



Economic injustice and functional education: Implications for sustainable development in rural communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study aimed to assess the effects of economic injustice on functional education and its consequences for sustainable development in rural communities within Nigeria's Niger Delta region. This investigation was driven by high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, and the prevailing attitudes of young people toward education in the area. A descriptive survey research design was employed, guided by three research questions. The study's target population consisted of school-aged children and adults residing in rural communities that host major oil and gas pipelines in the region. The research covered communities in Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, and Edo States, as these areas share similar experiences, often only gaining attention during boundary disputes. The sample included 100 community leaders, 100 primary and secondary school administrators, 100 youth leaders, and 100 opinion leaders (both male and female) from 100 communities across the four states. Participants were selected from 20 local government areas, with five local government areas chosen per state. Within each local government area, five communities were selected using purposive sampling. Both purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed in selecting respondents. Data collection was carried out using a 37-item structured questionnaire on a four-point rating scale, developed by the researchers. Three experts validated the instrument, and a trial test involving 30 respondents from Anambra State was conducted using the split-half method, yielding an internal consistency reliability score of 0.74. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed with assistance from three trained research assistants, and 389 (97%) were successfully retrieved. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard



deviation, were used to analyze and interpret the data. The study revealed significant economic injustice in rural communities hosting oil and gas exploration companies, resulting in stark disparities between urban and rural populations. Many residents struggle to afford basic necessities such as food, healthcare, and education, with limited access to clean water, electricity, and essential public services due to governmental failure to provide adequate education infrastructure. Additionally, school facilities in these areas were found to be insufficient. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the Nigerian Federal and State Governments should enforce corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies for oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, ensuring that they contribute to the provision of functional education in these communities.

Keywords:

Economic injustice, functional Education, rural communities, Niger Delta, and sustainable development.

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Introduction

Economic injustice remains a formidable challenge in many developing regions, particularly in rural communities where systemic inequalities persist. In Nigeria's Niger Delta region, despite the immense wealth generated from natural resources, especially crude oil, the majority of the population continues to grapple with poverty and social disparities (Amadi& Abdullah, 2017). These inequalities stem from a combination of interrelated factors, including environmental degradation caused by extensive oil exploration, inadequate infrastructure, pervasive corruption, and restricted access to quality, functional education.

Functional education, in this context, is an educational system tailored to equip individuals with the practical skills necessary to be self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to socioeconomic development (Ekong&Okoro, 2021). Its absence exacerbates economic injustice by limiting opportunities for upward mobility, thereby sustaining cycles of poverty. In contrast, functional education fosters sustainable development by preparing individuals with hands-on skills essential for improving their livelihoods. This is particularly crucial in rural areas where formal employment opportunities are scarce (Anyanwu&Erhiane, 2020). By emphasizing skill acquisition and entrepreneurship, functional education directly supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) (United Nations, 2015).

Beyond financial disparities, economic injustice in the Niger Delta manifests in severe environmental degradation. Oil exploration has resulted in extensive pollution of water bodies and the loss of arable land, further deepening poverty levels among rural populations

(Ekhatior, 2016). Given that agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood in these areas, environmental deterioration has far-reaching consequences, reducing productivity and worsening economic hardships. Implementing functional education that integrates sustainable farming techniques, small-scale enterprise development, and environmental conservation strategies could be instrumental in reversing these trends (Osuafor&Okeke, 2018).

Tackling economic injustice through functional education necessitates a holistic, multi-faceted approach that extends beyond formal schooling. Vocational training, community-based learning programs, and skill development initiatives must be tailored to the specific needs of rural populations (Okon&Ofoegbu, 2019). Such initiatives can empower individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, improve their economic conditions, and contribute to long-term sustainable development.

Economic injustice refers to the uneven distribution of wealth, resources, and opportunities within a society, leading to systemic disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized groups. This imbalance manifests in various forms, including income inequality, restricted access to quality education and healthcare, and social discrimination. In Nigeria, economic inequality is particularly stark, with national wealth concentrated in the hands of a select few, primarily in urban centers, while rural populations bear the brunt of environmental degradation and lack access to essential services (Oluwaseun&Idowu, 2025). Studies indicate that income inequality negatively impacts health outcomes, with lower life expectancy recorded in regions with significant economic disparities.

