

# EDUCATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

---

**Kingsley Chukwu Ajaude**

Department of Educational Foundations  
Faculty of Education  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria  
[ajakingso@gmail.com](mailto:ajakingso@gmail.com)

---

## **Abstract**

*The society that wishes to grow and develop a brighter future for its citizens must invest aggressively in child education. The strength of a nation lies in the development of children's education and youth empowerment. This could be achieved through the creation of an enabling environment for quality education and value orientation to thrive. Lack of proper and basic education is detrimental to human capital development, a stable economy, and a productive workforce. It is against the backdrop of the need for attention to the education of the child as a national stronghold for advancement that the study examined the concept of education, the Nigerian education system, and child development. The study acknowledges the importance of education in childhood development as a foundation for their future life. It further highlights the need for the government to harness the potential of young people through youth empowerment schemes for capacity building as an antidote to restive behaviour. Although the study identified some empowerment programmes of various government leaderships, the success of such initiatives has always been hampered by the 'Nigerian factor syndrome' which often makes the country vulnerable to youth restiveness. The study concluded and recommended, among other things, that child education should be given priority attention by the government, parents, and other caregivers, while youth empowerment initiatives should be vigorously monitored and given unreserved attention by the relevant organs to ensure safe delivery to the targeted beneficiaries.*

**Keywords:** Education, child development and youth empowerment

## **Introduction**

Life is basically about learning in order to have meaningful living. Learning is a continuous process as long as an individual exists. Education is the channel through which learning is achieved. An individual is old enough to learn from the surrounding environment from the moment of birth. The child of today grows up to become an adult citizen of tomorrow. The growth and development of such an individual which embodies the unique personality is reflected through the quality of the education system. The learning process must stimulate curiosity in the minds of the young impressionable children and equip them with tools to be better human beings for a life of dedicated service to the society. In essence, education facilitates the cultivation of a healthy thought process and cognitive abilities. In the competitive world of today, education is a basic recipe for a developing child after the basic needs of food, clothes and shelter.

The word education can be traced back to the Latin words “educare,” which means to bring up or to nourish, and “educere,” which means to bring forth or to draw out (Dagar & Dhull, 1994; Eke, 2022). Essentially, education aims to provide learners with a fertile environment to nurture, blossom, and develop their latent potentials. Education introduces young children to the cultural norms and values of society, preparing them for productivity. This process gradually stimulates their innate potentials necessary for economic viability and problem-solving skills. These traits should be harnessed and nurtured early enough throughout their growth and development into adulthood. Arnold and Rick (1991) observed that education is not a concept that confirms or sets any particular type of processes, such as training or an activity such as lecturing. Instead, it suggests criteria to which all processes and activities involved, such as training, instruction, would conform. In other words, what is passed on and the way it is passed on should be of value.

Education could also be perceived as a continuous process of learning from the birth of an individual till death. Nwakwesiri and Onebunne (2017) stated that by and large, education is any attempt made to impact knowledge on another person. It therefore involves the transmission of knowledge from one person to another or from the society to its members or from one culture to another. In essence, whenever the individual experiences a novelty, basically the person is being educated. Furthermore, education is viewed as a systematic process through which a child or an adult acquires knowledge, experiences, skills and sound attitude (Parankimalil, 2012). In other words, education seems to make an individual civilized, refined, empowered and cultured. It serves as a medium for providing information to an inexperienced person(s) to facilitate their physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, political and economic development and empowerment. More still, Nwakwesiri et al (2017) observed education as the process of cognitive, effective and psycho-motive development of an individual with a view to molding the individual for a holistic contribution to the development of the community as well as the promotion of cultural heritage. Therefore, education is the acquisition and utilization of knowledge not only for the benefit of the individual, but also the society at large.

As a broad phenomenon, education can be applied to various age brackets and ranges from informal to formal settings accessible to young children and adults. Education is therefore a valuable asset to the integral formation of the child. Meanwhile, a variety of elements play vital roles in the education and development of the child. These elements include parents, primary caregivers, and teachers in their immediate environment, especially during the pre-school years of the child (0 - 3 years of age), which are a critical period of human development. At this stage, there is predominantly a gradual development of self-awareness and intimate attachment with parents and other caregivers. The quality

of the relationship established could significantly determine the shape of the child's future. Besides informal education, there is also formal education which the child undergoes in the course of development spanning from three years of age and above. During this period, the curriculum design of educational programs appears to correspond with the developmental age of the child. The learning environment provided at various settings by the relevant stakeholders affords the child the opportunity to access the various programmes accordingly. This is fundamental to human and national development, offering more promising prospects.

