

INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A DEPRESSED NIGERIAN ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper assessed innovative educational practices for sustainable development in a depressed Nigerian economy. The secondary data were sourced from printed materials, online journals, and articles. The paper discussed on the Concept of education, sustainable development, innovative educational practices for sustainable development in Nigeria, and some of the factors that hindered innovative educational practices for sustainable development in a depressed Nigerian economy which include: limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, capacity gap in education, high poverty level, policy and governance issue, economic instability, lack of public awareness, corruption and environmental factors. To address these challenges, the paper suggested the following; policy reform and commitment, strengthening partnership and collaboration, investment in infrastructure, capacity building for educators, curriculum overhaul, affordable education solutions, promote alternative learning models, encouraging investors and researchers, resilience in financial management, and creating public awareness about the importance of education for sustainable development.

Keywords: Innovative education, sustainable development and depressed economy

Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental driver of national development, social progress, and economic growth. In Nigeria, however, the persistent economic depression characterized by declining government revenues, high inflation, unemployment, inadequate educational infrastructure, and socio-political instability has significantly constrained the effectiveness of the educational system. Within this challenging context, innovative educational practices have become essential to fostering sustainable development and ensuring that education contributes meaningfully to societal advancement. Innovative educational practices are those approaches, strategies, and interventions that creatively transform teaching, learning, and administrative processes to meet the evolving needs of learners and society. These practices emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, adaptability, and entrepreneurial skills as key competencies that enable learners to navigate and contribute to a depressed economy effectively (Obizue, 2022; Offorma, 2018).

The integration of technology into teaching and learning processes plays a central role in these innovations. The use of digital learning platforms, blended learning approaches, and online resources facilitates wider access to educational opportunities, even in regions with limited physical infrastructure. Information and Communication Technology, in particular, enables learners to acquire relevant knowledge and skills that support economic participation and personal empowerment. Additionally, implementing competency-based curricula, vocational training, project-based learning, and partnerships between educational institutions and industry ensures that learners develop practical skills

aligned with labor market demands (Adeniyi, 2020; Raisamo, 2021). Moreover, innovative educational practices contribute to social inclusion by providing equitable access to learning opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged populations. Collaboration among schools, community organizations, government agencies, and private sector actors can ensure the provision of essential resources, teacher training, and supportive learning environments. Such cooperation fosters resilience, engagement, and academic success for learners who may otherwise be excluded due to economic hardship or geographic isolation (Malik, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

Teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of innovative educational practices. Continuous professional development programs that equip educators with the skills and knowledge to adopt modern pedagogical methods, digital tools, and learner-centered strategies are essential. These programs enable teachers to create supportive and inclusive classrooms that enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, even in environments constrained by economic and infrastructural challenges (Obizue, Oguh, & Ogbuoka, 2024). Hence, adopting innovative educational practices in a depressed Nigerian economy is crucial for promoting sustainable development. By equipping learners with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies, these practices not only enhance employability and entrepreneurship but also contribute to poverty alleviation, human capital development, and long-term economic recovery. Through strategic investment, collaboration, and technology integration, education can serve as a catalyst for sustainable growth and national transformation despite prevailing economic adversities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017).

Over the past decade, considerable research has been conducted on innovative educational practices and their role in fostering sustainable development globally. Studies have highlighted the integration of Information and Communication Technology, blended learning, competency-based curricula, vocational education, and entrepreneurship programs as critical enablers of educational transformation (Offorma, 2018; Adeniyi, 2020). Research indicates that these practices improve learner engagement, skill acquisition, and adaptability, which are essential for responding to complex socio-economic challenges in developing countries (Malik, 2020; Raisamo, 2021). Globally, digital learning platforms, mobile learning applications, and virtual laboratories have revolutionized the way knowledge is delivered, expanding access to quality education even in remote or resource-constrained environments (UNESCO, 2022). In developed economies, these innovations have been linked to higher academic performance, greater employability, and the development of entrepreneurial skills among students (Obizue, 2022). Similarly, in Sub-Saharan Africa, innovative educational practices, including e-learning, ICT integration, and school-industry partnerships, have been shown to improve both learning outcomes and economic participation (Obizue, Oguh, & Ogbuoka, 2024). Despite these advancements, the practical implementation of innovative educational practices in Nigeria, particularly in economically depressed regions, remains limited. Many schools lack adequate technological infrastructure, trained personnel, and sustainable funding to fully adopt modern pedagogical methods (Adeniyi, 2020; Malik, 2020). Additionally, socio-economic barriers, including poverty, limited access to electricity, and poor internet connectivity, impede the effectiveness of ICT-driven educational interventions (UNESCO, 2022). Research on innovative educational practices in Nigeria has largely been fragmented, with studies often focusing on either technology

