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THE ROLE OF YOUTHS IN SHAPING NIGERIA'S POLITICS AND ECONOMIC FUTURE

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Abstract
This research investigates the multifaceted role of youth in shaping Nigeria's political and economic landscape. It explores the diverse ways in which young people are engaged in political processes, contributing to economic development and advocating for social change. The study examines the factors that influence youth participation in politics and economics, including education, socio-economic status, and government policies. It also analyses the challenges faced by Nigerian youth and the opportunity available for them to contribute to the country's progress. This study was hinged on the political socialization theory. Through empirical analysis, this research aims to identify the key areas where youth can have a significant impact on Nigeria's political and economic future. The study utilized the cross-sectional research design with a population of 8,478,638 youths in six south-south, States. A sample size of 375 was drawn using the Taro Yamane's sample size determination formulae. Hypothesis testing was carried out using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 25. The study found that despite facing challenges, Nigerian youth are increasingly involved in political activities, including voting, including voting, participating in political parties and organisations, and engaging in activism. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the role of young people in shaping the country's development and inform policy decisions aimed at empowering and supporting youth engagement.

Keyboards: Youth, Politics, Economics, Nigeria, Participation, Development, Challenges, Opportunities

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Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing governments and policymakers in Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," today is how to provide opportunities so that they can have decent lives and contribute to the economic development of the nation with a youthful population that plays a pivotal role in the nation socio-political and economic landscape. With over 60% of its population under the age of 25, the youth demographic is not only significant in numbers but also in influence. This article explores the multi role of Nigerian youths in shaping the country's political and economic future, underscoring their potential as agents of change, innovators, and leaders.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to investigate the role of Youths in Shaping Nigeria's Politics and Economic Future. Thus, the following specific objectives are stated as:

1. To examine the extent of youth participation in political processes in Nigeria.
2. To investigate the economic contributions of Nigerian youth.
3. To identify the challenges faced by Nigerian youth in the political and economic spheres.
4. To assess the effectiveness of government policies and programmes aimed at empowering and supporting Nigerian youth.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant correlation between the level of education and political participation among youths in Nigeria.
H2: There is a significant correlation between access to education and employment opportunities among youths in Nigeria.
H3: Government policies and programmes aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship have a positive impact on the economic growth of the country.
H4: Access to quality education and skills training is a key determinant of youth employability and economic success in Nigeria.

Politics in Youth Engagement

The trend has shown over the years that Nigeria’s politics has been dominated by older generations, leading to a disconnect with the aspirations and challenges faced by the youth. However, in recent years, there has been a marked shift in the Nigeria’s political class. The rise of social media and technological advancement has empowered youths to engage in political discourse, mobilizing for change, and challenge the status quo. Movements such as #EndSARS in 2020 have highlighted the youths' ability to organize and voice their grievances, particularly against police brutality and corruption.

While discussing the role of youths in contemporary political participation anddevelopment, there are certain underpinning assumptions (Suleiman, 2006). Firstly, we areassuming a political system that is endowed with a significant proportion of its youthfulpopulation who are highly informed and conscientized. Secondly, we are also assuming anorganized youth with clearly defined objectives and a variety of legitimate methods to makeinput in the political process. Thirdly, we are assuming a political system with sufficient publicspace that allows for unfettered citizens participation and robust engagement in the governanceprocess. Meanwhile, the degree of these variables in the Nigerian political system is at bestmeasured and sometimes highly debatable, it has been observed generally that over the yearsof democratic experiment has created opportunity for actors in the civil society, or what

socialentrepreneurial scholars now call ‘citizens sector’ to take on their role in the politicalparticipation process (Bornstein, 2005).

In recent research on government – civil society partnership in Nigeria, it wasobserved that: “Civil society groups are reaching out and trying to work with variousgovernment agencies and parastatals in efforts to build their capacity for service delivery and beaccountable to citizen” (Chukwuma, 2005:15).

Given this opportunity, the Nigerian youths is currently faced with the task of redefiningits role in the democratization process. The mission statement of the National Youth Policy istreated here as a point of departure in articulating the role expectation of Nigerian youth in thepolitical participation process.

