Impact of Funding Constraints on Practicum in Community Development Education in Rivers State University

WAMI, KEVIN CHINWEIKPE
Department of Adult Education & Community Development, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Abstract- ***This study investigates the impact of funding constraints on practicum in Community Development education in Rivers State University. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Two objectives and research questions guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 150 students and 15 lecturers of adult education and community development department of the Rivers State University. Using the purposive sampling technique, the entire population was used as sample of the study. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled "impact of funding constraints on practicum in Community Development education Questionnaire" was structured in line with the four-point summated rating scale response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The instrument was validated and its reliability index established at 0.82 using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and rank order were used in answering the research questions. Findings revealed that funding inadequacies significantly constrain the organization of practicums, limit field exposure, and reduce the effectiveness of experiential learning. The study concludes that without adequate funding, the objectives of Community Development education are compromised. It recommends stronger government funding support, greater utilization of community partnerships, and the integration of low-cost digital innovations to enhance student training and community engagement.***

Index Terms- ***Funding, Practicum, Community Development, Experiential Learning, Higher Education.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Practicum in Community Development education is intended to be a practical, non-formal, and experiential learning component—designed to immerse students in real-world community contexts, where they apply theoretical frameworks, develop problem-solving skills, and foster community engagement. This approach aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which emphasizes learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Similarly, Freire's theory of praxis (1970) underscores that authentic learning involves reflection and action, situating learners as agents of change in their communities.

However, in Nigeria, and particularly within Rivers State, this ideal is often undermined by chronic underfunding in the tertiary education sector. Nationally, Nigeria has consistently failed to meet UNESCO's recommended allocation of 26 percent of national budgets toward education, instead investing far less—often under 12 percent, and frequently dipping as low as 6–8 percent of annual budgets Aiyedun (2020). These shortfalls directly impact universities' ability to organize and support field-based practicums, which require funding for transport, supervision, logistics, and community engagement.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), established in 2011, was intended to mitigate these deficits by administering education taxes and disbursing funds to public tertiary institutions . Nevertheless, budget allocations remain inadequate relative to the scale of needs. Research by Amadi and

Nwogu (2025) highlights that insufficient funding contributes to gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, learning materials, and program relevance in Nigerian higher education Amadi and Nwogu (2025). Additionally, Ogunode and collaborators (2022) found that inadequate funding severely hampers the implementation of community service programs—of which practicums are a critical part—in Nigerian universities.

Such constraints mean that many institutions revert to delivering practicum components within formal classroom settings. While logistically less demanding, this formalization undermines the experiential and participatory learning objectives of the practicum. Students miss out on authentic community engagement, hands-on problem-solving, and reflective practice—weakening their development as competent community development professionals.

Now, the consequences of this shift span multiple dimensions:

a. Student Competencies: Without exposure to fieldwork, students are limited in acquiring practical skills—such as participatory rural appraisal, community mobilization, conflict resolution, and grassroots project design.
b. Community Impact: Communities lose the mutual benefits of student-led interventions and collaborations, further narrowing the impact of universities in developmental efforts.
c. Institutional Credibility: Universities risk compromising their role in advancing national development when their graduates lack practical competence.

Moreover, the broader educational landscape in Nigeria reflects systemic governance and resource allocation challenges. Underfunding is pervasive across all levels of education—primary, secondary, and tertiary—leading to dilapidated infrastructure, teacher shortages, and diminished educational quality Teesas (2025). Secondary schools suffer similarly, with funding gaps linked to compromised graduate quality, higher rates of indiscipline, and academic malpractice. The repercussions cascade upward: if foundational levels are fragile, higher-level specialization like practicum becomes even harder to sustain effectively.

Amid these realities, innovation and alternative models emerge as viable pathways. For example:

a. University-community partnerships (service-learning models) can mobilize local resources, volunteerism, and stakeholder engagement to offset funding limitations.
b. Digital and simulated field experiences may complement limited physical practicums, offering scaled-down but interactive learning environments.
c. Public-private and NGO collaborations can help cost-share field exposure and supervision activities, aligning with calls for education reform through partnerships.

These approaches are supported by evidence from related sectors. Lakan (2025) showed that community participation in infrastructure development—through resource contributions like labor and materials—significantly boosts sustainability and outcomes, signaling a promising model for sustainability in field-based education.

