

# Revitalizing Secondary Educational System for Youth Empowerment, Job Creation and Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper presented a comprehensive examination of revitalizing the secondary educational system in Nigeria, with a focus on youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development. The current state of Nigerian youth, youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development were discussed. This study also explored the underlying rationale for revitalizing the Nigerian secondary educational system, the challenges hindering its effectiveness in promoting youth empowerment, job creation, and sustainable economic development, and proposes a forward-thinking approach. The paper argued that revitalizing secondary educational system to achieve these goals necessitates addressing pressing issues, including leadership and management deficiencies, insecurity, inadequate funding, ineffective core curriculum planning, content development, and implementation, plus inefficient resource mobilization, utilization, and maintenance. The paper recommended a paradigm shift towards practically oriented secondary education core curricula, complemented by adequate provision and strategic allocation of educational resources through regular inventory submissions, and further emphasized the importance of efficient utilization and regular maintenance of available educational resources in secondary schools, facilitated through continuous evaluation and assessment.*

**Key Words:** Job Creation, Revitalizing, Secondary Education, Sustainable Economic Development, Youth Empowerment

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## Introduction

Youth constitute one of the major active forces in any society. No society can attain high level of sustainability in the development of its economy without the involvement and empowerment of the youth. Youth is the labour force of any society and requires active participation in the maintenance and development of the society (Nwiyi, 2006). To empower the youth for any meaningful and sustainable economic development in any society, Abraham et al. (2021) opined that such aim requires not only the imparting of knowledge and skills for the sake of literacy but for the improvement of conditions, standards, events and global perspective of educational

processes, activities and life. Education is very important for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development. Education is an effective instrument that prepares individuals for career opportunities. Ebirim and Duruchukwu (2024 p.165) remarked that “education forms the foundation for developing innovations, science and technology to harness resources and take part in the global knowledge wealth”. This goes down to explain that education creates opportunities for youth engagement in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services for livelihood in any given society. Every society is expected to adequately provide, properly allocate, efficiently utilize, effectively maintain and regularly supervise its resources in the educational system to create opportunities for youth to acquire new skills and to improve on existing skills available to them for self employment, creation of jobs and sustainable economic development of such society.

### **The Current State of Youth in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, today, youth occupies the greater number of the population in the society. As of the year 2006, Nigeria has a population of one hundred and forty million people according to National Population Commission (NPC, 2006) which makes her the most populated nation in Africa. One third of the Nigerian population is young people between 10-19 years of age (Nigeria.unfpa.org). Youth refers to people within the age of 15-24 years: - young people fall within 10-24 years while children 0-18 years (UNFPA, 2003 p.4 in Nigeria.unfpa.org.). Nigeria’s population is said to have reached 167 million people in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics in Akande, 2014). However, as of 2024, the youth population in Nigeria occupies a greater number with approximately 53.9% of the population being under the age of 18. This is based on the United Nations data, which estimates Nigeria’s population to be around 232,679,478 as of 2024 (Nigeria Population 2024, Worldometer).

As the total population of Nigeria increases, the number of the Nigerian youth increases too. The National population commission (NPC, 2006), states that about half of the population of Nigeria is made up of youth; being defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age. Unfortunately, as the youth population increases, the rate of unemployment increases. This was evidenced in the statistics from the National Manpower Bureau (2012) that Nigeria has a youth population of over 56 million representing 55.9% of the total population of Nigeria (155, 215, 573) which means over 30 million of them are unemployed. The majority of them according to Anachuna (2013) are being graduates. Many young people in Nigeria graduate without relevant skilful empowerment for job engagement. Many graduates in Nigeria who are mostly youth did not learn and acquire major practical skills during their academic programmes in their various institutions. Uzochukwu (2015) observed that Nigerian students graduate into joblessness and low morale as they were busy reading textbooks without knowing the application of what they read. Nigerian graduates apply for job for which they are not hired because they lack appropriate skills required for the job. They also lack opportunities to improve on their existing skills while in school. All these make many graduates in Nigeria not sufficiently empowered for job opportunities.

