REPOSITIONING BUSINESS EDUCATION TO ADDRESS EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA'S RECESSED ECONOMY

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Abstract
Nigeria's recessed economy, marked by inflation, declining Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and high unemployment, has exacerbated educational inequality, particularly in access to Business Education. This study explored how Business Education can be repositioned to reduce inequality and promote inclusive economic participation. The problem lies in certain barriers: underfunding, urban-rural divides, and gender biases which limit access to Business Education for marginalized groups. The aim of the study is to propose strategies for making Business Education more inclusive and impactful in a challenged economic context. The study adopted a desktop research approach, drawing on relevant literature, policy documents, and institutional reports, which were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that Business Education holds great potential for fostering entrepreneurship, enhancing employability, and equipping individuals with practical skills for economic recovery. However, inequalities in access and curriculum relevance hinder its full impact. The study concludes that repositioning Business Education for equity is both a developmental necessity and a national economic strategy. Recommendations include policy reform, curriculum overhaul, community-based education centers, and gender-inclusive programming to drive access and economic resilience.
Keywords: *Business Education, Educational, Human Capital, Inequality, Nigeria, Recessed Economy*

Introduction
In the face of Nigeria's ongoing economic challenges, educational inequality remains a persistent and widening gap, particularly in specialized fields such as Business Education. Education is globally recognized as a transformative force capable of reducing poverty, fostering equity, and driving economic growth (Kola & Adekunle, 2022). Yet, empirical studies show that inflationary pressures, unemployment, and declining public investment in education collectively deepen educational inequality, particularly in developing economies (Opuala-Charles & Oshilike, 2023; Okoli, 2024; Binuomoyo, 2023). Business Education, with its potential to impart entrepreneurial, managerial, and financial skills, offers a pathway to national recovery, self-reliance, and sustainable development (Amah & Onukwuli, 2024). However, the benefits of Business Education are unevenly distributed due to systemic barriers such as underfunding, urban-rural divides, gender biases, and technological exclusion (Emunemu, 2017). This paper interrogated the role of Business Education in addressing educational inequality in Nigeria's recessed economy. It argued for strategic repositioning of Business Education as a tool for inclusive human capital development and economic participation. Anchored on the theories of Human Capital and Human Development, the paper presented practical insights into how equitable access to Business Education can serve as a catalyst for both individual empowerment and national economic resilience. This paper argues that repositioning Business Education through inclusive, technology-driven, and community-oriented approaches is essential for addressing educational inequality and enhancing economic participation in Nigeria's recessed economy. It contends that equitable access to relevant Business Education can serve as a strategic tool for human capital development and national economic resilience.

Conceptual Clarifications
Business Education
Business education is a cornerstone of modern educational systems, equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of the global economy. Business education is a programme designed to equip learners with both academic and vocational skills needed

for both salaried jobs and self-employment as entrepreneurs (Odike & Nnaekwe in Amah & Onukwuli, 2024). It is a form of education that enriches basic education for teaching career, entrepreneurship, business understanding, office understanding, office environment and vocational practices (Anyaeneh & Nzegwu in Nwokike, Ezeabii & Jim, 2018). Amah and Moore (2022) noted that through Business Education, the behavior patterns of the citizens could be trained in the desired direction. It can develop the learners' intellectual, moral, emotional and physical power to enable them contribute in human capital development (Odike & Nnaekwe, 2019). Business Education enables learners to develop and master the ability to take rational decisions, have wealth of knowledge about job matters and ability to forecast trends given available data (Amah & Mbogu, 2016). It encompasses a range of disciplines, including management, finance, marketing, entrepreneurship, and information technology (Orhorhoro, 2025). By fostering critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and strategic planning skills, business education plays a crucial role in personal and professional development, as well as in driving economic growth and innovation. The importance of business education cannot be overstated. It prepares students to understand and respond to the dynamic needs of businesses and industries, thereby enhancing their employability and career prospects (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2019). Business education provides the tools for individuals to not only succeed in existing roles but also to create new opportunities and industries. For this study, Business Education is a multidisciplinary academic and vocational program designed to equip learners with the critical thinking, technical skills, and strategic decision-making abilities necessary for success in both salaried employment and entrepreneurial ventures within the global economy.