Despite the elevated awareness of the challenges confronting Nigerian and Africa’syouths noted by previous studies, several African countries like ours still do not seem to havedeveloped comprehensive and effective policies to deal with the issues facing this large andgrowing segment of the African population or to have in place a means to assess the progressmade. The purpose of this study is to advance the discussion of the problems facing youths inNigeria by assessing whether African countries’ existing youths’ policies can meet the challengesand how these policies can be improved to foster the continent’s equitable and efficientdevelopment in general and Nigeria in particular.

The engagement of youths in political processes is not limited to protests; it extends to participation in elections, civic engagements having youths register to vote and hold leaders accountable. Increasingly, young Nigerians are running for office, participating in political parties, and advocating for policies that resonate with their interests and those of their communities. Advocating the youths to champion causes like good governance, anti-corruption, and leveraging on technology and creativity to address political challenges.The involvement in politics has the potential to bring fresh perspectives, innovative solutions, and a greater focus on issues such as education, unemployment, and healthcare.

Economic Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The economic landscape in Nigeria is ripe with opportunities, especially for the youth. As traditional job markets become increasingly saturated, young Nigerians are pivoting towards entrepreneurship and innovation. With the rise of the digital economy, many are leveraging technology to create businesses that address local needs while also tapping into global markets by acquiring skills in areas like technology, agriculture, and manufacturing for the economic development (Farinha et al. 2018).

Economic advocacy through the youths can push for policies that support youth entrepreneurship and economic growth having to establish innovative hubs to drive innovation for creativity and entrepreneurship.

This entrepreneurial spirit is crucial for Nigeria's economic future. By fostering a culture of innovation, youths are not only creating job opportunities for themselves and others but are also contributing to the diversification of the economy away from oil dependency. Initiatives such as the Nigerian Start-Up Act aim to provide a supportive framework for young entrepreneurs, encouraging investment in technology and entrepreneurship (Carayannis et al. 2015).

Social Responsibility and Awareness

The potentially important role of youths in Africa's development cannot beoveremphasized. Youths could be a source of labor inputs as well as human capital inproduction, which would improve total factor productivity in a region of the world wherecapital formation is limited. When employed, youths could be a reliable source of demand forthe economy through their consumption activities. In addition, the youths of Nigeria could becritical for the development of a new class of entrepreneurs that African countries need toprosper. Furthermore, Nigeria has an opportunity to harness a "demographicdividend": With theprojection that most countries in Africa will have more working-age adults per child in 2030than in 2006, there will be a large workforce supporting fewer children and the elderly. Thistrend would result in a lower dependency burden, freeing up resources for development; see, forexample, Ashford (2007).

The youth's role in advocating for social justice and accountability in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Young activists have become potent voices against corruption, inequality, and human rights abuses. They utilize their social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter(X), Instagram, and TikTok to raise awareness, galvanize support, and advocate for policy changes.

Moreover, youths are increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Finding resonance among Nigerian youths, rallying efforts towards climate action and advocating for a sustainable future. Their activism not only impacts public policy but also inspires a collective consciousness aimed at improving the social fabric of the nation.

Youth Engagement Challenges

Despite their potential, Nigerian youths face numerous challenges that impede their participation in politics and the economy. Issues such as poverty, inadequate access to education, and unemployment hinder their ability to fully engage and thrive. Additionally, systemic corruption and political disenfranchisement create an environment that often discourages active participation hindering economic growth and political stability.

Where there is lack of youth representation or underrepresented in leadership positions leading to corruption discourages youths from participating in politics and entrepreneurship with limited access to quality education hinders skill development.

The government, civil society, and the private sector must work collaboratively to address these challenges. By providing educational resources, mentorship programs, and access to financing, stakeholders can empower youths to take on leadership roles and drive positive change.

Finally, given their vulnerability, the youth have the greater responsibility to promotepeace, security, stability and national unity. Through their political education and publicenlightenment campaign, through their policy advocacy, and their active involvement in theelectoral process, they can build bridges of understanding across ethnic groups, across politicalaffiliations and religious divide. Democracy and good governance can only be nurtured andsustained in an environment of peace, security and stability. Where these are lacking, it is notonly democracy and good governance that suffer, but also social progress and the future of theyouths are seriously compromised (Suleiman, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Political Socialization Theory

This theory explores how individuals develop political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. It can help to understand how young people in Nigeria are influenced by various factors, such as family, education, media, and peer groups, in shaping their political views and engagement (Dekker et al. 2020). Political socialization theory has several implications for understanding and promoting youth participation in Nigeria's political processes by recognizing the influence of early socialization experiences (family, education, media) highlights the need for interventions that promote civic education and positive political values at a young age.