Education appears to be the key to well-rounded development, but in Nigeria, the situation seems worrisome. The high level of insecurity in the country, as witnessed in attacks on schools and learning facilities, the kidnapping of school children, and communal clashes, which have displaced many families, cannot be overstated. Available data on early childhood education in Nigeria revealed that 25 schools were attacked as of February 2022; 1,470 learners were abducted; over one million children were afraid to return to school in 2021, and 11,500 schools were closed due to attacks (Fatunmole, 2023). The unfortunate situation has jeopardized the opportunities of many children from accessing basic education necessary not only for their future integral formation and self-reliance but also for nation-building. If such an ugly trend is treated and dismissed with a wave of the hand by the government and other relevant organs, the inherent consequences may be far-reaching and inimical to national stability.

The medium of education offers the child the atmosphere of exposure to various sources from whom and where they can acquire immense knowledge. Such exposure is instrumental to their development and empowerment at their youthful age. The youth are the lifeline of the society and must be guarded jealously from their formative years for maximum output. Research has revealed that no country can expect to successfully integrate into and benefit from the 21st-century economy without a well-educated and empowered workforce (Ojedeke & Falokin, 2009), who in this context are predominantly the youths. An educated child grows up to become an empowered youth or adult. Education then appears to be a very precious gift to the youth and the society at large. This study therefore focuses on the Nigerian education system, child development, and youth empowerment schemes in Nigeria.

### **Nigerian Education System and Child Development**

Basically, childhood applies to the 'early years of an individual's life'. Childhood education therefore comprises the education acquired during the early years of life, both formal and non-formal. The early years of an individual's life, according to Nnachi (2019), is the duration spanning from birth until the period prior to adolescence (0-12 years). Child development therefore constitutes the process by which an individual undergoes a series of progressive and qualitative changes from the period of fertilized egg through childhood (Nnachi, 2019). It consists of the formation, knowledge, and training acquired during the childhood period for the integral growth and maturity of the child in the future. Essentially, education provides a strong footing for child development. It enhances and facilitates the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional proficiency of the child's lifelong well-being. The curiosity of the child to learn begins even at the early stage of development.

The importance of childhood education was captured by the National Policy on Education as the beginning of a child's development and the foundation stone of the Nigerian Educational System (FRN, 2012). In addition, provisions were made concerning the objectives and guidelines put in place to accomplish the set goals of childhood education. The necessity of maintaining the levels of

education especially the pre-primary period is paramount. This stage forms the cornerstone of child development and should not be compromised as it prepares and fortifies the child for other levels of education as well as the rigors of future life. It further empowers the child to acquire skills essential for sustenance, protection, food production, and mastery of the environment. However, the nature of the environment, facilities, and personnel available for this knowledge acquisition could make or mar the child's future.

The education system in Nigeria has experienced a plethora of transformations orchestrated by policies of different government leaderships since independence. Notable in the restructuring effort was the advent of the national policy on education in 1977 and the task of accomplishing the primary objectives as enshrined in the policy. The understanding behind the policy is the enhancement of self-realization, promotion of individual and national efficiency, national unity among others. Over the past years, Nigeria has witnessed varied systems of education such as the 6-5-4; the 6-3-3-4 as well as the 9-3-4 system of Universal Basic Education of 1999 under Olusegun Obasanjo led administration. The program came as a replacement of the Universal Primary Education (UPE). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) manages the scheme and has made it “free”, “compulsory” and a “right” of every child. The UBEC law section 15 defines UBE as early childhood care and education (UBEC, 2012). Accordingly, the law stipulates a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programs, and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women, Al-majiri, out of school and disabled people (Aderinoye, Ojokheta, & Olojede, 2007). Therefore, the scheme aims at the total eradication of illiteracy and geometric increase in adult literacy rate for efficient human capital development and national stability.

Some years back, Nigeria together with the rest of the world readily embraced the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs). They include targets to give all children a quality education among others. Indeed, achieving quality education seems to be a mirage. Currently, with the ongoing economic quagmire and uncontrollable inflation ravaging the country, Nigeria seems to be sinking like a perforated ship on all the key 2030 indicators for child development. Besides, over 10 million children between 5–14 years of age are out of school which appears to be the largest population in the world (Fatunmole, 2023), even though education is nominally free and compulsory. In reality, the advantage of number possibly underscores that the fate of Nigeria's children may shape the world's development given the best atmosphere to thrive. However, one can observe some challenges that seem to negate achieving the SDG goals for child education in the country. There appear to be no coordinated and concerted efforts by any successive government to ensure that the nursery education is priority attention. They are still under the control of the private sectors with no standard rules and regulations to checkmate their activities, thereby making it a business enterprise for the owners at the detriment of the children and society at large.