Educational Inequality

Educational inequality refers to the unequal distribution of academic resources and outcomes among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. It manifests in disparities in both academic achievement and educational attainment, often beginning early in life and persisting across generations. It is a multidimensional issue that begins early in life, as disparities in parental investments, home environments, and access to early childhood education shape long-term educational trajectories. According to Blanden, Doepke, & Stuhler (2022), children from wealthier families tend to perform significantly better in standardized assessments and are more likely to pursue and complete higher education than their less advantaged peers. This inequality is shaped by a combination of factors including parental income, educational background, neighborhood environment, and access to quality schools. Educational inequality is intricately linked to broader economic disparities, which indicates a feedback loop where economic inequality reinforces educational gaps, which in turn perpetuate low intergenerational social mobility, a phenomenon they term the "Educational Great Gatsby Curve" (Blanden et al., 2022). Educational inequality refers to the systematic disparities in access, quality, and outcomes of education among different social, economic, gender, religious, and ethnic groups. In Nigeria, this inequality is visible in unequal resource distribution, disparities in the quality and availability of teachers, and the absence of inclusive infrastructure for students with disabilities (Kola & Adekunle, 2022). For instance, while urban and elite schools are well-equipped with learning facilities and qualified staff, many rural and religiously-affiliated schools suffer neglect. Girls in some regions are denied education due to early marriage and cultural beliefs, further deepening gender-based inequality (Ngwoke, 2020; Rustad & Ostby, 2017). Religion also fuels educational division, with faith-based schools imposing admission and operational biases that marginalize certain groups (Azuakor, 2019). Political interference exacerbates this problem by influencing teacher postings and the distribution of educational resources based on affiliation rather than need. According to conflict theory, which underpins this discourse, educational institutions serve to perpetuate existing social hierarchies and inequalities (Mishra, 2013). Consequently, the Nigerian education system often reproduces class and status divides instead of bridging them, thereby undermining national development efforts. While existing studies have extensively documented disparities in access and

outcomes, there is limited emphasis on the role of specialized education, such as Business Education, as a targeted intervention for reducing these inequalities.

Recessed Economy

A recessed economy represents a significant decline in economic activity that extends across multiple sectors and persists for an extended period. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) (2017) defines recession as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales." More technically, economic recession can be characterized as a negative real GDP growth rate sustained for two consecutive quarters (Nwabianke & Mordecai, 2017). This economic phenomenon manifests as a natural consequence of an overheated economy and represents a critical phase in the business cycle, characterized by slowdown, downturn, or extended decline in a nation's economic activity. The recession creates a cascading effect throughout the economy, where reduced government revenue, increased unemployment, rising inflation, and declining purchasing power collectively contribute to a challenging economic environment that significantly impacts all sectors, including education.

Socioeconomic Context and the Problem of Educational Inequality

Nigeria's economy has suffered multiple setbacks since 2016, marked by declining oil revenues, inflation, and currency devaluation. According to Emunemu (2017), the second quarter of 2016 saw GDP decline by 2.06%, while inflation rose to over 17%. This economic downturn strained household incomes and limited access to quality education, especially in specialized programmes like Business Education.

Budgetary allocations to the education sector have consistently fallen short of UNESCO's recommended 26% benchmark. For instance, allocation in 2016 and 2017 stood at a meager 6% (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2016). With education underfunded, especially in public institutions, families have been left to bear more costs, often forcing low-income students out of school or into substandard programs (Gilborn & Marais, 2001; Adeyemi, 1998). This has widened the gap between those who can afford skill-based education and those who cannot.

Business Education and Human Capital Development: A Pathway to Economic Inclusion

Business education represents a critical form of human capital development that serves as a pathway to economic inclusion by enhancing individual capabilities and creating opportunities for meaningful economic participation. Human capital, as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017), encompasses the knowledge, skills, competencies and other qualities inherent to someone or group of individuals which they acquired in the course of life and which is used for the purpose of production of goods, services or ideas in market. Business education specifically contributes to this human capital formation by providing individuals with the necessary tools to engage productively in economic activities, thereby promoting inclusive economic development.

The theoretical foundation for understanding business education as human capital development rests on Gary Becker's (1962) Human Capital Development Theory, which posits that individuals possess a unique set of skills and abilities that can be enhanced through education and training. This perspective is complemented by Amartya Sen's (1999) Human Development Theory, articulated in "Development as Freedom," which emphasizes the centrality of individuals and their capabilities in the process of development. These theoretical frameworks demonstrate that business education serves not merely as knowledge transfer but as capability enhancement that enables individuals to participate more effectively in economic activities.

