

## ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT OPERATION IN CONTEXT EDUCATION

Osu Uchechukwu Charles<sup>1</sup>, Imran Mutiu Olalekan<sup>2</sup>, Olakunle Titus Ajiye<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of Adult education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Youth empowerment stands as a crucial approach for fostering sustainable development in context education, particularly in countries such as Nigeria where the youth population is significant. This study examines the implementation and outcomes of the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) initiative in Oyo State, Nigeria. YESSO aims to combat poverty and unemployment among young people by facilitating access to job opportunities and social assistance. Employing a descriptive survey methodology, data were gathered from 180 program beneficiaries and stakeholders. The findings indicate a substantial positive impact of YESSO on the lives of participants. The program has effectively delivered essential services and skills training, fostering asset acquisition and enhancing the financial capacity of unemployed youth and impoverished households. Additionally, YESSO has contributed positively to the health and educational prospects of beneficiaries. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including payment delays, insufficient tools for work, and mismanagement of grants. The study emphasizes the crucial role of youth empowerment initiatives in addressing unemployment and poverty and also identifies opportunities to improve program implementation and sustainability in context-based education. Furthermore, recommendations put forward include enhancing public awareness of the program, ensuring prompt fund disbursement, and addressing logistical hurdles to optimize the effectiveness of YESSO.

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### Corresponding Author:

Olakunle Titus Ajiye,

Department of Adult education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Email: [titusolakunleajiye@yahoo.com](mailto:titusolakunleajiye@yahoo.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment is the ability and authority to make informed decisions and make positive change in their lives and communities. It serves as a mechanism for inspiring young people to achieve greatness personally and to have a significant impact on society (Olusola, 2019; Omeje et al., 2020). Recognized as pivotal to sustainable development, youth empowerment is particularly relevant today, given the unprecedentedly large cohort of young individuals globally, numbering 1.8 billion under the age of 25 (Secretariat, 2016; Canton, 2021). As a cornerstone of national progress,

it is imperative to involve the young policymakers of tomorrow in today's development decisions.

Youth empowerment entails the realization among young people that they possess or can create opportunities in life by education (Jennings et al., 2006; Ferrer-Fons et al., 2022; Planas-Lladó & Úcar, 2024). They consider the consequences of their actions, make rational decisions, and take responsibility. Moreover, empowerment entails the ability to foster conducive conditions under which young individuals can act autonomously rather than being directed by others. These enabling conditions encompass various facets, including economic and social foundations, political commitment, access to knowledge and skills, appropriate resource allocation, education, and supportive legal and administrative frameworks. Moreover, a stable environment characterized by principles of equality, peace, democracy, and positive values is essential (Sharifi & Simangan, 2021).

In Nigeria, the government has implemented the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) program to enhance the accessibility of employment opportunities for the poor and vulnerable (Edeme, 2019). YESSO utilizes improved social safety net systems to provide youth employment opportunities and targeted cash transfers to impoverished individuals, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), starting from the northern region of the country (Omoju et al., 2023). The Oyo state government, in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), secured financial assistance from the World Bank to support the implementation of YESSO. The program was developed by the World Bank in partnership with the federal government and twenty states, including Oyo, which demonstrated similar structures to YESSO during the conceptualization phase. Oyo State qualified for participation due to the establishment of the Youth Employment Scheme, known as YES-O, initiated in 2012 to address youth unemployment within the state. The assistance operation reinforced the joint commitment of the World Bank and the federal government to substantially alleviate poverty among the youth population in the country. The Oyo state government also embraced this commendable initiative with the goal of actively engaging and lifting the numerous unemployed youths in the state out of poverty.

Initially, the implementation of YESSO in the state was guided by a trio consisting of the former Special Adviser to the Governor on Interventions, the Special Adviser on Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and the retired Executive Secretary of the Agency for Youth Development (Shiyanbade et al., 2023). However, they had to step aside when it became evident that the Agency for Youth Development (AYD), designated as the implementation agency, could not effectively coordinate the support operation as per the World Bank's directive. Consequently, the Office of the Head of Service appointed necessary personnel from relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to oversee the coordination of YESSO in Oyo State through the State Operation Coordinating Unit (SOCU). The PWF-PIU (Public Workforce-Project Implementation Unit) was also appropriately staffed in alignment with these changes. The YESSO task team subsequently endorsed the selections made by the Head of Service when the list of personnel was shared with them. To provide clarity, the

following individuals comprised the pioneering staff of the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) in Oyo State.

