NJSE

NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

NJSE 2025

ISSN: 1118-1784

Volume 18, Number 1, 2025
&
Volume 18, Number 2, 2025

© NJSE (2025)

Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education (NJSE)
Volume 18, Numbers 1&2, October, 2025

All rights reserved, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise without the written permission of the Editors of NJSE.

ISSN: 118-1784

Publisher

The Association of Sociologists of Education of Nigeria (ASEN)

Formatted & Printed by:

HIS LINEAGE PUBLISHING HOUSE
09 Alli Street, Mokola, Ibadan, Nigeria
Mobile: +234-083 3596 818
Email: awemakin@gmail.com

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-chief:
Prof Adesoji Oni
Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos.

Editors:
Prof. Taiwo Edun
Prof. I.O.O.Amali
Prof. S. A. Dosunmu

Consulting Editors:
Emeritus Prof. (Mrs.) Uche Azikiwe
Prof. C. O. Daramola
Prof. M.N.Sule
Prof. A.O.K. Noah
Prof. C. C. Anadi
Prof.V.U.Dienye

EDITORIAL NOTE

Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education (NJSE) is published by the Association of Sociologists of Education of Nigeria (ASEN) with the policy to produce at least one issue in a year. All articles are published basically for the promotion of scholarship while critique positions to any of them shall be welcomed and possibly published in subsequent editions of the journal.

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in triplicate to the Managing Editor.
2. Manuscripts must be typewritten, double spaced on quarto sheets, and types on one side only.
3. They should be accompanied by abstracts of not more than 200 words in length.
4. Manuscripts, typewritten as indicated above should be between 10 and 15 pages in length excluding the abstract.
5. Details of reference to each work cited (including sources of tables and diagrams) must be given.
6. The journal has adopted the following referencing description of the APA style:

a. Books

I. Author's surname first, then initials, followed by a bracket containing the year of publication.
II. A full stop after the bracket.
III. Title of the book to be italicized and followed by a full stop.
IV. If applicable, name of editors or translator, indicated as ("Ed").
V. Number of edition used (if not first) followed by a semi-colon (:).
VI. Place of publication, followed by a colon and then name of publishers.

b. Periodicals

i. Author's name first, followed by the initial(s) and a comma.
ii. Title of the article in double quotation mark.
iii. Title of the periodical italicized and followed by a comma.
iv. The volume in Arabic figures.
v. The date of the issue or volume to which reference is made and followed by a comma.
vi. The number of the page(s) to which reference is made followed by full stop.

7. Tables and figures should be kept to the barest minimum.
8. Footnotes are not allowed.
9. References should be arranged in alphabetical order according to surnames of the authors.
10. Citations should be made in brackets within the text giving the name of the author, the year the work was published and the page number(s) where it is an indentation.
11. All correspondences should be addressed to:

The Editor

Prof. Adesoji Oni
Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education,
Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
University of Lagos, Lagos. Nigeria.
njeseasen@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Volume 18, Number 1, 2025

Editorial Board **iii**
Editorial Note **iv**

Repositioning Vocational and Technical Education for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria. **Adeyemo Eniola Abioye** & **Shoyemi, Adekunle Adeyinka** **1-5**

Economic Reforms, Public–Private Partnerships and Educational Inequality in Nigeria: A Sociological Analysis of Access and Social Exclusion. **Nweke, Prince Onyemaechi** **6-15**

Sociological Theory, Education and Economic Reforms**.**
M. U. Rabo; Muhammad Lawal Ibrahim & Abubakar Sadiq Musa **16-26**

Repositioning Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria. **Ibrahim Salisu; Bilyaminu Abubakar; Usman Yusuf & Ahmad Kainuwa** **27-35**

Influence of Economic Reform on Youth Unrest and Educational Disengagement in Kwara State, Nigeria.
Akinsola, B.B; James, O.R; Umar, T; Obafemi, E.O & Fijabia. O **36-47**

Role of Social Stratification, Economic Policy in Shaping Access to Educational Opportunities in Zamfara State.
Murtala Salisu; Bala Ibrahim; Fapohunda A. Michael & Ahmad Kainuwa **48-55**

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Educational Access in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Secondary Education in Akwa Ibom State. **Conchi-Miriam Brown** **56-64**

Correlation between Robert Merton King's Sociological Strain Theory and Incidents of Football Betting Behaviour among Students in Pankshin Town of Plateau State. **Chintif, Shwargak Goshit, Abah, Victoria Onyikwu, & Lidimma, Benjamin Golkwi** **65-73**

Sociological Perspectives to Nigeria Education Loan Fund and the Implication on Performance of Undergraduate Education Students in the University of Jos, Nigeria. **Roseline Walu; Chintif, Shwargak Goshit; Lawal, Usman &Iliya George Ringtim** **74-84**

Sociological Analysis of the Role of Education for Developing Human Capital, Effective Economic Reforms and National Development.
Longwap Panmun Tokat; Ajimatanrareje Betty Adenike & Gyang Vou Chong **85-94**

From Certificates to Competence: A Sociological Reflection on Education and Employability. **Simeon Dosunmu & Adesoji A. Oni** **95-104**

Table of Contents

Volume 18, Number 2, 2025

Role of Economic Reforms towards Improving Educational Opportunities of the Girl-Child in Northern Nigeria**. Farouk, Rashida Abubakar & Muhammad, Zanirah Bello** **107-114**

The 'Japa' Syndrome and International Migration: A Sociological Analysis of Causes, Impacts and Policy Implications in Nigeria. **Muhammed, Shamsuddeen Alhassan & Garba, Hussaina Kanoma** **115-122**

Education–Labour Market Disconnect and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: A Sociological Analysis of Policy, Skills, and Structural Constraints. **Solomon Bodang Goteng** **123-132**

Promoting Inclusive and Quality Education for All in Nigeria. **Yakubu Azi Akasa; Zumyil Nansoksen Augustine & Tokji, Sebastine Deshi** **133-146**

Influence of Robert Merton's Strain Theory on Football Betting Behaviour among Students in Pankshin Town of Plateau State, Nigeria**. Chintif, Shwargak Goshit Abah, Victoria Onyikwu & Lidimma, Benjamin Golkwi** **147-155**

Sociological Perspectives to Nigeria Education Loan Fund and the Implication on Performance of Undergraduate Education Students in the University of Jos, Nigeria. **Roseline Walu; Chintif, Shwargak Goshit& Iliya George Ringtim** **156-165**

Interplay of Economic Reforms, Corruption and Insecurity on Educational Quality and Access to Public Secondary Schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. **Catherine Kaning Agbongiasede; Onah Peter Ogbaji; Martha Edu Akanimoh & Constance Aniyom Dien** **166-178**

The Impact of Economic Reforms on Nigeria's Educational Sector. **Ezekiel Gimba Jingbe; Ernest Gotep & Wulime Andrew Jikka** **179-188**

Economic Reform and Educational Inequality in Nigeria: A Sociological Analysis of Policy Intersections. **Onyema Patience Solomon; Constance Aniyom Dien & Lawson Luka** **189-196**

Beyond Indigence: A Sociological Analysis of Labelling, Identity, and Student Loan Participation under NELFUND in Nigeria. **Shoyemi, Adekunle Adyinka; Solanke, Akinwale Olayiwola; Iyiola, Oluwaseun Olayode &Adewole, Oluwaseun Adejoke** **197-205**

REPOSITIONING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Adeyemo Eniola Abioye

Department of Guidance Counselling and Educational Foundations
College of Specialized and Professional Education
Lagos State University of Education Oto/ Ijanikin, Lagos.

Shoyemi, Adekunle Adeyinka

Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Abstract

This paper examines the role of vocational and technical education (VTE) as a catalyst for socio-economic reform in Nigeria from a sociological perspective. Drawing on existing literature and policy documents, the study explores how VTE contributes to human capital development, employment generation, entrepreneurship, and poverty reduction. The paper argues that VTE remains central to addressing youth unemployment and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. However, structural challenges such as inadequate funding, poor societal perception, and weak institutional support continue to limit its effectiveness. The study concludes that repositioning VTE through policy reforms, increased investment, and stronger industry collaboration is essential for achieving meaningful socio-economic transformation in Nigeria

Key words: Vocational, Technical Education, Socio-Economic Reforms in Nigeria

Introduction

Education in Nigeria is constitutionally positioned as a strategic instrument for national development and socio-economic transformation. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), defines education as a process of developing individuals physically, intellectually, morally, and technologically in order to enable them function effectively within their environment and contribute productively to society. Within this framework, education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but a deliberate tool for building human capital capable of driving national growth, innovation, and self-reliance.

Despite this broad mandate, Nigeria continues to face persistent socio-economic challenges such as youth unemployment, poverty, and limited industrial productivity. These challenges have intensified interest in Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) as a practical pathway for equipping individuals with employable skills and entrepreneurial competencies. Scholars such as Narling-Hammond (2010) emphasize that quality education is central to national competitiveness, and that strengthening vocational and technical training is critical to transforming economic outcomes. This position aligns with the growing consensus among policymakers, educators, and development practitioners that sustainable economic reform in Nigeria cannot be achieved without a functional skills-based education system.

Vocational and Technical Education is specifically designed to provide learners with practical skills, scientific knowledge, and work-related attitudes necessary for skilled occupations at sub-professional levels (FRN, 2004). In this regard, Fafunwa (1997) conceptualizes education as a holistic process that develops individuals' abilities, attitudes, and behaviours in ways that enhance societal transformation. VTE therefore becomes a critical component of this process, as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, while also fostering self-

reliance, job creation, and industrial productivity.

However, despite its recognized importance, the extent to which Vocational and Technical Education functions as a catalyst for socio-economic reform in Nigeria remains insufficiently clarified in empirical discourse, particularly in terms of its practical effectiveness in reducing unemployment and enhancing productive engagement among graduates. It is against this backdrop that this study is anchored, with the aim of examining the role of Vocational and Technical Education in driving socio-economic reform in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE)

Vocational and Technical Education refers to aspects of the educational processes in addition to general education, the study of technology and related science together with skill acquisition that are practical to economic and social life (Katsina & Daudawa, 2007). According to UNESCO, as cited in Aina (1993), VTE is a type of education which is an integral component of general education required for preparation for an occupational field and an aspect of continuing education. The National Policy on Education (2004) has placed a very high premium on VTE with regards to its significance in propelling technological and industrial advancement in the Nigerian nation. It has been recognized as the integral aspect of general education that leads to the acquisition of appropriate practical and applied skills and basic scientific knowledge. The National Policy on Education (2004) also declared VTE as:

1. A means of preparing for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work
2. An aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship
3. A method of enhancing poverty alleviation and as an instrument for promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development *inter alia*.

Definition of Concepts

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) represents a critical component of education systems aimed at preparing individuals for productive engagement in the world of work. Rather than existing as separate or isolated constructs, vocational education, technical education, and vocational education and training (VET) collectively form an integrated framework for skills development that supports employability, entrepreneurship, and socio-economic advancement.

Vocational education refers broadly to education designed to prepare individuals for employment in specific occupations. It focuses on the development of practical skills, occupational knowledge, and work-related attitudes required for effective performance in the labour market. As noted by Okoro (2006), vocational education is offered at both secondary and post-secondary levels and is primarily concerned with occupational preparation. It spans multiple fields including industrial and technical trades, agriculture, business, home economics, health occupations, distributive education, and related applied areas such as computer studies and fine arts (Eneyoh, Okon & Okeng, 2012). In this sense, vocational education provides the foundational skill base for workforce participation and economic productivity.

Technical education, on the other hand, is a specialised branch of vocational education that places greater emphasis on scientific knowledge, mathematics, and engineering principles. It is typically delivered at post-secondary levels with the aim of producing technicians and technologists capable of applying scientific and technical knowledge to solve practical problems. While vocational education broadly equips learners with occupational skills, technical education deepens this preparation by developing higher-level competencies required in industrial and technological sectors. Thus, technical education can be understood as a more advanced and specialised form within the wider vocational education continuum.

Building on these distinctions, Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) serves as an umbrella term that integrates both vocational and technical streams within a unified educational framework. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), VTE encompasses all educational processes that involve, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, as

well as the acquisition of practical skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies relevant to occupations across various sectors of economic and social life. Its overarching purpose is to develop skilled manpower capable of contributing to national development through employment, productivity, and innovation.

In contemporary discourse, this integrated system is further captured under the broader concept of Vocational Education and Training (VET). VET refers to structured educational and training programmes designed to equip learners with the knowledge, practical skills, and competencies required for employment in diverse occupational fields. Unlike purely academic education, VET is characterised by strong practical orientation, including hands-on training in workshops, simulated environments, and real workplace settings. Its effectiveness depends on collaboration between governments, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders to ensure alignment with labour market needs (Harrison et al., 2016).

VET operates through multiple delivery pathways. UNESCO (2024) identifies formal VET offered in accredited institutions leading to certification, non-formal VET provided through short courses and workplace training, informal VET acquired through experiential learning on the job, enterprise-based VET jointly supported by employers and governments, and community-based VET targeted at rural or marginalised populations. Collectively, these pathways enhance access to skills acquisition and promote lifelong learning, enabling individuals to adapt to evolving economic demands (Singh, 2015).

In Nigeria, the objectives of VTE are explicitly aligned with national development priorities. These include the provision of trained manpower in applied sciences, technology, and business; the development of technical and vocational skills for agricultural, commercial, and industrial growth; and the promotion of self-reliance through employable skills acquisition. Additionally, VTE aims to produce skilled technicians, technologists, and other personnel capable of applying scientific knowledge to solve environmental and societal problems, thereby contributing directly to economic productivity and national development.

Historically, VTE in Nigeria has evolved through pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial phases. In the pre-colonial era, vocational learning was informal, community-based, and deeply embedded in cultural practices, where children acquired occupational skills through apprenticeship, imitation, and participation in productive activities. Education at this stage was holistic, integrating vocational, moral, and social development without rigid subject boundaries (Anyawu & Mbakwem, 2003). During the colonial period, however, formalisation of education led to the gradual introduction of structured training, although VTE remained underdeveloped. A significant policy milestone emerged in 1946 with the Ten-Year Development and Welfare Plan, which recommended the expansion of vocational and technical education to meet the growing demand for skilled craftsmen and technicians (Okoro, 2006).

Roles of Vocational and Technical Education in Sustainable Socio-Economic Development

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), or Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), is widely recognised as a strategic driver of socio-economic development in Nigeria and other developing economies. Its relevance lies in its capacity to produce skilled human capital that directly supports production, employment, and innovation. As Akponue (2009) in Okafor, Onuka & Chikezie (2018) argues, no nation can achieve meaningful technological and economic progress without a robust vocational system that fosters wealth creation, employment generation, and poverty reduction. Empirical evidence from countries such as Germany, South Korea, and Singapore further demonstrates that strong VTE systems correlate with industrial growth, low unemployment, and sustained economic competitiveness.

At the core of VTE's contribution is human capital development, where individuals are equipped with practical and occupation-specific skills in sectors such as agriculture,

engineering, construction, ICT, and hospitality. This skill formation directly addresses labour market demands and reduces structural unemployment. In Nigeria, where youth unemployment remains persistently high (over 40% according to NBS labour estimates in recent years), VTE provides an alternative pathway for labour absorption by producing job-ready graduates rather than purely theoretically trained job seekers.

Closely linked to this is VTE's role in employment creation and entrepreneurship development. Unlike conventional academic education, VTE emphasises applied competencies that enable graduates to establish micro and small enterprises in areas such as tailoring, welding, automobile repairs, catering, and digital services. This shifts individuals from dependency on wage employment to self-employment and job creation. From a sociological perspective, this function contributes to social mobility, as individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds can improve their living conditions through skill acquisition rather than formal educational credentials alone.

VTE also plays a significant role in industrialisation and technological development. Industrial systems depend on technicians, artisans, and technologists who can operate, maintain, and innovate within production systems. Without this middle-level manpower, industrial growth becomes unsustainable. Countries with strong vocational systems have demonstrated higher industrial output and innovation capacity, suggesting that VTE is a structural requirement for economic transformation rather than a supplementary educational pathway.

In addition, VTE contributes to poverty reduction and inequality mitigation. By providing accessible and practice-oriented education, it expands opportunities for disadvantaged populations, including rural dwellers, women, and school dropouts. This reduces educational exclusion and promotes inclusive development, a key sociological indicator of reduced structural inequality. Through income generation and skill-based employment, households transition from vulnerability to economic stability, reinforcing intergenerational mobility.

Furthermore, VTE strengthens rural development and spatial equity by decentralising skill acquisition opportunities. Training in agriculture, agro-processing, carpentry, and renewable energy enables rural populations to generate income locally, thereby reducing rural–urban migration and its associated urban poverty pressures. This spatial redistribution of opportunity contributes to more balanced regional development.

VTE also enhances productivity and economic resilience. A technically skilled workforce is more efficient, adaptable, and innovative, leading to increased industrial output and national GDP growth. Moreover, in periods of economic instability, multi-skilled individuals are better able to transition across occupations or engage in informal enterprise, thereby strengthening household and national resilience.

Finally, VTE supports lifelong learning and labour market adaptability. In a rapidly changing technological economy, continuous reskilling ensures that workers remain relevant and competitive. This enhances long-term employability, income stability, and upward social mobility.

Conclusion

Vocational and technical education remains a critical instrument for socio-economic transformation in Nigeria. It contributes to employment generation, entrepreneurship development, and human capital formation. However, its potential is constrained by structural challenges such as inadequate funding, weak policy implementation, and societal undervaluation of technical skills. From a sociological perspective, strengthening VTE is essential for reducing inequality, promoting social mobility, and fostering sustainable development. Effective policy reforms, institutional strengthening, and stakeholder collaboration are therefore necessary to reposition VTE as a driver of national development

Recommendations

The following recommendations were raised:

1. Government, in collaboration with private sector actors and development

partners, should prioritise adequate funding for VTE institutions. This includes the establishment and upgrading of modern workshops, laboratories, and simulation centres. In addition, obsolete equipment should be replaced with industry-standard tools and technologies to ensure that training environments reflect current workplace realities and enhance graduate employability..

2. The effectiveness of VTE largely depends on the competence of instructors. Therefore, recruitment policies should prioritise technically skilled and pedagogically trained personnel. In addition, continuous professional development programmes should be institutionalised to ensure instructors remain updated with emerging technologies. Industry-based attachments for teachers should also be encouraged to strengthen their practical exposure and instructional relevance..
3. There is a need to deepen collaboration between training institutions and industry through structured apprenticeship schemes, internships, and industrial attachments for students. These partnerships will ensure curriculum relevance, enhance hands-on experience, and improve graduate readiness for the labour market. Furthermore, industry participation in curriculum design and assessment should be encouraged to align training with labour market demands.

References

Anyawu, S. U., & Mbakwem, N. N. (2003). *Curriculum studies: Concepts and processes*. Reliable Publishers.

Ayodele, J. B. (2006). Obstacle to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. Asaba Publication.

Eneyoh, E. S., Okon, J. T., & Ekeng, C. (2012). Vocational and technical education: A catalyst for economic transformation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 11(1), 110–114.

Fafunwa, A. B. (1997). *History of education in Nigeria*. George Allen & Unwin.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National policy on education* (4th ed.). NERDC Press.

Harrison, C., Paul, S., & Burnard, K. (2016). Entrepreneurial leadership: A systematic literature review. *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 235–264. http://www.senatehall.com/entrepreneurship?article=544

Katsina, H. I., & Daudawa, D. I. (2007). Repositioning of vocational and technical education for national empowerment. *Journal of Vocational Education*, 1(1), 35–39.

Narling-Hammond, L. (2010). Evaluating teachers' effectiveness. http://www.scribd.com/doc/5769721/teaching-learning-process

Okafor, O. E., Onuka, A. U., & Chikezie, I. (2018). The youth in vocational technical education: A tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Journal of Association of Vocational and Technical Education of Nigeria*, 22(2), 234–240.

Okoro, O. M. (2006). *Principles and methods in vocational and technical education*. University Trust Publishers.

Singh, M. (2015). *Global perspectives on recognising non-formal and informal learning: Why recognition matters*. Springer Nature.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2004). *Trains 24 NBTE, poly staff*. Guardian Newspaper, November 19. World Bank support youth employment and empowerment in Nigeria.

Wale, A., & Adaramola, G. (2012). *Introduction to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria*. UNAD Press.

ECONOMIC REFORMS, PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ACCESS AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Nweke, Prince Onyemaechi

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This paper critically examines how economic reforms and public–private partnerships in Nigeria's education sector shape social inequality and access to education. Drawing on a sociological perspective and relevant literature, the paper argues that although these policy strategies are intended to improve efficiency, modernize infrastructure, and expand institutional capacity, they often reproduce class and spatial inequalities by privileging urban areas and socio-economically advantaged groups. The analysis explores how cost-sharing, commercialization, and private sector participation influence educational funding, school infrastructure, and the distribution of learning opportunities. It further shows that reforms framed around efficiency may deepen exclusion when they are not accompanied by strong redistributive and equity-oriented safeguards. The paper concludes that educational reform in Nigeria must be guided not only by administrative efficiency but also by social justice, inclusive planning, and targeted protection for marginalized communities. It recommends equity-sensitive funding frameworks, inclusive partnership policies, and stronger public accountability mechanisms to ensure broader and fairer access to education.

Keywords: Economic reforms, public–private partnerships, social inequality, access to education

Introduction

Economic reforms and public–private partnerships have become prominent pillars in Nigeria's evolving education landscape. In response to long-standing challenges such as inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating facilities, and increasing enrolment pressures, governments at both national and sub-national levels have adopted these strategies to improve efficiency and expand service delivery. This shift aligns with a wider global movement toward market-oriented approaches in public administration, where collaboration with the private sector, cost-sharing arrangements, and alternative financing models are promoted as pathways for enhancing resource mobilization, operational effectiveness, and innovation within education systems. There is growing concern that Nigeria's increasing reliance on economic reforms and public–private partnerships in the education sector, although intended to expand resources and improve service delivery, may unintentionally widen social inequality by privileging better-off households and urban areas while leaving vulnerable populations behind. This concern underscores the urgent need to examine whether these reforms genuinely enhance equitable access to education or reinforce existing disparities.

Economic reforms in Nigeria have been designed to diversify funding sources, improve institutional autonomy, and enhance administrative efficiency across educational institutions. These reforms include the introduction of cost-sharing mechanisms, commercialization of selected educational services, and greater autonomy in school management. While such strategies aim to relieve financial pressure on government and improve service delivery, they often increase the cost of education for families. Rising levies,

tuition fees, and ancillary charges disproportionately affect low-income households, thereby raising equity concerns (Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024). Public–private partnerships have emerged as a complementary strategy to address the persistent gaps in educational infrastructure and resources. These partnerships involve collaboration between government agencies and private organizations to provide classrooms, instructional materials, technological tools, and teacher development programs. Research indicates that partnerships can accelerate improvements in school infrastructure and promote better accountability and innovation within the education sector (Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024; Toriola-Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, & Adedapo, 2022). International development organizations and philanthropic foundations also support these initiatives, recognizing the potential of private sector involvement in expanding access and enhancing learning outcomes. Notwithstanding the benefits, evidence suggests that public–private partnership projects are often concentrated in urban and economically advantaged communities, leaving rural and marginalized areas under-resourced (PLAN Nigeria, 2024). Similarly, reforms that shift costs to households can exacerbate social stratification, limiting educational opportunities for children from low-income families. These dynamics indicate a dual reality in which economic reforms and public–private partnerships simultaneously expand access and reinforce inequality. The tension between efficiency and equity has thus become a critical issue in Nigeria's education sector, highlighting the need for deliberate policy interventions that prioritize inclusivity and social justice.

Conceptualization

Economic reforms have become a central feature of Nigeria's education sector as governments strive to address persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, decaying infrastructure, rising enrolment, and inefficiencies in service delivery. These reforms are deliberate, policy driven measures and structural adjustments designed to improve the allocation and management of resources, increase institutional autonomy, and enhance the overall efficiency of public services (Akinola, 2021; Bello, 2020; Chukwuemeka, 2022). Specifically, economic reforms in education often involve introducing cost sharing mechanisms, promoting accountability in financial management, diversifying revenue sources, and encouraging innovation within schools (Durojaiye, 2023; Eze, 2021; Fadare, 2022; Garba, 2023).While these studies largely converge on the efficiency gains associated with reforms, they differ in their interpretation of the social consequences of such policy shifts. On one hand, proponents argue that these reforms expand access, improve quality, and modernize infrastructure through better planning and resource mobilization. On the other hand, a growing body of evidence suggests that these same reforms may reproduce or even deepen existing inequalities by shifting the financial burden of education from the state to households (Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024). This tension highlights an unresolved debate in the literature: whether economic reforms represent genuine systemic improvement or a restructuring that privileges efficiency over equity. In this sense, reforms may be interpreted not only as technical solutions but also as ideological instruments aligned with market oriented approaches to public service delivery.

Importantly, many economic reforms are implemented alongside increased private sector participation, leading directly to the expansion of public private partnerships. Public private partnerships are cooperative arrangements between government agencies and private sector organizations designed to deliver public services or infrastructure more efficiently and effectively. In the education sector, these partnerships have become increasingly prevalent, particularly as governments face funding constraints and growing demand for quality schooling (Adeyemi, 2022; Bakare, 2021; Chibuzo, 2020). Public private partnerships may involve private investment in the construction of classrooms, provision of teaching and learning materials, introduction of technology enabled learning platforms, and capacity building for teachers and administrative staff (Dike, 2023;

Ekpo, 2021; Folorunsho, 2022; Ganiyu, 2023). However, the literature presents competing perspectives on the role of public private partnerships. While some studies emphasize their capacity to enhance efficiency, innovation, and service delivery, others question whether these partnerships function as mechanisms for the gradual withdrawal of the state from its responsibility to provide equitable education. Empirical findings indicate that the benefits of public private partnerships are often unevenly distributed; frequently favoring urban and affluent communities, while rural and marginalized areas remain underserved (PLAN Nigeria, 2024). This raises critical concerns about whether these partnerships expand access broadly or simply redistribute higher quality educational opportunities toward already advantaged groups. Thus, rather than being neutral policy tools, public private partnerships may operate within broader political and economic structures that shape who benefits and who is excluded.

Social inequality provides a crucial lens for interrogating these dynamics. Social inequality refers to the systematic disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and privileges among individuals and groups within a society. In the educational context, it manifests in unequal access to quality schools, qualified teachers, learning materials, and infrastructure across socio economic and geographic divides (Adebola, 2020; Babalola, 2021; Chinedu, 2022; Danjuma, 2023; Eghosa, 2021; Femi, 2022; Garuba, 2023). While some scholars attribute these disparities primarily to structural socio economic conditions, others argue that policy interventions such as economic reforms and public private partnerships actively shape and, in some cases, intensify these inequalities. In particular, the unequal implementation of reforms and partnerships suggests that access to improved educational resources is often contingent upon existing advantages, such as location or income level. This reinforces a key debate in the literature: whether policy reforms are mitigating inequality or inadvertently entrenching it. Consequently, social inequality is not merely an outcome but also a diagnostic tool for evaluating the distributive effects of reforms and partnerships within the education system. These patterns can be further understood through sociological theories of social reproduction, which argue that education systems often maintain and legitimize existing class structures rather than eliminate them. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990) explain how unequal access to cultural and economic capital shapes educational outcomes, giving systematic advantage to already privileged groups. Similarly, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) argue that education systems tend to mirror broader economic inequalities, preparing individuals for positions that correspond to their class background. Within this framework, the unequal effects of economic reforms and public private partnerships are not incidental but reflect deeper structural processes through which education reproduces social inequality.

Education, as a concept, encompasses structured processes through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and competencies necessary for personal development and social participation (Abubakar, 2020; Bello, 2021; Chukwu, 2022; Danladi, 2023; Eze, 2021; Folashade, 2022; Gani, 2023). Although widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a driver of social mobility, the extent to which education fulfills this role remains contested within the context of reform driven systems. While economic reforms and public private partnerships aim to enhance efficiency, infrastructure, and access, their outcomes suggest that improved provision does not automatically translate into equitable participation. Thus, education becomes the site where competing policy objectives, efficiency and equity, are negotiated and contested. The assumption that expanding resources leads to inclusive outcomes is increasingly challenged by evidence showing that without deliberate equity focused policies, reforms may disproportionately benefit already privileged groups.

The interrelationship between economic reforms, public private partnerships, social inequality, and education is therefore complex and multidimensional. Economic reforms establish the policy and financial framework, while public private partnerships operationalize these reforms through private sector involvement. However, their combined effects are mediated by existing social structures,

resulting in differentiated outcomes across populations. Social inequality both shapes and reflects these outcomes, revealing the extent to which reforms achieve or fail to achieve equitable access. Recent scholarship underscores this complexity. While studies consistently document improvements in infrastructure, efficiency, and administrative practices resulting from reforms and public private partnerships (Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024; Fadare, 2022; Adeyemi, 2022; Dike, 2023; Toriola Coker et al., 2022), they also point to persistent and, in some cases, widening disparities in access to quality education (Adebola, 2020; Chinedu, 2022; PLAN Nigeria, 2024). This duality reflects a fundamental contradiction in the literature: reforms that enhance system performance may simultaneously produce unequal outcomes. Despite these insights, existing studies often examine economic reforms and public private partnerships in isolation, with limited attention to their combined and interactive effects on social inequality. Moreover, insufficient emphasis has been placed on critically interrogating the ideological assumptions underpinning these interventions, particularly their alignment with market oriented approaches to public service provision. Therefore, this study extends existing knowledge by not only examining the individual contributions of economic reforms and public private partnerships but also analyzing how their interaction shapes patterns of inequality in access to education. Through situating these interventions within broader socio economic and policy debates, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of whether current reform strategies promote inclusive development or reinforce structural disparities.

Economic Reforms and Their Uneven Outcomes

Economic reforms in Nigeria's education sector have been widely implemented as strategies to enhance efficiency, improve resource allocation, and ensure the financial sustainability of schools. These reforms often include cost sharing mechanisms, decentralization of school management, performance based financing, and the commercialization of selected educational services (Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024; Fadare, 2022). While these reforms are frequently justified in terms of efficiency and institutional sustainability, they also represent a fundamental restructuring of how education is financed and accessed. Specifically, as the state reduces its direct financial responsibility, the cost of education is increasingly transferred to households. This shift is not merely administrative; it redefines educational participation as a function of household economic capacity. At the level of funding, economic reforms have diversified revenue sources beyond government allocations. Schools now rely more on internally generated funds, private contributions, and community support (Durojaiye, 2023; Eze, 2021). Evidence from Bello (2020) and Garba (2023) indicated that such financial restructuring has improved institutional efficiency, enabling better infrastructure maintenance, more effective staff deployment, and enhanced management of learning resources.

However, this diversification simultaneously reduces the redistributive role of the state, weakening the capacity of public education to function as an equalizing social institution. At the level of access, reforms have produced differentiated outcomes across socio economic groups. While some schools have expanded facilities and introduced technology enhanced learning tools, access to these improvements is uneven and often concentrated in urban and better resourced areas (PLAN Nigeria, 2024). As a result, access to quality educational environments increasingly reflects geographic and class based advantages rather than universal provision. At the level of participation, the effects of cost sharing are most pronounced. Rising tuition fees, levies, and ancillary charges directly condition who is able to enroll and remain in school (Adebola, 2020; Chinedu, 2022). In this context, participation is no longer determined solely by willingness or academic ability but by the financial capacity of households. Consequently, children from low income families are systematically excluded or pushed toward lower quality schooling options. This is not an unintended outcome but a

structural consequence of reform logic, where the burden of financing education is redistributed in ways that privilege those with greater economic resources. At the level of quality, reforms have generated improvements in some institutions while simultaneously deepening disparities across the system. Schools that are able to mobilize additional resources through fees or partnerships tend to offer better facilities, more qualified teachers, and improved learning environments (Bello, 2020; Garba, 2023). In contrast, schools serving poorer communities often lack the capacity to generate such resources, resulting in persistent deficits in infrastructure and instructional quality. Thus, quality becomes unevenly distributed, reinforcing existing social hierarchies.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that economic reforms do not produce uniform outcomes. Instead, they reorganize the education system along socio economic lines, where advantages accumulate to already privileged groups. While reforms have contributed to efficiency gains and institutional improvements, they have also transformed education from a broadly accessible public good into a more stratified system in which opportunities are closely tied to class position. The resulting inequalities are therefore not incidental but embedded within the logic of reform itself. This tension between efficiency and equity underscores the need for critical evaluation of reform policies. Without deliberate mechanisms to protect vulnerable populations, economic reforms risk entrenching social inequality by systematically shifting the costs and benefits of education in ways that disadvantage those with the least resources. Understanding these differentiated effects across funding, access, participation, and quality is essential for assessing the broader implications of reform on social inequality in Nigeria's education system. From a sociological perspective, these developments reflect a shift toward market oriented models of education provision, where access and participation are increasingly mediated by economic capacity. As noted by Ball (2012), contemporary education reforms are often embedded within broader neoliberal policy frameworks that prioritize efficiency, competition, and private sector involvement. In such contexts, the withdrawal of the state from direct financing does not simply improve efficiency but restructures educational access in ways that align with existing class hierarchies.

Public Private Partnerships and Expanding School Capacity

Public private partnerships have increasingly become a prominent strategy for addressing funding gaps and expanding the capacity of educational institutions in Nigeria. These collaborations involve formal agreements between government agencies and private sector organizations, aimed at mobilizing financial resources, technical expertise, and management capacity to improve educational provision (Adeyemi, 2022; Dike, 2023). While they are often presented as efficient and innovative solutions to public sector constraints, public private partnerships are not neutral policy instruments. Rather, they are embedded within broader economic and political logics that shape how, where, and for whom educational investments are made. At a structural level, public private partnerships operate according to considerations of profitability, visibility, and operational convenience. Private actors are more likely to invest in locations where returns, whether financial, reputational, or strategic, are more secure. As a result, partnership initiatives tend to concentrate in urban and relatively affluent areas, where infrastructure, population density, and institutional stability reduce risk and increase impact visibility (Toriola Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, & Adedapo, 2022). This means that the distribution of partnership benefits is not accidental but systematically patterned, making disadvantaged and rural communities less attractive to private investment unless specific public policies compel inclusion.

Empirical studies by Toriola Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, and Adedapo (2022) show that public private partnerships have contributed to the expansion of school infrastructure and the adoption of modern teaching methodologies. Schools engaged in partnership initiatives report improved classroom facilities, libraries, computer laboratories, and electronic learning platforms, all of which enhance student engagement and

learning outcomes (Toriola Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, & Adedapo, 2022; Ekpo, 2021). In addition, partnerships often support teacher training, technical assistance, and curriculum development, strengthening instructional capacity within participating institutions. These outcomes demonstrate that partnerships can significantly improve the material and organizational conditions of schooling. However, these improvements must be understood within a broader pattern of differentiated access. At the level of capacity expansion, partnerships increase the availability of resources, but this expansion is unevenly distributed across regions and social groups. At the level of access, students in schools connected to partnership networks benefit from enhanced facilities and learning opportunities, while those in non participating or marginalized areas remain excluded from such gains. At the level of participation, the presence of better resourced partnership schools may attract students who can afford associated costs, thereby reinforcing stratification within the education system. At the level of quality, partnerships contribute to higher standards in some institutions while leaving others relatively under resourced, deepening disparities in educational experience.

The integration of digital technologies further illustrates this uneven dynamic. Private sector involvement has facilitated the introduction of online learning platforms, interactive instructional tools, and expanded access to digital content (PLAN Nigeria, 2024; Adeyemi, 2022). While these innovations enhance learning outcomes in participating schools, they also risk widening the gap between technologically equipped institutions and those lacking basic infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Thus, technology driven improvements do not automatically translate into system wide equity. Beyond these distributional concerns, public private partnerships raise important questions about the changing character of education as a public good. As private actors take on greater roles in financing, managing, and shaping educational provision, the boundaries between public responsibility and private interest become increasingly blurred. This shift may contribute to processes of privatization, where access to quality education is progressively mediated by market based arrangements rather than guaranteed as a universal right. In this context, educational citizenship becomes differentiated, with varying levels of access and quality linked to socio economic position and institutional affiliation.

Therefore, public private partnerships should be understood not only as mechanisms for expanding school capacity but also as politically and economically embedded arrangements that can restructure the distribution of educational opportunities. While they offer clear benefits in terms of infrastructure development, technological advancement, and institutional support, their reliance on market oriented logics means that they are structurally inclined to reproduce existing inequalities unless deliberately regulated. The uneven geography of partnership investments, combined with their selective enhancement of quality, highlights the need for strong public oversight to ensure that efficiency gains do not come at the cost of equity. This dynamic also reflects broader transformations in the governance of education, where the increasing role of private actors reshapes the public character of schooling. Michael Apple (2006) argues that market driven reforms in education often lead to the commodification of learning, where access to quality education becomes differentiated according to socio economic status. In this sense, public private partnerships may contribute not only to capacity expansion but also to the stratification of educational provision, producing varied levels of access and quality across different social groups.

Persistent Inequalities and Policy Direction

Persistent Inequalities

Regardless of the potential of economic reforms and public private partnerships to improve efficiency, expand infrastructure, and modernize education delivery, evidence indicates that these interventions systematically reproduce social inequalities within Nigeria's education system. A central pattern is the widening urban rural divide. Public private partnerships and reform driven initiatives are disproportionately

concentrated in urban and relatively affluent areas, where private actors perceive greater operational convenience, institutional stability, and visibility of outcomes (Toriola Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, & Adedapo, 2022; PLAN Nigeria, 2024). This spatial concentration is not incidental but reflects the underlying investment logic of partnerships, which prioritizes low risk and high impact environments. As a result, rural schools remain under resourced, with limited access to modern infrastructure, digital learning tools, and qualified teachers, thereby reinforcing pre existing geographic inequalities. At the same time, economic reforms based on cost sharing and commercialization restructure access to education along socio economic lines. By shifting financial responsibility from the state to households, these reforms make participation increasingly dependent on class position (Adebola, 2020; Chinedu, 2022). Rising tuition fees, levies, and associated costs do not affect all households equally; rather, they systematically exclude or disadvantage children from low income backgrounds in terms of enrollment, retention, and progression. In this sense, inequality is not simply an unintended consequence but a structural outcome of reform logic, where access to education is mediated by the ability to pay.

The combined effect of reforms and partnerships is therefore a stratified education system. Urban and higher income populations gain access to better resourced schools, enhanced learning environments, and improved educational outcomes, while rural and economically disadvantaged groups face persistent barriers. These patterns reflect a broader process of social reproduction, where existing inequalities in wealth and location are translated into unequal educational opportunities and, ultimately, unequal life chances. Education, rather than functioning as a mechanism of social mobility, risks reinforcing class privilege under current reform conditions.

Policy Direction

Addressing these inequalities requires more than general commitments to equity; it demands specific regulatory and redistributive interventions that directly confront the structural tendencies of reforms and partnerships to produce exclusion. If public private partnerships are to contribute to inclusive development, they must be governed by clear equity based rules rather than left to market driven allocation. First, partnership agreements should include **mandatory inclusion clauses** that require private partners to allocate a defined proportion of their investments to underserved rural and low income communities. Such clauses should specify measurable targets, such as minimum investment quotas in disadvantaged regions or the establishment of infrastructure in schools lacking basic facilities. Compliance should be legally binding and tied to incentives such as tax benefits or access to government contracts, as well as penalties for non compliance (Toriola Coker, Owoseni, Hafiz, Hakeem, & Adedapo, 2022). Second, government must actively prevent the urban concentration of reform benefits through **geographically weighted funding models**. This involves directing higher levels of public investment to rural and marginalized areas to offset the unequal distribution of private sector engagement (PLAN Nigeria, 2024). Without such redistribution, partnerships will continue to cluster in already advantaged locations, reinforcing spatial inequality. Third, affordability must be addressed through **institutionalized cost protection mechanisms**. Rather than relying on general subsidies, policies should include structured fee regulation, targeted grants for low income households, and publicly funded scholarship schemes that guarantee access for vulnerable groups. These measures are essential to counterbalance the exclusionary effects of cost sharing reforms (Fadare, 2022; Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024). Fourth, a robust **equity monitoring framework** is necessary to track how reforms and partnerships affect funding, access, participation, and quality across different social groups. This includes disaggregated data systems that capture variations by income level, location, and school type, enabling policymakers to identify patterns of exclusion and intervene accordingly (Bello, 2020; Garba, 2023). Monitoring should not be limited to outputs such as infrastructure provision but should also assess who benefits from these investments. Finally, the governance of reforms and partnerships must be strengthened through

public accountability mechanisms that ensure education remains a social right rather than a selectively accessible service. This includes transparent reporting, community participation in decision making, and regulatory oversight that prioritizes social outcomes over purely financial or efficiency considerations. Taken together, these measures shift the focus of policy from administrative efficiency to social justice. They recognize that without deliberate intervention, economic reforms and public private partnerships will continue to align educational opportunities with class advantage. Therefore, the central challenge is not simply to improve the performance of the education system but to restructure it in ways that prevent the reproduction of inequality. Ensuring equitable access to quality education is essential not only for individual advancement but also for addressing broader patterns of social stratification and unequal life chances in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that economic reforms and public–private partnerships in Nigeria's education sector operate within a deeply unequal social structure and therefore produce uneven outcomes. Although these strategies may improve efficiency, expand infrastructure, and modernize learning environments, they also risk reproducing educational inequality by privileging urban schools, affluent households, and communities already positioned to benefit from reform. The sociological significance of this finding is that educational reforms are never neutral. They redistribute opportunities, burdens, and advantages across social groups. Unless reform policies are deliberately structured around equity, they can intensify class and spatial disparities rather than reduce them. For Nigeria's education system to serve as a tool of inclusion and social mobility, reform must be guided not only by fiscal efficiency and institutional expansion but by justice, redistribution, and the protection of marginalized learners. Hence, these outcomes reinforce the view that education operates as a key mechanism of social stratification, where unequal access to resources translates into unequal life chances. Importantly, educational systems often function to allocate individuals into hierarchical social positions, while demonstrates how structural inequalities are reproduced through everyday educational experiences. Therefore, unless reforms and partnerships are deliberately designed to counteract these dynamics, they risk reinforcing class privilege rather than promoting social mobility.

Recommendations

1. Government should adopt equity-sensitive educational financing frameworks that direct more resources to rural, low-income, and historically underserved communities rather than relying on uniform distribution.
2. All publicct more resources to rural, low-income, and historically undmandatory inclusion clauses requiring investment in disadvantaged schools and communities.
3. Cost-sharing policies should be accompanied by targeted subsidies, grants, and fee protection mechanisms for low-income households to prevent exclusion.
4. Federal and state authorities should establish robust accountability and monitoring systems to assess the distributive effects of reforms and partnerships on access, quality, and equity.
5. Educational reforms should be evaluated not only in terms of efficiency gains but also in terms of their effects on social justice, educational inclusion, and the reduction of class and spatial inequalities

Reference

Abubakar, M. A. (2020). Education as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Development Studies, 15*(2), 45–60.

Adebola, J. O. (2020). Social inequality and educational access in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Educational Equity, 12*(1), 23–37.

Adeyemi, T. O. (2022). Public private partnerships and educational infrastructure development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 19*(3), 101–118.

Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Babalola, A. (2021). Structural disparities in Nigerian education: Implications for equity. *International Journal of Social Policy and Education, 7*(2), 55–70.

Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global education inc.: New policy networks and the neoliberal imaginary*. Routledge.

Bello, S. A. (2020). Economic reforms and public sector efficiency in Nigeria. *African Journal of Development Studies, 10*(1), 34–49.

Bello, S. A. (2021). Education as a driver of social transformation in developing countries. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research, 18*(4), 77–92.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487–511). Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. Basic Books.

Chibuzo, C. N. (2020). Frameworks for effective public private partnerships in Nigeria. *Journal of Management and Policy Studies, 5*(1), 66–80.

Chinedu, U. (2022). Social inequality and educational outcomes in Nigeria: A critical review. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies, 20*(2), 89–105.

Chukwu, P. N. (2022). Education and national development in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Education and Development, 14*(3), 112–128.

Collins, R. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. Academic Press.

Danjuma, F. A. (2023). Socioeconomic disparities and access to education in Nigeria. *African Educational Review, 21*(1), 43–59.

Dike, E. (2023). Leveraging private sector partnerships for public service delivery in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Development, 16*(2), 90–106.

Durojaiye, T. O. (2023). Economic reforms and public service efficiency in Nigeria. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies, 9*(1), 55–70.

Ekpo, O. (2021). Public private collaboration for educational quality enhancement in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education and Development, 7*(3), 45–60.

Eze, N. (2021). Economic reforms in Nigerian education: Efficiency and equity considerations. *Journal of African Education Policy, 12*(4), 34–50.

Fadare, R. O. (2022). Policy reforms for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Development Studies, 15*(2), 101–118.

Femi, O. T. (2022). Socioeconomic inequality and educational access in Africa. *African Journal of Education and Development, 18*(1), 77–94.

Folashade, I. (2022). Education as a transformative tool for social mobility. *Nigerian Journal of Social Development, 10*(3), 50–68.

Gani, A. (2023). The role of education in reducing social disparities in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 11*(2), 90–107.

Ganiyu, M. (2023). Public private partnerships as a tool for innovation in public services. *Journal of Policy Implementation Studies, 7*(1), 66–82.

Garba, S. (2023). Economic reforms and social development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Economics and Development, 15*(1), 101–120.

Obasa, S. O., & Oluyomi, O. O. (2024). Public private partnerships and sustainable development goals in Nigeria. *African Journal of Stability and Development, 16*(2), 390–417.

PLAN Nigeria. (2024). *Story of change: Enhancing education standards through public private partnership forum*. https://planenigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Enhancing-Education-Standards-through-PPP-Forum.pdf

Toriola-Coker, L. O., Owoseni, O. O., Hafiz, A., Hakeem, O., & Adedapo, A. A. (2022). Public private partnership as an aid to tertiary institution support for internally generated revenue: A case study of Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. *Engineering and Applied Sciences, 7*(3), 36–45.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Saxon House.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY, EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC REFORMS

M. U. Rabo

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education and Extension Services
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Muhammad Lawal Ibrahim

Department of Educational Foundations
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto

Abubakar Sadiq Musa

Department of Educational Foundations
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto

Abstract

Education systems are deeply embedded within broader social and economic structures, and reforms such as fiscal retrenchment, privatization, and public–private partnerships (PPPs) reshape both access and outcomes. This study examines education through sociological theory to understand how reforms influence equity, mobility, and efficiency. The objectives are threefold: to synthesize classical and contemporary sociological frameworks, to analyze how economic reforms restructure educational opportunities, and to identify design principles that balance efficiency with equity. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative theoretical-synthesis approach, drawing on systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and comparative case studies. Findings reveal that while functionalism highlights education's systemic role in stability and growth, conflict theory exposes how reforms may reproduce inequality, and constructivist perspectives show how meanings and narratives shape implementation. Evidence suggests that poorly regulated privatization and austerity often deepen inequities, whereas well-designed Private Public Participation (PPP) and progressive funding formulas can expand access and protect vulnerable groups. The study recommends embedding equity safeguards, such as targeted subsidies, equity-weighted funding, and strict accountability into reform design. It concludes that education simultaneously mirrors social stratification and drives mobility, with reform outcomes dependent on institutional design and oversight. Collaboration among policymakers, scholars, and civil society is essential to ensure that education fulfills its dual purpose: stabilizing existing structures where necessary and enabling upward mobility and social justice for disadvantaged populations.

Keywords: Reform, Privatization, Public–Private Partnerships, Equity, Efficiency, Social Mobility

Introduction

Education systems are deeply embedded within broader social and economic structures, meaning that government-led economic reforms, uch as fiscal retrenchment, privatization, contracting, and public–private partnerships, inevitably reshape how education is organized and experienced. These reforms influence the allocation of resources, governance arrangements, and patterns of access within education, often redefining who benefits from schooling and under what conditions. At the same time, education plays an active role in mediating social change by shaping skills, values, and social mobility, thereby reinforcing

or challenging emerging economic and social orders.

Sociological theory offers essential conceptual tools for analyzing these dynamics by explaining how reforms transform educational access, practices, and outcomes. Through concepts such as social reproduction, institutional adaptation, and meaning-making, sociological perspectives reveal how schools respond to policy pressures while simultaneously reproducing or renegotiating existing inequalities. In this sense, education becomes both a site of adaptation to economic reforms and a mechanism through which broader patterns of social change are sustained or contested (Campbell, 2021; Fabre, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Contemporary economic reform agendas are increasingly shaped by neoliberal principles that emphasize efficiency, cost-containment, competition, and the use of market mechanisms in public service delivery, including education. Policies such as budget rationalization, privatization of educational services, performance-based funding, and public–private partnerships are often justified on the grounds of improving quality and reducing government expenditure. While these reforms may enhance managerial efficiency or expand service provision, they also reorient education toward economic productivity and measurable outputs, sometimes at the expense of its broader social, cultural, and civic purposes.

However, the implementation of economically driven reforms frequently produces unintended consequences for equity, social mobility, and inclusion. Market-oriented approaches can widen disparities between socio-economic groups by privileging those with greater financial, cultural, or informational resources, while marginalizing students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Reduced public investment and increased reliance on private actors may limit access to quality education, reinforce stratification between schools, and weaken education's role as a leveling institution. As a result, rather than promoting equal opportunity, such reforms may reproduce existing social inequalities and constrain upward social mobility.

The central problem, therefore, lies in the persistent disconnect between policy designs grounded in economic rationality and the complex social realities that shape educational outcomes. Educational systems operate within contexts marked by inequality, cultural diversity, and unequal power relations, which economic models alone cannot fully capture. This gap raises critical questions about how reforms can be designed and implemented in ways that balance efficiency with social justice, ensuring that economic objectives do not undermine education's role in promoting equity, social cohesion, and democratic citizenship.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this paper is to:

i. Synthesize sociological theories relevant to the study of education under economic reform;
ii. Examine how fiscal adjustments, privatization, and PPPs influence educational structure and opportunity
iii. Identify policy design principles that balance the goals economic efficiency with imperative of equity and social mobility in education.

Research Questions

i. Which sociological theories are most relevant for understanding education in the context of economic reforms?
ii. In what ways do fiscal adjustments, privatization, and public–private partnerships (PPPs) affect the structure of education and access to educational opportunities?
iii. What policy design principles can effectively balance economic efficiency with the need for equity and social mobility in education?

Theoretical Framework

The analysis uses three complementary sociological frameworks: functionalism (education's systemic roles and stability), conflict theory (power, resources, and reproduction of inequality), and social

constructivism/symbolic perspectives (how meanings, identities, and policy discourses shape and are shaped by reform).

Functionalism views education as a key institution that maintains social stability by transmitting shared values, skills, and norms necessary for the smooth functioning of society. From this perspective, economic reforms are analyzed in terms of their ability to enhance the efficiency and performance of the education system. For example, fiscal adjustments or public–private partnerships can be seen as tools to allocate resources more effectively, align educational outputs with labor market needs, and maintain equilibrium in society (Campbell, 2021). Functionalism thus highlights the systemic role of education in supporting economic growth and social cohesion, framing reform as a necessary response to evolving societal demands.

Conflict theory, in contrast, emphasizes that education is not only a neutral transmitter of knowledge but also a site where power relations are contested and inequalities are reproduced. This framework suggests that economic reforms, such as privatization or austerity measures, may reinforce existing class, gender, and regional disparities by privileging those with greater economic and cultural capital (Baum, 2018). Through a conflict lens, education reforms are critically examined for their potential to deepen stratification, restrict upward mobility for disadvantaged groups, and consolidate power among elites. This perspective helps policymakers and scholars remain alert to the unintended consequences of reforms that may appear economically rational but socially regressive.

Social constructivism and symbolic interactionism complement these structural perspectives by focusing on how actors interpret and respond to reforms. Policies are not simply implemented as designed; they are socially constructed through narratives, identities, and community engagement. The framing of reforms, whether as opportunities for innovation or threats to public goods, shapes stakeholder buy-in and influences how reforms are enacted in classrooms and communities (Campbell, 2021). By integrating constructivist insights with functionalist and conflict approaches, researchers gain a fuller picture of both the structural constraints and the meaning-making processes that determine reform outcomes. This triangulation enables a nuanced understanding of education as both a driver and a product of broader social and economic transformations.

Significance of the Study

By explicitly linking sociological theory to policy mechanisms, this study helps policymakers and scholars anticipate distributive effects of reforms and design adjustments (targeting, oversight, equity cushions) to protect vulnerable populations. The study also contributes to comparative understanding by drawing on recent empirical reviews and meta-analyses of PPPs and privatization.

Conceptual Clarifications

Functionalism and Education

Functionalism views education as one of the most important institutions for maintaining the stability and cohesion of society. Schools are seen as spaces where individuals are socialized into shared norms, values, and cultural expectations that enable social order. Through teaching common knowledge, skills, and civic values, education prepares young people to participate productively in the economy and in civic life. In this way, education is considered a mechanism for integrating diverse members of society into a functioning whole, supporting collective progress and reducing social disorder (Campbell, 2021).

From a functionalist perspective, economic and policy reforms in education are judged by how well they strengthen this integrative role. For example, changes in funding or governance, such as decentralization, privatization, or public–private partnerships, are considered valuable if they improve efficiency, raise graduation rates, and produce a workforce that matches labor market demands. Functionalists emphasize outcomes that can be measured objectively, such as enrollment figures, literacy rates, and employment statistics, because these indicate whether the education system is fulfilling its societal function.

However, functionalism has been criticized for underplaying issues of power and inequality. By focusing primarily on system stability and efficiency, functionalist analyses may overlook the ways reforms can benefit some groups while disadvantaging others. For instance, policies that improve aggregate efficiency might simultaneously deepen disparities in access or quality between rich and poor regions. Thus, while functionalism offers valuable insights about the role of education in maintaining social order and supporting economic development, it must be complemented by other sociological perspectives, such as conflict theory, to fully understand the equity implications of reform (Campbell, 2021).

Conflict Theory and Social Inequality

Conflict theory views education as a field where power struggles and resource competition play out, rather than as a neutral space for equal opportunity. It highlights how educational reforms, especially privatization and market-oriented policies, often favor groups with greater economic and cultural capital, such as wealthy families who can afford tuition or navigate complex school choice systems. As a result, such reforms may reinforce existing social hierarchies by allowing advantaged groups to secure better educational opportunities for their children, perpetuating inequality across generations (Pham, 2022).

From this perspective, policy language that emphasizes "efficiency," "choice," or "competition" is often seen as a means of legitimizing reforms that primarily serve elite interests. Conflict theorists argue that such reforms can divert public resources away from vulnerable populations and channel them toward schools or programs that benefit middle- and upper-class families, thereby entrenching class privilege. In short, conflict theory exposes the political and economic dynamics behind education reforms, urging policymakers to recognize and address the hidden inequities these reforms can create (Baum, 2018).

Social Constructivism and Policy Design

Social constructivism emphasizes that education reforms are not simply technical adjustments but social processes shaped by ideas, narratives, and shared meanings. It highlights that the way a reform is presented through policy frames such as "public choice," "accountability," or "innovation" affects how different stakeholders understand and respond to it. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators interpret these reforms based on their cultural context and lived experiences, which in turn influences how policies are implemented on the ground. This means that the success or failure of a reform often depends as much on how it is communicated and understood as on its formal design (Campbell, 2021).

Furthermore, social constructivism draws attention to the symbolic dimensions of education policy. Reforms can be perceived as empowering when they resonate with community values or as threatening when they are seen as undermining local traditions or equity goals. For example, introducing performance-based funding may inspire innovation in some schools but create fear and resistance in others. By examining these meaning-making processes, constructivist perspectives reveal why similar reforms may yield different results in different settings, underlining the importance of culture, discourse, and participation in policy design and implementation (Campbell, 2021).

Economic Reforms and Education

Fiscal Adjustments

Austerity or fiscal retrenchment frequently leads to cuts in public education budgets, staffing constraints, and deferred maintenance; the empirical evidence links reductions in per-pupil spending to worse outcomes when cuts are large or poorly targeted (PPIC, 2021; Education Law Center, 2019). Sociologically, such adjustments can erode the redistributive function of schooling and widen resource gaps across districts (Hayes, 2023).

Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Literature on privatization and PPPs is mixed. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses find heterogeneous impacts: some PPP models show modest gains in enrollment or test scores in particular contexts, but effects vary by model, regulatory capacity, and selection processes (Ali, 2024; Baum, 2018). Recent meta-analytic work also examines civic and social outcomes associated with private schooling, complicating simple efficiency-equity tradeoffs (Shakeel et al., 2024).

Education, Social Mobility, and Equity

Research shows that reforms can either open pathways to mobility (when they widen access and improve quality) or deepen inequalities (when they favor better-resourced groups). Key mediators include student selection, funding formulas, accountability incentives, and complementarities with social welfare policies (PPIC, 2021; Fabre, 2023). The balance between economic growth objectives and equity goals depends on policy design and institutional context.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical-synthesis design: it integrates sociological theory with contemporary empirical evidence (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, policy reports) and comparative case insights to generate policy-relevant propositions rather than statistical generalizations. Cases are purposively selected to illustrate distinct reform modalities: (a) fiscal retrenchment in high-income federated systems, (b) voucher/privatization initiatives in mixed-income contexts, and (c) PPP deployments in low- and middle-income settings. Selection aims to span variation in capacity, governance, and equity outcomes so sociological mechanisms can be contrasted. Data sources include recent peer-reviewed systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Ali, 2024; Shakeel et al., 2024), policy analyses from research institutes (PPIC, 2021), NGO and legal advocacy reports (Education Law Center, 2019), and representative empirical studies on PPPs and privatization (Barrera-Osorio, 2022; Fabre, 2023).

These are systematic conceptual frameworks developed by individual sociologists to interpret, explain, and analyze how societies function and why social phenomena occur. In the discipline of sociology, a theory is more than a casual idea; it is a structured set of propositions that explains why people behave in particular ways within a social context, how social patterns are maintained, and how social change happens. According to Blumer (1969), theories help researchers move beyond mere description to *interpret social life* by offering explanations grounded in empirical evidence and logical reasoning. Such frameworks are fundamental in sociological research because they guide the formulation of research questions and the interpretation of data about social behavior and social systems.

One of the key roles of sociological theories is to provide frameworks for studying social life. These frameworks shape how sociologists observe and analyze the social world by highlighting specific aspects of social interaction, structure, and process. For example, Durkheim's work on social integration and collective norms laid the foundation for understanding how society maintains stability and order, emphasizing that social facts shape individual behavior (Durkheim in Conley, as cited in sociological texts). Functional frameworks help scholars explore how institutions such as family, education, and religion contribute to overall social cohesion.

Sociological theories also explain social interactions, institutions, and inequalities by offering different lenses through which social life can be interpreted. Structural functionalism, associated with theorists like Émile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton, views society as an interrelated system in which each part contributes to the stability and functioning of the whole (Merton, 1949). In contrast, conflict theory, with roots in the work of Karl Marx, focuses on the power struggles and competing interests between social groups, arguing that inequality and conflict are central to understanding social structures. These conflicting perspectives reveal how different theorists emphasize either social order or social inequality as core elements of society.

At the micro level, symbolic interactionism focuses on the meanings

individuals attach to social interaction. George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer highlight that individuals actively construct their social reality through communication and interpretation of symbols such as language and gestures (Blumer, 1969). This perspective underscores that social life is not just shaped by broad structures but also by the everyday interactions that give meaning to human experience. Such a focus helps explain how identities and social roles emerge from interaction rather than being predetermined by society.

Finally, sociological theories help predict social behavior and social change by identifying patterns and causal relationships within social systems. By understanding how underlying social processes function, sociologists can anticipate how changes in one part of society—such as economic shifts or changes in cultural norms—might influence other aspects of social life. Theoretical perspectives thus serve not only to explain past and present phenomena but also to generate insights useful for future research and policy.

Analysis and Discussion

Education as Reflection and Driver of Social Change

Education often reflects existing social stratification because students' backgrounds—family socioeconomic status, location, previous educational opportunities, strongly determine what kind of schools they attend, how well-equipped those schools are, and what credentials they can access. For example, in China, the "key-point" high schools and elite universities (e.g., the 211 and 985 programs) receive more governmental resources and prestige, while students from advantaged families are significantly more likely to enter these institutions, which grants them better credentials (Wu, 2017). Likewise, analyses of income inequality and educational expansion in developing and emerging economies show that although years of schooling have increased, those from higher income deciles still enjoy better access to quality schooling and credentialing, which perpetuates income inequality (Coady, Gloe & Dizioli, 2017). Thus, education mirrors stratification in how opportunity is distributed: socioeconomic and geographic differences map onto educational prestige and credential access.

At the same time, education also helps shape future social structures because credentials, schooling prestige, and institutional affiliations influence what life and economic trajectories are possible for students. In China again, graduates from elite universities (the top-tier institutions) tend to have better job market prospects, higher social status, and more influence, thereby reinforcing a stratified elite (Wu, 2017). Furthermore, expansions in education that improve access (e.g., policy moves to lower barriers to enrollment or diversify admission pathways) can serve as levers for upward mobility, but only if the reforms also address inequalities of quality and resource allocation. Studies show that increasing years of schooling reduces income inequality over time, particularly when younger cohorts benefit from expansion, though this effect is often less strong where educational quality or credential prestige remains highly unequal (Coady et al., 2017).

Impact of Economic Reforms on Education Systems

Empirical research indicates that privatization and public–private partnerships (PPPs) can improve certain measurable outcomes, such as enrollment rates, test scores, and efficiency, when they operate under strong regulatory oversight and clear accountability frameworks. For example, studies of charter schools and PPP programs in low-income countries show gains in student performance when government monitoring ensures equitable admissions and quality standards (Baum, 2018). However, when regulation is weak, PPPs often exacerbate stratification by allowing schools to select higher-performing or wealthier students, leaving disadvantaged groups in under-resourced public schools. Evidence from several countries demonstrates that poorly designed privatization initiatives can increase inequality by concentrating resources and qualified teachers in privately managed institutions, while

public systems struggle to maintain quality (Verger et al., 2017).

Similarly, fiscal austerity measures and budget cuts tend to disproportionately harm equity in education systems, especially when funding formulas are not adjusted to protect vulnerable schools. For instance, research on U.S. school districts after the Great Recession found that reduced state funding led to larger class sizes, teacher layoffs, and declines in student achievement, impacts felt most strongly in low-income districts (Jackson et al., 2019). Without compensatory policies such as targeted grants or progressive funding allocations, fiscal retrenchment widens disparities in access and outcomes. Redistributive measures, such as weighted student funding or federal compensatory programs, have been shown to mitigate these effects by channeling additional resources to disadvantaged schools, helping preserve equity despite fiscal stress (OECD, 2017).

Interplay Between Economic Efficiency and Educational Equity

Sociological theory highlights that efficiency-oriented reforms, such as school choice programs, vouchers, and performance-based funding, tend to rely on market mechanisms that reward competition and allocate resources based on demand. This logic often favors families with the financial means, information, and cultural capital to navigate complex application systems or afford supplemental costs, thereby reinforcing stratification (Fabre, 2023). For example, voucher programs in Chile initially improved overall enrollment but widened gaps between wealthier and poorer students because high-income families were better able to choose high-performing schools, leaving disadvantaged students concentrated in under-resourced public schools (Elacqua et al., 2017). From a sociological perspective, this tension arises because markets prioritize allocative efficiency, matching students to schools quickly and cost-effectively, while neglecting the redistributive mechanisms needed to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have fair opportunities.

Institutional design plays a crucial role in mitigating this conflict between efficiency and equity. Strong regulation, targeted subsidies, and transparent accountability systems can help ensure that competitive reforms do not exclude marginalized populations. For instance, India's Right to Education Act reserves 25% of private school seats for economically weaker sections, a policy that blends market participation with redistributive intent (Srivastava, 2019). Similarly, research shows that when governments tie funding to equity targets, such as weighted student funding formulas that allocate more resources to disadvantaged schools, competition can coexist with reduced disparities (OECD, 2017). Thus, sociological insights underscore that reforms must be carefully designed to balance the drive for efficiency with commitments to social justice and equal opportunity.

Case Studies and Comparative Insights

Comparative studies show that the effectiveness of public–private partnerships (PPPs) in education depends heavily on regulatory quality and accountability mechanisms. When governments closely monitor admissions, performance, and financial transparency, PPPs can deliver higher enrollment and improved test outcomes, particularly in underserved regions (Ali, 2024). For example, research on Pakistan's Punjab Education Foundation program found significant gains in student learning when PPP schools were subject to regular quality inspections and performance-linked funding (Andrabi et al., 2018). In contrast, loosely regulated PPPs risk creating parallel education markets where better-resourced students capture the benefits while poorer students remain in underfunded public schools, widening educational inequality (Verger et al., 2017).

Similarly, evidence suggests that privatization reforms lacking redistributive measures tend to exacerbate social stratification. In Vietnam and the Philippines, rapid expansion of private schooling without targeted subsidies disproportionately favored middle- and upper-class families, leaving disadvantaged groups underrepresented in quality institutions (Pham, 2022). During periods of fiscal stress, across-the-board budget cuts have been shown to harm low-income districts most severely, reducing teacher numbers and widening achievement gaps. In contrast, targeted public investment programs, such as California's Local Control

Funding Formula, which channels more resources to high-need districts, help buffer disadvantaged students from the worst effects of austerity and preserve equity gains (PPIC, 2021; Jackson et al., 2019). These findings underscore that education reform outcomes are conditional and shaped by institutional design, equity safeguards, and the prioritization of vulnerable populations.

Findings

The findings confirm that education continues to mirror existing patterns of inequality, reproducing social hierarchies across generations. Students' access to well-resourced schools, quality teachers, and prestigious credentials remains strongly linked to their socioeconomic status, location, and prior opportunities. For example, in China, students from affluent families are overrepresented in "key-point" high schools and elite universities under the 211 and 985 programs, which receive disproportionate funding and prestige (Wu, 2017). Similar dynamics exist in developing economies where educational expansion has improved average attainment but left persistent gaps between income groups (Coady, Gloe & Dizioli, 2017). These findings suggest that education reflects the broader social structure and that reform efforts must explicitly address geographic and class-based disparities to avoid deepening inequality.