### **Youth Empowerment Scheme in Nigeria and the Paralysis of Implementation**

The term ‘youth’ refers to people within the age range of 15 to 29 years (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019). In the same vein, the World Health Organization (2020) defines youth as anyone between 15 to 34 years old. Youth empowerment, which is an aspect of human development, is progressive in nature. A child progresses from dependency on their parents/guardians to increasing independence or autonomy (Berk, 2009). The child of today gradually becomes the youth of tomorrow. Youthful life in Nigeria appears to be characterized currently by storm and stress in the quest for survival, such as cultism, kidnapping, banditry, political thuggery, and militancy. Equipping the youth, therefore, through empowerment initiatives in a distressed and developing economy like

Nigeria is a step in the right direction. This is important because the youth are the backbone of the nation as they represent a good measure through which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. Accordingly, Cargo (2003) asserted that youths are the greatest assets that any nation can have; they are the future leaders and they are the investment for a country's development. Hence, the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan 2021-2024 report by the Federal Ministry of Sports and Youth Development (2021) identified youth as an important factor in economic growth and national development.

Conceptually, youth empowerment scheme entails the process of equipping the young people with the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to achieve mastery of their own lives for an improved standard of living. For a successful youth empowerment agenda to be in place, education has to present the learner with knowledge that has practical significance and real-life application. According to Ohize and Adamu (2009), Youth Empowerment Scheme is a policy framework or a mechanism put in place that provides training, empowerment opportunities, skills acquisition, and wealth creation to enhance income generation and improve the social status among the youth. The empowerment initiative is aimed at making life more meaningful for the youth and to promote nation-building. In a related development, Emejuru (2017) observed that youth empowerment entails the activities that involve the impartation of useful training, education, etc. Also describing the youth empowerment scheme, Ogundowolo (1988) noted that it is meant to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in the future. In other words, youth empowerment involves the aggressive promotion of value re-orientation among the youth aimed at enhancing their creativity, productivity, and engagement in entrepreneurial skills as a means of facilitating their chances of becoming employers of labour rather than job seekers. It is, therefore, a human development initiative to tackle poverty incidence and create avenues for a resourceful nation. The core of youth empowerment is the belief that young people are a conglomeration of inexhaustible talents who are capable of incredible excellence.

The National Bureau of Statistics revealed that Nigeria's population was estimated at 199 million (NBS, 2017), making Nigeria the most populous country in Africa. When the country is juxtaposed with the other African nations, the population of the youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) stood at 26.2 per cent in 2019 (ILO Youth Country Brief (Nigeria), 2023). In a related discovery, the National Youth Survey (2022) in its report, itemized the unemployment level in accordance with the six geopolitical zones operational in the country. Thus, "26.3 percent of the youth in North West were jobless, South West had (23.4 percent) while in the North-East and South-South (14.2 percent) and (14 percent) respectively had no job. Similarly, (12.5 percent) of the youth in South East and (9.5 percent) of the youth in the North Central were unemployed." Onibon (2022) also observed that about 70 to 80 per cent of Nigeria's population comprises youth, and more than 80 per cent are unemployed. The situation is not only precarious but also worrisome.

Since gaining political independence and the return to uninterrupted democracy from 1999 after sixteen years of military rule, there have policy initiatives by successive governments to better the lives of the teeming population of the Nigerian youth with some youth empowerment and skill acquisition programmes. The participation in the scheme is not contingent on educational attainment because the target populations are literate, semi-literate, and illiterate youth across the country. The rationale behind these programmes, as always enunciated by the relevant stakeholders, has been to minimize the unemployment level among youth, poverty alleviation as well as overcome youth restiveness and criminality. Several programmes, therefore, have been introduced by governments to overcome the threat of joblessness and rascality of the youth. These include the inaugural, second,



third, and fourth national development plans (1962-1985), the three-year rolling plans (1990-1992), Vision 2010 (1996-1998), and a host of others. Despite the budgetary allocations to those initiatives, there seem to be little to show for them in the country.

