



Appraising Educational Reforms

Strategic Input on Managing Socio-Economic Roadblocks to Sustainable Development in the 21st Century in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Educational reform in Nigeria has increasingly emphasized employability, entrepreneurship, vocational competence, civic values, and security-related learning as responses to persistent socio-economic challenges. This descriptive survey examined education stakeholders' perceptions of how Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE), Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies contribute to poverty reduction, employment creation, and security. The study included 1,080 respondents, including teachers, Ministry of Education personnel, and curriculum planners/developers across Nigeria. Data were collected using a researcher-developed four-point Likert questionnaire validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation; test-retest reliability was 0.68. We analyzed the data using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Respondents strongly endorsed positively worded statements linking EVE with income-generating skills, self-employment, practical competence, and reduced unemployment. Responses to Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies were more complex at the aggregate level, although positive items received strong endorsement and negatively worded items were largely rejected. The findings indicate strong stakeholder support for skills-oriented reforms and highlight the need for careful implementation, adequate learning resources, teacher preparation, and rigorous evaluation of civic and security-oriented curriculum reforms. The study interprets the results as stakeholder perceptions rather than causal effects of the reforms.

Keywords

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Introduction

Education is central to sustainable development because it builds human capabilities, supports social participation, and equips learners to respond to economic, technological, and environmental change. UNESCO positions education for sustainable development as a system-wide strategy for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals [1], while the World Bank emphasizes that access alone is insufficient unless education produces meaningful learning and relevant competencies [2]. In this sense, educational reform is not simply a change in curriculum content; it is an effort to align learning outcomes, pedagogy, and institutional arrangements with changing social and economic needs.

In Nigeria, the policy basis for such reform is reflected in the National Policy on Education, which links education with national development, self-reliance, scientific and technological progress, and the acquisition of practical skills [3]. Nigerian scholarship has similarly argued that education should respond to local development priorities rather than remain detached from the economic and social realities faced by learners [4]. Curriculum reform therefore becomes necessary when existing programmes no longer adequately address contemporary demands for employability, citizenship, technological competence, and social cohesion [5]. Recent public debate on education reform in Nigeria has also emphasized the need for a more comprehensive and equitable system capable of responding to persistent implementation challenges [6].

One of the most urgent policy pressures is the school-to-work transition. The International Labour Organization identifies continuing challenges in the Nigerian youth labour market, including difficult transitions into stable and productive employment [7]. The Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan 2021-2024 consequently places employability and entrepreneurship among its principal intervention areas and treats skills development as part of a broader strategy for decent youth employment [8]. These policy priorities provide a rationale for examining Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE) as components of educational reform.

Evidence from Nigeria generally supports the potential value of entrepreneurship education, while also showing that outcomes depend on programme quality and implementation. Taiwo, Oluwole, and Ayooluwa [9] argue that viable entrepreneurship education can contribute to poverty and unemployment reduction among Nigerian youth. Empirical research among Nigerian students further suggests that entrepreneurship education is associated with stronger intentions toward self-employment [10]. However, such findings should not be interpreted as automatic evidence that a curriculum intervention directly creates jobs.

The wider international literature reinforces this caution. A systematic review by Nabi et al. [11] found generally positive educational outcomes but considerable variation in the types and strength of entrepreneurship-education effects. Meta-analytic evidence similarly shows a positive but relatively modest association between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions [12], while another meta-analysis found positive relationships with entrepreneurship-related human capital and subsequent outcomes [13]. At the same time, methodological reviews warn that weak research designs can overstate programme effectiveness [14]. Accordingly, perception-based survey evidence is most appropriately interpreted as evidence of stakeholder confidence in the relevance of a reform, not as proof of causal labour-market impact.

Pedagogy is also important. Experiential entrepreneurship education is designed to connect conceptual knowledge with problem solving, reflection, and authentic task performance [15]. Within Nigeria, improving the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been linked to sustainable growth, practical competence, and labour-market relevance [16]. Recent evidence from federal universities in South-South Nigeria likewise emphasizes the role of TVET in youth capacity building and sustainable development [17]. Together, these studies suggest that curriculum inclusion must be accompanied by facilities, qualified educators, practical learning opportunities, and stronger links between training and the economy.