adoption or curriculum reform in isolation, rather than examining the integrated impact of multiple innovative approaches on sustainable development outcomes.

Hence, the study therefore, lies in the lack of empirical evidence examining how combined innovative educational practices including ICT integration, competency-based and vocational curricula, teacher professional development, and community engagement can collectively promote sustainable development in a depressed Nigerian economy. There is also limited understanding of how these practices can be adapted to overcome contextual challenges such as financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-political instability. Addressing this gap is critical to providing actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and development stakeholders seeking to leverage education as a tool for economic recovery and national transformation (Offorma, 2018; Obizue, 2022). This study, therefore, aims to investigate the effectiveness and challenges of innovative educational practices in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria's depressed economic context, providing a comprehensive analysis of how integrated approaches can drive both educational and socio-economic outcomes.

Conceptualizations

The term (education) is quite elusive and not easy to define. The complexity of the discipline is necessitated by what education has to perform in society as one of institution. This paper, therefore looked at the concept of education from the etymological point of a which stated that 'education' is derived from two latin words "educere" meaning "to lead out" and "educare" meaning 'to bring up'. This implies that education bring out skills in someone and build them up. Lenshie (2013) education to play a role in preparing or nurturing individuals to live in society and thus being able to perform specific functions for society. Clark cited in Olulobe (2016) described education as an interaction between a teacher and a student under the teachers responsibility in order to bring about the expected change in the student's behaviour. Murtala (2010) also noted that educational system of any society is a more or less elaborate mechanism design by society to instil in individuals certain skills or attitude that are judge to be useful and desirable in that society. In a related development, Adeyemi and Olukotun (2010) conceptualised education as an enterprise which sets out to instil values, attitude and skills in members of the society. This was aptly supported by Murtala (2019), that described education as a socializing agent that equips all its beneficiaries with the necessary tools such as knowledge, skills, attitude, cultural values, language and social skills to enable them conform to the desires/demand of their society.

Sustainable development refers to a multidimensional approach to growth and progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the Nigerian context, sustainable development is particularly relevant as the country grapples with challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, unemployment, and inadequate access to quality education. Innovative educational practices for sustainable development involve the integration of creative and transformative teaching methods that foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and adaptability among learners. These practices emphasize the inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which equips students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to address complex sustainability challenges (UNESCO, 2017). In Nigeria, this includes adopting technology enhanced learning, curriculum reforms, and community based education programmes that address the unique challenges faced by the country. Innovative practices such as integrating ICT in

classrooms and promoting vocational education can enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for real-world challenges (Olawale & Adebayo, 2019). Additionally, localizing education to reflect Nigeria's diverse cultures and environmental issues such as deforestation, desertification, and oil pollution can foster a sense of responsibility and active citizenship among learners. These approaches align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. By embracing innovative educational practices, Nigeria can build a generation of citizens equipped to drive sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship. However, this requires strategic investments in teacher training, infrastructure development, and policy frameworks that prioritize education as a tool for sustainable development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

Challenges of Innovative Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Limited Funding: The Nigerian education sector suffers significantly from underfunding, which is a major barrier to the implementation of innovative educational practices for sustainable development. Adequate funding is crucial for providing the necessary resources, infrastructure, and support systems that enhance the quality of education and drive innovation. However, despite the importance of education, Jacob and Samuel (2021) observed that the budgetary allocation for education is very poor that it cannot be used to implement the educational policies in the educational sector which hindered national development in Nigeria. Inadequate funding is one of the greatest challenges facing the education. A breakdown of budgetary allocation for the ministry of education for one decade shows that the budgetary allocation for the entire education is scanty as recommended by UNESCO that 20% should go for Education