In the effort to empower, reduce poverty and unemployment among the Nigerian youth, the Olusegun Obasanjo led administration of 1999 launched a scheme that engaged in paying about two hundred thousand Nigerians the sum of N3,500 per month. The said number was cut across the states of the federation. However, the initiative was subsequently replaced with National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 due to opposition and condemnation. The NAPEP was aimed at training the youths in vocational trades, create empowerment, support internship as well as provide micro-credit facilities (Iliffe, 2011). It was also observed that after about ten years of implementation, the programme could not deliver on the major objectives (Obikezie, Ananti, & Onyekwelu, 2015).

Moreover, shortly after the inauguration on May 29th, 2007, the Late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua was confronted with a series of insurgency around the Niger Delta region where the country has discovered large deposits of crude oil which serve as a major source of revenue for the nation. It was observed that the restiveness was the fallout of prolonged negligence and non-compliance of the government as well as other relevant agencies of the environmental protection and social responsibility pact. The outcome as Ajibola (2015) identified was widespread coordinated attacks on the oil facilities in the region by the youth; oil workers were occasionally kidnapped while some died in the process. In the effort to abate the ravaging situation, a technical committee on Niger Delta was set for possible solutions. The recommendation of the committee which centered on disarmament and demobilization was adopted. The programme, among other things, aimed at training, empowering, and reintegrating the angry youth in the region. Unfortunately, the exercise could not maximally satisfy the yearnings and desires of the young people. Thus, "Amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A critical appraisal," (2017) revealed that the package did not impact youth empowerment in the Niger Delta region. However, youth empowerment programs such as the Graduate Internship Scheme, Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programs (SURE-P) to mention but a few were initiated by President Goodluck Jonathan on assumption of office following the demise of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The SURE-P scheme was introduced in 2012 and became prominent as it seemed to have been given much priority. Udo (2013) noted that the program was aimed at providing short job opportunities to unemployed Nigerian youth which will sharpen their skill as well as enable them to gain some work experience. Meanwhile, a significant 72% poverty level of Nigeria in 2016 as observed by Ripples (2016) underscores the poor accomplishment of the said initiative.

Furthermore, May 29th, 2015, saw the advent of President Muhammadu Buhari to power. In a concerted effort to impact on the Nigeria youth like his predecessor, the leadership of President Buhari willingly launched some human development programs. The schemes were meant to empower as well as better the condition of the Nigerian youth and notable among them was the N-power initiative. The scheme was designed basically to empower and develop the unemployed Nigerian youth within the age bracket of 18 – 35 through capacity-building training and skill acquisition programs necessary to achieve self-reliance with a monthly stipend of N35,000. The scheme had the following packages, namely; N-Health and N-Teach, N-Agro, N-Build, N-Creature, and N-Tech. It was observed in an analysis of the scheme that it had the prospects of delivering on the set target, and perhaps improved the living condition of the mass unemployed Nigerian youth.

### **Challenges and Consequences of Ineffective Youth Empowerment Scheme in Nigeria**

Although the various schemes stated may have provided empowerment opportunities for the youth, it is important to observe that the programs also suffered major setbacks, namely the ‘Nigerian factor syndrome’. This is characterized by elements of tribalism, ethnicism, stakeholders’ quota system, corruption at all levels of government and beyond, etc. The development therefore accommodates only the privileged few while the majority of the intended beneficiaries are frustrated and abandoned to their fate. In addition, there is basically an absence of a blueprint for the effective and efficient establishment of the trainees for the much-desired self-sustaining outcome. The effort and resources invested in such initiatives virtually end up in futility as many of the beneficiaries eventually become helpless and unproductive. Besides, there is no continuum in government policies as each successive regime abandons the existing one and launches a new one. This makes the accomplishment of any scheme difficult and haphazard with little or no impact on the target population.

In essence, notwithstanding the seeming claims of success recorded, the probability that a greater percentage of Nigerian youth are handicapped with no means of livelihood is still high. The youth empowerment initiative has been undermined over the years which seem to have made the country very volatile. This appears to be very glaring in the rate of restiveness exhibited by young Nigerians through their involvement in series of anti-social activities. This is witnessed in the uncontrollable state of banditry, kidnapping, robbery, and other forms of security threat being experienced across the country. The situation is worrisome considering the fact that the stability and development of a nation to a large extent depends on the empowerment capacity of the youth as the leaders of tomorrow.