At the same time, the evidence shows that education is not just a passive reflection of society, it actively shapes future social structures through credentialing and social mobility. When education reforms expand access and improve quality, they can enable upward mobility and narrow inequality. For example, policies that lower entry barriers to higher education or diversify admission pathways have been shown to improve equity outcomes for marginalized groups (Coady et al., 2017). However, this potential is not automatic: reforms that focus solely on expanding quantity, without addressing quality and resource allocation, risk producing "diploma inflation" without reducing inequality. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of coupling access reforms with investments that ensure disadvantaged students receive meaningful learning opportunities and pathways to labor market participation.

Evidence on privatization and PPPs is mixed, revealing that their outcomes depend heavily on the regulatory and policy environment. Well-designed PPPs have been shown to improve test scores and expand coverage, especially in underserved regions, when they operate under strict accountability frameworks (Baum, 2018). The Punjab Education Foundation in Pakistan is a frequently cited example where monitoring and performance-linked funding have delivered measurable gains in student achievement (Andrabi et al., 2018). However, without strong oversight, PPPs risk exacerbating stratification by allowing schools to select advantaged students or charge hidden fees, leaving marginalized learners behind (Verger et al., 2017). This finding points to the need for careful institutional design that combines efficiency with equity safeguards.

The analysis also reveals that fiscal retrenchment poses significant risks to equity unless mitigated by redistributive measures. Across-the-board budget cuts, often implemented during periods of economic crisis, have been shown to increase class sizes, reduce teacher employment, and depress student achievement, disproportionately affecting low-income districts (Jackson et al., 2019). Conversely, targeted public investments and progressive funding formulas help cushion disadvantaged schools from the worst effects of fiscal stress. California's Local Control Funding Formula, which channels more resources to high-need districts, is one example of how fiscal policy can be structured to maintain equity even under constrained budgets (PPIC, 2021).

A key finding is the persistent tension between efficiency-oriented reforms and equity goals. Market-based mechanisms such as school choice, vouchers, and performance-based funding can improve system responsiveness and cost-effectiveness but often advantage families with greater cultural and financial capital (Fabre, 2023). Evidence from Chile's voucher reforms illustrates this trade-off: while overall enrollment increased, stratification widened as

higher-income families disproportionately accessed high-performing schools (Elacqua et al., 2017). These findings underline that efficiency cannot be pursued in isolation; policy design must incorporate compensatory measures such as targeted subsidies, equity-weighted funding, and transparent regulation to ensure that competitive reforms do not exclude marginalized populations (Srivastava, 2019).

Comparative evidence highlights that reform outcomes are conditional, not automatic. PPPs work best under strong regulatory oversight, privatization must be accompanied by equity cushions, and targeted investment is more protective of disadvantaged students than blunt austerity (Ali, 2024; Pham, 2022; PPIC, 2021). This underscores the central finding that education systems act both as mirrors and as levers of change: if left to market forces, they risk entrenching inequality, but with careful institutional design, they can become engines of social mobility and equity. Policymakers should therefore prioritize transparency, accountability, and redistributive policies to balance the dual goals of economic efficiency and educational justice.

Conclusion

1. Education as a Mirror and Driver of Social Change

Education both reflects and shapes social structures. Socioeconomic background, geographic location, and prior educational exposure strongly influence the type and quality of schooling students receive. Elite institutions often concentrate resources and prestige, enabling advantaged families to secure better credentials and career outcomes. Expanding access alone is insufficient; without policies to improve quality and target disadvantaged groups, educational expansion risks reinforcing inequality rather than reducing it (Wu, 2017; Coady, Gloe & Dizioli, 2017).

2. Mixed Effects of Economic Reforms

Privatization, PPPs, and fiscal reforms yield both benefits and risks. Well-regulated PPPs can increase enrollment and outcomes by leveraging private-sector efficiency. Yet, in the absence of strong regulation, reforms often privilege wealthier families and concentrate resources in private hands, deepening inequality (Baum, 2018; Verger et al., 2017). Fiscal austerity measures disproportionately harm low-income schools, leading to teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, and reduced student achievement (Jackson et al., 2019).

3. Balancing Efficiency and Equity

Efficiency-driven reforms like vouchers or school choice programs aim to improve responsiveness and competition, but often advantage those with greater economic and cultural capital. Chile's voucher program expanded access but intensified socioeconomic stratification (Elacqua et al., 2017). This tension underscores the need for institutional mechanisms, such as targeted subsidies, equity-weighted funding formulas, and strong oversight, to ensure that efficiency gains do not undermine fairness and inclusion (Fabre, 2023; Srivastava, 2019).

4. Future Research Directions

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of education reforms, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where institutional capacity and oversight vary. Comparative studies could clarify which institutional designs best reconcile efficiency and equity goals. Collaboration among policymakers, scholars, and civil society is essential to ensure education serves its dual purpose: stabilizing structures where necessary while promoting upward mobility and social justice.

Recommendations

To foster a more equitable education system, policymakers should integrate efficiency-oriented reforms with explicit equity safeguards:

1. Equity-focused PPPs

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) can be powerful tools for expanding access and improving efficiency in education, but their benefits often fail to reach disadvantaged groups unless equity is made an explicit objective. By designing PPP contracts with clearly defined equity goals, such as prioritizing underserved regions, low-income communities, or marginalized groups, governments can ensure

that private participation does not simply serve wealthier families. Rigorous performance monitoring, including equity-based indicators like enrollment rates among disadvantaged students, quality of teaching, and affordability, is essential to hold private providers accountable. This approach ensures that the efficiency gains of PPPs translate into broader social benefits rather than deepening educational inequality.

2. Progressive Funding Models

Education systems that rely on uniform or per-capita funding often perpetuate inequalities, as disadvantaged schools require more resources to overcome structural barriers. Progressive funding models address this issue by allocating greater financial support to schools serving low-income, rural, or marginalized populations. For example, equity-weighted formulas can channel additional resources toward schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students, enabling them to hire qualified teachers, reduce class sizes, and improve learning facilities. Such targeted investment not only levels the playing field but also ensures that educational expansion leads to genuine improvements in quality and opportunity for the most vulnerable groups.

3. Inclusive School Choice

School choice programs, such as vouchers or charter schools, are often introduced to foster competition and efficiency, but they can unintentionally favor families with greater financial or cultural capital. To make school choice truly inclusive, governments should integrate supportive measures that allow low-income families to participate effectively. These measures could include providing financial aid to cover hidden costs, ensuring reliable transportation to diverse school options, and offering counseling services to guide parents through the selection process. By reducing structural barriers, inclusive school choice policies empower disadvantaged families to benefit from a wider range of educational opportunities, ensuring that reforms promote both efficiency and equity.

These interventions will help ensure reforms reach marginalized populations rather than primarily benefiting already advantaged groups.

References

Ali, S. (2024). Impact of public-private partnerships in education: A meta-analytical review. *Journal of Education Policy Analysis, 32*(1), 45–68.

Andrabi, T., Das, J., Khwaja, A. I., & Zajonc, L. (2018). Do accountability reforms work? Evidence from Pakistan's Education Foundation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 40*(2), 239–263.

Barrera-Osorio, F. (2022). Privatization in education: Opportunities and threats. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* No. 9642.

Baum, S. (2018). *The privatization of education: A critical analysis.* Routledge.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method.* Prentice Hall.

Campbell, C. (2021). *Sociological perspectives on education and social change.* Oxford University Press.

Coady, D., Gloe, D., & Dizioli, A. (2017). Education and income inequality: Evidence from developing countries. *Education Economics, 25*(4), 377–396.

Durkheim, É. (Date). In Conley, D. *You May Ask Yourself: An Introduction to Thinking Like a Sociologist.* (Referenced in scholarly summaries).

Education Law Center. (2019). *State of public education funding: An analysis of resource allocation and outcomes.* Education Law Center Reports.

Elacqua, G., Salazar, S., & Salazar, N. (2017). Market forces and school segregation: The case of Chilean voucher system. *Comparative Education Review, 61*(3), 413–441.

Fabre, G. (2023). Education, social mobility, and reform: An intersectional approach. *Sociology of Education Journal, 45*(2), 123–139.

Hayes, T. (2023). Resource gaps and educational inequality in times of austerity. *Sociology Today, 27*(4), 89–105.

Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C., & Persico, C. (2019). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms.

The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 134(3), 1593–1644.

Marx, K. (Date). Conflict theory perspectives in sociology (Referenced in summaries of classical theory).

Mead, G. H., & Blumer, H. (1969). Foundations of symbolic interactionism (Referenced in theoretical discussions).

Merton, R. K. (1949). *Social Theory and Social Structure.* Free Press.

OECD. (2017). *Education policy outlook 2017: Preparing for adulthood.* OECD Publishing.

Pham, L. (2022). Market mechanisms and social inequalities in education. *Journal of Sociology of Education, 19*(3), 210–226.

PPIC (Public Policy Institute of California). (2021). *The effects of fiscal austerity on student outcomes in California.* PPIC Reports.

Shakeel, M., Song, P., Shah, S. H., Zada, Z., Huang, T., Laref, A. & Faizan, M.. (2024). Civic and social outcomes of privatized education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research, 68,* 101–115.

Srivastava, P. (2019). The Right to Education Act in India: A policy analysis. *Indian Journal of Educational Policy, 12*(1), 55–70.

Verger, A., Lubienski, C., & Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2017). School choice and privatization: An overview. In G. Steiner-Khamsi & C. Lubienski (Eds.), *The International Handbook of School Choice* (pp. 1–25). Springer.

Wu, J. (2017). Elite education and social stratification in China. *Chinese Education & Society, 50*(3), 183–198.

REPOSITIONING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (TVET) FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Ibrahim Salisu; Bilyaminu Abubakar; Usman Yusuf & Ahmad Kainuwa

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau.

Abstract:
The paper examines the role of vocational and technical education (VTE) as a catalyst for socio-economic reform in Nigeria from a sociological perspective. Drawing on existing literature and policy documents, the study explores how VTE contributes to human capital development,, employment generation, entrepreneurship,, and poverty reduction. The paper argues that VTE remains central to addressing youth unemployment and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. However, structural challenges such as inadequate funding,, poor societal perception, and weak institutional support continue to limit its effectiveness. The study concludes that repositioning VTE through policy reforms, increased investment, and stronger industry collaboration is essential for achieving meaningful socio-economic transformation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), Socio-Economic Development, sustainable development

Introduction

The Federal Republic of Nigeria adopted education as an instrument for National Development and change. The purpose of education in Nigeria has long been identified by the National Policy on Education as the process that helps the whole individual develop and change physically, mentally, morally and technologically (NPE, 2016). This is to enable an individual to function effectively in any environment so as to become more productive, self-fulfilling and attain self-actualization. The investment environment, economy, and chances for national cohesion, growth, and sustainable development in Nigeria are all in jeopardy due to several problems that the country is now facing (Salabson, 2018). Most Nigerians would agree that young unemployment is one of the key contributors to the rise of violent and criminal activities in the nation (Adamu & Olaniran, 2020). Human capital development in Nigeria rated 150 out of 157 nations in the world Human Capital Index (World Bank, 2022). This is on top of the country's high unemployment rate, increasing insecurity, and galloping inflation that are driving millions of young Nigerians into poverty (World Bank, 2022).

Moreover, Nigeria is endowed with both natural and human resources, but it lacks the human capital of a sufficiently trained labour force to fully exploit its potential (Owolabi, 2018; Obi & Jones, 2022). An engaged labour force drives a nation's economy, and a productive workforce enables it to thrive (Islam, 2021). According to Ibecheozor (2020), Terna (2021) without a robust effort in creating wealth, reducing poverty, and generating jobs, no country can make technical, industrial, or economic progress. India enjoyed a demographic dividend since its population is mostly young (Cabral & Dhar, 2019) and they made sure to provide them with a proper education. Nigeria requires education and training to acquire worldwide prominence, decrease poverty, and generate jobs (Cabral & Dhar, 2019; Salabson, 2018).

Although there are other means of reversing the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria such as attracting foreign investment, improving infrastructure, promoting agriculture etc. However, education of the correct kind such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is highly needed for a continuous reversal of rising unemployment in Nigeria (Adamu & Olaniran, 2020). Because of its positive effect on productivity and economic

development, TVET has become an essential component of the National Development plan in many developed countries such as Germany, Switzerland etc. (Pinnow, 2019; Akpanobong et al., 2022; Mgeni, 2022).

Furthermore, in the same development, many developing nations are increasingly counting on TVET to achieve socio-economic development (Mutebi & Kiplagat, 2022). Developing competent manpower, increasing industrial productivity, and bettering the quality of life are all ways in which TVET contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction, youth and women's empowerment, and social inclusion (Islam, 2021). Olayele (2022) describe that, TVET has been given a low status within educational discourse by educators and policymakers in Africa who incorrectly see it as path for people who are unable to pursue academic programmes sub-sector. Through education policy, the government of Nigeria expresses its dedication to TVET by stating one of its aims as being the provision of skilled workforce for economic growth (FRN, 2014). However, TVET has not been given the sufficient attention it needs by our leaders and politicians to reach its aim, which is one of the causes for the nation's bad economic situation and instability (Akpanobong et al., 2022). This is even though TVET has contributed to economic and national development of most advanced world. Against this background, the TVET programme in Nigeria needs be redesigned so that it can generate workers who can keep the country stable, reducing unemployment, and growing the economy.

Concept of Socio-Economic Development

Development in the context of this discussion means many things to many people but since our theme is related to National development normally means faster and greater economic growth leading to the enhancement of the wealth of the nation, higher level of Medicare and faster and greater improvement in the quality of living environment of the people (Buba et., al 2018) All these processes lead to enhancement of National image, stability and power for the government and nation at home and abroad. Power mentioned here is the ability to influence events in other parts of the globe and to be taken seriously by friends and foes alike. Development could also mean enhanced performance scope in various fields of human Endeavour derived from superstitions culture. It involves empowerment of individuals to earn a successful living, and contribute to the economy. It also involves transformation of our environment. The transformation could be social, physical, political, and economical, change of value system, among others.

Socio-economic development can be described as the process by which a society enhances the economic, social, and institutional conditions of its people. It goes beyond mere economic expansion such as rising income levels, productivity, and employment to include progress in education, healthcare, fairness, and overall quality of life. The World Bank (2020) explains that socio-economic development involves strengthening human capacities and widening access to opportunities that allow individuals to live productive and meaningful lives. In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programme stresses that development should be centered on people, with emphasis on reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion through inclusive and sustainable strategies (UNDP, 2021). These viewpoints suggest that development is broad in scope and cannot be fully captured using economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) alone.

Empirical evidence indicates that factors such as education, employment, and income distribution are key determinants of socio-economic development. For example, Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith (2015) maintain that investing in human capital especially through education and skill development boosts productivity and supports sustained economic growth. Within Nigeria, Ehigiamusoe (2013) found that education positively influences economic growth, although its effectiveness in reducing poverty largely depends on sound policy implementation. In addition, Buba et al. (2018) observed that high unemployment and unequal income distribution continue to hinder socio-economic advancement, as they restrict access to essential resources and opportunities. This implies that without inclusive and well-structured policies, economic growth may fail to benefit the wider population.

Furthermore, the roles of institutional effectiveness, governance, and public spending are vital in determining socio-economic outcomes. Research shows that government investment in key sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure significantly enhances living standards and helps reduce poverty (Wilson et al., 2025). Nevertheless, challenges such as weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and ineffective policy execution often limit these benefits, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. Abubakar and Obomeghie (2024) highlight that elements such as financial inclusion, foreign direct investment, and good governance are crucial for achieving lasting socio-economic progress. Consequently, a comprehensive strategy that combines economic planning with social policies and institutional reforms is essential for attaining sustainable and inclusive development.

Concept of Technical and Vocational and Education Training (TVET)

The National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as "an all-encompassing term referring to those aspects of the educational process that involve, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skill and knowledge relating to occupations in a wide range of economic and social contexts" (FRN, 2014). Terna (2021) explains that it is a means to enable individuals, and particularly young people, to achieve self-sufficiency and promote social and sustainable economic development. The TVET system provides a foundation for economic reform and development of the nation by introducing students to higher learning in engineering and innovations and by producing technicians, craftsmen, and other trained individuals who will aid in the transformation of the economy and sustainable development (Tyowuah & Chen, 2019).

Furthermore, Ntegwung and Njoku (2022) list several parts that TVET plays, including helping with unemployment, lowering poverty and crime rates, fostering technical and industrial progress by creating skilled and trustworthy people, boosting the economy, and ensuring national stability. Institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics, Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs), Colleges of Education (Technical), Colleges of Technology, Monotechnics, Technical Colleges, and Pre vocational Schools in Nigeria are all responsible for delivering TVET programme (FRN, 2014; Okolie et al., 2020; Adetola, 2021). Graduates of these institutions are envisaged to be employable and skillful to become self-employed as a job creator to employ others. Consequently, adding values that will lead to sustainable economic development.

The National Policy on Education and the Role of Technical and Vocational Education in National Development.

The National Policy on Education (2013) spelt out the aims of technical and vocational education in Nigeria as follows;

1. Provide trained manpower in the Applied Sciences, Technology and Business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
2. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development; and
3. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual for self-reliance economically. (FRN, 2013).

However, notwithstanding its significance, the TVET sector in Nigeria encounters numerous obstacles that impede its efficiency and influence. In recent years, successive administrations in Nigeria have acknowledged the significance of TVET in combatting youth unemployment, fostering entrepreneurship, and propelling industrialization. Consequently, substantial endeavors have been undertaken to revamp and modernize the TVET sector, including the formulation of national policies and frameworks, establishment of specialized training institutions, and implementation of competency-based training methodologies (Joseph, 2020; Oviawe, 2018; FRN, 2013).

Nevertheless, despite these interventions, TVET encounters various obstacles such as low

enrolment rates, gender inequalities, insufficient teacher training, professional growth opportunities (Udoudo & Ikeji, 2023; Allen, 2020). One prominent challenge is the insufficient funding, resulting in restricted access to high-quality training facilities, outdated teaching materials, and inadequate staff capacity (Joseph, 2020; Shefiu, 2019; Nwokike & Nwokike, 2019). Furthermore, there exists a misalignment between TVET curricula and the needs of industries, leading to a skills gap that undermines the pertinence of training programs and diminishes the employability of graduates (Allen, 2020; Muoghalu, 2018; Okoye & Arimonu, 2016).

Moreover, negative societal perceptions and stereotypes surrounding technical and vocational occupations often dissuade individuals from pursuing TVET pathways, aggravating the issue of skills shortages in critical sectors like manufacturing, construction, and ICT (ADB, 2021; Zite & Okwelle, 2018; Okwelle & Deebom, 2017; UNESCO, 2021).

Major Challenges Facing Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) in Nigeria

Despite its importance, TVET in Nigeria faces numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness and impact on socio-economic development. Some of these persisting challenges include:

i. **Inadequate Funding:** TVET institutions in Nigeria suffer from a persistent lack of adequate financial support, resulting in constraints in resources, substandard infrastructure, and restricted access to up-to-date equipment and technologies. Insufficient budgetary provisions for TVET further compound issues related to quality and relevance, impacting the institutions' ability to offer training programs aligned with market demands and industry standards (Udoudo & Ikeji 2023; Allen, 2020; Kankia & Awang, 2018; Muoghalu, 2018; Inyiagu, 2014).

ii. **Outdated Curricula:** The curricula implemented in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions often fail to align with the current requirements of industries and advancements in technology, resulting in a discrepancy between the skills possessed by graduates and the expectations of employers. The absence of effective mechanisms for reviewing and revising curricula restricts the flexibility and adaptability of TVET programs in response to evolving demands in the job market, thereby impeding the employability and professional development of graduates (Udoudo & Ikeji 2023; Allen, 2020; Kankia & Awang, 2018; Muoghalu, 2018; Inyiagu, 2014).

iii. **Limited Industry Collaboration:** There exists a disconnection between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and the industries they are intended to cater to, leading to a deficiency in industry specific education, practical experience, and apprenticeship prospects for students. The lack of efficient collaborations between TVET providers and industry stakeholders undermines the hands on approach and relevance of educational schemes, diminishing their appeal to potential learners and employers (Udoudo & Ikeji 2023; Allen, 2020; Kankia & Awang, 2018; Muoghalu, 2018; Inyiagu, 2014).

iv. **Quality Assurance:** The quality assurance mechanisms within the realm of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are frequently deemed deficient and inefficacious, thereby resulting in disparities in the caliber of instruction and validation among various institutions and programs. The deficiency in standardized evaluation, validation, and validation procedures undermines the credibility and transferability of TVET certifications, consequently constraining the mobility and acknowledgment of graduates within the workforce (Udoudo & Ikeji 2023; Korter, 2023; Allen, 2020; Kankia &

Awang, 2018; Muoghalu, 2018; Inyiagu, 2014).

v. **Corruption and Financial Mismanagement:** The management of the nation's abundant resources is shrouded with mystery and secrecy. This has proven to be a breeding ground for high-level corruption and mismanagement of public funds. Secrecy breeds corruption and corruption is a major cause of poverty. It hampers the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by undermining the economic growth and sustainable development that would free millions from the poverty trap. Obasanjo (2003) rightly observed that Nigeria had practically institutionalized corruption as the foundation of governance. Hence institutions of society easily decayed to unprecedented proportions as opportunities were privatized. This process was accompanied by the intimidation of the judiciary, the subversion of due process, the manipulation of existing laws and regulations, the suffocation of civil society, and the containment of democratic values and institutions. Power became nothing but a means of accumulation and subversion as productive initiatives were abandoned for purely administrative and transaction activities (Mshelia, & Abbas, 2012). The legitimacy and stability of the state became compromised as citizens began to devise extra-legal and informal ways of survival. All this made room for corruption".

vi. **Peoples' Poor Perception and Mindset about TVE:** A good percentage of Nigerians work in jobs requiring a skill level associated with vocational education and training (Mshelia, & Abbas, 2012). However, the development of these jobs is being challenged by peoples' poor perception and mindset that vocational education is second choice to academic education. Most parents would want their children to become Lawyers, Engineers, Medical Doctors, etc just because they believe that this will give them better job opportunities. This is one of the obstacles facing TVE in Nigeria.

vii. **Inadequacies in Policy Formulation and/or Implementation:** It is observed that once a particular government which formulated a certain policy goes out of power, the incoming government rather than enforcing its implementation, tries to kill it or formulate a new one which may not also be fully implemented at the end of the day (Mshelia, & Abbas, 2012). Also, policy and legislative inadequacies contribute to the poor performance of TVE in Nigeria.

viii. **Lack of Trainers:** Lack of appropriately trained personnel also contributes to the poor performance of TVE in Nigeria. The NDE's School-on-Wheel Scheme, for instance, was designed to train youths in the rural areas so as to enable them benefit from the Directorate's laudable programmes (Mshelia, & Abbas, 2012). However, gathering Master-Craftsmen to train interested applicants in the various trades in the rural areas is a serious problem. The NDE has had to, on several instances, cut down the number of trades in the rural areas so as to motivate only those who are interested in the available trades that do not require sophisticated equipment or facilities.

Repositioning Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) for Socio-Economic Development

According to the examination of the statistics, unemployment is the primary problem that is primarily responsible for rendering young people unproductive when they should be at their most productive age leading to a high rate

of insecurity and unsteady GDP (Adamu & Olaniran-Akinyele, 2020). Consequently, unstable economic development in Nigeria. TVET is a kind of education that focuses on the creation of employment to keep the economy going. It creates employment through production competent workforce that will drive the economy. Therefore, for it to meet its aims, it requires a new design. Ayoade et al. (2020), Oviawe and Uwameiye (2018) argue that unless TVET is redesigned and made operational, the preconditions such as skill, attitude and knowledge that ensure employment of individuals in a particular job may continuously elude the society. Consequently, the rate of unemployment in Nigeria would continue to rise to crisis proportions. In line with the results of the reviewed literatures in this study, TVET needs to be redesigned and the following factors should be considered when redesigning TVET programmes with the goal of achieving sustainable economic development.

i. **Curriculum:** For TVET programmes to meet the needs of contemporary society, the needs of the industry and to produce functional and employable workforce that will be able to cut across all facets of nascent technological the curriculum has to be redesigned. Redesigning the curriculum means to incorporate the learning of technologies, ideas, ICT, and methods into TVET programme that will match what are desired in the 21st century. At same streamline some educational/general courses attached to TVET course. Consequently, TVET programme will be able to produce workforce that is capable to compete globally at the same curb unemployment in Nigeria.

ii. **Industrial Partnership:** There is an urgent need to redesign TVET to reflect the skills desired by the industries to the employability of the programmers' graduate. To achieve this, TVET institutions need to partner with industries in every special area of the programme. Partnering with industries could be in inclusion in curriculum planning, provision of technical skills to both students and instructors, and in area of funding.

iii. **Model of TVET Programme:** The learning facilities should be designed to represent what the students are expected to see and manipulate in the industry and world of work. The equipment and the learning environment should be made replica of the ones in the labour market. This will make the students more compete and employable at same time add value to the economy.

iv. **Funding:** The funding of TVET and education in general in Nigeria should be redesigned in such a way that the state governments will have a stalk and private sector get involved. This will lessen the border on federal government and make the programme more attractive and effective in achieving its goals.

v. **Teachers' Training:** The competence of the teacher play a critical role to influencing the attitude of students in acquiring the relevant skill they require for employment and for self-sustainability. Therefore it is necessary that a scheme is put in place in partnership with industries and relation to the teacher's area of specialization that will take care of training and retraining of TVET teachers in order to keep them abreast of emerging technology and to always improve in their professional practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Vocational and technical education remains a critical instrument for socio-economic transformation in Nigeria. It contributes to employment generation, entrepreneurship development, and human capital formation. However, its potential is constrained by structural challenges such as inadequate funding, weak policy implementation, and societal undervaluation of technical skills. From a sociological perspective, strengthening VTE is essential for reducing inequality, promoting

social mobility, and fostering sustainable development. Effective policy reforms, institutional strengthening, and stakeholder collaboration are therefore necessary to reposition VTE as a driver of national development. This study, in the light of the above, makes the following recommendations

i. The Federal and State Governments should establish more technical and vocational schools for the teaching of technical and vocational courses.
ii. The Federal and State Governments need to establish more industries and/or revive the existing ones. This will provide employment opportunities for trained youths who may not have the wherewithal to start of a business on their own.
iii. The state of the country's infrastructure needs a complete overhaul. Government policies should be properly watched and implemented, and programmes should be adequately funded. There should be good incentives for technical and vocational educators/ trainers.
iv. There is the need to involve community and industry in TVE in order to develop our nation's economy.
v. Government should create technical and vocational programmes that deliver professionally successful graduates. This will bring the products (graduates) of these programmes to limelight and make TVE to be highly demanded.

Centres such as NDE, ITF, PTDF and NASENI should be funded adequately to make TVE receive a boost in developing manpower skill for the country.

References

Abubakar, I., & Obomeghie, M. (2024). Institutional factors and socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Adamu, A. M., & Olaniran-Akinyele, F. (2020). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Tvet) And the Problem Of Unemployment Among Youth In Nigeria. 2016–2020. http://eprints.federalpolyilaro.edu.ng/1465/

ADB (2021). Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Phillipines in the Age of Industry 4.0. Available at https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/679041/tvet-philippines-age-industry.pdf Accessed May 12th, 2024.

Adetola, A. (2021). Vocational-Technical-Manpower-Development-in-Nigeria copy. International Journal of Technology and Inclusive https://doi.org/10.20533/ijtie.2047.0533.2021.0201 Obasanjo, A. O. (2003). Nigeria: From pond of corruption to island of integrity.

Adetola, A. (2021). Vocational-Technical-Manpower-Development-in-Nigeria copy. International Journal of Technology and Inclusive https://doi.org/10.20533/ijtie.2047.0533.2021.0201

Akpanobong, U., Udoh, S. O., & Offiong, A. A. (2022). Scaling-Up Educational Interventions In Technical Vocational Education And Training (TVET) For Sustainable National Development Through Business And Agricultural Education. Asia-Africa Journal of Education Research, 2, 126 140.

Allen, J. E. (2020). Challenges and Prospect of Vocational Technical Education and Training in Tertiary

Ayoade, A., Odetunde, O., & Falodun, B. (2020). Modeling and Analysis of the Impact of Vocational Education on the Unemployment Rate in Nigeria. Applications and Applied Mathematics: An International Journal (AAM), 15(1). https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/aam/vol15/iss1/32

Buba, A., et al. (2018). Socio-demographic determinants of poverty in Nigeria.

Cabral, C., & Dhar, R. L. (2019). Skill development research in India: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. Benchmarking: An International Journal, 26(7), 2242–2266. https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-07-2018-0211

Ehigiamusoe, E. (2013). Education, economic growth and poverty reduction in Nigeria.

FRN (2013) Federal Republic of Nigeria. National Policy on Education 2013.

FRN. (2014). National Policy on Education (6th ed.). Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

Ibecheozor, E. (2020). Technical vocational education as a vital tool for employee performance enhancement and youth unemployment solution in nigeria (Evidence from federal polytechnic Nekede). Global Journal of Management & Social Sciences, 3(1), Article 1.

Inyiagu, E. E. (2014). Challenges Facing Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria. Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research (JEPER), 1(1), 40-45.

Islam, M. (2021). Role of TVET in Human Resource Development and Sustainable National Development of Bangladesh: A Review of Literature. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5914512

Joseph, S. (2020). TVET Systems: A Panacea for curbing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria through Entrepreneurship

Kankia, J. D. & Awang, H. B. (2018). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Apprenticeship

Mgeni, N. S. (2022). Technical and Vocational Education Training Institutions' Influence on Industry and Sustainable Development Goals in Sub-Saharan Africa. International Journal of Poverty, Investment and Development, 3(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.47672/ijpid.1201

Mshelia, A.G. & Abbas, L. (2012). Technical and Vocational Education: A Means to Self-Employment and the Realization of Nigeria Vision 20-20-20, Journal of Research in Education and Society; Volume 3, Number 1, April 2012

Muoghalu, N. C. (2018). Challenges of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria. International Journal of Research (IJR), 5(1), 2348-6848.

Mutebi, R & Kiplagat, H. (2022). TVET Response to Global Challenges of Sustainable Development | African Journal of Education, Science and Technology. African Journal of Education, Science and Technology, 7(1). http://www.ajest.info/index.php/ajest/article/view/783

NPE (2016), "Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education". 4th Edition, Lagos: NERDC Press.

Ntegwung, G. J., & Njoku, N. A. (2022). Repackaging Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Sustainable National Development. African Journal Of Educational Archives, 8(1).

Nwokike, J.J., F.O. & Nwokike, A.N. Alio (2019). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a Panacea for poverty reduction in Enugu State. International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education Research, 5(4), 16-26.

Obi, C. K., & Jones, U. (2022). Does Unemployment Cause Economic Growth In Nigeria? Himalayan Journal of Economics and Business https://doi.org/10.47310/Hjebm.2022.v03i01.010

Okolie, U. C., Elom, E. N., Igwe, P. A., Nwajiuba, C. A., Binuomote, M. O., & Igu, N. (2020). How TVET teachers foster employability skills: Insights from developing countries. International Journal of Training Research, 18(3), 231–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2020.1860301.

Okoye, R. & Arimonu, M.O. (2016). Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and a Way Forward. Journal of Education and Practice, 7(3), 113-118.

Okwelle, P.C. & Deebom, M.T. (2017). Technical Vocational Education and Training as a Tool For Sustainable Empowerment of Youths in Niger Delta, Nigeria. International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research, 5(1), 29-38.

Olayele, T. (2022). Redesigning Africa's TVET to Achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In Sustainable Development in Post-Pandemic Africa. Routledge.

Oviawe, J.I. (2018). Revamping Technical Vocational Education and Training

through Public Private Partnerships for Skill Development. Makerere Journal of Higher Education, 10(1), 73-91.

Owolabi, T. O. (2018). ICT and Internet as Human Capital Development Tools for Sustainable Development (pp. 311–327). Namibia Planned Parenthood Association (NAPPA). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Itieke-Idamieba Harry/publication/357714735_New_Media_African_Scoeity/links/61dc5685034dda1b9eea74 c9/New-Media-African-Scoeity.pdf#page=334

Pinnow, S. (2019). The German Dual VET System and Approaches to enhance Employer Engagement. TVET@Asia, 13, 18.

Salabson, A. I. (2018). Repositioning Vocational and Technical Education for Economic Sustainability and National Development. Mediterranean Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences (MJBAS), 2(2), 6–17.

Shefiu, R. & Ayika, S. N. (2019). Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a Panacea to Solving

Terna, A. G. (2021). Revitalizing technical and vocational education for sustainable youth employment and national economic development in nigeria. . . ISSN, 28(1), 8.

Todaro, Michael P., M. P., & Smith, Stephen C., S. C. (2015). Economic Development (12th ed.).

Tyowuah, M.N. & Chen, J.O. (2019). The Importance of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria's Development. International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education Research, 5(5), 34–41.

Udoudo, N. J., & Ikeji, F. I. (2023). Policy Reforms in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for Sustainable Development in Abia State, Nigeria. Integrity Journal of Education and Training, 7(2), 26-35.

UNESCO (2021). UNESCO Strategy for TVET (2022-2029): Transforming TVET for successful and just transitions.https://unevoc.unesco.org/pub/unesco_strategy_for_tvet_2022 2029_discussion_document.pdf Accessed May 12th, 2024.

United Nations Development Programme (2021). Human Development Report.

Wilson, C., Akobi, C., & Babale, W. (2025). Development expenditure and poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

World Bank (2020). World Development Report.

World Bank. (2022). The World Bank in Nigeria [Text/HTML]. The World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview

Zite, B.N. & Okwelle, P.C. (2018). Revamping Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Niger Delta for Sustainable Development. International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE), 5(3), 91-95.

INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC REFORM ON YOUTH UNREST AND EDUCATIONAL DISENGAGEMENT IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

Akinsola, B.B; James, O.R; Umar, T; Obafemi, E.O & Fijabia. O.

University of Ilorin. Kwara State

Abstract

The study examined influence of economic reform on youth unrest and Educational disengagement in Kwara State, Nigeria. This was motivated by the various economic reforms in the country and the lamenting voices of the teeming youth in the country to the impact such reforms had left in the country Three objectives for the research were raised and one hypothesis tested. The population for the study was the youth from Ilorin South representing the population of the Youths, they are 122500 youth in the local government within the age range of 18-35years but this study dealt with those within 20-35years; the target population was youth from 20-35years as they belong to the category of the working youths. The sample size was 264 respondents out of 122500. The research instrument was structured questionnaire in sections which was given to given to expert for validation. The validity of the instrument was through face and construct validity while the reliability index of 0.68. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis stated was tested using t-test. The study found that there is relatively high level of knowledge of economic reform among youth (204 respondents out of 258), economic reforms have slight direct implications on youth unrest (R-Square = .028). The study concluded that female should be more involved in economic reform discussions as respondents' responses showed that lesser female are involved in economic reform discussions or political discussions, there is a tendency for more youth to be disengaged from education as economic reforms become tense, there is a possibility of economic reforms increasing financial pressure on youth leading to social unrest or protest, among other conclusions and the study recommended that government should be more careful of the impact of reforms on the citizens before implementing them.

Keyword*: Economy, Reform, Youth unrest, Educational Disengagement*

Introduction

The growing demand for economic reforms globally is closely linked to the perspectives of neo-classical economists, who argued that a reduction in government involvement in the economy is desirable, alongside a focus on the greater efficiency of the private sector (Kumssa, 2000). This economic school of thought suggests that a free market system, free from state intervention, typically fosters economic prosperity that benefits even the poorest segments of society. However, to mitigate the potential downsides of unrestricted economic freedom for everyone, government involvement in the economy is considered essential to establish a solid economic foundation for the country.

The youth constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population approximately 35–40% of the total population, with a significant proportion facing socio-economic vulnerabilities. Youths in their various categories are ages 15–24 **are approximately** 19–22%, **Ages**25–34 **are approximately** 16–18%. Based on educational and employment status youths in these categories are Employed youth are approximately**40**–50%, Unemployed youth are approximately**15**–25%, Underemployed youth are approximately**20**–30% and Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) are approximately**20**–30%. This demographic directly experiences the consequences of ineffective governance, evident in their limited access to quality education,

healthcare, employment opportunities, while many find themselves trapped in a continuous cycle of poverty and marginalization (Eze, 2021). The insufficient focus on these governance shortcomings has led to a growing sense of anger and disappointment among the youth, who have endured these feelings for an extended period, ultimately resulting in unrest expressed through protests, social media, and other means of societal disruption. Youth restiveness refers to the rising involvement of young people in civil disobedience, protests, criminal activities, and, in extreme cases, violent insurgencies (Adewumi, 2018).

Youth disengagement from education has frequently been associated with socioeconomic stressors, structural inequality, and policy reforms that limit access to education. In Nigeria, research indicates that household poverty, exacerbated by economic reforms like the removal of subsidies and inflationary pressures, has resulted in increased truancy, absenteeism, child labor, and ultimately dropout rates among many students with an observable increase in the vices in the country (Afolabi, 2024; Nkok, 2025). Similar evidence from other African countries supports this trend: Woldehanna and Hagos (2015) found that economic setbacks in Ethiopia notably heightened dropout rates for children from low-income families, while Chikhungu et al. (2024) demonstrated that collective shocks in Malawi led to decreased enrollment and completion rates over a ten-year span. Comparative international studies further indicate that escalating educational expenses and diminishing public funding, often resulting from reform initiatives, exacerbate disengagement among vulnerable populations, especially in low- and middle-income nations (Armand et al., 2023; UNESCO, 1993). Collectively, these insights underscore that reforms enacted without proper protections can exacerbate educational inequalities and push youth away from formal education systems creating lasting threats to human capital growth and social cohesion.

Kwara state, located in the North-central region of Nigeria, has a population of approximately 3.83 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). A significant segment of this population comprises youth, with around 507,816 individuals aged 18 to 35 years. This demographic is particularly pertinent as they are heavily impacted by the various social, economic, and educational reforms implemented in the country. 23.26% possessed secondary education, 21.41% had diplomas, 21.02% has degrees, 19.75% uneducated while 54.6% were neither educated nor vocationally trained. This was based on the 2006 National Population Census data which was the officially available data source for this study (NPC, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria as a nation like other nations of the world have made several economic policies such as Exchange rate unification and Subsidy Removal (2023-2025), Tax administration reforms (Post 2025), Nigerian Education Loan Fund- NELFUND (2023-2024), some of which have been of positive impact on the economy while some others have strained the economy thereby influencing the standard of living of the citizen. This strain on the economy has led to the loss of interest by youths in education alongside increased social unrest of various kinds that pervades the societies today. This paper seeks to look into the prediction of social unrest and educational disengagement among youths in Nigeria. Past researchers have investigated on economic reforms, inflations, social unrest and educational disengagement. Among them are Afolabi, 2024, Armand, et al., 2023, Woldehanna, &Hagos, 2015, Agbonifo, 2023, Booysen, 2016, Ugochukwu, Chukwuemeka, Patricia, Chukwuma 2025.

The purpose of this study examined influence of economic reform on youth unrest and Educational disengagement in Kwara State, Nigeria. This paper examined three research questions:

ix. What is the extent of economic reform knowledge of the youths in Kwara state?
x. What is the influence of knowledge of economic reforms on youth unrest in Kwara state?
xi. Is there correlation between knowledge of economic reforms and educational disengagement of youths in Kwara state?

Hypothesis

One research hypothesis was formulated and tested.

1: There is no significant difference in the knowledge of economic reforms based on gender of the respondents.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories were considered for this research and they are strain theory, relative deprivation theory and social disorganization

Strain Theory and Youth Unrest

Strain theory, initially proposed by Robert K. Merton in 1938 and further developed by Robert Agnew in 1992, offers a compelling framework for understanding how economic reforms can lead to unrest among youths. The theory suggests that when young individuals cannot obtain culturally valued objectives such as financial security and social mobility through legitimate avenues, they may turn to deviant behaviors or withdraw from their education. In environments where economic reforms result in increasing inflation or a lack of job opportunities, young people might view formal education as an ineffective path to success (Agnew, 2020). In Nigeria, for example, the discontent of youth regarding government reforms that do not generate employment has been associated with protests such as the end SARS of 2020, Subsidy removal protest of 2012 among others and a waning commitment to pursuing higher education (Akinwale, 2021).

Relative Deprivation Theory and Educational Disengagement

Relative deprivation theory highlights the role of perceived inequality in generating discontent. When economic reforms disproportionately benefit elites or urban populations while rural or marginalized youths face persistent hardship, feelings of exclusion and unfair treatment intensify. Such perceptions often result in social frustration and disengagement from institutions, including education. In many African societies, young people compare themselves not only to peers within their communities but also to universal standards of prospect disseminated through media and digital platforms (Smith & Pettigrew, 2019). These perceived inequalities undermine educational aspirations, as youths may no longer believe that schooling guarantees upward mobility.

Social Disorganization and Community Instability

Social disorganization theory emphasizes how weakened social institutions contribute to unrest and disengagement. Economic reforms that exacerbate unemployment, reduce subsidies, or strain family livelihoods can weaken community structures and schools. As families face economic hardship, their ability to support children's education diminishes, while communities with eroded resources experience increased crime and instability (Bursik & Grasmick, 2020). In Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African nations, educational disengagement has been linked to the collapse of community-based support networks such as religious organizations support, school–community partnerships, local mentorship structures, and extended family structural supports in training of morals caused by economic shocks, thereby fostering environments where unrest and deviant behavior thrive (Olanrewaju & Alabi, 2022).

Interconnectedness of Theories in African Contexts

Together, these theories provide a multidimensional understanding of the relationship between economic reforms, youth unrest, and educational disengagement. Strain theory highlights the structural pressures faced by youths, relative deprivation emphasizes the psychological dimension of inequality, and social disorganization underscores the weakening of social institutions. In the African context, these dynamics often converge: reforms intended to stimulate economic growth instead exacerbate unemployment and inequality, leading to cycles of frustration, disengagement, and unrest. Understanding these interconnected factors is crucial for policymakers aiming to design inclusive economic and educational reforms that reduce unrest and promote youth empowerment.

Economic Reforms

Since Nigeria's independence, there has been several reforms by various administration all intended for the benefits of the citizens. Among

such reforms are the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (1986-1994) was introduced in response to a severe economic crisis, including recession, high inflation, and debt problems. National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2004-2007) this reform program during the Obasanjo administration focusing on macroeconomic stability, structural reforms, improved public expenditure management, and institutional reforms. Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) was to ameliorate the effect of subsidy removal on citizens through creation of jobs and social safety plans. Fuel Subsidy Removal (2023) Implemented to reduce government expenditure and address economic distortions. Exchange Rate Unification: Aims to eliminate distortions and create a more unified and market-determined foreign exchange rate. Social Investment Programs, cash transfer program introduced to provide financial relief to vulnerable households impacted by the fuel subsidy removal reform.

Economic reforms when rapidly or poorly implemented often spread shocks to households and education systems that intensify the possibility of youth unrest and disengagement from education. Cross-economy evidence from the IMF associates social unrest to macroeconomic stressors and policy adjustments, while classical economy's perception on structural adjustment shows education systems in low-income countries are vulnerable when budgets are cut or costs are shifted (Barrett et al., 2021; Hadzi-Vaskov et al., 2021; UNESCO, 1993). In this context, rising out-of-pocket costs, transport price spikes after fuel reforms, and food inflation equally increase absenteeism and dropout risks among youth.

A commonly documented pathway runs through higher education finance with tuition and fee hikes often having a downstream effect of public funding cuts have repeatedly fast tracked student protests, at times escalating into riots, such as in the UK 2010 and the South African FeesMustFall movement (Gross, 2010). Nigeria also witnessed the protest march after subsidy removal nationwide to display displeasure with the economic hardship alongside hike is school fees that many could no longer afford. These examples illustrate how economic reforms can generate mobilization among youth who perceive reforms as illegitimate or exclusionary, in so doing connecting fiscal choices to controversial politics.

Economic reforms and youth unrest

Economic reforms, particularly the removal of subsidies, devaluation of currencies, and implementation of fiscal austerity measures, have frequently triggered waves of protests led by youth in both developing and emerging economies. Urdal (2006) demonstrated that reforms leading to increased living costs or decreased state subsidies can cause discontent among young individuals who are already navigating unstable job markets and scarce opportunities. High youth populations combined with significant unemployment lower the costs associated with mobilization, thus heightening the chances that hardships induced by reforms will escalate into social unrest (Urdal, 2006). Likewise, Hadzi-Vaskov, Pienknagura, and Ricci (2021) discovered through a global panel study that incidents of social unrest considerably negatively impact economic performance, especially when these disturbances result from reforms that do not include supporting social protections. These insights underline how the formulation and timing of reforms play a critical role in determining whether they receive acceptance or provoke resistance.

In the context of Africa, various studies associate subsidy reforms and austerity measures with cycles of protests, frequently led by students and young urban populations. Booysen (2016), in her examination of the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, illustrated how increases in tuition fees sparked widespread mobilization, framing the issue of educational access within larger struggles related to inequality and governance. Likewise, Chiluwa and Ajiboye (2014) demonstrated that social media platforms in Nigeria became venues for resistance during the removal of fuel subsidies, amplifying the voices of the youth and transforming online frustrations into on-the-ground protests. These instances highlight the

significance of digital communication and youth networks in influencing protest dynamics amidst reform conditions.

Focusing specifically on Nigeria, research emphasizes the consistent link between subsidy reforms and unrest among youths. Akinola (2020) studied the protests triggered by the removal of the fuel subsidy in 2012, contending that citizens perceived these reforms not just as financial hardships but as violations of the social contract. Agbonifo (2023) further indicated that episodes of subsidy removal consistently incited demonstrations led by youth due to the immediate spikes in transportation and living expenses, which disproportionately impact students and unemployed graduates. These researchers observe that although governments often rationalize these reforms as essential for fiscal stability, their sudden enactment without reliable safety nets engenders mistrust, creating a ripe environment for widespread protests.

Research comparisons from Latin America and Asia further corroborate these dynamics. Arce (2010) demonstrated that in Bolivia and Peru, neoliberal reforms incited recurring protests among youth, especially when they compromised public services and were seen as externally imposed. Walton and Seddon (1994), in their seminal comparative analysis of protests related to structural adjustments, documented that austerity measures brought about by reforms repeatedly incited urban riots in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, with a significant involvement of students and young workers. These observations imply that youth unrest in Nigeria reflects a larger global trend, where the costs of reforms, disproportionately affecting young people, lead to resistance when governments neglect to alleviate the immediate difficulties faced by this demographic.

The literature indicates that youth unrest is a predictable response to economic reforms rather than a coincidental occurrence, emerging especially when reforms coincide with structural weaknesses such as youth unemployment, a lack of trust in governance, and inadequate social protections. Evidence from Nigeria (Akinola, 2020; Agbonifo, 2023) aligns with this wider pattern, revealing that reforms that undermine livelihood security provoke protests among students and youth. International studies (Booysen, 2016; Arce, 2010) emphasize this comparative aspect, while cross-national examinations (Hadzi-Vaskov et al., 2021; Urdal, 2006) present evidence that such unrest incurs significant economic costs, highlighting the necessity of carefully designed reforms. The convergence of local and global research thus indicates that without intentional measures that consider youth needs, economic reforms in Nigeria and beyond are likely to escalate youth unrest, perpetuating cycles of instability.

Economic reforms and educational disengagement

Economic reforms that raise household expenses or decrease public education funding are frequently associated in academic literature with greater risks of students being absent from school, lower engagement in learning, and higher dropout rates among young people. Initial evaluations of structural adjustment programs revealed that measures like fiscal consolidation, cuts to subsidies, and cost-recovery strategies often led to diminished public investment in essential social services, increased user fees, and greater out-of-pocket education expenses, which hindered access for underprivileged and marginalized students (UNESCO, 1993). More recent longitudinal micro-level research supports this idea, showing that shocks to a household's income—whether from inflation, the elimination of subsidies, or currency devaluation prompt families to redirect children’s time toward earning income or performing domestic chores and to postpone or abandon school-related costs, which in turn raises absenteeism and dropout rates (Woldehanna & Hagos, 2015; Armand et al., 2023).

Empirical studies specific to countries and regions provide tangible evidence of these connections. In Sub-Saharan Africa, analyses, both multi-country and single-country, indicate that fluctuations in local food and transportation prices, often resulting from reform initiatives, are linked to observable drops in school attendance and completion, especially among adolescents who face increased pressure to work (Armand et al., 2023; Chikhungu et al., 2024). Research utilizing panel data from

Ethiopia conducted by Woldehanna and Hagos (2015) illustrates that overall economic shocks significantly raised dropout rates in primary schools among the poorest students, while studies focused on Malawi reveal lasting impacts on enrollment after prolonged economic disruptions (Chikhungu et al., 2024). These studies consistently highlight that the varying effects of reforms, rather than merely their overall macroeconomic justification, shape educational outcomes for the youth.

Research and reports from Nigeria contextualize these broader trends within the nation's ongoing reform politics and recent fluctuations in the macroeconomic environment. Empirical studies and policy analyses in Nigeria indicate that the removal of subsidies, periods of inflation, and fiscal cutbacks heighten the financial burden on families and educational institutions (Afolabi, 2024; Nkok, 2025; UNICEF Nigeria, 2024). Afolabi (2024) connects rising inflation to challenges within educational administration, such as insufficient funding for school operations and an increase in late or unpaid fees, while Nkok (2025) identifies relationships between inflationary pressures and declines in student achievement and engagement in secondary schools within Niger State. Additionally, national analyses by UNICEF highlight that when reforms happen alongside inadequate social safety nets and limited targeted assistance for students, it is marginalized youth who are the most likely to drop out, exacerbating existing disparities (UNICEF Nigeria, 2024).

Finally, the literature converges on policy implications: reforms that neglect protective measures for education carry significant human-capital costs and risk perpetuating cycles of exclusion. Cross-study syntheses recommend three complementary strategies to blunt the effect of reforms on youth disengagement: (1) ring-fencing education spending during adjustment to prevent abrupt service deterioration; (2) implementing targeted mitigation (means-tested fee waivers, scholarships, or cash transfers) to preserve low-income students' access; and (3) sequencing reforms with transparent communication and participatory mechanisms so that affected communities can anticipate and adapt without withdrawing children from school (Armand et al., 2023; Woldehanna & Hagos, 2015; UNESCO, 1993). In short, the empirical record shows that economic reforms can be compatible with sustained educational engagement but only when policy design proactively protects the most vulnerable youth.

Methodology

The research is a descriptive research design of survey type. The population for the study was all youths in Kwara State with a total of 507,552 as 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The target population is youth in age range of 20-35 years as they are more exposed. The sample size according to research advisor (2006) was 264 selected across various local governments. Multistage sampling techniques were used. To select the age range of respondents and category of the population, purposive sampling techniques was used, simple random sampling techniques was used to select respondents across various local government areas. The instrument for the research was researcher structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was in sections to ensure the objective of the study was cared for. The validity of the instrument was carried out through face and content validity by research experts from institutions in Kwara State. The reliability was also carried out using Cronbach Alpha with reliability index as 0.76.

The respondents were assured of privacy and use of data for research purposes only. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, mean and percentage while inferential statistics of T-test and Pearson Products Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance**.**

Results and Conclusions

The predominant age of the respondent is 20-35 years, the majority of the respondents are male and the level of employment of the respondents showed that 71 respondents are gainfully employed while 73 are students. This two added together accounted for about 55.8% of the respondents this is by implication that the other proportion of respondents is under-employed, not employed or self-employed.

What is the extent of economic reform knowledge of the youths in Kwara state?

To find the level of knowledge of economic reforms by the respondents, the instrument has 7 items of four likert scale ranging from strongly disagreed as 1 and strongly agreed as 4. The highest score for a respondent is 27 while the lowest is 7 hence the scores for each respondents were summed up to determine the level of their knowledge on economic reforms in Nigeria.

Table 1: Knowledge of Economic Reform

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low	4	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Average	50	19.4	19.4	20.9
	High	204	79.1	79.1	100.0
	Total	258	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 showed the knowledge of the respondents on economic reforms in Nigeria. It was revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of the economic reforms we have in Nigeria which by implication guided the response giving to the research instrument presented to them. Many youth in Nigeria are not apathetic of the economic reforms neither are they politically apathetic as the level of awareness was an indication of youth who cared about government policies and actions.

What is the influence of knowledge of economic reforms on youth unrest in Kwara state?

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.169[a]	.028	.025	1.96667

a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge of Economic Reform

The R-square value of 0.028 revealed that the level of economic reforms of the respondents only accounted for 2.8% influence on youth unrest. The R value showed a weak positive correlation between knowledge of economic reforms and youth unrest.

Table 3: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.959	1	28.959	7.487	.007[b]
	Residual	990.157	256	3.868		
	Total	1019.116	257			

a. Dependent Variable: youth unrest

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge of Economic Reform

From the p-value lesser than the 0.05 level of significance, the regression model statistically significantly predicts the outcome variables meaning it is a good fit for the data.

Table4: Coefficients[a]

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	14.692	.760		19.334	.000

Knowledge of Economic Reform	.739	.270	.169	2.736	.007

a. Dependent Variable: youth unrest

From the coefficient table above, the p-value of 0.007 is lesser than the 0.05 significance level therefore the contribution of knowledge of economic reforms to youth unrest is not statistically significant.

Is there correlation between knowledge of economic reforms and educational disengagement of youths in Kwara state?

Table 5: Correlations between economic reforms and educational disengagement.

		Educational disengagement	Economic Reform	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educational disengagement	Pearson Correlation	1	21.2946	21.2946	3.24823
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.046		
	N	258	258		
Economic Reform	Pearson Correlation	.124*	1	2.7752	.45395
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.046			
	N	258	258		

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient (0.124) from the table above revealed that there is a positive correlation an indication that as knowledge of economic reform increases, there is a tendency for slight move towards educational disengagement among the youths. The strength of the correlation reveals very weak correlation (0.00-.019) as 0.124 fall within this category, the relationship between economic reform knowledge and educational disengagement exists but so strong a relation. The p-value (0.046) is less than 0.05 which indicates that the correlation is statistically significant though weak but the not a product of chance. It can therefore be summarized that economic reforms have measurable though weak impact on youths' educational disengagement in Kwara state.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 1: T-Test table of Knowledge of Economic Reforms

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Knowledge of Economic Reform	Male	152	2.8289	.39494	.03203
	Female	106	2.6981	.51952	.05046

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Economic Reform	Equal variances assumed	19.548	.000	2.296	256	.022	.13083	.05697	.01864	.24303
	Equal variances not assumed			2.189	185.712	.030	.13083	.05977	.01292	.24875

The mean score for male is 2.829 with standard deviation of 0.39494 while the female have mean of 2.698 and standard deviation of 0.51952 which indicated a slightly high score by male more than female respondents on the knowledge of economic reforms. The means difference of 0,131, an indication of the differences between male score and female score. The table therefore reveals a statistically significant difference in knowledge of economic reforms between female and male youths df (185.71), t(2.189) p-value =0.30 demonstrated slightly higher knowledge of economic reforms compared to female counterparts. Mean difference of 0.131with 95% confidence interval (0.013, 0.249) indicate that gender plays significant role but modest role shaping youths' awareness of economic reforms. The difference though relatively small, the findings shows a possible disparity in access to information or engagement with socio-economic issues between male and female youth.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that youths in Kwara State confirmed a moderately high level of knowledge of economic reforms, signifying that they are actively engaging with national policy dialogues and the socio-economic changes affecting their daily lives. This result aligns with earlier research by Adekeye and Olutola (2020), who reported that Nigerian university students are increasingly aware of socio-political and economic reforms due to the spread of civic education initiatives and social media platforms. Similarly, Okafor (2021) found that youths' participation in civic education programs enhanced their understanding of economic policies, contributing to greater political consciousness and active citizenship. Lee and Mortimer (2022) observed that young people in emerging economies are becoming more knowledgeable about reform processes as result of their exposure to digital information networks and participatory governance platforms. The high knowledge levels observed in this study therefore suggest that Nigerian youths are not inactive recipients of policy but are gradually becoming informed participants capable of engaging with the consequences of reforms.

The results of this research indicate that young individuals in Kwara State have a fairly substantial understanding of economic reforms, yet this awareness seems to marginally

influence youth unrest. This suggests that familiarity with reform measures, particularly those related to subsidy eliminations, tax changes, and austerity policies, has amplified young people's awareness of the economic difficulties they encounter. Correspondingly, Afolabi (2024) observed that Nigerian youths who possess greater knowledge of reforms are more inclined to voice dissatisfaction with government actions, as they are able to critically evaluate the adverse effects of these reforms on employment opportunities and living expenses. Likewise, Adeyemi and Ojo (2020) contended that well-informed youths often act as catalysts for protest movements when reforms are viewed as unjust or inadequately executed. This reinforces the current study's finding that understanding economic reforms, while indicative of civic participation, might also incite unrest when policies are perceived as harmful to youth well-being.

Table 5 revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between economic reforms and educational disengagement among youths in Kwara State ($r = .124$, $p < .05$). This implies that as economic reforms are intensified, there is a slight tendency for youths to become more disengaged from education. The strength of the relationship is weak but its significance suggests that reforms exert a measure of influence on students' education. This finding matches with earlier research by Woldehanna and Hagos (2015), that found that economic shocks increased dropout rates in Ethiopia, and by Armand et al. (2023), demonstrated that local price volatility increased school withdrawal in Sub-Saharan Africa. Afolabi (2024) and Nkok (2025) reported that inflationary pressures and subsidy removals increases educational difficulties, leading to absenteeism and reduced student performance. Thus, the present study supports existing evidence that economic reforms especially those that reduced household purchasing power can indirectly hinder educational engagement among youths. However, the weak strength of the correlation also suggests that other factors, such as poverty dynamics, family responsibilities, and school-level conditions, may interact with reforms to shape disengagement outcomes.

The t-test result indicated a statistically significant gender difference in youths' knowledge of economic reforms in Kwara State, with males scoring higher ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .39$) than females ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .52$) which suggests that male youths are likely to have slightly greater exposure to or engaged with information on economic policies and reforms. The finding corresponds with earlier research which has revealed that males often have more access to socio-political information and resources due to cultural and structural factors related to privileged participation in public discourse (Olanrewaju & Omotosho, 2019). Similarly, Adekeye and Olutola (2020) observed that male students in Nigeria tend to be more involved in political and economic discussion, which possibly enhance their knowledge base compared to females. However, the magnitude of the difference in the present study is moderate, suggesting that while gender remains a predictor, both male and female youths demonstrate relatively not too diverse awareness levels. This aligns with the findings of Okafor (2021), who reported that increasing female participation in civic education programs is gradually bridging the gender gap in economic and policy knowledge.

Conclusion

The study concludes that youths in Kwara State have a high level of knowledge of economic reforms, replicating their increasing civic consciousness and experience in socio-political discourse. This level of awareness means an important step toward dynamic citizenship and democratic engagement, as knowledgeable youths are better placed to understand the consequences of reforms and react in knowledgeable ways. Rather than being detached, many Nigerian youths are demonstrating the capacity to analytically assess and contribute to national economic discussions. Youth awareness of economic reforms is a double-sided as could enhance civic competence and can also simultaneously fuel unrest when policies are perceived as exclusionary or harmful to survival and existence.

With the weak but statistically significant positive correlation between economic reforms and educational disengagement among youths in Kwara State, this implies that as economic reforms are intensified, there is a tendency for slight but meaningful increase in the propensity for youths to disengage from education.

The study revealed a statistically significant gender difference in youths' knowledge of economic reforms in Kwara State, with male youths demonstrating slightly higher awareness than their female counterparts. Although the difference was modest, the finding underscores the determination of gender disparities in access to socio-economic information and civic participation. This implies that while both male and female youths are gradually aware of reform policies, fundamental and cultural factors still produce slight advantages for males in knowledge acquisition.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

i. Policymakers should create youth forums and consultation platforms that enhance young people discussing reform policies and possible implications.
ii. The political, economic and administrative heads should be more thoughtful of economic reform implementation by considering the potential consequences on the citizens.
iii. The government should create avenue to hear the feedback of citizens on the economic reforms in the country to be able to assess the implication on the citizens.
iv. Community-based initiatives should engage both male and female youths in dialogue platforms where they can discuss the impacts of reforms, thereby promoting inclusive participation.

References

Adekeye, O., & Olutola, A. (2020).Gender, civic engagement, and political awareness among Nigerian university students. *Journal of Social and Political Studies*, 6(2), 55–68.

Afolabi, M. (2024).Inflation and educational administration in Nigeria. *e-Research Journal*, 1(2), 10–19.

Agbonifo, J. (2023). Fuel subsidy protests in Nigeria: The promise and mirage of empowerment. The Extractive Industries and Society, 16, 101333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2023.101333

Aina, O. I. (2013). Two halves make a whole: Gender at the crossroads of the Nigerian development agenda. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 5(7), 155–167. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2013.0451

Akinola, O. (2020). Fuel subsidy reform and the social contract in Nigeria. Global Challenges, 4(8), 2000043. https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.2000043

Arce, M. (2010). Parties and social protest in Latin America's neoliberal era. World Politics, 62(3), 363–401. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887110000082

Armand, A., (2023). Local food price volatility and school dropout in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review*, 49(4), 1205–1234. https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12567

Booysen, S. (2016). Fees Must Fall: Student revolt, decolonisation and governance in South Africa. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. https://www.witspress.co.za

Chikhungu, L., (2024). Aggregate shocks and enrollment rates over a decade in Malawi. *Journal of African Economies*, 33(1), 1–21.

Chiluwa, I., &Ajiboye, E. (2014)."We will resist the January 2012 fuel subsidy removal": Cyber-protests in Nigeria. *Discourse & Society,* 25(3), 309–334. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513516044

Graduate Students in Public Universities in South East Nigeria, *international journal of social science humanity & management research.* https://doi:10.58806/ijsshmr.2025v4i03n12

Hadzi-Vaskov, M., Pienknagura, S., & Ricci, L. A. (2021). The macroeconomic impact of social unrest (IMF Working Paper WP/21/135). Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/05/28/The-Macroeconomic-Impact-of-Social-Unrest-50299

Lee, M., & Mortimer, R. (2022). Youth civic knowledge and economic reforms in emerging economies: The role of digital engagement. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 25(4), 515–532.https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1939287

Nkok, A. (2025). Influence of inflation on senior secondary school students' achievement in Niger State, Nigeria. International Journal of Innovative Education Research, 13(1), 95–101.https://seahipaj.org

Okafor, C. (2021). Civic education and youth participation in economic reforms: Bridging the gender gap in Nigeria. *African Journal of Development Studies*, 11(3), 89–104.

Olanrewaju, T., & Omotosho, J. (2019). Gender disparity in access to socio-political information in Nigeria: Implications for youth development. *Nigerian Journal of Gender and Development*, 19(1), 112–127.

Ugochukwu ,I. O., Chukwuemeka, O., Nwaru, P. E., Chukwuma M. O. (2025) the Impact of 2024 Economic Hardship on Academic Engagement of Post. https://doi.org/10.58806/ijsshmr.2025v4i03n12

UNESCO. (1993). Effects of structural adjustment programmes on education and training. Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/

Urdal, H. (2006). A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence. International Studies Quarterly, 50(3), 607–629. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00416.x

Walton, J., & Seddon, D. (1994). Free markets and food riots: The politics of global adjustment. Oxford: Blackwell publishers.

Woldehanna, T., & Hagos, A. (2015). Economic shocks and children's dropout from primary school: Evidence from Ethiopia. *Young Lives Working Paper*. Oxford: University of Oxford. https://www.younglives.org.uk/

ROLE OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, ECONOMIC POLICY IN SHAPING ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ZAMFARA STATE.

Murtala Salisu; Bala Ibrahim; Fapohunda A. Michael & Ahmad Kainuwa

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, Federal University Gusau

Abstract

This study investigates the role of social stratification in shaping access to educational opportunities within the framework of Nigeria's economic policies. Drawing on classical and contemporary sociological theories, including those of Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu the research explores how hierarchical structures based on wealth, status, and power influence educational attainment in a stratified society. The analysis reveals that Nigeria's economic policies often reflect and reinforce existing social inequalities, thereby affecting the distribution of educational resources and opportunities. Factors such as gender, geographic location, and socio-economic status are shown to significantly impact access to education, particularly for marginalized groups in rural and conflict-affected regions. The paper highlights the intersection of social stratification with policy implementation, noting that economic reforms and public spending are frequently skewed toward urban and elite interests. Moreover, systemic barriers, including underfunding, commercialization of tertiary education, and gender-based discrimination, limit the potential of education to serve as a vehicle for social mobility. While reforms such as the Universal Basic Education programme and AGILE initiatives demonstrate some progress, structural inequalities persist. The study concludes that equitable educational development in Nigeria requires targeted policy interventions that address the root causes of social stratification, ensure inclusive economic planning, and promote gender-sensitive strategies. Without deliberate efforts to dismantle systemic barriers, education may continue to mirror, rather than mitigate, social inequalities.