Economic injustice also results in unequal access to critical social services, including education and healthcare. Research suggests that universal social protection systems are more effective in mitigating income inequality and improving overall health outcomes compared to targeted programs (Lee, 2023). Systemic discrimination—based on factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status—exacerbates these disparities. For instance, the South African Human Rights Commission has reported that structural discrimination significantly contributes to economic inequality, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Liebenberg & Slade, 2023). Encouraging governments to adopt inclusive and equitable policies can play a crucial role in uplifting marginalized communities while driving broader economic growth.

Functional education, which emphasizes real-world applications and hands-on skills, is a fundamental driver of sustainable development. By equipping individuals with the competencies needed to navigate contemporary challenges, functional education promotes sustainable practices across multiple sectors. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) integrates sustainability principles into learning frameworks, fostering informed decision-making and responsible actions that uphold environmental integrity and economic viability. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2023), ESD seeks to "equip people with knowledge and skills in sustainable development, making them more competent and confident."

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the necessity of inclusive, quality education, as outlined in SDG 4. This goal aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, n.d.). Functional education aligns with this objective by focusing on practical skill development that enables individuals to contribute effectively to sustainable development.

To maximize its impact, educational curricula must evolve to integrate sustainability concepts across disciplines. A holistic approach that incorporates core sustainability principles, systems thinking, and ethical considerations can better prepare learners to address modern challenges (Moreira, 2024). However, in many developing countries, economic injustice hinders the realization of these educational reforms. In Nigeria, for example, the education system often appears nationally inclusive but is frequently subjected to ethnic and political favoritism, sidelining marginalized communities. Consequently, policy implementation remains biased, neglecting the masses who are primarily disadvantaged by poverty.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of functional education in fostering sustainability, significant challenges remain. These include difficulties in integrating sustainability into existing curricula, ensuring universal access to quality education, and aligning educational outcomes with sustainable development goals (UNESCO, 2021). Addressing these challenges demands coordinated efforts among policymakers, educators, and communities to create learning environments that prioritize sustainability.

Sustainable development, as defined by the Brundtland Commission (1987), seeks to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection to meet present needs without compromising future generations. The 17 SDGs outlined by the United Nations (2015) underscore the necessity of an integrated approach to development, ensuring that economic progress does not come at the expense of environmental sustainability or social justice.

Rural communities, particularly in developing nations, often lack essential services such as healthcare, education, and modern communication technologies, exacerbating socio-economic disparities (World Bank, 2019). These communities, despite their economic contributions through natural resources, remain marginalized. In Nigeria, systemic issues such as political oppression, corruption, ethnic divides, and religious rivalries further deepen these disparities, making sustainable development an elusive goal.

Economic justice is especially critical for rural communities in the Niger Delta, given their historical socio-economic marginalization and environmental exploitation due to oil exploration. These communities have endured systemic neglect, persistent poverty, and inadequate infrastructure despite being the backbone of Nigeria's oil wealth (UNDP, 2006). The ongoing environmental damage from oil spills and gas flaring has devastated local livelihoods, particularly in agriculture and fishing, pushing communities deeper into poverty (Okonkwo et al., 2021). Economic justice would ensure fair resource distribution, compensation for environmental damages, and investment in non-oil sectors to diversify the regional economy (Ibaba, 2017). Moreover, inclusive policies and active community

participation in resource governance are essential to addressing socio-economic marginalization (Ojakorotu & Gilbert, 2010).

Ensuring economic justice in the Niger Delta is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic necessity for long-term stability. Persistent economic and environmental injustices have fueled social unrest and conflicts over resource control, leading to disruptions such as school closures and deteriorating education standards (Watts, 2012). Without targeted interventions, these challenges will continue to undermine Nigeria's broader educational and developmental goals.

Integrating functional education into local policies and ensuring equitable access to learning resources can foster self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship, and economic resilience in rural communities. However, achieving this requires government commitment, corporate social responsibility, and active community participation in educational reforms. A multi-stakeholder approach, encompassing the government, private sector, and civil society, will be essential in addressing economic injustice and fostering sustainable development in the Niger Delta and beyond.

Statement of the Problem

Economic injustice remains a persistent challenge in the rural communities of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, manifesting in widespread poverty, unemployment, and limited access to essential services. Despite the region's wealth of natural resources, economic disparities continue to widen, leaving many rural populations marginalized and deprived of opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. One of the critical pathways to addressing these inequalities is functional education, an education system designed to equip individuals with practical skills, knowledge, and competencies that foster self-reliance, economic productivity, and active citizenship. However, access to quality functional education in rural communities is severely limited due to inadequate infrastructure, poor funding, and ineffective policy implementation.

