

Higher education and poverty reduction among the youth

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



Education in Nigeria and higher education, in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and worthwhile society in any nation hence, from a global perspective, economic, political, technological and social developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge, skills and socialization acquired in the process of this education. This paper presents an empirical study of higher education and poverty reduction among the youth using the University of Lagos, Nigeria. A total of 330 youth population comprised the sample drawn from the eight faculties on campus. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using chi-square statistical tool at 0.05 levels of significance. The major findings are that higher education is significant in exposing the youth to talent discovery, physical and intellectual development among the youth and has high potency reduction for poverty reduction among the youth.

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has brought profound and fundamental changes to economics, technology, politics, culture, morals, social values and ethics. Globalization is the driving force in all these changes.

While globalization has induced the collapse of time and space, it has also expanded opportunities and challenges for individuals and for nations and has sidelined the weak and unprepared. Anya (2002). The task of the university education will then be to empower the youths to be able to cope with the dynamics of globalization. Consequently, the university must have an organic linkage with the industrial and economic environment to contribute to the economic growth of the nation. Education has for long been recognized and accepted as a panacea for Nigeria's ills and woes. Particularly so in the case of higher education. The stupendous amount

of money and other resources, even though inadequate are expended on the universities annually. Unarguably all stakeholders look up to the universities as the nation's beacon of hope, light and civilization. For this reason, besides over 50 public universities are springing up all over the nooks and crannies of the country. Nigeria's philosophy of education is aimed at education that fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society, there is need for empowerment so as to break the chains of poverty for necessary liberation.

Are the Nigerian youths hopeful? Do they see the light? Are they civilized? The quest and agitation for the empowerment of the youth and their liberation through higher education is fast becoming almost hysterical given the often reported cases of incessant strike actions by lecturers, lack or inadequate infrastructures in the universities, brain drain, and so on, within the university system. Instance abound when university graduates are not employable in the labour market.

The situation becomes worrisome and intriguing with the jet-speed rate of opening up of new universities with its attendant alleged unemployment of "unqualified" staff, and stragglers from older universities. The Concept of Higher Education and Poverty Higher education means different things to many people, but the purpose is perceived to be the same. It is the type of education that focuses on professionalization, by empowering the partaker of this level of education with skills that are not necessarily the function of the formal educational process. This type of skills emanates from students' interaction with their peers, teachers and other members of

their academic community. Though these experiences that culminate into skills make students sojourn in their academic environment a complete one, which necessitates the saying “ passing through the school without the school passing through the student” The proponents of this statement are of the opinion that students who passed through the school without the school passing through them have learnt only partially regardless of their grades at the end of their academic pursuit in the university, thereby limiting their opportunities.

This is corroborated by Gay 2005, who opined that poverty can only be eliminated if the students to whom implicit promises are being by urging them to attend school actually receive some tangible benefit for their years spent in school. Higher education includes teaching, research and social service activities of universities, and within the realm of teaching, it includes both the undergraduate level (sometimes referred to as tertiary education and the graduate school). Higher education generally involves work towards a degree-level or foundation for a degree qualification. In most developed countries a high proportion of the population (up to 50%) now enters higher education is therefore very important to the national economy, both as a source of trained and educated personnel for the rest of the economy. Higher education is based on theoretical expertise. It might be contrasted with higher vocational education, which concentrates on both practice and theory. Deciding to further education and attain a degree tends to improve many aspects of life.

People with college degrees tend to earn more money and salary increases over the years are more substantial than for those that do not have a college degree or university degree. Additionally, people that have a college degree are less likely to go through long bouts of unemployment. However attaining certifications and/or degrees related to your field can yield better jobs and ongoing opportunities (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). University qualifications need to match employers' and labour market requirements as closely as possible. Mass unemployment of university graduates is the result where university programmes and the labour market are at variance. The issue of relevance, utilitarian criteria based on prospects of income generation at the completion of a programme should be uppermost in the programmes provided by universities. The idea of pursuing knowledge for its own sake or of the sake of engaging in a programme of study given a passion for learning in a particular subject area will seem to acquaint if it is remembered at all.

