



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ETHICAL AND VALUES EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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Abstract

This paper examined youth empowerment through ethics and value education for sustainable development. In a country with a higher percentage of the population who are youth, of whom a majority are unemployed, there cannot be meaningful and sustainable development. However, youth are considered the engine room for national and sustainable development if adequately empowered. Youth empowerment refers to the process of providing youth individuals with the tools and knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to make informed decisions, take actions, and influence their own lives and the world around them. Some of these tools are empathy, compassion, integrity, honesty, respect, tolerance, responsibility, leadership, growth, mindset, and resilience. All these can be acquired through ethics and value education. It is therefore recommended that the government should provide a good educational system based on ethics and values. Also, the government should make empowerment policies that are well implemented and supervised.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment, sustainable development, employment, leadership.

Introduction

Youth are the engine room of national and sustainable development and any nation looking forward to a sustainable development must take cognizance of the fact that her youth must be empowered economically, politically and social-culturally. Youth are known to be a dependable agent of change. The size and youthfulness of the population offer great potential of expand Nigeria's capacity as the regional economic lab of Africa and globally. In Nigeria, it was observed that her population contains largest percentage of youth which make it a potentially an economic abet nation (Akinyemi and Mobolaji, 2022). A young large population growth and urbanization go together and economic development is closely correlated with urbanization. Jacob, Shedrach, and Ishaya, (2019) reported that Nigeria has a youth population of over

Eighty (80) million, representing over 60 percent of the total population of the country. Sixty Four (64) million Nigerians are unemployed, while one million six hundred thousand (1.6 million) are underemployed, and 4.5 million graduates enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for life sustenance.

Youth are often dynamic, resourceful, creative, innovative and adventurous. They have rebellious nature, seemingly illusions of invincibility and fearless idealism which are catalysts that are capable of propelling nation to a sustainable development (Ezechi, Adonye and Adegun, 2024). Similarly, a nation economic viability and strength which is an index of a viable national integration and development, depends on the avalanche of youth and their aspirations. It is therefore imperative to note that youths and /or youthful labour are very critical to the sustainable development of any nation,



they are one of the greatest resources and a necessary force for improving the productivity and sustained growth of all sectors of the economy (Isike and Ovekaemo, 2018).

However, youth need education with ethics and values, which is a fundamental human life process. Youths of today are less socially influenced and highly individualistic; values and ethics should be given to the youth by making them aware through the education system, which will make them gain confidence to face all situations in their life. Sound education with strong values that create great leaders with ethics is needed to help in developing the personality of youth and make them responsible citizens, and in turn produce a developed and sustainable nation.

Conceptual Clarification

In the academic exercise of this nature, a conceptual clarification is necessary. In this paper, the concepts of youth, youth empowerment, education, ethics and values education and sustainable development need clarification

Who is a Youth?

Youths are regarded as young people. The age boundary varies from one culture to another culture by which a person is considered a youth and this eligible for special treatment. Akinyemi and Mobolaji (2022) observed that Nigeria has the largest population of youth in the world, with the age range from 15 to 30 years. This is in agreement with the United Nations General Assembly and the World Bank, which considered a youth to be between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Although there is a slight difference in the World Health Organization, as cited by Jato and Akven (2014), on the age bracket for a youth as any member of the society that falls between the ages of 15 and 34 years. Umezulike (2020) observed that this age range in Nigeria falls within those in tertiary institutions or have finished, depending on their course of study and institution attended, including those that are out of school or have not gone to school at all.

Youth Empowerment – Empowerment is a policy of providing special opportunities in education, training, and other areas to people. It is a process of supporting a person to discover and actualize his/her dreams to their full potential. It is viewed as an act of giving power to a person or group of persons who initially lack power or authority or ability to make decisions and act on such decisions without unwanted hindrances. Summarily put, empowerment is the process of strengthening the capabilities and capacities of disadvantaged groups in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society at large. Empowerment is seen as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives. It is a process that fosters power, that is the capacity to implement in people for use in their own lives, their communities and their societies by acting on issues that are defined as important.

Olabiyi (2013) opined that youth empowerment is the process of encouraging the youth to imbibe positive attitudinal change to be active citizens in their community. Youth empowerment can provide young people with positive attitudinal change to become role models in society. It is also considered as one of the most effective ways of helping the youths to reach their full potential as productive members of society. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of other people (Ojo, Abayomi & Odozi, 2014).

Youth empowerment is a process of equipping the youth with relevant knowledge, abilities, competence, and skills that make him/her become able to take effective control of themselves and become useful to himself/herself and society. It is the process of making the youth dependable. It is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people in the society. It is a process where the children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives by addressing their situation and then taking action to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Umezulike, 2020). According to Youth Cafe (2023), Youth empowerment refers to the process of providing youth individuals with the tools and knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to make informed decisions, take actions, and influence



their own lives and the world around them. Empowering young people involves recognizing their potential and valuing their contribution to society. It encompasses the aspects as education, employment, civic engagement, leadership development and access to resources.