Inadequate Infrastructure: Inadequate school infrastructure remains one of the most significant barriers to the effective adoption of innovative educational practices in Nigeria. Infrastructure plays a crucial role in creating a conducive learning environment where students and teachers can thrive. However, the absence or poor state of essential facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and technological resources has severely limited the capacity of schools to embrace modern teaching tools and methods (Okebukola, 2020). This challenge is prevalent in both rural and urban schools, affecting the quality of education across the country.

Capacity Gap in Education In the Nigerian context, the capacity gap in education represents one of the most pressing challenges to achieving quality education and adopting innovative teaching practices. This gap is particularly evident among teachers, who often lack the requisite knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement modern and effective teaching methodologies. These shortcomings hinder efforts to transition from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more dynamic and innovative practices, such as ICT-based learning, project-based teaching, and experiential education (Ajiboye & Akinwale, 2019).

High Poverty Level The high poverty level in Nigeria remains a significant factor hindering innovative educational practices for sustainable development, especially in the context of a depressed economy. Poverty adversely affects both the demand and supply sides of education, creating systemic challenges that limit the adoption of innovative methods. (Adekunle, 2019).

Policy and Governance Issues: Policy and governance issues represent significant obstacles to the adoption and sustainability of innovative educational practices for sustainable development in Nigeria. The lack of coherent and consistent governance

structures, coupled with poorly formulated and executed policies, creates inefficiencies that undermine the education system's ability to implement transformative strategies (Ekanem, 2019).

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Economic Instability: The depressed Nigerian economy creates an environment of uncertainty, limiting investment in education (Nwosu & Onyekachi, 2020). Fluctuating oil revenues, the primary source of government income, result in budgetary inconsistencies. As a result, funding for innovative educational projects is deprioritized in favor of immediate economic needs.

Lack of Public Awareness: A significant portion of the population lacks awareness of the role of education in sustainable development (Ibrahim & Garba, 2020). This lack of awareness affects public support and advocacy for innovative educational practices. Parents and communities may not prioritize education as a pathway to development, reducing the demand for quality and innovative teaching approaches.

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Corruption: Corruption in the education sector siphons resources meant for development projects, leaving schools underfunded and understaffed (Transparency International, 2021). Embezzlement of funds allocated to infrastructure, teacher training, and ICT initiatives has consistently undermined efforts to improve the education system. Osunyikanmi, (2018) opines that Nigeria has been experiencing underwhelming development amidst overwhelming corruption. Education is not insulated from this malaise. Corruption allows a high percentage of the funds allocated to the sector to get diverted into the private accounts of public officials.

Environmental Factors: Environmental factors in Nigeria present significant challenges to the implementation of innovative educational practices for sustainable development. These include natural disasters, such as floods and desertification, as well as human-induced challenges, such as insecurity caused by insurgency and other forms of violence. These environmental issues disrupt education systems, divert resources, and create barriers to integrating innovation into the learning process (Okeke & Adeoye, 2020).

Contribution to Knowledge

This study provides valuable insights into innovative educational practices and their role in promoting sustainable development within the context of a depressed Nigerian economy. Unlike prior research that often examines individual innovations, such as Information and Communication Technology integration, vocational training, or entrepreneurship education in isolation, this study adopts a holistic perspective by analyzing the combined effect of these practices on educational outcomes and sustainable development. The research offers context-specific insights by addressing the unique

challenges of implementing innovative educational strategies in Nigeria, where financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-political instability hinder the effectiveness of educational initiatives. As a result of identifying both effective strategies and barriers, the study provides practical guidance for policymakers, educational institutions, and development stakeholders seeking to implement reforms that are both innovative and sustainable, tailored to Nigeria's socio-economic realities. Furthermore, the study establishes a clear link between innovative educational practices and the broader Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrating how education can serve as a catalyst for economic recovery, poverty alleviation, and human capital development. The empirical evidence generated also serves as a foundation for future research, offering insights that can inform educational reforms in other economically depressed or developing regions. In essence, this study advances knowledge by showing how integrated educational innovations can foster sustainable development while highlighting the context-specific challenges that must be addressed to ensure their successful implementation.