### **Youth Empowerment**

United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco.org) describes youth as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of people’s independence as members of a community. For activities at international or regional levels, the United Nations (UN) describes youth as those persons between 15-24

years of age. African Youth Charter gave youth as every person between the age of 15 and 35 years. Meanwhile, empowerment refers to equipping individuals to stand on their own to face the challenges of life in the society. Obi (2013) sees empowerment as equipping an individual to fully use one's capabilities to take charge of one's life. Hefner (2004) argued that empowerment should occur largely through self-activity and not through the action of others. To empower means powering an individual or group with what is needed for the achievement of a stated target (Okoyeocha, 2013). Empowerment anchors on strengthening individuals with required skills and competences that will see the individuals through in their life endeavours.

Youth empowerment refers to the act of equipping individuals within the transition period of childhood to adulthood with necessary opportunities, skills and competences that will help and guide them face the challenges of life in the society. Gbenedio (2013) describes youth empowerment as creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. Youth empowerment is an organizational arrangement and enriching process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and liberty to make decision and implement change in their own lives and in the lives of other people within and outside their environment. Youth empowerment is very important in every nation. Youth empowerment encourages individuals and national growth and development through job creation. Youth empowerment provides opportunities for youthful individuals to acquire relevant skills and improve on their existing skills for self-reliance and national development.

### **Job Creation**

Job refers to work or task done as element of existence action. It is a specific task done as part of the routine of one's occupation or for an agreed price (Dictionary.com, 2014). Online Cambridge Dictionary (2015) refers to job as regular work that a person does to earn money. Job means any valuable activity individuals engage in for sustenance and development. Creation means bringing opportunities into existence for individuals to participate. To create means to cause something new to exist (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Creation brings into action what is not functional at the time of need. For a job to exist there must be an action into the situation that demands for the job. Creation gives room for job opportunity. One major objectives of Job creation is to indirectly produce job opportunities (Economic Development Services Inc, 2015). Longman Dictionary Online explains Job creation as the process of making more paid jobs available. Foundation for Job Creation (2015) sees job creation as the process of providing new jobs for individuals who are unemployed. However, job creation is more than providing jobs for the unemployed; it involves providing opportunities and creating enabling environment that allow individuals engage in valuable activities throughout life. The essence of job creation is to engage individuals into productive existence action.

### **Sustainable Economic Development**

Development means the improvement of peoples' lifestyle through improved education, improved incomes, skill acquisition and employment (Ebirim & Uzoukwu, 2023). Enwere and Ugwu (2013) maintained that sustainable development is a pattern of economic growth in which resources' use aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that the needs can be met not only in the present but for generations to come. Mbaji and Ebirim (2013) promote sustainable development as collective improvement and justifiable circulation of resources in all sections of an economy to improve the living standard of the masses both in the present and in

the future. Sustainable economic development refers to the ability of different nations to get better on their economy with a view to increasing their productive capacities for the satisfaction of essential needs of their individuals in the economy (Ilume & Ebirim, 2016). Sustainable economic development carries undertone of lifelong economic transformation. It involves the emancipation of various sections of different nations' system such as the secondary educational system from obstructions that affect their ability to develop and sustain their economy. Sustainable economic development involves minimizing wastage of resources and creating opportunities for resources' optimization in the educational system to trigger economic growth. Sustainable economic development involves all round progress that takes place in all sections of a nation's economy that meets the educational needs of both present and future individuals.

### **Rationale for Revitalizing the Nigerian Secondary Educational System**

The call for revitalizing the Nigerian secondary educational system cannot be ignored. Considering the link between empowerment, job creation and economic development and the role secondary education plays in this relationship, it becomes apposite that revitalizing the Nigerian secondary educational system and their practices need adequate and proper attention. Secondary education is one of the three levels of education where individuals are prepared for lifelong useful living within the society (Ebirim & Uzoukwu, 2023). The broad aim of secondary education according to Binta and Edozie (2021) is to give individuals the right to acquire necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and values which enable them to live and become productive in discharging their social duties as global citizens. Osuagwu et al. (2021) also noted that secondary education gives the youth and students the right to acquire necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and values which enable them to live and become productive individuals and discharge their social duties as technological citizens.