## **Conclusion**

The early years of a child’s life are very important for future growth and development. Education of the child forms the foundation stone of any society for optimal survival. It is responsible for the economic, social, political growth, and development of the nation. The stability of the country depends upon the quality of education being imparted on the young minds. Youth Empowerment is an essential ingredient in the developmental process of the nation with its negative consequences if relegated to the background. It would obviously be difficult to achieve sustainable youth empowerment goals such as promoting critical awareness among the youth, determining appropriate solutions to their problems as well as giving the youth the conducive atmosphere to develop their own potentials unless the measures adopted are economically viable, rewarding and followed up to a logical conclusion.

## **Recommendations**

1. The government should initiate policies that would ensure mandatory childhood education for citizens.
2. There should be a laid-down procedure that will guarantee strict implementation of the said policies.
3. Child education should be given priority attention by the government, parents, and other caregivers.
4. Youth empowerment initiatives should be vigorously monitored and given full backing by the relevant organs to ensure safe delivery to the targeted beneficiaries.
5. There should be adequate awareness and sensitization of youth empowerment programs.

6. Relevant law(s) to support child education and capacity building should be enacted by the government and reviewed periodically to suit the reality of the time.

## References

- Aderinoye, R. A., Ojokheta, K. O., & Olojede, A. A. (2007). Integrating Mobile Learning into Nomadic Education Programme in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 8(2).
- Ajibola, O. I. (2015). Nigeria's Amnesty Programme: The Role of Empowerment in achieving peace and development in a post-conflict Niger Delta.
- Amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A critical appraisal. (2017). *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 6(5), 48-59.
- Arnold, S., & Rick, L. (1991). *Education for change*. Toronto: Doris Marshall.
- Berk, L. E. (2009). *Child Development (8th ed.)*. United States of America: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Cargo, M. (2003). Empowerment as fostering positive youth development and citizenship. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 27(Supplement 1), S66-79.
- Dagar, B. S., & Dhull (1994). *Indian Respective in Moral Education*. New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House.
- Eke, H. A. (2022). A case for philosophy literacy at basic education level in Nigeria. *APPON Philosophical Quarterly* 1(2), 93-105.  
<https://www.acjoi.org/index.php/apponquarterly/article/view/3178/3125>
- Emejuru, S. (2016). The concept of youth empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.edclueswordpress.com>.
- Fatunmole, M. (2023). Key data on early childhood education in Nigeria. International Centre for Investigative Reporting. <https://www.icirnigeria.org/key-data-on-early-childhood-education-in-nigeria/>
- Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. (2021). *Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan, 2021-2024*. Retrieved from <https://youthandsports.ng/>.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2012). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Iiffe, J. (2011). *Obasanjo, Nigeria and the world*. James Carey. Retrieved from <https://www.books.google.com>.
- International Labour Organization. (2023). *ILO Youth Country Brief: Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/employment>.



- National Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Demographic Statistics Bulletin 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/775>
- National Population Commission. (2013). *Nigerian Unemployment Profile Index Report*. Retrieved from [www.npc.gov.ng](http://www.npc.gov.ng).
- National Youth Survey. (2022). Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development in Collaboration with National Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng>.
- Nigeria National Youth Policy. (2019). Enhancing youth development and participation in the context of sustainable development. Retrieved from <https://www.evanigeria.org/>.
- Nnachi, R. O. (2019). *Introduction to Psychology in Education (3rd ed.)*. Owerri: Chin and Chis Press.
- Nwakwesiri, A., & Onebunne, J. I. (2019). Belongingness and Migration. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*.
- Obikeze, O. S. A., Ananti, M. O., & Onyekwelu (2015). The challenges of ending rural poverty: An appraisal of national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP). *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 9(3), 109-199.
- Ogundowolo, E. K. (1988). Philosophy of education and education for self-reliance. Paper presented at the second departmental conference on the philosophy of education. O.A.U. Ile-Ife.
- Ohize, E., & Adamu, M. J. (2009). Case Study of Youth Empowerment Scheme of Niger State, Nigeria in Poverty Alleviation. *AU Journal of Technology*, 13(1), 47–52.
- Ojedeke, P. K., & Fadokun, J. B. (2009). Problems and Issues in Higher Education in Nigeria in Educational Management. In J. B. Babalola, & A. O. Ayeni (Eds.), *Theories and Tasks*. Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria publishes Limited.
- Onibon, M. T. G. (2022). Youth Empowerment and Employment Generation in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance & Management Research*, 4, 46-52.
- Parankimalil, J. (2012). Meaning, nature and aims of education. Retrieved from [www.johnparankimalil.wordpress.com/](http://www.johnparankimalil.wordpress.com/).
- UBEC. (2012). Universal Basic Education Commission.
- World Health Organization. (2020). Adolescent Health in the South-East Asia Region.