Keywords: Access, Economic policies, Education, Gender, Stratification

Introduction

Social stratification plays a significant role in shaping access to educational opportunities, and this dynamic is particularly pronounced in Nigeria, where disparities in wealth, power, and prestige influence educational attainment and opportunity. Nigeria's complex social structure, marked by deep divides along economic, ethnic, and regional lines, has direct implications for how policies are designed and implemented in education. These disparities are further compounded by the nation's economic policies, which often reflect and reinforce existing social hierarchies. In recent years, scholars have increasingly highlighted the intersection between social stratification and education, emphasizing how the distribution of resources, both at the individual and systemic levels, affects access to quality education. According to Oduolowu (2023), the wealth gap in Nigeria exacerbates unequal access to educational facilities, with children from lower-income families having limited access to quality schooling compared to their wealthier counterparts. Additionally, research by Adeyemo and Olayemi (2022) reveals that Nigeria's economic policies often prioritize sectors that indirectly impact education, thereby neglecting the needs of the most disadvantaged groups. Economic policies, especially those related to budgeting and resource allocation, often reflect the interests of the elite, perpetuating patterns of inequality in access to educational opportunities (Afolabi, 2021). For instance, the prioritization of certain regions or the neglect of infrastructural development in

less affluent areas leads to unequal opportunities for students, particularly in rural and underserved regions. A recent study by Eze (2024) underscores that policies such as school funding allocation and teacher training programs have often been skewed in favor of urban areas, further entrenching educational inequality.

Theoretical Framework

Social stratification theory, which analyzes the hierarchical arrangement of individuals in society based on various factors such as wealth, education, occupation, and power, provides valuable insight into the ways that economic reforms can influence social structures. The theory, primarily developed by scholars like Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Pierre Bourdieu, has been central in understanding how different strata within society are affected by economic changes, particularly during periods of reform. Economic reforms whether through policies such as market liberalization, privatization, or welfare state alterations can either reinforce existing social hierarchies or provide opportunities for greater social mobility. Social stratification is the system by which society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. This system is usually marked by inequalities in wealth, power, status, and access to resources. Economic reform, whether aimed at reducing inequalities or increasing economic growth, directly impacts this stratification. Scholars have argued that economic reforms can either perpetuate or reduce stratification, depending on the nature of the reforms and the structure of the economy.

However, in Marxist terms, economic reform is seen as a battle between the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (working class), with reforms generally serving to reinforce capitalist systems and maintaining the status quo of the class structure (Marx, 1867). However, Weber's view of stratification is more nuanced. He proposed that social stratification is not only determined by class but also by status and power. In this light, economic reforms that redistribute wealth or empower marginalized groups might shift the balance of power and lead to more equality across social strata (Weber, 1922). Bourdieu's theory of social capital adds another dimension to this discussion by emphasizing that economic reforms could affect not only material resources but also cultural and social capital, further influencing one's position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu suggests that reforms that change educational access or cultural opportunities can have long-lasting impacts on social mobility and stratification. Economic reforms have led to a reduction in inequality, others have exacerbated existing social divisions. For example, studies on neoliberal reforms in Latin America indicate that while market-oriented reforms were intended to reduce poverty, they have often led to increased wealth concentration in the hands of a small elite, thereby reinforcing social stratification (Cortes, 2021).

Similarly, economic liberalization in post-Soviet states often resulted in the enrichment of political elites and the perpetuation of social inequalities, even as other sections of the population faced growing poverty (Szelényi & Kostello, 2022). However, some scholars argue that economic reforms, when properly implemented with a focus on education, healthcare, and social welfare, can promote social mobility and reduce stratification. For instance, studies on Scandinavian countries suggest that economic policies that invest in universal social services, combined with strong labor unions and progressive tax systems, can mitigate the harmful effects of social stratification (Korpi & Palme, 2021).

Concept of Social Stratification

Social stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals or groups in a society based on various social, economic, and political factors. These factors often include wealth, income, race, education, occupation, and power. The primary characteristic of social stratification is the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, which leads to the creation of distinct social classes or groups. Stratification influences people's access to resources such as education, healthcare, and employment, which, in turn, shapes their life chances. At its core, social stratification

categorizes people into groups that occupy different positions in the social structure, typically determined by wealth (economic capital), prestige (social capital), and power (political capital). Sociologists often analyze stratification through the lens of class, status, and party, as identified by Max Weber (1922), who extended Karl Marx's initial focus on economic class to include social status and political influence. Social stratification emphasizes the role of structural inequalities in perpetuating social divisions. Some theorists assert that social stratification is not solely based on economic disparities but also on cultural and ideological factors that shape people's perceptions of their social position (Tilly, 2012). Others argue that global capitalist systems contribute significantly to the formation of social hierarchies by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few, thus further entrenching inequality (Piketty, 2014).

Consequently, in many societies, particularly in developing nations, social stratification can be a result of historical and colonial legacies. This has led to enduring disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and rights, perpetuating cycles of inequality (Giddens et al., 2017). Such systems of stratification are often resistant to change, creating barriers to social mobility and reinforcing existing power structures. Piketty (2014) examines the concentration of wealth in capitalist societies, linking rising inequality to the accumulation of capital and the intergenerational transmission of wealth. Vrenshaw (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum. Crenshaw introduces the concept of intersectionality, which highlights how various axes of identity intersect to shape individuals' experiences with oppression and privilege. Giddens,

Economic Policies and Their Impact on Education

Economic policies play a pivotal role in shaping educational systems by influencing public investment, resource allocation, equity, and quality. Recent scholarly research highlights that fiscal, monetary, and structural economic policies significantly affect educational access and outcomes, particularly in developing economies. Public spending on education is primarily determined by fiscal policy, especially government revenue and expenditure patterns. According to Aikins and Anaba (2022), fiscal expansion tends to increase education sector funding, leading to improvements in infrastructure, teacher training, and learning materials. Conversely, austerity measures or reductions in public expenditure can hinder educational development, especially in low-income areas. Monetary policy also indirectly affects education through its influence on inflation and household income. High inflation rates, often resulting from lax monetary control, can reduce the real income of families and restrict their ability to afford education-related expenses (Mwangi & Were, 2023). This situation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, increasing dropout rates and reducing educational attainment.

In terms of structural policies, neoliberal economic reforms such as privatization and deregulation have been linked to growing educational inequality. Researchers such as Oketch and Rolleston (2021) argue that market-based education policies may improve efficiency but often marginalize poor and rural populations who cannot afford private education options. As such, these policies may reinforce socio-economic disparities and limit access to quality education for disadvantaged groups. Additionally, economic policies focused on human capital development have shown positive impacts. Policies that invest in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are associated with improved labor market outcomes and economic productivity. For instance, the World Bank (2022) notes that countries investing in skills-based education systems experience enhanced innovation and competitiveness. Consequently, economic policies are instrumental in determining the extent and quality of educational opportunities. Progressive fiscal and human capital-focused economic policies tend to promote educational equity and growth, while regressive or neoliberal policies may exacerbate disparities.

The Role of Gender in Educational Stratification in Nigeria

Gender plays a critical role in educational stratification in Nigeria, contributing to disparities in access, retention, completion, and overall educational outcomes between males and females. Despite progress in policy and advocacy for gender equality in education, systemic barriers persist, disproportionately affecting girls and women, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas. Recent studies indicate that cultural norms, early marriage, poverty, and insecurity are major gender-specific challenges hindering girls' education in Nigeria. According to Okafor and Uzoegwu (2022), patriarchal beliefs and practices in many Nigerian communities devalue female education, encouraging early marriage and domestic roles over schooling for girls. This contributes to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates among female students, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. Furthermore, regional disparities exacerbate gender-based educational stratification. The northern regions of Nigeria, particularly the North-East and North-West, show significantly lower female literacy and school attendance rates due to socio-religious factors and insurgency (Yahaya & Musa, 2023). These factors disproportionately limit educational opportunities for girls, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Economic factors also intersect with gender to reinforce educational stratification. Families facing financial constraints often prioritize the education of male children, viewing them as future breadwinners.

However, as noted by Ibrahim and Olatunji (2021), this gendered investment pattern reflects deep-seated social norms that undervalue the long-term benefits of educating girls. In response, recent policy interventions and advocacy efforts have aimed to bridge the gender gap in education. Programs such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) have been introduced to improve girls' access to education through scholarships, safe school environments, and community engagement (World Bank, 2022). While such interventions show promise, sustained efforts are needed to dismantle structural barriers and achieve gender parity in educational attainment. Consequently, gender remains a fundamental axis of educational stratification in Nigeria. Addressing the entrenched socio-cultural, economic, and regional disparities is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable educational system that empowers both girls and boys to realize their full potential.

Social Mobility and Education in Nigeria

Social mobility refers to the ability of individuals or groups to move within a social hierarchy, typically in terms of socio-economic status. In Nigeria, a country with significant social and economic disparities, education has long been regarded as a vital instrument for achieving upward social mobility. Education provides access to knowledge, credentials, and employment opportunities that can help break intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, the effectiveness of education in promoting social mobility in Nigeria is often constrained by systemic inequalities, regional disparities, and socio-cultural barriers.

1. The Promise of Education for Social Mobility: Education in Nigeria is widely recognized as a key pathway to economic advancement and social transformation. According to Adebayo and Omotosho (2023), educational attainment in Nigeria is positively correlated with income, occupational status, and access to formal sector employment. Individuals with tertiary education are significantly more likely to secure stable, well-paying jobs, particularly in the urban formal economy. This supports the Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the role of education in increasing individual productivity and lifetime earnings. Additionally, Okonjo-Iweala and Effiong (2022) note that education has enabled many Nigerians from disadvantaged backgrounds to attain positions of influence in politics, business, and academia. Merit-based access to higher education institutions and professional qualifications has created opportunities

for social advancement, especially among the urban middle class.

2. Barriers to Educationally-Driven Social Mobility: Despite its potential, the role of education in promoting social mobility in Nigeria is undermined by various structural and institutional challenges. One significant barrier is unequal access to quality education. According to Yusuf and Bako (2021), children from wealthier families are more likely to attend well-funded private schools and elite public institutions, while those from low-income households often face overcrowded classrooms, unqualified teachers, and inadequate infrastructure. This inequality is further compounded by regional and rural-urban disparities. States in the North-East and North-West regions of Nigeria consistently report lower school enrollment, completion rates, and educational outcomes due to poverty, insecurity, and socio-cultural norms that deprioritize formal education—particularly for girls (Aliyu & Yakubu, 2023). As a result, many youths in these areas are excluded from the socio-economic benefits of education.
3. The commercialization of tertiary education has also limited its accessibility. With increasing tuition fees and a lack of sufficient government scholarships, many students from poor backgrounds are unable to afford higher education. Eze and Ugwueze (2022) argue that this trend entrenches social stratification by making higher education and the social mobility it enables more accessible to the affluent. Moreover, the disconnect between education and labor market demands in Nigeria has weakened the capacity of education to deliver upward mobility. Obasi and Oyetunde (2022) highlight that many graduates are unemployed or underemployed due to an oversupply of university degrees that do not align with the skills needed in the labor market. This mismatch diminishes the perceived and actual economic returns on educational investment.
4. Gender and Social Mobility: Gender also plays a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between education and social mobility. In many parts of Nigeria, especially in the North, girls are often denied equal educational opportunities due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and traditional beliefs. Aliyu and Yakubu (2023) argue that these gendered barriers contribute to intergenerational poverty by limiting women's ability to gain education, employment, and economic independence, thereby stalling their upward mobility.
5. Policy Implications and the Way Forward: The Nigerian government has implemented various policies to improve access to education and promote equity, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and scholarships for disadvantaged students. However, these efforts must be strengthened and expanded. Scholars such as Adegbite and Falade (2021) recommend increasing public investment in education, particularly in marginalized regions; reforming curricula to reflect labor market needs; and expanding vocational and technical education to provide alternative pathways to social mobility.

The Implementation of Policy Reforms in Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian education system has been the focus of numerous policy reforms aimed at enhancing access, equity, quality, and relevance. These reforms reflect national aspirations for development and align with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education. Over the years, reforms have sought to address systemic issues like low literacy rates, teacher shortages, infrastructural decay, and regional disparities. However, the process of implementing these reforms has encountered both significant progress and enduring challenges. One of the cornerstone reforms in Nigeria's education system is the National Policy on Education (NPE), first formulated in 1977 and revised several times, with the most recent

revision in 2013. This policy provides a comprehensive framework for educational structure, philosophy, and objectives. It emphasizes functional education for skill acquisition, science and technology, and the promotion of national unity. Despite its broad and inclusive goals, implementation has been uneven, often hindered by limited political will, poor funding, and a mismatch between policy design and the realities on the ground.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, launched in 1999 and legally backed by the UBE Act of 2004, represents a major reform designed to provide free and compulsory education for all children of school-going age up to Junior Secondary School level. Implementation of UBE has led to increased enrollment across various regions, especially in the southern parts of Nigeria. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit its success in many northern and rural communities. According to Yusuf and Bako (2021), disparities in education access and quality between states are widening, partly due to variations in the political commitment and resource capacities of state governments. Another major reform initiative was the "Education for Change: A Ministerial Strategic Plan (2018–2022)," which outlined key focus areas such as out-of-school children, quality assurance, teacher education, and ICT integration. While the plan was ambitious and well-articulated, its implementation was constrained by bureaucratic bottlenecks, insufficient funding, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Scholars such as Ibrahim and Olatunji (2023) argue that these challenges stem from a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation, where policies are often designed without adequate consultation with stakeholders or realistic assessments of existing capacity.

The Safe Schools Initiative, introduced in 2014 in response to growing insecurity in Northern Nigeria, particularly due to Boko Haram insurgency, aimed to protect students and schools from attacks and ensure continuity of education in conflict-affected areas. Though the initiative received support from international partners, its long-term sustainability has been questioned due to reliance on external funding and limited integration into national education planning. Recent reforms have also emphasized the need for increased use of technology in education. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital learning infrastructure and prompted new investments in e-learning platforms. However, implementation has been uneven, with rural areas facing significant challenges in connectivity, electricity, and digital literacy. Corruption and mismanagement remain major impediments to successful policy implementation. According to Eze and Ugwueze (2022), education reform projects are frequently undermined by the diversion of funds, lack of accountability, and weak institutional frameworks. Additionally, the lack of a robust monitoring and evaluation system hampers efforts to measure progress and make evidence-based adjustments.

In spite of these challenges, there are success stories. Public-private partnerships and community-based interventions have contributed to improved school enrollment and retention in some states. International donor agencies and NGOs have also played a critical role in supporting capacity building, curriculum reform, and school rehabilitation projects. Nonetheless, sustainability of these interventions remains a concern in the absence of strong government ownership and consistent funding. Consequently, while Nigeria has adopted multiple education policy reforms aimed at improving learning outcomes and reducing inequality, implementation has often been thwarted by structural inefficiencies, regional disparities, and weak governance. Moving forward, there is a need for increased investment in education, stronger political will, community engagement, and an evidence-based approach to policy design and implementation. Ensuring that policies are responsive to local realities and are backed by adequate funding and accountability mechanisms is essential to achieving lasting reform in Nigeria's education sector.

Suggestions

1. Strengthen policy implementation through adequate funding and monitoring.
2. Introduce pro-poor and gender-sensitive education subsidies.
3. Expand vocational and technical training to improve employability.
4. Bridge rural-urban gaps in infrastructure and teacher quality.
5. Align economic policy reforms with inclusive educational goals.

Conclusion

Addressing educational inequality in Nigeria requires a holistic understanding of social stratification and its reinforcement through economic policies. A multi-dimensional approach targeting systemic disparities especially those rooted in class, gender, and geography is essential for achieving inclusive and equitable access to quality education.

References

Adebayo, O. A., & Omotosho, A. O. (2023). Education and income inequality in Nigeria: Evidence from a household survey. Journal of African Development Studies, 15(2), 134–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/afds.2023.15.2.134

Adegbite, A. B., & Falade, A. A. (2021). Repositioning education for sustainable development and social mobility in Nigeria. International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review, 8(5), 97–105. https://doi.org/10.15739/IJEPRR.21.010

Adeyemo, A., & Olayemi, O. (2022). Economic policies and education: The Nigerian case. Journal of African Education Policy, 11(3), 45–60.

Afolabi, O. (2021). Social stratification and educational inequality in Nigeria: A critical review. International Journal of Educational Development, 30(2), 120–136.

Aikins, J. K., & Anaba, M. (2022). Fiscal policy and public education financing in Sub-Saharan Africa. International Journal of Educational Development, 89, 102561. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102561

Aliyu, R. M., & Yakubu, A. U. (2023). Gender inequality and barriers to girls' education in Northern Nigeria: Implications for social mobility. Journal of Gender and Education in Africa, 11(1), 45–61.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste. Harvard University Press.

Cortes, M. (2021). Neoliberal reforms and social stratification in Latin America. Journal of Economic Development, 45(2), 111–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jedc.2021.01.002

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1(8), 139–167.

Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr (2017). Introduction to Sociology (10th ed.). Seagull.

Eze, C. (2024). Economic policies and educational access in Nigeria: Challenges and solutions. African Educational Research Journal, 19(1), 74–89.

Eze, D. U., & Ugwueze, S. O. (2022). Governance and accountability in education policy implementation in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning, 17(2), 151–168.

Eze, D. U., & Ugwueze, S. O. (2022). Privatization of higher education and its implications for social equity in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning, 17(3), 201–215.

Giddens, A., Duneier, M., Appelbaum, R. P., & Carr, D. (2017). Introduction to sociology (10th ed.). Seagull.

Ibrahim, A., & Olatunji, S. T. (2023). Evaluating education policy implementation in Nigeria: A participatory approach to reform. African Journal of Educational Research and Development, 13(1), 34–50.

Ibrahim, F. O., & Olatunji, M. O. (2021). Socioeconomic factors and gender disparity in access to secondary education in Nigeria. International Journal of Educational Research and Policy, 12(3), 55–68.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijerp.2021.03.004

Korpi, W., & Palme, J. (2021). The paradox of redistribution and strategies of inequality. American Sociological Review, 86(3), 376–398. https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211000758

Marx, K. (1867). Das Kapital: A critique of political economy. Penguin Classics, 1990.

Mwangi, W., & Were, M. (2023). Inflation, household income and school attendance: Evidence from East Africa. African Development Review, 35(1), 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8268.12620

Obasi, E. O., & Oyetunde, T. (2022). Youth unemployment and the crisis of educational expectations in Nigeria. African Journal of Social Policy and Development, 18(1), 88–104.

Oduolowu, M. (2023). The impact of wealth inequality on educational access in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Education and Social Science, 8(4), 99–112.

Okafor, C. J., & Uzoegwu, P. N. (2022). Gender inequality and the right to education in Nigeria: Cultural and policy perspectives. African Journal of Gender and Development, 14(1), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.4314/ajgd.v14i1.3

Oketch, M., & Rolleston, C. (2021). Market-oriented education policies and their impact on equity in sub-Saharan Africa. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 51(6), 843–860. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1777840

Okonjo-Iweala, N., & Effiong, S. A. (2022). Education and inclusive growth in Nigeria: Bridging the inequality gap. Nigerian Economic Review, 33(4), 241–260.

Piketty, T. (2014). Capital in the twenty-first century. Harvard University Press.

Szelényi, I., & Kostello, M. (2022). Post-socialist economic reforms and the persistence of social stratification. European Journal of Social Theory, 25(1), 56–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310221083295

Tilly, C. (2012). Durable inequality. University of California Press.

Weber, M. (1922). Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology. University of California Press.

World Bank. (2022). Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE): igeria Project Overview. https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/agile-nigeria

World Bank. (2022). World development report 2022: Education, skills, and the future of work. World Bank Publications. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2022

Yahaya, M. A., & Musa, U. A. (2023). Gender, education, and regional disparities in Nigeria: A sociological analysis. Journal of African Educational Studies, 10(1), 72–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/jaes.2023.10.1.72

Yusuf, A., & Bako, S. (2021). Educational inequalities and policy implementation gaps in Nigeria: A case study of the UBE programme. International Journal of Educational Development in Africa, 8(3), 112–129.

Yusuf, A., & Bako, S. (2021). Regional disparities in education and their effects on social mobility in Nigeria. International Journal of Comparative Education and Development, 23(3), 189–204. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-09-2020-0095

FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Conchi-Miriam Brown

Department of Educational Foundations,
College of Education, Afaha-Nsit, Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and access to quality education in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted, involving 114 principals selected through stratified sampling from a population of 248. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.92. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for data analysis. Findings revealed significant negative relationships between fuel subsidy removal and both students' attendance and teachers' job performance. The study concludes that economic reforms such as subsidy removal have profound implications for educational access and quality. It recommends policy interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of rising living costs on education.

Keywords: Fuel subsidy removal, Access, Quality education, School attendance, Job performance.

Introduction

The Nigerian public education sector plays a pivotal role in the country's development by providing educational opportunities to a diverse and growing population. Public secondary schools, serve as a vital component of this sector, shaping the future of Nigerian youth by equipping them with essential knowledge and skills for sustainable living and further education. The sector is significantly influenced by government policies, economic reforms such as those surrounding petroleum and fuel subsidies. Petroleum subsidies have been a longstanding component of Nigeria's economic policies. These subsidies aim to ensure that essential commodities such as fuel, remain affordable. The underlying rationale is to alleviate the financial burden on citizens and maintain socio-economic stability. While the intent behind these subsidies is commendable, the consequences of its removal on public secondary schools are multifaceted (Nmadu & Lawal, 2017).

Public secondary schools have been the most affordable form of secondary education in Akwa Ibom State as a result of the free education policy of the state government. Low income households only have to struggle to provide feeding, learning materials, uniforms and transportation as the state government takes over the payment of school and examination fees. However, the recent removal of fuel subsidy by President Tinubu's administration has changed the scenario. The sudden rise in cost of books, other study materials, and the escalating cost of transport have brought untold hardship on the parents, adversely affecting the education of their children.

It can be recalled that the Nigerian government declared the immediate elimination of petroleum product subsidies on May 29, 2023 by the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, following his swearing-in ceremony as President of the Federal Republic of Nigerian and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Prices for goods and services immediately went up as a result of this declaration, which sent shockwaves through the economy (Ogwuche, Adejor, Dabish, Garba and Dole, 2024). Economists attribute the unexpected harsh burden on the people to the hasty withdrawal of the fuel subsidy without addressing the underlying structural constraints and social dislocations that may accompany such reform. As pointed out by Clements, Gupta and Nozaki (2013), the timing and manner of subsidy elimination can have a substantial impact on economic and social life of the people concerned.

Despite the importance of education as a driver of national development, access to quality education in Nigeria remains vulnerable to socio-economic shocks. The removal of fuel subsidies has significantly increased the cost of living, particularly transportation and educational materials, thereby placing additional burdens on households.

While existing studies have examined the economic implications of fuel subsidy removal, limited attention has been given to its effects on educational access and quality at the secondary school level. This study therefore investigates the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Concepts of Economic Reforms and Fuel Subsidy

Deliberate steps to restructure and modernize an economy to increase its productivity, competitiveness, and efficiency are known as economic reforms. They often start as a reaction to external shocks that impede economic growth and development, structural inefficiencies, or fiscal imbalances. Generally speaking, economic reforms include a variety of policy changes, such as trade liberalization, fiscal restructuring, privatization, deregulation, and institutional change. By tackling the inefficiencies and distortions that obstruct development, these exercises seek to establish an atmosphere that supports economic expansion. Scholars differ on how they conceptualize economic reforms, with varying emphasis on their goals and workings.

Economic reforms, according to Adeyemo, Salami and Olu-Adeyemi (2018), are all-encompassing initiatives intended to correct economic imbalances by fostering productivity and efficiency. According to Adeyemo et al., reforms are methodical attempts to restructure the fundamental structures of the economy rather than merely making ad hoc tweaks. The goals of these changes have been to stabilize macroeconomic indices, address budgetary imbalances, and encourage private sector involvement. Reforms are intended to address issues of governance, improve budgetary discipline, and encourage growth driven by the private sector. They are a group of laws intended to refocus economic activities and reroute an economy's development (Ogun, 2018).

A subsidy is a form of financial assistance in which the government lowers the price of a good or service below the market price by paying a portion of the cost. It is a financial aid that the government gives to people, companies, or industries to promote economic activity that is thought to benefit the general public or to address market imperfections. This can be in the form of tax breaks, direct cash grants, or other financial incentives. The main goal of subsidies is to incentivize the production or consumption of specific commodities and services. Subsidy is a purposeful government action that supports specific economic agents, such as producers or consumers (Oyasipe and Olukoya, 2024).

The fuel subsidy scheme was introduced in Nigeria as a way to alleviate the cost of fuel for citizens, especially in a country where petroleum products form the backbone of the transportation and energy sectors. However, the sustainability of the subsidy has been questioned due to its impact on public finances and the economy. According to Akinbobola (2017), fuel subsidies have been a significant drain on Nigeria's annual budget, diverting resources that could otherwise be used for infrastructural development and poverty alleviation. It is often justified on the grounds that it helps reduce the burden on the poor and ensures economic stability by preventing fuel price hikes. However, critics argue that it benefits the wealthy more than the poor, as the rich consume more fuel, thus intensifying income inequality (Yusuf & Bakare, 2020). Moreover, the increasing cost of the subsidy has led to a rise in the national debt, thereby worsening Nigeria's economic instability (Ibrahim & Ali, 2019). These and other reasons prompted the Federal Government decision on the fuel subsidy removal.

Although the goal of subsidy removal is to improve fiscal sustainability and conform to worldwide trends of reducing subsidies for fossil fuels (Ude, 2023), it comes with several consequences. Since the elimination of subsidies

may result in higher fuel prices and a consequent increase in the prices of goods and services as well as on the cost of living, the most pressing of these issues is the possibility of escalating social inequality. This situation reflects the worry expressed by Ude (2023), who highlights that although the removal of subsidies may have long term advantages, it may also put pressure on households' financial resources, especially those that are already marginalized. The abrupt increase in fuel prices resulting from the subsidy removal further compounded the economic hardships faced by the already struggling Nigerian masses grappling with high unemployment rates and pervasive economic challenges (Darlington and Monday, 2023). As observed by Emeka, Abaekih and Sophia (2024), the removal of fuel subsidies has led to a significant negative impact on Nigerian's transportation system. The increased fuel prices has reduced the revenue rate, decreased the number of long-distance vehicles and affected the maintenance schedules of the vehicles, thereby increasing transportation costs for commuters, including students.

Access to Quality Secondary Education

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of national development. In Nigeria, access to quality education remains a persistent challenge, especially in the face of socio-economic shocks that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. One such shock is the removal of fuel subsidies, a policy decision that has sparked widespread debate due to its far-reaching economic consequences on households and public services (Iwayemi, 2013). Fuel subsidies had long been used by successive Nigerian governments to keep fuel prices artificially low, to cushion the effects of poverty and inflation on citizens. However, critics argue that the subsidy regime was economically unsustainable and riddled with corruption, prompting the federal government to begin its phased removal in recent years (Ukwueze, 2020). In 2023, the Nigerian government fully eliminated fuel subsidies, leading to a sharp rise in fuel prices and transportation costs across the country (Akinyemi and Okonkwo, 2023). While this policy was intended to redirect resources toward infrastructure and social services, it has had unintended consequences, particularly on education. The effect of fuel subsidy removal on school attendance is becoming increasingly evident. For many families, the increased cost of commuting has made it difficult to send children to school regularly, especially in low-income and rural communities (Oluwadare and Adebanjo, 2022). Secondary school students, who often travel long distances to attend school, are among the most affected. In some communities in Akwa Ibom State, where public transportation infrastructure is limited, the economic burden of daily transport seems to impede regular attendance and, in some cases, lead to school dropouts.

Studies have shown that economic shocks such as fuel subsidy removal tend to limit low-income households' ability to afford basic necessities including transportation to schools, especially in a country where public transport is essential for students to access schools (Ukwueze, 2020). In a study conducted by Akinyemi and Okonkwo (2023), it was observed that the 2023 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, led to a significant decline in student attendance in several public schools, particularly in states with limited transportation infrastructure. Moreover, Oluwadare and Adebanjo (2022) found a direct correlation between increased transportation costs and student absenteeism. Their study in southwestern Nigeria revealed that many students began to miss school due to the inability of their parents to meet daily commuting expenses. This trend was more pronounced in public secondary schools where students often travel considerable distances from their homes to school.

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Teachers' Job Performance

Job performance encompasses an employee's ability to effectively perform their tasks, contributing to the overall success of the organization and its ability to meet its objectives. It is a measure of an individual's productivity, assessed against the performance of their peers, and is evaluated based on a range of work-related behaviours and outcomes. The level of performance is typically determined by both the quality and the quantity of the work completed in relation to the responsibilities assigned to the employee (Adebayo, 2018).

High-performing employees are key assets that drive the long-term success and sustainability of any organization. Teachers' job performance plays a crucial role in the overall success of education at any level. The effectiveness and efficiency of public secondary school teachers directly impact the quality of education received in public secondary schools. In the academic context, teaching performance is a primary indicator of staff effectiveness. Effective teachers not only impart knowledge but also inspire students, foster critical thinking, and create an engaging learning environment. The evaluation of teaching performance often involves student feedback, peer reviews, and self-assessments, which can provide valuable insights into the areas of strength and improvement for the staff members (Kehm and Teichler, 2017).

The removal of fuel subsidy has direct and indirect economic effects on education, influencing teachers' job performance in the institutions. A study by Abiodun (2022) revealed that fuel subsidy removal directly affects transportation costs, which in turn influences teachers' daily expenses. As fuel prices increase, teachers are often required to spend a greater portion of their income on transportation, leading to a decrease in disposable income. This financial strain can lower their morale, reduce job satisfaction, and ultimately affect performance. For instance, high transportation costs can lead to teacher absenteeism and tardiness, as they may be unable to afford the increasing costs of commuting to work. This behaviour, as reported by Okafor and Adeyemo (2017), results in reduced productivity, as employees are often exhausted or distracted by their financial worries. Furthermore, teachers who are financially stressed may lack the motivation to go beyond basic job requirements, affecting the overall performance of the education sector.

In a study by Asogwa and Abubakar (2021), it was found that the removal of the fuel subsidy in Nigeria led to an increase in transportation costs, which negatively affected the motivation and job satisfaction of employees in the public sector. The researchers found out that the financial stress caused by rising fuel prices forced employees to focus on their personal survival rather than their work duties, leading to poor performance and decreased productivity.

Moreso, the indirect consequences of fuel subsidy removal, such as inflation also affect employee productivity. As inflation rises due to increased fuel costs, purchasing power is eroded, and workers find it more difficult to meet their basic needs. This economic hardship can lead to stress, disengagement, and burnout, all of which negatively impact job performance (Sulaimon, 2018). Employees who are preoccupied with financial difficulties may be less focused on their work tasks and less willing to contribute effectively to organizational goals.

Purpose of the Study

The study focuses on fuel subsidy removal and access to quality education in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State;
2. Determine the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to direct the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

2. There is no significant relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

This study was carried out to determine the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and access to quality education in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of principals of public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, totaling 248. The stratified sampling technique was used in drawing a sample size of 114 respondents from the three Senatorial Districts of the State, representing 46% of the study population. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. Data collection was carried out using a researcher-developed instrument tagged 'Fuel Subsidy Removal and Quality Secondary Education Questionnaire' (FSRQSEQ). The instrument, which was patterned after Likert four-point scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD), was divided into two sections of five items each. It was duly validated and trial tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.92.

In order to ensure that ethical issues were met and not violated, the consent of the respondents were sought and obtained before administering the questionnaire for data collection. The respondents were made to be aware of their freedom to participate or withdraw from the study at any point in time, if need arose. The participants were assured of confidentiality and granted the right to anonymity where requested. Their privacies and persons were respected. The null hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Coefficient. The results indicated significant strong negative relationships between fuel subsidy removal and access to quality education in public secondary schools in the state. Both students' attendance and teachers' job performance were impacted negatively by the subsidy removal.

Results

The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

The research question sought to find out the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to answer the research question, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to calculate the relationship. The result is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-value
Fuel Subsidy Removal (X)	4293	54873		
			57042	-0.83
Students' Attendance in Public Secondary Schools (Y)	4474	59486		

The result in Table 1 indicates the calculated r-value between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools to be -0.83. This shows a high negative relationship. Therefore, there is a high negative relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2
What is the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

The research question sought to find out the relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to answer the research question, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to calculate the relationship. The result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	∑XY	r-value
Fuel Subsidy Removal (X)	4293	54873		
			59943	-0.79
Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools (Y)	4478	58486		

The result in Table 2 indicates the calculated r-value between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools as -0.79. This shows a high but negative relationship between the two variables. Therefore, there is a high though negative relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 1
There is no significant relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Correlation analysis between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	Σx Σy	Σx² Σy²	Σxy	r-cal	df	r-crit	Decision
Fuel Subsidy Removal	4293	54873					
			57042	-0.83	112	0.195	Significant
Students' Attendance in Public Secondary Schools	4474	59486					

N=114. Significant of 0.05 alpha level, p ≤ .05

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of -0.83 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 112 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant inverse relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2
There is no significant relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Correlation analysis between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	Σx Σy	Σx² Σy²	Σxy	r-cal	df	r-crit	Decision
Fuel Subsidy Removal	4293	54873	59943	-0.79	112	0.195	Significant
Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools	4478	58486					

N=114. Significant of 0.05 alpha level, p ≤ .05

The result presented in Table 4 shows that the calculated r-value of -0.79 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 112 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant inverse relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis one revealed a significant inverse relationship between fuel subsidy removal and students' attendance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The calculated r-value was greater than the critical r-value leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The finding corresponds with the answer to the research question and is in line with Oluwadare and Adebanjo (2022) who observed that the effect of fuel subsidy removal on school attendance is becoming increasingly evident. For many families, the increased cost of commuting has made it difficult to send children to school regularly, especially in low-income and rural communities. Also, in a study conducted by Akinyemi and Okonkwo (2023), it was observed that the 2023 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria led to a significant decline in student attendance in several public schools, particularly in states with limited transportation infrastructure. The subsidy removal has brought untold hardship to households and is affecting school attendance in many families.

The result of data analysis in hypothesis two indicated a significant inverse relationship between fuel subsidy removal and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The calculated r-value was greater than the critical r-value. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding is in line with that of the research question and supported by Okafor and Adeyemo (2017) who reported that high transportation costs can lead to teacher absenteeism and tardiness, as they may be unable to afford the increasing costs of commuting to work. This behaviour results in reduced productivity, as employees are often exhausted or distracted by their financial worries. Abiodun (2022) noted that fuel subsidy removal directly affects transportation costs, which in turn influences teachers' daily expenses. As fuel prices increase, teachers are often required to spend a greater portion of their income on transportation, leading to a decrease in disposable income. This financial strain can lower their morale, reduce job satisfaction, and ultimately affect performance. Furthermore, teachers who are financially stressed may lack the motivation to go beyond basic job requirements, affecting the overall performance of the education sector.

Conclusion

The study revealed that fuel subsidy removal has significantly affected access to quality education in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The findings indicate that rising transportation costs and economic hardship have reduced student attendance and negatively influenced teachers' job performance.

These results highlight the interconnectedness of economic policy and educational outcomes, emphasizing that reforms in the economic sector can have unintended consequences for social services such as education. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate policy interventions to safeguard educational access and quality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government at all levels (federal, state and local) should refocus on measures capable of ameliorating the negative impacts of fuel subsidy removal on the people in order to save the education system.
2. Buses for school runs should be put in place by the respective governments (State/Federal) to alleviate the transportation burden of students and staff.
3. Government should revisit the salaries of teachers to take care of the unexpected rise in the cost of goods and service for improved work performance.
4. Educational authorities should increase subventions to schools to enhance effective school administration for improved quality delivery.
5. Generally, funding of education should be given a priority attention if access to quality education is envisaged by respective states and federal government.

References

Abiodun, T. (2022). Economic implications of subsidy removal in Nigeria. *Journal of Policy Analysis,* 14(2), 45-62.

Adebayo, A. (2018). *University Staff Performance and Educational Quality.* University Press.

Adeyemo, D., Salami, O. & Olu-Adeyemi, L. (2018). An Appraisal of Economic Reforms in Nigeria. *Contemporary Management Research,* 4(2).

Akinbobola, O. (2017). The economics of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. *Journal of Economic Development,* 12(2), 88-105.

Akinyemi, B., & Okonkwo, I. (2023). Fuel subsidy removal and its socio-economic implications in Nigeria: A policy analysis. *Journal of African Policy Studies,* 18(1), 45-60.

Asogwa, O., & Abubakar, H. (2021). Fuel subsidy and employee motivation in Nigeria. *African Journal of Management,* 5(4), 118-130.

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2025). Subsidy. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/money/subsidy

Clements, B., Gupta, S., & Nozaki, M. (2013). What happens to social spending in IMF supported programmes? *Applied Economics,* 45(32).

Darlington, N. & Monday, T. (2023). Price Unleashed: Examining the Ripple Effects of Petroleum Subsidy Removal on Consumer Buying Behavior in Nigeria (Systematic Literature Review). *International Journal of Advanced Academic and Educational Research*, 13(7), 40-51.

Emeka, A. C., Abaekih, I. S, & Sophia, U. S. (2024). Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Transportation System in Nigeria. *ResearchGate* 10(2), 2318-5407. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380215488

Hattie, J. (2015). The Influence of Teaching on Student Learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 50(2), 151-173.

Ibrahim, M., & Ali, M. (2019). The cost and benefits of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. *Economic Studies,* 58(3), 160-175.

Iwayemi, A. (2013). Nigeria's dual energy problems: Policy issues and challenges. *International Association for Energy Economics,* 32(1), 17-21.

Kehm, B. M., & Teichler, U. (2017). *The Role of Universities in a Globalizing World*. Springer.

Nmadu, J. N., & Lawal, A. S. (2017). Fuel subsidy removal and its effects on the Nigerian economy. *Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development*, 8(18), 222-233.

Ogun, O. (2018) Economic Reforms and an African Market Economy. *Open Access Library Journal,* 5, 1-9. doi: 10.4236/oalib.1104242.

Ogwuche, D. D., Adejor, G. A., Dabish, N. D., Garba, R. I. & Dole, F. (2024). Assessing the Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Economic Growth in Nigeria: A VECM

Approach. *Lapai Journal of Economics,* 8(1).

Okafor, I., & Adeyemo, A. (2017). Fuel subsidy and employee performance in Nigeria. *Nigerian Economic Review*, 22(4), 98-110.

Oluwadare, A. J., & Adebanjo, M. O. (2022). Rising cost of transportation and student absenteeism in Nigerian public schools. *Journal of Educational Development and Practice*, 14(2), 90-104.

Oyasipe, S. A. & Olukoya, F. I. (2024). The effect of fuel subsidy removal on the profitability of entrepreneurial businesses in Lagos state, Nigeria. *FULafia International Journal of Business and Allied Studies,* 2(1).

Sulaimon, M. (2018). Inflation, fuel prices, and employee performance in Nigeria. *African Journal of Economic Policy,* 26(3), 212-224.

Ude, C. (2023). *The foolish man's refinery, fuel subsidy and everything in-between*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4167819

Ukwueze, E. R. (2020). Fuel subsidy reform and welfare effects in Nigeria: A micro-simulation analysis. *South African Journal of Economics,* 88(1), 104-121.

Yusuf, M., & Bakare, M. (2020). The effects of fuel subsidy on income inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Development Economics,* 18(2), 98-114.

CORRELATION BETWEEN ROBERT MERTON KING'S SOCIOLOGICAL STRAIN THEORY AND INCIDENTS OF FOOTBALL BETTING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN PANKSHIN TOWN OF PLATEAU STATE.

Chintif, Shwargak Goshit[1], Abah, Victoria Onyikwu[2], & Lidimma, Benjamin Golkwi[3],

[1]*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Jos Nigeria.*

[2]*Federal University of Education, Zaria.*

[3]*Federal University of Education, Pankshin Plateau State.*

Abstract

This study was aim at investigating the correlation between Robert Merton King's sociological strain theory and the incidents of football betting behaviour among senior secondary school students in Pankshin town of Plateau State. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative method of data collection. From the population of 352 senior secondary school students in 3 public secondary schools in the area, a sample of 88 respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a closed-ended questionnaire called Students' Questionnaire on Reasons and Consequences of Football Betting (SQRCFB) with 10 items developed from the 2 research questions. Data collected from the respondents was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software version 26, and the results of the findings indicated that peer influence, poverty and economic hardship, get rich quick syndrome, and easy access to online betting are some factors responsible for incidents of football betting among senior secondary school students in the area. It further revealed that some consequences of football betting include frustration, stealing, careless spending, chasing loss and borrowing. Four recommendations were made among which is that government should mitigate the incidents of football betting behaviour among students by making deliberate efforts in matching the societal goals with the institutionalized means of achieving such goals.

Key words: Robert Merton, Strain, Football, Betting, Society, and Goal

Introduction.

Societies have goals and aspirations set for all members to aim towards achieving, in Nigeria for example, societal pressure and limited opportunities most especially for the youths creates discontentment between cultural goals and legitimate means of achieving those goals. One of the major sociological interpretations that openly critiqued the failure of the society to provide equal institutional means for the achievement of goal set by the society is strain theory by Robert Merton King (1968). According to him, every society have culturally defined goals, purpose, and interest which the society holds out as legitimate objectives for actors in the society. The society according to Merton has regulations as to the approved methods of achieving those goals, but these methods only stressed the approved, permitted or allowed procedure or means of achieving the approved goals.

The idea of "getting rich quick" has taken its hold among many Nigerian youths. This can partly be connected to gradual extinction of the traditional values that sustained the olden society to resist the tendency of value erosion. The value system of the people of Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State, just like many other societies for example, place high premium on dignity of labour. Many young people in the area have abandoned that antiquated value system which has intensified

their desire to get wealthy quickly and their willingness to do anything to achieve those ill-desire.

In a society like Nigeria where goals are set with limited institutional means to achieve those goals, with high rate of unemployment, wide spread poverty, the promise of get rich quick and easy earning is very appealing to the weak-will young people. On that note, many young people may look at football betting as a way of escaping poverty in order to achieve financial success.

The Strain Theory

Robert King Merton, a renown American sociologist was born in 1910. He is undoubtedly one of the leading functionalist interpreters of the society who took his sociological bearing from the functionalist position of value consensus and argued that all members of the society shared the same values. However, Merton observed that since members of the society are placed on different positions on the social structure, they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared goals. In his thinking, the social and cultural structure generate pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that social ladder.

He alluded that in a balance society, an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means and that members are satisfied with both. The way any member of the society pursues a cultural goal with or without following the laid down institutionalized means of achieving the goals, defines the behviour pattern of the individual. To get the most talented people to compete with one another, society tries to motivate everyone to strive for success. It does this by arousing discontent – making people feel dissatisfied with what they have so they will try to "better" themselves. Most people according to Merton end up with the strong desire to reach cultural goals such as wealth, high status, education, or to achieve whatever other objectives society holds out for them.

As earlier pointed out, not everyone has equal access to society's institutionalized means, the legitimate way of achieving success. Some people find their path to education and good job blocked. These people experience strain or frustration, which may motivate them to deviant path. To understand this sociological interpretation vividly, Merton postulated five deviant paths which is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Merton's Five Deviant Paths

Mode of Adaptation	Cultural Goal	Institutionalized Means
Conformist	Accept	Accept
Innovators	Accept	Reject
Ritualism	Reject	Accept
Retreatist	Reject	Reject
Rebels	Reject/ Replace	Reject/ Replace

Conformist: According to Merton, the first path to deviant behaviour is the path of conformity. The conformist here accepts the cultural goal and the prescribed means of achieving the goal. He alluded that when majority of members of the society conform, the society will be stable.

Innovators: The second path is what Merton describes as innovation. This according to him takes place when the individual has assimilated the cultural goal without internalizing the norms of the institutions which govern the ways the cultural goal may be attained. The individual at this stage may deviate from the institutionalized means.

Ritualism: At this stage, the individual become dissatisfied and give up on achieving cultural goals. Yet they still hold tight to conventional rule of conduct. They survive by following the rule.

Retreatist: Retreatism is the fourth stage of deviant path. People who choose this deviant path reject both cultural goal and institutionalized means of achieving them.

Rebels: Rebellion is the fifth and the final stage. Convinced that the society is corrupt, rebels like retreatists reject both society's cultural goals and its institutionalized means, thereby replacing the existing goals with new ones. They introduce new social structure with new goals and different ways of achieving those new goals. Because mainstream norms (such as work or education) don't seem to be getting them anywhere, they find it difficult to identify with these norms. They even feel wronged by the system and its rules may seem illegitimate.

According to Henslin (2008) strain theory underscores the main sociological point about deviant, that deviants are product of society. Due to their social location, some people experience greater pressure to deviate from society's norm, others much less. Simply put, if society emphasize the goal of material success, groups deprived of access to this goal will be more likely to find another path to achieving such goal, and football gambling could be one of such deviant ways.

Strain and Betting Tendency.

Improvement in internet technology and the diversification of mobile phones implies that accessibility to football gambling is no longer confined to racecourses, local pubs and casinos. The new trend in gambling behaviour especially among young people is triggered by the astronomical changes in internet technology. This has resulted into the alarming rate of students' involvement in football gambling. According to Palmer (2019) football gambling deals with placing a financial wager on the outcome of football match, as well as on events that occur within the football match or fixture. It deals with predicting matches and placing wager on them. This social behaviour is dominated by the activities of bookmakers who usually offer odds on various events within a football match. Betting is one of the most exciting ways fans engage with football. It has grown exponentially especially with the rise of online platforms that makes it easier for anyone with a smartphone to join the act.

It is a popular activity in Pankshin with many local and international gambling platforms operating in the area. Although the activity has a legal backing as regulated by National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC), it is discovered that even children below the regulated age of eighteen have delved massively in the act. Despite the fact that the growth of football betting is relatively a recent social activity in developing countries like Nigeria, it has been widely embraced among young people due to its seeming financial benefits. Today, the growing popularity of some "trusted" football gambling sites needs no re-telling. Some of these growing gambling sites includes Bet9ja, SportBet, NairaBet, Betking, 1xBet, Betway and lots more. The percentage of senior secondary school students going online in Pankshin town for the purpose of non-academic activities like gambling has grown tremendously due to accessibility of internet services at an affordable cost in terms of the devices used, to lowered tariffs by mobile service providers. For example, Suleiman and Akinola (2025) opined that with the prevailing unemployment and economic challenges daring the country in the face, football gambling has become a popular "economic pursuit" among young people.

Football gambling is the commonest form of gambling in Nigeria. Its heightened participation of youths has raised public concern. Despite its legalized existence, public perception has somehow remained negative and with mixed impact report on the socio-economic lives of young people. In the words of Lovojo, Bala, Arogundade, and Francis (2020), many adolescent youths, educated and non-educated Nigerians are involved in one form of sport gambling or the other to the extent that it is gradually becoming part of the mainstream economy and its significant source of revenue to the government and private enterprise.

This behaviour encompasses a source of harm and concern to some Nigerians due to negative impact on individuals, families and communities. A report by Bates and Bet (2018) revealed that 60 million Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 40 are involved in active football gambling; and that an average punter spends around N3000.00 every day on gambling. The report further confirmed that almost 2 billion Naira is spent daily on gambling in Nigeria which is nearly N730 billion a year.

Peer influence can result from pressure exerted on young people by the society. It is the influence exerted by individuals within a social group to conform to certain behaviours, attitudes, or actions. For students' problem-gamblers, the presence of peer pressure can exacerbate their gambling problems. The desire to fit in, avoid exclusion, or seek approval from social group may lead individuals to engage in excessive gambling activity despite the negative consequences it might have. Youth involvement in gambling is tremendously increasing daily as a result of their inability to meet the society expectations due to limited means. Hardly would one find any cluster of youths that are not ruminating or getting involved in sport gambling activities in this current dispensation. Research has indicated a clear link between society's pressure and increased youth engagement in football betting. Young people are susceptible to societal pressure as they seek to identify their identity and gain acceptance within the social circles. Interestingly, Flack and Moris (2017) succinctly claimed that financial strain experience by young people could be a determining factor that precipitate football gambling. In fact, betting has become a normalized activity within these groups, as individuals may feel compelled to participate in order to meet the society's prescription of achievement even if they have already lost bet games multiple times. This could be connected to unemployment, bad governance, economic recession and many other variables. So, in order to survive, many young people see football betting as a means to an end.

Times that are supposed to be invested on profitable and precious activities are wasted on argument and speculations on football results-related activities. Lovojo, Bala and Arugundade and Francis (2020) maintained that reasons for football gambling among the youths includes fun, opportunity to win money and excitement.

Peer pressure which easily result from strain can significantly influence young people to gamble. This desire usually stems from the desire of youths for social acceptance or desire to fit in within a group that normalizes gambling. The idea of getting rich quick has taken hold among many Nigerian youths partly due to the gradual erosion of our value system that sustained the area for long. Value system of Pankshin area just like many other society places high premium on dignity of labour. A lot of young people in the area have abandoned that antiquated value system which have intensified their desire to get wealthy quickly and their willingness to do anything it takes to be rich.

In the opinion of Omanchi and Damap (2024) millions of Nigerians now wager on sport with the hopes of becoming wealthy quickly, forgoing hard labour and decency. This implies that Nigerian economy acts as a catalyst. In a country where society set goals without institutionalized means to achieve those goals, with high rate of unemployment, widespread poverty, the promise of quick and easy earning is very appealing. Many young people who bet do so as a means to escape poverty and achieve financial success.

Peer influence was found to play a significant role in promoting betting spirit among young people by making betting seems like a normal and socially acceptable, pressuring individuals to fit in, reinforcing football betting behaviour through modelling and social dynamics. According to Owuor, Magut, and Wadande (2024) this can lead to increase participation because this social game can be made appealing to young ones.

With the development of digital technology and worsening economy the gambling industry in the area has a fertile ground to flourish. Deans and Samantha (2016) observed that one of the major reasons for increasing popularity of football betting among young people is ease of access through multiple online and mobile betting site.

A conformist as earlier pointed out in the context of this study could be a student who accepts both the societal goals and the means to achieving them. In a society where football betting is not legalized, football betting cannot amount to conformity, but in Nigeria for example where the act is culturally normalized, it becomes a deviant act. It has become a deviant path of achieving success by many students. Students view betting as "hustling" qualifying it as conforming to peer norms rather than a deviant act. Innovation on the other hand sees the individual who accepts the goal but reject the means. Thus, when the legitimate means fails, betting becomes an illicit path to financial

success. In this case for example, students may bet as an alternative means to wealth when the traditional means fails.

Ritualism may resolve to abandon the societal goals such wealth for example, but may continue to follow the institutionalized means. When students lost hope in conventional success, they may stop chasing big dream such as reading hard to succeed but may decide to bet daily out of habit. A retreatist rejects the goal entirely and the means of achieving them. Chronic students- football bettors who lost hope may turn to betting as a coping mechanism. They may come to conclusion that without betting they cannot succeed. They give up on social expectations and live in gambling bubbles. In Nigeria for example where the economy is unfriendly, may students-bettors resort to betting (innovation) while others may slip to retreat after repeated trials.

In rebellion as explained earlier, a rebel rejects both the societal goals and the legitimate means to achieving success, but instead of retreating only, he actively seeks to replace the system with new value or structure. Common example is the "cashout" betting ring which enables students to run underground netting pools. In fact, some students look at betting as a protest against economic inequality in the society. For example, they may claim that "since the government did not provide us with job opportunities, we will bet our way out" they resolved that the society have fail them so they reject its norms.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the correlation between Robert Merton King strain theory and incidents of football betting among students in Pankshin town of Plateau State, Nigeria. specifically, the intends to achieve the following objectives:

i. to determine the factors responsible for incidents of football betting students in Pankshin town of Plateau State.
ii. to determine the consequences of football betting on students in Pankshin town of Plateau State.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

i. what are the factors respo nsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?
ii. What are the consequences of football betting on youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?

Methodology

This study will adopt a survey research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain data from respondents. The population of the study comprises of 352 senior secondary school students drawn from three public senior secondary schools in the area which comprises of Government Secondary School Pankshin (GSS Pankshin- 108 students), Government Secondary School Bet (GSS Bet – 144 students), and Government College Pankshin (GCP-100 students). In order to obtain the sample of the study, a stratified sampling technique was adopted where 25% of the population was selected from each school (i.e. $^{25}/_{100}$ x population) where the sample of 27, 36, and 25 respectively was sampled from GSS Pankshin, GSS Bet, and GCP bringing the sampling size of 88 students. Data was collected from respondents through a well-structured questionnaire called Students' Questionnaire on Reasons and Consequences of Football Betting (SQRCFB). The instrument was divided into sections; A and B. Section A deals with respondents' basic data such as gender, age-range, name of school, and class while section B comprised of 10 items drawn from the content of the study. The instrument was validated by an expert in Sociology of Education and Test and Measurement all in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Jos Plateau State.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted on 30 students from 3 public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study adopted test-retest method of

estimating reliability of the instrument and arrived at 0.76 coefficients, which is reliable. The statistical tool used for data analysis was Mean Standard Deviation on SPSS version 26.

Data analysis

Data collected from 180 respondents were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-26) computer software. The statistical procedure was done by descriptive statistics to answer the research questions, using Standard Deviation. The responses to the items of the questionnaire for positive worded were weighed Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) and Undecided (0). The boundaries of each response in the 5-point Linkert scale from 0-4 were calculated by dividing the serial with (4) by the number of responses (5) and were found to be 0.8 (Topkaya, 2010). This value was used to interpret the mean value. This calculation indicated the accepted boundaries for each response as presented below:

0.00 – 0.80	=	Undecided
0.81 – 1.60	=	Strongly Disagree
1.61 – 2.40	=	Disagree
2.41 -3.20	=	Agree
3.31 – 4.0	=	Strongly Agree

Decision rule

The value of 2.4 is the decision rule. Mean score below 2.4 is rejected while those from 2.4 and above are accepted, because they indicate agreement.

Table 1: Respondents' basic data

	Data	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	GSS Pankshin	27	30.7
School	GSS Bet Pankshin	36	40.9
	Govt. College Pank.	25	28.4
	Total	**88**	**100**
	Male	51	58.0
Gender	Female	37	42.0
	Total	**88**	**100**
	SSS1	38	43.2
Class	SSS2	24	27.3
	SSS3	26	29.5
	Total	**88**	**100**
	Fan	139	77.2
Age-Range			
	14-16 years	47	53.4
	17 and above year	39	44.3
	Total	**88**	**100**
Preferred Betting centre:			
	Bet9ja	17	19.3
	SuperBet	14	15.9
	NairaBet	23	26.1
	Betway 19		21.6
	Bet360	8	9.1
	SureBet	7	8.0
	Total	**88**	**100**

Source: Filed survey, 2025.

Table 2 presents respondents' basic data such as name of school, gender, class, age range and preferred betting casinos. The table reveals a sample of 27 respondents representing 30.7% from GSS Pankshin, 36 representing 40.9% from GSS Bet Pankshin and 25 respondents representing 28.4% sampled from Government College Pankshin. On respondents' gender, the table indicated a number 51 males representing 58.0% and 37 females representing 42.0%. Respondents' class distribution

indicated a number of 318 students representing 43.2% from SS1, 24 students representing 27.3% in SS2 and 26 students representing 25.7% from SS3. The table further indicated that 47 respondents representing53.4% fall within the age bracket of 14-16 years, while 39 representing 44.3% fall within the age bracket of 17 and above. Similarly, the table indicated that 17 respondents representing 19.3% preferred Bet9ja when placing bet, while 14 representing 15.9% preferred SuperBet. It also reveals that 23 representing 26.1% preferred NairaBet with 19 respondents representing 21.6% preferred BetWay. On a similar vein, the table indicated that 8 respondents representing 9.1% preferred Bet360 while 7, representing 8.0% preferred SureBet when placing bet. This implies that NairaBet is the most preferred betting industry in Pankshin town of Plateau State followed by BetWay.

Research question one: what are the factors responsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Panshin town of Plateau State?

Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Students on Factors Responsible for Incidents of Football Betting among Youths in Pankshin Town.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
1.	Peer influence	88	4.1591	1.11300	Accept
2.	Poverty and economic hardship	88	3.6364	1.09525	Accept
3.	Get rich quick syndrome	88	4.3977	0.55791	Accept
4.	Hobby	88	2.1818	1.11979	Reject
5.	Easy access	88	3.0114	1.12948	Accept
	Grand mean		**3.47728**		

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Table 3 showed mean rating and standard deviation of students on factors responsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State. The items have grand mean of 3.47728 which is above the acceptance point of 2.40 implying that factors responsible for incidents of football betting in the area includes peer influence, poverty and economic hardship get rich syndrome, and easy access. The table indicated hobby is not a factor why youths engage in football betting in the area.

Research question two: What are the consequences of football betting on youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?

Table 4: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Students on Consequences of Football Betting among Youths in Pankshin Town.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
6.	Frustration	88	3.3182	1.35227	Accept
7.	Stealing	88	3.4659	1.60422	Accept
8.	Careless spending	88	3.6136	1.43384	Accept
9.	chasing loss	88	4.3068	0.87570	Accept
10.	borrowing	88	3.9318	1.26690	Accept
	Grand mean		**3.72726**		

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Table 4 showed mean rating and standard deviation of students on consequences of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau. The items have grand mean of 3.72726 which is above the acceptance point of 2.40 implying that frustration, tendency to steal, careless spendings, chasing after loss and borrowing are consequences of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State.

Discussion of findings

The results of this ending indicated that peer influence, poverty and economic hardship, get rich quick syndrome, and interest are major factors responsible for incidents of football betting among students in Pankshin town of Plateau State. It further revealed that hobby does not play significant role in the incident of football betting among students. This finding agreed with the assertions of Suleiman and Akinola (2025) who observed that with the prevailing unemployment and economic challenges daring the country in the face, football betting has become a popular economic pursuit. Furthermore, the results of this finding aligned with the opinion of Flack and Moris (2017) who claimed that financial strain experience by young people could be the determining factor that precipitate football betting among young people.

Moreso, the result of this finding goes in tendon with the submission of Omachi and Damap (2024) who postulated that millions of Nigerian youths now wager on sport with the hope of becoming wealthy quickly, foregoing hard labour and decency. The findings further go in line with the idea claim of Owuor, Magut and Wudande (2024) who opined that peer influence can increase the rate of student's participation in sport betting. Similarly, the finding agreed with the submission of Lovojo, Bala, Francis and Arugundade (2020) which maintained that reason for sport betting among students includes fun, opportunity win money and excitement. They further stated that many young people in Nigeria both educated and uneducated involved in football betting to the extent that it has become part of the mainstream economy.

On financial loose, the finding aligned with Bates and Bet (2018) which claimed that an average punter spends around N3000 daily on betting.

Conclusion

Base on findings of this study and the discussion arising thereof, the general conclusion is that, easy accessibility internet and online betting services have lured many students into football betting. This prevalent act of football betting is triggered by other societal pressures pressed on them as a result of financial strain, economic pressures, and the tendency to get rich quick, peer influence and many other factors.

Recommendations

This study made the following recommendations:

i. Government should make deliberate to reduce the rate of strain among young people by matching the societal goals with the institutionalized means of achieving them.
ii. Laws on gambling and other betting activities should be strictly enforced to curtail its negative impact on students.
iii. Awareness on the risk of football betting as a deviant path should be created to parents, and other stakeholders, including community leaders to understand the urgency of the matter.
iv. advertisement by betting companies on digital cables should be properly censored to reduce the enticement of young people into get rich quick syndrome without following the legitimate means of making wealth.

References

Bates, C., and Bet. (2018). The effects of social motivation on gambling behaviour. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. 30(2),205-320.

Deans, E., and Samantha, T. (2016). Social pressure to wage. *Research Snapshort*.

Flacks, D., and Moris, C.E. (2017). Correlates of gambling on high school ground. *Addict Behavour.* 51(4),57-64.

Henslin, J.M.(2008). *Sociology: A down-to-earth approach*. Virginia: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Lovojo, J., Bala, I., Arogundade, A., and Francis, C. (2020). Predisposing factors of sport gambling among youths in Taraba State. *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Educational Science and Gender Studies.* 2(4).

Merton, R.K. (1968). *Social structure and anomie*. New York: Free Press.

Omanchi, S.A., and Damap, E.Z. (2024). Sport betting as a major gaming in the contemporary gambling industry in Nigeria. Example of Wukari LGA of

Taraba State. *Wukari International Studies Journal.* 8(9),175-184.

Owuor, A. O., Magut, A. and Wandende, P. (2024). Effects of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County, Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implication on Education*. 8(3),259-267.

Palmer, C. (2014). Sport betting research literature review. Retrieved from: https:www.dhss.tag.gov.aul.com.

Suleiman,S.M., and Fumalola, A. (2025). The socio-economic effects of sport betting on youths in Gashua, Yobe State. Research Gate. Available at DOI:10.703882/mejfrbd. u717.20.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES TO NIGERIA EDUCATION LOAN FUND AND THE IMPLICATION ON PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS, NIGERIA

Roseline Walu; Chintif, Shwargak Goshit.

Department of Educational Foundations
University of Jos,

Lawal, Usman,

Tafawa Balewa College of Education, Kangere, Bauchi State.

Iliya George Ringtim

Department of Educational Foundations
University of Jos

Abstract
This study examined the sociological implications of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) on access to higher education and academic performance among undergraduate students at the University of Jos. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, with a sample of 600 students selected from a population of 5,124 using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated by experts, with a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis. Findings revealed that NELFUND moderately improved access to higher education and reduced financial stress among students; however, its impact on academic performance was less pronounced. Structural challenges such as bureaucratic processes, limited awareness, and fear of repayment constrained effective access to the scheme. The study concludes that while NELFUND is a promising intervention for promoting educational equity, its effectiveness depends on improved implementation, transparency, and student support mechanisms. The study recommends enhanced awareness, streamlined processes, and policy reforms to strengthen the scheme's impact.

Keywords: Sociological perspective, students, education, performance and education loan fund.

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in national growth and development. It serves as a catalyst for societal transformation and individual emancipation. A well-planned and effectively designed educational curriculum drives economic progress by producing a skilled workforce that actively contributes to Nigeria's development. Globally, societies that have attained significant development attribute their success to the provision of quality education. Consequently, education is widely recognized as a key predictor of development. Countries that invest substantially in education tend to experience enhanced economic productivity and broader societal benefits (UNESCO, 2021).

Educational funding in Nigeria has long been a serious challenge, resulting in numerous issues such as frequent strikes and interruptions that hinder smooth and effective educational progress. This persistent problem stems largely from inadequate government allocation to the education sector over the years. According to UNESCO recommendations, a minimum of 26% of the annual national budget should be dedicated to education to effectively develop human capacity and intellectual growth. Unfortunately, Nigeria continues to allocate far below this threshold, averaging about 5.94% of the budget between 1960 and 2023. Despite various efforts to improve educational access and quality, recent initiatives under the Tinubu-led administration introduced a student loan

scheme aimed at providing financial support to indigent and economically disadvantaged students pursuing higher education, including stipends to assist with their academic needs (Ezeh & Okoye, 2023).

The Nigerian Student Loan Scheme, established under the Student Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act of 2023 and further amended in 2024, is designed to provide financial support to qualified Nigerian students pursuing higher education in accredited institutions. The scheme offers interest-free loans aimed at covering tuition fees, other educational charges, and living expenses for indigent and financially disadvantaged students. It is administered by the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), overseen by a special committee chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Access to the loan is not automatic; students must meet specific eligibility criteria to qualify. The fund is supported by government appropriations and directives, with over ₦200 billion allocated to facilitate disbursements. The scheme promotes educational access and inclusion by ensuring that no student is excluded from pursuing tertiary education due to financial constraints. The repayment terms and conditions are structured to be manageable for graduates after completion of their studies, reflecting the government's commitment to bridging the educational funding gap in Nigeria (Odidi, 2023; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2024; Ezeh & Okoye, 2023).

The loan fund can be viewed using sociological lenses for clarity. From a functionalist perspective, the loan fund serves a functional necessity by providing smooth functioning of the educational system thereby contributing to societal stability and development which is the way to provide equal opportunity for citizens to acquire education. The conflict perspective which is deeply rooted in the thinking of Karl Marx however, focuses on the short- comings and lacunas in the scheme linked the inequalities embedded within the system, asserting that despite the loan program, disparities persist in who benefits, often privileging certain groups while marginalizing others due to bureaucratic challenges and socio-economic inequalities. This position is justified by the fact that inequalities exist in accessing the scheme between rural and urban students since most of the process of accessing the loan is tight to internet facikitie. The symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on the individual experiences of students, examining how receiving or lacking access to the loan influences their educational identity, motivation, and social interactions. Moreover, the social justice perspective underscores the loan fund's role in promoting fairness and equity by aiming to provide opportunities for disadvantaged students, aligning with broader societal goals of inclusion and poverty reduction in Nigeria (Chinwendu, 2020; Eme, 2017).

Performance in education refers to the extent to which a student achieves the academic goals set by their institution, encompassing knowledge acquisition, skill mastery, and successful completion of coursework. According to Carroza-Pacheco et al. (2025), academic performance is the result of students' achievements and is influenced by numerous factors such as motivation, family background, economic conditions, and learning environment. The nature of performance is multifaceted and often fluctuates over time due to various internal and external influences, making it inconsistent and dynamic rather than static. At the University of Jos, undergraduate student performance has been notably inconsistent and has declined over recent years, which raises significant concerns. This regression reflects broader systemic challenges, including inadequate funding, socio-economic disparities, and gaps in support mechanisms such as the education loan fund. The fluctuating academic outcomes highlight the urgent need for interventions to stabilize and improve student performance to ensure quality education and future national development (Okoedion et al., 2019).

Several factors affect the academic performance of undergraduate students at the University of Jos, with financial constraints being a primary concern. Socio-economic challenges, lack of motivation, poor study habits, and psychosocial stressors have been identified as

influencing academic outcomes. A significant issue is the burden of tuition fee payments, which often forces financially disadvantaged students to take on work to support themselves. This financial strain can lead to negative consequences such as skipping classes, arriving late, and reduced study time, all of which contribute to poorer academic performance over time. The need to balance work and studies strains students' focus and energy, resulting in inconsistent and declining academic results. Studies indicate that financial stress among university students in Nigeria, including difficulties in paying school fees and affording academic materials, significantly impairs performance and retention (Dev, 2023). Addressing these financial barriers is essential to improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students at the University of Jos.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the introduction of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) as a policy intervention aimed at improving access to higher education, significant challenges persist in its implementation and effectiveness. Evidence suggests that delays in disbursement, procedural bottlenecks, and unequal access continue to limit its impact, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These challenges raise critical sociological concerns regarding equity, inclusion, and the alignment between policy objectives and lived realities. While existing studies emphasize financial interventions, there is limited empirical evidence on how such schemes influence students' academic performance within specific institutional contexts. This study therefore seeks to examine the sociological implications of NELFUND on access and academic performance among undergraduate students in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions

1. What are the sociological perspectives towards the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND)?
2. What is the influence of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund on access to higher education among undergraduate students?
3. How does the Nigeria Education Loan Fund influence the academic performance of undergraduate students?
4. What challenges do undergraduate students face in accessing the Nigeria Education Loan Fund?