Educational reform in Nigeria also extends beyond employability to social cohesion and security. UNESCO's 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development identifies education as a means of developing the knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviours required for peaceful and inclusive societies [18]. Research on education in conflict-affected settings shows, however, that schooling can either mitigate or reproduce conflict depending on curriculum content, access, institutional conditions, and pedagogy [19], [20]. This distinction is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where insecurity has complex political, economic, religious, and social causes.

Studies of Boko Haram and insecurity demonstrate why education-security relationships should not be reduced to a single explanatory factor. Akinbi [21] situates the insurgency within a wider set of socio-economic and political conditions. More recent qualitative work on Qur'anic schools in northeast Nigeria similarly shows that relationships among education, marginalization, and violent conflict are historically and institutionally complex [22]. Nigerian scholarship nevertheless identifies quality education as one component of longer-term national security strategies [23], and teacher-education research supports the integration of security and sustainable peace education into curriculum development [24]. Recent work on critical peace

education further argues that civic and peace education becomes more meaningful when it develops active agency, dialogue, and democratic participation rather than relying only on passive knowledge transmission [25].

Against this background, the present study addresses a practical evidence gap by examining how Nigerian education stakeholders perceive two reform clusters: (1) Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education as responses to poverty and unemployment, and (2) Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies as responses to insecurity. The study does not test the causal effects of these reforms on national poverty, employment, or crime rates. Rather, it evaluates stakeholder perceptions of their relevance and perceived contribution, thereby providing descriptive evidence that can inform curriculum implementation and subsequent outcome-based research.

A. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria continues to face intertwined socio-economic challenges, including youth unemployment, poverty, skills mismatch, and insecurity. Educational reforms have responded by introducing or strengthening entrepreneurship, vocational, civic, peace, national-values, and security-related content across different levels of education. The policy logic is plausible, but curriculum inclusion does not itself demonstrate effectiveness. There remains a need to understand whether key education stakeholders perceive these reforms as relevant to the problems they are intended to address and where implementation may require strengthening.

Accordingly, this study appraised stakeholders' perceptions of the contribution of selected educational reforms to managing socio-economic barriers to sustainable development in 21st-century Nigeria.

B. Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to appraise stakeholders' perceptions of the contribution of selected educational reforms to socio-economic challenges and sustainable development in Nigeria. Specifically, it sought to:

1. assess perceptions of the contribution of Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education to poverty reduction and employment creation in Nigeria; and
2. assess perceptions of the contribution of Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies to addressing security challenges in Nigeria.

C. Research Questions:

Two research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study.

1. To what extent do stakeholders perceive Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education as contributing to poverty reduction and employment creation in Nigeria?

2. To what extent do stakeholders perceive Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies as contributing to efforts to address security challenges in Nigeria?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population comprised education stakeholders in Nigeria, specifically teachers, Ministry of Education personnel, and curriculum planners/developers. A total of 1,080 respondents participated. The sampling procedure was described as simple random selection by ballot. The intended allocation was 30 respondents from each of Nigeria's 36 states, comprising 10 teachers, 10 Ministry of Education personnel, and 10 curriculum planners/developers per state. The analysis therefore describes the views of the sampled stakeholders and does not establish causal effects of the educational reforms.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument entitled "Questionnaire on Appraising Educational Reforms Strategic Input on Managing Socio-Economic Roadblocks to Sustainable Development in the 21st Century in Nigeria." Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Experts in Measurement and Evaluation reviewed the instrument for validity. Test-retest reliability was assessed over a two-week interval and yielded a coefficient of 0.68. Data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, with 2.50 used as the stated decision threshold. Because the design is descriptive and no inferential hypothesis test was reported, the terms "statistically significant" and "effect" are avoided when interpreting the findings.

Results

A. Research Question One: Can Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE) reduce poverty and enhance employment creation in Nigeria?