Conclusion

Innovative educational practices tailored to Nigeria's economic realities can catalyze sustainable development. By implementing policy reforms, fostering partnerships, investing in infrastructure, and building educators' capacity, the country can overcome its challenges and transform its educational sector. Commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders are essential to realize this vision for a sustainable future.

Way Forward

The current economic challenges facing Nigeria have necessitated a rethinking of the educational system to ensure its relevance and sustainability in fostering national development. The following are detailed approaches to achieving innovative educational practices for sustainable development in Nigeria:

Policy Reform and Commitment: The Nigerian government must prioritize education by implementing robust policy reforms that address the root causes of inefficiency in the sector. Policies should focus on equitable access to quality education, accountability mechanisms, and improved funding allocation. Commitment at all levels of government is essential to ensure that these policies are implemented effectively. According to Adebayo and Adeoye (2020), policy reforms anchored on transparency and inclusiveness can drive sustainable educational growth even in challenging economic conditions.

Strengthening Partnerships and Collaboration: Collaboration between the government, private sector, and international organizations is critical for sustainable development in education. Partnerships can help bridge resource gaps, foster knowledge sharing, and ensure the scalability of successful models. For instance, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has demonstrated the potential of partnerships in enhancing educational access and quality (UNESCO, 2022).

Investment in Infrastructure and Technology: Lack of adequate infrastructure and technological tools hinders effective learning in Nigeria. There is a need for strategic investment in school buildings, laboratories, internet connectivity, and digital learning platforms. Integrating technology into classrooms not only enhances learning but also equips students with essential 21st-century skills. For example, projects like the "e-learning initiative" in Lagos State have shown promise in improving educational outcomes (Oladipo et al., 2021).

Capacity Building for Educators: Empowering educators through continuous professional development and training is crucial for fostering innovation in teaching

practices. Training programs should focus on modern pedagogical methods, digital literacy, and classroom management. Peer-to-peer learning models, as highlighted by (Jones, 2021), can also be effective in building educators' capacity and encouraging collaboration.

Curriculum Overhaul : The current curriculum in Nigeria requires significant updates to align with global standards and the demands of the contemporary labor market. A reformed curriculum should emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and environmental sustainability. This approach ensures that graduates are better prepared for the workforce and can contribute meaningfully to national development.

Affordable Education Solutions: To address the economic challenges of many Nigerian families, innovative solutions such as subsidized tuition fees, scholarships, and flexible payment plans should be implemented. Community-based learning centers and public-private partnerships in funding education can also make quality education more accessible to disadvantaged populations (World Bank, 2023).

Promoting Alternative Learning Models: Alternative learning models such as online education, vocational training, and modular learning can cater to diverse student needs and circumstances. For instance, the success of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in other countries can serve as a blueprint for expanding access to education in Nigeria.

Encouraging Investors and Researchers: Incentivizing private investors and researchers to contribute to the educational sector can foster innovation and drive sustainable development. Tax reliefs, grants, and funding opportunities can encourage investments in educational startups, research, and development projects. Supporting indigenous research on education-related challenges ensures context-specific solutions.

Resilience in Financial Management : Educational institutions must adopt resilient financial management practices to sustain operations during economic downturns. Transparent budgeting, efficient resource allocation, and diversification of funding sources can enhance financial stability. According to Eze and Nnamdi (2023), adopting these measures has helped some institutions navigate financial crises successfully.

Awareness and Campaign: Creating public awareness about the importance of education for sustainable development is crucial. Campaigns should highlight the societal benefits of education and mobilize communities to support and advocate for educational reforms. Media platforms, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions can play significant roles in disseminating information and rallying public support

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