The failure to bridge the gap between economic injustice and functional education has significant implications for sustainable development. Without equitable access to education that empowers individuals with market-relevant skills and entrepreneurial capabilities, rural dwellers remain trapped in cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. This not only exacerbates economic inequalities but also hinders the attainment of key sustainable development goals (SDGs), including poverty eradication, decent work, and reduced inequalities.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the relationship the impact of economic injustice on functional education in the rural communities of the Niger Delta, highlighting the implications for sustainable development. It will explore the barriers to functional education in these marginalized areas and propose strategies for enhancing educational access and economic inclusion as pathways to sustainable development.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to assess the impact of economic injustice on functional education in the rural communities of the Niger Delta, highlighting the implications for sustainable development. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Examine the dimensions of economic injustice in rural communities of the Niger Delta region.
2. Assess the impact of economic injustice on access to quality education in rural areas.
3. Analyze the role of functional education in addressing economic disparities in these communities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the key indicators of economic injustice in rural communities of the Niger Delta?
2. How does economic injustice affect access to and the quality of education in rural communities?
3. To what extent is functional education provided for addressing economic disparities in rural areas?

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study covered communities in Bayelsa, Delta State, Rivers State and Edo State. The scope was determined by the proximity of the states and to the researchers and the homogenous experiences of these states and communities as the share common boundaries marked by rural communities that are seemingly only remembered when boundary issues come up. The population of the study comprised all rural communities in the selected four states of the Niger Delta Region that are considered as host communities of major oil pipelines. The sample size for the study consisted of 100 community leaders and 100 school heads (secondary and secondary), 100 youth leaders of communities, and 100 opinion leaders (male and female) selected from 100 communities within the four states. The selection was done in Ika South, Ndokwa West, Burutu and Ethiope West L.G.As for Delta State; Southern Ijaw, Nembe, Ogbia and Sagbama L. G.As Areas for Bayelsa, Akuku-Toru, Degema, Abua/Odual, and Ahoada West L.G.As for Rivers State, and Ovia South-West, Etsako Central, Orhionmwon, and Ikpoba-Okha L.G.A. for Edo State. The selection was done in 16 local government areas within the region. Thus, four communities were selected from each local government area and from each community, four representatives were selected. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for the selection of the communities based on proximity and homogenous development characteristics and as host communities of major oil companies. The purposive and accidental (convenience) sampling techniques were used for the selection of respondents. The purposive was used due to the choice of the respondents with specific reference to their positions and statuses in the communities and schools while the accidental sampling

technique was used due to ethical reasons of consent. The instrument for data collection was a 37-item four-point rating scale structured questionnaire developed by the researchers to elicit responses from the respondents. The instrument was validated by three experts and was trial tested on with respondents sampled from Anambra State through the split-half method. The two results generated for the trial test (0.73 and 0.75) were subjected to internal consistency test with the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) and an index value of 0.74 was attained. 400 copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents with the help of three guided research assistants while 389(97%) were retrieved. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis.

Results

Research Question One: What are the key indicators of economic injustice in rural communities of the Niger Delta?

Table 1: Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' rating on the Key Indicators of Economic injustice in Rural Communities in the Niger Delta

S/N	Item	SA	A	SA	D	x	SD	Decision
1	There is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in this community	112	121	85	71	2.70	1.07	Agree
2	Most people in my community struggle to afford basic needs (food, healthcare, education)	133	79	92	85	2.67	1.16	Agree
3	There is poor access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare services in the school in my community.	90	111	101	87	2.52	1.08	Agree
4	The government has failed to provide adequate and quality education services in my community	127	77	94	91	2.62	1.17	Agree
5	Due to oil exploration and industrial activities people from our communities no longer have access to farmlands and fishing activities for economic enhancement	92	141	93	63	2.67	1.01	Agree
6	Unemployment is a major problem in our community	161	91	76	61	2.90	1.11	Agree
7	Most young people migrate to cities due to lack of job opportunities in the village	99	97	93	100	2.50	1.13	Agree
8	Government and oil companies rarely employ local community members	132	96	83	78	2.72	1.13	Agree
9	Government poverty alleviation programs do not reach the most vulnerable people in the rural communities.	101	98	91	99	2.52	1.13	Agree
10	There is poor enforcement of policies to protect the economic rights of rural dwellers who are host to oil companies	195	68	93	33	3.09	1.04	Agree
Grand Mean Score/Standard Deviation						2.69	1.10	Agree