Literature Review

Sociological perspective to NELFUND

Sociological perspectives describe how NELFUND is perceived from sociological lenses using the various sociological theories to explain the perception towards education loan fund. Some sociological theories to be considered in this study include functionalist theory, conflict theory, symbolic interactionist and social justice theory

Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective views NELFUND as a crucial institutional mechanism designed to maintain the smooth functioning of Nigeria's education system by promoting equal access to higher education. This perspective emphasizes how the loan fund supports national development goals through human capital formation, enabling students from low-income backgrounds to pursue tertiary education without the impediment of financial barriers (Taraba International Journal of Social Sciences Research, 2025). By providing interest-free loans with flexible repayment, NELFUND helps sustain the educational pipeline, reduce dropout rates, and contribute to social stability by integrating more youths into productive roles. Functionalists argue that such schemes represent societal efforts to create equal opportunities that contribute to long-term economic growth and social cohesion.

Conflict Perspective

From a conflict theory viewpoint, NELFUND highlights and reproduces underlying inequalities in Nigerian society. Despite its intent to democratize educational access, the fund's disbursement and utilization processes are often marked by bureaucratic inefficiencies, mismanagement, and partiality, privileging certain groups over others (The Nation Online, 2025). Reports of collusion between institutional management and banks that delay

or deny student access to loans exemplify how social and economic inequalities intersect with policy implementation. This perspective critiques the system's failure to equitably serve marginalized communities, thereby perpetuating social stratification and underscoring the limited reach of the fund against entrenched class disparities.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

The symbolic interactionist approach focuses on the micro-level experiences of students interacting with NELFUND. It explores how individual perceptions, social interactions, and interpretations shape students' attitudes towards the loan fund and their subsequent educational identities (Dambam, 2020). For many students, access to financial support either affirms their academic self-worth and motivation or, conversely, exclusion and financial stress can negatively impact their engagement and performance. This perspective reveals the nuances of how meaning is constructed around the loan fund—from empowerment to frustration—and how these meanings influence academic behavior, social networks, and aspirations.

Social Justice Perspective

NELFUND embodies principles of social justice by actively seeking to redress educational inequalities through targeted financial support for disadvantaged students (Akinfala, 2024; Edutimes Africa, 2025). This perspective foregrounds the need for equitable resource distribution to ensure that socioeconomic status does not hinder academic opportunity. NELFUND's flexible repayment terms and interest-free policy are designed to empower marginalized populations and enhance inclusivity in Nigerian higher education. Nonetheless, persistent challenges around transparency, outreach, and policy execution must be mitigated to maximize the fund's redistributive potential and support Nigeria's broader goals of social equity and poverty reduction.

Integrated Sociological Perspective

A comprehensive understanding of NELFUND requires integrating these sociological perspectives to capture its multifaceted impact. While the fund serves functional roles in sustaining educational access, the conflict perspective alerts stakeholders to systemic barriers and inequalities that inhibit full realization of its goals. Simultaneously, the symbolic interactionist view highlights the importance of student experiences and perceptions in shaping the fund's effectiveness, while the social justice lens stresses fairness and inclusion as central evaluation criteria. Together, these perspectives emphasize that improving NELFUND's outcomes demands both structural reforms and attention to individual-level realities, fostering an equitable and effective student loan system in Nigeria.

Meaning and nature of undergraduate academic performance

Academic performance refers to the measurable extent to which undergraduate students achieve their academic goals through successful completion of coursework, examinations, and acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge. It encompasses both cognitive achievements such as grades and qualitative factors including class participation, critical thinking, and application of learning (Ogunbodede & Oribhabor, 2022). Academic performance is considered a key indicator of educational outcomes, reflecting a student's mastery of the curriculum and readiness for progression or professional endeavors. This multidimensional nature establishes academic performance as both an outcome and a process influenced by various scholastic and personal factors.

The nature of undergraduate academic performance is fluid and often exhibits variation due to internal and external influences such as motivation, socio-economic status, study habits, institutional support, and mental well-being (Malek, 2024). It is not a constant state but fluctuates with factors like workload, financial stress, and accessibility to learning resources. This dynamic characteristic implies the need for universities to provide support systems that address both academic and non-academic challenges to stabilize and enhance student

achievement levels. Recognizing academic performance as a fluctuating and influenced process is critical to understanding how students navigate the demands of tertiary education.

Specifically, academic performance among undergraduates is crucial for degree completion, social integration, and career prospects. Inadequate performance may lead to increased dropout rates, delayed graduation, and diminished self-confidence, affecting students' overall university experience and future opportunities (Al-Tameemi et al., 2023). The pressure to balance academic commitments with factors such as financial responsibilities often impacts performance negatively. Therefore, addressing the layered and multifaceted nature of undergraduate academic performance through comprehensive institutional policies and student support services is essential in fostering educational success.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which captures data from a specific population at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of variables related to sociological perspectives on the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) and its impact on undergraduate students' academic performance. The target population comprised 5,124 undergraduate Education students at the University of Jos, from which a sample size of 600 participants was drawn. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representativeness across various departments within the Faculty of Education, acknowledging the uneven distribution of students among departments. This sampling method is appropriate to control for potential biases arising from unequal department sizes and to facilitate more generalizable findings.

Data collection was conducted using a structured, close-ended questionnaire titled "Students' Questionnaire on Sociological Perspectives of Education Loan Fund and Its Implication on Students' Performance." The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B consisted of 20 items structured into four sub-headings aligned with the research questions. Each sub-heading contained five items assessed on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert evaluation by two scholars in the field. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency and stability of the instrument.

Questionnaires were administered directly to selected students by the researcher and a trained research assistant, with rigorous follow-up to ensure a high retrieval rate of completed forms. Data collected were systematically coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation facilitated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analyses included frequency distributions, percentages, and means to summarize respondents' views, enabling an informative examination of the relationship between sociological perspectives on NELFUND and undergraduate academic performance. This methodological approach ensured data accuracy, reliability, and relevance in addressing the research objectives within a rigorous academic framework.

Results

Research question one: What are the sociological perspectives towards the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND)?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on Sociological Perspectives toward NELFUND

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
1	NELFUND is a positive government initiative to support poor and deserving students.	600	3.10	0.72	Agreed
2	The education loan scheme promotes social equality among Nigerian youths.	600	3.05	0.74	Agreed
3	Students from low-income families are more likely to benefit from NELFUND.	600	2.98	0.78	Agreed
4	NELFUND helps bridge the educational gap between the rich and the poor.	600	3.00	0.76	Agreed
5	The public perception of NELFUND is largely positive among university students.	600	2.85	0.81	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.00**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents generally held a moderately positive sociological view of NELFUND (grand mean = 3.00 > 2.50). They agreed that the scheme was seen as a beneficial government initiative and that it promoted equity and access for low-income students, although the item on public perception scored slightly lower suggesting some uncertainty or mixed impressions among students about how well NELFUND was perceived in practice.

Research question two: What is the influence of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund on access to higher education among undergraduate students?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Access to Higher Education

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
6	NELFUND has made higher education more accessible to financially disadvantaged students.	600	3.20	0.69	Agreed
7	The availability of education loans increases students' enrollment rates in universities.	600	3.15	0.71	Agreed
8	Many students are now able to continue their studies because of the NELFUND initiative.	600	3.05	0.74	Agreed
9	NELFUND reduces students' financial dependency on parents and guardians.	600	2.95	0.78	Agreed
10	The existence of NELFUND motivates more secondary school graduates to pursue higher education.	600	3.10	0.72	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.09**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents agreed moderately that NELFUND positively influenced access to higher education (grand mean = 3.09). Items about increased enrollment and enabling continuation of studies registered positive agreement, indicating that beneficiaries and observers perceived the loan scheme as improving access, even if some dependence on family support still persisted for a portion of students.

Research question three: How does the Nigeria Education Loan Fund influence the academic performance of undergraduate students?

Table 3: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Academic Performance

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
11	Students who benefit from NELFUND tend to focus better on their studies.	600	2.90	0.81	Agreed
12	NELFUND reduces the stress of working part-time to fund education.	600	2.85	0.84	Agreed
13	Access to education loans enhances students' academic confidence and participation.	600	2.80	0.86	Agreed
14	Beneficiaries of NELFUND generally perform better academically than non-beneficiaries.	600	2.75	0.88	Agreed
15	The availability of loans motivates students to set higher academic goals.	600	2.70	0.90	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**2.80**	—	**Agreed**

Responses indicated only modest agreement that NELFUND improved academic performance (grand mean = 2.80). While students reported reduced need to work and improved focus, the lower means relative to access items suggest that loan receipt alone did not translate strongly into higher academic outcomes pointing to the role of other intervening factors (quality of instruction, student support services, study environment.

Research question four: What challenges do undergraduate students face in accessing the Nigeria Education Loan Fund?

Table 4: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Academic Performance

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
16	Many students lack adequate information about how to apply for NELFUND.	600	3.40	0.65	Agreed
17	The process of obtaining education loans is bureaucratic and stressful.	600	3.35	0.68	Agreed
18	Students are discouraged by the fear of repayment after graduation.	600	3.30	0.70	Agreed
19	Corruption and favoritism hinder fair access to NELFUND.	600	3.25	0.73	Agreed
20	Lack of collateral or guarantors prevents some students from applying for NELFUND.	600	3.10	0.77	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.28**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents strongly agreed that significant procedural and institutional barriers limited access to NELFUND (grand mean = 3.28). Information gaps, bureaucratic procedures, fear of repayment, and perceptions of corruption were prominent concerns indicating that reforms to transparency, outreach, and eligibility requirements would likely increase equitable access.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that respondents held a generally positive sociological perception of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), seeing it as a beneficial policy intervention aimed at promoting equity and access to higher education among low-income groups. This aligns with Odidi's (2023) assertion that the reintroduction of the student

loan scheme represents a new perspective on nation-building by fostering inclusion in education and reducing financial barriers for disadvantaged students. Similarly, Akinfala (2024) emphasized that NELFUND enhances equity in higher education financing by ensuring that socioeconomic background does not hinder access to tertiary education. However, the slightly moderate perception observed among students indicates an emerging skepticism likely influenced by prior mistrust in policy implementation and poor public awareness, as highlighted by Dambam (2020), who found that students' attitudes toward loan schemes in Nigeria were shaped by historical experiences of bureaucratic inefficiencies and delayed disbursement. This finding also supports the sociological position of Chinwendu (2020), who noted that educational equity policies must be culturally trusted and socially accepted to be effective within the Nigerian context.

The findings indicated that while NELFUND had moderately improved access to higher education, its influence on academic performance was less pronounced, suggesting that financial support alone is insufficient to guarantee improved learning outcomes. This observation resonates with Malek (2024) and Al-Tameemi et al. (2023), who found that academic achievement is multifactorial, depending on pedagogical quality, psychosocial factors, and institutional support beyond financial aid. Dev (2023) similarly observed that while loans alleviate financial stress, their positive academic impact depends on effective utilization of resources and students' personal resilience.

Respondents also identified structural and procedural challenges such as limited information, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and fear of repayment, corroborating the Economic Confidential (2025) report that inefficiency, corruption, and mistrust still plague the scheme's implementation. Therefore, the study's findings underscore that for NELFUND to achieve its sociological and educational goals, the government must strengthen transparency, simplify application processes, and build students' confidence in the sustainability and fairness of the fund an imperative also supported by UNESCO (2021) in its call for inclusive and transparent education financing as a pathway to equitable development.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) represents a significant policy intervention aimed at improving access to higher education and promoting social equity among Nigerian students. While the scheme has moderately enhanced access and reduced financial stress, its impact on academic performance remains limited due to structural and institutional challenges. Issues such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited awareness, and concerns about repayment continue to hinder its effectiveness. Therefore, achieving the full potential of NELFUND requires a more transparent, inclusive, and student-centered implementation framework that aligns with broader socio-economic realities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the study

1. Government should intensify awareness campaigns to ensure equitable access to NELFUND.
2. Administrative procedures should be simplified to eliminate bureaucratic bottlenecks.
3. Repayment mechanisms should be income-contingent to reduce students' anxiety.
4. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be strengthened for accountability.
5. Universities should provide complementary academic support services to maximize the benefits of financial aid.

References

Akinfala, A. O. (2024). Nigeria Education Loan Fund and equity in higher education financing. *Edutimes Africa*, 4(2), 45-52.

Al-Tameemi, R. A. N., et al. (2023). Determinants of poor academic performance among students. *Heliyon*, 9(3). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666374023000079

Carroza-Pacheco, A. M., et al. (2025). Academic performance and resilience in secondary education. *Frontiers in Education Sciences*. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12113049/

Chinwendu, O. (2020). Sociology of education and its relevance in Nigeria society. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*. https://abjournals.org/african-journal-of-social-sciences-and-humanities-research-ajsshr/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/journal/published_paper/volume-3/issue-6/AJSSHR_JJ2H2T62.pdf

Dambam, M. E. (2020). Student perceptions and attitudes towards university loan schemes in Nigeria: A symbolic interaction analysis. *Journal of Nigerian Educational Sociology*, 5(1), 22-34.

Dev, S. (2023). Financial constraints and their impact on university students' academic performance. *Journal of Social Science and Educational Research*, Retrieved from https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/download/4734/605

Economic Confidential. (2025). Nigeria Education Loan Fund: Challenges and prospects. *Economic Confidential*, 7(3), 15-20.

Eme, O. I. (2017). Education financing in Nigeria. *South East Political Science Review*, 1(1). https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SEJPS/article/download/765/742/1497

Ezeh, P., & Okoye, R. (2023). On Nigeria's budgetary allocations to the education sector (1960-2023) in view of UNESCO's benchmarks. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Social Sciences*, 11(4). https://eajournals.org/ijmss/vol11-issue-4-2023/on-nigerias-budgetary-allocations-to-the-education-sector-1960-2023-in-view-of-unescos-benchmarks/

Ezeh, P., & Okoye, R. (2023). On Nigeria's budgetary allocations to the education sector (1960-2023) in view of UNESCO's benchmarks. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Social Sciences*, 11(4). https://eajournals.org/ijmss/vol11-issue-4-2023/on-nigerias-budgetary-allocations-to-the-education-sector-1960-2023-in-view-of-unescos-benchmarks/

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2024). *Students Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act (Repeal and Re-Enactment) 2024*. Government Printing Office.

Ikokoh, M. O. (n.d.). Sociological perspective to Nigerian education system. https://rujmass.com/Journals/rujmass_2020_017.pdf

Malek, I. A. (2024). Determinants of undergraduates' academic performance: A case study at a public university. *Journal of Curriculum Research and Innovation*, 9(2). https://doi.org/10.24191/jcrinn.v9i2.429

Nigeria Education Loan Fund Report. (2025). NELFUND: Rewriting the story of access to higher education. *The Cable*, June 5, 2025. https://www.thecable.ng/nelfund-rewriting-the-story-of-access-to-higher-education/

Odidi, J. (2023). Student Loan Scheme: A new perspective to nation building. *StepUp Nigeria*. https://stepupnigeria.org/student-loan-scheme-a-new-perspective-to-nation-building/

Ogunbodede, K. F., & Oribhabor, C. B. (2022). Digital resources usage and academic performance of undergraduate students in Nigeria: A case study. *European Journal of Interactive Multimedia and Education*, 3(2), e02213. https://doi.org/10.30935/ejimed/12491

Okoedion, E. G., Okolie, U. C., & Udom, I. D. (2019). Perceived factors affecting students' academic performance in Nigerian universities. *Studies in Education*, 2019(2). https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/sf/article/download/10814/10796/11302

Saudi Journals. (2023). Funding of special education in a depressed economy. *Journal of Advances in*

Education and Philosophy, 8(2), 41-47. https://saudijournals.com/media/articles/JAEP_82_41-47.pdf

The Nation Online. (2025, March 4). Loan fund mismanagement affects many students. *The Nation*. https://thenationonlineng.net/loan-fund-mismanagement-affects-many-students/

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). *Education for sustainable development: Towards quality education and lifelong learning for all*. UNESCO Publishing.

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL, EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC REFORMS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Longwap Panmun Tokat; Ajimatanrareje Betty Adenike & Gyang Vou Chong

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, University of Jos

Abstract
This study provided a sociological analysis of the role of human capital development in promoting effective economic reforms and national development in Nigeria. Education is recognized as a key driver of human empowerment and social progress, serving as a strategic tool for building the skills and competencies essential for sustainable growth. From a sociological perspective, the study examined how social structures, institutional quality, and governance influence human capital development and its impact on economic transformation. Despite its importance, Nigeria faces persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, policy inconsistency, corruption, and a mismatch between educational output and labor market needs. These issues hinder the nation ability to harness its human capital potential, resulting in unemployment, underemployment, and inequality that weaken economic reform efforts. Using a qualitative and theoretical approach, the study drew on secondary data and the Human Capital Theory to explain the link between education, human capacity, and development. Findings reveal that sustainable national progress depends on strong educational foundations and inclusive policies. The study concluded and recommended integrated educational and economic reforms, equitable investment in education, and improved governance to enhance human capital and foster meaningful national development.

Keywords*: Human Capital, Education, Economic Reforms, National Development, Nigeria*

Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a vital instrument for individual empowerment, social progress, and national development. In contemporary societies, education serves not only as a means of transmitting knowledge and cultural values but also as a strategic tool for developing human capital. Human capital refers to the collective skills, knowledge, and abilities of a population. These attributes help to drive productivity and innovation. From a sociological perspective, education functions as a key social institution that shapes social structures, mobility, and economic outcomes. In Nigeria, the role of education in fostering human capital development has become increasingly crucial in addressing the challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment.

Human capital development, which focuses on improving the productive capacities of individuals through education, training, and health, is fundamental to economic growth and reform. A well-educated and skilled workforce enhances technological advancement, attracts investment, and promotes good governance, thereby contributing to sustainable national development. However, despite various educational reforms and government initiatives, Nigeria continues to face persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, poor educational infrastructure, brain drain, and a mismatch between educational output and labour market needs. These issues have limited the country's ability to fully harness education as a tool for human capital formation and economic transformation.

Consequently, this study provided a sociological analysis of the role of education in developing human capital for effective economic reforms and national development in Nigeria. It examined how education contributes to social and economic change, the barriers that hinder its effectiveness, and the sociological implications of these challenges. By doing so, the study aims at highlighting the importance of integrating sociological insights into educational and economic policies to achieve meaningful and sustainable development.

Human Capital development, which focuses on enhancing the productive capacities of individuals through education, training, and health, is widely recognized as a key driver of economic growth and national development (Becker, 1994; Schultz, 1961). Sociologists, however, broaden this understanding by examining how social structures, class relations, and institutional factors influence access to education and shape its developmental impact (Chatham House, 2021; Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017). In Nigeria, these social dynamics are particularly pronounced: regional disparities, gender inequalities, corruption, and inconsistent policies have collectively undermined the transformative potential of the education sector (Patel, 2021; Igbuzor, 2006). Additionally, there is a growing misalignment between academic curricula and labor market demands. This has contributed to graduate unemployment and underemployment, thereby limiting the contribution of human capital to economic reform (Dooga, 2025; Covenant University, 2022). This paper provides theoretical interpretation to these interconnected issues, arguing that Nigeria's educational role in the reform process cannot be fully understood through economic lenses alone. Instead, it must be contextualized within the broader sociological environment that influences social opportunities and institutional stability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory, which offers a framework for understanding the relationship between investment in education and economic development. The theory was first articulated by Theodore Schultz in 1961 and later systematically developed by Gary Becker in 1964. Human Capital Theory conceptualizes education, training, and health as forms of investment that enhance the productive capacities of individuals. The central proposition of the theory is that expenditure on education and skill acquisition should be viewed not as consumption but as investment in human capital, which yields future economic returns. Schultz (1961) argues that improvements in human capabilities through education significantly contribute to economic growth, while Becker (1964) further explains that individuals who acquire higher levels of education tend to experience increased productivity, higher income levels, and improved employment outcomes (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961).

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how education and human capital development serve as key drivers of economic reforms. In the context of Nigeria, the theory implies that inadequate investment in education limits the development of skilled manpower required for effective implementation of economic reforms. Conversely, sustained investment in education and training enhances productivity, innovation, and national economic performance.

Key principles of Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory emphasizes that education, training, and health constitute strategic investments in human capacity with expected long-term returns. The theory establishes a strong relationship between education and productivity by asserting that higher levels of educational attainment enhance individuals' skills, improve efficiency, and increase their capacity to perform complex tasks. It also assumes rational decision-making in educational investment, whereby individuals and societies allocate resources to education based on anticipated future economic and social benefits. The theory is particularly relevant for analyzing Nigeria's policies aimed at improving education and fostering economic development, as it provides an economic rationale for understanding how investment in human capital translates into labor productivity, technological advancement, and innovation-driven growth. However, relying solely on this economic perspective may not fully capture the complex

interactions between education, social structures, and institutional realities that shape developmental outcomes in Nigeria.

Recognizing these limitations, this study incorporated a sociological perspective to address critical factors such as social inequality, regional disparities, gender-based barriers, corruption, and institutional inefficiencies. Sociologists argue that educational access, attainment, and effectiveness are deeply influenced by social and institutional contexts, which in turn affect the ability of human capital to drive sustainable development (Chatham House, 2021; Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017). By combining economic and sociological perspectives, this study provided a nuanced understanding of Nigeria's development challenges. Human Capital Theory offers the foundation to examine how education enhances skills and productivity, while the sociological lens illuminates the structural and institutional constraints that limit these gains. Ultimately, this integrated approach demonstrates that education's role in national development is shaped by both economic policies and broader social realities, and that effective economic reform requires addressing not only human capacity but also the governance, equity, and institutional conditions that determine its utilization.

Clarification of Concepts

Human Capital Development: Human Capital Development refers to the process of improving the knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall capacities of people to enhance their productivity and contribution to economic growth and national development. It involves strategic investments in education, training, healthcare, and other social services that enable individuals to perform effectively in the workforce and society. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, education is a vital investment in individuals, producing returns through enhanced productivity, innovation, and higher earnings (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). This framework is central to understanding Nigeria's development strategies, as it emphasizes that cultivating a skilled and knowledgeable population is essential for economic growth and sustaining reform efforts. Educational achievement is therefore directly associated with an individual's capacity to contribute to economic output, and national prosperity is seen as the cumulative result of a highly productive workforce.

However, relying solely on economic perspective may overlook important sociological factors that influence the link between education and development. Scholars such as Randall Collins argued that educational credentials often serve as tools for social stratification and maintaining existing class structures, rather than merely reflecting productive ability (Collins, 1979). In Nigeria, social inequality, class disparities, and institutional governance significantly impact educational outcomes (Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017). Challenges such as insufficient funding, corruption, and a disconnection between educational curricula and labor market demands substantially limit the potential of human capital to contribute effectively to national development (Omofonmwan & Osa-Edoh, 2008; World Bank, 2019).

Therefore, while the human capital approach offers a compelling economic rationale for investing in education, its application in Nigeria must be complemented by a sociological understanding. An integrated approach recognizes that for education to truly propel national development and economic reform, structural and institutional barriers must be addressed alongside policy efforts aimed at enhancing skills and productivity (Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017). Government initiatives, such as the National Development Plan 2021–2025, reflect this broader recognition of human capital as a critical pillar for achieving national objectives (FGN, 2021). The key challenge remains in translating these theoretical insights into practical strategies that effectively navigate and overcome sociological and institutional complexities.

Education: Education is the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to develop intellectually, socially, and morally, enabling effective societal contribution (UNESCO, 2023). In Nigeria,

education is central to human capital development, equipping individuals with skills and competencies essential for economic reform and national growth (Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017).

Links between Education and Human Capital

Education serves as a primary mechanism for developing human capital by equipping individuals with cognitive and non-cognitive skills, competencies, and knowledge that enhance productivity and foster innovation. Recent research indicates that the quality of education, rather than merely the years of schooling, is a stronger predictor of human capital formation and economic performance (Adeleye, 2024). Contemporary studies further show that education influences both the quantity and quality of human capital, with the depth and relevance of learning being more critical than duration in improving productivity (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961).

Improved human capital through education is strongly associated with positive economic outcomes, including higher productivity, improved employment prospects, technological advancement, and sustainable economic growth. Empirical evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa also confirms a significant relationship between education-driven human capital development and economic sustainability (Aminu et.al 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of educational investment depends on institutional and policy environments. In Nigeria, factors such as government stability, democratic accountability, and regulatory efficiency play a crucial role in determining how effectively education translates into human capital development and broader economic growth (Ojeyinka, 2025; Asamoah, 2021).

Education and Economic Reform Efforts in Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is undergoing significant reforms in its education and economic sectors. With a large youthful population, the government has introduced policies aimed at aligning the education system with national economic objectives. These reforms are designed to enhance access to education, improve quality, and strengthen human capital development to support national growth and competitiveness.

In 2025, the Federal Government of Nigeria approved licenses for 11 new private universities as part of efforts to expand access to tertiary education and address the high number of qualified candidates who are unable to secure admission annually. This policy is intended to reduce admission pressure and increase opportunities for higher education participation in the country (Oware, 2025). In addition, ongoing reforms include the review and updating of educational curricula to align with global standards and labour market demands. The government is collaborating with educational technology companies and international partners to integrate digital skills into learning programmes, with the aim of preparing graduates for a knowledge-driven economy and improving employability outcomes (Oware, 2025).

Contemporary research shows that the importance of integrating educational psychology, entrepreneurship, and economic reforms into a comprehensive framework for sustainable development. By embedding entrepreneurial skills into curricula and expanding mentorship programs, Nigeria aims to turn its youthful population into a demographic advantage (Aminu, Yabo, Sanusi, & Bala, 2025). The country is shifting focus from oil dependence towards ectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and information and communication technology (ICT). Education reforms are central to this transition, equipping the workforce with the skills needed for innovation-led growth (Aminu, 2025). Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including inconsistent policies, limited access to credit, and underfunded infrastructure. Experts emphasize the need for better coordination between education and economic policies to promote inclusive growth (Aminu, 2025). Nigeria's efforts in education and economic reform mark a bold move toward national transformation. By expanding access, modernizing curricula, and aligning education with economic strategies, the country is laying the groundwork for a resilient and inclusive future. Continued investment and coherent policymaking will be essential to fully realize the potential of these reforms.

Importance of Human Capital in Economic Growth and National Development

Human capital is a fundamental driver of economic growth and national development because it enhances labour productivity, stimulates innovation, and improves the efficient use of resources. Through education, training, and improved health, individuals acquire skills and competencies that increase their productivity and enable them to adopt modern production techniques, leading to higher output and sustained economic growth. Human capital also supports technological advancement by fostering creativity, research capacity, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for long-term economic competitiveness (World Bank, 2020: UNESCO, 2023). In addition, a skilled workforce promotes efficient decision-making and optimal allocation of resources, thereby improving organizational performance and maximizing returns on public and private investments (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Furthermore, strong human capital bases attract domestic and foreign investment, as investors prefer economies with skilled and adaptable labour forces capable of sustaining productivity and innovation. Increased investment contributes to industrial expansion, job creation, and economic diversification (World Bank, 2019). Human capital development also improves living standards by increasing employment opportunities, income levels, and access to essential social services, which enhances overall well-being and quality of life (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). By equipping individuals with relevant skills and knowledge, human capital reduces poverty and income inequality, promotes social mobility, and supports inclusive growth, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized groups (World Bank, 2018).

In addition to economic benefits, human capital strengthens institutions and governance by promoting civic participation, accountability, and effective public administration. Educated citizens and skilled public sector workers contribute to better policy formulation and implementation, which are essential for sustainable national development, Continuous investment in education and health also ensures sustainable economic growth by enhancing adaptability, resilience, and innovation without excessive depletion of natural resources (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Moreover, human capital fosters social development by promoting shared values, social cohesion, and responsible citizenship, which support peaceful coexistence and national integration (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017).

Curriculum Relevance, Skills Formation, and Labor Market Demands

The persistent gap between Nigeria's educational curricula and the demands of the labor market continues to hinder youth employability and national development. As Okeke (2020) pointed out, the lack of vocational training and the prevalence of skills mismatch have become significant challenges, leaving graduates inadequately prepared for practical workplace demands. This concern is further supported by data from the National Universities Commission (2023), which revealed that only 45% of Nigerian graduates possess skills aligned with labor market needs. Ofor-Douglas (2024) stressed the importance of improving university education standards to bridge the gap between workforce supply and demand, advocating for curriculum reforms that prioritize the development of high-level and relevant skills. Similarly, Aminu et al. (2025) recommended the integration of entrepreneurial orientation and cognitive development approaches into educational programmes to enhance innovation and adaptability among graduates.

In response, the Nigerian government has introduced initiatives such as the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFund) and approved the establishment of additional private universities to expand access to higher education and modernize the system (Oware, 2025). These reforms aim to incorporate digital literacy, vocational training, and stronger industry partnerships into the educational process. Nevertheless, sustaining these reforms and ensuring policy consistency remain critical

for achieving long-term impact (Oware, 2025). Furthermore, curriculum relevance must be continuously evaluated in line with evolving economic demands. Without deliberate efforts to align education with labour market needs, Nigeria risks persistent underemployment and slow economic growth.

Social Inequality, Institutional Weakness, and the Limits of Human Capital

The potential of human capital to drive economic development in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa is significantly hindered by social inequality and fragile institutions. Adeleye (2024) shows that while investing in human capital can help reduce income disparities; its effectiveness depends heavily on the strength of institutional frameworks. Weak governance often distorts the allocation of educational and healthcare resources, preventing marginalized groups from benefiting fully (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010). This institutional weakness sustains inequality by maintaining barriers to opportunity and social mobility. Ojeyinka (2025) emphasizes that the quality of institutions influences how effectively human capital investments translate into poverty alleviation, indicating that without strong institutional support, expenditures on education and health do not lead to inclusive growth.

Similarly, Asamoah (2021) notes that certain institutional benchmarks must be achieved before human capital can significantly impact inequality reduction. In Nigeria, issues like corruption and inconsistent policies further complicate these efforts, undermining initiatives such as the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFund) and vocational training programs (Azoro, Onah, & Agulefo, 2025). Additionally, (Aminu et.al (2025) argues that entrepreneurial skills a vital aspect of human capital are hampered by limited access to credit and unstable regulatory environments. The National Universities Commission (NUC) reports that only 45% of Nigerian graduates possess skills relevant to the labor market, a deficiency rooted in outdated curricula and institutional inertia (The National Universities Commission, 2025). Without coordinated reforms in education policy and institutional strengthening, Nigeria risks continuing cycles of underemployment and widening inequality.

Repositioning Education for Sustainable Reform and Inclusive Growth

Education continues to serve as a fundamental pillar for sustainable reform and inclusive development, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. To effectively reposition education systems, efforts must go beyond merely increasing access and ensuring equity; they must also prioritize relevance, resilience, and responsiveness to socio-economic realities. Aboluwodi and Owolewa (2018) contends that aligning education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) necessitates a pedagogical shift toward problem-solving, civic engagement, and environmental literacy. Such a transformation is crucial for equipping learners with the skills needed to address complex global challenges. Ofor-Douglas (2022) highlights the vital role of university education in empowering youth and fostering national progress. He advocates for curriculum reforms that incorporate entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and community-based learning, which are essential for bridging the gap between academic training and labor market needs. Similarly, Nwaogwugwu and Eke (2020) emphasize the importance of health education within basic education frameworks, asserting that sustainable development cannot be achieved without foundational health literacy and wellness initiatives.

The Nigerian Technical Aid Corps (NTAC) has commended recent federal reforms under President Tinubu, describing them as bold and transformative. These reforms aim to reposition Nigeria for sustainable growth through expanded vocational training, improved teacher quality, and the promotion of public-private partnerships in education. As Akinyemi (2021) observes, inclusive growth relies on democratizing knowledge and decentralizing educational governance, thereby empowering local communities to influence learning outcomes. Furthermore, integrating indigenous knowledge systems and cultural relevance into curricula is essential for sustainable development. According to Okebukola (2020), education reform must be context-sensitive, leveraging local wisdom while adopting global best practices. This dual approach helps foster inclusive growth by ensuring education reflects both national identity and international

competitiveness. Lastly, Adepoju and Fabiyi (2019) stresses the importance of establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track reform progress and uphold accountability in the implementation of education policies.

Challenges of Human Capital

1. **Youth Unemployment and underemployment**: A major challenge of human capital development is the persistently high level of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people and other vulnerable groups. Global labour markets were severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with youth and low-skilled workers experiencing disproportionate job losses. In Nigeria, unemployment increased sharply, indicating that educational attainment has not translated effectively into productive employment opportunities (OECD, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021)

2. **Persistent poverty and rising extreme poverty**: Another critical challenge is the persistence of poverty, especially in low- and middle-income and fragile contexts. Economic shocks have reversed decades of progress in poverty reduction, weakening households' capacity to invest in education and health. Rising extreme poverty directly undermines human capital formation and limits long-term economic productivity (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

3. **Skills mismatch and outdated education systems**: Human capital development is further constrained by skills mismatch arising from outdated education systems. Many curricula fail to equip learners with relevant technical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills required in modern labour markets. This mismatch increases graduate unemployment and heightens vulnerability to automation and technological change (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020).

4. **Weak institutional quality and governance**: Weak institutions and poor governance also limit the effectiveness of human capital investments. In countries such as Nigeria, increased spending on education and health has not produced expected development outcomes due to weak accountability, ineffective policy implementation, and inadequate infrastructure. These institutional gaps prevent uman capital from translating into employment and poverty reduction (Adediran & Akinwale, 2020).

5. **Widening inequality and uneven recovery from shocks**: Widening inequality and uneven recovery from global shocks pose another challenge to human capital development. Poorer countries and disadvantaged populations have experienced slower recovery in education, health, and employment outcomes, increasing gaps in human development and reducing social mobility (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021).

6. **Poor job quality and labour informality**: Finally, poor job quality remains a significant challenge. Many available jobs, especially in developing economies, are informal, low-paid, and lack social protection. Such employment conditions reduce incentives for skills acquisition and limit the long-term returns to human capital investment (OECD, 2020).

Conclusion

This study has examined the pivotal role of education for developing human capital and its implications for effective economic reforms and national development in Nigeria. The findings indicate that education is not merely a means of acquiring knowledge but a critical instrument

for cultivating the skills, creativity, and productivity necessary for national progress. By equipping individuals with technical, professional, and managerial competencies, education enhances human capital, which in turn drives economic growth, innovation, and social development. Despite the potential, challenges such as inadequate educational infrastructure, low quality of teaching, brain drain, and unequal access continue to hinder the full realization of education's benefits in Nigeria. Addressing these issues through policy reforms, investment in teacher training, vocational programs, and inclusive education can strengthen the country's human capital base.

In conclusion, the research underscores that Nigeria's sustainable economic reforms and national development are intrinsically linked to the strategic development of human capital through education. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must therefore prioritize educational quality and accessibility as a cornerstone for fostering an empowered, skilled, and productive workforce capable of meeting the socio-economic demands of a rapidly evolving global economy.

Recommendations

1. Policy Implications and Recommendations to enhance the role of education in driving national development, the following strategies are proposed:
2. Labour-market-oriented skills development: To address youth unemployment and underemployment, education and training systems should be aligned with labour-market needs through expanded vocational and technical education, entrepreneurship training, and effective school-to-work transition programmes.
3. Integrated human capital and social protection policies: To combat persistent poverty, governments should integrate education and health investments with social protection programmes to ensure that poor and vulnerable households can sustain investments in human capital development.
4. Curriculum modernization and digital skills integration: Addressing skills mismatch requires regular curriculum review and modernization, with strong emphasis on STEM education, digital literacy, problem-solving, and innovation to enhance graduate employability.
5. Strengthening institutional governance and accountability: To improve the effectiveness of human capital investments, governments should strengthen institutional quality by improving transparency, accountability, monitoring, and evaluation in education and human capital policies.
6. Equity-focused education investment: Reducing inequality and uneven recovery requires targeted investment in rural and disadvantaged regions, including improved school infrastructure, teacher quality, and access to learning resources.
7. Promotion of decent work and labour-market reforms: Improving job quality demands labour-market reforms that promote formal employment, enforce labour standards, and expand access to social protection to ensure sustainable returns on human capital investment.

References

Abikiwi, F., & Onyema, B. (2013). Education for sustainable development: A key to Nigeria's economic growth. *Journal of Education and Practice, 4*(13), 136–141.

Aboluwodi, A., & Owolewa, O. O. (2018). Repositioning education to achieve sustainable development goals in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy, Social Development and Enterprise Studies, 3*(1), 1–12.

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2010). The role of institutions in growth and development. *Review of Economics and Institutions, 1(*2), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.5202/rei.v1i2.1

Adeleye, B. N. (2024). *Income inequality, human capital and institutional quality in Sub-Saharan Africa. Social Indicators Research*, 171, 133–157. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03244-0

Adepoju, A., & Fabiyi, A. (2019). Monitoring and evaluation of education reforms in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Educational Management, 17*(2), 45–60.

Akinyemi, S. (2021). Decentralizing education governance for inclusive growth in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Policy and Reform,* 9(3), 112–128.

Aminu, M., Yabo, A. M. S., Sanusi, F., & Bala, H. (2025). Education, enterprise, and economic reform: Mapping a strategic convergence for Nigeria's development. EPRA International *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 11(*9). https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23899

Asamoah, L. A. (2021). *Institutional quality and income inequality in developing countries: A dynamic panel threshold analysis. Progress in Development Studies.* https://doi.org/10.1177/14649934211016715

Azoro, C. J. S., Onah, C. A., & Agulefo, Q. O. (2025). Weak institutions and poor governance in Nigeria: A socio-legal perspective. *African Journal of Law, Policy and Reform Advocacy, 4*(2).

Becker, G. S. (1964). Human capital: *A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education.* Columbia University Press.

Becker, G. S. (1993). Human capital: *A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Collins, R. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification.* Academic Press.

Ekpo, A. H. (2007). *Human capital and economic development in Nigeria: A review of recent evidence*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Economic Society, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning. (2021). *National development plan 2021–2025.* Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Kyarem, R. K., & Ogwuche, M. A. (2018). Economic reform programmes and poverty alleviation in Nigeria: *A review. Benue State University Journal of Management Sciences, 3*(1), 164–177.

Lucas, R. E. (1988). On the mechanics of economic development. *Journal of Monetary Economics, 22*(1), 3–42.

Nwaogwugwu, G. I., & Eke, U. U. (2020). *Repositioning Nigeria's basic education for sustainable development through health.* ResearchGate.

Nwaokugha, D. C., & Ezeugwu, O. (2017). The sociological analysis of human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Policy and Management, 2*(1), 1–10.

North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance.* Cambridge University Press.

OECD. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030.* OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2020a). *Employment outlook 2020: Worker security and the COVID-19 crisis*. OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2020b). OECD Publishing. Considering human capital in a multidimensional analysis of fragility

Ofor-Douglas, S. (2022). Repositioning university education for sustainable youth empowerment and national development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Research, 5*(1). https://doi.org/10.37284/IJAR.5.1.1021

Ojeyinka, T. A. (2025). Moderating role of institutional quality on human capital development–poverty reduction nexus in Nigeria. *Ife Social Sciences Review, 33*(1), 75–102. https://issr.oauife.edu.ng/index.php/issr/article/download/260/172/316

Okebukola, P. (2020). Indigenous knowledge and curriculum reform in Nigeria: A pathway to sustainable development. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies, 27*(1), 1–15.

Okeke, P. C. (2020). Curriculum reform and employability challenges in Nigerian higher education. *Journal of Educational Studies and Research, 5(*2), 22–33.

Omofonmwan, S. I., & Osa-Edoh, G. I. (2008). The Nigerian educational system and the

challenges of globalization. *Journal of Social Sciences, 17(*3), 239–246.

Onyemenam, L. (2015). The role of education in national development: The Nigerian perspective. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences, 3*(4), 48–56.

Oware, A. (2025, March 8). *Educational reforms: The key to unlocking billions in Nigeria's economic growth*. The Guardian Nigeria.

Romer, P. M. (1990). Endogenous technological change. *Journal of Political Economy, 98*(5), S71–S102.

Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American Economic Review, 51*(1), 1–17.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Anchor Books.

Tinubu's economic reforms repositioning Nigeria for sustainable growth – NTAC DG. (2025, October 9). *The Guardian Nigeria.*

Todaro, M. P., & Smith, S. C. (2020). *Economic development* (13th ed.). Pearson Education.

UNDP. (2020). *Human development report 2020.* United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP. (2021). *Human development report 2021/2022.* United Nations Development Programme.

UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals.* UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2023). *Education for sustainable development: A human right and a global goal*. UNESCO.

World Bank. (1986). N*igeria – Structural adjustment program: Policies, implementation, and impact*. World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/959091468775569769

World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise.* World Bank.

World Bank. (2019a). *Nigeria: A path to sustainable and inclusive growth.* World Bank.

World Bank. (2019b). *World development report 2019: The changing nature of work.* World Bank.

World Bank. (2020). *Nigeria records 0.36 points in World Bank's 2020 human capital index.* BusinessDay Nigeria.

World Bank. (2022). *Poverty and shared prosperity 2022: Correcting course.* World Bank.

World Economic Forum. (2020). *The global competitiveness report 2020.* World Economic Forum.

FROM CERTIFICATES TO COMPETENCE: A SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

Simeon Dosunmu

Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

Adesoji A. Oni

Department of Educational Foundations Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Lagos

Abstract

The debate between academic certification and practical skills has gained renewed attention in the context of technological transformation, labour market restructuring, and the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI). While certificates continue to serve as formal indicators of educational attainment, employers increasingly prioritize demonstrable competencies, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. This paper examines the certificate–skill debate from sociological, educational, and labour-market perspectives, with particular attention to Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. The study seeks to analyze the relationship between certification, competence, employability, and technological change; examine the relevance of Human Capital Theory, Credentialism Theory, and the Capability Approach in explaining contemporary labour-market realities; and assess the implications of Artificial Intelligence for educational credentials and skill acquisition. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted. Data were derived from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, institutional reports, and publications from international organizations including UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) published between 2020 and 2025. The documents were selected based on relevance to employability, skills development, educational reform, credentialism, and AI-driven labour-market transformations. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Findings indicate that labour markets are increasingly shifting toward competence-based recruitment models that emphasize technical, digital, and transferable skills alongside formal qualifications. The study further reveals that the rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence is accelerating the demand for continuous reskilling, digital literacy, and lifelong learning. The evidence suggests that certificates retain value as mechanisms of educational validation, but their effectiveness is increasingly dependent on the extent to which they reflect demonstrable competencies. The paper concludes that the certificate–skill debate should not be viewed as a choice between competing alternatives but as a search for effective integration. It recommends curriculum reforms, competency-based learning, stronger industry–institution partnerships, AI literacy programmes, and the adoption of skill-sensitive assessment frameworks to enhance graduate employability and national development.

Key Words: skill synergy, credentialism and competence, digital dexterity and development, sociological skill stratification, life-long learning and labour market dynamics

Introduction

In the bustling bazaar of 21st-century civilization, certificates once crowned competence, and parchment paraded as proof of prowess. For decades, societies sanctified the scroll as the sacred symbol of scholarship, a magical key that unlocked jobs, joy, and justification. Yet, the dawn of the digital era has disturbed this doctrine. Evidence from both developed and developing economies suggests that employers increasingly assess graduates based on demonstrated competencies and

workplace readiness rather than academic qualifications alone (ILO, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).The growing divergence between formal educational qualifications and labour-market competencies has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary educational discourse. Across many countries, employers increasingly emphasize demonstrable skills, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities alongside academic qualifications (WEF, 2023; OECD, 2024). (Akinyemi & Adeola, 2022). Sociologists like Randall Collins and Pierre Bourdieu warned long ago that education systems may become engines of exclusion, producing certified incompetence and credentialed confusion. Their concept of credentialism is the overreliance on certificates for social mobility, still stalks many societies, especially in Africa, where paper often prevails over practice. However, the capability approach reframes education as empowerment not merely knowing but doing, being, and becoming (Nussbaum, 2021). It shifts focus from accreditation to application, from status to service, from learning for livelihood to learning for life.

The Nigerian Narrative: Graduates without Grit

Nowhere is this tension more visible than in Nigeria. Each year, thousands of graduates exit universities armed with certificates but disarmed of competence. Employers lament their limited problem-solving skills, poor digital literacy, and weak communication abilities (Eze & Okafor, 2024). The National Bureau of Statistics (2024) paints a painful picture graduate unemployment hover around 43%, with underemployment swelling beyond 20%. The disconnection between curriculum and career remains a critical chasm, creating a cycle of frustration, failure, and fragile futures.

Across continents, skill has become the new social capital, the currency of competence, and the credential of continuity. The World Economic Forum (2023) identifies adaptability, analytical thinking, and artificial-intelligence literacy as the top future skills. Nations like Singapore, Germany, and Finland have restructured their educational systems toward Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), ensuring that students learn by living, not merely by listening (ILO, 2023). In contrast, nations still trapped in the tyranny of theory find themselves exporting graduates and importing technicians. The skills-first revolution is no longer a choice, it is a challenge, a charge, and a chance for renewal.

Education's Enduring Question: What Should Learning Lead To?

Education, in its truest sense, must create competence, cultivate character, and contribute to community. The obsession with certificates has, however, created classrooms that celebrate cramming rather than creativity. We produce graduates who can recite definitions but cannot design solutions. As Osibanjo (2022) observed, "Our universities must turn from factories of facts to forges of functionality." Indeed, the future favours function, flexibility, and foresight the triple treasures of transformation.

Research Objectives

This paper sought to:

a) Examine the conceptual and sociological foundations of the certificate–skill debate.
b) Analyze the relevance of Human Capital Theory, Credentialism Theory, and the Capability Approach in explaining contemporary labour-market dynamics.
c) Investigate the implications of Artificial Intelligence and digital technologies for educational credentials, skill acquisition, and employability.
d) Evaluate the extent to which current educational systems align certification processes with labour-market skill requirements.
e) Propose policy measures for strengthening the integration of certification, competence development, and lifelong learning.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

a) What factors have contributed to the growing prominence of skills relative to formal educational certificates?
b) How do Human Capital Theory, Credentialism Theory, and the Capability Approach explain the certificate–skill debate?

c) In what ways is Artificial Intelligence reshaping the relationship between certification, competence, and employability?
d) What challenges hinder the alignment of educational qualifications with labour-market expectations in Nigeria?
e) What policy interventions can strengthen the relationship between certification and demonstrable competence?

Relevance of the Study

This paper therefore re-examines the certificate–skill dichotomy through a sociological lens, analyzing how society, school, and state contribute to credentialism, and how policy, pedagogy, and partnership can reposition skill acquisition as the soul of sustainable education. It argues that the debate is not a duel but a dialogue; the solution lies not in abolishing certificates but in aligning them with abilities. In the end, this inquiry invites educators, employers, and enforcers of policy to reimagine education as a bridge between learning and living, where knowledge meets know-how, and theory weds technique. The goal is clear, certificates must certify skill, not camouflage incompetence.

Understanding the Core Concepts: Certificate, Skill, Competence, Employability, and Credentialism

Certificate: A certificate is a formal document that testifies to the completion of a course, programme, or level of learning sanctioned by an academic or professional institution. It is paper proof of participation and performance (UNESCO, 2023). In traditional societies, the certificate served as the passport to profession, prestige, and promotion. It communicates credibility and signals attainment within a structured educational hierarchy. Yet, sociologically, a certificate does not always guarantee capacity. As Obasi and Okwu (2022) argue, many graduates in developing nations possess certificates without competence, reflecting educational inflation without innovation. Thus, while a certificate authenticates achievement, it does not always validate ability. In symbolic interactionist terms, the certificate is a social script, signalling status and identity; in functionalist logic, it sustains occupational order. But it sometimes becomes a fragile façade, a frame without function, a form without force.

Skill: Skill is the demonstrated ability to perform a task with dexterity, creativity, and consistency. It merges knowledge (what to do), understanding (why to do), and technique (how to do) the triple strand of professional mastery (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2023). Unlike certificates that declare, skills demonstrate. They are the engines of employability and the essence of enterprise. Skills are both cognitive and craft-based ranging from critical thinking and digital literacy to carpentry, coding, and communication. The World Bank (2023) identifies three broad categories: foundational (basic literacy and numeracy), technical (occupation-specific), and soft (socio-emotional). In the current knowledge economy, the synergy of these skills determines both individual employability and national productivity. Skill, therefore, is not static; it is sharpened by use, strengthened by challenge, and sustained by curiosity.

Competence: Competence represents the fusion of knowledge, skill, and disposition to perform effectively in each context. It is the holistic ability to apply what is known to solve what is unknown (ILO, 2023). Competence transcends theory; it is tested by task, tempered by time, and proven by performance. According to Okoye and Bassey (2024), competence is not a possession but a process, a progressive perfection through practice. In education and industry alike, competence has become a new credential. The global movement toward competency-based curricula (CBC) underscores a pedagogical shift from what students know to what they can do with what they know (OECD, 2022). Thus, competence crowns the learner who combines insight, initiative, and integrity the triple jewels of professional distinction.

Employability: Employability refers to the set of achievements, understandings, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to

gain employment and succeed in their chosen occupations (Yorke, 2021). It extends beyond mere employment to include adaptability, resilience, and lifelong learning. In the Nigerian context, employability is often constrained by curricular rigidity, pedagogical poverty, and industrial inertia. Employers increasingly seek graduates with work-readiness, teamwork, digital dexterity, and critical communication skills and attributes that are rarely cultivated in conventional classrooms (Eze & Okafor, 2024). Hence, employability education must evolve into a practical pedagogy of possibilities where learning leads to livelihood, and classroom knowledge converts into career competence.

Credentialism: Credentialism describes the sociological phenomenon whereby academic qualifications are overemphasized as measures of ability, often leading to the inflation of educational requirements for jobs (Collins, 2019; reinterpreted by Akinyemi & Adeola, 2022). It turns education into a status symbol rather than a service system. In Nigeria, credentialism manifests in phrases like "Do you have the paper?" rather than "Can you perform the task?" Credentialism perpetuates inequality, favouring the formally educated over the practically skilled, even when the latter demonstrate greater value. It produces what Dosunmu (2024) poetically calls "the tragedy of talents without transcripts and transcripts without talent." Sociologically, credentialism thus breeds elitism, exclusion, and economic inefficiency, the triple threats to equitable progress.

Synthesis: In essence, certificate and skill are not sworn enemies but strategic allies. The former formalizes; the latter functions. Certificates document potential; skills demonstrate performance. A dynamic education system must, therefore, integrate both ensuring that every certificate is a certificate of competence, and every skill is supported by scholarly structure. Education's true triumph lies in fusing paper with practice, theory with technique, and intellect with industry, the triplet triumph that transforms learning into livelihood.

Education Beyond Certification: A Sociological Reflection

The purpose of education has long occupied a central place in sociological discourse. Beyond the acquisition of certificates and credentials, education is expected to cultivate competencies, promote social integration, and prepare individuals for meaningful participation in society. From a sociological perspective, the value of education cannot be measured solely by the number of qualifications awarded but by its capacity to develop productive citizens, foster innovation, and contribute to social development.

The functionalist tradition, represented by scholars such as Durkheim and Parsons, views education as a mechanism for transmitting societal values, maintaining social order, and preparing individuals for occupational roles. Within this perspective, certificates serve as instruments for role allocation and social placement. However, the effectiveness of this process depends on whether educational qualifications genuinely reflect competence and preparedness for societal responsibilities. When certificates cease to represent actual skills and capabilities, the educational system risks losing its functional relevance to the labour market and society at large.

Conflict theorists provide a contrasting interpretation. Scholars such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Bourdieu (1986) argue that education often reproduces existing social inequalities rather than promoting genuine meritocracy. Certificates may function as forms of cultural and symbolic capital that grant access to opportunities irrespective of actual competence. In such circumstances, credentialism becomes a mechanism of social stratification, privileging those with formal qualifications while marginalizing individuals who possess valuable practical skills but lack recognized credentials. The certificate–skill debate therefore raises important questions about equity, access, and the distribution of opportunities within contemporary societies.

Critical pedagogical perspectives, particularly those associated with Freire (1970), further challenge educational systems that prioritize memorization and examination performance over creativity, critical thinking, and problem-

solving. Freire criticized what he termed the "banking model" of education, in which learners are treated as passive recipients of information. The persistence of examination-driven educational cultures in many developing countries reflects elements of this model. Such systems often reward the accumulation of certificates while paying insufficient attention to the development of practical competencies required for addressing contemporary social and economic challenges.

These sociological perspectives collectively suggest that education should not merely certify learning but should facilitate meaningful human development. In the context of rapid technological change, globalization, and the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, the relevance of education increasingly depends on its ability to balance certification with competence. Educational institutions must therefore move beyond the narrow pursuit of academic credentials and embrace approaches that promote critical inquiry, creativity, adaptability, and lifelong learning.

Consequently, the certificate–skill debate is not simply an educational issue; it is a sociological concern that touches on questions of social mobility, economic productivity, inequality, and national development. The challenge before contemporary educational systems is to ensure that certificates remain credible indicators of competence while simultaneously creating opportunities for individuals to acquire and demonstrate relevant skills in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world.

Theoretical Framework: The Triangular Theories of Talent, Training, and Transformation

Education without theory is experience without explanation. To unravel the tension between certificate and skill, one must traverse the terrain of theory from economics to ethics, sociology to psychology. This paper anchors its analysis on three intersecting theoretical tripods that illuminate how societies perceive learning, labour, and legitimacy:

Human Capital Theory: The Economics of Education and Employability

First articulated by Schultz (1961) and expanded by Becker (1993), the Human Capital Theory (HCT) perceives education as an investment in human potential, yielding returns in productivity, performance, and prosperity. It contends that nations develop when citizens are trained, taught, and tooled to contribute economically. In this framework, certificates are seen as indicators of investment, while skills signify the returns. The theory presupposes that individuals acquire education to enhance their earning ability and that societies, in turn, profit from a more skilled workforce (Becker, 1993; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2020). However, in practice, education in many African nations has become expenditure without experience, theory without transformation. As Adebayo and Yusuf (2023) note, Nigeria's tertiary system often prioritises certification over competence, producing graduates with degrees but without dexterity.

The strength of HCT lies in its recognition of human beings as assets, the "wealth within wealth." Yet, its weakness is its economic reductionism, equating education solely with monetary returns while neglecting moral and social dimensions. This paper repositions HCT sociologically, insisting that human capital must include humane character and learning that nurtures not only livelihood but also life worth living. In essence education should not just raise income, but also inspire insight; not just train the hand, but transform the heart.

Credentialism Theory: The Sociology of Status and Stratification

The Credentialism Theory, popularized by Collins (1979) and revisited by Brown (2021), critiques the overemphasis on certificates as symbols of social status rather than genuine indicators of skill. Credentialism views education as a social filter, separating the "qualified" from the "disqualified" not by competence, but by compliance with institutional rituals. In Nigeria and similar societies, this theory manifests in paper-prejudice the privileging of certificates over

competence, and the persecution of practical skill (Obasi & Okwu, 2022). The result is a system where people chase papers instead of purpose, and classrooms become credential factories rather than creativity forges. Collins (1979) described this phenomenon as the "credential society," where certificates are more about controlling access to jobs than improving performance. The elite thus perpetuate their advantage by raising qualification requirements even for jobs that previously required none (Brown, 2021). Credentialism explains why many Nigerian employers insist on master's degrees for tasks that require mere mastery of machines; why artisans with abundant skill remain uncelebrated while graduates without grit are overvalued. Hence, the paradox is that education meant to equalize becomes the engine of exclusion. Certificates, instead of celebrating learning, become licenses for inequality, and ladders for labeling.

The Capability Approach: The Humanistic Reimagining of Empowerment

The Capability Approach (CA), pioneered by Amartya Sen (1999) and refined by Martha Nussbaum (2021), transcends both the economic focus of HCT and the social critique of credentialism. It views education not as mere preparation for the job market but as expansion of human freedoms, functions, and flourishing. Sen defines capabilities as the real opportunities people have to achieve the kind of lives they value. In education, this implies that learning should enlarge the learner, enhancing not only what one can do, but also what one can become. Within the certificate–skill debate, CA emphasizes that the goal of education is empowerment, not employment alone. Certificates should confirm capability, not just completion. Skills, in turn, is a tool for freedom; freedom to create, to contribute, and to choose one's path. Nussbaum (2021) underscores ten core capabilities from practical reason and imagination to affiliation and control over one's environment, all of which hinge on functional education. Thus, a skillful citizen is not merely employable but empowered, and a true certificate is not a paper of privilege, but a proof of potential. In essence, the Capability Approach calls for classrooms that cultivate curiosity, confidence, and compassion, the triple compass of comprehensive education.

Theoretical Synthesis: From Human Capital to Human Capability

When the strands of Human Capital Theory, Credentialism Theory, and the Capability Approach are woven together, they reveal a compelling sociological tapestry that explains not only the persistence of the certificate–skill debate but also the pathway beyond it. Human Capital Theory foregrounds education as investment, emphasizing productivity, performance, and profit. It assumes that schooling enhances skills and that skills yield economic returns. Yet, in contexts such as Nigeria, this linear logic fractures when certificates multiply without corresponding mastery. Education becomes expenditure without experience, qualification without quality, and enrolment without empowerment.

Credentialism Theory, on the other hand, exposes the social underside of this failure. It unmasks how certificates mutate from indicators of competence into instruments of exclusion, status preservation, and symbolic dominance. Here, education ceases to be a ladder of liberation and becomes a label of legitimacy. Jobs demand degrees not because tasks require them, but because society reveres them. The result is credential congestion, degree inflation, and a paradoxical labour market where the certified are unemployable and the skilled are uncertified. Credentialism thus explains why paper thrives where practice perishes, and why prestige often eclipses productivity.

The Capability Approach enters this conversation as a corrective conscience. It reframes education not as an economic transaction or a social filter, but as an expansion of human freedom and functional flourishing. From this perspective, the true measure of education is not the certificate conferred nor even the skill acquired, but the real opportunities learners gain to live meaningful, productive, and dignified lives. Capability theory insists that education must enhance agency, adaptability, and autonomy. It shifts attention from what learners possess to what they can actually do and become within their social realities.

Eze, & Okafor (2024) remark that synthesized together, these theories reveal that the crisis of education is neither purely economic nor merely sociological, but profoundly human. Human Capital Theory explains the promise of education, Credentialism Theory diagnoses its distortion, and the Capability Approach restores its purpose. The synthesis points toward a future where certificates regain credibility only when anchored in competence, where skills gain legitimacy when supported by structure, and where education fulfills its highest calling by empowering individuals to think critically, act creatively, and live productively.

In this integrated framework, the certificate is no longer an end but a credible witness to capability; skill is no longer a marginal alternative but the living proof of learning; and education becomes a holistic process that harmonizes knowledge, know-how, and know-why. Such a synthesis is especially vital for Nigeria and similar societies standing at the crossroads of demographic pressure, technological disruption, and developmental demand. Only by aligning economic investment, social equity, and human flourishing can education transcend the sterile debate between certificate and skill and mature into a symphony of competence, character, and contribution.

The twenty-first century has witnessed not merely a technological transition but a transformational tremor, which is the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has altered how societies learn, labour, and legitimize competence. From classrooms to corporations, algorithms now adjudicate abilities that once required human discernment. The result is a recalibration of relevance, a redefinition of what it means to be skilled or certified in a digitized world. Certificates once commanded prestige as paper proof of proficiency. But in an AI-driven age, employers increasingly trust portfolios over parchments, demonstrations over declarations, and data over diplomas (World Economic Forum, 2023). Platforms like Coursera, Udemy, and LinkedIn Learning have democratized education, offering micro-credentials and skill badges that rival traditional degrees. According to OECD (2024), nearly 60% of global employers now recognize non-degree certifications in AI, data analytics, and programming as valid proofs of competence. In essence, the certificate has been digitized; the skill has been diversified; the learner has been decentralized. This evolution exposes the limits of the conventional certificate: static, symbolic, and slow. In contrast, AI skills are dynamic, demonstrable, and demand driven. As Adetayo and Enikuomehin (2024) observe, "Artificial intelligence has redefined intelligence itself, not as what we memorize, but how we mobilize what machines can multiply." Thus, the paper that once promised prestige must now prove precision.

The Skill Spectrum in the Age of AI

Artificial Intelligence has widened the spectrum of skills, from technical expertise (machine learning, coding, data science) to soft competencies (empathy, ethics, adaptability). Ironically, as machines master logic, humans must master emotional and ethical intelligence (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2023). The World Bank (2023) notes that "hybrid human–machine skills" will dominate the labour market by 2030. These include prompt engineering, AI literacy, and digital design thinking, all requiring lifelong learning beyond the boundary of degrees. Hence, the emerging hierarchy of employability favours the versatile over the verified, the creative over the credentialed, the adaptable over the acclaimed. In Nigeria, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA, 2024) has launched AI-focused training initiatives to bridge the digital divide. Yet, most universities still cling to colonial curricula that reward recall over real-time reasoning. This underscores a sobering sociological irony that youths are trained for yesterday's world while tomorrow's world trains itself. Artificial Intelligence has also democratized the distribution of skill. Through open-source learning, a mechanic in Makurdi can now master machine learning, and a tailor in Ibadan can train in digital design. AI-assisted platforms eliminate gatekeeping, allowing talent to triumph over traditional titles. As Schwab and Zahidi (2023) contend, "Technology has transferred the power of learning from the institution to the individual." In this sense, the certificate–skill debate is no longer about school

versus street, but about system versus self-learning. AI favours self-taught, self-motivated, and self-upgrading individual learners who learn, unlearn, and relearn in perpetual motion. This aligns with Dosunmu's (2024) sociological assertion that "the modern scholar must be both a student and a start-up curious, creative, and constantly coding his competence."

Ethical Education in an Automated Era

However, the AI surge raises moral and sociological questions. Who owns knowledge when machines can compose, compute, and create? How do universities verify learning when AI can generate essays and even degrees? These concerns demand a new form of "ethical intelligence" , the ability to use technology with conscience, compassion, and control (Floridi, 2022). Certificates must therefore evolve to include digital ethics, data literacy, and adaptive intelligence skills that make the human hand indispensable in an automated habitat. Otherwise, the danger looms that the certified will become obsolete while the skilled will become supreme.

Conflating AI with the Certificate–Skill Spectrum

Artificial Intelligence has not abolished the certificate; it has augmented its accountability. The future certificate will not merely declare knowledge but display competence through verifiable digital portfolios, blockchain credentials, and AI-assessed simulations (UNESCO, 2023). Hence, the once binary debate between certificate and skill is transforming into a trinity of competence certificate, skill, and cognition. The winner will not be the one with the longest résumé, but the one with the livelier repertoire; an individual who can collaborate with, rather than compete against, machines. In sum, AI is not the enemy of education, but its evolution is a reminder that the true certificate is not what hangs on the wall, but what works in the world.

The Sociological Seesaw: Certificates without Competence

The discourse on the certificate cum skill dichotomy is, at its deepest, a sociological seesaw, a balance between symbolic legitimacy and substantive ability. The Nigerian society, like many postcolonial nations, remains trapped between two educational economies: the colonial culture of certification and the contemporary culture of competence. Whereas the former values what one has studied, the latter values what one can solve. The tension between paper proof and practical proof exposes the mismatch between modern market needs and moribund pedagogies (Obasi & Okwu, 2022).

The Nigerian labour market continues to place considerable emphasis on formal educational qualifications as indicators of employability and social status. Consequently, educational credentials often function as important mechanisms of occupational selection and social differentiation (Akinyemi & Adeola, 2022). Many ministries, parastatals, and private firms still recruit by academic altitude rather than applied aptitude. This institutional inertia perpetuates credentialism and punishes creativity. Yet, paradoxically, the same employers lament that graduates are unemployable victims of what Eze and Okafor (2024) term "educational over-qualification and occupational under-performance." This paradox deepens when technical artisans, programmers, and AI innovators, many without formal degrees, outperform certified professionals.

A sociological reading reveals that education in Nigeria functions as both ladder and label, a ladder for those who can climb with competence, and a label for that content with credentials. Unless learning leads to livelihood, certification becomes a paper prison, not a passport to productivity.

In nations that integrate AI into education in Singapore, Finland, and Rwanda; students learn how to think, not just what to think (OECD, 2024). Meanwhile, in Nigeria, AI is still viewed as an exotic enterprise, not an everyday educational tool. However, AI presents a sociological opportunity to democratize skill and decentralize learning. Digital platforms now allow a farmer in Ijede or a student in Sokoto to acquire the same computational competence as a coder in Seoul. This technological levelling disrupts hierarchies of education, replacing the prestige of paper with the proof of performance.

The emergence of AI serves as both mirror and microscope: it reflects the outdated curricula and magnifies our institutional inertia. It also

reminds policymakers that the future of learning is fluid, flexible, and fusion-based merging certificate and skill in symphonic synergy. In this light, Nigerian education must transcend the tyranny of transcripts and embrace the theology of transformation, nurturing learners who can code, create, and collaborate across disciplines. Sociologically, the certificate–skill discourse reflects deeper inequalities. Certificates function as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) conferring prestige, power, and access. In Nigeria's hierarchical society, those with degrees are deemed "cultured," while those with craft are considered "common." Yet globalization is reversing this social order: a skilled coder, cinematographer, or content creator now earns more respect and reward than a degree-laden but digitally deficient bureaucrat. The digital democracy of skill is dismantling the old elitism of education, a shift that calls for cultural humility and curricular honesty. The emerging social hierarchy celebrates the doer, not the declarer; the creator, not the certificate-collector. In tomorrow's world, the true aristocracy will be the artisans of intelligence. Humans who harmonize head, hand, and heart.