Youth (in the developed world): like all identities, is a culturally relative manifestation whose meanings and applications are specific to certain times and manifestation whose meaning and applications are specific to certain times and locales. For those living in present-day western cultures, the term youth refers to persons who are no longer children and not yet adults. In a strictly legal sense, the term is typically applied to a person from the time of their early teens until a point between 16 and 21, after which the person is legally an adult. As an adult, they have endowed privileges such as the right to vote and consume alcohol e. c. used colloquially, however, the term generally refers to a broader, more ambiguous field of reference – from

physically adolescent to those in their late 20s, the United Nations, for example, defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive (United Nations Education and Scientific Children Organisation, 2002b). Poverty refers to a situation and process of serious deprivation or lack of resources and material necessary for living within a minimum standard conducive to human dignity and well being. Poverty connotes deprivation of the means of subsistence. The manifestation of poverty, i. inadequate distribution of resources, access to basic social services like education and health, food scarcity, low life expectancy, and lack of participation in decision-making processes. For the purpose of this paper, poverty is viewed as deprivation of common necessities that determine the quality of life, which include food, clothing, shelter and safe drinking water, and may also include the deprivation of opportunities to learn, to obtain better employment to escape poverty and/or to enjoy the respect of fellow citizens.

This can be measured in terms of absolute or relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a set standard which is consistent in overtime between countries. An example of an absolute measurement would be the percentage of the population eating less food than is required to sustain the human body, which may lead to extreme poverty. United Nations 2002 report defines extreme poverty as “poverty that kills”, depriving individuals of the means to stay alive in the face of hunger, disease and environmental hazards. This is further substantiated by Moore (2007) in his report for the World Bank, that extreme poverty implies living on less than 1 dollar per day and moderate poverty as less than \$2 a day. The proportion of the

developing world's population living in extreme economic poverty fell from 28 per cent in 1990 to 21 per cent in 2001. Looking at the period 1981 – 2001, the percentage of the world's population living on less than \$1 per day has halved. Analysis of social aspects of poverty links conditions of scarcity to aspects of the distribution of resources and power in a society and recognizes that poverty may be a function of the diminished “ capability” of people to live the kinds of lives they value. The social aspects of poverty may include lack of access to information, education, health care, or political power. Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society.

Statement of the Problem The growth and development of this country will to a large extent be determined by quality, in character and in learning, of the products of our universities. UNESCO policy (1997) posited that basic education for all should incorporate: literacy, income generation, health care, child care, familyplanning, food management, union education, labour laws, civil and voting rights, peace education, environmental management, HIV/AIDS and drug awareness. The questions are what is the hope of Nigerian youth in universities? Do they really discover their potentials having gone through the university? What then can we say are the contributions of Nigeria universities to poverty reduction among the Nigerian youth? It becomes imperative, therefore, to ascertain the potency of Nigerian higher education for poverty reduction among the youth and to proffer measures for enhancement and sustainability of youth empowerment. **Methodology** The

study was carried out using the descriptive survey research design. The youths in the University of Lagos constituted the study which comprises 500 respondents. They were diploma and 100-300 level students, from the eight faculties of the University of Lagos, Akoka Campus, Lagos, Nigeria.

Higher Education Potency for Poverty Reduction Questionnaire (HEPPRQ) designed by the researchers was the data-gathering instrument. It measures sure such poverty reduction potencies as talent discovery, facilitation of mind development in the youth, good leadership skills, enabling intellectual development, development of social ethics through positive interaction, exposure to entrepreneurial activities, provision of mindset for creative ideas, preparation for rendering payable service (income generation), inculcation of technological ideas for product development, self-esteem among peers, the position of youth for global alignment with contemporaries in the western world and realization of the academic inclination (discipline). Colleagues affirmed the face validity and reliability of the instrument. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaire to 500 respondents across the 8 faculties on campus on different occasions; some of the respondents returned the questionnaire immediately while others returned theirs the following day. Of the 500 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 330 (66%) usable copies were returned. However, the analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. To be precise, simple percentage and chi-square statistical tools were used. Findings Total response of the respondents was done by finding the percentages.

From the responses of the participants in the table, it is realized that the observed chi-square (49. 6) is greater than the critical value (21. 03) at 12 degrees of freedom and at 0. 05 levels of significance. The result is therefore significant, thus higher education will have a significant influence on the physical and intellectual development of the youth. Hypothesis 3 Higher education will make a significant provision of resources and materials for youths' adequate living. To test this hypothesis, the chi-square statistical tool was employed and tested at 0. 05 levels of significance. Thus higher education provides resources and materials for youths adequate living. Results and Discussion Analysis revealed that the study population consisted of 330 participants, 210(63. 63%) were males and 120 (36. 365) females whose age ranges from 15 to 30 years. 300(90. 90%) were single and 30 (9. 09%) were married. 40 (12. 12%) were in diploma 1, 10 (3. 03%) in diploma 2, 90 (27. 27%) in 100 level, 40 (12. 12%) in 200 level and 150 (45. 45%) in 300 level respectively. Shows the item-by-item analysis of the perception of the youth towards the potency indices of higher education concerning poverty reduction. Majority of the youth (60. 60%) who participated in the study were of the opinion that university environment enables the youth to discover their talents and higher education poses challenges that enable intellectual development in the youth. 57. 57% of the respondents were in tune with the fact that higher education inculcates good leadership skills in the youth, apart from certification, being in the university environment gives them self esteem among their contemporaries in the western world.