Table 1. Frequency, percentage, and mean responses for Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (N = 1,080; criterion mean = 2.50)

S/N	Items	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	N	Mean	Decision
1.	EE can equip students with skills and knowledge to venture into income-generating activities	995 92.12	36 3.33	29 2.68	20 1.85	1080	3.85	A
2.	Without EE, students can still venture into income-generating activities	30 2.77	48 4.44	61 5.64	941 87.12	1080	1.22	R
3.	Entrepreneurship teaching in schools will enable students to	998 92.40	46 4.25	19 1.75	17 1.57	1080	3.87	A

S/N	Items	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	N	Mean	Decision
	undertake business and be successfully							
4.	Entrepreneurship teaching in schools will not make students to undertake business and become successful	59 5.46	35 3.24	97 8.98	889 83.20	1080	3.87	A
5.	Vocational Education will equip students with practical knowledge to embark on local technology for survival	1022 94.62	19 1.75	32 2.96	7 0.64	1080	3.90	A
6.	Without Vocational Education, students can still embark on local technology for survival	4 0.37	13 1.20	66 6.11	997 92.31	1080	1.09	R
7.	Unemployment among students will reduce with the acquisition of practical knowledge in vocational education	909 84.16	102 9.44	61 5.64	8 0.74	1080	3.77	A
8.	Acquisition of practical knowledge will not reduce unemployment among students	41 3.79	41 3.79	99 9.16	899 83.24	1080	1.28	R
Weighted Mean		4,058 46.91	340 3.93	464 5.36	3,768 43.79		2.53	Accepted

Remark:

N= Total Number of Respondents, C= cut-off point, {x} = mean, SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D= Disagreed, SD= Strongly Disagreed, A= Accepted, R= Rejected.

Table 1 presents responses to the Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education items. Positive statements received very high levels of agreement. For example, 92.12% strongly agreed that entrepreneurship education can equip students with knowledge and skills for income-generating activities, 92.40% strongly agreed that entrepreneurship teaching can support business engagement, and 94.62% strongly agreed that vocational education can provide practical knowledge for local technological activities.

The negatively worded items were predominantly rejected. More than 87% strongly disagreed that students could engage in income-generating activities without entrepreneurship education, 92.31% strongly disagreed that students could readily engage in local technology without vocational education, and 83.24% strongly disagreed that practical knowledge would not reduce unemployment. This response pattern indicates strong stakeholder endorsement of EVE as a relevant skills-oriented reform.

The table reports an overall weighted mean of 2.53, marginally above the stated criterion mean of 2.50. Because the questionnaire includes both positively and negatively worded items, the overall mean should be interpreted cautiously unless the negative items are explicitly reverse-scored. The clearest descriptive evidence is therefore the item-level pattern of strong agreement with positive EVE statements and strong disagreement with their negative counterparts.

B. Research Question Two: Will Peace Education, National Values and Security Studies Curb Security Challenges in Nigeria?

Table 2. Frequency, percentage, and mean responses for Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies (N = 1,080; criterion mean = 2.50)

S/N	Items	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	N	Mean	Decision
9.	Peace Education will make youths to eschew crimes	1,012 93.70	61 5.64	6 0.55	1 0.09	1,080	3.92	Accepted
10.	Peace Education will not make youths to eschew crimes	6 0.55	41 3.79	39 3.61	994 92.03	1080	1.12	Rejected
11.	National Values can promote unity and peaceful co-existence among the tribes in Nigeria	911 84.35	96 8.88	32 2.96	41 3.7	1080	3.73	Accepted
12.	National Values will not promote peaceful existence among the tribes in Nigeria	3 0.27	5 0.46	51 4.72	1021 94.53	1080	1.06	Rejected
13.	Peace Education will make youths to know the importance of peaceful living and co-existence to the nation's sustainable development	1,004 92.96	48 4.44	19 1.75	9 0.83	1080	3.89	Accepted
14.	Peace Education will not enable youths to know the importance of peaceful living and co-existence to the nations' sustainable development	8 0.74	11 0.01	63 5.83	998 92.40	1080	1.10	Rejected
15.	Security Studies will expose youths to various actions and inactions that can cause insecurity in the country	977 90.46	54 5	33 3.05	16 1.48	1080	3.19	Accepted
16.	Security Studies will not expose youths to actions and inactions that can cause insecurity in the country	9 0.83	43 3.98	51 4.72	977 90.46	1080	1.15	Rejected
Weighted Mean		3,930 45.48	359 4.15	294 3.40	4,057 46.95		2.39	Rejected

Remark:

N= Total Number of Respondents, C= cut-off-point, x = Mean, SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D= Disagreed, SD= Strongly Disagreed, A= Accepted, R= Rejected.