Over the years, youth unemployment has remained a pressing issue in Nigeria, posing a significant challenge for the federal government to ensure that its large youth population does not languish without employment opportunities, as being jobless often plunges many Nigerian youths into poverty (Ahmadu & Valentine, 2022). This situation can result in a range of adverse consequences, such as inadequate income and resources for sustainable livelihoods, hunger, malnutrition, poor health, restricted access to education and essential services, increased morbidity and mortality, homelessness, inadequate housing, exposure to unsafe environments, social discrimination, exclusion from decision-making processes, and limited participation in civil society and cultural life. This unwanted scenario has contributed to rising crime rates and youth unrest nationwide.

The government has consistently introduced various programs and encouraged improvements in educational aspects in an attempt to mitigate these social challenges and provide relief to Nigerians, but it has only achieved minimal success thus far. The YESSO project aims to address this by offering increased opportunities for youth employment and social service delivery while streamlining the implementation of social protection initiatives across the country (Li et al., 2010; Edeme, 2019). Its objectives include enhancing access to employment opportunities for the poor, strengthening safety net systems in participating states, and leveraging these efforts to empower youths and support impoverished households effectively. This strategic move enables the government to offer compelling incentives for unemployed youths and extremely impoverished households to invest in their children's human capital and receive adequate cash benefits to enhance household consumption. Investing in human capital also bolsters the future employability prospects of youths and encourage further studies.

The goal of the Youth Development and Empowerment (YD&E) initiative is to provide a framework for youth empowerment efforts within the context of substance abuse prevention programs (Kim et al., 1998; To et al., 2021; Geza et al., 2022). Similar to the Adolescent Empowerment Model, the YD&E extends beyond merely preventing risky behaviors and emphasizes the meaningful engagement of youth in community service projects. Central to the YD&E approach is the promotion of positive social connections and readiness for active involvement in the socioeconomic and public spheres of the community. This model draws upon principles from social control theory, social learning theory, and expectations-states theory (Omeje et al., 2020). These theoretical foundations are pertinent to the study because they underpin key aspects such as skill acquisition, cash transfers to impoverished households, and participation in public workfare, all of which drive empowerment initiatives and encourage improvements in educational aspects.

The advantages of YESSO extend beyond merely curbing risky behaviors; they encompass community engagement, fostering positive social connections, and facilitating active participation in the socioeconomic, education, and public aspects of communities. Particularly, the following research questions served as the study's

guiding principles: (1) examine YESSO's provision of basic services for unemployed youths, poor households, and the vulnerable to continue education. (2) examine how YESSO has encouraged asset acquisition for unemployed youths, poor households, and the vulnerable to continue education. And (3) Determine the YESSO project's influence on schooling/education opportunities for unemployed youths, poor households, and the vulnerable.

## 2. METHOD

A descriptive case study survey design was conducted to assess the extent to which youth empowerment and social support operations have impacted the empowerment of unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable in context education at Oyo State, Nigeria. The target population for this study comprised beneficiaries of Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation, members of the coordinating unit at the state level, and the local government community development officers trained to partake in YESSO in Oyo State, Nigeria in context educational.

The sample size for this study was 180. Simple random sampling was adopted to select the respondents from the selected local government areas; each of the three local governments represents each of the three senatorial districts in Oyo State. A total of 180 respondents were selected from communities in Ibarapa North, including Aboju Oko, Abule Alfa, Ilupeju Oba, Ogunlaja, Alagbede, and Asunnara, as well as communities in Saki West, including Ajegunle, Mokola, Kinikini, Sangote, Isale Adini, Oke Alaka, and Akinyele, including Bagadaje, Isale Ojo, Abiola, Akingbile, and Idi-Ose.

The researchers developed a self-structured questionnaire tagged Assessment of Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) in Oyo State. Section A focused on demographic factors such as age, sex, local government area, religion, educational status, occupational status, marital status, and family type. Section B focused on YESSO and basic services for unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable; Section C focused on YESSO and asset acquisition for unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable; Section D focused on YESSO and healthy living for unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable; Section E focused on YESSO and financial capability for unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable; Section F focused on YESSO and schooling opportunities for unemployed youths, poor households, and vulnerable; and Section G focused on problems facing beneficiaries of YESSO during the execution of the program. List of instruments used. YESSO Provision Basic Services Scale  $r=0.85$ ; YESSO Assets Acquisition Scale  $r=0.82$ ; YESSO Healthy Living Scale  $r=0.89$ ; YESSO Financial Capability Scale  $r=0.80$ ; YESSO Schooling Opportunities Scale  $r=0.80$ ; and YESSO Challenges Scale  $r=0.84$ .

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire with the assistance of two trained research assistants, explaining all parts of it to the respondents when necessary to avoid any ambiguity. This helped facilitate better understanding and accurate responses to the items contained in the questionnaire. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, 172 copies retrieved and used for this study.