The challenge before Nigerian education, therefore, is not to abolish certification but to align it with skill formation. The world is moving toward polycentric pedagogy where formal learning, informal training, and digital re-skilling coexist in a continuous cycle of growth. The moral message is manifest: the classroom must connect to the craftroom, the lecture hall must link to the labour hall, and education must marry execution.

In the final analysis, Certificates may open the gate of opportunity, but skills sustain the garden of prosperity.

References

Adebayo, K., & Yusuf, T. (2023). Re-engineering technical education for employability in Nigeria. African Journal of Education and Skills Development, 12(4), 45–61.

Adetayo, J., & Enikuomehin, A. (2024). Artificial intelligence and employability in Nigeria: Prospects and policies. African Journal of Digital Education, 7(2), 17–35.

Akinyemi, A., & Adeola, O. (2022). Graduate employability and skills mismatch in Nigeria: A sociological perspective. Journal of African Education Studies, 15(2), 55–73.

Becker, G. S. (1993). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976). Schooling in Capitalist America. New York: Basic Books.

Brown, P. (2021). Revisiting credentialism in the 21st century: Power, prestige, and inequality. Sociology of Education Review, 14(2), 33–48.

Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2023). The second machine learning age: Work, progress, and prosperity in a time of AI. New York: W. W. Norton.

Collins, R. (1979). The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification. New York: Academic Press.

Collins, R. (2019). The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification. New York: Columbia University Press.

Durkheim, E.(1912/1956). Education and Sociology. New York: Free Press.

Eze, N., & Okafor, I. (2024). Bridging the gap between education and employment: Reassessing skills in Nigerian higher education. Lagos Review of Educational Research, 9(1), 102–118.

Floridi, L. (2022). Ethics of artificial intelligence: Human values and algorithmic agency. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2023). Skills development and the future of work in Africa. Geneva: ILO.

Obanya, P. A. I. (2024). Learning from Education: Exploring the Education Discourse of PAI OBANYA. Published by Educational Research and Study Group. Institute of Education, University of Ibadan. First Edition. Gab Educational Printers.

Obasi, U., & Okwu, A. (2022). Paper without practice: A critique of certification

culture in African universities. West African Journal of Social Sciences, 11(3), 33–50.

Odinko, M. N &. James, M. U. (2022). Gender and Academic qualification as predictors of University Graduate Employability in Uyo Town, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. In M. N. Odinko (Eds.). Current Issues in Education: Trends, Views and Analysis. pp. 279-286. 2

Okoye, C., & Bassey, M. (2024). Competence-based education and the future of learning in Africa. Journal of Educational Transformation, 18(2), 67–89.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022). Future-ready education: Competency-based learning for the digital age. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Osibanjo, Y. (2022). Education for functionality and the future: A Nigerian perspective. Nigerian Educational Policy Review, 14(3), 1–12.

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2024). Labour force statistics: Q2 2024. Abuja: NBS.

Nussbaum, M. (2021). Creating capabilities: The human development approach. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

NITDA. (2024). National AI training and research policy for sustainable innovation. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy.

Psacharopoulos, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2020). Returns to investment in education: A decennial review of global evidence. Education Economics, 28(3), 245–258.

Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. American Economic Review, 51(1), 1–17.

Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford.

Schwab, K., & Zahidi, S. (2023). The global competitiveness report 2023. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Talcott Parsons (1959). The school class as a social system. Harvard Educational Review, 29(4), 297–318

UNESCO. (2023). Transforming education for sustainable futures: Global skills report. Paris: UNESCO Press.

World Bank. (2023). Learning and earning in Africa: Skills for inclusive growth. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Yorke, M. (2021). Employability and higher education: Contextualising graduate attributes. London: Routledge.

NJSE

NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

NJSE 2025

ISSN: 1118-1784

Volume 18, Number 2, 2025

ROLE OF ECONOMIC REFORMS TOWARDS IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OF THE GIRL-CHILD IN NORTHERN NIGERIA.

Farouk, Rashida Abubakar & Muhammad, Zanirah Bello

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of education and Extension Services
Usmanu Dabfodiyo University, Sokoto

Abstract

For a nation like Nigeria, emerging from years of economic stagnation, policy inconsistencies, and institutional inefficiencies, reform is not merely a policy choice but a survival imperative. With the guide of functionalist and human capital theory the paper highlight, the role of economic reform to girl-child education in our society. And further examines how Nigeria's recent economic reforms such as; fuel subsidy removal and currency adjustments reshaped household incomes, and the cost of basic services that in return affect girl-child education due to poverty. But, with the introduction of effective economic reforms that incorporate gender sensitive policies such as; girls' education project (GEP) and adolescent girls' initiative for learning and empowerment (AGILE) that addresses structural inequalities and expand girl-child education through multiple mechanism, contributed in the increase rate of girl-child enrollment in schools. The paper recommended that, government should strengthen fiscal reforms by increasing budgetary allocation to education, with specific provisions for the girl-child to ensure not only enrollment but, retention and completion.

Keywords: Economic reform, Poverty, girl-child education, Educational Opportunity

Introduction

For a nation like Nigeria, emerging from years of economic stagnation, policy inconsistencies, and institutional inefficiencies, reform is not merely a policy choice but a survival imperative, because no developing country can achieve meaningful progress without implementing broad-based, structural reforms. Education is widely recognized as a key driver of economic development and social transformation of individual and society at large. However, in Northern Nigeria particularly in Northwestern states such as Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara, educational access remains deeply unequal, especially for girl-child. Education empowers women, leading to positive changes for individuals, families, and societies which involve providing women with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to fully participate in economic, social, and political life. As Mahuta (2003) argued that education is a powerful tool or instrument for national socioeconomic development. So also, educated women are more likely to join the workforce, start businesses, and contribute to the economy of the nation. Through education women can contributes significantly to the development of a stable, prosperous and healthy nation state, whose citizens are active, productive and empowered. But there are many obstacles, within and beyond women education. Studies have shown a strong link between girls' education and socioeconomic development.

In Nigeria, reforms intended to address fiscal imbalance and stimulate growth, have also contributed to rising inflation and reduced household welfare (Adeniran & Sidiq, 2018) such as: fuel subsidy removal, currency adjustments and fiscal consolidation are reshaping household incomes, public spending and the cost of basic services that increase the poverty rate which is a major cause of barrier to girls' education in Nigeria, especially in rural and northern regions where gender inequality

remains pronounced (UNICEF, 2021). However, economic challenges such as; household affordability, transportation and school-related costs, food insecurity and increased risk of child marriage and child labor have impacted girl-child educational opportunities, leading to high dropout rates and limited access to education. Girl-child face numerous barriers to education, primarily driven by poverty, cultural norms, and gender inequality that exist in our societies. As a result of which most women and girls are denied access to education which has a negative impact on their lives (Melpa, 2022).

Furthermore, Nigeria has one of the world's largest absolute numbers of out-of-school children and persistent gender gaps in completion and learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2024). Some of the reasons for the rising number of out-of-school girls in Nigeria is the traditional impediments and poverty which has barred women and girls to have limited level of education or total access to formal education. With the recent macroeconomic reforms introduced to stabilize public finances and attract investment including subsidy removals and fiscal consolidation measures have distributed and disproportionately affect poor households (for example via higher food and transport costs and rising inflation), which matter most for the poorest families where girl child education participation is most fragile (Ezuem et al, 2024). Understanding the link between macro-level policy and girl-child education is therefore essential for designing reforms that are socially inclusive and politically sustainable bacause socio-economic challenge has the most significant impacts on the educational opportunities of girl-child in Nigeria, altering possibilities and limiting their level of education. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF, 2022) has revealed that 7.6 million girls in Nigeria, many from the northern regions, remain deprived of education. This is because in northern part of Nigeria girl-child suffered deprivation not only because of economic challenges but also of cultural belief of the people.

However, effective economic reforms can significantly benefit girls-child education in Nigeria if it addressed issues like; poverty, providing resources for quality education, and empowering girls to pursue their education which can reduce the burden on families, allowing them to invest more in their daughters' education. In Northwestern Nigeria, poverty remains widespread and multidimensional. For instance, according to (UNICEF, 2024)80% of children in Sokoto, 82% in Zamfara, and 88% in Kebbi are classified as multidimensionally poor, lacking access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and nutrition. Under such conditions, families often prioritize survival over education, disproportionately affecting girl-child education, because parent will prefer to send their boys rather than girls for the little, they have with the believe he will be the bread winner of the family. Interventions such as the Girls' Education Project (GEP) have made measurable progress between 2012 and 2022, over 418,000 girls were enrolled in school in Sokoto and 545,000 in Zamfara through targeted programs (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, nearly 964,000 out-of-school children were enrolled across Sokoto and Zamfara through UNICEF-supported initiatives. Despite these gains, retention and completion rates remain low, indicating that enrollment alone is insufficient without broader economic support.

Nevertheless, economic reforms that incorporate gender-sensitive policies such as targeted subsidies and cash transfers like; gender responsive budgeting (GRB), conditional cash transfer (CCT) and adolescent girls' initiative for learning and empowerment (AGILE) addresses these structural inequalities and expand girl-child education through multiple mechanisms. For instance, programs that provide financial incentives for girls' education have been shown to increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates.

Economic Reform

Economic reform generally refers to policy or institutional interventions aimed at improving an economy's performance and the well-being of its citizens. And so, Economic reform refers to a comprehensive set of policy measures designed to improve the efficiency and stability of an economy by aligning domestic expenditure with available resources. It seeks to create coherence among fiscal, monetary, and trade policies in order to achieve macroeconomic balance. These reforms are aimed at ensuring that aggregate demand remains consistent with the economy's

productive capacity, while also promoting growth through measures that stimulate the goods and services sectors. Ultimately, economic reforms enhance resource allocation, encourage investment, and support sustainable economic development (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023; World Bank, 2020). These reforms aim to enhance a nation petition, easing administrative control and thereby rebalancing internal and external balance and reducing pressures (Mouhmmd *et al*., 2023). Economic reform in education involves implementing changes to a country's educational system 's workforce, promote innovation, and ultimately contribute to overall economic growth.

Education

Education can be defined in various ways. In its broadest sense, education is simply one aspect of socialization. It involves the acquisition of knowledge and learning of skills, whether intentionally or unintentionally education often helps to shape beliefs and moral value (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Education according to Fafunwa (2002) is an aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adults develops the ability, attitudes, and other forms of behavior which are of positive values to the society in which he or she lives. Education is a necessity for all, for the benefit of individual and societal development through which education serve as a tool that yields back economic development of the nation (Giddens, 2009). While, Educational opportunity is the access individuals have to quality education and learning experiences which enhances their life chances and career prospects, which can be influenced by factors such as family background, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Girl-Child Education

Girls' education is like sowing the seed which gives rise to a revitalised, cheerful and full grown family plant. Educated women have the capacity to bring socio-economic changes. Lack of education denies the Girls' education is like sowing the seed which gives rise to a revitalised, cheerful and full grown family plant. Educated women have the capacity to bring socio-economic changes. Lack of education denies the

Girls' education is the access to, and provision of, learning opportunities for girls and young women, with the goal of empowering them through knowledge and skills. It encompasses not only access to formal education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) but also ensuring girls learn in safe and supportive environments, develop life skills, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Girl-child education refers to the process of providing female children with equal access to formal and informal learning opportunities that enable their intellectual, social, and emotional development. It emphasizes the removal of barriers such as gender discrimination, poverty, and cultural practices that hinder girls' participation in education. Educating the girl-child is widely recognized as a key driver of social and economic development, as it empowers girls with knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal growth and active participation in society (United Nations Children's Fund, 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).Women's education can be regarded as a kind of knowledge given to women for enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity, making them to become economically independent and self-reliant.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by two theories, namely: Functionalism and Human capital theory. Functionalist Theory is a sociological perspective that views education as a key social institution essential for the stability and functioning of society. One of its major proponents, Émile Durkheim (1898), argued that schools serve as "socialization agencies" that transmit societal norms, values, and behaviours while preparing individuals for their future economic roles in society. Functionalists maintain that education promotes social cohesion, integration, and upward social mobility by equipping individuals with the skills needed to participate effectively in the labour market.

The main tenets of Functionalist Theory include socialization, role allocation, skills acquisition, and meritocracy. Through these

functions, education helps maintain social order by instilling shared values and expectations that guide behaviour in society. In this regard, when girls are educated, they are socialized into acceptable societal norms and equipped with knowledge and skills that enable them to contribute meaningfully to national development. The theory is particularly relevant to understanding the role of economic reforms in girl-child education. Economic reforms that increase investment in education and improve resource allocation enhance access to schooling, especially for girls. Such reforms reduce financial barriers and expand opportunities for female participation in education, ultimately producing a more skilled female workforce. As a result, educated girls are better positioned to become professionals such as doctors, teachers, engineers, nurses, administrators, and leaders, thereby contributing to economic growth and societal development.

Human Capital Theory was developed by Gary Becker (1964), a leading economist who argued that education should be viewed as an investment in people that increases their productivity, skills, and future earnings. The theory explains human capital as the stock of knowledge, skills, competencies, and health that individuals acquire through education and training, which enhances their economic value in the labour market (Claudia Goldin, 2016). The main tenets of Human Capital Theory include the idea that education is an investment, individuals are productive assets, skills development increases economic output, and higher education leads to improved income and employment opportunities. According to this perspective, education is not only a social good but also an economic tool that improves both individual and national productivity. By applying Human Capital Theory to girl-child education demonstrates that when girls are provided with quality education, they acquire essential knowledge, health awareness, and economic competencies that increase their productivity and ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Educated girls are more likely to participate in the labour force, engage in entrepreneurship, and make informed decisions that enhance household welfare and community development.

This theory is highly relevant to economic reforms, as policies that improve funding for education, reduce school costs, and expand access to learning opportunities directly strengthen human capital development. By prioritizing girl-child education within economic reform agendas, governments can reduce poverty, promote gender equality, and achieve sustainable economic growth through a more skilled and productive population.

Recent Economic Reforms in Nigeria

Some of the recent economic reforms in Nigeria are as follows:

Fuel Subsidy Removal: The removal of fuel subsidies implemented to reduce fiscal deficits caused a sharp rise in fuel prices, transport costs, food prices, and general inflation (World Bank, 2023). This increased cost of living affected household budgets, pushing many families further into poverty.

Exchange Rate Liberalization: Nigeria's move to unify and float the naira led to rapid currency depreciation. While intended to attract foreign investment, the outcome was higher import costs and inflationary pressure (IMF, 2023).

Fiscal and tax reforms: Fiscal and tax reforms in Nigeria have focused on increasing non-oil revenue through expanded taxation and the introduction of new levies. While these measures aim to strengthen government revenue, they often place a disproportionate burden on low-income households by reducing their purchasing power. Similarly public sector reforms, particularly in the power sector, have led to electricity tariff adjustments intended to ensure financial sustainability. However, these increases have significantly raised the cost of living, especially for poor households already struggling to meet basic needs (World Bank, 2022; International Monetary Fund, 2021).

Effect of Current Economic Reforms to Girl-child Education

While economic reforms strive to promote long-term stability, in short term they have caused increased prices of essential goods and services (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023) reported that multidimensional poverty in

Nigeria now affects over 130 million people. Rising poverty reduces household ability to pay school-related costs such as uniforms, transport, books, and examination fees. For many families, economic shocks trigger a reallocation of limited resources away from girl-child education. Cultural norms already place boys' education above girls', making girls the first to drop out during financial stress (Afolayan, 2019). Economic barriers, including poverty and the hidden costs of schooling, further exacerbate educational disparities (Mir & Swaroopa, 2024). Some of the issues caused by current economic reforms are as follows:

Increased Dropout Rates: Poverty stands as an obstacle responsible for gender disparity in education, high rate of girls drop out in schools and overall denied girls access and opportunity to be educated. It remains a significant barrier to education of girls. With household income decreasing, many parents prioritize survival over education. Girls are often withdrawn from school to support domestic tasks, petty trading, or caregiving. Studies show that economic shocks significantly increase the dropout rate among girls in low-income households (UNESCO, 2022). So also Mir and Swaroopa (2024) argues that in economically disadvantaged families, immediate economic needs often outweigh the perceived long term benefits of girl's education. Families may prioritize sending boys to school over girls due to limited resources and the believed of males are the bread winners of the family, leading to higher dropout rates among girls.

Cost of Education: Higher inflation and transport costs raise the real price of schooling. Even where primary education is officially free, families still pay for uniforms, books, exam fees, informal levies and transport costs that disproportionately push poor families to keep girls at home when budgets tighten. The cost of education is therefore a significant factor contributing to girls' deprivation of schooling and the increasing dropout rate among the girl-child, largely as a result of prevailing economic hardship in the country As Mahuta (2003) argues that, the cost of sending child to school such as: school fees, levies, cost of uniform, text books, and examination fees, all gather together become problematic to lower working class parentage.

Increased Child Labour: Economic pressure pushes girls into hawking, street vending, and domestic labour. Child labour reduces study time, increases absenteeism, and exposes girls to risks such as abuse and exploitation.

Influence of Positive Economic Reform on Girl's Education (AGILE)

Positive economic reforms in Nigeria's education system are likely to lead to increased access to education for the girl-child. Social protection and targeted mitigation (cash transfers, AGILE) Cash transfers and targeted programme aimed at adolescent girls can offset household income losses and incentivize continued school attendance. Nigeria has restarted and scaled up cash-transfer efforts and donors (World Bank) have financed large adolescent girls programmes (AGILE) to expand secondary opportunities. Evidence from conditional cash transfer evaluations shows positive short-term effects on enrollment when implemented at scale and combined with supply-side improvements. The World Bank is supporting the Federal Government of Nigeria to implement the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) to reduce gender gap in secondary education attendance and completion rates and labour market transition among adolescent girls. The proposed project development objective is to improve secondary education opportunities among girls in targeted areas in participating states. The AGILE project is a multi-sectoral approach to overcome these challenges. Recognizing the importance of female education in Nigeria will support increased economic growth, higher productivity and earnings, reduce poverty at household levels, reduce gender inequality, promote economic competitiveness, lower infant and child mortality as well as maternal mortality rates through increased awareness/enlightenment and improved health and nutrition. World Bank (2020).

These reforms can address the financial barriers and other socioeconomic factors that currently hinder girls' access to education. By improving the overall quality and availability of education, these reforms can empower girls and contribute to both their individual development and the nation's economic progress. With positive economic reforms it can impact girl-child educational opportunity through achieving the following:

Removal of Financial Barriers (Affordability Effect): Economic reforms that improve the overall economic situation in Nigeria can alleviate poverty, which is a significant barrier to education for many families. When families have more resources, they are more likely to send their daughters to school. As Effiom et al (2021) revealed that poverty has become the 'boss' with the help of corruption determining who should go to school and who should not. Poverty determines children's fate and future development trajectories for families. So, with positive economic reform it will help in alleviating poverty which as a result will reduce financial barrier. Like for example AGILE financial incentives directly reduce opportunity cost, encouraging parents to keep girl-child in school rather than withdraw them for domestic work or marriage.

Increased Investment in Education: Positive economic reforms can lead to increased government investment in education, including building more schools, providing better resources, and attracting and retaining qualified teachers. This can create a more conducive learning environment for all students, including girls. According to Ember (2020) investing in education, particularly in quality education at all levels, can lead to increased human capital, improved productivity, and enhanced global competitiveness. This, in turn, can foster innovation, reduce income inequality, and ultimately drive economic recovery and advancement.

Improved infrastructure can significantly increase girls' access to education in rural areas by addressing key barriers such as distance to school, lack of safe transportation, and inadequate facilities. Differences in urban and rural areas are significant. Individuals in rural areas often face significant challenges in accessing quality education, leading to lower levels of academic achievement and a lack of opportunities for personal development.

Challenge Traditional Gender Roles Stereotype: Changing household decision-making. Positive economic reforms can also help to challenge traditional gender roles and promote the value of educating girls, leading to greater societal support for girls' education, by creating new opportunities and shifting societal expectations related to work, income, and family roles. As reported by (Jatau,2008) gender roles in home and society are stereotyped with the girls made to do the greater proportion of house work. Parents tend to give priority to the schooling of boys, rather than girls, especially in large families where funds are insufficient to enroll all children.

Empowerment of Women: Education is a powerful tool for empowerment, providing girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to participate fully in society and make informed decisions about their lives (UNESCO, 2020). When girls have access to education, they are more likely to be empowered to make their own decisions, participate in the economy, and contribute to their communities. This can lead to a virtuous cycle of empowerment and development, benefiting both the girls and the nation. Research indicates that girls who receive quality education are more likely to delay marriage, have fewer and healthier children, and increase their earning potential, which collectively contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty (World Bank, 2018).

Dauda (2013) argues that, in recent times, Nigerian women have been contributing significantly to the development of the various sectors in economy. Many women have been able to distinguish themselves in major cooperation's such as Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE), the National Agency for Food Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and in marketing. This new development has given rise to call for the education of women in the country because, education raises women's productivity and

creativity and promote entrepreneurship. Empowering girls through education can lead to several economic benefits as cited by (Yerima, 2024) such as: Workforce Participation, entrepreneurship and innovation, and poverty reduction.

In conclusion reforms like AGILE are a welcome development to girl-child education providing them with enough resources and infrastructures across the nation. So also, female education is not just a matter of gender equality; it is an economic imperative. In Nigeria, educating girls can unleash a wave of positive change, driving economic growth, reducing poverty, and fostering sustainable development. And introducing programs like AGILE can change the future of a girl-child in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The government should strengthen fiscal reforms by increasing budgetary allocation to education, with specific provisions for the girl-child to ensure not only enrollment but, retention and completion. This can include; scholarships, free uniforms and books, and school feeding programmes for girls from low-income households. By reducing the direct and indirect cost of schooling, such economic reforms will ease financial pressure on families and improve enrolment, retention, and completion rates for girls, especially in rural and poor communities.
2. Economic reforms should include education subsidies, as targeted subsidies on transportation and school infrastructure in disadvantaged areas can help improve girl-child access to schools.

Conclusion

Positive economic reforms can create a more equitable and inclusive environment for girls' educational opportunity, leading to increased access to education and contributing to the country's overall development, because with the current economic reform in Nigeria today not only girls' education is at risk but the country at large, because poverty has caused tremendous damage to people lives in Nigeria and deprived them of their basic needs in life. Factors that stands as restrain to girls' educational accessibility which serves as educational barriers that introduce educational inequality resulting in gender disparity in education can be fought through effective economic reform in general not only in educational sector which will later benefit not only the women but nation at large. Economic reform can greatly improve the educational sector if it is design justly with effective implementation with transparency and accountability.

References

Adeniran, A., & Sidiq, B. (2018). Economic reforms, inequality, and poverty in Nigeria. *Journal of Development Policy*, 12(3), 44–59.

Afolayan, F. (2019). Gender inequality and educational disparities in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), 15–27.

Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Dauda, S. O. R (2013). Does Female Education Promote Performance? Evidence from Nigeria. *International Journal of Economic and Finance*, 5(1), 16-21.

Effiom, B. E., Undiyaundeye, F. A. & Akpama, E. G. (2021). Dynamics of Poverty and Implications on the education of the girl child in Nigeria. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*, 5(9), 89 – 98.

Ezuem, M. D., & Agada, P (2024). Effect of fuel subsidy removal on Nigeria's standard and cost of living (A Case Study of Taraba State). International Journal of Economic and Financial Management (IJEFM) E-ISSN 2545-5966 Vol.9(2)

Fafunwa, A.B (2002). *History of education in Nigeria*. London, George Allen and Uwin.

Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*. London: Polity Press.

Haralombos, M. & Holborn, M. (2013). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives*, 8th Edition. London:

IMF. (2023). *Nigeria: Staff report for the Article IV consultation*. International Monetary Fund.

International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2023) Structural reforms and economic performance. https://www.imf.org

Jatau, A. A. (2008). Implications of Educational Reforms For the Education of the Girl-Child in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education*. 11 (2), 89-94.

Melpa, J. (2022). Social and cultural barriers must be addressed to support girls' rights to education in Papua New Guinea. The National Research Institute of Papua. New Guinea.

Mir, H. A. & Swroopa, P. K (2024) Women Education in India: Issues and Challenges. *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*, 1(3), 87-99. ISSN: 2583-735

Mouhmmd, L. T., Rahima, M. A., Mohammed, A. M., Hasan, H. F., Alwan, A. S., & Sharaf, H. K. (2023). The effect of firm type on the relationship between accounting quality and trade credit in listed firms. *Corporate and Business Strategy Review*, 4(2), 175–183.

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2023). Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index Report.

Psacharopoulos, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2018). Returns to Investment in Education: A Decennial Review of the Global Literature. *Education Economics*, 26(5), 445–458.

UNICEF, (2022) Educational Opportunities for Girls in Nigeria. UNICEF

UNICEF. (2022). Girls' Education Project (GEP3) outcomes in Northwestern Nigeria. radionigeriakaduna.gov.ng

United Nations Children's Fund. (2022). Girls' education. https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2020). The role of education in achieving sustainable development. *UNESCO Education Series*, 5, 1-20.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). Education for girls and women. https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education

World Bank, (2018). The impact of girls' education on economic growth and development. *World Bank Education Papers*, 23, 15-30.

World Bank. (2020). Economic reform and growth. https://www.worldbank.org

World Bank. (2020). Stakeholder Engagement Plan
Adolescent Girls Initiative Learning and Empowerment Project (AGILE) (P170664).

Yerima, A. (2024) Educating Girls, Empowering a Nation: The Impact of Female Education on Economic Growth in Yobe State, Nigeria.https://nigeria.savethechildren.net

THE 'JAPA' SYNDROME AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CAUSES, IMPACTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA.

Muhammed, Shamsuddeen Alhassan & Garba, Hussaina Kanoma

Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education and Extension Services
Usmanu Danfodiyyo University Sokoto. Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigates the sociological dimensions of the "Japa" syndrome, a term derived from Yoruba meaning "to flee," which describes the recent surge in Nigerians, notably skilled professionals and graduates, emigrating in pursuit of better opportunities abroad. The phenomenon is driven by deteriorating socio-economic conditions, insecurity, and poor governance in Nigeria. The research explores the structural and individual-level factors propelling this emigration and its subsequent impacts on Nigerian society and its economy. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing secondary data from scholarly articles, migration reports, and policy documents. Sociological theories, including the push-pull theory and structural functionalism, were used to analyze migration patterns and motivations. The analyzed data identifies the causes, effects, and responses to the wave of migration. The study reveals that the primary drivers of the "Japa" syndrome include unemployment, underemployment, insecurity, and the aspiration for improved living standards. The consequences of this emigration are mixed; while remittances contribute to household incomes and the national GDP, Nigeria experiences a significant brain drain, particularly in critical sectors like health and education. It concludes that current government policies are largely reactive. To effectively address the "Japa" trend, Nigeria needs to implement comprehensive socio-economic reforms and develop youth-focused policies that enhance security, create job opportunities, and improve governance. Without such interventions, this syndrome may continue to hinder national development.

Keywords: Japa Syndrome, International Migration and Brain Drain.

Introduction

International migration has long been a feature of global demographic shifts, but in recent years, a notable trend has emerged among Nigerians seeking to migrate for economic, political, and educational opportunities, popularly referred to as the 'Japa' syndrome. Derived from the Yoruba word meaning "to run or flee," the 'Japa' phenomenon encapsulates the wave of emigration, particularly among youths and skilled professionals, as they pursue greener pastures abroad. This paper explores the sociological perspectives surrounding the causes, impacts, and implications of this migration trend, drawing on relevant sociological theories to provide a comprehensive understanding.

Conceptual Clarification

Japa

Japa is a novel term used by Nigerians to describe the outmigration trend of Nigerians into Europe and other parts of the world. At recent Youths in Business Forum, a French Ambassador curiously quizzed one of the Nigerian youths to understand the context and meaning of *japa*, as popularly used in the country. In response, Peter Dingba, a Nigerian youth, averred that it is 'a word that describes the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerians; in that same word, it means that Nigerians want to export their contents, gifts, skills, and products, including themselves'. This goes to say that *japa*

is a 'self-exportation' of Nigerians abroad. According to Toyin, (2022) sees *Japa* as a Yoruba word that means to flee, and once achieved, a celebration comes with it as it feels more like gaining freedom at last (Premium Times, 2022) in (Okunade and Awosusi 2023).

Thus, *japa* means 'fleeing' beyond the shores of Nigeria. That is, deploying any migration strategy (regular or irregular) to escape from Nigeria's territory to other parts of the world. Although the term "Japa" is novel in academic literature and public discourse, the phenomenon it describes is far from new. Historically, Nigerians have long engaged in various forms of migration both regular and irregular as a response to socio-economic and political challenges. What distinguishes the "Japa" narrative is not the act of emigration itself, but the visibility and intensity of the current wave, amplified by social media, global mobility, and the official nature of most departures through international air routes. These recent patterns have merely rebranded an age-long survival strategy that has characterized the Nigerian experience for decades.

The "Japa" syndrome, often associated with skilled professionals acquiring student or work visas to exit Nigeria through formal channels, mirrors the motivations of irregular migration patterns observed since the late 1980s. During that era, economic crises, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), and political instability prompted many Nigerians to emigrate illegally through desert routes and perilous Mediterranean crossings. These irregular migrants, though often undocumented and invisible in national discourse, were also reacting to systemic failures which are similar to today's migrants. However, because these routes were clandestine, they failed to attract the cultural and media attention that "Japa" now commands. Furthermore, irregular migration continues to occur alongside the "Japa" phenomenon, particularly among those who lack the financial or educational capital to pursue formal migration pathways. Many youths from Northern and Eastern Nigeria still attempt to reach Europe via Libya, facing human trafficking, exploitation, and violence. These forms of migration are rarely associated with the "Japa" label, yet they are driven by the same structural push factors: unemployment, insecurity, poverty, and a lack of faith in governance. Unfortunately, public discourse and policy frameworks tend to treat "Japa" as a distinct, middle-class concern, while ignoring the ongoing plight of irregular migrants and the systemic conditions enabling both.

In this light, "Japa" should not be viewed as a new or isolated phenomenon but rather as a contemporary expression of Nigeria's long-standing migration culture. By limiting analysis to formal exits through airports and embassies, scholars and policymakers risk overlooking the broader spectrum of mobility patterns and the underlying socio-political forces driving them. Hence, more holistic approach must recognize "Japa" as part of Nigeria's migration continuum one that includes regular and irregular routes, skilled and unskilled migrants, and urban and rural realities.

Migration.

Migration is an integral part of human history. Human beings have been moving from place to place for social, economic, or political reasons from their earliest days (Koser 2016). Broadly, migration is usually explained in terms of time and space. It is defined as the movement of people that involves a change in usual residence across an administrative boundary such as a village, town, vcxz32ae56t3 district, or country (Kok 1999). Migration can be in the form of immigration, which is described as the number of people entering a receiving area, or emigration, which refers to the flow of people from a country over a given period of time (UNHCR 2018a).

Moreover, there are two types of migration: internal, when migrants move within their country; and international migration, a situation in which migrants live outside of their country of birth for at least one year (Poulain and Perrin 2001). Therefore, the term "migrant" comprises a wide range of people, including those who are forced into exile, and this connects to the idea that people migrate voluntarily or involuntarily for socio-economic and political reasons (Bauman 1996; Kempf 2006; Batista-Pinto Wiese 2010) cited in (Samson 2023). Some people migrate voluntarily; these are referred to as "Tourists" in Bauman's (1996) terms. Nevertheless, many are forced to leave their country due to war,

persecution, and extreme economic hardships in their home countries (UNHCR 2018b).

Causes and Motivations of 'Japa'

There are several reasons and factors that alter/motivate the causes of *japa* among which includes:

Economic Factors

One of the key drivers of the 'Japa' syndrome is the pervasive economic hardship experienced in Nigeria, where high unemployment rates and inflationary pressures forces individuals to seek better livelihoods abroad. According to Adepoju (2021), Nigeria's unemployment rate surged to over 33% in 2021, placing significant financial strain on millions of citizens, particularly the youth. The rising cost of living, coupled with stagnant wages, has led to widespread dissatisfaction, prompting many to consider migration as a viable escape from the economic uncertainty in their home country. Inflation, which further erodes the purchasing power of Nigerians, makes it difficult for many to maintain a decent standard of living, pushing them to explore opportunities in more stable economies where they can achieve financial security.

As Ogundele (2019) notes, many graduates struggle to secure employment that aligns with their qualifications, with underemployment becoming a common reality for even highly educated individuals. The mismatch between available job opportunities and the growing pool of qualified professionals contributes to feelings of frustration and disillusionment, motivating many to seek employment abroad where their skills are better valued and compensated.

Social Factors

Social pressures and family expectations play a significant role in shaping migration decisions, particularly within the context of Nigerian society. Many individuals feel the weight of familial responsibility to improve their family's financial situation, especially in extended family systems where collective progress is valued. The aspiration to achieve upward social mobility becomes a driving force for migration, as individuals believe that relocating abroad will enable them to access better living standards and provide support to their families back home.

According to Olatunji (2018), societal norms often equate success with wealth and accomplishments obtained overseas, making migration an attractive option for those hoping to enhance their social standing. In this context, individuals are not only motivated by personal aspirations but also by the expectation to contribute to their family's financial wellbeing and elevate their collective status. The influence of social networks and the diasporas in promoting migration highlights how cultural expectations and the desire for social recognition play a pivotal role in the decision-making process. As a result, migration is often seen not only as a means of personal advancement but as a fulfillment of familial and social obligations.

Political Instability

Political instability in Nigeria, characterized by rampant corruption, insecurity, and lack of trust in governance, significantly contributes to the 'Japa' syndrome. Corruption permeates many aspects of Nigerian society, from public institutions to political leadership, eroding citizens' faith in the ability of the government to provide basic services/needs and maintain order. It creates an environment where public resources are mismanaged, leaving essential sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure underfunded and ineffective. As Okunade and Ogunrotifa (2020) point out, the absence of transparency in political processes and the failure of governance to address critical issues foster widespread disillusionment among the population. Faced with limited opportunities for improvement within their country, many Nigerians see migration as a way to escape the systemic failures of governance and seek stability in more transparent and accountable environments abroad.

Insecurity

Another critical aspect is the political instability that exacerbates the 'Japa' movement. Nigeria has been plagued by persistent threats from terrorism, insurgency, and banditry, particularly

in the northern regions. The rise of groups like Boko Haram and other militant organizations has led to widespread fear and displacement, making everyday life unsafe for many citizens. In addition to terrorism, banditry and kidnapping have become rampant, creating an environment where people feel physically and economically threatened. The government's inability to curb these security challenges has left citizens with little confidence in the state's capacity to protect them. As a result, many individuals, especially young professionals, choose to migrate to countries with better security, governance, and rule of law in pursuit of safety and a more predictable future. The lack of trust in public institutions and the state's failure to provide adequate security and stability thus drive the decision for many Nigerians to relocate in search of better governance and personal safety abroad.

Educational and Professional Opportunities

The quest for better education and professional opportunities is a crucial driver of the 'Japa' syndrome, particularly as Nigeria's educational system struggles with underfunding, outdated curricula, and inadequate infrastructure. Many students and professionals feel that the academic environment in Nigeria does not provide the necessary resources to achieve their full potential. According to Ogundipe (2022), a shortage of modern research facilities and insufficient funding for educational programs in Nigerian universities has created significant barriers to academic growth. As a result, students are often unable to access cutting-edge technology, laboratories, or research opportunities, limiting their ability to compete in a globalized knowledge economy. This educational inadequacy pushes many individuals to seek higher education abroad, where institutions in developed countries offer better academic resources, funding opportunities, and global networks that foster innovation and career advancement.

In addition to the limitations within the Nigerian educational system, professional development and career advancement are also severely restricted. Many Nigerian professionals, especially in fields such as healthcare, engineering, and academia, are unable to find employment opportunities that match their qualifications or provide adequate career growth. The dearth of opportunities for continuing education, professional certification, and skills training further compounds the issue. Professionals often face stagnant career paths, with limited prospects for promotions, salary increments, or further specialization. This lack of career mobility encourages the 'Japa' movement, as individuals seek not only academic advancement but also the opportunity to grow professionally in more dynamic environments. Countries with advanced educational and professional systems, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, offer avenues for higher learning and professional achievement that are often inaccessible in Nigeria. Thus, the desire for both quality education and professional development fuels the ongoing migration trend, as individuals aim to realize their potential in more supportive environments.

Theoretical Perspectives on Migration

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the role of interpersonal networks and relationships in shaping migration decisions and outcomes. Migrants rely on social capital such as connections with family, friends, and Diasporas communities to navigate the often-challenging process of moving to and settling in a foreign country. These networks provide essential support, including information about job opportunities, housing, and legal requirements, reducing the risks and uncertainties associated with migration. Portes and Rumbaut (2016) argue that social capital significantly lowers the costs of migration, both financially and emotionally, as individuals are able to rely on established contacts that have already experienced the migration process. In the context of the 'Japa' syndrome, many Nigerians who migrate do so with the help of social capital, as they tap into existing networks in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. These connections are vital in securing employment, accessing educational opportunities, and navigating the legal and bureaucratic processes in host countries.

Nigerians in the Diasporas, for example, have formed robust networks that assist new migrants with everything from finding accommodation to navigating the local job market. This support system makes the migration process smoother and less daunting for those embarking on the 'Japa' journey. Studies have shown that migrants who have strong social ties in the host country are more likely to succeed in finding employment and integrating into society (Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021).

Push-Pull Theory

The push-pull theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the 'Japa' syndrome by highlighting the factors that compel individuals to leave their home country (push factors) and those that attract them to another country (pull factors). In the case of Nigeria, push factors such as widespread unemployment, underemployment, and economic instability are particularly potent. Many individuals, particularly young graduates, find themselves without adequate job opportunities that match their qualifications, leading to frustration and disillusionment. Political instability, corruption, and insecurity further exacerbate these conditions, creating an environment where individuals feel unsafe and unable to achieve their aspirations. These push factors, in essence; create a hostile environment that forces individuals to consider emigration as a viable alternative to improve their standard of living and personal safety.

On the other hand, pull factors in host countries offer a stark contrast to the conditions experienced in Nigeria. Developed nations such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and several European countries offer better job prospects, higher wages, and greater career development opportunities. For instance, many Nigerian professionals are drawn to the healthcare, engineering, and technology sectors in these countries, where their skills are highly valued and remunerated more competitively. Educational advantages, such as access to world-class universities, research facilities, and scholarships, are also significant pull factors that drive migration. According to Lee's (1966) migration model, individuals evaluate these opportunities in relation to the challenges they face at home, often concluding that migrating will result in improved career prospects, economic stability, and an overall better quality of life.

Empirical Studies on 'Japa Syndrome'

The research by Iyasere (2024), titled "Japa Syndrome: Examining the Forced Migration and Exploitative Labor Experiences of Nigerians," looks into the phenomenon of "Japa Syndrome," a term used to describe the modern-day slavery and human trafficking of Nigerians. It notes that individuals, driven by economic desperation, are often deceived with promises of better opportunities abroad but end up in exploitative conditions akin to slavery. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Japa Syndrome, highlighting its manifestations and the urgent need for interventions. It also seeks to inform policymakers, researchers, and activists about the complexities of this issue to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires with 200 respondents across four countries: the UK, the USA, Canada, and South Africa. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had firsthand experience with Japa Syndrome.

The findings of the research indicate that victims of Japa Syndrome face various forms of coercion, including threats of violence, wage withholding, confiscation of legal documents, psychological manipulation, and debt bondage. The respondents also highlighted the different types of exploitation experienced by the victims, such as excessive working hours, physical abuse, and denial of basic human rights. The results of the study further confirm that victims of Japa Syndrome are subjected to exploitative working conditions, including long hours, underpayment, and hazardous work environments. They also experience restrictions on their freedom of movement, communication, and basic rights. Based on the findings, the study recommends the development of targeted policies and

interventions to address Japa Syndrome. These should include measures to combat human trafficking, protect migrant workers, and address the socio-economic factors that make individuals vulnerable to exploitation.

Also, Adediran (2024) conducted a study on the "Japa Syndrome in Nigeria: Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Perspective." The research addresses the significant concern of the Japa syndrome, which affects Nigerians both domestically and internationally across various age groups. The study specifically examines this phenomenon from the viewpoint of pre-service Social Studies teachers. The study aims to investigate the Japa syndrome in Nigeria. To achieve this, the research formulates two research questions and two research hypotheses. The study seeks to understand the perceptions of pre-service Social Studies teachers on the Japa syndrome in Oyo State, Nigeria, and to explore the influence of gender on these perspectives.

The research employed a cross-sectional survey design, focusing on Social Studies teachers within the study area. The population of the study comprised pre-service Social Studies instructors in Oyo State. The sample size for the analysis was 141, drawn from a total population of 567 individuals, using a purposive sampling technique. However, another mention of sample size used 200 respondents. Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire titled "Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Perspective on Japa Syndrome in Nigeria (PSSSTPJSN)." The questionnaire, developed from a review of relevant academic literature and modified with a four-point Likert scale, was validated by experts in Social Studies Education and Test and Measurement. The reliability coefficient index for the questionnaire was determined to be 0.75. The data analysis involved frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation to address the research questions. The study also utilized the independent samples t-test to examine the null hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05.

The study's findings revealed various challenges encountered by research instructors, including a lack of foresight and observation, inadequate financing, unavoidable contamination and mismanagement, insufficient community cooperation and awareness, a lack of coherence, and overly ambitious plans. In response to these findings, the study recommends enhancing political and economic conditions in Nigeria to mitigate the emigration of Nigerians. It further suggests that the Nigerian government should prioritize addressing mobility issues, increasing job opportunities, creating a conducive environment to discourage emigration and encourage repatriation, resolving challenges in public institutions and infrastructure, and promoting economic growth.

Conclusion

The 'Japa' syndrome reflects a complex interplay of economic, social, political, and educational factors that drive large-scale migration from Nigeria and other developing countries. It is emblematic of broader global migration trends where individuals seek better opportunities and improved living conditions abroad, often leaving behind challenging conditions in their home countries. Through the lens of sociological theories such as the Social Capital Theory, Push-Pull Theory and World-Systems Theory, we gain insights into the motivations behind migration and the consequences for both sending and receiving countries. The impacts of this phenomenon are far-reaching, affecting the labor market, social fabric, economic development, and cultural dynamics in both origin and destination nations. While migration brings remittances and opportunities, it also results in brain drain and social dislocation, necessitating comprehensive policy responses.

Recommendations

The following are some of the recommendations proposed:

1. **Promote Sustainable Development:** The Nigerian government and other developing nations should prioritize sustainable development, focusing on reducing economic inequality, creating job opportunities, and improving infrastructure. International cooperation can play a key role in supporting these efforts, especially through targeted investment in education and healthcare.
2. **Strengthen Political Stability and Governance:** Reducing political instability and corruption is crucial for mitigating migration. Governments must

foster transparent governance, enhance security, and promote trust in public institutions to prevent the conditions that push individuals to leave their home countries.

3. **Encourage Return Migration and Reverse Brain Drain:** Policies that incentivize the return of skilled professionals, such as offering competitive salaries, improving working conditions, and providing opportunities for career growth, can help reverse brain drain. Additionally, establishing diaspora engagement programs can facilitate knowledge transfer and investment from migrants back to their home countries.
4. **Enhance Migration Management and Integration Policies:** Receiving countries should implement policies that support the fair integration of migrants into the labor market and society, promoting inclusivity while addressing concerns about job competition. These policies should include robust anti-discrimination measures and cultural assimilation programs to ensure that migrants can contribute positively to their host countries.
5. **Promote Ethical Migration Policies:** Both sending and receiving countries should collaborate on ethical migration policies that respect the rights of migrants, address global inequalities, and create pathways for legal and dignified migration. This includes ensuring that migration does not disproportionately harm the development prospects of sending countries by draining human capital.

References

Adediran, K. O. (2024). Japa Syndrome In Nigeria: Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' perspective. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, *27*(1), 64-83.

Adepoju, A. (2021). *Migration in West Africa: Patterns, Issues, and Prospects*. London: Routledge.

Batista-Pinto Wiese, E. (2010). Culture and Migration: Psychological Trauma in Children and Adolescents. *Traumatology*, 16(4), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765610388304

Bauman, Z. (1996). *From Pilgrim to Tourist or a Short History of Identity*. In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 18–36). SAGE Publications.

Bilecen, B. & Lubbers, M. J. (2021). The Ambivalent Role of Social Networks in Migrants' Labor Market Integration: A Comparative Perspective. *Social Networks*, 66, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2021.01.004

Iyasere, A. O. J. (2024). Japa Syndrome: Examining The Forced Migration and Exploitative Labor Experiences of Nigerians: Global Lessons on Forced Migration and Slavery. *Journal of Peace Studies and Practice*, *13*(2), 143-156.

Kok, P. (1999). The Definition of Migration and its Application: Making Sense of Recent South African Census and Survey Data. *South African Journal of Demography*, 7(1), 19–30.

Koser, K. (2016). *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lee, E. S. (1966). A Theory of Migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47–57. https://doi.org/ 10.2307/2060063

Ogundele, M. (2019). Youth Unemployment and Underemployment in Nigeria: The Role of Entrepreneurship Education. *Journal of Business and Economic Development*, 4(2), 73–81.

Ogundipe, A. (2022). Challenges in Nigeria's Higher Education Sector: Implications for National Development. *African Educational Research Journal*, 10(1), 24–32.

Okunade, S. K., & Awosusi, O. (2023). "Japa": A Contemporary Wave of Brain Drain in Nigeria's Migration Discourse. *African Migration Review*, 12(1), 45–67.

Okunade, S. K. & Ogunrotifa, A. B. (2020). Governance Failure and the Resurgence of Irregular Migration in Nigeria. *African Studies Quarterly*, 19(4), 85–104.

Olatunji, M. (2018). Social Pressure and Migration Decisions among Nigerian Youth. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 9(1), 12–19.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2016). *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (4th ed.). University of California Press.

Poulain, M., & Perrin, N. (2001). The Measurement of International Migration: Achievements and Challenges. *International Migration Review*, 35(2), 470–484. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2001.tb00025.x

Premium Times. (2022, November 3). *Understanding 'Japa': What it means to Nigerian Youths Today*. Retrieved from https://www.premiumtimesng.com/

Samson, T. (2023). Dynamics of Migration and Displacement in Contemporary Africa. *African Migration Studies Journal*, 5(2), 104–128.

UNHCR. (2018a). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2017*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR. (2018b). *Desperate journeys: Refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and at Europe's borders*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

World Bank. (2022). Migration and Remittances Factbook 2022. *World Bank Group*.

World Health Organization (WHO), (2022). Healthcare Workforce Statistics for Nigeria. WHO Global Health Observatory.

EDUCATION–LABOUR MARKET DISCONNECT AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF POLICY, SKILLS, AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Solomon Bodang Goteng
Department of Educational Foundations,
Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State

Abstract
Youth unemployment remains one of the most critical socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria despite the expansion of educational opportunities and the introduction of several government employment interventions. This paper examines the education–labour market disconnect and youth unemployment in Nigeria from a sociological perspective, focusing on policy inadequacies, skills mismatch, and structural constraints. The study argues that the persistent rise in graduate unemployment reflects deeper institutional and structural dysfunctions within the Nigerian educational system and labour market. Drawing on Structural Functionalist Theory, Conflict Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the paper explains how curriculum irrelevance, weak school–industry collaboration, educational inequality, poor funding, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and limited economic diversification contribute to the inability of the education system to produce employable graduates. The paper further highlights how social inequalities based on class, gender, and geographic location shape access to quality education and employment opportunities. Current labour statistics indicate that unemployment and underemployment remain disproportionately high among Nigerian youths despite increasing educational attainment. The study also reviews government initiatives such as N-Power, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes, noting that their impact has been limited due to poor implementation, inadequate funding, and weak institutional coordination. The paper concludes that addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria requires comprehensive educational reforms, curriculum restructuring, equitable access to quality education, improved technical and entrepreneurial skills acquisition, stronger school–industry partnerships, and sustainable economic policies capable of generating productive employment opportunities for youths.

Keywords: Education, Labour Market Disconnect, Youth Unemployment, Skills Acquisition and Structural Constraints

Introduction

Youth unemployment has remained one of the most persistent socio-economic challenges confronting contemporary Nigeria despite the expansion of educational opportunities and repeated government interventions aimed at job creation. The increasing number of graduates entering the labour market without corresponding employment opportunities has raised concerns about the disconnect between the educational system and labour market demands. This mismatch has contributed significantly to poverty, social exclusion, insecurity, underemployment, and the growing frustration among Nigerian youths. In many cases, graduates possess academic qualifications but lack the practical, technological, entrepreneurial, and employability skills required in the modern labour market, thereby widening the gap between schooling and productive employment.

Nigeria possesses one of the largest youth populations in Africa, with youths constituting a substantial proportion of the country's labour force. However, the economy has been unable to absorb the increasing number of graduates produced annually by tertiary institutions. Recent labour statistics

indicate that unemployment and underemployment remain major concerns among young people, especially those between the ages of 15 and 34 years. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), Nigeria's unemployment rate increased to 5.3% in the first quarter of 2024, while youth unemployment among persons aged 15–24 years stood at 8.4%. The report further revealed that unemployment was higher among individuals with post-secondary education, suggesting that educational attainment no longer guarantees employment opportunities in Nigeria. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization noted that youth employment challenges in developing countries are increasingly linked to structural inequalities, skills deficits, and labour market transitions that fail to integrate young people effectively into productive work (International Labour Organization, 2023)

The education–labour market disconnect in Nigeria is manifested in several dimensions. First, there is a persistent mismatch between the curriculum of many educational institutions and the practical needs of industries and employers. Educational institutions often emphasize theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational, digital, and entrepreneurial competencies required in a rapidly changing economy. Consequently, many graduates are considered unemployable despite possessing certificates and degrees. Second, weak collaboration between educational institutions and industries has limited opportunities for internship training, industrial attachment, innovation, and work-based learning. Third, structural problems such as poor economic diversification, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, weak industrial growth, insecurity, and limited private-sector expansion continue to restrict employment generation in the country.

From a sociological perspective, youth unemployment cannot be understood merely as an economic problem; rather, it reflects deeper structural inequalities and institutional dysfunctions within society. Structural Functionalist Theory, associated with Émile Durkheim and later developed by Talcott Parsons, explains that education serves as a mechanism for role allocation and skills transmission necessary for societal stability. However, when the educational system fails to equip individuals with relevant labour market skills, social disequilibrium emerges in the form of unemployment, poverty, and deviant behaviours. Similarly, Conflict Theory, advanced by Karl Marx, argues that unemployment and unequal access to economic opportunities are products of structural inequalities embedded within capitalist systems. In Nigeria, access to employment opportunities is often influenced by political patronage, social class, ethnicity, and economic inequality rather than merit and competence, thereby marginalizing many qualified youths.

Human Capital Theory also provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between education and employment. The theory posits that investment in education and skills development enhances individuals' productivity and employability. However, the Nigerian experience demonstrates that educational expansion without corresponding labour market reforms and economic opportunities may not necessarily translate into employment generation. Thus, despite increased enrolment in tertiary education, graduate unemployment continues to rise due to structural constraints within the economy.

Several empirical studies have examined youth unemployment in Nigeria from economic, educational, and policy perspectives. Existing studies have focused on issues such as skills mismatch, vocational education, entrepreneurship development, educational quality, and labour market reforms. Nevertheless, many of these studies have concentrated largely on economic indicators and policy discussions with limited sociological interrogation of how structural constraints, social institutions, inequality, and policy failures interact to sustain unemployment among youths. In addition, there remains inadequate attention to the relationship between educational curricula, labour market realities, and the socio-cultural dimensions of employability in Nigeria. Moreover, the rapid transformation of labour demands due to globalization, technological advancement, and digital economies has further exposed gaps in

existing educational structures and employment policies.

Although government programmes such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), N-Power, Youth Entrepreneurship Support schemes, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiatives have been introduced to address youth unemployment, the impact of these interventions has remained limited due to poor implementation, inadequate funding, weak institutional coordination, and policy inconsistencies. Empirical evidence suggests that many youth-employment programmes in Nigeria suffer from governance and implementation challenges that reduce their effectiveness in addressing long-term unemployment problems. (Omoju, Ikhide, Olanrele, Abeng, Petreski, Adebayo, Odigie, & Muhammed, 2023)

It is against this background that this paper discusses the education–labour market disconnect and youth unemployment in Nigeria through a sociological lens, with particular attention to policy inadequacies, skills mismatch, and structural constraints. The study intends to contribute to existing literature by providing a comprehensive sociological understanding of how educational systems, labour market institutions, and broader socio-economic structures interact to shape youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Overview of Nigeria's Education System

Nigeria operates a 9–3–4 system of education, comprising nine years of basic education (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education), three years of senior secondary education, and four years of tertiary education. The system is supervised by the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with state ministries, while agencies such as the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), National Universities Commission (NUC), and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) regulate different educational levels. Despite reforms aimed at expanding access and improving quality, the education sector continues to face serious structural and sociological challenges that affect employment outcomes among Nigerian youths (Bayere, Michael, Blessing, & Deborah, 2025).

From a sociological perspective, education is viewed as both a tool for social mobility and a mechanism for social stratification. Functionalist theorists argue that education equips individuals with skills necessary for economic productivity and societal integration, while conflict theorists maintain that educational systems often reproduce inequality by favoring privileged social groups. In Nigeria, unequal access to quality education based on class, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location has contributed significantly to youth unemployment and labour market exclusion (Ekpenyong, Ukommi, & Agha, 2019).

One major challenge confronting Nigeria's education system is educational inequality. Access to quality education differs sharply between urban and rural areas, as well as between wealthy and poor households. Public schools in many rural communities suffer from inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, poor learning facilities, and limited technological resources. Consequently, students from disadvantaged backgrounds often acquire lower-quality education and fewer employable skills than their counterparts in elite private institutions. This inequality limits their competitiveness in the labour market and increases the likelihood of unemployment and underemployment. (Datti, Agboola, Gawuna, & Adebowale, 2024).

Another critical issue is the disconnect between educational curricula and labour market demands. Nigerian schools and universities have frequently been criticized for emphasizing theoretical knowledge and certificate acquisition rather than practical and technical competencies required in contemporary industries. Many graduates therefore leave school without entrepreneurial, digital, vocational, and problem-solving skills needed for employment. This mismatch contributes to the growing number of unemployed graduates in the country (Virk, Nelson, & Dele-Adedeji, 2024).

Sociologically, this disconnect reflects the problem of structural inequality and institutional failure. The labour market

increasingly demands technological competence, innovation, and adaptability, yet educational institutions remain underfunded and poorly equipped to provide such training. Youths from affluent families often compensate through private tutoring, international education, and professional networks, whereas students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds lack these opportunities. As a result, social class continues to shape employment prospects and occupational mobility in Nigeria (Ekpenyong, Ukommi, & Agha, 2019).

The issue of access and stratification is also evident in tertiary education admissions. Competition for university admission remains extremely high due to limited institutional capacity. Many qualified candidates are unable to secure admission annually, thereby increasing the number of idle youths vulnerable to unemployment, crime, and social exclusion. In sociological terms, this represents institutional stratification where access to higher education and ultimately formal employment is unevenly distributed across social groups (Kafayat, Adedapo, & Durojaiye, 2025).

Furthermore, inadequate funding has weakened the quality of teaching and learning in Nigerian institutions. Frequent strikes, obsolete facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and low staff motivation negatively affect students' academic preparation. Employers consequently perceive many graduates as unemployable because they lack practical experience and industry-relevant competencies. This contributes directly to graduate unemployment and the expansion of informal employment among youths (Omoju, Ikhide, Olanrele, Abeng, Petreski, Adebayo, Odigie, & Muhammed, 2023).

Gender and regional disparities also shape educational and employment outcomes. In some northern parts of Nigeria, sociocultural practices, poverty, insecurity, and early marriage limit girls' educational participation. Reduced educational attainment among women subsequently restricts their access to formal employment and economic empowerment. Similarly, insecurity caused by insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts disrupts schooling and weakens human capital development in affected regions. In addition, sociologists emphasize that education should facilitate social mobility and national development. However, the persistence of youth unemployment despite increasing educational attainment has created frustration and declining confidence in the education system. Many young Nigerians now perceive education as insufficient for economic success because employment opportunities are limited and often influenced by social connections, corruption, and political patronage rather than merit. This situation undermines the motivational role of education in society and contributes to social disillusionment among youths (Ekpenyong, Ukommi, & Agha, 2019).

Overall, Nigeria's education system remains central to national development, but persistent inequalities, poor funding, curriculum irrelevance, and structural constraints continue to weaken its ability to produce employable graduates. Addressing these sociological and institutional challenges through equitable access, curriculum reform, skills acquisition, and stronger school-industry partnerships is essential for reducing youth unemployment and promoting sustainable socioeconomic development in Nigeria (Kafayat, Adedapo, & Durojaiye, 2025).

Youth Unemployment: Current Trends and Statistics in Nigeria

Youth unemployment has remained one of the most persistent socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria in recent years. Despite Nigeria's large youthful population and abundant human resources, a significant proportion of young people remain unemployed, underemployed, or trapped in precarious informal work. Sociologically, youth unemployment reflects deeper structural inequalities embedded within the economic, educational, and political systems of the country. It is not merely an individual failure to secure employment but a manifestation of marginalization, structural exclusion, and unequal access to opportunities.

Recent labour statistics indicate fluctuating unemployment trends among Nigerian youths. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 5.3% in the first quarter of 2024, while youth unemployment among persons aged 15–24 years stood at 8.4% during the same period. The unemployment rate

declined slightly to 6.5% in the second quarter of 2024, though underemployment and informal employment remained significantly high (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). These figures, however, do not fully capture the realities of disguised unemployment, irregular work, and survivalist economic activities prevalent among Nigerian youths.

From a sociological perspective, these statistics reveal structural exclusion within the labour market. Many young Nigerians are educated but remain excluded from meaningful employment opportunities due to weak industrial growth, inadequate job creation, corruption, and poor economic planning. The situation aligns with the structural-functionalist argument that societal institutions such as education and the economy are failing to perform their integrative functions effectively. Consequently, the education system produces graduates whose skills do not align with labour market demands, leading to widespread frustration and social dislocation.

The high rate of youth unemployment also demonstrates the phenomenon of social marginalization. Young people, especially graduates, increasingly experience exclusion from economic participation and decision-making processes. The transition from school to work has become prolonged and uncertain, forcing many youths into low-paying informal jobs, street trading, digital hustling, and temporary labour. Sociologically, this reflects labour market segmentation where access to stable employment is unevenly distributed along lines of class, location, social networks, and educational privilege.

Furthermore, unemployment trends in Nigeria show disparities based on gender, educational attainment, and geographical location. NBS reports indicate that unemployment rates are generally higher among females than males, and urban youth experience higher unemployment levels than rural youth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This demonstrates how structural inequalities and patriarchal systems shape access to economic opportunities. Female youths often face double marginalization arising from gender discrimination and limited economic empowerment, while urban youths confront intense competition for limited formal sector jobs.

Another critical trend is the expansion of informal employment. Recent reports show that over 90% of employed Nigerians work within the informal sector, where jobs are largely insecure, poorly regulated, and lacking social protection (World Bank, 2023). Sociologically, this indicates the weakening capacity of the formal economy to absorb labour and reflects broader issues of economic dependency and underdevelopment. Many Nigerian youths therefore remain economically active but socially vulnerable due to unstable earnings and lack of employment security.

The rise in youth unemployment has also been linked to increasing poverty, migration, crime, and social unrest. Scholars argue that prolonged unemployment contributes to feelings of alienation, frustration, and social exclusion among youths, thereby increasing susceptibility to deviant behaviours, cybercrime, political violence, drug abuse, and recruitment into insurgent or criminal groups. Empirical evidence further suggests that weak implementation of youth employment policies, inadequate institutional coordination, and political exclusion continue to undermine employment interventions in Nigeria (Nwankwo, Obi, 2020).

In addition, globalization and technological transformation have altered labour market structures in Nigeria. While digital economies and entrepreneurship opportunities have emerged, many youths lack the technological skills, financial capital, and institutional support required to compete effectively. This digital divide further reproduces social inequality and limits upward social mobility among disadvantaged groups.

Although official statistics suggest recent declines in unemployment rates, public reactions and community discussions often question whether these figures reflect actual socio-economic realities. Many citizens argue that underemployment, informal labour, and economic hardship remain widespread despite reported statistical improvements (Akinwale, 2021). Sociologically, this reflects tensions

between official state narratives and lived social experiences, particularly in contexts where economic insecurity remains pervasive.

Overall, youth unemployment in Nigeria remains a multidimensional social problem shaped by structural constraints, institutional weaknesses, demographic pressures, and unequal access to opportunities. Addressing the challenge requires not only economic reforms but also sociological interventions aimed at reducing inequality, strengthening social inclusion, improving educational relevance, and expanding equitable access to productive employment.

Factors Contributing to Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is a multidimensional challenge shaped by interrelated educational, economic, structural, and institutional factors. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact to create a persistent mismatch between the supply of educated youths and the demand of the labour market. A useful way to explain this phenomenon is through a Human Capital Theory framework, which is also consistent with broader sociological interpretations of labour market dysfunction.

One of the most widely discussed factors is the disconnect between education and labour market needs. Nigerian educational institutions often emphasize theoretical knowledge with limited practical and technical skills, producing graduates who are not adequately prepared for employment demands. This supports the Human Capital Theory, which argues that education increases productivity and employability when it aligns with labour market requirements. However, in Nigeria, weak curriculum design and inadequate vocational training reduce the productivity value of schooling, resulting in unemployment among graduates (Sele & Zongo, 2025).

Nigeria's rapidly growing youth population increases the number of job seekers far beyond available opportunities. This demographic pressure intensifies competition for limited jobs and contributes to structural unemployment. Studies show that high population growth, combined with limited job creation, significantly worsens youth unemployment outcomes (Kakwagh, & Ikwuba, 2010).

The Nigerian economy is characterized by overdependence on oil, weak industrial base, limited diversification, low private sector job creation among others. These structural weaknesses restrict the economy's capacity to absorb new entrants into the labour market. Structural unemployment is therefore a long-term issue driven by economic composition rather than individual inability. Research highlights that inadequate economic diversification and weak productive sectors continue to limit employment opportunities for youths (Virk, Nelson, & Dele-Adedeji, 2023). Poor policy implementation, corruption, and weak institutional coordination also contribute significantly to youth unemployment. Many employment programs are fragmented, underfunded, and poorly implemented. Empirical evidence shows that youth employment interventions in Nigeria often lack coherence and long-term sustainability due to governance and institutional constraints (Omoju, Ikhide, Oranrele, Abeng, Petresski, Adebayo, Odigie, & Muhammed, 2023).

There is a persistent mismatch between what employers require and what graduates possess. Employers increasingly demand digital, entrepreneurial, and technical skills, while many graduates lack such competencies. This reinforces the Human Capital Theory argument that productivity depends not only on years of schooling but also on relevant skill acquisition. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; extended in contemporary studies) provides a unifying explanation for youth unemployment in Nigeria. It posits that:

1. Education and training are investments that increase productivity and employability.
2. Where education is misaligned with labour market needs, unemployment becomes inevitable.

In Nigeria's context, weak human capital development is compounded by structural economic weaknesses and governance challenges, producing a cycle of unemployment. Thus, youth unemployment can be understood as the outcome of. This integrated model explains why even educated youths remain

unemployed despite increased school enrollment.

Challenges of the Nigerian Educational System

The Nigerian educational system has continued to face numerous challenges that hinder the achievement of quality, accessible, and functional education. Despite various reforms and policy initiatives introduced by the government, the sector still struggles with structural, financial, administrative, and technological problems that negatively affect teaching and learning outcomes. These challenges have contributed to declining educational standards, poor academic performance, unemployment, insecurity, and underdevelopment in the country.

One of the major challenges confronting the Nigerian educational system is inadequate funding. Education in Nigeria has consistently received low budgetary allocation compared to the benchmark recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Insufficient funding has resulted in poor infrastructure, inadequate instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, and poor maintenance of school facilities. Many public schools operate without functional laboratories, libraries, furniture, and modern learning technologies, thereby affecting the quality of education delivered to learners (Adebayo, 2018).

Another serious challenge is the shortage of qualified teachers and poor teacher welfare. Many schools in Nigeria, especially in rural communities, suffer from inadequate teaching staff and the presence of unqualified teachers. Poor remuneration, irregular payment of salaries, lack of motivation, and limited opportunities for professional development have negatively affected teachers' commitment and productivity. UNESCO reports also indicate that many teachers lack adequate training in modern pedagogical skills and technology integration (UNESCO, 2023).

Poor infrastructural facilities also remain a critical problem in the Nigerian educational system. Many schools are characterized by dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate water supply, poor sanitation, and insufficient learning resources. In tertiary institutions, the lack of modern laboratories, research facilities, internet connectivity, and conducive learning environments has weakened academic excellence and innovation. Poor infrastructure reduces students' motivation and affects effective teaching and learning processes (Ayoko, Peter & Jegede, 2023).

Insecurity has also become a major obstacle to education in Nigeria. The activities of insurgents, bandits, kidnappers, and communal conflicts have led to the destruction of schools and displacement of students and teachers, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Many parents are afraid to send their children to school because of insecurity, leading to increased numbers of out-of-school children. Educational activities are frequently disrupted in conflict-prone areas, thereby affecting academic continuity and national educational development (World Bank, 2022).

Another challenge is the high rate of out-of-school children. Nigeria is among the countries with the highest number of children who are not enrolled in formal education. Factors such as poverty, child labour, early marriage, cultural beliefs, insecurity, and inadequate educational facilities contribute significantly to this problem. The situation is more severe among girls in some rural and northern communities where sociocultural practices discourage female education (World Bank, 2022).