Results in table 1 reveal that respondents agree with all the items as the mean scores for all the items range between 2.50 and 3.09; values that are significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean for determination of a mean score as agreed or disagreed. The grand mean for

the results is revealed as 2.69 and is significantly higher than 2.50. However, the grand standard deviation is revealed as 1.10. The results revealed the indicators of economic injustice in rural communities in the Niger Delta Region to include a wide gap between the rich and the poor in this community, struggle to afford basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education services, poor access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare services, government failure to provide adequate and quality education services, poor access to farmlands and fishing activities for economic enhancement due to oil exploration and industrial activities, unemployment which pull young adults out of the communities in search of job opportunities, non-extension of poverty alleviation programmes by government agencies, and poor enforcement of policies to protect the economic rights of rural dwellers who are host to oil companies.

Research Question Two: How does economic injustice affect access to and the quality of education in rural communities?

Table 1: Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' rating on How Economic Injustice Affect Access to Quality of Education in Rural Communities.

S/N	Item	SA	A	SA	D	x	SD	Decision
11	Many families in this community cannot afford school fees for their children	95	172	60	62	2.77	0.99	Agree
12	Economic hardship forces many children to drop out of school	82	95	72	40	2.76	1.02	Agree
13	Children from poorer families are more likely to be absent from school	100	100	102	87	2.55	1.10	Agree
14	The government does not provide adequate funding for rural schools.	121	98	87	83	2.66	1.13	Agree
15	There are not enough schools in this community, making access to education difficult.	109	98	99	83	2.60	1.11	Agree
16	School facilities (classrooms, toilets, libraries) in this community are poor	98	113	99	79	2.59	1.07	Agree
17	There are not enough qualified teachers in rural schools.	97	114	95	83	2.58	1.08	Agree
18	Schools in this community lack basic learning materials (textbooks, chairs, boards, etc.)	132	87	95	75	2.71	1.13	Agree
19	Teachers in this community are often unpaid or underpaid, affecting their motivation	90	127	97	75	2.60	1.04	Agree
20	Students in this community do not perform well in exams due to poor learning conditions.	141	76	111	61	2.76	1.11	Agree
21	Poor children are more likely to receive lower-quality education compared to wealthier children	91	95	122	81	2.50	1.07	Agree
22	Some children in this community engage in child labor instead of attending school.	114	100	97	78	2.64	1.10	Agree
23	Many students in this community travel long distances to attend school	134	73	91	91	2.64	1.18	Agree
24	Scholarships and financial aid are not available for students in this community	201	89	76	23	3.20	0.95	Agree
Grand Mean Score/Standard Deviation						2.68	1.07	Agree

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Results in table 2 reveal that respondents agree with all the item as the mean score for the items are significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean as the mean scores for the items range between 2.50 and 3.20. The grand mean for the results is 2.68 with a grand standard deviation of 1.07. The results indicate that economic injustice affect access to quality education as many families in this community cannot afford school fees for their children, many children are forced to drop out of school due to economic hardship, some are always absent from school, as the government does not provide adequate funding for rural schools, to create an enabling access quality education. It also indicates that school facilities (classrooms, toilets, libraries) are not adequately available in this communities, where such are found, they are dysfunctional, and there are no adequate qualified teachers. Schools in this community lack basic learning materials (textbooks, chairs, boards, etc.) with teachers poorly motivated, resulting in poor academic performance of student/pupils. Some children in the community engage in child labour instead of attending school just to help parents economically, while some travel long distances to attend school as scholarships and financial aids are not available for students in this community despite the communities playing host to oil exploration companies.

Research Question Three: To what extent is functional education provided for addressing economic disparities in rural areas?

Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' rating on How Economic Injustice Affect Access to Quality of Education in Rural Communities.