Youth empowerment and economic development are very important to youth's advancement and improvement. No youth can acquire relevant skills to become empowered without good secondary education training. Education impacts in-depth knowledge and understanding so as to advance youth to new frontiers of knowledge in different walks of life (Enwere & Ugwu, 2013). As such, secondary education widens the intellectual authority of youth to become more productive in different walks of life in the society. Youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development are very important not only to youth's advancement and improvement but to the development of the society in general. No society can be healthy without empowered and skilled youth. Hence, revitalizing the Nigerian secondary educational system for youth empowerment and job creation will lead to healthy society reflecting in the nation's level of social growth and economic development. Eze (2013) maintained that the strength of future development of a nation depends solely on youth empowerment through enhanced education.

Revitalizing the Nigerian secondary educational system for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development is like watering some nursery farms to preserve and prepare them for future planting and harvesting. When the Nigerian youth are empowered through the programmes and activities of secondary education, they will become familiar with the systematic practices of the knowledge acquired in the programmes. This will enable the youth to have confidence in their abilities to perform and contribute meaningfully to the growth of the system. Uzochukwu (2015) expressed that when youth are empowered through skill learning, the youth can equally use the skills acquired to support their personal growth and the growth of the educational standard of the society which invariably reflects to the general development of the society.

## **Issues in Revitalizing the Secondary Educational System for Youth Empowerment, Job Creation and Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria**

The main function of any educational institution is to educate the young generation through sequence of organized teaching subjects (Asodike, 2013). Education is acknowledged as a means through which young people acquire relevant skills that will put them in advantage position to deal with the challenges of life in any given society. As such, secondary educational system of any society such as the Nigerian society needs to be revitalised with the vision of providing the youth with opportunities to develop skills and competences required to live a meaningful life and to contribute successfully in the activities of the society. Youth empowerment is an ongoing process of human growth and development which promotes greater participation and involvement of youth in the socio-economic affairs of a nation (Egboka, 2009).

Revitalizing secondary educational system is very important for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in any society. Every organization in any society such as the secondary educational organizations in Nigeria is based on certain general principles which are necessary for the attainment of its goals (Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011; Ogunu, 2000). Revitalizing secondary educational system in Nigeria needs to anchor on certain general principles which are necessary for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development. To empower the youth and to create job opportunities that bring about sustainable economic development in Nigeria, revitalizing the secondary educational system becomes necessary and requires effective leadership, administration, planning and management of the available resources required for qualitative secondary educational delivery and achievement of secondary educational goals in the society.

Despite every effort to make secondary education a priority, the secondary educational system in Nigeria has been rampaged with many challenges ranging from the issues of insecurity, poor funding, poor core curriculum planning, content development and ineffective implementation, inadequate resources' mobilization and inefficiency in resources' utilization among other issues which make the secondary educational products (secondary school leavers- youth) difficult to become relevant to the needs and demands of the global labour market. It is acknowledged by Aja-Okorie and Adali (2013) that most of the Nigerian graduates lack relevant marketable skills. This has resulted to joblessness and increase youth unemployment. Unarguably, if the core curriculum content of the Nigerian secondary educational system is effectively developed and the required resources adequately provided for its implementation in relevance to the modern needs and global demand of the labour markets, the youth will be appropriately equipped to become employable and, or even empowered to create jobs not only in the immediate society but in the global wealth market.

Planning, development and implementation of secondary education core curriculum involves decisions that are determined by a wide range of factors to achieve the aim and objectives for which secondary education stands to accomplish. In the Nigerian educational system, modern curriculum planning, development and implementation are affected by various elements such as the learners' attitude, teachers' attitude, learning environment, psychology of learning, subjects contents, the education agencies, the society, members of the public and the philosophy of the nation in general. Oteh (2002) pointed that curriculum planning, development and implementation require inputs from different sources consisting people, groups and institutions that are affected in various ways of the educational system. Revitalizing secondary educational system for the purpose of empowering the youth and creating jobs for them and sustainable economic development requires the considerations of all the elements' interest, aspirations and



needs while planning, developing and implementing the core curriculum in the secondary educational system.