This theory has certain limitations as it often emphasizes the importance of early socialization experiences (family, education, media) in shaping political attitudes. However, later life experiences and events can also significantly influence political beliefs. Political socialization theory may not fully capture the impact of structural factors, such as socioeconomic inequality, political repression, and historical context, on youth political participation.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey method research design. The population for this study is youths residing in Nigeria. This includes individuals between the ages of 18 and 35. The target population is total number of youths in South-South, Nigeria. According to the NBS (2013), the total number of youths in the six South-South States in Nigeria is 8,478,638. Using the Taro Yamane Sample size determination formulae, the study arrived at a sample size of 375. The simple random sampling was utilized with the help of self-structured questionnaire. The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations) was used to summarize and describe the quantitative data while the inferential statistics (using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient) was used to test the research hypotheses and draw conclusions about the relationship between the variables with the aid of SPSS version 25.

Results and Discussion

The researcher made the google form link available for respondents to fill out. Out of the sample size of 375, only 307 respondents (81.9%) filled out the questionnaire. Out of the 307 copied filled, 285 (92.8) responses were valid and was used for the analysis.

Table 1: Demographic (Descriptive) Data Analysis

Age of the Respondents	**Response Rates**	**Gender**	**Response Rates**
18-24Yrs	155	Male	101
25-30Yrs	99	Female	184
31-35Yrs	31	Total	285 (100%)
Total	285 (100%)	**Occupation**	**Response Rates**
Education Level	**Response Rates**	Student	22
Primary Education	13	Employed (Private Sector)	33
Secondary Education	78	Employed (Public Sector)	42
Tertiary (Undergraduate)	162	Self-Employed	84
Tertiary (Postgraduate)	32	Unemployed	104
Total	285 (100%)	Total	285 (100%)
Place of Residence	**Response Rates**		
Urban	192		

Rural	93		
Total	285 (100%)		

Table 1 displays the distribution based on the age group of the participants. It reveals that the largest proportion of respondents are in the 18–24 Years age bracket (54.4%), followed by the 25–30 age bracket (34.7%), the 31–35 age bracket (10.9%). This suggests that the majority of South-South youths are younger than 35 years old.

The gender characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. More female than men filled out the survey. Of the total population, 64.6% (184 respondents) were female and 35.4% (101 participants) were men. This would indicate that the majority of Southern youths are female.

The respondents' educational backgrounds are displayed in Table 1. The majority of respondents hold a bachelor's degree (162 respondents), while 78 have completed secondary education. Out of the total number of responses, 32 hold a postgraduate degree and 13 have only completed primary education. Since the majority of youths have bachelor's degrees, we can assume that they are well-versed in the role of youths in shaping Nigeria's politics and economic future and will have no trouble answering our questionnaire questions.

The respondents' occupation reveal that majority of the youths are unemployed (36.5%) 104 respondents. 84 respondents are self-employed (29.5%), 42 respondents representing (14.7%) are employed (public sector), 33 respondents representing (11.6%) are employed (private sector), while 22 respondents are students representing (7.7%). This suggests that most youths in South-South, Nigeria are unemployed.

The next category is the place of residence. Table 1 shows that majority of the youths are resident in urban area with a population of 192 respondents representing (67.4%), while 93 respondents are resident in the rural area representing (32.6%).

Hypothesis One

H1: There is a significant correlation between the level of education and political participation among youths in Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation between the level of education (LOE) and political participation (PPN) among youths in Nigeria

		LOE	PPN
LOE	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.727
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.005
	N	285	285
PPN	Pearson Correlation	.727	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.
	N	285	285

Source: SPSS 25.0 output on research data

Table 2 reveals that the Pearson Correlation coefficient is 0.727 which reflect a positive linear relationship between level of education and political participation. And the Correlation test is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.005. Positive relationship means that as

level of education increases political participation increases. The study concludes that there is a link between level of education and political participation as a result of this finding. As a result, the hypothesis was approved.This finding corroborates with the results of Ojibara and Omede (2017) in their study on youth and political participation in Kwara state, Nigeria. Findings revealed that Kwara youth are likely to engage in conventional mode of participation than unconventional mode of participations with variations. Voting in general election is the prefer pattern of conventional participation. Furthermore, apart from age, local government of residence, years of residing in the local government, level of education, marital status, and occupation have a significant influence on youth political participation in Kwara State.