Education

Education is a lifelong process that starts from the mother's womb and ends in the grave. Education is a process by which an individual acquires general knowledge, develops power of reasoning and judgment and generally prepares one or others intellectually. Education is viewed as the cornerstone for meaningful and sustainable growth, development and achievement in art, science and technology (Attah and Truang, 2021). It is an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding value for all activities of life. Education is both act of imparting knowledge to others and act of learning (Nirupama and Donald, 2021). From the definition, it implies that education makes one knowledgeable, experienced and matured. It makes an individual civilized, refined, cultured and educated. Education empowers humans and gets them ready to face the challenges of life efficiently. It helps an individual take a better and informed decision with the use of their knowledge and enhances self-confidence.

Values and Ethics – values are regarded as the basic norms that guide our actions. It describes the personal qualities required to guide our actions; the sort of person we want to be; the manner in which we treat ourselves and others and our intention with the world around us. While ethics is a systematic approach to analyze and distinguish what is right, wrong, good and bad, understand them as they relate to the well-being of the relationships. It is the moral philosophy to be practiced by a person or group of people (Nirupama and Donald, 2021). Ethics set the standards of what is right and wrong.

Sustainable Development – the concept of sustainable development involves the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. Sustainable development is a development that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Needham (2011) viewed sustainable development as ability to meet the needs of the present while contributing to the future generation. Ojenike, Shodiya and Jolaosho, (2016) the term sustainable economic development can be operationally defined as a strategic process of ensuring that the utilization of physical environment and its diverse natural resources by nation should be done in a manner that the environment and its resources would provide continuous stream of benefits to both current and future generation. Umezulike (2020), view sustainable development as any form of developmental strives of the people and government that is enduring, meeting the needs of the present persons and future generations, while Jato and Akven (2014) view sustainable development as a pattern of economic growth in which resources used aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generation to come. It is a reconciliation of society's development goals with the planet's environmental limits over a long term (Akinsola, 2017 and Bamidele, 2018). Summarily, sustainable development involves environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and socio-political sustainability.

From the above conceptual clarification, it was observed that youths are agents of change needed for sustainable development. However, there is need for proper education system that will address values and ethics to the youth which will make them gain the confidence to face all situations in their life. Therefore, the topic Youth empowerment through ethics and values education for sustainable development is apt for discussion.

Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

The assertion that youth are the leaders of tomorrow cannot be overemphasized because any responsible government especially developing countries like Nigeria formulates national policies geared towards present and future development which demonstrates its effort in ensuring that the youth of today will have a better tomorrow. Youth empowerment and sustainable development are inter connected concept that highlight the importance of involving the youth in the process of achieving long term social, economic and environment progress (Youthcare, 2023).



Youths are the majority in Nigeria and form a strong formidable force in the society we live but many of them are not empowered while in school or even after graduation. This has led to them rarely contributing to sustainable development in the society.

The youth are the engine room of sustainable development. Relying on this assertion, every responsible government formulates national policies geared towards present and future development which demonstrates its efforts in ensuring that the youth of today will have a better tomorrow. On the contrary, an irresponsible government negates youth empowerment with the resultant consequences of unemployment, political thuggery, poverty, disease, drug abuse just to mention a few. In this direction, Uyanga and Archibong (2022) asserted that “in many Third World countries today, unemployment has pushed a lot of youths into political thuggery and armed robbery. Political leaders, instead of rehabilitating these youths, prefer to invest in people and agencies that will help them perpetuate themselves in office for many years.

Kalagbor and Harry (2018) observed that, Nigeria governments at different levels of governance had embarked on various uncoordinated youth empowerment schemes over the years that amounted to little or nothing in real terms. They identified ten (10) youth empowerment strategies in Nigeria to include:

- development of youth skills;
- opportunities for physical, social and mental development,
- provision of better working opportunities;
- active participation in community service;
- provision of recreational facilities;
- involvement of leadership training;
- provision of micro credit facilities;
- scholarships/bursaries;
- formation of organizations and;
- Involvement in decision-making processes.

To avoid the collapse of the Nigerian state, the government, over the years, has institutionalized programmes as well as embarked upon social campaigns to better the lot of the Nigerian people, especially the youths. Notably amongst the programmes include: N-Power Programme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Green Revolution (GR), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Farm Settlement Scheme (FSS), Micro Credit Youth Empowerment Programme, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) (Ojenike, Shodiya and Jolaosho, 2016; Adejuwa, Segun, and Gbenga 2016; Umezulike, 2020 and Ezechi, Adonye & Adegun, 2024)

Akande (2016) posits that the major reason for the failure of these efforts is faulty selection of beneficiaries and trainees for the programmer. According to him, youths are usually “lumped” together as if they (youths) are homogenous in terms of education, skills capabilities among others. He added that finance, poor governance and policy implementation, inconsistent policies, and unqualified resource persons handling the training programmes all contribute to the failure of government youth empowerment programs in Nigeria.

Importance of Youth Empowerment in Sustainable Development

A lot would be achieved personally and in society at large if youth were empowered. Some of the benefits of youth empowerment are;

Empowering the youths, according to Olabiyi (2013), would encourage the youths to imbibe positive attitudinal change to be active citizens in their community.