Scholars emphasize that community development education is rooted in non-formal, participatory learning (Freire, 1970; Kolb, 2015). Practicum provides students with exposure to real community settings, encouraging problem-solving and leadership development. However, funding challenges in Africa hinder experiential learning. According to Mugisha (2020), inadequate resources for transport, field supervision, and logistics force institutions to adopt classroom models. Similarly, Adedeji and Oyebade (2021) argue that Nigerian universities often lack structured partnerships with communities, further limiting practicum opportunities. Innovations such as virtual community simulations (Kellerman, 2022), partnerships with NGOs, and community-based service-learning models (Eyler & Giles, 2018) offer potential pathways to bridge the funding gap. Yet, empirical studies on their effectiveness in Nigeria are scarce.

Therefore, this study seeks to delve into how funding constraints reshape practicum delivery in Community

Development education in Nigeria—especially at universities in Rivers State—and to identify innovative, cost-effective models to salvage the experiential integrity of practicum. By unearthing these dynamics, the research aims to inform policy, institutional reforms, and pedagogical practices that enhance the quality, relevance, and impact of community development education.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Community development education in Nigeria emphasizes the importance of experiential learning through practicums. However, poor funding has forced institutions to adopt formal classroom teaching approaches instead of non-formal, field-based learning. This creates several problems: Students lack hands-on skills in participatory community work, the objectives of practicum as a bridge between theory and practice are undermined, communities lose the potential benefits of student-led interventions.

The credibility of higher education in producing competent development practitioners is weakened. Despite recognition of these challenges, there is limited empirical research exploring the extent, implications, and possible innovations that can sustain practicum in community development education under financial constraints.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate facilitators' welfare management for effective job performance in non-formal education centres in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. Determine the extent to which funding challenges affect the implementation of practicum in Community Development programs.
2. Assess the impact of reduced fieldwork exposure on students' acquisition of practical competencies.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study

1. How does underfunding affect the organization and delivery of practicum in Community Development?
2. What are the perceived impacts of reduced fieldwork exposure on students' competencies?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised one hundred and fifty (150) students and fifteen lecturers in the department of adult education and community development in the faculty of Education, Rivers State University. From the population, a sample of one hundred and fifty students and fifteen lecturers were constituted. The sample was obtained through purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled impact of funding constraints on practicum in Community Development education Questionnaire. It consists of two sections, A and B. section A generated demographic data of the respondents while section B had 12 items addressing the research questions and eliciting Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree response options. The instrument was validated and its reliability index established at 0.82 using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and rank order statistics were used to answer the research questions. Decision for the analysis was based on a mean score of 2.50 and above for Agree while below 2.50 was for disagree, this was obtained by taking the mean of the ratings thus: 4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.50.

V. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results obtained after data analysis are presented below.

Research Question 1:
Howdoesunderfundingaffecttheorganizationanddelivery ofpracticum in Community Development?

Table 1: Mean Perceptions of Respondents on How Underfunding Affect the Organization and Delivery of Practicum in Community Development.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Students (N = 150). $\bar{X}_1$	Lecturers (N =15) $\bar{X}_2$	Mean Set $\frac{X1+X2}{2}$	Rank Order	Remarks
	Insufficient fund limits opportunity for field visits in practicum for community development.	4.05	3.81	3.90	2nd	Agreed
2.	Lack of financial support reduces the availability of learning materials and resources in practicum.	4.01	3.82	3.92	4th	Agreed
3.	Underfunding affects the ability of lecturers/supervisors to effectively coordinate field-based activities.	3.95	3.90	3.93	2nd	Agreed
4.	Students are often compelled to classroom-based practicum sessions instead of fieldwork due to poor funding.	3.92	3.95	3.91	3rd	Agreed
5.	Transportation and logistical costs hinder the effective delivery of community-based practicum programme.	4.00	4.03	4.00	1st	Agreed
6.	Inadequate funding reduces the quality of student-community engagement and practical skill acquisition.	4.01	3.81	3.91	4th	Agreed
	Aggregate $\bar{X}/SD$	3.99	3.88	3.92		Agreed

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025

Data on Table 1 revealed that the respondents in their mean perceptions agreed that items 1,2,3,4,5, and 6 with weighted mean values of 3.90, 3.92, 3.93, 3.91, 4.00, and 3.91 and rank order of 2nd, 4th, 2nd, 3rd, 1st, and 4th respectively show how underfunding affect the organization and delivery of practicum in community. The aggregate mean set of 3.92 attested to this finding.

Research Question 2: What are the perceived impacts of reduced fieldwork exposure on students' competencies?