Business Education offers practical training in entrepreneurship, finance, administration, and marketing, skills vital for navigating both the formal and informal sectors. In a recessed economy, these skills are even more crucial. For disadvantaged youth, access to Business Education could transform lives through job creation and self-reliance. Business education functions as a pathway to economic inclusion through several interconnected mechanisms:

1. Comprehensive Skill Development: Business education develops both cognitive and non-cognitive skills essential for economic participation. Human capital is not only about formal education; it includes a broad spectrum of abilities, from problem-solving and critical thinking to creativity and adaptability. Business programs integrate technical competencies in areas such as finance, marketing, and operations with analytical skills developed through case studies and business simulations, creating well-rounded human capital assets.
2. Entrepreneurship Promotion: Business education serves as a catalyst for entrepreneurial activity, which is particularly crucial for economic inclusion in developing economies. Entrepreneurship and innovation can lead to the creation of new businesses and industries. Also, support for research and development can foster innovation and technological advancement thereby enhancing the country's competitiveness in the global market. Through entrepreneurship training, individuals acquire business planning skills, financial literacy, risk management competencies, and innovation capabilities that enable them to create their own economic opportunities.
3. Employment Enhancement: Business education improves employability by providing graduates with skills that are highly valued in the job market. The technical and analytical competencies developed through business programs increase individuals' attractiveness to employers and improve their earning potential, thereby facilitating their inclusion in formal economic structures.
4. Innovation and Technological Advancement: Business education fosters innovation capacity, which is essential for inclusive economic growth. A focused investment in education fosters innovation and technological advancement, providing a competitive edge in the global market. Business programs that integrate technology and innovation components prepare individuals to participate in the knowledge economy and contribute to technological advancement in their communities.
5. Network Development: Business education institutions serve as important nodes in professional and entrepreneurial networks, providing access to mentorship, funding opportunities, and market connections. These networks are particularly valuable for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who may lack access to traditional business networks, thereby democratizing access to economic opportunities.
6. Financial Literacy and Resource Management: Business education develops critical financial literacy skills that enable individuals to manage resources effectively, access capital, and make informed economic decisions. This financial competency is essential for both employment success and entrepreneurial ventures.
7. Communication and Leadership Skills: Business programs emphasize interpersonal skills, leadership development, and communication competencies that are crucial for economic participation and career advancement. These soft skills complement technical knowledge and enhance individuals' ability to succeed in various economic contexts.
8. Adaptability and Lifelong Learning: Business education instills adaptability and continuous learning mindsets that enable individuals to respond to changing economic conditions and technological developments. This adaptability is increasingly important in dynamic economic environments where skills requirements evolve rapidly.

These roles underscore the importance of Business Education not only as a skill acquisition tool but also as a mechanism for reducing socio-economic disparities, particularly among marginalized groups in Nigeria. Although the literature highlights the benefits of Business Education for employability and entrepreneurship, insufficient attention has been given to structural barriers that limit access for disadvantaged populations, particularly in recessed economic contexts.

Barriers to Equitable Access in Business Education

Certain barriers prevent equitable access to Business Education in Nigeria. They include:

- High tuition fees across private and public institutions due to government underfunding.

- Digital divides, especially in rural areas, hinder online learning and access to Business Education tools.
- Urban-rural disparities in the distribution of well-equipped institutions and qualified staff (Emunemu, 2017).
- Gender and cultural biases, which discourage female students from pursuing business-related fields (Akajagbor, 2017).
- Limited policy incentives for extending Business Education to underserved areas (Onukwu & Igoni, 2017).

These barriers perpetuate inequality and exclude the very groups that Business Education should empower.

Advancing the Case for Inclusive Business Education in a Recessed Economy

Business Education, if made accessible and inclusive, can play a catalytic role in reducing inequality and fostering national recovery. Beyond academics, it offers pathways to entrepreneurship, job creation, and sustainable livelihoods, particularly relevant in a struggling economy. As Ifedili (2017) noted, education remains a labor and capital-intensive sector, and its neglect undercuts national development.

Unequal access to Business Education mirrors broader social disparities. Rural youth, low-income families, and women face layered disadvantages that restrict their participation. Reimagining Business Education through inclusive policies and community-based delivery models can reverse this trend. The case for inclusive business education in recessed economies is strengthened by several critical factors that demonstrate its necessity and potential impact:

1. Addressing Youth Unemployment Crisis: The economic downturn has worsened existing unemployment challenges, with the rate of youth unemployment and poverty among graduates increasing daily in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020, as cited in Alao et al., 2023). Inclusive business education programs can provide alternative pathways to employment through entrepreneurship and skill development, addressing this critical challenge directly.
2. Economic Diversification Imperative: Recessed economies often suffer from over-dependence on limited sectors. As Usen and Udukeke (2019) emphasized, there is an urgency of embracing the sustainable and diversifying entrepreneurial opportunities through Business Education programme. Inclusive business education can foster economic diversification by developing human capital across multiple sectors.
3. Pandemic-Induced Educational Disruption: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional educational delivery methods, with more than 1.5 billion of students from about 188 countries globally affected by the total lockdown and closure of schools and tertiary institutions (UNESCO, 2020). This disruption necessitates innovative, inclusive approaches to business education that can adapt to changing circumstances.
4. Digital Skills Gap: The pandemic highlighted critical digital skills gaps, as adequate learning could not take place due to the suddenness of the pandemic as well as unpreparedness of the parties involved, coupled with limited technologies for effective online learning (NCIRD, 2020). Inclusive business education must address these digital competency needs.
5. Social Entrepreneurship Demand: The economic challenges have created urgent social needs that traditional government responses cannot adequately address. As Mohammed and Ndulue (2017) note, social entrepreneurship involves identifying social problems, creating methods of solving them and designing an action plan to execute the solution identified.

The strategic approaches for advancing inclusive business education in recessed economies entail certain interconnected dimensions, namely:

1. Curriculum Revitalization and Relevance: Current business education curricula have been found inadequate for contemporary challenges. Aquah (2014) submitted that Business Education curriculum was not relevant for sustainable employment for the twenty-first century. Inclusive programs must integrate contemporary skills, digital literacy, and sustainability principles to remain relevant in recessed economic conditions.

2. Experiential Learning Integration: The adoption of experiential learning approaches is crucial for inclusive business education. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes the significant role that experience plays in the learning process and includes interaction among students, instructors, and the environment. This approach is particularly valuable in recessed economies where practical, applicable skills are essential.
3. Industry-Institution Collaboration Enhancement: Traditional approaches like Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) have been found insufficient, as SIWES lacks adequate provisions for up-to-date entrepreneurial exposures and empowerment necessary for achieving the sustainable development goals 2030. Inclusive business education requires more comprehensive industry partnerships.
4. Digital Technology Integration: The Nigerian recessed economy demands digital competency as this is a digital age, therefore, to successfully impart knowledge and skills in learners, the teachers and lecturers themselves must be well versed with digital technologies competences. This includes integrating "game, online laboratories, real-time assessment, experiential digital learning, multicultural online communications" into business education programs.
5. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Implementation: ESD represents a holistic approach that is "locally relevant, culturally appropriate, and universally sustainable - economically, socially and environmentally" (Howard, 2018, p. 150). This approach is particularly relevant for inclusive business education in recessed economies seeking sustainable recovery pathways.
6. Social Entrepreneurship Emphasis: Inclusive business education must move beyond traditional profit-oriented entrepreneurship to include social entrepreneurship. As Ogunyemi (2012) emphasized, "social entrepreneurship creates employment and self-employment opportunities for the less privileged, the poor, the homeless, physically and mentally challenged people in the communities" (p. 151).
7. Green Entrepreneurship Integration: Environmental sustainability becomes crucial in recessed economies seeking resilient recovery. UNESCO (2017) explained that green jobs contribute to the restoration and preservation of environmental quality while maintaining adequate pay, proper condition of work as well as workers' right. Inclusive business education should integrate green entrepreneurship opportunities.
8. Capacity Building and Professional Development: Both educators and students require continuous capacity building. This can be done through collaboration with industries and constant organizing of workshops and seminars as strategies to bridge the knowledge and competences gaps.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the critical role of Business Education in addressing educational inequality and stimulating economic inclusion within Nigeria’s recessed economy. Business Education offers a viable means of equipping individuals, particularly those in underserved communities with the skills needed to navigate a volatile economic landscape. However, certain barriers continue to impede equitable access and undermine its transformative potential. The findings revealed that equitable access to Business Education is not merely aspirational but essential for national recovery and sustainable development. In conclusion, repositioning Business Education is not merely an educational reform but a strategic imperative for inclusive economic transformation in Nigeria. Ensuring equitable access, curriculum relevance, and targeted policy support will not only reduce educational inequality but also strengthen national capacity for sustainable development and economic resilience.

Recommendations

1. Federal Ministry of Education should increase budgetary allocations to Business Education programmes, with targeted funding directed toward rural and low-income areas in alignment with UNESCO education financing benchmarks.
2. National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should review and modernize the Business Education curriculum to include digital skills, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and experiential learning methodologies relevant to today's economic realities.

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