Youth empowerment can provide young people with positive attitudinal change to become role models in the society. Youth empowerment is considered as one of the most effective ways of helping the youths to reach their full potential as productive members of the society. This will check the rate of poverty (Ezechi, Adonye & Adegun, 2024 and Nmadu, 2023)



Youth empowerment will enable the youths to develop good work ethics, gain entrepreneurship experience, attain employment readiness, and develop skills and competencies that will enable them to make positive contribution to the development of their communities, to foster the development of good behaviours that will instill some level of responsibility and accountability in them (Nmadu, 2023). When the youths are entrepreneurs, they will now be job creators instead of being job seekers. This will reduce the level of unemployment in the country. It will further stimulate the youths to channel their energy, time, and effort into more productive means that will equip them for work and not to engage in socially degrading activities that could disrupt the peace and stability of the nation. In this, youth now have the necessary skills to sustain a livelihood, preventing him to adopt the path of crime thereby reduce crime and improve national security

Reasons for the Failure of Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Since the Nigerian government has taken several strategies to empower the youth to attain sustainable development, one is surprised why it has not yielded the desired result. Some scholars have highlighted reasons why the youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria have failed to yield the desired results. Some of the reasons for the abysmal failure, as stated by the scholars, are;

Corruption – Ogar, Egbara and Ugal (2020) stated that corruption, over politicization of empowerment programmes to reflect party interest, lack of political will on part of the government to execute meaningful programmes that will benefit the youth, poor implementation of empowerment programmes due to lack of supervision from government or agencies, implementation of wrong projects that does not satisfy the direct needs of the unemployed/poor youth has contributed greatly to the failure of some of the government empowerment programmes.

Commenting on some of the reasons for the failure of some of the youth empowerment programmes by the government, Ezechietal (2024) stated that those factors that possess threat to youth empowerment includes corruption, constant change in government policies, poor educational development system, poverty and social media or internet which exposes youths to many vices that are linked to the internet. They further stated that the lack of access to support by the youth who have great ideas and intellectual capacity to help them bolster their work and even improve on their ideas possess a threat to youth empowerment. Most times, youth with good plans and even good ideas that might boost the economy in one way or another are not given the kind of encouragement they deserve.

Sustainable development through Value and ethics education

In today's rapidly evolving world, where technological advancements often outpace moral considerations, the need for value and ethics education for the youth has become more important than ever. Ethics and value-based education will instill essential principles and ethics, guiding individual towards becoming responsible, compassionate, and socially aware citizens. Aryan (2025) highlighted ways by which value and ethics education can help in empowering youths for sustainable development. Firstly, ethics and value education can help to develop a strong moral compass in an era marked by ethical dilemmas and societal challenges. Value education will impact such values as honesty, integrity, and empathy; equip young minds with the tools to navigate complex situations ethically. If these values are internalized, young people would be better equipped to make decisions that prioritize the well-being of others and uphold the principles of justice and fairness, which can lead to sustainable development.

He stated further that value education would cultivate a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement. It would promote values such as respect for diversity, cooperation, and environmental stewardship. This will encourage young individuals to actively participate in community-building efforts and contribute positively to society. Through service-learning initiatives and volunteer opportunities, youth can apply their values in real-world contexts, fostering a sense of empathy and solidarity with those in need

Furthermore, ethics and value education play a vital role in promoting mental well-being and resilience among the youth, thus emphasizing principles of self-discipline, resilience, and gratitude. It equips individuals with the emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms necessary to navigate life



challenges effectively. Mental health issues are on the rise nowadays, ethics and value education that foster a sense of self-awareness and emotional regulation is needed.

Trinidad (2024) stated that value-based education equips youth with empathy and compassion, integrity and honesty, respect and tolerance, responsibility and leadership, a growth mindset and resilience, all of which are characteristics of empowered youth for sustainable development. He concluded that ethics and values-based education are essential in shaping well-rounded, ethical, and responsible young people, not just learning facts but about developing the wisdom to make thoughtful decisions, the empathy to build meaningful relationships, and the integrity to leave a positive impact on the world. When schools introduce and prioritize these values, they invest in a future that is brighter, kinder, and more resilient, and the result is a nation that is socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable.

Conclusion

Investing in the youth who are dynamic, resourceful, creative, innovative, and adventurous, who form a larger percentage of the nation's population through empowerment, can play a critical role in sustainable development. However, this empowerment must be done taking into consideration those factors that make former strategies fail, such as corruption, poor implementation, lack of access to support facilities, among others. When youth are properly motivated, sufficiently guided, they succeed in life. Ethics and value-based education, which can instill essential principles and ethics, guiding individuals towards becoming responsible, compassionate and socially aware citizen need to be introduced to the youth as early as possible.

Recommendation

Youth empowerment is critical to sustainable development, for proper youth empowerment to take place there is need for good education system. It is recommended that ethics and value education should be introduced to youth by the government. Government should provide enough facilities and resources for promotion of value education in Nigeria. Also, youth empowerment policies that will be properly implemented should be introduced

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