For the demographic information of the respondents, descriptive statistics like frequency counts, simple percentage representation, pie charts, and bar charts were used to collect, code, and analyze the data. For the research questions, frequency counts and mean scores were used to analyze the data.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

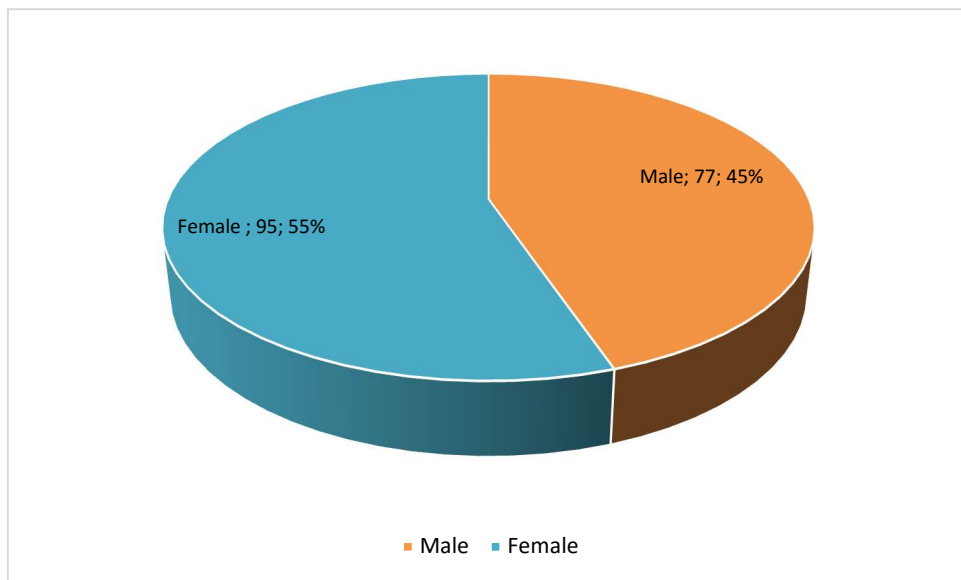
#### Results

##### *Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants*

Table 1 showed that 71 (41.3%) of the youths are between 18 and 30 years old, and 101 (58.7%) are 30 and above years of age. Figure 1 showed that 77 (44.8%) youths are male and 95 (55.2%) are female. Table 2 showed that 77 (44.8%) youths are Christians, 88 (51.2%) are Muslims, and 7 (4.1%) young people belong to other religious groups aside from the aforementioned. Figure 2 showed that 60 (34.9%) youths had a first school leaving certificate, 69 (40.1%) had a polytechnic/NCE certificate, 42 (24.4%) had a minimum of a degree certificate, and 1 (0.6%) had no formal education in the study. Table 3 showed that 59 (34.3%) youths are single, 85 (49.4%) are married, 13 (7.6%) are divorced, and 15 (8.7%) are separated.

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of respondents by age

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
18-30 years	71	41.3
30 and above years	101	58.7
Total	172	100.0

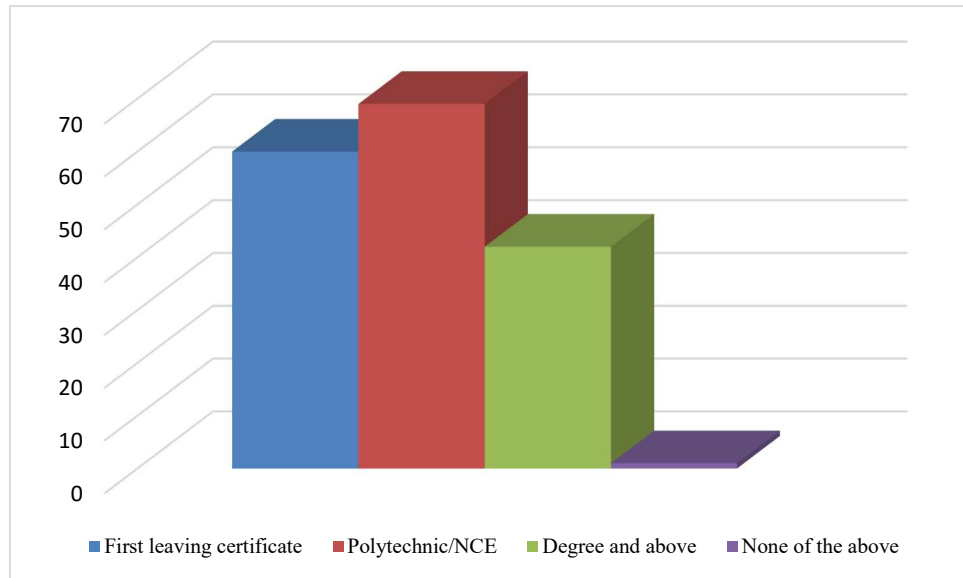


**Figure 1.** Pie chart showing the distribution of youths by gender

**Table 2.** Frequency distribution of respondents by religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	77	44.8

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Islam	88	51.2
Others	7	4.1
Total	172	100.0