S/N	Item	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	x	SD	Decision
25	Functional education (vocational training, entrepreneurship, life skills) is accessible in this community.	112	97	97	83	2.61	1.12	HE
26	Many people in this community lack access to skill-based education.	101	117	76	95	2.58	1.12	HE
27	Government and private organizations invest in skill development programmes in this area.	71	59	98	161	2.10	1.14	LE
28	There are not enough training centers or vocational schools in this communities	210	81	34	64	3.12	1.13	HE
29	Functional education helps people in this community secure better jobs	59	46	117	167	1.99	1.08	LE
30	Vocational training has helped reduce unemployment in this community	72	82	102	133	2.24	1.11	LE
31	People with functional education are more likely to start their own businesses.	145	90	87	67	2.80	1.12	HE
32	Functional education improves the earning potential of rural dwellers	134	101	93	61	2.79	1.08	HE
33	Functional education can reduce income inequality in rural areas	109	112	56	112	2.56	1.18	HE
34	People with vocational skills are less likely to depend on government aid	121	89	127	52	2.72	1.05	HE
35	Women and youth benefit from functional education programs in this community	56	49	79	205	1.89	1.10	LE
36	Economic disparities in this community would	119	173	42	55	2.92	0.99	

	reduce if more people had access to functional education							HE
37	Government support for functional education in this community is inadequate	177	121	66	25	3.16	0.93	HE
Grand Mean Score/Standard Deviation						2.57	1.08	HE

Results in table 3 reveal that respondents agree to a high extent with items 25(2.61), 26(2.58), 28(3.12), 31(2.80), 32(2.79), 33(2.56), 34(2.72), 36(2.92), and 37(3.16). The mean scores for these items range between 2.56 and 3.16 and are significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean for treatment of a mean score as high or low extent. On the other hand, respondents agree to a low extent with items 27(2.10), 29(1.99), 30(2.24), and 35(1.89), with mean scores significantly less than the 2.50 criterion mean. The grand mean score for the results is 2.57 and is significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean. It also reveals a grand standard deviation of 1.08. The results indicate that functional education is not adequately provided by the government (state and federal) to address economic injustice as vocational training, entrepreneurship, and life skills are not available and accessible in the rural community as many people in this community lack access to skill-based education, and there are not enough training centers or vocational schools in the communities. It also reveals that people with functional education are more likely to start their own businesses, improve the earning potential of rural dwellers, and reduce income inequality in rural areas, and that people with vocational skills are less likely to depend on government aids as the economic disparities in the communities would reduce if more people had access to functional education.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study reveal that there exists a large scale economic injustice in rural communities that play host to oil and gas exploration companies in the Niger Delta and that the indicators of the economic injustice in the region include a wide gap between the rich and the poor in the urban and rural communities as majority of the people in the rural (host communities) struggle to afford basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education services with relatively no access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare services due to government failure to provide adequate and quality education services. This finding aligns with the position of Oluwaseun and Idowu(2025) who unequivocally stated that significant disparities in income levels can lead to unequal access to essential services and opportunities including education. Findings also reveal that rural communities that play host to oil exploration companies, suffer poor access to farmlands, creeks and rivers for fishing activities for economic enhancement due to oil exploration and industrial activities thereby compounding the issue of unemployment which tend to pull young adults out of the communities in search of job opportunities; and that non-extension of poverty alleviation programmes by government agencies and poor enforcement of policies to protect the economic rights of rural dwellers who are host to oil companies. These findings corroborate with the findings of Okonkwo et al.(2021) who stated that the persistent environmental pollution from oil spills and gas flaring has led to the loss of livelihoods, particularly among farmers and fishers, further deepening the economic injustice and poverty levels. It also

complements the findings of Anyanwu and Erhiane, (2020) who stated that the lack of functional education perpetuates economic injustice by limiting the capacity of individuals to participate meaningfully in the economy, thus creating a cycle of poverty and that functional education is essential for promoting sustainable development as it prepares individuals with practical skills to improve their livelihoods, particularly in rural communities where formal employment opportunities are scarce. It also aligns with the assertion of the UNDP (2006) that these communities (rural communities in the Niger Delta, in the case of Nigeria) have faced systemic neglect, poverty, and lack of basic infrastructure despite being the primary contributors to Nigeria's oil wealth.

Further findings from the study reveal that economic injustice affects access to quality education as many families in this community cannot afford school fees for their children and that many children are forced to drop out of school due to economic hardship, some are always absent from school, as the government does not provide adequate funding for rural schools to create an enabling access to quality education. These findings complement the unwavering stance of the World Bank (2019) which stated that rural communities generally lack access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and modern communication technologies, which can contribute to socioeconomic disparities between rural and urban areas due to near neglect of such communities by government and associated agencies. It also indicates that school facilities (such as classrooms, toilets, libraries) are not adequately available in the communities, where such are found, they are grossly dysfunctional and that there are no adequate qualified teachers in the schools available (primary and secondary). Findings also reveal that schools in the communities lack basic learning materials (textbooks, chairs, boards, etc.) with teachers poorly motivated, resulting in poor academic performance of students/pupils. Some children in the community engage in child labour instead of attending school just to help parents economically, while some travel long distances to attend school as scholarships and financial aids are not available for students in this community despite the communities playing host to oil exploration companies. These findings complement the position of Liebenberg and Slade(2023) who found that unequal access to social services results from systemic discrimination based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status which tend to exacerbate economic disparities and that structural patterns of discrimination contribute to economic inequality, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.