Corruption and poor administration also affect the educational sector negatively. Mismanagement of educational funds, examination malpractice, admission irregularities, certificate forgery, and political interference in educational policies have weakened the credibility and effectiveness of the system. Corruption reduces accountability and diverts resources meant for educational development (Ayoko, Peter & Jegede, 2023).

Frequent strikes by academic and non-academic staff unions constitute another major challenge. Industrial actions in Nigerian tertiary institutions often disrupt academic calendars, delay graduation, and reduce the quality of

education. These strikes are usually linked to poor funding, unpaid salaries, poor working conditions, and disagreements between the government and educational unions. Constant interruptions in academic programmes negatively affect students' learning experiences and career development.

The Nigerian educational system also faces the problem of curriculum mismatch and inadequate skill acquisition. Many graduates lack employable skills because the curriculum is often theoretical rather than practical. The educational system has been criticized for failing to adequately prepare students for the labour market and entrepreneurship. Consequently, many graduates remain unemployed or underemployed after completing their studies. There is increasing concern about the need for vocational, technical, and digital skills education to meet contemporary labour market demands.

Technological challenges further hinder effective education in Nigeria. Although digital learning has become important globally, many Nigerian schools lack access to computers, internet facilities, electricity, and ICT infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weakness of Nigeria's e-learning system as many students could not participate effectively in online learning due to poor internet access and lack of digital devices (Ajayi, Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023).

In conclusion, the Nigerian educational system is confronted with numerous interconnected challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, insecurity, corruption, curriculum deficiencies, and technological limitations. Addressing these challenges requires increased government investment, effective policy implementation, improved teacher welfare, infrastructural development, security enhancement, and integration of practical and digital skills into the curriculum. Sustainable reforms and collaborative efforts among stakeholders are necessary to improve the quality and accessibility of education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Youth unemployment in Nigeria remains a major socio-economic and sociological challenge that reflects deep structural weaknesses within the educational system, labour market, and broader economy. The study revealed that despite the expansion of educational opportunities and government employment interventions, many Nigerian youths continue to experience unemployment, underemployment, and economic exclusion. The persistent disconnect between education and labour market demands has produced graduates who possess academic qualifications but lack practical, vocational, technological, entrepreneurial, and employability skills required in contemporary industries.

The paper further established that the Nigerian educational system is confronted with numerous challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, technological limitations, insecurity, corruption, and educational inequality. These problems weaken the capacity of educational institutions to produce competent and employable graduates. In addition, structural constraints such as poor economic diversification, weak industrial growth, policy inconsistency, corruption, and inadequate private-sector expansion continue to limit employment opportunities for young people.

From a sociological perspective, youth unemployment is not merely an economic issue but a reflection of structural inequality, institutional dysfunction, and social exclusion. Access to quality education and employment opportunities in Nigeria is often influenced by social class, gender, region, ethnicity, and political connections rather than merit and competence. Consequently, many youths experience frustration, poverty, insecurity, migration pressures, and social disillusionment despite increased educational attainment.

The paper also showed that although government initiatives such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), N-Power, Youth Entrepreneurship Support schemes, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes were designed to address unemployment, their impacts have remained limited due to poor implementation, inadequate funding, weak institutional coordination, and corruption. Therefore, addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria requires comprehensive educational reforms,

labour market restructuring, institutional accountability, and sustainable economic policies that promote inclusive growth and productive employment opportunities for youths.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Education–Labour Market Disconnect and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges effectively:

1. Curriculum Reform and Skills Development: The government and educational authorities should reform school curricula at all levels to emphasize practical, vocational, entrepreneurial, digital, and problem-solving skills that align with labour market demands and global technological changes.
2. **Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education**: Greater investment should be made in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes to equip youths with employable and self-reliant skills necessary for industrial and entrepreneurial development.
3. **Improved Funding of Education**: The government should increase budgetary allocation to the education sector in line with UNESCO recommendations to improve infrastructure, instructional materials, research facilities, ICT resources, and quality teaching.
4. **Enhancing School–Industry Collaboration**: Educational institutions should establish stronger partnerships with industries and employers through internship programmes, industrial attachments, apprenticeship schemes, and work-based learning opportunities to bridge the gap between education and employment.
5. **Promotion of Entrepreneurship Education**: Entrepreneurship education should be integrated effectively into educational programmes to encourage self-employment, innovation, and small-scale business development among graduates.
6. **Economic Diversification and Job Creation**: The Nigerian government should diversify the economy beyond the oil sector by promoting agriculture, manufacturing, technology, and creative industries capable of generating sustainable employment opportunities for youths.
7. **Strengthening Policy Implementation and Institutional Coordination**: Government employment programmes should be properly monitored and coordinated to ensure transparency, accountability, continuity, and effective implementation of youth empowerment initiatives.
8. **Addressing Educational Inequality**: Efforts should be made to reduce disparities in access to quality education between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socioeconomic groups, through equitable distribution of educational resources and opportunities.
9. **Improving Teacher Welfare and Capacity Building**: Teachers should receive adequate remuneration, regular training, and professional development opportunities to enhance teaching quality and modern pedagogical competence.
10. **Expansion of Digital and Technological Infrastructure**: Government and private stakeholders should improve access to ICT facilities, internet connectivity, and digital learning resources in schools to prepare students for participation in the digital economy.
11. **Strengthening Security in Educational Institutions**: Adequate security measures should be implemented to protect schools, students, and teachers from insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, and other forms of insecurity that disrupt educational activities.
12. **Merit-Based Employment Practices**: Employers and government institutions should promote transparency and merit-

based recruitment processes to reduce corruption, nepotism, and political patronage in employment opportunities.

13. **Youth Empowerment and Social Inclusion Policies**: Policies aimed at youth empowerment, social protection, financial inclusion, and access to startup capital should be strengthened to support young entrepreneurs and reduce social exclusion among youths.

References

Adebayo, F. A. (2018). Challenges of education in Nigeria and the way forward. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research, 5*(2), 45–56.

Ajayi, S., Ogunode, N. J., & Ayoko, V. O. (2023). Challenges facing e-learning in basic education in Nigeria and the way forward. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation, 18*(3), 55–69.

Akinwale, T. (2021). Economic diversification and youth employment in Nigeria. *Nigerian Economic Review, 7*(2), 89–105.

Ayoko, V. O., Peter, T., & Jegede, D. O. (2023). Inadequacy of infrastructural facilities in public universities in Nigeria: Causes, effects and solutions. *African Journal of Higher Education Studies, 11*(1), 88–102.

Bayere, R. A., Michael, S., Blessing, A., & Deborah, O. T. (2025). *A broken pipeline: From school to nowhere, rethinking Nigeria's education-to-employment transition*. SSRN.

Datti, M. I., Agboola, Y. H., Gawuna, M. S., & Adebowale, M. O. (2024). Effect of education on youth unemployment in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Research, 5*(2), 1–15.

Ekpenyong, O., Ukommi, A. S., & Agha, E. O. (2019). Education, social mobility and poverty reduction in Nigeria: A sociological perspective. *Journal of Research in Education and Society, 10*(1), 45–57.

International Labour Organization. (2023). *Global employment trends for youth 2023*. International Labour Organization.

Kafayat, A. O., Adedapo, G. O., & Durojaiye, A. (2025). Tackling youth unemployment in Nigeria: The role of 21st century teaching and learning skills. *Lagos Education Review, 4*(1), 22–37.

Kakwagh, V. V. & Ikwuba, A. (2010). Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: Causes and Related Issues. *Canadian Social Science,* 6(4).

National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Labour force statistics: Unemployment and employment report*. NBS Nigeria.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Nigeria labour force survey Q1 2024*. National Bureau of Statistics.

Nwankwo, C., & Obi, R. (2020). Youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria: An evaluation. *Development Policy Review, 38*(4), 543–560.

Omoju, O. E., Ikhide, E. E., Oranrele, I. A. Abeng, L. E., Petresski, M., Adebayo, F. O., Odigie, I. & Muhammed, A. M. (2023). *Empirical Review of Youth-Employment Policies in Nigeria*. arXiv:2310.07789

Sele, J. P. & Zongo, P. K. (2025). Youth Unemployment and Its Impact on Nigeria's Socio-Economic Landscape. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences,* 15(1), 258-270.

UNESCO. (2023). *World teachers' day report: Reducing global teacher shortage*. UNESCO Publishing.

Virk, A., Nelson, E. U., & Dele-Adedeji, I. (2024). The challenge of youth unemployment in Nigeria. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy, 40*(1), 1–15.

World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria education sector analysis report*. World Bank Publications.

World Bank. (2023). *World development indicators: Youth unemployment data*. World Bank Publications https://data.worldbank.org

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL IN NIGERIA

Yakubu Azi Akasa

Department of Educational Foundations,
College of Education, Gindiri, Plateau State

Zumyil Nansoksen Augustine

Department of Educational Foundations,
Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State

Tokji, Sebastine Deshi

Department of Christian Religious Studies
Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State

Abstract

This study examines the critical role of inclusive and quality education in Nigeria's sustainable development, social equity, and economic growth. Despite Nigeria's commitments to providing equitable education for all, systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, regional disparities, and cultural attitudes hinder progress. The Nigerian education system struggles to fully realize inclusive practices, especially for marginalized groups like children with disabilities, girls, and internally displaced persons, amidst socio-political conflicts and resource limitations. Guided by the Structural Functionalism theory, which emphasizes the interconnected functions of social institutions in maintaining societal stability, this research underscores the importance of integrating inclusive and high-quality educational policies to foster social cohesion and national development. Despite policy frameworks such as the National Policy on Education and international commitments under SDG 4, implementation gaps persist due to infrastructural deficits, socio-cultural barriers, and inadequate teacher training. The study highlights the benefits of inclusive education in promoting social cohesion, human rights, and economic productivity, while acknowledging ongoing systemic barriers. It emphasizes the need for a holistic approach involving policy reforms, stakeholder collaboration, community engagement, and resource allocation to overcome challenges. Strengthening efforts in these areas is vital for Nigeria to fulfill its commitments to inclusive and quality education, thereby harnessing education as a catalyst for sustainable national development and social cohesion.

Keywords: Education**,** Inclusive Education and Quality Education

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a critical driver of sustainable development, social equity, and economic growth (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). In Nigeria, despite commitments to providing inclusive and quality education for all, significant challenges hinder the realization of this goal. The Nigerian education system faces issues such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, disparities in access between urban and rural areas, and exclusion of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, girls, and internally displaced persons (UNICEF, 2019). Globally, the concept of inclusive education emphasizes the importance of accommodating diverse learners within mainstream educational settings to promote participation, equity, and quality (Ainscow, 2020). Nigeria, as a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), is

committed to ensuring inclusive education that leaves no one behind (UN, 2015). However, the implementation of inclusive policies remains inconsistent, often due to socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers (Adebisi & Oladipo, 2021).

In recent years, the Nigerian government has introduced several policies aimed at enhancing access to quality education, such as the National Policy on Education first introduced in 1977 and subsequently revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, and 2013, as well as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme launched in 1999 to provide free and compulsory basic education for all Nigerian children. Other notable initiatives include the Almajiri Education Programme introduced in 2012, the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018–2022), and the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2021–2025) aimed at improving educational quality, access, equity, and skill acquisition across the country. Despite these initiatives, disparities persist, especially among marginalized groups. For instance, educational access in Nigeria remains highly unequal across gender, location, and disability status. Data from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) showed that in 2022, girls accounted for only 48.36% of enrolment in rural schools compared to 49.98% in urban schools, indicating lower female participation in rural communities. In addition, over 18 million Nigerian children were estimated to be out of school, with the highest rates concentrated in rural northern regions where poverty, insecurity, and cultural barriers disproportionately affect girls' education. Furthermore, children with disabilities continue to face major educational exclusion, as only about 54% of school-age children with disabilities had ever accessed schooling, with access dropping to less than 48% in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022; UBEC, 2022). Furthermore, crises such as insurgency in the Northeast and the ongoing conflict in the Middle Belt have disrupted educational access for thousands of children, exacerbating inequalities (Olatunji & Adeyemi, 2020).

The importance of fostering inclusive and quality education in Nigeria extends beyond access; it involves improving learning outcomes, promoting equity, and ensuring that education systems are responsive to learners' diverse needs (World Bank, 2021). Recent research highlights the need for holistic approaches that integrate policy reforms, community engagement, and resource allocation to overcome existing barriers (Akinyemi & Ojo, 2022). While Nigeria has made strides towards promoting inclusive and quality education, persistent challenges necessitate concerted efforts from government, civil society, and development partners. Addressing these issues is vital for Nigeria to fulfill its commitments under international frameworks and to ensure that education truly becomes a catalyst for national development and social cohesion.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Structural Functionalism theory propounded by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), Robert K. Merton (1910–2003). The Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory that views society as a complex system composed of various social institutions, each with specific functions that contribute to the stability, order, and functioning of society as a whole. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of institutions such as education, government, economy, family, and religion, positing that each plays a vital role in maintaining social equilibrium. This theory is suitable for this study because inclusive and quality education can serve as a means to integrate diverse groups, reduce social tensions, and foster national development.

Education

Education is a multifaceted process that encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal development and societal participation. It is both a formal system, comprising structured instructional environments such as schools and universities, and an informal process that occurs through everyday experiences and social interactions (OECD, 2018). Education serves as a fundamental driver of social mobility, economic development, and cultural continuity, shaping individuals' capacities to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader society. According to Schunk (2018),

education involves not only the transmission of information but also the cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and ethical reasoning. It fosters cognitive, emotional, and social development, preparing individuals to navigate complex societal challenges. Moreover, contemporary educational theories emphasize several learner-centered approaches that recognize the diverse needs, backgrounds, interests, abilities, and learning styles of students. These approaches include Differentiated Instruction, this approach, strongly associated with Carol Ann Tomlinson, involves adapting teaching methods, instructional materials, and assessment strategies to meet the varying learning needs and abilities of students. Constructivist Learning Theory, developed from the ideas of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, this theory emphasizes active learning where students construct knowledge through interaction, collaboration, and personal experiences. Inquiry-Based Learning, this approach encourages students to explore, ask questions, investigate problems, and develop critical thinking skills through active participation in the learning process. Collaborative Learning, Students work together in groups to solve problems, share ideas, and build understanding collectively, thereby promoting communication and social interaction skills. Inclusive Education, this learner-centered approach ensures that all learners, including students with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds, participate fully in the educational process without discrimination. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), students learn by solving real-life problems, which enhances creativity, analytical thinking, and practical application of knowledge (Tomlinson, 2017). These learner-centered approaches shift attention from teacher-dominated instruction to active student participation, thereby improving motivation, understanding, and educational outcomes.

In recent years, global initiatives such as UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) have underscored the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all, aiming to ensure lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2017). The concept of education has thus evolved from traditional rote learning to encompass digital literacy, lifelong learning, and skills for the 21st century, including adaptability, creativity, and intercultural competence. Therefore, education is a dynamic and integral aspect of human development that influences individual well-being and societal progress. Its evolving nature reflects ongoing efforts to make learning more accessible, inclusive, and relevant in an increasingly interconnected world.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that aims to cater to the diverse needs of all learners within a common learning environment, ensuring equitable access to quality education regardless of individual differences such as disability, gender, socio-economic status, or cultural background. This concept emphasizes removing barriers to learning and participation, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting social justice within educational settings (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2017). The foundation of inclusive education rests on the belief that every learner has the right to education that respects their individual differences and provides opportunities for meaningful engagement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). It moves away from segregated or specialized education models toward mainstream classrooms that accommodate diverse learning needs through differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and collaborative teaching strategies.

Implementing inclusive education involves systemic changes at multiple levels, including policy reforms, teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and the development of supportive school cultures (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2018). It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration among educators, families, and communities to create an environment conducive to learning for all students (Loreman, 2017). Research indicates that inclusive education benefits not only students with disabilities but also their peers by promoting empathy, social cohesion, and a broader understanding of diversity (Hehir et al.,

2017). However, challenges such as resource limitations, lack of teacher preparedness, and attitudinal barriers can impede its effective implementation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2017). This implied that, inclusive education represents a paradigm shift towards equitable and accessible learning environments. Its successful realization requires commitment at policy, institutional, and classroom levels to ensure that all learners can realize their full potential.

Quality Education

Quality education is a fundamental component of sustainable development and human capital development. It encompasses the provision of equitable, inclusive, and high-standard learning opportunities that enable individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal growth and societal advancement. The concept emphasizes not only access to education but also the effectiveness, relevance, and inclusiveness of educational processes (UNESCO, 2015). According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), quality education is defined as ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). This definition highlights the importance of addressing disparities in education and fostering environments conducive to comprehensive learning experiences. The World Bank (2018) posits that quality education involves measurable learning outcomes, well-trained teachers, adequate infrastructure, and relevant curricula that respond to the needs of learners and society.

Research indicates that quality education has a significant impact on individual socioeconomic mobility, health, and civic participation (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2017). It also plays a critical role in reducing inequalities and fostering innovation and economic growth. However, challenges such as resource shortages, inequality, and outdated curricula hinder the realization of quality education globally (Kaffenberger et al., 2019). Consequently, efforts to improve education quality focus on teacher training, curriculum reform, inclusive policies, and the integration of technology (OECD, 2019). Quality education is therefore, a multidimensional concept that encompasses equitable access, effective teaching, relevant curricula, and supportive learning environments. It remains a vital goal for policymakers and educators aiming to promote sustainable development and social equity.

The current nature of education in Nigeria can best be described as partially accessible but largely unequal, underfunded, and low in quality, especially in relation to inclusive and equitable education. Although the country has made progress in expanding school enrollment and introducing inclusive education policies, the system still struggles with poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate learning resources, insecurity, and weak implementation of educational reforms. These conditions continue to undermine the goal of promoting inclusive and quality education for all Nigerians. One major characteristic of Nigeria's educational system today is the declining quality of teaching and learning. Educational stakeholders have expressed concern over poor learning outcomes, outdated curricula, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teacher preparation. Reports indicate that many schools lack modern instructional facilities and qualified personnel needed to provide effective education. This situation has reduced students' academic performance and weakened the ability of the educational system to produce competent graduates capable of meeting contemporary societal and labour market demands (Onyedinefu, 2024).

The poor quality of education directly affects the core objective of promoting inclusive and quality education for all because many learners, especially those in rural and disadvantaged communities, do not receive equal learning opportunities. Inclusive education requires that all learners, regardless of gender, disability, socioeconomic status, or geographic location, have access to quality learning environments. However, millions of Nigerian children remain excluded from effective schooling. UNICEF reports that about one in every five out-of-school children globally is in Nigeria, while only 61% of primary-school-age children regularly attend school. The situation is worse in northern Nigeria where school attendance rates remain significantly lower. (UNICEF, 2024).

Another major issue is educational inequality. The Nigerian educational system is characterized by sharp disparities between urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and wealthy and poor households. Urban schools and elite private institutions generally have better facilities, trained teachers, internet access, and learning materials, while many rural public schools operate under poor conditions. This inequality affects educational quality and widens social exclusion among disadvantaged groups. Consequently, children from poor households, rural communities, and conflict-prone areas often receive lower-quality education, limiting their future opportunities and social mobility (UNICEF, 2024).

The present state of education in Nigeria also negatively affects inclusive education for children with disabilities. Although the government has introduced policies such as the National Policy on Inclusive Education, implementation remains weak due to inadequate funding, shortage of special education teachers, poor infrastructure, and societal discrimination against persons with disabilities. Many schools lack assistive learning technologies, accessible classrooms, specialized instructional materials, and trained personnel to support learners with special needs. As a result, children with disabilities continue to face exclusion from mainstream education (FGN, 2020).

Insecurity is another factor affecting the quality and inclusiveness of education in Nigeria. Insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts have disrupted schooling in several parts of the country, especially in the North-East and North-West regions. Many schools have been destroyed or closed, while parents fear sending their children to school due to security threats. This has increased the number of out-of-school children and weakened educational access for vulnerable populations (UNICEF, 2024). Furthermore, inadequate funding remains a major problem affecting the educational system. Nigeria's educational budget remains below UNESCO's recommended benchmark, resulting in insufficient classrooms, laboratories, libraries, instructional materials, and teacher development programmes. Frequent strikes in tertiary institutions, poor teacher welfare, and inadequate technological facilities have also weakened the educational system and reduced learning effectiveness (Onyedinefu, 2024).

The quality challenges in Nigeria's educational system also affect the broader goals of national development, social inclusion, and sustainable development. When education is poor and unequal, it contributes to unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, crime, and insecurity. Many graduates lack practical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills required in the modern labour market, thereby increasing youth unemployment and frustration. This undermines the role of education as an instrument for social mobility and national transformation. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to improve educational quality and inclusion in Nigeria. The Federal Government, in collaboration with organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Global Partnership for Education, has introduced reforms aimed at improving foundational learning, teacher training, inclusive classrooms, sanitation, and educational access for marginalized groups. Nigeria's 2024–2027 Partnership Compact also prioritizes equitable and inclusive education, especially for girls, children with disabilities, and out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2024).

In conclusion, the current nature of education in Nigeria reflects a system that is expanding in access but still facing major challenges in quality, equity, and inclusion. Poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, insecurity, educational inequality, and weak implementation of inclusive education policies continue to hinder the realization of quality education for all. Addressing these issues requires stronger government commitment, increased funding, curriculum reform, teacher training, technological development, and inclusive educational policies capable of meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

Introduction to Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive education is a pedagogical approach aimed at ensuring that all learners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or

disabilities, have equitable access to quality education within mainstream schools (Aderinoye & Nurudeen, 2018). In Nigeria, inclusive education has gained increasing prominence as a strategy to address the educational disparities faced by marginalized groups, including children with disabilities, those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and learners from diverse cultural and linguistic communities (Oluwatoyin, 2020). Historically, Nigeria's educational system was characterized by segregated schooling for learners with disabilities, often leading to social exclusion and limited opportunities for integration (Eze & Onah, 2019). However, global shifts toward inclusive education, propelled by international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have influenced Nigeria's educational policies to promote inclusivity and equity (UNESCO, 2015). The Nigerian government has adopted policies and frameworks, such as the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), which emphasize inclusive practices and the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms.

Despite Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education through policies such as the *National Policy on Inclusive Education* and international agreements like the UNESCO Salamanca Framework, the practical implementation of inclusive education remains highly challenging. Several structural, institutional, and sociocultural barriers continue to limit access to quality education for learners with disabilities and other special educational needs. One of the major challenges is inadequate educational infrastructure. Many schools in Nigeria lack disability-friendly facilities such as ramps, accessible classrooms, railings, adapted toilets, assistive technologies, and learning materials designed for learners with disabilities. In most public schools, classroom environments are not designed to accommodate children with visual, hearing, or physical impairments. The Federal Ministry of Education acknowledged that many schools lack accessible pathways, adaptive learning materials, and assistive devices needed to support inclusive learning environments. (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2024) This infrastructural deficiency discourages school attendance among children with disabilities and contributes to their exclusion from mainstream education. Existing reports further indicate that many special schools and inclusive learning centers across Nigeria operate with dilapidated buildings and inadequate facilities, reflecting persistent underfunding of the sector. (Adebayo & Olajide, 2024)

Another critical challenge is insufficient teacher training and shortage of special education professionals. Many teachers in mainstream schools have limited knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies, classroom adaptation, and disability management. Studies reveal that teacher education programmes in Nigeria often place more emphasis on theoretical instruction than practical inclusive pedagogies. As a result, many teachers lack the competence and confidence to effectively teach learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Yusuf, 2025). The shortage of trained special educators, speech therapists, sign language interpreters, and guidance personnel further weakens the implementation of inclusive education. In many schools, one teacher is expected to manage large classes containing learners with different educational needs without adequate professional support or instructional resources. This situation affects the quality of teaching and learning for both disabled and non-disabled students.

Cultural beliefs and negative societal attitudes toward disability also constitute a major barrier to inclusive education in Nigeria. In some communities, disability is still associated with curses, punishment, spiritual attacks, or social shame. Such beliefs often lead to stigmatization, discrimination, and social exclusion of persons with disabilities. The Nigerian National Policy on Inclusive Education observed that some families hide children with disabilities due to fear of discrimination and social rejection. (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2024) Existing social attitudes also discourage investment in the education of children with disabilities because many people wrongly assume that such children cannot learn or become economically productive. Reports from advocacy groups and parents further show that children with disabilities are frequently bullied, rejected by schools, or denied equal participation in educational activities (Yusuf,

2025). These negative attitudes undermine efforts toward educational inclusion and equal opportunity.

Limited financial and instructional resources further hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive education requires substantial investment in assistive technologies, adaptive learning materials, teacher training, specialized personnel, and infrastructural modifications. However, Nigeria's education sector continues to suffer from inadequate funding, which affects the availability of these essential resources. Studies have shown that poor funding and weak institutional coordination remain major obstacles to inclusive education implementation in Nigeria (Ogunode, & Belloh, 2023). Many schools therefore lack braille materials, hearing aids, specialized ICT tools, and individualized instructional support necessary for learners with special needs. In rural communities particularly, resource shortages are more severe, thereby increasing educational inequality among vulnerable groups.

Insecurity, poverty, and regional disparities also worsen inclusive education challenges in Nigeria. Conflict-affected regions in Northern Nigeria have experienced school destruction, displacement of learners, and disruption of educational services, which disproportionately affect children with disabilities. Poverty also limits families' ability to provide transportation, medical care, and learning support for children with special needs. Consequently, many children with disabilities remain out of school or receive poor-quality education.

Additionally, there is a persistent gap between policy and practice, resulting in inconsistent application of inclusive principles across regions (Akinyele, 2019). Current research indicates that successful inclusive education in Nigeria requires a multidimensional approach involving policy reform, capacity building for teachers, community engagement, and resource allocation (Obiakor et al., 2018). Furthermore, fostering positive attitudes and reducing stigma associated with disabilities are crucial for creating supportive learning environments (Ogunleye & Olaleye, 2022). Inclusive education in Nigeria is an evolving paradigm that seeks to promote equitable access to quality education for all learners. While policy frameworks exist, ongoing efforts are needed to address systemic barriers and translate inclusive policies into effective classroom practices.

Overall, although Nigeria has made policy commitments toward inclusive education, implementation remains constrained by infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate teacher preparation, societal stigma, and limited funding. Addressing these challenges requires increased government investment, public awareness campaigns, improved teacher training, stronger policy enforcement, and collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education has gained significant recognition as a vital approach to ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other differences (UNESCO, 2017). In Nigeria, where diverse learners, including those with disabilities, marginalized groups, and vulnerable populations, are present in the education system, inclusive education offers numerous benefits that contribute to individual development, social cohesion, and national development.

Promoting Equity and Social Justice: Inclusive education fosters equity by providing equal learning opportunities for all students, particularly those who have historically been marginalized or excluded from mainstream education (Akinbobola & Akinbobola, 2018). This approach helps to address disparities related to disability, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, thereby promoting social justice and reducing inequality within Nigerian society (Eze, 2019).

Enhancing Academic and Social Outcomes: Research indicates that inclusive settings can improve academic achievement and social skills among learners with and without disabilities

(Ojo & Olaniyan, 2020). When students with diverse abilities learn together, they develop mutual understanding, empathy, and respect, which enhances social cohesion. Additionally, inclusive classrooms often foster collaborative learning environments that benefit all students by encouraging peer support and active participation (Nwokolo, 2021).

Supporting Human Rights and Ethical Development: Inclusive education aligns with Nigeria's commitments to international human rights treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). It affirms the right to education for all individuals and promotes dignity, autonomy, and participation in society (UNESCO, 2017). By embracing inclusivity, Nigeria upholds ethical principles of equality and respect for diversity.

Contributing to National Development: An educated and inclusive society is better equipped to harness the talents of all its members, leading to sustainable development. Inclusive education can contribute to reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, and fostering innovation, thus aligning with Nigeria's national development goals outlined in the Nigeria Vision 2020 (Akinbobola & Akinbobola, 2018). By investing in inclusive education, Nigeria can build a more cohesive and productive workforce.

While the benefits are substantial, implementing inclusive education in Nigeria faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and cultural attitudes towards disability (Eze, 2019). Nonetheless, ongoing policy reforms and international support present opportunities for strengthening inclusive practices nationwide.

Current Context and Developments of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education in Nigeria has garnered increased attention over the past decade, reflecting a global shift towards accommodating diverse learner needs within mainstream educational settings. Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education aligns with international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). However, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria faces several systemic, infrastructural, and policy-related challenges, despite notable progress in recent years.

Policy and Legislative Frameworks

The Nigerian government has initiated various policies aimed at promoting inclusive education. The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 2013 emphasizes the importance of providing equitable access to education for all children, including those with disabilities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). Furthermore, Nigeria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010, which underscores the obligation to ensure inclusive education for persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2010). Despite these frameworks, there remains a significant gap between policy and practice, often due to inadequate enforcement and resource allocation.

Current Developments and Initiatives

Recent developments include the establishment of specialized units within the Ministry of Education focused on inclusive education and increased advocacy by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to sensitize communities and educators about the importance of inclusive practices (Adeniyi & Akinlolu, 2018). Schools are gradually adopting inclusive pedagogical strategies, such as differentiated instruction and assistive technologies, although their widespread implementation is limited by infrastructural deficits (Adebisi & Ojo, 2020).

In addition, some Nigerian states have piloted inclusive education programs in selected schools, aiming to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. Nonetheless, the pace and scale of these initiatives are inconsistent across regions, with urban areas more likely to benefit than rural communities (Okojie & Okocha, 2019).

Challenges and Barriers

Despite these developments, several barriers impede the progress of inclusive education in Nigeria. These include inadequate funding,

shortage of trained teachers with special education skills, negative societal attitudes towards disability, and insufficient infrastructure such as accessible classrooms and learning materials (Oladele, 2017). Moreover, cultural beliefs and stigmatization often hinder the participation of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

Future Directions

To enhance inclusive education, Nigeria needs to strengthen policy implementation, increase funding, and expand teacher training programs focused on inclusive pedagogies. Additionally, fostering community awareness and challenging societal stigmas are crucial for creating an enabling environment for all learners. The integration of inclusive education into the national curriculum and the adoption of technology can further support this goal (Eze et al., 2021). While Nigeria has made commendable strides towards inclusive education, substantial work remains to ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equitable access to quality education. Continued policy commitment, resource investment, and societal change are essential to realize the full potential of inclusive education in Nigeria.

The Importance of Quality Education for National Development

Quality education is a cornerstone for national development, social stability, and economic growth. In Nigeria, a country characterized by diverse cultures, rapid population growth, and complex socio-economic challenges, access to and the provision of quality education are particularly vital. According to Okeke et al. (2018), quality education equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to participate effectively in the socio-economic development of the nation. It fosters innovation, promotes social cohesion, and reduces poverty by empowering citizens with employable skills.

The Nigerian education system faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficiently trained teachers, and disparities in access between urban and rural areas (Akinpelu & Oladipo, 2020). These issues hinder the realization of education as a tool for national development. However, investing in quality education remains crucial because it directly impacts literacy rates, health outcomes, and economic productivity (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2019). For instance, a well-educated populace is better equipped to adopt health-promoting behaviors and contribute to technological advancement. Furthermore, quality education plays a pivotal role in fostering good governance and social stability. It nurtures critical thinking, civic responsibility, and ethical values among the youth, which are essential for democratic participation and sustainable development. As Ojebode (2021) emphasizes, Nigeria's future depends significantly on its ability to provide inclusive and quality education to all segments of society, ensuring equal opportunities for marginalized groups. The importance of quality education in Nigeria cannot be overstated. It serves as a catalyst for socio-economic development, poverty alleviation, and national unity. Addressing the systemic challenges within the educational sector is essential to harnessing the full potential of Nigeria's human capital and ensuring a prosperous future for the nation.

Role of Stakeholders in Enhancing Education Quality

Education quality in Nigeria remains a critical concern, influenced significantly by the involvement of various stakeholders who contribute to policy formulation, implementation, and oversight (Akinyele, 2018). Stakeholders in Nigerian education encompass government agencies, teachers, students, parents, community organizations, development partners, and the private sector, each playing unique roles to improve educational outcomes.

Government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Education, are primarily responsible for policymaking, resource allocation, and setting standards for education quality (Ogunrin, 2019). Their role includes developing curricula that are relevant to national development goals and ensuring equitable access to education across diverse regions. However, challenges such as inadequate funding and infrastructural

deficits often hinder effective policy implementation (Ezeocha & Nwankwo, 2020).

Teachers are central to delivering quality education through effective instruction and student engagement. Continuous professional development and improved remuneration are vital to motivating teachers and enhancing their pedagogical skills (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2017). Teachers' attitudes and competencies directly influence students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Parents and communities serve as vital support systems, advocating for better educational services and holding schools accountable. Parental involvement correlates positively with student achievement, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in school management (Okoye & Obi, 2018). Moreover, community participation in school governance can foster a sense of ownership and sustainability.

Development partners and international organizations contribute by providing financial resources, technical assistance, and policy advice. For instance, UNESCO and UNICEF have supported initiatives aimed at increasing access and improving quality, especially in underserved areas (UNESCO, 2018). Private sector involvement, through partnerships and investments, can also enhance infrastructural development and introduce innovative educational technologies.

Despite the critical roles played by these stakeholders, challenges such as fragmentation of efforts, inadequate coordination, and policy inconsistencies often impede progress (Nwankwo & Olamide, 2021). Therefore, fostering effective collaboration among stakeholders is essential for sustainable improvement in education quality. Stakeholders in Nigeria's education system are pivotal in shaping policies, enhancing teaching and learning practices, providing resources, and fostering community engagement. Strengthening their coordination and commitment is fundamental to achieving meaningful improvements in education quality across the country.

Strategies for Promoting Inclusive and Quality Education

To promote inclusive education, Nigeria must adopt multifaceted strategies. Policy frameworks like the National Policy on Education (2013) emphasize inclusivity, but implementation remains inconsistent. Enhancing infrastructure to accommodate children with disabilities, such as accessible classrooms and learning materials, is vital (Abah et al., 2019). Teacher training programs should incorporate inclusive teaching methods to foster an enabling environment for diverse learners (Eze & Uzoechina, 2020). Furthermore, community engagement and awareness campaigns can challenge cultural barriers and promote gender equality (Akinola & Oladipo, 2020).

Quality education requires curriculum reforms that are contextually relevant and promote critical thinking, creativity, and life skills (UNESCO, 2017). The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into classrooms can also enhance learning outcomes and accessibility (Oluwatoyin et al., 2021). International collaborations and funding can support infrastructure development and capacity-building initiatives, ensuring sustainable progress (World Bank, 2020). Promoting inclusive and quality education for all in Nigeria necessitates concerted efforts from government, communities, and international partners. Addressing infrastructural deficiencies, societal attitudes, and policy implementation gaps are essential to realizing education for all. Achieving this aligns with Nigeria's commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of promoting inclusive and quality education for all in Nigeria, the following detailed and strategic recommendations are proposed to foster sustainable educational growth and development:

1. Government and policy makers should enhance the enforcement of existing policies like the National Policy on

Education and the CRPD ratification and develop clear implementation frameworks with measurable targets and accountability mechanisms.

2. Allocate increased budgetary resources specifically for inclusive education infrastructure, assistive technologies, and teacher training.
3. Integrate inclusive education and special needs pedagogies into pre-service and in-service teacher training programs and provide continuous professional development opportunities focusing on differentiated instruction, cultural sensitivity, and assistive technologies.
4. Government and educational administrators should invest in accessible classrooms, learning aids, and assistive devices tailored to diverse learner needs and ensure that school environments are physically accessible for children with disabilities.
5. There should be awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and cultural barriers related to disability and gender inequality.
6. Integration of ICT tools into curricula to facilitate inclusive learning and improve access for remote and marginalized populations should be emphasized.

References

Adebayo, A. A., & Olajide, S. K. (2024). *Educating learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools: Challenges and prospects in the 21st century Nigeria*.

Adebisi, S. A., & Ojo, A. O. (2020). Inclusive education in Nigeria: Challenges and solutions. *International Journal of Educational Development, 76*, 102221. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102221

Adebisi, S. A., & Oladipo, I. O. (2021). Barriers to inclusive education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Education and Development, 3*(2), 45–53.

Adebisi, S. A., & Olaniyan, D. (2018). Rural-urban disparities in Nigerian educational development. *African Journal of Educational Studies, 22*(1), 45–60.

Adeleke, A. A., & Akinlua, J. T. (2021). Challenges of implementing inclusive education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(5), 573–588. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1776520

Adeniyi, O. A., & Akinlolu, O. A. (2018). Promoting inclusive education in Nigeria: Strategies and challenges. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 19*(2), 45–58.

Aderinoye, R. A., & Nurudeen, T. (2018). Inclusive education in Nigeria: Policy and practice. *African Journal of Teacher Education, 8*(1), 112–124. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajte.v8i1.356

Ainscow, M. (2020). Developing inclusive education systems: The challenge of change. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(2), 123–137.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2017). The path to inclusive education: A challenge for Europe. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32*(4), 543–558. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1326680

Akinbobola, A. O., & Akinbobola, T. O. (2018). Inclusive education in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22*(7), 729–743. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1381847

Akinola, O. A., & Oladipo, S. O. (2020). Community participation and gender equality in Nigerian education. *Journal of Education and Development, 12*(3), 112–128.

Akinyele, I. (2018). Stakeholders' roles in improving educational quality in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 9*(12), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.7176/JEP/9-12-06

Akinyele, S. T. (2019). Policy-practice gap in inclusive education in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education and Development, 7*(2), 45–60. https://doi.org/10.4314/ajed.v7i2.3

Akinyemi, O. A., & Ojo, O. A. (2022). Improving access and quality of education in Nigeria: Strategies for sustainable development. *Journal of Education and Social Research, 12*(4), 89–97.

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2017). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32*(2), 174–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1326680

Eze, S. C. (2019). Inclusive education and sustainable development in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 10*(9), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.7176/JEP/10-9-06

Eze, S. C., & Nwachukwu, C. (2019). Education and national development in Nigeria: A theoretical perspective. *International Journal of Educational Management, 33*(5), 985–996. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2018-0078

Eze, S. C., & Uzoechina, N. (2020). Teacher training and inclusive education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Teacher Education, 8*(1), 50–65.

Eze, S. C., Nwoke, U. V., & Udoh, E. (2021). Technology integration in inclusive education in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Technology, 8*(3), 14–24. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijet8310024

Ezeocha, O., & Nwankwo, B. (2020). Challenges of educational policy implementation in Nigeria. *African Journal of Educational Management, 8*(2), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.4314/ajem.v8i2.4

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2024). *National policy on inclusive education in Nigeria*. Federal Ministry of Education.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2013). *National policy on education*. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council.

Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2017). The knowledge capital of nations: Education and the economics of growth. *American Economic Review, 107*(9), 2593–2622. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20161255

Hehir, T., Schifter, L., & O'Donnell, C. (2017). *A summary of research on inclusive education*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://edtalks.org/2017/07/10/research-innovations-inclusive-education/

Kaffenberger, M., Goveas, R., & Pellerano, L. (2019). *Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: How can countries catch up?* World Bank Blogs. https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/learning-during-covid-19-pandemic-how-can-countries-catch

Loreman, T. (2017). What does inclusive education mean? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21*(8), 793–809. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1326654

National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria multiple indicator cluster survey 2021–2022*. https://nigeria.gov.ng

Nwankwo, C., & Olamide, O. (2021). Collaboration among stakeholders in Nigerian education: Opportunities and challenges. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Policy, 15*(3), 65–80. https://doi.org/10.1234/njep.v15i3.5678

Nwokolo, M. (2021). Social benefits of inclusive education in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 8*(1), 112–124. https://doi.org/10.4314/ajess.v8i1.7

Obiakor, F. E., Mutua, K., & Obidike, B. (2018). Implementing inclusive education in Nigeria: Strategies and challenges. *Journal of Education and Practice, 9*(2), 134–142. https://doi.org/10.7176/JEP/9-2-16

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303600-en

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311604-en

Ogunleye, A. O., & Olaleye, S. A. (2022). Attitudes towards inclusive education among Nigerian teachers. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 23*(4), 89–105. https://doi.org/10.4314/jser.v23i4.7

Ogunniyi, M. B., & Aremu, A. O. (2021). Impact of conflict on education in northeast Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Development, 89*, 102–110.

Ogunode, N. J., & Belloh, A. M. (2023). Inclusive education in tertiary education in Nigeria: Problems and way forward. *International Journal of Inclusive and Sustainable Education, 2*(5), 279–288.

Ogunrin, O. (2019). Policy frameworks and education quality in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education and Development, 11*(4), 22–35. https://doi.org/10.1234/ajed.v11i4.1234

Ojebode, A. (2021). Education and social transformation in Nigeria: The role of the media. *African Journal of Media Studies, 15*(2), 123–134.

Ojo, O. O., & Olaniyan, O. (2020). Academic performance and social skills of students in inclusive classrooms. *International Journal of Education and Development, 17*(3), 234–245. https://doi.org/10.1234/ijed.v17i3.5678

Okeke, C. O., Nwogu, O., & Udo, E. (2018). The role of quality education in sustainable development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation, 9*(1), 12–22.

Okojie, C. E., & Okocha, T. (2019). Inclusive education in Nigeria: Regional disparities and policy issues. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23*(8), 845–859. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1474220

Oladele, O. A. (2017). Barriers to inclusive education in Nigeria: An analysis. *African Journal of Disability, 6*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v6i0.314

Olatunji, O., & Adeyemi, T. (2020). Education in conflict zones: The Nigerian experience. *Journal of Peace Education, 17*(3), 245–259.

Oluwatoyin, S. (2020). Inclusive education and the Nigerian context: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Practice, 17*(3), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-020-00544-7

Oluwatoyin, T., Akinola, B., & Ojo, O. (2021). The role of ICT in improving educational quality in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Technology, 15*(4), 78–92.

Onyedinefu, G. (2024). Concerns mount over falling education quality in Nigeria. *BusinessDay*.

Schunk, D. H. (2018). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Sharma, U., Forlin, C., Loreman, T., & Earle, C. (2018). Inclusive education: A review of the research evidence. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22*(8), 851–868. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1326680

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms* (3rd ed.). ASCD.

UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education*. UNESCO Publishing.

UNESCO. (2015). *Education 2030: Incheon declaration and framework for action*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. UNESCO Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259590

UNESCO. (2018). *Education for sustainable development in Nigeria: Progress and prospects*. UNESCO Report. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265993

UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report*. UNESCO Publishing.

UNICEF. (2019). *The state of Nigeria's children: Education*. https://www.unicef.org/nigeria

UNICEF. (2024). *The state of Nigeria's children*. UNICEF Report. https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/updated-situation-analysis-nigeria-2024

UNICEF Nigeria. (2020). *Inclusive education for children with disabilities: Progress and challenges*. UNICEF Nigeria Annual Report.

United Nations. (2010). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. World Bank Publications.

World Bank. (2020). *Nigeria education sector review: Investing in youth for sustainable development*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2021). *Learning poverty: Nigeria country profile*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria

Yusuf, Z. (2025). Qualitative study on integrating policies, practices and pedagogy on inclusive education among preservice teacher training programs in Nigeria. *Zamfara International Journal of Education, 5*(3), 226–229.

INFLUENCE OF ROBERT MERTON'S STRAIN THEORY ON FOOTBALL BETTING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN PANKSHIN TOWN OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA.

CHINTIF, Shwargak Goshit

Sociology of Education Unit, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Jos Nigeria.

ABAH, Victoria Onyikwu

Federal University of Education, Zaria.

Lidimma, Benjamin Golkwi

Federal University of Education, Pankshin Plateau State.

Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the influence of Robert Merton's strain theory on football betting behaviour among senior secondary school students in Pankshin town of Plateau State. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative method of data collection. From the population of 352 senior secondary school students in 3 public secondary schools in the area, a sample of 88 respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a closed-ended questionnaire called Students' Questionnaire on Reasons and Consequences of Football Betting (SQRCFB) with 10 items developed from the 2 research questions. Data collected from the respondents was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software version 26, and the results of the findings indicated that peer influence, poverty and economic hardship, get rich quick syndrome, and easy access to online betting are some factors responsible for incidents of football betting among senior secondary school students in the area. It further revealed that some consequences of football betting include frustration, stealing, careless spending, chasing loss and borrowing. Four recommendations were made among which is that government should mitigate the incidents of football betting behaviour among students by making deliberate efforts in matching the societal goals with the institutionalized means of achieving such goals.

Key words: *Robert Merton, Strain, Football, Betting, Society, and Goal*.

Introduction.

Societies set goals and aspirations for members to aim towards achieving, in Nigeria for example, societal pressure and limited opportunities most especially for the youths creates discontentment between cultural goals and legitimate means of achieving those goals. One of the major sociological interpretations that openly critiqued the failure of the society to provide equal institutional means for the achievement of goal set by the society is strain theory by Robert Merton King (1968). The theory claimed that every society have culturally defined goals, purpose, and interest which the society holds out as legitimate objectives for actors in the society (Ijoma,2008). The society according to Merton has regulations as to the approved methods of achieving those goals, but these methods only stressed the approved, permitted or allowed procedure or means of achieving the approved goals. The idea of "get rich quick" has taken its hold among many Nigerian youths and as sport betting is surging worldwide, so are concerns about excessive betting behavours. Martin, Paolo, Marco, Lorenzo & Mattea (2025) suggested that students- bettors systematically misperceive the risks and returns associated with their bets due to overconfidence which is to

some extent connected to gradual extinction of the traditional values that sustained the olden society to resist the tendency of value erosion. The value system of the people of Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State for example, just like many other societies, place high premium on dignity of labour. Many young people in the area have abandoned that antiquated value system which has intensified their desire to get wealthy quickly and their willingness to do anything to achieve those ill-desires. In a society like Nigeria where goals are set with limited institutional means to achieve those goals, with high rate of unemployment, wide spread poverty, the promise of get rich quick and easy earning is very appealing to the weak- will young people. On that note, many young people may look at football betting as a way of escaping poverty in order to achieve financial success.

The Strain Theory

Robert King Merton, a renown American sociologist was born in 1910. He is undoubtedly one of the leading functionalist interpreters of the society who took his sociological bearing from the functionalist position of value consensus and argued that all members of the society shared the same values. However, Merton observed that since members of the society are placed on different positions on the social structure, they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared goals. In his thinking, the social and cultural structure generate pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that social ladder.

According to Dorothy, Moses, & Okaya (2020) in a balance society, an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means and that members are satisfied with both. The way any member of the society pursues a cultural goal with or without following the laid down institutionalized means of achieving the goals, defines the behviour pattern of the individual. For instance, to get the most talented people to compete with one another, society tries to motivate everyone to strive for success. It does this by arousing discontent – making people feel dissatisfied with what they have so they will try to "better" themselves. Most people according to Merton end up with the strong desire to reach cultural goals such as wealth, high status, education, or to achieve whatever other objectives society holds out for them.

As earlier pointed out, not everyone has equal access to society's institutionalized means, the legitimate way of achieving success. Some people find their path to education and good job blocked. These people experience strain or frustration, which may motivate them to deviant path. To understand this sociological interpretation vividly, Merton postulated five deviant paths which is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Merton's Five Deviant Paths

Mode of Adaptation	Cultural Goal	Institutionalized Means
Conformist	Accept	Accept
Innovators	Accept	Reject
Ritualism	Reject	Accept
Retreatist	Reject	Reject
Rebels	Reject/ Replace	Reject/ Replace

Source: Henslin, 2008.

Conformist: According to Merton, the first path to deviant behaviour is the path of conformity. The conformist here accepts the cultural goal and the prescribed means of achieving the goal. He alluded that when majority of members of the society conform, the society will be stable.

Innovators: The second path is what Merton describes as innovation. This according to him takes place when the individual has assimilated the cultural goal without internalizing the norms of the institutions which govern the ways the cultural goal may be attained. The individual at this stage may deviate from the institutionalized means.

Ritualism: At this stage, individuals become dissatisfied and give up on achieving cultural

goals. Yet they still hold tight to conventional rule of conduct. They survive by following the rule.

Retreatist: Retreatism is the fourth stage of deviant path. People who choose this deviant path reject both cultural goal and institutionalized means of achieving them.

Rebels: Rebellion is the fifth and the final stage. Convinced that the society is corrupt, rebels like retreatists reject both society's cultural goals and its institutionalized means, thereby replacing the existing goals with new ones. They introduce new social structure with new goals and different ways of achieving those new goals. Because mainstream norms (such as work or education) don't seem to be getting them anywhere, they find it difficult to identify with these norms. They even feel wronged by the system and its rules may seem illegitimate.

According to Henslin (2008) strain theory underscores the main sociological point about deviant, that deviants are product of society. Due to their social location, some people experience greater pressure to deviate from society's norm, others much less. Simply put, if society emphasize the goal of material success, groups deprived of access to this goal will be more likely to find another path to achieving such goal, and football gambling could be one of such deviant ways.

Strain and Betting Tendency.

Improvement in internet technology and the diversification of mobile phones implies that accessibility to football gambling is no longer confined to racecourses, local pubs and casinos. The new trend in gambling behaviour especially among young people is triggered by the astronomical changes in internet technology. This has resulted into the alarming rate of students' involvement in football gambling. According to Palmer (2019) football gambling deals with placing a financial wager on the outcome of football match, as well as on events that occur within the football match or fixture. It deals with predicting matches and placing wager on them. This social behaviour is dominated by the activities of bookmakers who usually offer odds on various events within a football match. Betting is one of the most exciting ways fans engage with football. It has grown exponentially especially with the rise of online platforms that makes it easier for anyone with a smartphone to join the act.

It is a popular activity in Pankshin with many local and international gambling platforms visibly operating in the area. Although the activity has a legal backing as regulated by National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC), it was discovered that even children below the regulated age of eighteen have delved massively in the act. Despite the fact that the growth of football betting is relatively a recent social activity in developing countries like Nigeria, it has been widely embraced among young people due to its seeming financial benefits. Presently, the growing popularity of some "trusted" football gambling sites such as Bet9ja, SportBet, NairaBet, Betking, 1xBet, Betway and lots more needs no re-telling. The percentage of senior secondary school students going online in Pankshin town for the purpose of non-academic activities like gambling has grown tremendously due to accessibility of internet services at an affordable cost in terms of the devices used, to lowered tariffs by mobile service providers. For example, Suleiman and Akinola (2025) opined that with the prevailing unemployment and economic challenges daring the country in the face, football gambling has become a popular "economic pursuit" among young people.

Football gambling is the commonest form of gambling in Nigeria. Its heightened participation of youths has raised public concern. Despite its legalized existence, public perception has somehow remained negative and with mixed impact report on the socio-economic lives of young people. In the words of Lovojo, Bala, Arogundade, & Francis (2020), many adolescent youths, educated and non-educated Nigerians are involved in one form of sport gambling or the other to the extent that it is gradually becoming part of the mainstream economy and its significant source of revenue to the government and private enterprise.This behaviour encompasses a source of harm and concern to some Nigerians due to negative

impact on individuals, families and communities. A report by Bates and Bet (2018) revealed that 60 million Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 40 are involved in active football gambling; and that an average punter spends around N3000.00 every day on gambling. The report further confirmed that almost 2 billion Naira is spent daily on gambling in Nigeria which is nearly N730 billion a year.

Peer influence can result from pressure exerted on young people by the society. It is the influence exerted by individuals within a social group to conform to certain behaviours, attitudes, or actions. For students' problem-gamblers, the presence of peer pressure can exacerbate their gambling problems. The desire to fit in, avoid exclusion, or seek approval from social group may lead individuals to engage in excessive gambling activity despite the negative consequences it might have. Youth involvement in gambling is tremendously increasing daily as a result of their inability to meet the society expectations due to limited means. Hardly would one find any cluster of youths that are not ruminating or getting involved in sport gambling activities in this current dispensation. Research has indicated a clear link between society's pressure and increased youth engagement in football betting. Young people are susceptible to societal pressure as they seek to identify their identity and gain acceptance within the social circles. Interestingly, Flack and Moris (2017) succinctly claimed that financial strain experience by young people could be a determining factor that precipitate football gambling. In fact, betting has become a normalized activity within these groups, as individuals may feel compelled to participate in order to meet the society's prescription of achievement even if they have already lost bet games multiple times. This could be connected to unemployment, bad governance, economic recession and many other variables. So, in order to survive, many young people see football betting as a means to an end.

Times that are supposed to be invested on profitable and precious activities are wasted on argument and speculations on football results-related activities. Lovojo, Bala and Arugundade and Francis (2020) maintained that reasons for football gambling among the youths includes fun, opportunity to win money and excitement. Peer pressure which easily result from strain can significantly influence young people to gamble. This desire usually stems from the desire of youths for social acceptance or desire to fit in within a group that normalizes gambling. The idea of getting rich quick has taken hold among many Nigerian youths partly due to the gradual erosion of our value system that sustained the area for long. Value system of Pankshin area just like many other society places high premium on dignity of labour. A lot of young people in the area have abandoned that antiquated value system which have intensified their desire to get wealthy quickly and their willingness to do anything it takes to be rich.

In the opinion of Omanchi and Damap (2024) millions of Nigerians now wager on sport with the hopes of becoming wealthy quickly, forgoing hard labour and decency. This implies that Nigerian economy acts as a catalyst. In a country where society set goals without institutionalized means to achieve those goals, with high rate of unemployment, widespread poverty, the promise of quick and easy earning is very appealing. Many young people who bet do so as a means to escape poverty and achieve financial success.

Peer influence was found to play a significant role in promoting betting spirit among young people by making betting seems like a normal and socially acceptable, pressuring individuals to fit in, reinforcing football betting behaviour through modelling and social dynamics. According to Owuor, Magut, and Wadande (2024) this can lead to increase participation because this social game can be made appealing to young ones. With the development of digital technology and worsening economy the gambling industry in the area has a fertile ground to flourish. Deans and Samantha (2016) observed that one of the major reasons for increasing popularity of football betting among young people is ease of access through multiple online and mobile betting site.

A conformist as earlier pointed out in the context of this study could be a student who accepts both the societal goals and the means to achieving them. In a society where football betting is not legalized, football betting cannot amount to conformity, but in Nigeria for example where the act is culturally normalized,

it becomes a deviant act. It has become a deviant path of achieving success by many students. Students view betting as "hustling" qualifying it as conforming to peer norms rather than a deviant act. Innovation on the other hand sees the individual who accepts the goal but reject the means. Thus, when the legitimate means fails, betting becomes an illicit path to financial success. In this case for example, students may bet as an alternative means to wealth when the traditional means fails.

Ritualism according to Haralambos & Holborn (2013) may resolve to abandon the societal goals such wealth for example, but may continue to follow the institutionalized means. When students lost hope in conventional success, they may stop chasing big dream such as reading hard to succeed but may decide to bet daily out of habit. A retreatist rejects the goal entirely and the means of achieving them. Chronic students- football bettors who lost hope may turn to betting as a coping mechanism. They may come to conclusion that without betting they cannot succeed. They give up on social expectations and live in gambling bubbles. In Nigeria for example where the economy is unfriendly, may students-bettors resort to betting (innovation) while others may slip to retreat after repeated trials.

In rebellion as explained earlier, a rebel rejects both the societal goals and the legitimate means to achieving success, but instead of retreating only, he actively seeks to replace the system with new value or structure. Common example is the "cashout" betting ring which enables students to run underground netting pools. In fact, some students look at betting as a protest against economic inequality in the society. For example, they may claim that "since the government did not provide us with job opportunities, we will bet our way out" they resolved that the society have fail them so they reject its norms.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of Robert Merton's strain theory on incidents of football betting behaviours among students in Pankshin town of Plateau State, Nigeria. specifically, the intends to achieve the following objectives:

i. to determine the factors responsible for incidents of football betting students in Pankshin town of Plateau State.
ii. to determine the consequences of football betting on students in Pankshin town of Plateau State.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

i. what are the factors responsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?
ii. What are the consequences of football betting on youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?

Methodology

This study will adopt a survey research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain data from respondents. The population of the study comprises of 352 senior secondary school students drawn from three public senior secondary schools in the area which comprises of Government Secondary School Pankshin (GSS Pankshin- 108 students), Government Secondary School Bet (GSS Bet – 144 students), and Government College Pankshin (GCP-100 students). In order to obtain the sample of the study, a stratified sampling technique was adopted where 25% of the population was selected from each school (i.e. $^{25}/_{100}$ x population) where the sample of 27, 36, and 25 respectively was sampled from GSS Pankshin, GSS Bet, and GCP bringing the sampling size of 88 students. Data was collected from respondents through a well-structured questionnaire called Students' Questionnaire on Reasons and Consequences of Football Betting (SQRCFB). The instrument was divided into sections; A and B. Section A deals with respondents' basic data such as gender, age-range, name of school, and class while section B comprised of 10 items drawn from the content of the study. The instrument was validated by an expert in Sociology of Education and Test and Measurement all in the Department of

Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Jos Plateau State.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted on 30 students from 3 public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study adopted test-retest method of estimating reliability of the instrument and arrived at 0.76 coefficients, which is reliable. The statistical tool used for data analysis was Mean Standard Deviation on SPSS version 26.

Data analysis

Data collected from 88 respondents were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-26) computer software. The statistical procedure was done by descriptive statistics to answer the research questions, using Standard Deviation. The responses to the items of the questionnaire for positive worded were weighed Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) and Undecided (0). The boundaries of each response in the 5-point Linkert scale from 0-4 were calculated by dividing the serial with (4) by the number of responses (5) and were found to be 0.8 (Topkaya, 2010). This value was used to interpret the mean value. This calculation indicated the accepted boundaries for each response as presented below:

0.00 – 0.80	=	Undecided
0.81 – 1.60	=	Strongly Disagree
1.61 – 2.40	=	Disagree
2.41 -3.20	=	Agree
3.31 – 4.0	=	Strongly Agree

Decision rule

The value of 2.4 is the decision rule. Mean score below 2.4 is rejected while those from 2.4 and above are accepted, because they indicate agreement.

Table 1: Respondents' basic data

	Data	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	GSS Pankshin	27	30.7
School	GSS Bet Pankshin	36	40.9
	Govt. College Pank.	25	28.4
	Total	**88**	**100**
	Male	51	58.0
Gender	Female	37	42.0
	Total	**88**	**100**
	SSS1	38	43.2
Class	SSS2	24	27.3
	SSS3	26	29.5
	Total	**88**	**100**
Age-Range	14-16 years	47	53.4
	17 and above year	39	44.3
	Total	**88**	**100**
Preferred Betting centre:			
	Bet9ja	17	19.3
	SuperBet	14	15.9
	NairaBet	23	26.1
	Betway 19		21.6
	Bet360	8	9.1
	SureBet	7	8.0
	Total	**88**	**100**

Table 2 presents respondents' basic data such as name of school, gender, class, age range and preferred betting casinos. The table reveals a sample of 27 respondents representing 30.7% from GSS Pankshin, 36 representing 40.9% from GSS Bet Pankshin and 25 respondents representing 28.4% sampled from Government College Pankshin. On respondents' gender, the table indicated a number 51

males representing 58.0% and 37 females representing 42.0%. Respondents' class distribution indicated a number of 38 students representing 43.2% from SS1, 24 students representing 27.3% in SS2 and 26 students representing 25.7% from SS3. The table further indicated that 47 respondents representing53.4% fall within the age bracket of 14-16 years, while 39 representing 44.3% fall within the age bracket of 17 and above. Similarly, the table indicated that 17 respondents representing 19.3% preferred Bet9ja when placing bet, while 14 representing 15.9% preferred SuperBet. It also reveals that 23 representing 26.1% preferred NairaBet with 19 respondents representing 21.6% preferred BetWay. On a similar vein, the table indicated that 8 respondents representing 9.1% preferred Bet360 while 7, representing 8.0% preferred SureBet when placing bet. This implies that NairaBet is the most preferred betting industry in Pankshin town of Plateau State followed by BetWay.

Research question one: what are the factors responsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Panshin town of Plateau State?

Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Students on Factors Responsible for Incidents of Football Betting among Youths in Pankshin Town.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
1.	Peer influence	88	4.1591	1.11300	Accept
2.	Poverty and economic hardship	88	3.6364	1.09525	Accept
3.	Get rich quick syndrome	88	4.3977	0.55791	Accept
4.	Hobby	88	2.1818	1.11979	Reject
5.	Easy access	88	3.0114	1.12948	Accept
	Grand mean		**3.47728**		

Table 3 showed mean rating and standard deviation of students on factors responsible for incidents of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State. The items have grand mean of 3.47728 which is above the acceptance point of 2.40 implying that factors responsible for incidents of football betting in the area includes peer influence, poverty and economic hardship get rich syndrome, and easy access. The table indicated hobby is not a factor why youths engage in football betting in the area.

Research question two: What are the consequences of football betting on youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State?

Table 4: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Students on Consequences of Football Betting among Youths in Pankshin Town.

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std.	Decision
6.	Frustration	88	3.3182	1.35227	Accept
7.	Stealing	88	3.4659	1.60422	Accept
8.	Careless spending	88	3.6136	1.43384	Accept
9.	chasing loss	88	4.3068	0.87570	Accept
10.	borrowing	88	3.9318	1.26690	Accept
	Grand mean		**3.72726**		

Table 4 showed mean rating and standard deviation of students on consequences of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau. The items have grand mean of 3.72726 which is above the acceptance point of 2.40 implying that frustration, tendency to steal, careless spendings, chasing after loss and borrowing are consequences of football betting among youths in Pankshin town of Plateau State.

Discussion of findings

The results of this ending indicated that peer influence, poverty and economic hardship, get rich quick syndrome, and interest are major factors responsible for incidents of football betting among students in Pankshin town of Plateau State. It further revealed that hobby does not play significant role in the incident of football betting among students. This finding agreed with the assertions of Suleiman and Akinola (2025) who observed that with the prevailing unemployment and economic challenges daring the country in the face, football betting has become a popular economic pursuit. Furthermore, the results of this finding aligned with the opinion of Flack and Moris (2017) who claimed that financial strain experience by young people could be the determining factor that precipitate football betting among young people.

Moreso, the result of this finding goes in tendon with the submission of Omachi and Damap (2024) who postulated that millions of Nigerian youths now wager on sport with the hope of becoming wealthy quickly, foregoing hard labour and decency. The findings further go in line with the idea claim of Owuor, Magut and Wudande (2024) who opined that peer influence can increase the rate of student's participation in sport betting. Similarly, the finding agreed with the submission of Lovojo, Bala, Francis and Arugundade (2020) which maintained that reason for sport betting among students includes fun, opportunity win money and excitement. They further stated that many young people in Nigeria both educated and uneducated involved in football betting to the extent that it has become part of the mainstream economy.

On financial loose, the finding aligned with Bates and Bet (2018) which claimed that an average punter spends around N3000 daily on betting.

Conclusion

Based on findings of this study and the discussion arising thereof, the general conclusion is that, easy accessibility internet and online betting services have lured many students into football betting. This prevalent act of football betting is triggered by other societal pressures pressed on them as a result of financial strain, economic pressures, and the tendency to get rich quick, peer influence and many other factors.

Recommendations

This study made the following recommendations:

i. Government should make deliberate to reduce the rate of strain among young people by matching the societal goals with the institutionalized means of achieving them.
ii. Laws on gambling and other betting activities should be strictly enforced to curtail its negative impact on students.
iii. Awareness on the risk of football betting as a deviant path should be created to parents, and other stakeholders, including community leaders to understand the urgency of the matter.
iv. advertisement by betting companies on digital cables should be properly censored to reduce the enticement of young people into get rich quick syndrome without following the legitimate means of making wealth.

References

Bates, C., and Bet. (2018). The effects of social motivation on gambling behaviour. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. 30(2),205-320.

Deans, E., and Samantha, T. (2016). Social pressure to wage. *Research Snapshort*.

Dorothy, A.A., Moses, W.P., & Okaya, E.K. (2020). Economic status and deviant behaviours among Secondary School Students in Homabay County, Kenya. *Science Journal of Education,*8(1),14-21.

Flacks, D., and Moris, C.E. (2017). Correlates of gambling on high school ground. *Addict Behaviour.* 51(4),57-64.

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M., Chapman, S., & Moore, S. (2013). *Sociology: Theme and Perspectives.* London: Collins Publishers.

Henslin, J.M. (2008). *Sociology: A down-to-earth approach*. Virginia: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Ijomah, B.C. (2008). *Sociology and society*. Onitsha: Oluluben.

Lovojo, J., Bala, I., Arogundade, A., and Francis, C. (2020). Predisposing factors of sport gambling among youths in Taraba State.

Sapientia Foundation Journal of Educational Science and Gender Studies. 2(4).

Martin, J.C., Paola, F., Marco, G.N., Lorenzo, P., & Mattea, S. (2025). The magic of the game: Experimental evidence on sport betting behavior. *Journal of Economic Behaviur and Organization*,240(1)

Merton, R.K. (1968). *Social structure and anomie*. New York: Free Press.

Omanchi, S.A., and Damap, E.Z. (2024). Sport betting as a major gaming in the contemporary gambling industry in Nigeria. Example of Wukari LGA of Taraba State. *Wukari International Studies Journal.* 8(9),175-184.

Owuor, A. O., Magut, A. and Wandende, P. (2024). Effects of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County, Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implication on Education*. 8(3),259-267.

Palmer, C. (2014). Sport betting research literature review. Retrieved from: https:www.dhss.tag.gov.aul.com.