Also 51. 51% of the respondents who are in the majority opined that they gain social ethics through positive interaction with their peers while at the

university. University environment provides the youth with the mindset for creative ideas and talents developed in the university prepare them to render payable service (income generation). 48. 48% of the participants who were in the majority believed that higher education facilitates the development of youths' mind, 45. 45% were in tune with the fact that higher education makes the youth realize the relevance of their academic inclination (discipline) outside their myopic perception. Majority of the respondents (54. 54%) admit that university education inculcates technological ideas that can facilitate product development. However, 45. 45% of the respondents felt that youth only sometimes get employment with industries related to their discipline before graduation, but 21. 21% and 24. 24% of them believe that youth with university experience are always able to sustain themselves in the face of job scarcity, equal percentage the participants contend that it happens only sometimes.

The findings in this study showed that:

- Higher education is significant in exposing the youth to talent discovery.
- Higher education has a significant influence on the physical and intellectual development of the youth.
- Higher education makes the significant provision of resources and materials for youths' adequate living.

The significance of higher education in exposing the youth to talent discovery is corroborated by UNESCO policy 1997, which stipulates that basic education for all should incorporate: literacy, income generation, health care,

child care family planning, food management, union education, labour laws, civil and voting rights, peace education, environmental management, HIV/AIDS and drug awareness. Also, the finding relating to higher education has a significant influence on the physical and intellectual development of youth is justified by Subar and Ashiru 2007, they opined that the students (youth) are the core input into our educational institutions and the quality of the output (students) depends largely on the provision of infrastructures capable of directly or indirectly supporting, facilitating, influencing and encouraging the development of their potentials. Therefore, the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes students (youth) acquire for life can make them fit into the cultural, social, economic and political contexts of the society in which they live, and to work and employment. The finding that education makes the significant provision of resources and materials for youth's adequate living emanates from the fact that youth get employment with industries related to their discipline even before graduation, youths with university experience are mostly able to sustain themselves in the face of job scarcity, apart from certification, being in the university environment gives the youth self-esteem among their peers, higher education positions youth for global alignment with their contemporaries in the western world and education makes the youth realize the relevance of their academic inclination (discipline) outside their myopic perception. Conclusion? From the foregoing, it is permissible to justify the above stated with the statement of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, " there have been steady increases in college job placement". This means that not only are

college graduates more likely to find good jobs, but they progress after college.

Ashiru and Owodiong 2008 declared that the absolute position of the university graduate is declining as more educated workers are displacing less-educated workers in the same job, this shows that the Nigerian youth should advance academically, this challenge to the youth is evidenced by the continuous increases in entry point requirement for jobs, for instance, a degree certificate is required to teach in a secondary school, while a doctoral degree is required to lecture in the university. The dawn of the 21st century has brought profound and fundamental changes to economics, technology, politics, culture, morals, social values and ethics through globalization. This globalization has induced the collapse of time and space; it has also expanded opportunities and challenges for the individual and for the nations and has sidelined the weak and the unprepared. Recommendations Government and university authorities should ensure that university programmes and labour market are not at variance on the issue of relevance, utilitarian criteria based on prospects of income generation should be uppermost in the programmes provided by the universities? Universities must have an organic linkage with the industrial and economic environment to contribute to economic growth? Acquisition of higher education should be encouraged among the youth, through scholarship awards for those who lack the resources in continuing their education. ? Government should encourage enrollment expansion in tertiary institutions, which will avail more people the opportunity to higher education, hence empowerment through skill acquisition and enhanced

intellectuality and human capital development that will necessitate innovative ideas for job creation, employment and economic advancement? University authorities should integrate entrepreneurial skills into academic programmes of students for rounded preparation for the world of work. Entrepreneurial Development Programme (EDP) should be provided in all faculties to enable undergraduates to develop and market products and services relevant to their areas of study.

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