Additionally, findings from the study revealed that functional education is not adequately provided by the government (state and federal) to address economic injustice as vocational training, entrepreneurship, and life skills are not available and accessible in the rural community as many people in this communities lack access to skill-based education, and there are not enough training centers or vocational schools in the communities. This situation negates the submission of FAO(2020) which emphasizes that sustainable rural development efforts should focus on improving infrastructure, increasing access to services, and promoting economic diversification to enhance the quality of life for rural populations and reduce the level of economic injustice. Further findings reveal that people with functional education are more likely to start their own businesses, improve the earning potential of rural dwellers, and

reduce income inequality in rural areas, and that people with vocational skills are less likely to depend on government aids as the economic disparities in the communities would reduce if more people had access to functional education. These findings support the positions of Ojakorotu and Gilbert(2010) and Watts(2012), who, though in different studies aligned that fair policies and community participation in resource governance are necessary to address the socio-economic marginalization of the region and that ensuring economic justice in the Niger Delta is not only a moral imperative but also a strategy for long-term stability, reducing conflicts arising from resource control agitation which have over the years resulted in closure of schools and widen the level of economic injustices and deepened the poverty level.

Conclusion

Economic injustice continues to pose a formidable challenge to sustainable development in the rich-oil producing communities of Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Deep-rooted systemic inequalities, reflected in stark wealth disparities, restricted access to quality education, functional skills development and inadequate infrastructure hinder efforts to uplift local livelihoods. These structural barriers not only sustain cycles of poverty but also limit opportunities for economic advancement thereby dehumanizing the people who play host to oil and gas facilities.

A transformative solution lies in functional education, which prioritizes practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills and attitude tailored to local economic realities. By integrating this approach into educational policies and ensuring widespread access to learning resources, rural communities can cultivate self-sufficiency, foster entrepreneurship, and enhance economic resilience. Moreover, incorporating digital tools and innovative learning methods can further amplify the impact of functional education, equipping individuals with the adaptability needed in an evolving economic landscape.

Realizing this vision requires a concerted effort from multiple stakeholders. Government commitment to educational reform, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and active community involvement are all crucial for driving meaningful change. Additionally, fostering public-private partnerships can accelerate the development of sustainable education models that directly address the economic challenges faced by these communities.

Ultimately, tackling economic injustice through functional education is a critical step toward fostering inclusive growth, reducing youth unemployment, and ensuring long-term sustainability in the Niger Delta. A collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach—where government, private enterprises, and civil society align their efforts—will be instrumental in creating a more equitable and prosperous future for the region

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria in partnership with oil and gas exploration companies and other Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) should make and implement inclusive education policies that prioritize free and quality education in rural areas to promote

functional education in the region. This will help to reduce the economic gaps between the rural host communities and the urban areas.

2. The Federal and States Government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency increase budgetary allocation to rural education, ensuring adequate funding for infrastructure, teacher training, and learning materials. This will encourage teachers and learner to put in their best in the development of functional skills and attitude for improved livelihood.
3. The Federal and States Government of Nigeria should enforce corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies for oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, mandating contributions to functional education. This will not only reduce encourage students to develop functional skills but also curb further expansion of poverty within the region.
4. The Federal and States governments should develop community-based vocational training programmes that equip youths with skills in agriculture, renewable energy, ICT, and local entrepreneurship. If this is done, students (youth) will functionally engaged and they could be employers of labour in the near future rather job seekers.
5. The Federal and States governments, in collaboration with oil and gas companies should expand technical and vocational education and training (TVET) centers tailored to the Niger Delta's economic realities. This will motivate the students and make the intended skill acquired relevant to the learners.
6. The relevant government departments and agencies should engage traditional rulers and local leaders in promoting the value of functional education in the area.
7. The relevant government departments and agencies in partnership with the oil and gas exploration companies should ensure the implementation of environmental remediation programmes to mitigate oil pollution effects on community health and school attendance.

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