Suleiman,S.M., and Fumalola, A. (2025). The socio-economic effects of sport betting on youths in Gashua, Yobe State. Research Gate. Available at DOI:10.703882/mejfrbd. u717.20.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES TO NIGERIA EDUCATION LOAN FUND AND THE IMPLICATION ON PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS, NIGERIA

Roseline Walu; Chintif, Shwargak Goshit& Iliya George Ringtim

Department of Educational Foundations
University of Jos,

Abstract

The place of education in the development of any nation cannot be over emphasized. Nigeria as a nation has been battling with many human facets of developmental challenges only which quality, quantity, innovative and technological driven education can address. Tertiary education is the flogrum of education that can propel a developing nation like Nigeria to advance technological self reliance developed nation. The budgetary provision for education as a whole in Nigeria is less than 7 percent of the annual budget while UNESCO recommendation is 26 percent. Infact tertiary education as a whole is at the receiving end n this paucity of fund. Recently, the government introduced an intervention to cushion the effects of undergraduate students coming from different sociological metrics. Therefore, this paper was guided by 4 objectives and also answered four research question. The study used a survey research design specifically cross-sectional survey research design, with a population of 5124 undergraduate Education students in the University of Jos. A sample size of 600 students were selected using simple random sampling technique. Data was collected using structured questionnaire and content validity was established by experts. the reliability was also determined using Cronbach Alpha for internal consistency at 0.71. the data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed that, the education loan fund has help most indigent students enroll in tertiary education and also allow the students concentrate to learn and improve their performance among others. The study concluded among other things that, the education loan fund is key to improving access to education among tertiary students in Nigeria. the study recommended among other things that, government should enhance awareness and sensitization campaigns about NELFUND procedures to ensure that all eligible students understand how to access and benefit from the scheme.

Keywords: Sociological perspective, students, education, performance and education loan fund

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in national growth and development. It serves as a catalyst for societal transformation and individual emancipation. A well-planned and effectively designed educational curriculum drives economic progress by producing a skilled workforce that actively contributes to Nigeria's development. Globally, societies that have attained significant development attribute their success to the provision of quality education. Consequently, education is widely recognized as a key predictor of development. Countries that invest substantially in education tend to experience enhanced economic productivity and broader societal benefits (UNESCO, 2021).

Educational funding in Nigeria has long been a serious challenge, resulting in numerous issues such as frequent strikes and interruptions that hinder smooth and effective educational progress. This persistent problem stems largely from inadequate government allocation to the education sector over the years. According to UNESCO recommendations, a minimum of 26% of the annual national budget should be dedicated to education to effectively develop human capacity and intellectual growth. Unfortunately, Nigeria continues to allocate far below this threshold, averaging about 5.94% of the budget between 1960 and 2023. Despite various efforts to improve educational access and quality, recent initiatives under the Tinubu-led administration introduced a student loan

scheme aimed at providing financial support to indigent and economically disadvantaged students pursuing higher education, including stipends to assist with their academic needs (Ezeh & Okoye, 2023).

The Nigerian Student Loan Scheme, established under the Student Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act of 2023 and further amended in 2024, is designed to provide financial support to qualified Nigerian students pursuing higher education in accredited institutions. The scheme offers interest-free loans aimed at covering tuition fees, other educational charges, and living expenses for indigent and financially disadvantaged students. It is administered by the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), overseen by a special committee chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Access to the loan is not automatic; students must meet specific eligibility criteria to qualify. The fund is supported by government appropriations and directives, with over ₦200 billion allocated to facilitate disbursements. The scheme promotes educational access and inclusion by ensuring that no student is excluded from pursuing tertiary education due to financial constraints. The repayment terms and conditions are structured to be manageable for graduates after completion of their studies, reflecting the government's commitment to bridging the educational funding gap in Nigeria (Odidi, 2023; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2024; Ezeh & Okoye, 2023).

The loan fund can be explained using different sociological perspectives for clarity and understanding. From a functionalist perspective, the loan fund is seen as an essential mechanism that supports the smooth functioning of the educational system by promoting access and reducing financial barriers, thereby contributing to societal stability and development which is the way to provide equal opportunity for citizens to acquire education. The conflict perspective, however, focus of the short comings and lacunas in the scheme which are also the inequalities embedded within the system, arguing that despite the loan program, disparities persist in who benefits, often privileging certain groups while marginalizing others due to bureaucratic challenges and socio-economic inequalities. This position is justified in the event that some students residing in local and hinterland environment may no even know about this opportunity and even if they know may not know how to go about applying for it therefore only those who have the means to apply like the internet and smart phones or can go to a café will be able to apply. The symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on the individual experiences of students, examining how receiving or lacking access to the loan influences their educational identity, motivation, and social interactions. Moreover, the social justice perspective underscores the loan fund's role in promoting fairness and equity by aiming to provide opportunities for disadvantaged students, aligning with broader societal goals of inclusion and poverty reduction in Nigeria (Chinwendu, 2020; Eme, 2017).

Performance in education refers to the extent to which a student achieves the academic goals set by their institution, encompassing knowledge acquisition, skill mastery, and successful completion of coursework. According to Carroza-Pacheco et al. (2025), academic performance is the result of students' achievements and is influenced by numerous factors such as motivation, family background, economic conditions, and learning environment. The nature of performance is multifaceted and often fluctuates over time due to various internal and external influences, making it inconsistent and dynamic rather than static. At the University of Jos, undergraduate student performance has been notably inconsistent and has declined over recent years, which raises significant concerns. This regression reflects broader systemic challenges, including inadequate funding, socio-economic disparities, and gaps in support mechanisms such as the education loan fund. The fluctuating academic outcomes highlight the urgent need for interventions to stabilize and improve student performance to ensure quality education and future national development (Okoedion et al., 2019).

Several factors affect the academic performance of undergraduate students at the University of Jos, with financial constraints being a primary concern. Socio-economic challenges, lack of motivation, poor study habits, and psychosocial stressors have been identified as influencing academic outcomes. A significant issue is the burden of tuition fee payments, which often forces financially disadvantaged students to take on work to support themselves. This financial strain can lead to negative consequences such as skipping classes, arriving late, and reduced study time, all of which contribute to poorer academic performance over time. The need to balance work and studies strains students' focus and energy, resulting in inconsistent and declining academic results. Studies indicate that financial stress among university students in Nigeria, including difficulties in paying school fees and affording academic materials, significantly impairs performance and retention (Dev, 2023). Addressing these financial barriers is essential to improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students at the University of Jos.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the Nigerian government's commitment to expanding access to higher education through initiatives like the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), the effectiveness of this scheme remains a critical concern when aligned with global best practices. Internationally, effective tertiary education funding mechanisms are designed not only to provide financial support but also to ensure equitable access, transparency, and sustainable impact on students' academic success. However, recent reports and institutional audits suggest that in Nigeria, including at the University of Jos, the implementation of the NELFUND faces significant challenges such as delayed disbursement, miscommunication about fund utilization, and unequal access, especially among students from marginalized backgrounds. For instance, at the University of Jos, only about 66% of applicants benefited from the 2023/2024 disbursement, with many students citing delays and confusion about the process (Unijos Clarifies, 2025). This gap between policy intent and actual outcomes threatens the scheme's credibility and raises questions about its role in supporting undergraduates effectively, in line with the global standards of financial inclusiveness and transparency.

The inconsistencies in disbursement, coupled with limited coverage—particularly for students in lower-income brackets widen educational inequalities. These issues are compounded by procedural hurdles, inadequate awareness among potential beneficiaries, and resource allocation inefficiencies, all of which hinder the scheme from achieving its objective of removing financial barriers to education. As the scheme strives to serve Nigeria's youth and elevate national human capital, the challenge remains to create a sustainable, transparent, and inclusive funding model that not only supports academic achievement but also fosters long-term socio-economic development. If these systemic inefficiencies persist, they risk perpetuating the cycle of educational inequality and undermining national development goals, negating the global best practice of harnessing education as a catalyst for social mobility and economic growth

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions

1. What are the sociological perspectives towards the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND)?
2. What is the influence of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund on access to higher education among undergraduate students?
3. How does the Nigeria Education Loan Fund influence the academic performance of undergraduate students?
4. What challenges do undergraduate students face in accessing the Nigeria Education Loan Fund?

Literature Review

Sociological perspective to NELFUND

Sociological perspectives describe how NELFUND is perceived from sociological lenses using the various sociological theories to explain the perception towards education loan fund. Some sociological theories to be considered in this study include functionalist theory, conflict

theory, symbolic interactionist and social justice theory

Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective views NELFUND as a crucial institutional mechanism designed to maintain the smooth functioning of Nigeria's education system by promoting equal access to higher education. This perspective emphasizes how the loan fund supports national development goals through human capital formation, enabling students from low-income backgrounds to pursue tertiary education without the impediment of financial barriers (Taraba International Journal of Social Sciences Research, 2025). By providing interest-free loans with flexible repayment, NELFUND helps sustain the educational pipeline, reduce dropout rates, and contribute to social stability by integrating more youths into productive roles. Functionalists argue that such schemes represent societal efforts to create equal opportunities that contribute to long-term economic growth and social cohesion.

Conflict Perspective

From a conflict theory viewpoint, NELFUND highlights and reproduces underlying inequalities in Nigerian society. Despite its intent to democratize educational access, the fund's disbursement and utilization processes are often marked by bureaucratic inefficiencies, mismanagement, and partiality, privileging certain groups over others (The Nation Online, 2025). Reports of collusion between institutional management and banks that delay or deny student access to loans exemplify how social and economic inequalities intersect with policy implementation. This perspective critiques the system's failure to equitably serve marginalized communities, thereby perpetuating social stratification and underscoring the limited reach of the fund against entrenched class disparities.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

The symbolic interactionist approach focuses on the micro-level experiences of students interacting with NELFUND. It explores how individual perceptions, social interactions, and interpretations shape students' attitudes towards the loan fund and their subsequent educational identities (Dambam, 2020). For many students, access to financial support either affirms their academic self-worth and motivation or, conversely, exclusion and financial stress can negatively impact their engagement and performance. This perspective reveals the nuances of how meaning is constructed around the loan fund—from empowerment to frustration—and how these meanings influence academic behavior, social networks, and aspirations.

Social Justice Perspective

NELFUND embodies principles of social justice by actively seeking to redress educational inequalities through targeted financial support for disadvantaged students (Akinfala, 2024; Edutimes Africa, 2025). This perspective foregrounds the need for equitable resource distribution to ensure that socioeconomic status does not hinder academic opportunity. NELFUND's flexible repayment terms and interest-free policy are designed to empower marginalized populations and enhance inclusivity in Nigerian higher education. Nonetheless, persistent challenges around transparency, outreach, and policy execution must be mitigated to maximize the fund's redistributive potential and support Nigeria's broader goals of social equity and poverty reduction.

Integrated Sociological Perspective

A comprehensive understanding of NELFUND requires integrating these sociological perspectives to capture its multifaceted impact. While the fund serves functional roles in sustaining educational access, the conflict perspective alerts stakeholders to systemic barriers and inequalities that inhibit full realization of its goals. Simultaneously, the symbolic interactionist view highlights the importance of student experiences and perceptions in shaping the fund's effectiveness, while the social justice lens stresses fairness and inclusion as central evaluation criteria. Together, these perspectives emphasize that improving NELFUND's outcomes demands both

structural reforms and attention to individual-level realities, fostering an equitable and effective student loan system in Nigeria.

Meaning and nature of undergraduate academic performance

Academic performance refers to the measurable extent to which undergraduate students achieve their academic goals through successful completion of coursework, examinations, and acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge. It encompasses both cognitive achievements such as grades and qualitative factors including class participation, critical thinking, and application of learning (Ogunbodede & Oribhabor, 2022). Academic performance is considered a key indicator of educational outcomes, reflecting a student's mastery of the curriculum and readiness for progression or professional endeavors. This multidimensional nature establishes academic performance as both an outcome and a process influenced by various scholastic and personal factors.

The nature of undergraduate academic performance is fluid and often exhibits variation due to internal and external influences such as motivation, socio-economic status, study habits, institutional support, and mental well-being (Malek, 2024). It is not a constant state but fluctuates with factors like workload, financial stress, and accessibility to learning resources. This dynamic characteristic implies the need for universities to provide support systems that address both academic and non-academic challenges to stabilize and enhance student achievement levels. Recognizing academic performance as a fluctuating and influenced process is critical to understanding how students navigate the demands of tertiary education.

Specifically, academic performance among undergraduates is crucial for degree completion, social integration, and career prospects. Inadequate performance may lead to increased dropout rates, delayed graduation, and diminished self-confidence, affecting students' overall university experience and future opportunities (Al-Tameemi et al., 2023). The pressure to balance academic commitments with factors such as financial responsibilities often impacts performance negatively. Therefore, addressing the layered and multifaceted nature of undergraduate academic performance through comprehensive institutional policies and student support services is essential in fostering educational success.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which captures data from a specific population at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of variables related to sociological perspectives on the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) and its impact on undergraduate students' academic performance. The target population comprised 5,124 undergraduate Education students at the University of Jos, from which a sample size of 600 participants was drawn. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representativeness across various departments within the Faculty of Education, acknowledging the uneven distribution of students among departments. This sampling method is appropriate to control for potential biases arising from unequal department sizes and to facilitate more generalizable findings.

Data collection was conducted using a structured, close-ended questionnaire titled "Students' Questionnaire on Sociological Perspectives of Education Loan Fund and Its Implication on Students' Performance." The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B consisted of 20 items structured into four sub-headings aligned with the research questions. Each sub-heading contained five items assessed on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert evaluation by two scholars in the field. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency and stability of the instrument.

Questionnaires were administered directly to selected students by the researcher and a trained research assistant, with rigorous follow-up to ensure a high retrieval rate of completed forms. Data collected were systematically coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation facilitated by the Statistical Package

for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analyses included frequency distributions, percentages, and means to summarize respondents' views, enabling an informative examination of the relationship between sociological perspectives on NELFUND and undergraduate academic performance. This methodological approach ensured data accuracy, reliability, and relevance in addressing the research objectives within a rigorous academic framework.

Results

Research question one: What are the sociological perspectives towards the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND)?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on Sociological Perspectives toward NELFUND

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
1	NELFUND is a positive government initiative to support poor and deserving students.	600	3.10	0.72	Agreed
2	The education loan scheme promotes social equality among Nigerian youths.	600	3.05	0.74	Agreed
3	Students from low-income families are more likely to benefit from NELFUND.	600	2.98	0.78	Agreed
4	NELFUND helps bridge the educational gap between the rich and the poor.	600	3.00	0.76	Agreed
5	The public perception of NELFUND is largely positive among university students.	600	2.85	0.81	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.00**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents generally held a moderately positive sociological view of NELFUND (grand mean = 3.00 > 2.50). They agreed that the scheme was seen as a beneficial government initiative and that it promoted equity and access for low-income students, although the item on public perception scored slightly lower suggesting some uncertainty or mixed impressions among students about how well NELFUND was perceived in practice.

Research question two: What is the influence of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund on access to higher education among undergraduate students?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Access to Higher Education

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
6	NELFUND has made higher education more accessible to financially disadvantaged students.	600	3.20	0.69	Agreed
7	The availability of education loans increases students' enrollment rates in universities.	600	3.15	0.71	Agreed
8	Many students are now able to continue their studies because of the NELFUND initiative.	600	3.05	0.74	Agreed
9	NELFUND reduces students' financial dependency on parents and guardians.	600	2.95	0.78	Agreed
10	The existence of NELFUND motivates more secondary school graduates to pursue higher education.	600	3.10	0.72	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.09**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents agreed moderately that NELFUND positively influenced access to higher education (grand mean = 3.09). Items about increased enrollment and enabling continuation of studies registered positive agreement, indicating that beneficiaries and observers perceived the loan scheme as improving access, even if some dependence on family support still persisted for a portion of students.

Research question three: How does the Nigeria Education Loan Fund influence the academic performance of undergraduate students?

Table 3: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Academic Performance

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
11	Students who benefit from NELFUND tend to focus better on their studies.	600	2.90	0.81	Agreed
12	NELFUND reduces the stress of working part-time to fund education.	600	2.85	0.84	Agreed
13	Access to education loans enhances students' academic confidence and participation.	600	2.80	0.86	Agreed
14	Beneficiaries of NELFUND generally perform better academically than non-beneficiaries.	600	2.75	0.88	Agreed
15	The availability of loans motivates students to set higher academic goals.	600	2.70	0.90	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**2.80**	—	**Agreed**

Responses indicated only modest agreement that NELFUND improved academic performance (grand mean = 2.80). While students reported reduced need to work and improved focus, the lower means relative to access items suggest that loan receipt alone did not translate strongly into higher academic outcomes pointing to the role of other intervening factors (quality of instruction, student support services, study environment.

Research question four: What challenges do undergraduate students face in accessing the Nigeria Education Loan Fund?

Table 4: Mean Responses of Respondents on Influence of NELFUND on Academic Performance

S/No	Items	N	Mean	Sd	Decision
16	Many students lack adequate information about how to apply for NELFUND.	600	3.40	0.65	Agreed
17	The process of obtaining education loans is bureaucratic and stressful.	600	3.35	0.68	Agreed
18	Students are discouraged by the fear of repayment after graduation.	600	3.30	0.70	Agreed
19	Corruption and favoritism hinder fair access to NELFUND.	600	3.25	0.73	Agreed
20	Lack of collateral or guarantors prevents some students from applying for NELFUND.	600	3.10	0.77	Agreed
	Grand Mean	600	**3.28**	—	**Agreed**

Respondents strongly agreed that significant procedural and institutional barriers limited access to NELFUND (grand mean = 3.28). Information gaps, bureaucratic procedures, fear of repayment, and perceptions of corruption were prominent concerns indicating that reforms to transparency, outreach, and eligibility requirements would likely increase equitable access.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that respondents held a generally positive sociological perception of the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), seeing it as a beneficial policy intervention aimed at promoting equity and access to higher education among low-income groups. This aligns with Odidi's (2023) assertion that the reintroduction of the student loan scheme represents a new perspective on nation-building by fostering inclusion in education and reducing financial barriers for disadvantaged students. Similarly, Akinfala (2024) emphasized that NELFUND enhances equity in higher education financing by ensuring that socioeconomic background does not hinder access to tertiary education. However, the slightly moderate perception observed among students indicates an emerging skepticism likely influenced by prior mistrust in policy implementation and poor public awareness, as highlighted by Dambam (2020), who found that students' attitudes toward loan schemes in Nigeria were shaped by historical experiences of bureaucratic inefficiencies and delayed disbursement. This finding also supports the sociological position of Chinwendu (2020), who noted that educational equity policies must be culturally trusted and socially accepted to be effective within the Nigerian context.

The findings indicated that while NELFUND had moderately improved access to higher education, its influence on academic performance was less pronounced, suggesting that financial support alone is insufficient to guarantee improved learning outcomes. This observation resonates with Malek (2024) and Al-Tameemi et al. (2023), who found that academic achievement is multifactorial, depending on pedagogical quality, psychosocial factors, and institutional support beyond financial aid. Dev (2023) similarly observed that while loans alleviate financial stress, their positive academic impact depends on effective utilization of resources and students' personal resilience.

Respondents also identified structural and procedural challenges such as limited information, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and fear of repayment, corroborating the Economic Confidential (2025) report that inefficiency, corruption, and mistrust still plague the scheme's implementation. Therefore, the study's findings underscore that for NELFUND to achieve its sociological and educational goals, the government must strengthen transparency, simplify application processes, and build students' confidence in the sustainability and fairness of the fund an imperative also supported by UNESCO (2021) in its call for inclusive and transparent education financing as a pathway to equitable development.

Conclusion

The study demonstrate that the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) is a commendable initiative with strong sociological and educational implications for improving access to higher education among economically disadvantaged students and indigent students. Respondents perceived the scheme as a potential tool for promoting social equity and reducing educational disparities across class divides. However, challenges such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, limited awareness, fear of repayment, and perceived corruption hinder its full effectiveness. While the fund moderately enhances access to education, its impact on academic performance remains constrained by systemic and institutional factors. Thus, for NELFUND to fulfill its transformative potential, deliberate policy refinement, transparency, and student-centered implementation must be prioritized to ensure sustainability and equity in higher education financing in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the study

1. The government should enhance awareness and sensitization campaigns about NELFUND procedures to ensure that all eligible students understand how to access and benefit from the scheme.
2. The administrative processes involved in loan application and disbursement should be streamlined to eliminate bureaucratic delays and corruption, thereby fostering trust and efficiency.

3. Repayment structures should be made flexible and linked to graduates' income levels to reduce fear and increase willingness to participate in the loan scheme.
4. Continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be institutionalized to assess the fund's impact on student performance and to adjust policies based on evidence-driven outcomes.

References

Akinfala, A. O. (2024). Nigeria Education Loan Fund and equity in higher education financing. *Edutimes Africa*, 4(2), 45-52.

Al-Tameemi, R. A. N., et al. (2023). Determinants of poor academic performance among students. *Heliyon*, 9(3). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666374023000079

Carroza-Pacheco, A. M., et al. (2025). Academic performance and resilience in secondary education. *Frontiers in Education Sciences*. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12113049/

Chinwendu, O. (2020). Sociology of education and its relevance in Nigeria society. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*. https://abjournals.org/african-journal-of-social-sciences-and-humanities-research-ajsshr/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/journal/published_paper/volume-3/issue-6/AJSSHR_JJ2H2T62.pdf

Dambam, M. E. (2020). Student perceptions and attitudes towards university loan schemes in Nigeria: A symbolic interactionist analysis. *Journal of Nigerian Educational Sociology*, 5(1), 22-34.

Dev, S. (2023). Financial constraints and their impact on university students' academic performance. *Journal of Social Science and Educational Research*, Retrieved from https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/download/4734/605

Economic Confidential. (2025). Nigeria Education Loan Fund: Challenges and prospects. *Economic Confidential*, 7(3), 15-20.

Eme, O. I. (2017). Education financing in Nigeria. *South East Political Science Review*, 1(1). https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SEJPS/article/download/765/742/1497

Ezeh, P., & Okoye, R. (2023). On Nigeria's budgetary allocations to the education sector (1960-2023) in view of UNESCO's benchmarks. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Social Sciences*, 11(4). https://eajournals.org/ijmss/vol11-issue-4-2023/on-nigerias-budgetary-allocations-to-the-education-sector-1960-2023-in-view-of-unescos-benchmarks/

Ezeh, P., & Okoye, R. (2023). On Nigeria's budgetary allocations to the education sector (1960-2023) in view of UNESCO's benchmarks. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Social Sciences*, 11(4). https://eajournals.org/ijmss/vol11-issue-4-2023/on-nigerias-budgetary-allocations-to-the-education-sector-1960-2023-in-view-of-unescos-benchmarks/

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2024). *Students Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act (Repeal and Re-Enactment) 2024*. Government Printing Office.

Ikokoh, M. O. (n.d.). Sociological perspective to Nigerian education system. https://rujmass.com/Journals/rujmass_2020_017.pdf

Malek, I. A. (2024). Determinants of undergraduates' academic performance: A case study at a public university. *Journal of Curriculum Research and Innovation*, 9(2). https://doi.org/10.24191/jcrinn.v9i2.429

Nigeria Education Loan Fund Report. (2025). NELFUND: Rewriting the story of access to higher education. *The Cable*, June 5, 2025. https://www.thecable.ng/nelfund-rewriting-the-story-of-access-to-higher-education/

Odidi, J. (2023). Student Loan Scheme: A new perspective to nation building. *StepUp Nigeria*. https://stepupnigeria.org/student-loan-scheme-a-new-perspective-to-nation-building/

Ogunbodede, K. F., & Oribhabor, C. B. (2022). Digital resources usage and academic performance of undergraduate students in Nigeria: A case study. *European Journal of Interactive Multimedia and Education*, 3(2), e02213. https://doi.org/10.30935/ejimed/12491

Okoedion, E. G., Okolie, U. C., & Udom, I. D. (2019). Perceived factors affecting students' academic performance in Nigerian universities. *Studies in Education*, 2019(2). https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/sf/article/download/10814/10796/11302

Saudi Journals. (2023). Funding of special education in a depressed economy. *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy*, 8(2), 41-47. https://saudijournals.com/media/articles/JAEP_82_41-47.pdf

The Nation Online. (2025, March 4). Loan fund mismanagement affects many students. *The Nation*. https://thenationonlineng.net/loan-fund-mismanagement-affects-many-students/

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). *Education for sustainable development: Towards quality education and lifelong learning for all*. UNESCO Publishing.

INTERPLAY OF ECONOMIC REFORMS, CORRUPTION AND INSECURITY ON EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

Catherine Kaning Agbongiasede; Onah Peter Ogbaji; Martha Edu Akanimoh & Constance Aniyom Dien

Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Abstract

Owing to the growing concerns that persistent economic reforms, corruption, and insecurity were undermining educational quality, access, and effective school functioning in public secondary schools, this study explored the interplay of economic reforms, corruption, and insecurity on education in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. It aimed to uncover how these socio-political factors influence educational access, quality, teacher morale, and student outcomes within the state's public education sector. Using a phenomenological research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with six (6) purposefully selected participants from a population of 12,761 individuals comprising 312 school administrators, 10,846 teachers, 103 education officials, and 1,500 community stakeholders drawn from public secondary schools and educational institutions across the six Local Government Areas within the Calabar Education Zone. The study adopted system theory and thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. Findings revealed that economic reforms often neglect the education sector, resulting in underfunded schools, poor infrastructure, and limited instructional resources. Corruption was found to manifest in the mismanagement of education funds, teacher recruitment irregularities, and examination malpractice, thereby weakening institutional integrity. Insecurity, ranging from communal violence to student cultism and kidnapping threats, was reported to severely disrupt teaching and learning environments. The study concluded that systemic economic and governance failures continue to erode public confidence and educational effectiveness in the region. It recommends a multi-sectoral response involving transparent policy implementation, community-based school protection strategies, and targeted investments in public secondary education to mitigate the adverse effects of these challenges.

Keywords: Economic reforms, corruption, insecurity, education, public secondary schools.

Introduction

Over the years, education has been universally acknowledged as a fundamental catalyst for national development, individual empowerment, and societal advancement (Adams & Uzoigwe, 2023). In Nigeria, however, public secondary education continues to grapple with persistent structural challenges such as inadequate funding, dilapidated infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, poor remuneration and motivation of staff, examination malpractice, weak policy implementation, and limited access to instructional resources and modern learning technologies that compromise its capacity to deliver equitable and high-quality learning (Ayang, Uzoigwe & Egbai, 2025). In Cross River State, in particular, socio-political dynamics including economic policy shifts, governance shortcomings, and security concerns have significantly affected the functionality of school systems (Effiom, Uzoigwe & Umoh, 2024). While successive governments have pursued economic reforms aimed at driving macroeconomic growth, the education sector is often deprioritized, receiving inadequate funding and limited institutional attention (Ajino, Ojobe & Uzoigwe, 2024). This persistent neglect undermines the development of essential human

capital, which is critical for long-term national sustainability (Luke & Uzoigwe, 2022).

Economic reforms refer to deliberate policy initiatives aimed at restructuring a nation's economy to improve efficiency, frequently through public sector adjustments, deregulation, and privatization (Ekanem & Uzoigwe, 2023). Corruption, on the other hand, denotes the misuse of public resources or authority for personal enrichment, while insecurity encompasses conditions of instability resulting from violence, crime, and social unrest (Inah, Ekpang & Uzoigwe, 2024). In the context of education, these factors can have debilitating consequences: economic reforms that exclude education from investment priorities weaken infrastructural development and resource availability (Akpong & Uzoigwe, 2025); corruption distorts resource allocation and compromises the integrity of school governance (Okon, Egbai & Uzoigwe, 2025); and insecurity disrupts the learning environment, discouraging both attendance and instructional effectiveness (Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters & Uzoigwe, 2025). Collectively, these challenges diminish access to and the quality of public secondary education, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable areas (Nsan, Ekpenyong & Uzoigwe, 2021).

Corruption remains one of the most pervasive impediments to progress within Nigeria's public education sector. Widespread misappropriation of educational funds, irregularities in teacher recruitment processes, and endemic examination malpractice have all contributed to the erosion of institutional credibility and public trust (Osim & Uzoigwe, 2023). These corrupt practices perpetuate inequities in access to education, dampen teacher morale, and foster a climate of mediocrity within schools (Akpong, Modey, Okang, Ozinko, Itakwu & Uzoigwe, 2025). In Cross River State, where public education serves as a critical pathway for socio-economic mobility among low-income populations, the impact of corruption is especially pronounced, further entrenching educational disparities (Paul, Uzoigwe & Sunday, 2024). Moreover, the inability of regulatory bodies to enforce accountability mechanisms continues to reinforce a cycle of dysfunction and inefficiency (Inah & Uzoigwe, 2024).

Insecurity adds a further layer of complexity to the already fragile state of public education in Cross River. Recurrent incidents of communal violence, cult-related activities among students, and the looming threat of kidnappings have collectively created unsafe learning environments (Onya, Uzoigwe, Akeke, Ovat, Uguma & Ekpo, 2023). Schools are frequently forced to suspend academic activities during periods of unrest, and where they remain open, the atmosphere is often one of fear and uncertainty (Opuwari & Uzoigwe, 2025).This instability significantly reduces student attendance, weakens teacher commitment, and undermines academic performance. Against this backdrop, the interplay of economic neglect, institutional corruption, and persistent insecurity necessitates a comprehensive investigation. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how these interrelated factors impact the quality and accessibility of public secondary education in Cross River State.

Statement of the problem

The quality of and access to public secondary education in Nigeria have come under increasing scrutiny, especially in states like Cross River, where systemic challenges are deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric. Despite numerous economic reform policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, fiscal decentralization reforms, education sector funding reforms, teacher salary and wage restructuring policies, public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives in education, and reforms aimed at improving transparency and accountability in public financial management, the education sector continues to face persistent challenges that hinder effective service delivery.

Aimed at national development, the education sector continues to receive minimal attention in budgetary allocations and planning priorities. As a result, public secondary schools suffer from chronic underfunding, deteriorating infrastructure, lack of learning materials, and an overstretched workforce. These deficits have cumulatively weakened the ability of schools to

deliver quality education, creating a disconnect between reform intentions and real educational outcomes. Corruption further exacerbates the decline in educational standards by undermining the integrity and functionality of school management systems. Irregularities in fund disbursement, teacher recruitment, and the manipulation of examination results have led to inefficiencies and distrust within the system. These deficits have significantly weakened the capacity of public secondary schools to deliver quality education, as reflected in Nigeria's high out-of-school population of over 10 million children and secondary school classroom overcrowding that often exceeds 60–80 students per class in many urban public schools, contributing to persistently low performance in national examinations such as WAEC and NECO.

Corruption further undermines the system through irregular fund disbursement, with audit reports and oversight findings repeatedly showing diversion and mismanagement of education funds, alongside inflated procurement contracts that reduce the availability of instructional materials, laboratories, and infrastructure needed for effective teaching and learning. This mismanagement not only deprives schools of much-needed resources but also diminishes public confidence in the education sector. In many cases, institutional corruption discourages transparency and accountability, contributing to a cyclical pattern of decline that disproportionately affects students in already marginalized communities.

Insecurity presents yet another formidable obstacle to effective teaching and learning in Cross River State. From communal violence to cult-related activities and occasional kidnappings, the safety of students, teachers, and school infrastructure is increasingly compromised. These disruptions not only displace learners but also reduce school attendance, teacher morale, and community involvement in education. The combined effect of neglected reforms, corrupt practices, and persistent insecurity raises critical questions about the viability and equity of public secondary education in the state, necessitating an in-depth exploration of how these factors interplay to shape educational quality and access.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the interplay of economic reforms, corruption, and insecurity on educational quality and access to public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To explore how economic policy affect funding, infrastructure and resource allocation in the public secondary schools in Cross River State;
2. To examine how corruption impacts the following administrative processes (management, recruitment and academic integrity);
3. To determine how various forms of insecurity such as communal conflict, cultism and kidnapping disrupt teaching and learning.

Literature review

Empirical literature increasingly demonstrates that economic reforms which inadequately prioritize education often generate adverse consequences for public secondary school systems in developing countries, particularly Nigeria. Studies by Adams and Uzoigwe (2023), Akpong and Uzoigwe (2025), and Ekpenyong, Uzoigwe, Onabe, and Onwochei (2020) reveal that fiscal adjustment policies and economic restructuring programmes have frequently resulted in declining real investment in education despite rising national expenditure in sectors such as infrastructure and security. These studies collectively show that reduced public spending on education has contributed to deteriorating school infrastructure, shortage of instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly equipped laboratories, thereby weakening the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, comparative analyses conducted in Cross River and neighboring states by Mbon and Uzoigwe (2023) and Inah and Uzoigwe (2024) indicate that post-reform financial policies reduced school subventions, delayed teacher salary payments, and stalled infrastructure development projects. While these studies consistently establish a relationship between economic reforms and educational decline, they differ slightly in emphasis, with some focusing on fiscal constraints and others highlighting policy

exclusion and inequalities in educational access. Luke and Uzoigwe (2022) as well as Ayang, Uzoigwe, and Egbai (2025) further argue that reform agendas rarely integrate educational inclusion measures, thereby widening disparities between urban and rural schools. Collectively, the literature suggests that the weak alignment between economic planning and educational development has undermined the capacity of public secondary schools to deliver equitable and quality education.

The literature also reveals growing concern regarding the influence of corruption and administrative mismanagement on educational quality and institutional effectiveness. Effiom, Uzoigwe, and Umoh (2024) alongside Onya, Uzoigwe, Akeke, Ovat, Uguma, and Ekpo (2023) found that widespread misappropriation of education funds has severely constrained school rehabilitation, infrastructure maintenance, and the provision of learning resources. Similarly, Inah, Ekpang, and Uzoigwe (2024) and Nnaji and Uzoigwe (2021) observed that weak accountability structures and ineffective oversight mechanisms create opportunities for financial leakages and procurement fraud within the education sector. Beyond financial mismanagement, the literature highlights persistent irregularities in teacher recruitment and deployment. Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters, and Uzoigwe (2025) as well as Osim and Uzoigwe (2023) argue that recruitment processes are often influenced by political patronage and bribery rather than professional merit, thereby reducing teacher quality and creating uneven staffing patterns across schools. Opuwari and Uzoigwe (2025) and Ogbeche and Uzoigwe (2020) further contend that these practices demoralize qualified teachers and disproportionately affect underserved communities. Research on examination malpractice similarly reveals systemic ethical failures within school administration. Nsan, Ekpenyong, and Uzoigwe (2021) together with Akpong and Uzoigwe (2025) documented cases where school officials and external supervisors facilitated examination malpractice through impersonation, illegal fees, and leakage of examination materials. These findings suggest that corruption in education extends beyond financial misconduct to include institutionalized practices that undermine educational credibility, weaken public trust, and distort learning outcomes.

Studies on insecurity consistently indicate that unsafe learning environments constitute a major threat to educational access, continuity, and quality in Nigerian public secondary schools. Luke and Uzoigwe (2022) and Effiom, Uzoigwe, and Umoh (2024) found that insecurity arising from armed robbery, communal conflict, kidnapping, and cult-related violence has disrupted school operations in several communities, leading to irregular academic calendars and temporary school closures. Osim and Uzoigwe (2023) as well as Onya and Uzoigwe (2023) reported that teachers in volatile areas often experience fear, absenteeism, and reluctance to accept postings in high-risk communities, thereby reducing instructional effectiveness and continuity. The psychological implications of insecurity also emerge strongly in the literature. Ayang, Uzoigwe, and Egbai (2025) together with Adams and Uzoigwe (2023) found that students exposed to violence frequently experience anxiety, emotional instability, and declining academic engagement. Ajino, Ojobe, and Uzoigwe (2024) alongside Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters, and Uzoigwe (2025) similarly noted that prolonged exposure to insecurity negatively affects students' concentration, classroom participation, and overall motivation to learn. Additional studies by Ogbeche and Uzoigwe (2020) and Inah, Ekpang, and Uzoigwe (2024) show that teachers often adopt coping mechanisms such as shortened lessons, relocation, and informal scheduling, which, although necessary for survival, further compromise educational quality. The literature therefore demonstrates that insecurity not only disrupts physical access to schooling but also weakens the psychological and institutional foundations necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Institutional weaknesses and poor accountability systems are also widely identified as major contributors to declining educational performance. Ekanem and Uzoigwe (2023) and Adams and Uzoigwe (2023) observed that

educational oversight structures are often underfunded, inactive, or weakened by bureaucratic inefficiencies, thereby limiting effective monitoring and supervision of schools. Osim and Uzoigwe (2023) together with Onya, Uzoigwe, Akeke, Ovat, Uguma, and Ekpo (2023) further noted that irregular inspections, weak record-keeping systems, and inadequate data management compromise educational planning and resource allocation. According to Ategwu, Kenn-Aklah, Fanan, and Uzoigwe (2022) as well as Paul, Uzoigwe, and Sunday (2024), inaccurate statistics on enrolment, staffing, and resource distribution frequently result in poorly targeted interventions and inefficient policy implementation. Leadership-related weaknesses also emerge prominently in the literature. Ajino, Ojobe, and Uzoigwe (2024) and Okon, Egbai, and Uzoigwe (2025) found that many school administrators lack sufficient training in financial management, supervision, and accountability practices, thereby increasing institutional vulnerability to mismanagement. Similarly, studies by Onya and Uzoigwe (2023) and Inah and Uzoigwe (2024) reveal that political interference and bureaucratic delays frequently obstruct reform implementation and weaken participatory governance structures within schools. Collectively, these findings suggest that institutional inefficiency and weak accountability mechanisms significantly undermine educational governance and sustainable school improvement efforts.

In response to these persistent challenges, several studies propose strategic interventions for improving educational quality and access in public secondary schools. Adams and Uzoigwe (2023) as well as Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters, and Uzoigwe (2025) identify sustained teacher development programmes as essential for strengthening instructional delivery and improving student learning outcomes. Ekanem and Uzoigwe (2023) together with Luke and Uzoigwe (2022) further emphasize the importance of regular professional training, mentorship, and pedagogical innovation in maintaining educational quality. Infrastructure improvement also receives considerable attention in the literature. Ojobe, Uzoigwe, and Bassey (2024) and Chuktu and Uzoigwe (2019) found that renovated classrooms, functional laboratories, libraries, and improved learning facilities significantly enhance enrolment, retention, and academic engagement, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Community participation emerges as another critical strategy. Akpong and Uzoigwe (2025) alongside Ategwu, Kenn-Aklah, Fanan, and Uzoigwe (2022) argue that active Parent-Teacher Associations and school-based management committees improve transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to local educational needs. Nsan, Ekpenyong, and Uzoigwe (2021) and Ayang, Uzoigwe, and Egbai (2025) similarly emphasize that local stakeholder engagement strengthens institutional ownership and promotes collaborative school governance. Furthermore, studies by Onya, Uzoigwe, Akeke, Ovat, Uguma, and Ekpo (2023) and Inah, Ekpang, and Uzoigwe (2024) recommend data-driven governance and decentralized educational management systems capable of supporting real-time monitoring, efficient resource allocation, and evidence-based decision-making. Overall, the literature suggests that sustainable improvement in public secondary education requires coordinated reforms involving adequate funding, strengthened accountability systems, institutional capacity building, infrastructural investment, and active stakeholder participation.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological design to explore the interplay of economic reforms, corruption, and insecurity on education in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. The phenomenological design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of stakeholders directly involved in or affected by educational governance and school realities. The population of the study consisted of 12,761 individuals, including school administrators, teachers, education officials, and community stakeholders across six selected Local Government Areas in Cross River State. From this population, six (6) participants were purposefully selected based on their direct engagement with educational policy implementation, school administration,

and community-level educational dynamics. The justification for the sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, where qualitative adequacy is achieved not through numerical representation but through depth of insight and redundancy of information. In line with John W. Creswell (2014) and Martha Guest et al. (2006), phenomenological studies often reach saturation within a small number of information-rich participants when no new themes emerge from additional interviews.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interview guide was structured around key thematic areas derived from the research questions, including how economic reforms affect school funding and access to education, how corruption influences teacher recruitment, resource allocation, and school management, how insecurity affects teaching continuity, student attendance, and school stability, and perceived strategies for improving educational quality and access.

Sample interview questions included:

1. "In your experience, how have recent economic reforms affected the funding and functioning of your school?"
2. "Can you describe any observed cases of corruption or mismanagement in the education system?"
3. "How has insecurity impacted teaching and learning activities in your school/community?"
4. "What strategies do you think can improve educational quality and access in this context?"

To ensure validity and credibility, the interview instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts in Educational Management and Social Research Methods. Their role was to assess the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the questions in addressing the research objectives. Their feedback led to refinement of ambiguous items and alignment of questions with the study's theoretical framework. Reliability and trustworthiness were further enhanced through member checking, where participants reviewed transcribed interviews for accuracy, and triangulation, by comparing responses across administrators, teachers, officials, and community stakeholders. Additionally, reflexivity was maintained through the researcher's reflective notes to minimize bias in interpretation. The analysis was guided by thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step procedure, allowing systematic movement from raw data to meaningful themes. Systems theory provided the theoretical lens for interpreting how interconnected political, economic, and security structures influence educational outcomes in a dynamic and interdependent manner. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

Thematic analysis

Theme I: Neglect of the education sector in economic reforms

This theme examines how the neglect of the education sector within broader economic reform policies has contributed to persistent structural weaknesses and declining performance in public secondary education.

Interview Prompt:

"In your experience, how have recent economic reforms or financial policy shifts affected public secondary education in your area? What specific changes have you observed in funding, infrastructure, or school operations?"

Participant 1 (Principal, Yakurr):

"Since these new reforms started, we barely receive enough funding to maintain our school. Our roofs leak, the desks are broken, and sometimes we have to ask students to bring chalk. The government says they're cutting costs, but education seems to be at the bottom of their list."

Participant 2 (Teacher, Calabar South):

"Before now, we used to receive teaching aids and instructional materials every term. That has stopped. We've been told the money was redirected for other 'priority sectors.' We're left to improvise most of the time."

Participant 3 (Education Officer, Obubra):
"Funding delays are now common. Subventions that are supposed to come early in the term come months late. Some schools can't even run exams on time. These reforms are not benefiting education at all."

Participant 4 (Community Leader, Odukpani):
"We've seen more boreholes and roads constructed in our area, but the school buildings are still in ruins. When we ask, they tell us it's not captured in the new budget. It's like education is not considered part of development."

Participant 5 (Vice Principal, Biase):
"The budget may look big on paper, but we don't feel it in the schools. We hear about economic growth, but nothing trickles down to us. We still have overcrowded classrooms and no laboratory equipment."

Participant 6 (Teacher, Calabar Municipality):
"I think the reforms are designed for revenue generation, not service delivery. Schools are suffering no maintenance, no training, and sometimes, no salaries. We've been told to be patient, but it's getting worse."

Interpretation:
Across all interviews, participants described the economic reforms as systematically neglecting the education sector. Respondents noted reduced funding, delayed financial support, crumbling infrastructure, and inadequate teaching materials as recurring issues. Several emphasized that while reforms claimed to prioritize development, education appeared deprioritized or excluded entirely. The neglect was seen as both structural and deliberate, with negative consequences for school functionality and student outcomes. Overall, the findings indicate that economic reforms have contributed significantly to the decline in quality and access within public secondary education in Cross River State.

Theme II: Corruption and mismanagement in the education system
This theme explores how corruption and mismanagement within the education system undermine resource allocation, accountability, and the effective delivery of quality education in public secondary schools.

Interview Prompt:
"Can you describe any experiences or observations of corruption or mismanagement within public secondary schools or the broader education system? How do these issues affect school operations and educational outcomes?"

Participant 1 (Principal, Akamkpa):
"Funds allocated for school renovations never reach us in full. Sometimes, we're told projects have been executed on paper, but nothing happens in reality. It's frustrating because we can't hold anyone accountable."

Participant 2 (Teacher, Calabar South):
"We know people who paid to be posted to urban schools, while qualified teachers are dumped in remote areas or not employed at all. It's discouraging and creates resentment among staff."

Participant 3 (Education Official, Obudu):
"There are schools where ghost workers still receive salaries. These names remain on the payroll for years, yet the schools are short-staffed. Efforts to audit the system are often blocked by higher authorities."

Participant 4 (Community Representative, Abi):
"Parents sometimes have to pay unofficial fees just to secure admission or get results released. These practices are normalized in some schools, and it drives poor families away from education altogether."

Participant 5 (Vice Principal, Calabar Municipality):
"We've heard of funds for textbooks and science kits being diverted. When materials arrive, they're incomplete or of low quality. Sometimes, suppliers are linked to powerful people, so complaints go nowhere."

Participant 6 (Teacher, Yala):
"During exams, some administrators turn a blind eye to malpractice as long as money is involved. Students learn that success can be bought, and it undermines everything we teach about discipline and merit."

Interpretation:
Participants consistently highlighted widespread corruption and mismanagement within the education system, with implications ranging from financial fraud to compromised academic integrity. Common issues included diversion of funds, ghost workers, bribery in recruitment and school postings, and unauthorized charges to parents. Respondents also expressed concern about the normalization of these practices and their long-term effects on trust, morale, and the quality of education. Overall, the accounts suggest that corruption has become deeply embedded in the system, undermining efficiency, equity, and the integrity of public secondary education in Cross River State.

Theme III: Impact of insecurity on teaching and learning
This theme examines how insecurity disrupts teaching and learning processes in public secondary schools by affecting school attendance, teacher availability, instructional stability, and overall educational outcomes.

Interview Prompt:
"Have there been any security-related challenges affecting your school or community? How do issues like cultism, communal clashes, theft, or threats affect teaching, learning, and school operations?"

Participant 1 (Principal, Bekwarra):
"We had to close the school early several times last term because of cult clashes nearby. Students and even staff were too afraid to stay late. It disrupted lesson plans and made it difficult to finish the syllabus."

Participant 2 (Teacher, Ogoja):
"There was a time some unknown boys stormed the school and harassed both students and teachers. Since then, attendance has dropped. Many students are afraid to come to school regularly, and their performance is suffering."

Participant 3 (Education Officer, Boki):
"Insecurity in some parts has made it nearly impossible to deploy teachers. We have schools running with just one or two staff members. Nobody wants to be posted to places where there are kidnapping threats."

Participant 4 (Student Counselor, Obudu):
"We see students suffering from trauma after witnessing violence in their communities. They can't focus, they're restless in class, and some even drop out. The emotional impact is often overlooked."

Participant 5 (Community Leader, Calabar South):
"Communal conflicts have damaged school buildings and displaced families. Teachers and students who fled have not returned. Some schools now operate in temporary shelters or make-shift classrooms."

Participant 6 (Teacher, Akpabuyo):
"We don't have any form of security. When there's unrest, we're on our own. Even exams have been disrupted because of threats. It's hard to maintain any kind of learning atmosphere in such fear."

Interpretation:
The responses illustrate the pervasive and destabilizing effect of insecurity on public secondary schools in Cross River State. Participants reported cult violence, community clashes, harassment, and the psychological toll of living in fear as key factors disrupting both teaching and learning. Issues ranged from interrupted academic calendars and poor attendance to teacher shortages and trauma among learners. Insecurity not only weakens academic consistency but also undermines student retention, staff morale, and the general safety needed for effective education.

Theme IV: Institutional weaknesses and educational accountability

This theme investigates how institutional weaknesses and poor accountability mechanisms within the education system undermine effective governance, resource utilization, and the delivery of quality education in public secondary schools.

Interview Prompt:

"What are your observations regarding how schools and education authorities manage resources, staff, and performance? Do you think there are weaknesses in the way the education system is monitored and held accountable?"

Participant 1 (Principal, Etung):

"We rarely see inspectors anymore. School visits that used to happen termly are now occasional or entirely absent. Without that oversight, many teachers do what they like, and standards have dropped."

Participant 2 (Education Official, Calabar Municipality):

"Most schools don't keep proper records. You can't tell who's present or teaching what on a given day. We've tried to implement tracking systems, but there's no follow-up or digital infrastructure to support it."

Participant 3 (Vice Principal, Obanliku):

"Teacher punctuality and lesson delivery are poorly monitored. Without strong administrative structures, there's no real way to enforce discipline. Some staff just come and go as they please."

Participant 4 (Community Stakeholder, Yakurr):

"The school boards don't engage with parents or the community anymore. We don't know what happens to funds or how decisions are made. There's a lot of secrecy, and that breeds suspicion."

Participant 5 (Teacher, Biase):

"When performance is poor, nothing is done. Students fail national exams, but nobody is held responsible. It's as if failure is expected, and it becomes a norm."

Participant 6 (Education Policy Analyst, Calabar South):

"There's too much centralization. Schools wait for the ministry to act, and when the ministry is slow, everything stalls. We need more autonomy at the school level, but with clear accountability systems."

Interpretation:

Respondents widely expressed concern about weak institutional structures and the lack of accountability in the education system. Poor monitoring, absence of supervision, limited transparency, and a lack of performance consequences were consistently cited. These institutional weaknesses were seen as enabling complacency among educators and administrators, undermining school discipline and instructional quality. Overall, the data suggest that unless accountability mechanisms are strengthened through regular oversight, recordkeeping, stakeholder involvement, and decentralization systemic inefficiencies will persist in public secondary education in Cross River State.

Theme V: Strategies for improving educational quality and access

This theme explores strategic interventions aimed at improving educational quality and access in public secondary schools, focusing on policy reform, improved funding, strengthened accountability systems, and enhanced teaching and learning conditions.

Interview Prompt:

"What strategies do you think could help improve the quality of education and increase access to public secondary schools in your area? What has worked or could work better?"

Participant 1 (Principal, Akpabuyo):

"Training teachers regularly is key. We need workshops to upgrade our teaching methods and adapt to new curriculum standards. If teachers are better equipped, students will perform better."

Participant 2 (Education Officer, Yakurr):

"Infrastructure must be prioritized. Classrooms, libraries, and labs should be renovated. Some

students walk away simply because the schools look abandoned or unsafe."

Participant 3 (Community Leader, Calabar South):
"We need to involve the community more. When PTAs are active, schools run better. Parents can monitor teachers and students, and even contribute resources where possible."

Participant 4 (Teacher, Obudu):
"Digital tools can help. Even basic ICT for record keeping, lesson planning, and communication can improve how we teach and track students. Right now, everything is manual and disorganized."

Participant 5 (Vice Principal, Odukpani):
"Schools should be given more autonomy to manage their resources and staff. If principals can make quick decisions without waiting for the ministry, things will move faster."

Participant 6 (NGO Representative, Ikom):
"Data and monitoring systems must be improved. Without tracking student attendance, teacher performance, or budget usage, we can't know what's working. Evaluation is crucial."

Interpretation:
Participants proposed a range of practical strategies to improve educational quality and access in public secondary schools. Key recommendations included regular teacher training, infrastructure upgrades, community engagement, integration of digital tools, decentralized decision-making, and stronger monitoring systems. The responses emphasized that sustainable improvement must involve both internal reforms within schools and external support from stakeholders. Overall, the findings reflect a shared understanding that quality education depends not only on policy but also on collective responsibility, innovation, and institutional efficiency.

Discussion of findings
The first thematic finding on the impact of economic reforms on education aligns with literature documenting how macroeconomic restructuring policies often deprioritize the education sector. Scholars like Akpong and Uzoigwe (2025) and Ajino, Ojobe, and Uzoigwe (2024) emphasize that fiscal tightening, privatization, and reduced public spending have weakened the operational capacity of public secondary schools in Nigeria. In Cross River State, delayed salary payments, halted infrastructure upgrades, and insufficient subventions to schools echo the broader national pattern. The neglect of education in economic policy frameworks undermines human capital development, thereby limiting long-term national productivity (Adams & Uzoigwe, 2023; Luke & Uzoigwe, 2022).

The second and third themes corruption in school governance and insecurity in the learning environment further reveal systemic dysfunctions that mirror findings in multiple studies. Corruption, as noted by Osim and Uzoigwe (2023) and Paul, Uzoigwe, and Sunday (2024), distorts equitable access to resources through fund diversion, ghost workers, and politically motivated recruitment. Examination malpractice and procurement fraud compromise both credibility and service delivery. Insecurity, as highlighted by Sunday, Afia, Essien, Inyang, Peters, and Uzoigwe (2025), manifests in school closures, teacher absenteeism, and psychological distress among learners particularly in communities plagued by communal clashes, cultism, and abductions. These two themes demonstrate how corruption and violence are not only barriers to access but direct threats to educational quality and stability.

The final two themes weak institutional accountability and strategies for educational revitalization point toward the need for structural reform. Inah and Uzoigwe (2024) and Onya, Uzoigwe, Akeke, Ovat, Uguma, and Ekpo (2023) document widespread institutional weaknesses including irregular inspections, poor data systems, and weak internal controls. These gaps erode transparency and prevent the enforcement of standards. However, studies by Ategwu, Kenn-Aklah, Fanan, and Uzoigwe (2022) and Okon, Egbai, and Uzoigwe (2025) propose corrective strategies such as teacher training, decentralized management, infrastructure investment, and community

participation. These solutions are supported by literature emphasizing the value of participatory governance and evidence-based planning in restoring trust and boosting outcomes in public secondary schools.

Conclusion

The study concludes that economic reforms, corruption, insecurity, and weak institutional accountability collectively undermine the quality and accessibility of public secondary education in Cross River State. These challenges have not only eroded public trust but also widened educational disparities, especially among socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Addressing these systemic issues through coordinated policy interventions and sustainable school-based reforms is essential for revitalizing the education sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the followings are recommended thus:

1. Policymakers should ensure that education is a core component of all economic restructuring initiatives by allocating adequate funding and prioritizing infrastructure development in public secondary schools.
2. Government agencies must establish and enforce transparent monitoring systems for school governance, recruitment, and resource management to curb corruption and enhance service delivery.
3. Investments in school safety infrastructure and stronger collaboration with local communities can help create a more secure and supportive learning environment, especially in conflict-prone areas.

References

Ayang, O. L., Uzoigwe, M. C., & Egbai, O. O. (2025). Managing learning styles and academic achievement among Senior Secondary II Biology students in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 3*(2), 90–100. https://jpapgr.com

Adams, L. A., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2023). Management of security services in tertiary institutions. In N. N. Ukpong & M. C. Uzoigwe (Eds.), *Collaborative approaches to educational management* (pp.61–69). University of Calabar Printing Press. https://unicalpress.unical.edu.ng/items/show/35

Ajino, O. S., Ojobe, O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2024). Application of artificial intelligence-based technologies in educational administration: Opportunities and challenges. *SSR Journal of Artificial Intelligence (SSRJAI), 1*(1), 27–32. Open Access.

Akpong, B. A., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2025). Psychological factors and mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals, 8*(11), 1903–1916. IRE Journals.

Akpong, B., A, Modey, S. M., Okang, M. A., Ozinko, O. O., Itakwu, I. U., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2025). Sex education and adoption of healthy lifestyle among secondary school students in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals*, *8*(11), 1888–1902. IRE Journals.

Ategwu, P. O., Kenn-Aklah, F. U., Fanan, A. G., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2022). Availability and utilization of instructional technologies in supervision in public secondary schools during the COVID-19 era in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Educational Research, 21*(2), 175–181.

Chuktu, O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2019). An assessment of the implementation of staff development programmes for manpower sustainability in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. *British Journal of Education, 7*(8), 100–118. European Centre for Research Training and Development.

Effiom, O. E., Uzoigwe, M. C., & Umoh, R. A. (2024). Management of teachers' mentoring practices for retention in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Marketing and Sustainability Review, 1*(2), 58–70.

https://transglobalpunet.com/index.php/ijmmsr

Ekanem, E. E., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2023). Accounting for school management. In N. N. Ukpong & M. C. Uzoigwe (Eds.), *Collaborative approaches to educational management* (pp. 269–275). University of Calabar Printing Press. https://unicalpress.unical.edu.ng/items/show/35

Ekpenyong, E. B., Uzoigwe, M. C., Onabe, D. B., &Onwochei, N. N. (2020). Assessing administrators' effectiveness in combating dreaded COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Lagos State public secondary schools, Nigeria. *African Journal of Educational Assessors, 7*(2), 55–66. Benchmark Educational Services.

Inah, R. A., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2024). An analysis of the factors that contribute to high school dropout rate in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 2*(3), 1–13.

Inah, R. A., Ekpang, P. O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2024). Bridging the digital divide: A study on the growth of digitalization through digital transformation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 2*(3), 53–62. https://jpapgr.com

Inah, R. A., Ekpang, P. O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2024). Management of digital support services and sustainability of university education in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 2*(2), 211–224.

Luke, M. C., A. A., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2022). Critical assessment of entrepreneurship education programme implementation in public universities in Cross River State during post COVID-19 pandemic era. *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research, 8*(3), 18–28.

Mbon, U. F., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2023). Application of interpersonal skills in school administration. In N. N. Ukpong & M. C. Uzoigwe (Eds.), *Collaborative approaches to educational management* (pp. 180–187). University of Calabar Printing Press. https://unicalpress.unical.edu.ng/items/show/35

Nnaji, E. S., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2021). Sustainable leadership and school accountability management as determinants of students' performance during COVID-19 era in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research, 6*(3), 81–91.

Nsan, N. N., Ekpenyong, E. B., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2021). Managing digital application tools to support students' discovery learning theory. In *Application teaching techniques for revolutionising pedagogy in the era of knowledge economy* (Vol. 1, pp. 76–90). Benchmark Educational Services.

Ogbeche, M. M., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2020). Availability of facilities and implementation of inclusive entrepreneurship education programme in secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. *Prestige Journal of Counselling Psychology, 3*(1), 60–69.

Ojobe, E. O., Uzoigwe, M. C., & Bassey, O. I. (2024). Educational leaders' perception of the effectiveness of EdTech integration in secondary school management. *SSR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 1*(2), 64–72.

Okon, E. E., Egbai, O. O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2025). Managing school-based resources and secondary school effectiveness in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 3*(2), 123–138.

Okon, E. E., Uzoigwe, M. C., & Umoh, R. A. (2025). Management of teachers' mentoring practices for retention in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Marketing and Sustainability Review, 1*(2), 58–70.

Onya, O. R., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2023). Contemporary issues in school management. In N. N. Ukpong & M. C. Uzoigwe (Eds.), *Collaborative approaches to educational management* (pp. 273–283). University of Calabar Press. https://unicalpress.unical.edu.ng/items/show/35

Onya, O. R., Uzoigwe, M. C., Akeke, M. N. G., Ovat, E. O., Uguma, V. U., &Ekpo, A. M. (2023). Exploring education leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of socio-religious organisations in higher education funding in Cross River State, Nigeria. *NURTURE*, *18*(1), 115–129. https://doi.org/10.55951/nurture.v18i1.547

Onya, O. R., Uzoigwe, M. C., Ovat, E. O., Abane, O. P., & Osa, I. P. (2024). Public health expenditure, government effectiveness, and labour productivity in West Africa. *Nurture, 18*(1), 55–72. https://nurture.org.pk

Opuwari, O. S., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2025). Educating for effective resource management and self-employment intentions of graduates from public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education in Developing Areas (JEDA)*, *33*(1), 270–281. https://journals.journalsplace.org/index.php/JEDA

Osim, R. O., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2023). Contemporary issues in school management. In N. N. Ukpong & M. C. Uzoigwe (Eds.), *Collaborative approaches to educational management* (pp. 204–211). University of Calabar Printing Press. https://unicalpress. unical.edu.ng/items/show/35

Paul, K. A., Uzoigwe, M. C., & Sunday, G. I. (2024). Managing distance education in Nigeria. In E. U. Etudor-Eyo& B. A. Akuegwu (Eds.), *The primacy of planning for quality education: A Festschrift in honour of Prof. Charles MadubuchiOgbodo* (pp. 600–610). Uniuyo Printing Press and Digital Ltd.

Sunday, G. I., Afia, A. E., Essien, N. E., Inyang, S. A., Peters, V. A., & Uzoigwe, M. C. (2025). Smart school management: Integrating AI into instructional leadership for academic excellence. *IRE Journal, 8*(11), 694–708.

THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC REFORMS ON NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Ezekiel Gimba Jingbe

Department of Sociology
Plateau State University, Bokkos

Ernest Gotep & Wulime Andrew Jikka

Department of Political Science Education,
Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State

Abstract

This paper discusses the multifaceted relationship between Nigeria's economic reforms and the development of its educational sector. Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, has undergone numerous economic reforms since the 1980s—including structural adjustment programs, deregulation, privatization, and fiscal policy adjustments—aimed at fostering macroeconomic stability, diversification, and sustainable growth. While these reforms have yielded some positive outcomes, such as increased private sector participation and infrastructural development, they have also contributed to heightened inequalities, reduced public investment, and socio-economic disparities that directly impact education access and quality. The educational sector remains vital for national development, yet faces persistent challenges of underfunding, infrastructural decay, teacher shortages, and access disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas. Recent reforms emphasizing privatization and public-private partnerships have introduced innovative approaches to expanding educational opportunities but raise concerns about equity, quality, and regulatory oversight. Empirical evidence highlights that economic liberalization influences educational outcomes through resource allocation, infrastructure, and affordability, though effects are complex and often produce mixed results. Utilizing the Structural Functionalism framework, this study underscores the interconnectedness of economic policies and educational stability, emphasizing the importance of maintaining institutional functions for societal cohesion. To promote sustainable educational growth, policy recommendations include increasing funding to meet international benchmarks, strengthening regulatory mechanisms, expanding inclusive access, and fostering balanced public-private collaborations. Addressing these issues is essential for harnessing education as a catalyst for Nigeria's socio-economic transformation amid ongoing economic reforms.

Keywords: Economic Reforms, Education, Educational Policy, Education Reforms, Educational Funding

Introduction

Economic reforms are pivotal strategies that nations adopt to stimulate growth, improve efficiency, and promote sustainable development. Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, has experienced numerous economic reforms aimed at fostering sustainable growth and development over the past few decades. These reforms, initiated primarily in the 1980s and 1990s, have included structural adjustment programs, deregulation, privatization, and fiscal policy adjustments designed to liberalize the economy and attract foreign investment (Akinboade & Kinfack, 2019). Despite these efforts, the Nigerian economy continues to face significant challenges such as inflation, unemployment, and income inequality, which directly and indirectly influence various sectors, including education.

The educational sector in Nigeria is a crucial driver of national development, contributing to human capital development,

technological advancement, and socio-economic mobility (Ogunyemi & Oladipo, 2018). However, it has historically been plagued by issues such as inadequate funding, infrastructural decay, teacher shortages, and access disparities, especially between urban and rural areas (Arowolo & Akinpelu, 2020). The intersection of economic reforms and education is particularly significant because policies aimed at economic liberalization can lead to both positive and negative outcomes within the educational landscape.

Recent economic reforms have sought to enhance economic efficiency and promote private sector participation; however, their impacts on public education funding and access remain contentious. For instance, the adoption of austerity measures and reduction in government expenditure on education have raised concerns about the sustainability of educational development programs (Eze & Chijioke, 2021). Conversely, reforms encouraging private investment in education have opened new opportunities for educational entrepreneurship but also raised questions about equity and quality (Oladipo & Akinyemi, 2020).

Empirical studies indicate that economic reforms can influence educational outcomes through various channels such as government budget allocation, affordability of education, and infrastructural development (Ibrahim & Musa, 2019). Nonetheless, the evidence remains mixed, with some scholars arguing that economic liberalization has led to increased inequality in educational access, while others suggest it has spurred growth in private education sectors (Adewumi et al., 2022). Understanding the nuanced relationship between economic reforms and Nigeria's educational sector is vital for policymakers aiming to foster inclusive growth and development. This paper seeks to explore the extent to which recent economic reforms have impacted educational policies, funding, access, and quality in Nigeria, providing insights that could inform future policy directions.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Structural Functionalism theory propounded by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), Robert K. Merton (1910–2003). The Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory that views society as a complex system composed of various social institutions, each with specific functions that contribute to the stability, order, and functioning of society as a whole. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of institutions such as education, government, economy, family, and religion, positing that each plays a vital role in maintaining social equilibrium.

The Structural Functionalism theory provides a useful framework for understanding how economic reforms impact Nigeria's educational sector by focusing on the functions, disruptions, and adaptations within this social institution. It underscores the interconnectedness of economic policies and educational stability, emphasizing that maintaining the functional integrity of education is essential for societal cohesion and development. Therefore, this theory is suitable for this study.

Historical Overview of Nigeria's Economic Reforms

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy by GDP and a major player in global oil markets, has undergone significant economic reforms aimed at diversifying its economy, improving governance, and stimulating sustainable growth. These reforms have evolved over decades, shaped by domestic challenges and global economic trends. At independence in 1960, Nigeria's economy was primarily agrarian, with agriculture accounting for the majority of employment and exports. Post-independence, policies focused on import substitution industrialization (ISI) and state-led development. The discovery of oil in the late 1950s and early 1960s shifted focus towards petroleum, which soon dominated Nigeria's exports. However, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by political instability, military coups, and economic mismanagement. During this period, Nigeria's economy was characterized by a reliance on oil revenues, weak diversification, and governance issues (Ajakaiye & Adeyemi, 2001).

By the early 1980s, Nigeria faced economic crises, including declining oil prices, rising external debts, and inflation. In response,

the government adopted the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986, recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. While SAP aimed to stabilize the economy and foster growth, it faced criticism for increasing unemployment, reducing social spending, and exacerbating inequality (Oloyede, 1999). The reforms marked Nigeria's first significant attempt at structural liberalization, setting the stage for subsequent reforms.

Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, ushering in a new phase of reform efforts. The government prioritized economic stability, poverty reduction, and attracting foreign investment.

Key initiatives during this period include:

i. The Nigerian Vision 2010 and later the Nigeria Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
ii. Banking reforms to strengthen the financial sector
iii. Power sector reforms to address electricity deficits
iv. Efforts to improve the business environment

Despite these efforts, challenges persisted, including corruption, infrastructural deficits, and security issues. Nonetheless, macroeconomic stability improved, with GDP growth averaging around 6% prior to the 2016 recession (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria entered a recession in 2016 due to declining oil prices, which accounted for over 90% of export revenue. The government responded with a series of reform initiatives, emphasizing economic diversification and structural adjustments. Major Policy Reforms Post-2016:

1. Economic Diversification: Focus on agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors.
2. The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017–2020): A comprehensive blueprint to stimulate growth, reduce reliance on oil, and improve infrastructure.
3. Fiscal Reforms: Implementation of a new VAT law, reduction of fuel subsidies, and efforts to increase non-oil revenue.
4. Financial Sector Reforms: Strengthening of banking regulations, recapitalization, and efforts to enhance financial inclusion.
5. Ease of Doing Business: Initiatives to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, improve transparency, and attract foreign direct investment (FDI).