Table 2 shows that respondents strongly endorsed the positively framed statements concerning peace, national values, and security education. For example, 93.70% strongly agreed that Peace Education can encourage young people to eschew crime, 84.35% strongly agreed that National Values can promote unity and peaceful coexistence, and 92.96% strongly agreed that Peace Education can improve understanding of the importance of peaceful living for sustainable development.

The negatively framed statements were likewise overwhelmingly rejected: 92.03% strongly disagreed that Peace Education would not discourage crime, 94.53% strongly disagreed that National Values would not promote peaceful coexistence, and more than 90% strongly disagreed

with the corresponding negative statement on Security Studies. At the item level, therefore, the response pattern indicates substantial stakeholder support for the intended civic and security functions of these curriculum components.

The reported overall weighted mean is 2.39, below the criterion mean of 2.50. However, this aggregate value combines positively and negatively worded items and is not consistent with the direction of the item-level responses unless reverse-scoring was applied. For this reason, the present narrative does not treat the aggregate mean as evidence that Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies are ineffective; instead, it reports the item-level perception pattern and recommends more rigorous scale scoring in subsequent analysis.

Discussion

The findings for Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education show strong stakeholder confidence in skills-oriented educational reform. This pattern is consistent with Nigerian evidence linking entrepreneurship education with poverty reduction, self-employment, and employability [9], [10], as well as with national policy priorities emphasizing employability and entrepreneurship [7], [8]. It also accords with broader evidence that entrepreneurship education can strengthen entrepreneurial human capital and intentions [11]-[13]. Nevertheless, the current survey measures perceptions rather than observed employment outcomes. This distinction is important because methodological reviews have shown that entrepreneurship-education effects vary by programme design and that weaker evaluation designs may overstate impact [14]. The policy implication is therefore not merely to expand entrepreneurship content, but to improve implementation quality through experiential pedagogy [15], practical facilities, qualified instructors, and strong TVET systems [16], [17].

The Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies findings require more careful interpretation than the original aggregate mean suggests. The item-level responses strongly endorse the proposition that these subjects can support peaceful coexistence, awareness of insecurity, and crime prevention. This orientation is consistent with UNESCO's current framework for education for peace, human rights, and sustainable development [18] and with Nigerian scholarship that treats education as one component of national security and sustainable peace strategies [23], [24]. However, conflict research cautions against assuming a simple linear relationship between curriculum exposure and reductions in violence: education can mitigate or reproduce conflict depending on access, content, pedagogy, governance, and wider structural conditions [19], [20]. Nigeria's experience with Boko Haram likewise demonstrates that insecurity is embedded in complex socio-economic, political, religious, and historical processes [21], [22]. Recent work on critical peace education further suggests that knowledge needs to be

connected with dialogue, civic agency, and opportunities for democratic participation if it is to influence behaviour [25]. Accordingly, the survey supports the perceived relevance of peace and security-oriented curriculum reform, but it cannot establish that these subjects by themselves reduce national insecurity.

Conclusion

This study found strong stakeholder support for the relevance of Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education to income generation, practical skills, self-employment, and unemployment reduction. The item-level responses also showed substantial support for the intended roles of Peace Education, National Values, and Security Studies in promoting peaceful coexistence and security awareness. Because the study used a descriptive perception survey, these findings should not be interpreted as causal evidence that the reforms directly reduce poverty, unemployment, or insecurity. In addition, the aggregate interpretation of the second construct is sensitive to the treatment of negatively worded items. The study therefore supports continued implementation of the reforms while underscoring the need for stronger measurement procedures and outcome-based evaluations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the limitations of the descriptive design, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education should be strengthened across appropriate levels of education, with emphasis on practical competence, enterprise development, and links to local labour-market opportunities rather than curriculum inclusion alone.
2. Government and education providers should improve the facilities, equipment, teacher development, and financing required for effective entrepreneurship and vocational learning.
3. Learners should receive structured guidance on how entrepreneurship, vocational, civic, peace, and security-oriented learning can be translated into practical opportunities and responsible social participation.
4. Schools should maintain safe and enabling learning environments, because practical and participatory approaches to entrepreneurship, peace, and security education depend on sustained learner engagement.
5. Future studies should use validated multi-item scales with explicit reverse-scoring procedures for negatively worded items and should complement perception surveys with behavioural, employment, enterprise, and security-related outcome indicators.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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