The issue of resources' mobilization and utilization in Nigerian secondary educational system needs much attention as resources' mobilization and utilization have always been among the major challenges in accomplishing the goals of secondary education in Nigeria. Resources are the neck of any organisation and its management (Maduagwu & Nwogu, 2006). This implies that no system can function effectively and achieve whatever aim for which such system is expected to accomplish without resources. Resources are indispensable elements in the achievement of educational goals (Ebirim et al., 2023). Educational resources according to Ebirim et al. (2023a) are the essential ingredients for effective performance of tasks and development of educational institutions for goals achievement. There have been cases of inadequate supply of infrastructural and instructional materials, equipment, facilities, experienced and high quality personnel in some of the Nigerian secondary schools. In some cases, few resources available for secondary educational activities and programmes are either under-utilized or diverted into other purposes. These situations pose great challenges to revitalizing secondary educational system for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Providing enough fund at the appropriate time for procurement of learning equipment; settlement of running expenses; providing good quality and required infrastructure and facilities for learning as well as recruiting right type of personnel with required and needed skills, knowledge and competences capable of encouraging and equipping youth to acquire marketable skills and ability in the Nigerian secondary educational system will have huge impact in empowering the youth thereby exposing them to the chances of job engagements before and after school leaving or graduation from their various secondary educational programmes. Fund as a financial resource plays a significant role in the survival of secondary educational system. This is why Akinsolu (2012) recognized fund as the major resource in the development of any educational system. Many resources are required to enable secondary educational system operates effectively and efficiently towards the empowerment of youth, job creation and sustainable economic development. With adequate funding and judicious utilization of the available funds required for secondary education, other resources can be acquired and maintained for the secondary educational system to prepare the ground for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

The issue of insecurity is another factor to consider in revitalizing secondary educational system for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria. Insecurity is a situation that poses threat to lives and activities of individuals in the society (Ebirim & Uzoukwu, 2023). Insecurity makes many sections of the society such as the secondary educational system unsafe for youth to carry out various activities that will empower them for job opportunities and sustainable economic development in the society. There are cases of infrastructural decays, paucity of funds, inconsistency in government policies and negative attitude of individuals towards secondary education in the society. The secondary educational resources required for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development are not adequately provided and secured. Moreover, the available resources in secondary schools are ineffectively maintained and inefficiently utilized. Besides, secondary educational managers are unable to ensure that students' activities in secondary schools are regularly supervised and directed towards securing the available resources in secondary schools. For this reason, youths in the secondary educational system are discouraged to utilize their time productively in building up their career opportunities for job creation and sustainable economic development.

## **Conclusion**

Revitalizing secondary educational system for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria is possible if the core curriculum the secondary educational system of the society delivers is structured in such a way that is practically oriented than theoretically based. The available resources required for the operations and implementation of the secondary educational core curriculum, policies and budgets must be effectively mobilized and efficiently utilized. These will enable the youth to become relevant to the needs and demands of the global market.

## **The Way Forward**

Considering the current state of youth in Nigeria today and secondary education, the system provides, it is apposite to rehearse, rephrase and readdress many issues in secondary education for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

1. The government should regularly review the Nigerian secondary education core curriculum. Youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development require dedication and serious mindedness with entrepreneurial spirit and practical exposure. The core curriculum needs to be more extensive and challenging in relevance to the demand of global markets so as to expose the youth into current and future different works of life.
2. The government should always ensure that the development of the Nigerian secondary education core curriculum content and policies are based on the current state of art in Nigeria with proper considerations to the level of resources available for their implementation. Their implementation should be more of practical oriented than more of theoretical in the school system.
3. National philanthropists, civil societies and the government should be highly interested and committed in issues and programmes relating to secondary education. They should also be committed in providing timely adequate funding to secondary educational programmes and involve directly in examining the use of available funds required for secondary education in the society.
4. The authorities responsible for appointing and recruiting staff of secondary educational system should always hire the right type of personnel with relevant and requisite skills needed for empowerment of the youth. The authorities should periodically provide opportunities for staff professional development on specific areas of need to keep them abreast with the current issues and trends in the society.
5. The secondary school managers and administrators should ensure that the required educational resources are adequately provided and properly allocated by the government and parents through periodic submission of inventories on resources' situations in the schools. On the other hand, government and parents should ensure that the required resources available in secondary schools are efficiently utilized and regularly maintained by the school managers and administrators through continuous evaluation.
6. The government and other educational stakeholders should ensure regular supervision of instruction and inspection of educational facilities and equipment in relevance with current challenges and changes in the society. Again, they should always ensure that students' activities in secondary schools are regularly supervised and directed towards maximizing the available resources required for youth empowerment, job creation and sustainable economic development.

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