**Figure 2.** Bar chart showing the distribution of youths by educational status

**Table 3.** Frequency distribution of respondents by marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	59	34.3
Married	85	49.4
Divorced	13	7.6
Separated	15	8.7
Total	172	100.0

***Extent to which YESSO provided service for unemployed youths and poor household to continue education***

Table 4 presents the feedback from the youth regarding YESSO's provision of basic services for unemployed youths and poor households. The majority, comprising 155 (90.1%) of the youths involved in the study, acknowledged that fashion designing is included among the services offered through YESSO's skill development program. Additionally, 148 (86.1%) of the youths indicated that many YESSO beneficiaries have successfully established their own barbershops after acquiring skills from the program. Moreover, most of the youths confirmed that some beneficiaries of YESSO have transitioned into roles as laptop and handset repairers, leveraging the knowledge gained from the program, and so forth.

**Table 4.** Basic service for unemployed youths by YESSO

s/n	Basic service for unemployed youths	SD	D	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S. D
1	Fashion designing is one of the services under YESSO skill for job scheme	5 2.9%	12 7.0%	75 43.6%	80 46.5%	3.34	0.735
2	Most YESSO beneficiaries have established self-owned barber shop after gaining the skill from the scheme	6 3.5%	18 10.5%	77 44.8%	71 41.3%	3.24	0.777
3	Some beneficiaries of YESSO have become repairers of laptops and handsets because of knowledge acquired from YESSO	22 12.8%	19 11.0%	73 42.4%	58 33.7%	2.97	0.982
4	Most unemployed youths have invested in hair dressing service being their benefit from YESSO intervention	9 5.2%	21 12.2%	74 43.0%	68 39.5%	3.17	0.838
5	YESSO has helped some unemployed youths to become liquid soap makers in the community	6 3.5%	18 10.5%	78 45.3%	70 40.7%	3.23	0.775
<b>Weighted Mean =3.19</b>							

A test of the norm shows the extent of YESSO's provision of services for unemployed youths and poor households. Out of the total respondents, 3.5% (n=6) of the youths expressed a low extent of YESSO's service provision, while a significant majority, accounting for 96.5% (n=166) of the youths, indicated a high extent of YESSO's service provision. Hence, the findings suggest a notable level of service provision by YESSO for unemployed youths and poor households in the study. Table 5 presents the percentage distribution of the extent to which YESSO provides services for unemployed youths and poor households.

**Table 5.** The percentage distribution

Interval	Mean index	Extend of YESSO provision of services	Frequency	Percentage
0-10		Low	6	3.5
11-20	<b>15.9477</b>	High	166	96.5

***Extent to which YESSO encouraged assets acquisition for unemployed youth to continue education***

Table 6 presents the input from youths concerning YESSO's assistance in facilitating asset acquisition for unemployed individuals and impoverished households. The research indicated that most respondents recognized that YESSO has enhanced their capacity to obtain numerous things, including phones, wristwatches, and transistor radios. Moreover, several youngsters have acquired bicycles or motorbikes due to the asset acquisition encouragement offered by YESSO. The findings indicate a significant

degree of motivation for asset acquisition as evaluated by the majority of the youngsters in the study.

**Table 6.** Encouragement of asset acquisition for unemployed youths

s/n	Statement	SD	D	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S. D
1	YESSO has contributed to ability of some beneficiaries to acquire more mobile phone, wristwatch, and transistor radio through financial power gained from the programmeme	10 5.8%	18 10.5%	82 47.7%	62 36.0%	3.14	0.826
2	Some youths have become owners of bicycles or motorcycles through contribution and savings from stipends and grants from YESSO	13 7.6%	20 11.6%	97 56.4%	42 24.4%	2.98	0.816
3	The stipends from YESSO have helped the ability of most beneficiaries to afford buying more clothes and shoes	17 9.9%	27 15.7%	73 42.4%	55 32.0%	2.97	0.936
4	Stipends from YESSO have aided ability of some beneficiaries to acquire some common agricultural tools such as cutlass and hoes	17 9.9%	20 11.6%	74 43.0%	61 35.5%	3.04	0.933
<b>Weighted Mean =3.03</b>							

Table 7 presents the extent to which YESSO encourages asset acquisition for unemployed youth, expressed in percentages. Out of the respondents, 8.1% (n = 14) of youths reported a low extent of YESSO encouragement in this regard, while a significant majority of 91.9% (n = 158) indicated a high extent of encouragement from YESSO. Hence, the findings suggest a substantial level of YESSO's encouragement of asset acquisition for unemployed youths and poor households in the study.

