and vocational and technical skills.

Table 3: Relationship between Youth Empowerment and Vocational and Technical Skills.

Variable	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-tab	Df
Youth empowerment	445	0.890	0.888	0.053	0.050	444
Vocational and technical skills	448	0.896	0.986			446

$$P > 0.05$$

Since t-cal is greater than t-tab, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between the youth empowerment and vocational and technical.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and open and distance learning.

Table 4: Relationship between Youth Empowerment and Open and Distance Learning.

Variable	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-tab	Df
Youth empowerment	445	0.890	0.888	0.051	0.050	444
Open & Distance Learning	445	0.890	0.888			444

$$P > 0.05$$

Since t-cal is greater than t-tab, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between the youth empowerment and Open and Distance Learning.

Discussion

This study showed that there is a relationship between higher education curriculum and youth empowerment. Hence, the finding strengthened the assertion that curriculum is an important and indispensable tool used in the process of training individuals. It determines the quality of manpower that will be available in the life of a nation and the extent to which the youths can be empowered, independent and self-reliant. Ewuzie(2012) study supports this finding as it asserted that, the

universities in Nigeria should start by tailoring the curriculum to meet the demands of the industry and that of a self-reliant graduates.

The study also showed that there was a significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment. This result is supported by Adebayo (2009), Timmons and Spinelly (2004) who said that entrepreneurship training and education encourages Nigerians to become jobs creator, rather than job seekers. Hence, more skill-oriented development should be introduced into the curriculum to alleviate poverty among the youths. The study of Anene & Hauwa (2011) supported this study by recommending twenty most acceptable skills by universities students in Nigeria as the basis upon which the entrepreneurship curriculum content could be improved for better skill development on the part of the students.

The study revealed a good degree of dependency of youth empowerment on the vocational and technical education. This result also agrees with the work of Omoruyi and Osunde (2004) that vocational and technical education gives training and impacts the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant. However, Akpochofo & Wailter (2007) study identified poor implementation of the content of the curriculum due to some variables such as quantity and quality of the teaching staff and students. Perhaps, if the content of the current curriculum is well implemented, the students might as well acquire a better skill that can make them self-dependent.

The study revealed relationship between open and distance learning, this shows the significant role played by ODL in supporting youth empowerment in Nigeria. Mudasiru O. Y. (2006) study supported this study with the view that Open and distance education provide needed access for Nigerian who are presently disadvantaged through the conventional educational system. Haaveshi 2005, Rashid A & Kester O. (2004) study conclusion is in line with the result in that Distance education in Africa most importantly Nigeria and other continents has been instrumental in lowering illiteracy rate, and more importantly turning about "dropout rates" into "drop-in rates."

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the implementation of pragmatic skill-oriented curriculum programme in the higher educational institutions of learning (conventional and National open universities) will help to improve the youth empowerment in the country. Since there are fewer job openings than graduates, the major challenge facing the higher institutions is to equip the graduates with appropriate skills and competencies for self-employment, self-dependence and self-reliance.

Recommendations:

1. There should be full implementation of improved, innovative and dynamic curriculum in higher education open and distance learning inclusive in Nigeria as means of promoting youth empowerment and development through skill acquisition and training.
2. Curriculum should specify one skill acquisition that must be acquired by all higher education students before graduation.
3. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should enforce all higher institutions in Nigeria to create viable Entrepreneurship development centre.
4. A department of training and development should be set up in every higher educational institution. This department will be responsible for identifying training needs of youths, designing and implementing training and development programmes which should ensure high performance level of youths on graduation.
5. Undergraduate curriculum development division of the National Universities Commission should utilize the recommendations of researchers on this issue of entrepreneurship courses most importantly in collaboration with the artisan groups in Nigeria through open learning.
6. Adaptation of literacy or adult education into the NOUN curriculum should be encouraged and extension of programme to rural area is recommended.

This paper strongly believed that improved implementation of the practical area of the curriculum would bring the conventional higher education and ODL to the attainments of its potentials

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