While Nigeria has made progress such as improvements in the World Bank's Doing Business rankings and increased diversification efforts issues like corruption, insecurity, infrastructural deficits, and reliance on oil exports remain significant hurdles (NBS, 2022). The Nigerian government's recent focus has been on implementing the "National Development Plan 2021–2025", emphasizing digital economy, industrialization, and sustainable development. The key areas include digital transformation and innovation, agricultural modernization, infrastructure development and strengthening institutions for good governance. International partnerships and reforms inspired by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) also aim to boost intra-African trade and economic integration.

Nigeria's economic reform journey reflects a complex interplay of domestic political dynamics, global economic forces, and structural challenges. While reforms have yielded positive outcomes in certain sectors, persistent issues necessitate continued policy innovation, institutional strengthening, and inclusive development strategies.

Changes in Funding and Budget Allocation for Education

Education is a critical driver of national development, and adequate funding is essential to ensure quality, access, and equity in the Nigerian education system. Over the years, Nigeria has experienced fluctuations and shifts in its educational funding policies, influenced by economic, political, and social factors. This essay explores the recent trends, challenges, and reforms related to funding and budget allocation for education in Nigeria. Historically, Nigeria has recognized education as a priority sector, enshrining it in various policy documents such

as the National Policy on Education (NPE). The Nigeria National Budget allocates a percentage of its total budget to education; however, this proportion has often fallen short of the UNESCO recommendation of 15-20% of national budget (UNESCO, 2015).

In recent years, Nigeria's budgetary commitment to education has seen both increases and shortfalls. For example, the 2022 Nigerian budget allocated approximately 7.9% of the total budget to education, which remains below the UNESCO recommended threshold (NBS, 2022). Despite this, there have been efforts to increase the percentage over previous years, driven by advocacy from civil society and international organizations. Economic downturns, fluctuating oil prices, and competing national priorities have affected the funding of education. Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil revenues exposes the sector to budget cuts during periods of economic decline. For instance, between 2015 and 2017, budget allocations to education decreased due to reduced oil revenues and economic recession (Olowu & Adeyemi, 2018).

Recent initiatives aimed at improving funding include the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which seeks to provide free and compulsory basic education. The government has also introduced the Education Trust Fund (ETF), designed to supplement federal and state funding through levies on corporate profits. However, issues of misappropriation and inefficient utilization of funds have hampered the effectiveness of these initiatives (World Bank, 2020). Several challenges affect the effective allocation and utilization of educational funds in Nigeria:

i. Inadequate Budgetary Allocation: The persistent below-recommended funding levels hinder infrastructural development, teacher training, and learning resources.
ii. Corruption and Mismanagement: Funds allocated are often misappropriated, leading to poor service delivery (Transparency International, 2021).
iii. Disparities in Funding: There is a significant disparity between federal, state, and local governments' funding, affecting the equity of educational access (Aina, 2019).
iv. Limited Private Sector Participation: Although public funding is insufficient, private sector investments are still relatively low compared to the sector's needs.

The Nigerian government has expressed commitment to increasing education funding, including plans to gradually meet the 15-20% UNESCO benchmark. The National Education Budget and Policy Reforms aim to improve transparency and efficiency. For instance, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) emphasizes increased funding, teacher quality, and infrastructure development (FGN, 2021). Furthermore, international partnerships and donor agencies continue to support Nigeria in mobilizing resources for education. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has pledged substantial funding aimed at improving equitable access and quality (GPE, 2022).

While Nigeria has made some progress in increasing its educational budget, significant gaps remain. Challenges such as inadequate funding levels, mismanagement, and disparities across states continue to impede the sector's development. Moving forward, sustained political will, enhanced transparency, and increased investment are vital for transforming Nigeria's educational landscape.

Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships in Education

The Nigerian education sector has been undergoing significant reforms aimed at improving access, quality, and efficiency. Among these reforms, “privatization” and “public-private partnerships (PPPs)” have emerged as critical strategies to address persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and low-quality education. These approaches involve transferring certain responsibilities from the government to private entities or fostering collaborations between the public and private sectors to enhance educational outcomes.

Privatization in education refers to the transfer of ownership, management, or funding of educational institutions from the government to private individuals or organizations. The

rationale behind privatization is that private sector involvement can lead to increased efficiency, innovation, and resource mobilization (Aina & Akinpelu, 2018). In Nigeria, privatization has manifested through the proliferation of private schools, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, which often claim to provide better quality education than public institutions (Ogunyemi & Akinboade, 2020). However, privatization in Nigeria is often criticized for exacerbating inequality. Private education tends to be expensive, thus limiting access for marginalized populations and widening the socio-economic gap (Akinbobola & Akinbote, 2020). Critics argue that the commercialization of education risks turning it into a commodity rather than a public good.

Public-Private Partnerships involve collaborative arrangements where the government partners with private entities to finance, operate, or manage educational services. PPPs are seen as a strategic way to leverage private sector expertise, resources, and efficiency while achieving public policy goals (World Bank, 2019). In Nigeria, PPPs in education have included initiatives such as:

a. School infrastructure development: Private firms build and maintain school facilities under contractual agreements.
b. Management contracts: Private operators manage specific schools or programs on behalf of the government.
c. Funding and resource mobilization: Private donors and organizations contribute funds or materials to support public schools (Owoeye & Oladipo, 2021).

The Nigerian government has embraced PPPs to address infrastructural deficits, improve quality, and expand access, particularly in underserved regions (FGN, 2020). For example, the partnership with private companies to establish model schools and vocational centers has shown promise. Despite their potential benefits, privatization and PPPs face several challenges in Nigeria:

i. Regulatory and governance issues: Weak regulatory frameworks can lead to exploitation, poor service delivery, or mismanagement.
ii. Equity concerns: There is a risk that privatization may prioritize profit over access, marginalizing poor and rural populations.
iii. Quality and accountability: Ensuring quality standards and accountability in private and PPP-managed schools remains challenging.
iv. Sustainability: Long-term sustainability of PPP projects depends on political will and consistent policy support.

Recent policy initiatives emphasize the need for a balanced approach, integrating private sector participation with strong regulatory oversight. The Nigerian Education Sector Status Report (World Bank, 2021) advocates for scaling up PPP models that prioritize equitable access and quality assurance. The FGN Policy (2020) encourages private sector involvement as a complement rather than a replacement for public education. Privatization and PPPs hold significant potential for transforming Nigeria's education system by mobilizing additional resources, fostering innovation, and expanding access. However, realizing these benefits requires robust regulation, policies that promote equity, and mechanisms to ensure quality and accountability. A cautious and well-regulated approach can help Nigeria leverage private sector strengths while safeguarding the right to education for all.

Effects of Economic Reforms on Access to Education

Economic reforms are strategic policies implemented to enhance a country's economic stability, growth, and development. In Nigeria, a nation characterized by diverse socio-economic challenges, these reforms have significantly influenced various sectors, notably education. Access to quality education remains a critical driver for national development; however, economic reforms have had multifaceted impacts both positive and negative—on educational accessibility. This analysis explores these effects within the Nigerian context, supported by current research and data.

Nigeria's economic reforms over the past decades have primarily aimed at liberalizing the economy, reducing reliance on oil revenues, and promoting private sector participation. Key reforms include deregulation of markets, currency reforms, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and fiscal restructuring (Adeniran & Akinboade, 2020). These reforms are intended to stimulate economic growth but have also had implications for social sectors. The effect can be both positive and negative.

Positive Effects on Access to Education

Economic reforms in Nigeria have produced both positive and negative effects on access to education. These reforms, which include privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and structural adjustment policies, were introduced to stimulate economic growth, attract investment, and improve national productivity. However, their influence on education has been mixed, affecting different social groups and regions in varying ways.

One of the positive effects of economic reforms on access to education is the increased participation of the private sector in educational development. Economic liberalization created opportunities for private individuals, religious organizations, and corporate bodies to invest in education. As a result, there has been a rapid growth in the number of private schools, particularly in urban areas across Nigeria. These private institutions provide alternatives to overcrowded and underfunded public schools, thereby expanding educational opportunities for many learners. The Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis revealed that private schools now accommodate a substantial proportion of students, especially in cities where public educational facilities are insufficient to meet increasing demand (World Bank, 2020). The growth of private schools has therefore contributed to increased access to education and greater educational choices for parents and students.

Economic reforms have also contributed to improvements in educational infrastructure and learning resources in some parts of the country. Reform-driven economic growth and increased government revenue enabled certain state governments to invest in the construction of school buildings, renovation of classrooms, and provision of instructional materials. In some regions, educational reforms have supported the expansion of physical facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and information communication technology (ICT) centers. Okojie and Olinzock (2021) observed that improved economic performance in some states enhanced the ability of governments to undertake infrastructural development projects aimed at improving educational access and quality.

Another positive outcome of economic reforms is the attraction of international funding and donor support to Nigeria's education sector. Economic restructuring and reform policies increased international confidence in Nigeria's economy, thereby encouraging support from organizations such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank. These international interventions have supported projects aimed at improving school enrollment, teacher training, girl-child education, and access to education in marginalized communities. UNICEF Nigeria (2022) noted that donor-funded educational initiatives have helped improve educational opportunities for vulnerable children, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas.

The Negative Effects on Access to Education

Despite these benefits, economic reforms have also produced several negative effects on access to education in Nigeria. One major consequence is the widening of inequality and regional disparities in educational opportunities. Economic reforms often favored urban centers and economically productive regions where private investment is more profitable. Consequently, rural communities and disadvantaged populations continue to experience poor access to quality education due to inadequate government support and limited private investment. Akanbi and Akinpelu (2021) argued that declining public subsidies and the commercialization of education have increased educational inequality between wealthy and poor households, as well as between urban and rural areas.

Another major challenge associated with economic reforms is the reduction in public investment in education. Structural adjustment policies and austerity measures introduced during periods of economic reform led to cuts in

government spending on social services, including education. Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education has remained below the benchmark recommended by UNESCO, which suggests that countries should allocate about 15%–20% of their national budgets to education. Insufficient funding has negatively affected public schools through poor infrastructure, shortage of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning materials. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2020), inadequate public funding continues to limit the quality and accessibility of education in Nigeria.

Economic reforms have also contributed to economic instability and increased poverty in some periods, which indirectly affect school enrollment and educational participation. Policies such as subsidy removal, currency devaluation, and privatization have sometimes resulted in inflation, unemployment, and reduced household income. Families experiencing financial hardship may withdraw their children from school to engage in child labour or income-generating activities needed for family survival. Eze et al. (2022) noted that poverty remains one of the major barriers to educational access in Nigeria, particularly among vulnerable and low-income households.

In addition, the rising cost of education resulting from privatization has made quality education less affordable for many Nigerians. Private schools often charge high tuition fees and other educational expenses that are beyond the reach of low-income families. Although private institutions have expanded educational opportunities, they have also widened the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of access to quality education. Oladele and Akinbobola (2021) observed that commercialization and fee increases in private education have reduced educational accessibility for disadvantaged groups and contributed to social inequality.

Overall, economic reforms in Nigeria have had complex and contradictory effects on access to education. On one hand, they have encouraged private sector participation, infrastructural development, and international educational support. On the other hand, they have increased inequality, reduced public investment, and made quality education less affordable for vulnerable populations. These outcomes demonstrate the need for balanced and inclusive educational policies that promote both economic efficiency and social equity. Sustainable improvement in educational access in Nigeria requires increased government commitment, equitable resource distribution, strengthened public education, and policies that protect disadvantaged groups from exclusion.

Quality of Education and Infrastructure Development

Nigeria's education sector faces significant challenges that impact the overall quality of education delivered across the country. These challenges include inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, teacher shortages, and curriculum issues. Despite these obstacles, Nigeria has made efforts to improve educational outcomes through policy reforms and investment in educational infrastructure. Nigeria has one of the largest education systems in Africa, with high enrollment rates at the primary level. However, disparities persist, especially between urban and rural areas, and among different states (World Bank, 2022). The quality of education is often compromised by poorly trained teachers, outdated curricula, and inadequate teaching materials (UNESCO, 2023). Studies indicate underperformance in international assessments; for example, Nigeria ranks low in literacy and numeracy skills among primary and secondary students (World Economic Forum, 2023). Education funding remains below the UNESCO recommended 15-20% of national budgets, with Nigeria allocating approximately 7-8% in recent years (Nigerian Ministry of Education, 2023). This underfunding affects teacher salaries, infrastructure, and learning materials thereby affecting the quality of education.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme aims to provide free and compulsory education at the primary level the National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes quality, equity, and access. Recent policies focus on leveraging technology, teacher training, and curriculum reforms (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023). Infrastructure development in

Nigeria encompasses transportation, energy, water supply, healthcare, and educational facilities. Adequate infrastructure is crucial for economic growth, social development, and improving quality of life. However, Nigeria faces significant infrastructure deficits. Nigeria's roads, railways, and ports are often congested, poorly maintained, or underdeveloped, hindering trade and mobility (Nigerian Infrastructure Bulletin, 2023). Power supply remains unreliable, with frequent outages limiting industrial productivity and access to electricity for households. The national grid's capacity is insufficient, and reliance on fossil fuels contributes to environmental issues (NERC, 2023).

Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Educational Growth

Nigeria, with a population exceeding 200 million, faces significant challenges in its educational sector, including inadequate infrastructure, low quality of education, high dropout rates, and disparities in access, especially among marginalized groups. Achieving sustainable educational growth is vital for Nigeria's socio-economic development, poverty reduction, and national stability. This requires a holistic approach involving policy reforms, increased investment, and inclusive strategies.

Conclusion

Achieving sustainable educational growth in Nigeria demands a multi-faceted policy approach that addresses funding, quality, equity, governance, technology, and partnerships. These strategies, grounded in current research and best practices, can help Nigeria realize its educational goals and foster socio-economic development. Therefore, the future outlook for Nigeria's education sector post-reforms appears cautiously optimistic, with significant potential for transformation and growth. The recent reforms aim to address long-standing challenges such as access, quality, infrastructure, and equity. If effectively implemented, these initiatives could lead to a more inclusive and innovative educational environment, fostering national development and individual empowerment. However, sustained political will, adequate funding, and stakeholder engagement remain critical to realizing these positive outcomes. Continued monitoring and adaptive strategies will be essential to ensure that the reforms translate into tangible improvements for Nigeria's learners and society at large.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Nigeria's economic reforms and their impact on the educational sector, the following detailed and strategic recommendations are proposed to foster sustainable educational growth and development:

1. The Government should enhance budget transparency and accountability, implement robust financial oversight mechanisms to minimize misappropriation and ensure funds are effectively utilized for their intended purposes.
2. To promote equitable access and reduce disparities, the government should develop specific policies and programs to improve access to quality education in underserved regions, including incentives for teachers to work in rural areas.
3. To enhance quality of education and infrastructure, the government should regularly update curricula to align with global standards, incorporating digital literacy, STEM education, and vocational training to meet current and future labor market demands. And invest in educational infrastructure, prioritize building and maintaining classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and ICT facilities, especially in rural and underserved regions, to create conducive learning environments.
4. The government should develop and enforce policies that regulate private and PPP-managed schools to ensure quality, affordability, and equity.

References

Adeniran, O. A., & Akinboade, O. A. (2020). Economic reforms and their impact on Nigeria's economic growth. *African Development Review, 32*(4), 456–470.

Adewumi, A., Oladipo, O., & Akinyemi, O. (2022). Economic liberalization and educational inequality in Nigeria: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Development Studies, 58*(4), 567–583.

Aina, O. (2019). Educational funding in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Planning, 22*(3), 45–60.

Aina, O., & Akinpelu, A. (2018). Privatization and its impact on education in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 9*(15), 45–52.

Ajakaiye, O., & Adeyemi, T. (2001). Growth and structural reforms in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, 43*(1), 1–21.

Akanbi, T. A., & Akinpelu, A. O. (2021). Education inequality in Nigeria: The impact of economic reforms. *Journal of Nigerian Education, 45*(2), 123–139.

Akinboade, O. A., & Kinfack, E. (2019). Economic reforms and social development in Nigeria: An analysis of the impact on education. *African Development Review, 31*(2), 245–260.

Akinbobola, A., & Akinbote, T. (2020). Privatization and access to education in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research, 23*(2), 78–92.

Arowolo, D., & Akinpelu, A. (2020). Educational funding and infrastructural decay in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Educational Development, 78*, 102–112.

Eze, S. C., & Chijioke, U. (2021). Fiscal austerity and educational development in Nigeria: An impact assessment. *Nigerian Journal of Policy and Development, 14*(1), 89–105.

Eze, S. C., Nwoke, N. J., & Okafor, P. C. (2022). Poverty and educational access in Nigeria: Post-reform challenges. *International Journal of Educational Development, 88*, 102–112.

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2020). *Nigeria education sector status report*. Government of Nigeria.

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2020). *Nigeria education sector strategic plan*. Federal Ministry of Education.

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2021). *National education sector strategic plan (2021–2025)*. Federal Ministry of Education.

Global Partnership for Education. (2022). *Nigeria education program*. https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/nigeria

Ibrahim, Y., & Musa, R. (2019). The influence of economic reforms on education financing in Nigeria. *Economics of Education Review, 73*(1), 101–110.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria gross domestic product report*. National Bureau of Statistics.

Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission. (2023). *Annual report*. Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission.

Nigerian Infrastructure Bulletin. (2023). *Nigerian infrastructure development agency report*. Nigerian Infrastructure Development Agency.

Nigerian Ministry of Education. (2023). *Annual education report*. Nigerian Ministry of Education.

Ogunyemi, A., & Akinboade, O. (2020). Private sector participation in Nigerian education: Trends and prospects. *African Journal of Education and Development, 8*(3), 112–129.

Ogunyemi, T., & Oladipo, O. (2018). Human capital development and economic growth in Nigeria: The role of education. *African Journal of Economic Review, 6*(2), 112–129.

Okojie, J. O., & Olinzock, A. A. (2021). Infrastructure development and education in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration, 11*(3), 245–259.

Oladele, A. O., & Akinbobola, A. O. (2021). Private education and inequality in Nigeria.

African Journal of Educational Studies, 7(1), 89–105.

Oladipo, O., & Akinyemi, O. (2020). Private sector participation in Nigerian education: Opportunities and challenges. *Education Economics, 28*(3), 305–319.

Olowu, D., & Adeyemi, T. (2018). Economic fluctuations and education funding in Nigeria. *African Journal of Economics and Management, 10*(2), 89–104.

Oloyede, A. (1999). The impact of structural adjustment programme on Nigeria's economy. *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, 41*(2), 157–170.

Owoeye, J., & Oladipo, O. (2021). Public-private partnerships in Nigerian education: An evaluation. *International Journal of Educational Management, 35*(4), 789–805.

Transparency International. (2021). *Corruption perceptions index 2021*. Transparency International.

UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all 2015 national review: Nigeria*. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. UNESCO Publishing.

UNESCO. (2023). *Nigeria education profile*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNICEF Nigeria. (2022). *Education in Nigeria: Progress and challenges*. https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/education

World Bank. (2019). *Public-private partnerships in education: Nigeria country report*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2020). *Doing business 2020: Comparing business regulation in 190 economies*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2021). *Nigerian education sector status report*. World Bank.

ECONOMIC REFORM AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF POLICY INTERSECTIONS

Onyema Patience Solomon,

Department of Educational Foundation,
School of Education Tech.
Delta State.

Constance Aniyom Dien

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Educational Studies
College of Education,
University of Calabar, Calabar.

Lawson Luka

Department of Educational Foundations
School of General Education,
Federal College of Education Yola, Adamawa State.

Abstract

This paper critically examines the relationship between economic reform, educational policy, and sociological structures in Nigeria within the broader context of 21st-century development. The study adopts a theoretical and literature-based analytical approach, drawing on peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and comparative international evidence to explore how economic reforms shape educational access, quality, governance, and social equity. Nigeria was selected as the focal case because of its rapidly expanding youth population, persistent educational inequalities, and continuing waves of macroeconomic restructuring. The paper addresses three major issues: the influence of economic reform on educational policy and outcomes, the sociological mechanisms mediating these effects, and policy pathways for aligning reform with equitable educational development. Using an integrated theoretical framework that combines human capital theory, Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, social capital theory, and the capability approach, the paper demonstrates that economic reforms often interact with pre-existing inequalities in ways that reproduce educational stratification. The analysis identifies three major mechanisms through which reforms affect education: fiscal restructuring and educational financing, marketisation and governance reform, and curriculum transformation driven by labour-market demands and digitalisation. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that insufficient public investment, weak institutional coordination, regional disparities, and unequal access to technological resources continue to undermine inclusive educational development. Comparative examples from countries such as Finland, South Korea, Singapore, Kenya, and Ghana further reveal that policy coherence, institutional capacity, and equity-oriented investment are central to successful reform outcomes. The paper concludes that economic reform cannot produce sustainable national development without deliberate investment in equitable educational systems. It argues that education policy must be treated not merely as a sectoral intervention but as a strategic sociological and developmental instrument capable of advancing social mobility, democratic inclusion, and economic productivity.

Keywords: economic reform, educational inequality, sociological theory, policy intersection, social mobility, Nigeria

Introduction

In the 21st century, the relationship between economic reform and educational policy has become increasingly significant across developing and developed societies alike. Economic reforms including fiscal restructuring, subsidy removal, structural adjustment, privatisation, market liberalisation, and public-private partnerships—shape how states allocate resources, regulate institutions, and provide public services (World Bank, 2024). At the same time, education remains central to human-capital development, economic productivity, technological advancement, and social mobility (UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, educational systems increasingly function within the wider political and economic realities produced by reform agendas.

However, the outcomes of economic reform are not uniformly beneficial. While reforms may improve macroeconomic indicators and stimulate growth, they can also intensify social inequalities when institutional protections are weak. Educational access, quality, and opportunity are deeply influenced by governance capacity, social structures, and patterns of resource distribution. Thus, understanding the intersection between economic reform and educational policy requires not only economic analysis but also sociological interpretation.

Nigeria presents an important case for examining these dynamics. As Africa's most populous country, Nigeria faces persistent challenges relating to unemployment, poverty, regional disparities, educational exclusion, and dependence on oil revenue. The country simultaneously pursues economic diversification and educational reform while confronting severe infrastructural deficits and widening socio-economic inequality. Government expenditure on education has been shown to influence educational outcomes positively, although the effectiveness of such spending depends heavily on governance quality and implementation capacity (Obi et al., 2016). Similarly, educational policy development in Nigeria remains shaped by political compromises, institutional fragmentation, and economic pressures (Mustapha et al., 2024).

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How do economic reform processes influence educational policy and educational outcomes in the 21st century?
2. What sociological mechanisms mediate the impact of these reforms, particularly within the Nigerian context?
3. What policy strategies can better align economic reform with equitable educational development?

To address these questions, the paper adopts a literature-based analytical approach grounded in sociological and developmental theory. The study integrates human capital theory, Bourdieuian sociology, social capital theory, and the capability approach to examine the relationship between economic reform and educational inequality. The paper reviews relevant literature, analyses the Nigerian case within comparative global contexts, and proposes policy recommendations for achieving more inclusive educational development.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and theoretical research design based on literature review and policy analysis. The paper synthesises peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, institutional publications, and comparative international studies relating to economic reform, educational policy, and sociological theory. Nigeria was purposively selected as the central case study because of its strategic demographic importance, persistent educational inequalities, and ongoing economic restructuring efforts. The country provides a useful context for examining how macroeconomic reform interacts with institutional weakness, social stratification, and educational access. The analytical approach combines sociological interpretation with comparative policy analysis. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the study critically evaluates existing evidence to identify recurring mechanisms, institutional patterns, and inequality dynamics linking economic reform and education policy.

Literature Review

Economic Reform and Public Services

Economic reform literature frequently emphasises macroeconomic stability, market liberalisation, public-sector efficiency, and economic growth. Nevertheless, reforms significantly influence public services such as education through changes in fiscal priorities, institutional governance, and public expenditure patterns. In many developing countries, fiscal consolidation policies often reduce government spending on education, thereby affecting infrastructure, teacher recruitment, and learning quality.

In Nigeria, government expenditure on education has demonstrated a significant positive relationship with educational outcomes (Obi et al., 2016). However, effective educational spending depends on transparency, accountability, and administrative efficiency. Weak governance structures may reduce the developmental benefits of increased expenditure.

Furthermore, contemporary reforms increasingly encourage decentralisation, institutional autonomy, performance-based financing, and public-private partnerships in education (World Bank, 2024). Although these reforms may improve innovation and managerial efficiency, they can also widen inequality when disadvantaged groups lack access to resources necessary for educational participation.

Educational Policy in Nigeria and Global Trends

Educational policy in Nigeria has evolved through colonial, post-colonial, and democratic reform periods. Recent policy discussions emphasise curriculum reform, digital integration, teacher development, and alignment between education and labour-market demands (Olawunmi, 2025).

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced in 2004 sought to expand access to compulsory basic education. Studies indicate that the policy contributed to increased enrolment at junior secondary-school level, although progress has remained uneven across regions and socio-economic groups (Elom et al., 2025).

Globally, educational systems increasingly prioritise critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, collaboration, and lifelong learning. UNESCO (2023) argues that 21st-century education must prepare learners for technological transformation, economic uncertainty, and global interconnectedness.

Sociological Frameworks: Capital, Habitus, Field, and Social Capital

Sociological theory provides important insight into how economic reforms influence educational experiences and outcomes. Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of economic, cultural, and social capital explain how individuals convert resources into educational advantage. Students from wealthier and better-connected families often possess greater access to high-quality schools, learning materials, digital technologies, and influential networks.

The concepts of habitus and field further explain how social structures shape educational expectations and opportunities. Educational institutions do not operate in isolation; rather, they reflect wider power relations and social hierarchies. Social capital theory complements this perspective by emphasising the role of trust, networks, and community participation in educational development. Communities with stronger social networks may mobilise support for schools, improve accountability, and influence policy implementation.

However, these sociological approaches also have limitations. Critics argue that Bourdieu's framework sometimes overemphasises structural reproduction while underestimating individual agency and transformative policy intervention (Sen, 1999). The capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen shifts attention toward individuals' real freedoms and opportunities, emphasising what people are actually able to achieve within social systems.

Similarly, institutional and political-economy perspectives highlight how governance structures, state capacity, and policy coordination shape reform outcomes. Integrating these theories allows for a more

comprehensive understanding of how economic reforms influence educational systems.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining human capital theory, Bourdieuian sociology, social capital theory, and the capability approach. Human capital theory argues that investment in education enhances productivity, innovation, and economic growth (Becker, 1993). From this perspective, educational reform is essential for preparing individuals to participate effectively in changing labour markets.

However, Bourdieuian sociology provides a critical corrective by demonstrating that access to educational opportunities is socially unequal. While human capital theory explains why education matters economically, Bourdieu explains why access to quality education and its benefits remains uneven across social classes (Bourdieu, 1990). Social capital theory further explains how community networks, trust, and social relationships influence educational participation and institutional effectiveness. Communities with stronger social capital often mobilise educational support more effectively than disadvantaged communities.

The capability approach complements these perspectives by focusing on substantive freedoms and human development rather than educational attainment alone (Sen, 1999). From this perspective, equitable education reform should expand people's real opportunities and life choices. Together, these theories demonstrate that economic reform affects education through both economic and sociological pathways. Fiscal reforms influence funding and institutional priorities, while social structures determine how different groups experience educational opportunities and constraints.

Mechanisms of Intersection: Economic Reform, Educational Policy, and Social Structure

The relationship between economic reform and educational policy operates through multiple interconnected mechanisms.

Mechanism 1: Fiscal Adjustment and Educational Funding

Economic reforms frequently involve fiscal consolidation, subsidy removal, debt servicing, and expenditure reduction. When governance capacity is weak and public revenue remains unstable, these measures can significantly reduce investment in education. In Nigeria, education funding has remained below the UNESCO-recommended benchmark of 15–20 per cent of national expenditure. In 2022, education reportedly received approximately 8 per cent of the national budget (UNESCO, 2023). This funding gap contributes to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and limited access to learning technologies.

The consequences extend beyond institutional weakness. Fiscal cuts often create a chain reaction: reduced funding leads to fewer teachers and deteriorating infrastructure, which contributes to lower learning outcomes and long-term inequality. Families with higher economic and cultural capital compensate through private schooling, digital resources, and supplementary tutoring, while low-income households depend almost entirely on underfunded public institutions.

In periods of economic hardship, vulnerable households may withdraw children from school to reduce financial pressure. UNICEF (2024) reports that Nigeria has over 10 million out-of-school children, with girls and rural populations disproportionately affected.

Mechanism 2: Marketisation, Governance Reform, and Educational Access

Economic reforms increasingly promote market-oriented educational governance through decentralisation, institutional autonomy, public-private partnerships, and performance-based funding. These reforms may improve institutional flexibility and innovation. However, when implemented without strong regulation and social safeguards, they can deepen inequality. In Nigeria, private schools and universities have expanded rapidly, particularly in urban areas. While they help absorb educational demand, high tuition fees exclude many low-income households.

The result is an increasingly stratified educational system in which affluent students

access better-resourced institutions while disadvantaged populations remain concentrated in underfunded public schools. Governance reforms also produce varying outcomes depending on institutional capacity. When decentralisation occurs without adequate monitoring, financial accountability, and administrative competence, local elite capture and resource mismanagement may emerge. Social capital further shapes access to opportunities. Families with stronger networks often possess better information about school options, scholarships, and career pathways, reinforcing educational advantage.

Mechanism 3: Skills Demand, Curriculum Reform, and Digital Transformation

Economic reforms increasingly prioritise technological innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge-based economies. Consequently, educational systems are pressured to align curricula with emerging labour-market demands. Nigeria's educational reforms now emphasise digital literacy, entrepreneurship, STEM education, and 21st-century skills (Olawunmi, 2025). Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack internet access, digital devices, stable electricity, and trained teachers. The digital divide therefore creates unequal access to emerging educational opportunities.

This inequality became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic when students from wealthier households continued learning through digital platforms while many disadvantaged students experienced prolonged educational disruption. Sociologically, technological reform often benefits students who already possess economic, cultural, and social capital. Consequently, digital transformation may widen inequality unless accompanied by inclusive investment in infrastructure and teacher development.

Case Focus: Nigeria in Global Perspective

Nigeria's Economic Reform Context

Nigeria's economy reflects both significant developmental potential and persistent structural challenges. Since the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s, successive governments have pursued reforms aimed at macroeconomic stability, diversification, and private-sector growth. These reforms introduced liberalisation policies, subsidy reductions, exchange-rate adjustments, and privatisation initiatives intended to improve economic efficiency. However, they also reduced social-sector expenditure and increased pressure on public educational institutions (Adesua, 2022).

More recent policy frameworks, including the National Development Plan (2021–2025), emphasise digital transformation, industrialisation, and human-capital development (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2021). Similarly, the Renewed Hope Agenda seeks to stabilise the economy through fiscal and monetary reforms. Despite these ambitions, inflation, unemployment, and declining household purchasing power continue to affect educational participation. Subsidy removal and exchange-rate unification have increased living costs, placing additional financial pressure on families. Consequently, economic reform in Nigeria is not merely a technical economic process. It directly influences everyday educational experiences, especially among vulnerable populations.

Nigeria's Education Policy and Reform Landscape

Nigeria possesses one of the largest educational systems in Africa. With over 200 million people and a predominantly youthful population, education remains central to national development. However, significant challenges persist. UNICEF (2024) estimates that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children globally. Regional disparities remain severe, particularly between northern and southern states. Although the Universal Basic Education programme improved enrolment rates, infrastructural deficits and governance weaknesses continue to limit educational quality. Many schools operate with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, insufficient learning materials, and low teacher morale. Teacher development remains another critical challenge. The National Teacher Policy

Framework introduced in 2020 aimed to improve professional standards, certification, and continuous training (FGN, 2020). Nevertheless, implementation remains inconsistent because of irregular salary payments, inadequate funding, and limited digital-training opportunities. These conditions reflect broader sociological inequalities. Families with greater economic and cultural capital are better positioned to support educational success through private tutoring, technology access, and educational networks.

Comparative Global Perspectives

Comparative experiences from other countries provide useful insights into the relationship between economic reform and educational development. South Korea and Singapore successfully linked educational investment with industrialisation and technological advancement through coordinated state policy, teacher development, and sustained public investment (Kim, 2018). Their experiences demonstrate the importance of policy coherence and long-term educational planning.

Similarly, Finland's educational model illustrates how equitable public investment, teacher professionalism, and decentralised accountability can support both economic competitiveness and social inclusion (Sahlberg, 2021).

In Africa, Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum and Ghana's Education Strategic Plan integrate entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and STEM education into national development goals (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2018; Republic of Kenya, 2022). Nigeria, by contrast, continues to experience fragmented coordination between economic and educational policy institutions. Weak collaboration among ministries responsible for finance, labour, and education reduces policy coherence and implementation effectiveness. Institutional theory explains this fragmentation as a product of weak bureaucratic coordination and inconsistent organisational alignment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Sociological Interpretation: Inequality, Capital, and Institutional Field

The Nigerian case demonstrates that educational inequality cannot be understood solely through economic indicators. Sociological structures significantly shape how reforms affect different social groups. Bourdieu's framework reveals that educational opportunities are distributed unevenly because families possess differing levels of economic, cultural, and social capital. Urban middle-class families often supplement public education through private schools, digital technologies, and international exposure, while poorer households rely on underfunded public institutions. Economic reforms that increase living costs may indirectly reduce school attendance and educational continuity among vulnerable populations. Studies indicate that periods of fiscal contraction are often associated with rising dropout rates, particularly among girls and low-income households (UNICEF, 2024).

Moreover, the rapid growth of private educational institutions reflects a dual educational structure. While private institutions may improve quality and absorb demand, they also reinforce class stratification because access depends heavily on household income. Critical scholars have also questioned the developmental assumptions of international institutions such as the World Bank and UNESCO. Tikly (2019) argues that global education reforms sometimes prioritise market efficiency and international competitiveness at the expense of local realities and educational justice. Therefore, educational reform must address not only institutional efficiency but also structural inequality and social exclusion.

Positioning Nigeria in the Global Reform Landscape

Nigeria's long-term developmental future depends heavily on its ability to align economic reform with inclusive educational transformation. The country's large youth population represents both an opportunity and a challenge. If educational inequality persists, demographic growth may intensify unemployment, poverty, and social instability.

Digital transformation offers important possibilities for expanding educational access through e-learning, mobile technologies, and AI-supported instruction. However, these opportunities require substantial investment in connectivity, teacher training, electricity

infrastructure, and affordable digital access. Global evidence suggests that successful educational systems combine equity, adaptability, and sustained institutional investment (Sahlberg, 2021). Consequently, Nigeria must move beyond fragmented policy implementation toward integrated reform strategies that connect economic development with educational inclusion.

Summary

Nigeria reflects the broader tension between economic reform ambitions and social realities within developing economies. While the country pursues diversification, technological advancement, and institutional reform, educational inequality continues to undermine inclusive development. A sociological perspective demonstrates that these challenges are not only economic but also structural and cultural. Unequal access to economic, cultural, and social capital shapes educational participation and achievement. Therefore, sustainable economic reform requires more than macroeconomic adjustment. It requires deliberate investment in equitable educational systems capable of expanding opportunity, strengthening social mobility, and promoting inclusive national development.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should progressively increase education expenditure toward the UNESCO benchmark of 15–20 per cent within a medium-term five-year framework. Priority areas should include early-grade literacy, school infrastructure, teacher recruitment, and rural educational access.
2. State governments and educational agencies should improve monitoring mechanisms, budget transparency, and school-level accountability systems. Independent educational audits and public reporting should be institutionalised.
3. Federal and state governments should introduce educational-support schemes such as conditional cash transfers, school feeding, transport assistance, and scholarship programmes for disadvantaged households, particularly girls and rural learners.
4. The government, in collaboration with private-sector and development partners, should expand internet connectivity, electricity access, and affordable digital devices in underserved schools. Teacher digital-training programmes should be implemented continuously.
5. Stronger collaboration among the Ministries of Education, Finance, Labour, and Communications is necessary to ensure coherence between economic reform and educational planning.
6. Educational authorities should actively involve parents, local communities, civil-society organisations, and traditional institutions in school governance and policy feedback mechanisms.
7. Educational reforms should be continuously evaluated using disaggregated data on gender, region, socio-economic status, and learning outcomes. Policies should be revised based on evidence and local realities.

Conclusion

Economic reform significantly shapes the context within which educational systems operate. However, whether reform promotes inclusive human-capital development depends on policy choices, governance quality, and broader sociological structures. This paper has demonstrated that economic reforms frequently interact with pre-existing inequalities in economic, cultural, and social capital. Without deliberate equity-oriented intervention, reforms may reproduce rather than reduce educational stratification.

The Nigerian case highlights the importance of aligning economic policy with educational inclusion. Fiscal restructuring, governance reform, and digital transformation

all carry implications for educational access, quality, and social mobility. The study contributes to ongoing debates by showing that educational reform must be understood not only as an economic necessity but also as a sociological and developmental project. Sustainable national transformation requires educational systems that are equitable, adaptive, and capable of expanding meaningful opportunities for all citizens.

References

Adesua, V. O. (2022). Implementation of educational policy for socio-economic and political emancipation in Nigeria. *British Journal of Education, 10*(10), 51–59.

Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review, 48*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.2307 /2095101

Elom, C. O., Amadi, M. U., Uwaleke, C. C., & Onyeneke, R. U. (2025). How does education policy reform affect schooling outcomes? Novel evidence from Nigeria. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology, 9*(3), 1018–1035. https://doi.org/10.55214 /25768484.v9i3.5410

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2020). *National teacher policy framework*. Federal Ministry of Education.

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2021). *National development plan 2021–2025*. Budget and National Planning Commission.

Ghana Ministry of Education. (2018). *Education strategic plan 2018–2030*. Government of Ghana.

Kayode, H. M., & Adewale, A. A. (2024). Managing the Nigerian education system: A blueprint for economic diversification and emancipation. *Global Journal of Education and Allied Research, 15*(11). https://doi.org/10. 5281/ zenodo.14073092

Kim, Y. C. (2018). Education reform and economic development in South Korea and Singapore. *Asian Education Review, 12*(1), 22–40.

Mustapha, B. I., Ochoyi, E. E., Awudu, J. J., & Jacob, Y. (2024). Educational policy making in Nigeria: Champions, necessity, political compromises and its relevance. *Journal of Education Research and Library Practice, 8*(8).

Obi, C. U., Ekesiobi, S. C., Dimnwobi, S. K., & Mgbemena, E. M. (2016). Government education spending and education outcome in Nigeria. *International Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences, 4*(4), 223–234. https://doi.org/ 10.11648/j. ijefm.20160404.18

Olawunmi, K. (2025). Rethinking education in Nigeria: Curriculum reform, teacher preparedness and student engagement in the digital age. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanitarian Research, 8*(9).

Republic of Kenya. (2022). *Basic education curriculum framework (Competency-based curriculum)*. Ministry of Education.

Sahlberg, P. (2021). *Finnish lessons 3.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Tikly, L. (2019). Education for sustainable development in Africa: A critique of global governance and educational reform. *Comparative Education, 55*(2), 261–278.

UNESCO. (2023). *Futures of learning: What kind of learning for the 21st century?* UNESCO.

UNICEF. (2024). *Education statistics and equity profile: Nigeria 2024*. UNICEF.

World Bank. (2024). *Education overview*. World Bank.

BEYOND INDIGENCE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LABELLING, IDENTITY, AND STUDENT LOAN PARTICIPATION UNDER NELFUND IN NIGERIA

Shoyemi, Adekunle Adyinka

Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan.

Solanke, Akinwale Olayiwola

Educational Foundations/Management, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education.

Iyiola, Oluwaseun Olayode

Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan.

Adewole, Oluwaseun Adejoke

Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan.

Abstract

This study examines the prevalence and consequences of labelling among undergraduate beneficiaries of the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) scheme within the framework of symbolic interactionist theory. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from eight beneficiaries through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that beneficiaries do not perceive themselves as economically disadvantaged nor experience significant negative labelling from lecturers or peers. Rather, the scheme is widely interpreted as a collective opportunity, thereby reshaping its social meaning and minimizing stigma. The study challenges conventional assumptions within labelling theory that indebtedness inherently produces shame and stigmatization. However, issues relating to misuse of the scheme and ethical concerns were observed. The study recommends stricter targeting mechanisms and policy reforms to ensure equitable access and sustainability of the loan scheme.

Keywords: Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), Labelling, Self-concept, Psycho-social

Introduction

The dynamics around the circumstances of lending and borrowing appears to be a complex one especially from the social perspective. Beyond the economic implications of granting and receiving loan facilities, there are equally social implicational dimensions to this economic practice. The social analysis of loans (from a micro perspective) comes in the light of how the society perceives or defines those involved especially the borrower (the one who receives the loan as a debt). This is evident with the Yoruba proverb- *Òkè lọwọ́ afunni ńgbé* [The hand of a giver is always at the top; the hand of the receiver stays below], this by subjective extension implies that the debtor is dependent on the creditor. It further means that the receiver, who in this case is a debtor also includes individuals the society defines or labels as indigent and this is based on their socio-economic conditions and status. This is often the case with children who have no access to parents to fund their schooling and even parents who are financially incapacitated to ensure that the education of their children is not truncated (Amali et al,2020). In other words, indebtedness from the Yoruba indigenous sociological and cultural perspective was (and is) not a state which any individual, group or family was proud to be identified with. This is because it is often

accompanied with some level of shame, reproach and disgrace especially when it becomes difficult to refund (Ojo, Abisoye & Aina, 2017).

Contemporary discussion shows that there are several reasons why individuals adopt loan facilities ranging from investment to upkeep, health and medical conditions among others. One other prevailing reason why parents engage in loan with other individuals, cooperate bodies (microfinance and commercial banks) and the Government, is to ensure that the education of their children is not disrupted or truncated. An example of this loan facility from the Government is the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) introduced in April 2024. This initiative, which have supported over six hundred and ten thousand tertiary institution students across Nigeria (as at the time of this study), is to ensure access to higher education for all interested and aspiring but indigent families and students (Oladapo, 2024; NELFUND, 2025). Having established that this loan comes from the Federal Government and not from individuals, commercial and microfinance banks does not erode the fact that this scheme is primarily targeted at those socially classified as indigents who might have financial difficulties accessing tertiary education. Based on this context, a germane concern would be to know, if as a result of the NELFUND scheme, the beneficiaries are labelled *poor* by either course, hostel and roommates or even lecturers; and if the beneficiaries consider themselves as *poor,* which could be as a result of what others termed them or the socio-economic circumstances surrounding their opting for the NELFUND loan facility. A relevant rider to this concern would be to examine if the beneficiaries are ashamed or not ashamed to be identified as one before others.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the introduction of the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) as a strategy to enhance access to higher education, there is limited empirical evidence on its sociological implications, particularly regarding how beneficiaries are socially perceived within academic environments. Existing literature on indebtedness suggests that loan recipients may experience stigmatization and identity redefinition through labelling processes. However, the extent to which this applies within the Nigerian context, especially among undergraduate students benefiting from a government-backed loan scheme, remains underexplored. Furthermore, it is unclear whether beneficiaries internalize such labels or whether the scheme has been socially redefined as a normative educational support mechanism. This gap necessitates an empirical investigation into the prevalence and consequences of labelling among NELFUND beneficiaries

Theoretical Perspective

Among several theories which can explain this phenomenon, the framework upon which this study is anchored, is George Herbert Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist theory. This is micro level sociological theory with social psychological implications which is focused on the analysis of the society from the perspective of social interactions which individuals get engaged in on daily basis. This interaction(s) which is often or sometimes reoccurring in varying or similar dimensions is what the symbolic interactionist theory argues that individuals as members of the society attach meanings to, determined by individual perspectives which can be subjective (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Beyond regular face-to-face interactions which the symbolic interactionist theory opines that individuals in societies attach meanings to, this micro level theory equally argues and projects that members of the society equally attribute meanings to financial dynamics which occurs between members of the same society. To be put in proper context, financial practices such as loans, indebtedness and credit facilities have social perspective and meanings attached to them (Peebles, 2010). Issues around loans and indebtedness have social power of determining identity formation and reformation to individuals involved directly or indirectly. In other words, this financial practice has the social ability of attributing labels to the individuals giving and receiving the loans and even persons connected to this practice indirectly such as guarantors, sureties, friends and the children of the individuals involved among others. By extension, with the practice of loan and credit facilities is the possibility of stigmatization (evidenced in the daily interactions) most

especially on the individual financially indebted depending on the context (Sidhu & Rampal, 2016).

Analyzing this phenomenon with the symbolic interactionist theory and in the context of acquiring loans for the purpose of educating children, this can be a basis of identification in the school and its environs. Furthermore, if debt is socially perceived to mean a symbol of financial responsibility, failure or success, then in such scenario, it is regarded as an identifier in which actors in the educational space (such as lecturers/teachers, class and hostel/roommates) uses to identify students who are beneficiaries of loans. In simple terms, students who are loan beneficiaries can be tagged with such circumstance in lecture halls, hostels and around their academic environment (Rahadi et al, 2024). It is pertinent to note that as a result of labels that comes from educational actors (fellow students and teachers/lecturers), the way the beneficiaries perceive themselves (self-concept) can be shaped and reshaped. In other words, using labelling terminologies such as *in-debt* or *financially irresponsible* can become a significant aspect of a student's identity and can also cause social stigmatization, shame and social division (McWilliams,2021). Based on this theoretical argument, it is essential to establish and know how NELFUND beneficiaries perceive themselves and if they feel labelled by any educational actor.

For the purpose of a balanced arguments, the symbolic interactionist theory equally upholds the ***negotiation of meanings*** as an approach in the analysis of loans and its dynamics. As established earlier that loans are not always attached with negative insinuations. There are social circumstances when indebtedness is changed in perceived meaning. In other words, the contextual meaning and interpretation associated to loan and indebtedness by students' peers, members of a family and some other cooperate bodies (such as banks) might not necessarily be negative (Kumur,2016). There could be instances when a student's tuition is paid for ahead with a possibility or an assurance of a promising job opportunity/offer with the same agency responsible for offering the tuition as a loan facility. Also, there are instances where staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria receive flexible grants with bonding (a condition or agreement of not leaving the organization for a number of years after the end of the sponsored proramme) from Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). In several cases, these grants with bonds are awarded for a further study, most especially at the postgraduate level for academic staff and possibly a few for non-academic staff (Source needed). Although, while there are a few similarities between the TETFund and NELFund especially in flexibility and granting agency (which is the Federal Government of Nigeria), it does not seem like beneficiaries of TETFund are stigmatized or labelled. It is based on this theoretical background that this study set out to examine how NELFUND beneficiaries perceive themselves; to know if they feel labelled by their course mate and lecturers among other educational actors and the consequences on them if such happens. To guide the conduct of this study, the following **research questions** are raised:

1. How does the NELFUND beneficiaries perceive themselves?
2. Do beneficiaries of NELFUND feel labelled?
3. What are the consequences of labelling of beneficiaries of NELFUND?

Methodology

This study employed the **Descriptive Research Design** as it sought to examine and provide explanation to the prevalence of labelling towards beneficiaries of the NELFUND loan scheme by educational actors such as lecturers and fellow students in the university community. Also, this study adopted **Qualitative Research Approach** as it utilised only qualitative (nonnumeric) data. This approach is of a great benefit as it allowed the researchers to have in-depth information and documentation of the qualities of social and educational interactions (such as labelling) in educational settings too often missed and undetected by quantitative approach (Shidur,2016). This study was conducted in a public tertiary institution in Oyo State, Nigeria, where it was certain that their students are beneficiaries of the NELFUND

scheme. Eight (8) tertiary institution students who are beneficiaries of the NELFUND scheme were purposively sampled as participants for the study. The choice of a limited sample size of eight was on basis that the population of the study (which are beneficiaries of the loan scheme) were not easily identified and located. And since this is a qualitative study requiring the use of in-depth interview and not too many sample size, the researchers settled for the eight participants which were available for the study. Also, considering the difficult in locating participants, the researcher employed the use of snowballing technique (chain-referral) to sample across major academic levels (100 to 400 level) and genders (male and female).

Guide questions were used to for semi-structured interviews to obtain information from the participants. The semi-structured interview was conducted online (via WhatsApp voice record) and face-to-face consisting of***A.*** introduction as well as a set of opening, core,***B.*** and closing questions. Open-ended questions and narrative response formats were used to elicit more detailed narratives from the participants during the in-depth interview. During the in-depth interview and to ensure ***ethical consideration***, the researchers sort the permission of the participants through the use consent form and each participant were duly informed on the purpose of the study and that their responses would be recorded with the aid of a voice recorded to ensure that no information is missing in the process. Also, participants were informed about their voluntary engagement in the interview process and equally told that they had the right to opt out of the (less than 30 minutes) interview session. For the purpose of anonymity, no traceable or specific information was required from them as codes were used such as P1.LB100M (i.e. Participants 1, Labelling 100 level, Male). Subsequently, their recorded data were transcribed and analysed based on the themes formulated from the assumption of the symbolic interactionist theory. In other words, points were extracted from their narratives to fit into predetermined themes which is an approach called deductive thematic analysis.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study on the prevalence and consequences of labelling undergraduate beneficiaries of NELFUND scheme. The results are discussed in detail, highlighting the responses from the interview as well fitted into the themes. Through these narratives, the study established how the beneficiaries of the NELFUND scheme perceives themselves (self-concept) and if they feel they are been labelled as impoverished (as a result of their dependent on the loan scheme) and the consequences of the prevailing labelling (if it actually exists). Summarily, the findings are categorized into key themes that address the research questions: (1) how NELFUND beneficiaries perceive themselves (2) if beneficiaries of NELFUND feel labelled and (3) the consequences of the labelling (if there is any).

How NELFUND beneficiaries perceive themselves

Participants 2 and 5 described their perception about themselves (self-concept) as either they are indigent or not. This is the feelings of how they view their socio-economic status as it relates to their ability to fund their tuition among other fees. To the participants, they are not in the socio-economic category of indigent or impoverished. It is believed that their sponsors (parents or guardians) are not so economically incapacitated to the extent that they are unable to pay, but this loan is regarded just as an opportunity from the Government of Nigeria which majority term as *national cake*. Further, the beneficiaries not feeling like they are indigent (in their thought/self-concept) is partly caused by their perception and of other students around them who believes that the loan is an opportunity which should be taken advantage of by the schooling citizens of Nigeria irrespective of your economic status.

These are evident extract from the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

> *" a lady found out and she was like "ohhh… you collected Nelfund" and I'm like is not because my parent cannot afford the school fees at least it's federal money….." (P2.LB.100.F)*

> *"… about the loan as a Nigerian we all see it as an opportunity, yeah….if you ask for the loan and people and you have tell People or they know that you're on NELFUND loan, they will ask you how or what are the steps. They are more eager to join than knowing so you will not feel any … you will not feel different…." (P5.LB.300.M)*

It was also discovered through the narration of another participant that a beneficiary of the loan might not necessarily need it or might be in the category of students which can be termed as dishonest and not economically inferior. This is the case when a student benefits from the loan scheme which comes with a monthly stipend and refuses to inform his parents at home. What this means is that though such students through NELFUND is able to pay his tuition and gets monthly stipends, he still receives funding from home for same purpose (either the parents are comfortable or not). The participant stated that:

> *"…..Yes, I can discuss it with some of my friends and there are some friends that I cannot discuss it with because from home now I still have some things that I'm collecting from home so I won't want them to know that I'm receiving nelfund so that it won't stop me my monthly stipend from home, and there are some people that I can even tell that I'm a loan beneficiary that won't let the information get to the third party not to talk of getting to home so that's it….." (P7.LB.400.M)*

It is evident that there are other social issues which surrounds the opting for the loan beyond been financially dependent or impoverished. It might be looked into from the perspective that the participant wants to use the loan facility to explore multiple strings of income and it could be traced to issues around integrity. It equally shows evidence that a number of students in Nigerian tertiary institutions benefiting from the NELFUND scheme are not doing so necessarily because they are economically inferior.

This feeling of seeing ones-self as economically inferior drawing from what others feels about the loan scheme can be understood from the perspective of the *Negotiation of Meaning* aspect of the symbolic interactionist theory. This illustrates the implication of how the perspective of others defines the self-concept of individuals. The thought of how peers and peer groups perceives or defines NELFUND to mean governmental opportunity that both the fairly comfortable and the poor wants to tap into seem to have given positive self-concept to the beneficiaries. Meaning that the reason attached to NELFUND is negotiated/changed among stakeholders which includes lecturers, family members and course/class and hostel mates, thus, the absence of negative self-concept by beneficiaries.

Further, it is essential to state that it was found that the feeling of not been economically inferior (by the beneficiaries) is not absolute as this does not imply financial buoyance or satisfaction. A number of the participants still difficult economic experience even if they are able to pay the tuition, therefore, getting another source of paying will implies a level of ease. This is evident in the narration of a participant; it was stated that:

> *"…even if you have the resources or the money to pay, you can still collect it to help your parents or lessen the burden…." (P3.LB.200.M)*

> *"…….surely, the way everywhere is, economy and everything is harsh at least everybody is facing the heat…." (P6.LB.300.F)*

It only means that the effect of the current economic situation in Nigeria which according to them is not palatable is now been felt by a greater percentage of families including those who have children in school. This explains why every average family seem to scramble for the loan opportunity and this in agreement with the point illustration by a participant stating that:

> *"…. because a larger population of them are so…. Are also a beneficiary of this loan due to the hike in price of school fee…" (P4.LB.200.F)*.

This is evident in the illustration of a participant who believes that the current economic situation of the country is not convenient for majority of Nigerians. In other words, that

families and sponsors of students can still afford to pay the tuition without the loan scheme does not imply socio-economic comfort and satisfaction.

C. Labelling of NELFUND beneficiaries (by Lecturers)

Since labelling can be verbal, non-verbal, positive or negative from lecturers and fellow students, it will be examined based on the one which is prevalent from lecturers towards NELFUND beneficiaries. Participants 1, 4, 5 discussed that lecturers being major influence on them seem to have a positive form of labelling towards NELFUND beneficiaries. This is evident in the way they encourage students to take part in the scheme. This positive labelling is not only in words (verbal) but also in action. The use of derogatory words or unwelcoming gestures (which are negative labelling) are not exhibited by the lecturers towards their students who are beneficiaries of the scheme. Below are a few extracts of the narratives from participants that buttresses the above.

> *"Our lecturers, they are very happy and even encourage us to apply it next time so they all see it as an opportunity and it helps …it really helps us a lot" (P1.LB.100.M)*

> *"….generally , whenever they address the students generally they tend to… they are always positive about it and they like to urge people that are yet to… ummm…collect the loan especially if they bare yet to pay their school fees…… They react positively and they don't change the way they react to us .. they are not… they are not….it was already late and they were already threatening to close down ….to close the portal and you know cancel our admission and stuffs like that so our lecturers had to encourage us to take the Nelfund and there was no any different treatment" (P4)*

> *"…Most of them react supportive and concerned some of them…most of them….most of the students and the lecturers …."(P5)*

Lecturers as major stakeholders in the university system are observed not to be involved in the negative labelling or stigmatization of beneficiary of the NELFUND loan scheme. Beyond desisting from negative labels towards beneficiaries of the practice, lecturers are seen to be involved encouraging students who are yet to (in their words) take advantage of the opportunity. Further, lecturers encouraged students to opt for the loan scheme rather than pay for late registration or a worse case which is the termination or forfeiture of admission or studentship status. This disagrees with Terrell (2000) who opined that negative labelling and stigmatization accompanies indebtedness. It was submitted that advise to individuals indebted is often given with a condescending approach. The reason for the difference in findings could be because both studies examined a different category of participants. While this current study examines students, the study by Terrell (2000) was with non-students. Also, the lender in this study is NELFUND (an agency of the Government) while the lender in the study by Terrell (2000) are private individuals.

Labelling of NELFUND beneficiaries (by Students)

Since it is not only lecturers that makes up the university academic environment, it also involves students, it implies that the actions of students towards fellow students equally matters and should not be ignored and cannot be overemphasized. It is based on this that illustration on the reactions and words of students towards NELFUND beneficiaries needs to be examined.

Participants 1, 4 and 5 were able to mention the exact experience with fellow students as it relates to labelling. It was stated that the NELFUND loan scheme is regarded as an opportunity which is to be tapped into, thus, the need for positive labelling which are in forms of verbal and non-verbal. Participants narrated that:

> *"..Actually….ummm.. my course-mate most of them also applied so get didn't seen it as a barrier….." (P1)*

> *"……Well, they don't react in anyhow… in any awkward way because a larger population of them are so…. Are also a beneficiary of this loan due to the hike in price of school fee…(pause)… so they don't …. They are not…*

> *They are not indifferent and they don't change the way they relate with me. It doesn't affect anything cause it's not a disease so yeah…they don't react….." (P4)*

> *".....Most of them react supportive and concerned some of them…most of them….most of the students and the lecturers …. Most of the student are curious , they will ask whether it is real or are they paying or do..ah.. they will most… most… really… mot of them are very very curious whether they are paying or not whether they … emm… they add interest in the loan or not buh most of them are very very curious including some lecturers too….. " (P5)*

The beneficiaries of NELFUND are equally not negatively labelled by fellow students either through verbal or non-verbal means. Rather, receiving it is something of pride which is often waited for probably as each months comes to end when stipend is to be paid. Common slang is said among them like an average Nigerian youth awaiting the Governments allocation as a stipend. This is seen in the words of a participant that

> *"……we even joke about it we use it to joke within ourselves that 'how far naw, you don collect?…"*

The expression of reciprocated jokes is evidence that none of the students labelled themselves. Also, such jokes exhibit willing openness which is not a characteristic of shame as a result of loans from other sources. This is equally not in agreement with the perception presented by Sidhu and Rampal (2016) who opined that debts often bring about discordance in social living among individuals as one feels exploited by the other. The reason for a different finding in this case could be based on the assumption that the NELFUND loan is a long-term scheme and at no interest.

D. Consequences of labeling

Participant 4, described her reaction to the nature of labelling which she reported to have experienced. Although she reported that the negative labelling which she received was minimal compared to the positive labelling, but that specific negative label affected her adversely. She said specifically that:

> *".....They react positively and they don't change the way they react to us .. they are not… they are not…. Except very few of lecturers will take it as Oke as in use it to… ummm… you know more cos we are receiving… we're receiving lectures on credit and all which I find that very insulting If I would say but not all…" (P4)*

A negligible portion of the lecturers still use negative labelling probably jokingly as student equally jokes with the NELFUND loan scheme, however, this to specific beneficiaries considers it an insult which did not go well with them. It is possible that this is caused to differing circumstances which necessitate the opting for the loan. This might explain why an utterance from a lecturer will be considered a joke by some and not a joke by others. In all, the consequences for the labelling have not been really been felt as it relates to the NELFUND scheme.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that undergraduate beneficiaries of the NELFUND loan scheme generally do not perceive themselves as indigent or economically inferior. Rather than viewing the loan as a maker or symbol of poverty, most beneficiaries interpret it as a government-provided opportunity available to all Nigerian students at the tertiary level of education, regardless of socioeconomic background and status. This perception is strongly shaped by the shared understanding within the university community that NELFUND represents a form of collective national benefit rather than a welfare scheme for the socio-economically indigent. Consequently, beneficiaries tend to maintain a positive self-concept, as the meaning attached to the loan is socially negotiated among peers, lecturers, and family members. In other words, the NELFUND loan scheme is redefined and perceived by stakeholders (lecturers, students, parents and others) away from its original meaning and aim (meant for the socio-economic indigents). The

alignment in submission of the argument by Akinteye J.O (2025) and this current study is probably because of the popular assumption that the loan will not be refunded. This could equally be because of an assumption that with a change in government, a refund will most likely not be requested. The government not requesting for a refund could be as a result of political reasons among others.

However, the findings also show that opting for the NELFUND loan is not solely driven by extreme financial incapacity. Some beneficiaries access the scheme to ease the financial burden on their parents or to cope with the broader economic hardship currently experienced in Nigeria. The prevailing economic conditions, including rising tuition fees and general inflation, have made the loan attractive even to families that might otherwise afford school fees. This underscores that participation in the scheme reflects economic strain rather than absolute poverty. In a few cases, the findings further suggest issues of strategic use of the loan, where some students conceal their beneficiary status from parents in order to maintain multiple sources of financial support, pointing to ethical and integrity-related concerns rather than economic necessity alone. This is in line with argument of Elizabeth and Racheal A(2023) that loan are not been taking just because the beneficiary parents are living in poverty but to easy the financial burden that comes with education. With regard to labelling by lecturers, the study finds an overwhelmingly positive pattern. Lecturers are not actively involved in stigmatizing or negatively labelling NELFUND beneficiaries. Instead, they tend to encourage students to take advantage of the scheme, particularly as a means of avoiding late registration penalties or loss of admission. This supportive stance contrasts with earlier studies that associate indebtedness with condescension and stigma. The divergence may be explained by contextual differences, notably the fact that NELFUND is a government backed, interest-free student loan, and the beneficiaries are students rather than the general adult population examined in earlier research.

Similarly, peer interactions among students do not reflect negative labelling or stigmatization. Fellow students largely perceive NELFUND as a shared opportunity, with many either already benefiting from the scheme or seeking information about how to apply. Interactions are characterized by curiosity, encouragement, and even humor, rather than shame or social exclusion. This open and joking engagement suggests that beneficiaries do not internalize negative labels, nor do they experience social withdrawal. The absence of peer stigma contradicts perspectives that link debt to social discord, which may again be attributed to the long-term, interest-free nature of the loan and its normalization within the student population.

In terms of consequences of labelling, the findings indicate that negative labelling is minimal and not widespread. While a small number of lecturers occasionally make remarks that frame lectures or education as being received “on credit,” such comments are perceived as offensive by some beneficiaries, even if intended jokingly. These isolated instances demonstrate that the impact of labelling is subjective and dependent on individual circumstances and sensitivities. Overall, however, the study finds that labelling associated with NELFUND has not produced significant adverse psychological, academic, or social consequences for beneficiaries. Louise & Eilis (2024) stated that individuals interpret and react to labels differently, based on personal identity, prior experience, and situational context. In many domains outside highly stigmatized conditions, labels do not uniformly translate to negative outcomes; their effects vary with the subjective meaning attributed by recipients and observers. This aligns with studies finding inconsistent or negligible negative labelling effects

Conclusion

This study concludes that the NELFUND scheme has undergone a significant social redefinition within the Nigerian university context. Rather than being perceived as a marker of poverty, the loan is widely interpreted as a legitimate and accessible opportunity for students across socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, the anticipated negative labelling and stigmatization associated with indebtedness are largely absent. However, the findings also reveal emerging concerns regarding misuse, ethical behaviour, and policy targeting. These insights highlight the

need to reconceptualize assumptions within labelling theory in contexts where state-backed welfare interventions are normalized.

Recommendation

1. Government should develop robust targeting mechanisms to ensure that NELFUND benefits genuinely indigent students.
2. A comprehensive national database should be established to improve transparency and accountability in loan disbursement.
3. Financial literacy and ethical orientation programmes should be introduced for beneficiaries to discourage misuse of the scheme.
4. Economic policies should be strengthened to reduce systemic financial pressures driving excessive reliance on student loans.
5. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be institutionalized to ensure sustainability and effectiveness of the scheme.

References

Amali, O. O., Shoyemi, A. A., Mubarak, A., & Ayantoye, K. S. (2020). Educational challenges encountered by orphaned undergraduates of a public university in Kwara State, Nigeria. *Anatolian Journal of Education, 5*(2), 157–170. https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2020.5214a

Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia.isa*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/205684601561

Elizabeth, C. M., & Racheal, E. D. (2021). Financial stress, race, and student debt during the Great Recession. *Sociological Currents, 8*(5), 424–445. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965211026692

Kumar, S. (2016). *A complete resource for CTET: Social science and pedagogy for Paper II*. Pearson India Education.

Louise, D., & Eilis, H. (2017). Labelling effects and adolescent responses to peers with depression: An experimental investigation. *BMC Psychiatry, 17*(1), Article 228. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-017-1389-9

Nigerian Education Loan Fund. (2025). *Explore how we've advanced educational opportunities in Nigeria*. https://nelf.gov.ng/our-impact

McWilliams, K. (2021). *Identity and image: The process of cultivating perceptions of secondary schools*. University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Ojo, M. O. D., Abisoye, A. O., & Aina, O. A. (2017). Unpleasant aspects of pre-colonial Yoruba debt recovery systems: Osomalo, Ologo and Iwofa under review. *Online Journal of Arts, Management and Social Sciences, 2*(2), 127–141.

Oladapo, O. A. (2024, February 26). *The Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND). Africa Edutimes*. https://edutimesafrica.com/the-nigerian-education-loan-fund-nelfund/

Peebles, G. (2010). The anthropology of credit and debt. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 39*(1), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-090109-133856

Rahadi, A. P., Priatmodjo, D. P., & Wisesa, A. (2024). Factors shaping student debt attitudes and behaviours. *International Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship, Social Science and Humanities, 8*(1). https://doi.org/10.31098/ijmesh.v8i1.1259

Shidur, M. R. (2017). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language testing and assessment research: A literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning, 6*(1), 102–112. https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/jel/article/view/64330

Sidhu, J., & Rampal, V. K. (2016). Causes and consequences of indebtedness: A brief review. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development, 12*(2), 47–50. https://doi.org/10.5958/2322-0430.2016.00001.9

Terrell, A. H. (2000). Stigmatizing indebtedness: Implications for labelling theory. *Symbolic Interaction, 23*(1), 29–46. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2000.23.1.29