**Table 7.** Test of norm showing the extent of YESSO

Interval	Mean index	Extend of YESSO encouragement of asset acquisition	Frequency	Percentage
0-8		Low	14	8.1
9-16	<b>12.1221</b>	High	158	91.9

### ***Ways in which YESSO influenced schooling/education opportunities of unemployed youths and poor households***

Table 8 illustrates the influence of YESSO on the educational prospects of impoverished households and unemployed adolescents. YESSO was perceived to have improved the financial stability of economically disadvantaged parents, thereby allowing them to increase their children's school attendance, according to a significant majority of the participants (89.5%). Furthermore, 76.7% of the young people reported that the financial assistance provided by YESSO encouraged them to pursue additional



education. Additionally, 73.8% of respondents confirmed that YESSO's grants contributed to the reduction of school dropout rates. As a result, the educational opportunities of impoverished households and unemployed adolescents in the study have been significantly impacted by YESSO. The youths' feedback regarding YESSO's assistance in facilitating the procurement of assets for unemployed youths and impoverished households is presented in Table 6. The data indicated that the majority of the respondents acknowledged that YESSO has facilitated the acquisition of a variety of items, including transistor radios, wristwatches, and phones. Additionally, YESSO has encouraged the acquisition of assets by certain adolescents, resulting in the ownership of bicycles or motorcycles. Consequently, the results indicate that the majority of the young people in the study perceive a significant degree of encouragement in the acquisition of assets.

**Table 8.** Schooling/Education opportunities of unemployed youth

s/n	Statement	SD	D	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S. D
1	YESSO enhances financial strength of poor parents to increase school participation of their children	6 3.5%	12 7.0%	81 47.1%	73 42.4%	3.28	0.746
2	YESSO instigates beneficiaries to further their education pursuits due to their financial gain from the programmeme	11 6.4%	29 16.9%	80 46.5%	52 30.2%	3.01	0.855
3	YESSO has contributed to reduction in the level of drop-out from school due to grant involvement of the programmeme	22 12.8%	23 13.4%	64 37.2%	63 36.6%	2.98	1.008
<b>Weighted Mean =3.09</b>							

## Discussion

There is no denying that unemployment and poverty levels are on the rise in Nigeria due to the educational gap. To address this issue, the government has implemented the Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation Program (YESSO) nationwide. YESSO has been instrumental in providing essential services to beneficiaries by equipping them with valuable skills, such as fashion designing, establishing self-owned barber shops, repairing laptops and handsets, and becoming hairdressers or liquid soap makers (Edeme, 2019; Omoju et al., 2023). Furthermore, the program promotes the acquisition of various assets such as mobile phones, wristwatches, transistor radios, bicycles, among others, with the aim of enhancing the education sector.

The findings of the study also indicate that YESSO has improved the overall health and well-being of unemployed youths. Beneficiaries, especially women, have been empowered to afford nutritious meals for their families, cover healthcare expenses, including hospital visits for treatment and check-ups, and ensure daily sustenance through contributions and savings. Furthermore, YESSO has enhanced the financial capabilities of unemployed youths, enabling them to attain financial freedom. The

program's monetary gains have bolstered the earnings of beneficiaries, facilitated meeting daily financial obligations through savings, and elevated income levels and savings crucial for investing in businesses of their choice.

Additionally, YESSO has positively influenced educational opportunities for unemployed youths by strengthening the financial capacity of economically disadvantaged parents to afford their children's tuition fees. Beneficiaries have been motivated to pursue educational endeavors, and the program's involvement has contributed to reducing school dropout rates.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion suggests that YESSO has a significant positive impact on the lives of participants in terms of enhancing the education sector. The program has successfully provided essential services and skills training, thereby promoted the acquisition of assets and improved the financial capacity of indigent households and unemployed youth. Furthermore, YESSO has made a positive impact on the educational and health prospects of its beneficiaries. Nevertheless, obstacles continue to exist, such as inadequate instruments for the job, payment delays, and grant mismanagement. The study underscores the critical role of youth empowerment initiatives in addressing poverty and unemployment, as well as identifies opportunities to enhance the sustainability and implementation of context-based education programs.

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