Hypothesis Two

H2: There is a significant correlation between access to education and employment opportunities among youths in Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlation between access to education (ATE) and employment opportunities (EOS) among youths in Nigeria

		ATE	EOS
ATE	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.803
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
	N	285	285
EOS	Pearson Correlation	.803	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
	N	285	285

Source: SPSS 25.0 output on research data

Table 3 reveals that the Pearson Correlation coefficient is 0.803 which reflect a strong positive linear relationship between access to education and employment opportunities. And the Correlation test is highly significance at (p=0.004). The p-value is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Positive relationship means that as access to education increases employment opportunities also increases. The study concludes that there is a link between access to education and employment opportunities as a result of this discovery. As a result, the hypothesis was approved. This agrees with O'Higgins and Ivanov (2006) in the study of education and employment opportunities for the Roma. It is shown that lack of formal education cannot provide a full explanation of the relatively high unemployment rates faced by Roma and that at least part of the problem arises from discrimination in employment. Roma are also disproportionately employed in low-quality jobs in the informal sector. The paper argues that programmes aimed at combating labour market and income disadvantages of the Roma must be based on the development of opportunities for autonomous income generation rather than the public works temporary employment programmes currently prevalent.

Hypothesis Three

H3: Government policies and programmes aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship have a positive impact on the economic growth of the country.

Table 4: Correlation between government policies (GPP) and economic growth (EGH) among youths in Nigeria

		GPP	EGH
GPP	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.744
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
	N	285	285
EGH	Pearson Correlation	.744	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
	N	285	285

Source: SPSS 25.0 output on research data

Table 4 reveals that the Pearson Correlation coefficient is 0.744 which reflect a positive linear relationship between government policies and economic growth. And the Correlation test show that government policies has significant effect on economic growth with a p-value of 0.002. Positive relationship means that as government policies increases economic growth increases. The study concludes that there is a link between government policies and programmes aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship and economic growth as a result of this discovery. Therefore, hypothesis was not rejected. This finding relates with Odongo and Kyei (2018) in the study on the role of government in promoting youth entrepreneurship: the case of South Africa. The National Youth Policy (2015- 2020) aims at creating a conducive environment that enables young people to reach their full potential. The National Development Plan and the Vision 2030 provide several proposals to deal with youth unemployment through skills development, entrepreneurship training and provision of opportunities, so that they can ably participate in the development of their communities. Despite these and other well-meaning interventions, the contribution of youth owned and managed enterprises to the gross domestic product remained a paltry 5% in 2013. In 2009, South Africa was ranked 35th out of 54 global entrepreneurship monitored countries with a total early stage entrepreneurial activity rate of only 5.9%, which is amongst the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa and the world. The 2016-2017 global entrepreneurship monitor reports that only 37.9% of South Africans perceived that they have the capabilities required to start their own business and only 35% were able to recognise entrepreneurial opportunities in and around their communities. It is evident that putting in place elaborate legislative and institutional frameworks alone is not enough to scale up youth entrepreneurship. This paper proposes interventions that can be categorised into the following themes: conducive and supportive government policy; supporting systems, structures and collaborative partnerships; appropriate and responsive entrepreneurship education; and developing and nurturing entrepreneurial behaviours.

H4: Access to quality education and skills training is a key determinant of youth employability and economic success in Nigeria

Table 5: Correlation between access to quality education (AQE) and economic success (ESS) among youths in Nigeria

		AQE	ESS
AQE	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.783
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
	N	147	147
ESSPearson Correlation		.783	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
	N	147	147

Source: SPSS 25.0 output on research data

Table 5 reveals that the Pearson Correlation coefficient is 0.783 which reflect a strong positive linear relationship between access to quality education and economic success. And the Correlation test is highly significance at (p=0.003). The p-value is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Positive relationship means that as access to quality education increases economic success also increases. The study concludes that there is a link between access to quality education and economic success as a result of this discovery. As a result, the null hypothesis was approved. This relates with Rimisho (2019) in the study on factors influencing youth employability in SMEs in Tanzania: A Case of SMEs in Ilala District. The results from logit model show that about 29 percent of young people who are employed in SMEs are doing that in order to get income, and 24 percent wanted to have a good future. About 21 percent of employers agreed that, employees who are ready to take instructions from employers, are creative and knowledgeable, and are willing to work, are likely to be employed. About 25 percent of employees enjoy the salary they get from employment, 23 percent enjoy the benefits from employment and about 22 percent were able to start their own business from the salary proceeds. Therefore, about 23 percent of employers called for the saving culture among the youth in order to reduce poverty, while 22 percent suggested more knowledge about poverty, as 21 percent emphasized the training of youths about the conduct of SMEs, with a view to reducing youth unemployment, and eventually alleviating poverty in the country. It is suggested that; a similar study should be conducted to investigate factors influencing youth employability in other non-SMEs since the challenges facing youth employability are not limited to SMEs.

Recommendations and Opportunities

Many global problems have a particularly strong impact on youths and these problems have far-reaching consequences. Focusing on youths will substantially boost efforts by Nigeria to:

1. Create a stable economic system that equitably benefits people in all areas, both poor and rich with demographic dividend where Nigeria's large youth population can drive economic growth.
2. Promote political stability based on participation and human rights.
3. Limit the number of economic and war-related refugees and internally displaced people.
4. Stem the tide of fundamentalism, terrorism, and hatred.

5. On board the youths who can leverage technology to innovate and create solutions.
6. Advocate policy reforms that support youths' participation in politics and economy.
7. Moderate population growth and promote equal rights for women to enable gender balance.

Addressing these challenges and seizing opportunities, Nigerian youths can shape a brighter political and economic future for themselves and their country.

Conclusion

The role of youths in shaping Nigeria's political and economic future is undeniably vital. As the nation grapples with various challenges, the energy, creativity, and resilience of its young population can serve as a catalyst for transformative change. By harnessing their potential and ensuring their voices are heard, Nigeria can pave the way for a brighter, more equitable future. The engagement of youths in the political and economic spheres must be seen as not only beneficial but essential for the progress of the nation. It is imperative that all stakeholders recognize and support the integral role that young Nigerians play in defining the trajectory of the country.

The study found that policies to address the challenges facing youths have not resulted in a great deal of success. We attribute the failures to a number of factors including the inadequacy of information about youths that is necessary in the design of policy, weak coordination amongst government agencies, donors, regional organizations, and the failure to design specific policies that are suited to deal with the problems of African youths.

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Questionnaire: The Role of Youths in Shaping Nigeria's Politics and Economic Future

Section A: Demographic Information
[Please select the appropriate option]

1. Age:
    - 18-24
    - 25-30
    - 31-35
    - 36+
2. Gender:
    - Male
    - Female
3. Education Level:
    - Primary
    - Secondary
    - Tertiary (Undergraduate)
    - Tertiary (Postgraduate)
4. Occupation:
    - Student
    - Employed (Private Sector)
    - Employed (Public Sector)
    - Self-Employed
    - Unemployed
5. Place of Residence:
    - Urban
    - Rural

Section B: Political Participation
Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. I have voted in at least one election in the past five years.
2. I am a member of a political party or organization.
3. I have participated in political protests or demonstrations.
4. I am interested in current political events in Nigeria.
5. I believe that young people can have a significant impact on Nigerian politics.

Section C: Economic Activities
Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. I have considered starting my own business.
2. I believe that there are sufficient opportunities for young people to succeed economically in Nigeria.
3. I am satisfied with my current employment situation.
4. I have received adequate support from the government to start or grow a business.
5. I believe that education and skills training are essential for economic success.

Section D: Perceptions of Government
Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. I trust the Nigerian government to represent my interests.
2. I believe that the Nigerian government is effective in addressing the needs of young people.
3. I am satisfied with the quality of governance in Nigeria.

4. I believe that corruption is a major obstacle to development in Nigeria.
5. I am optimistic about the future of Nigeria.

Section E: Future Expectations

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. I believe that young people can play a significant role in shaping Nigeria's future.
2. I am confident that I will achieve my career goals.
3. I believe that Nigeria has the potential to become a developed nation.
4. I am optimistic about the future of Nigeria's economy.
5. I am willing to contribute to the development of my community.