Table 2: Mean Perceptions of Respondents on the Perceived Impacts of Reduced Fieldwork Exposure on Students' Competencies

S/N Questionnaire Items	Students	Lecturers	Mean Set	Rank Order	Remarks
	(N = 320)	(N =226)	$\frac{X1+X2}{2}$		
		$\bar{X}_1$	$\bar{X}_2$		
Reduced fieldwork exposure Limits students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life community setting.	4.00	3.71	3.89	4th	Agreed
Lack of adequate field experie- nce negatively affects students' problem and decision-making skills.	4.10	3.82	4.03	2nd	Agreed
Students who undergo limited practicum fieldwork struggle are unable to develop leadership and teamwork competencies.	4.03	3.91	4.04	3rd	Agreed
Insufficient field exposure reduces students' confidence in engaging directly with community.	3.81	3.85	3.79	5th	Agreed
Practical fieldwork is essential for building students' research and data collection skills in community development.	3.94	3.70	3.82	4th	Agreed
Reduced field experience lowers students' preparedness for future professional practice in community development.	4.04	3.80	3.94	6th	Agreed
Aggregate $\bar{X}/SD$	3.98	3.79	3.91		Agreed

Data on Table 2 revealed that the respondents in their mean perceptions agreed that items 7,8,9,10,11, and 12 with weighted mean values of 3.89, 4.03, 4.04, 3.79, 3.82, and 3.94 and rank order of 4th, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 4th, and 6th respectively represents the perceived impacts of reduced fieldwork exposure on students' competencies. The aggregate mean set of 3.96 attested to this finding.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results from Table 1 revealed that Insufficient funding limits opportunities for field visits during practicum in community development; lack of financial support reduces the availability of learning materials and resources for practicum; underfunding affects the ability of lecturers/supervisors to effectively coordinate field-based activities; students are often compelled to undertake classroom-based practicum sessions instead of fieldwork due to poor funding; transportation and logistical costs hinder the

effective delivery of community-based practicum programs; inadequate funding reduces the quality of student-community engagement and practical skill acquisition. In agreement with this finding, This approach aligns with Aiyedun (2020) who averred that in Nigeria, and particularly within Rivers State, this ideal is often undermined by chronic underfunding in the tertiary education sector. Nationally, Nigeria has consistently failed to meet UNESCO's recommended allocation of 26 percent of national budgets toward education, instead investing far less—often under 12 percent, and frequently dipping as low as 6–8 percent of annual budgets. These shortfalls directly impact universities' ability to organize and support field-based practicums, which require funding for transport, supervision, logistics, and community engagement. Furthermore, the underfunding has led to learning outcome deficiencies as contained in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which emphasizes learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Similarly, Freire's theory of praxis (1970) underscores that authentic learning involves reflection and action, situating learners as agents of change in their communities.

The result from Table 2 revealed that Reduced fieldwork exposure limits students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life community settings; Lack of adequate field experience negatively affects students' problem-solving and decision-making skills; Students who undergo limited practicum fieldwork struggle to develop leadership and teamwork competencies; Insufficient field exposure reduces students' confidence in engaging directly with communities; Practical fieldwork is essential for building students' research and data collection skills in community development; Reduced field experience lowers students' preparedness for future professional practice in community development. In collaboration with this finding, Mugisha (2020), opined that inadequate resources for transport, field supervision, and logistics force institutions to adopt classroom models. Similarly, Adedeji and Oyebade (2021) argue that Nigerian universities often lack structured partnerships with communities, further limiting practicum opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that underfunding significantly undermines the organization and delivery of practicum in Community Development education. Designed as a practical and experiential course, the practicum is intended to bridge the gap between theory and real-life community engagement. However, inadequate financial support has reduced it to classroom-based instruction in many Nigerian universities, thereby limiting students' opportunities to acquire essential competencies such as problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, and effective community participation. The findings further reveal that reduced fieldwork exposure weakens students' confidence and readiness for professional practice, while also compromising the overall goals of Community Development education. Despite these challenges, the study highlights that innovative approaches—such as fostering community partnerships, leveraging low-cost digital technologies, and strengthening institutional collaborations—can mitigate the negative effects of underfunding.

In conclusion, the study stresses that sustainable funding and innovation are critical to preserving the integrity of practicum in Community Development education. If stakeholdersincluding government, universities, and communities prioritize financial support and embrace creative alternatives, practicum can continue to provide students with meaningful experiential learning, equipping them to contribute effectively to grassroots development in Nigeria and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Increased Government and Institutional Funding: Universities and policy makers should allocate adequate funds to support field-based practicum, covering logistics, transportation, and materials needed for effective student engagement.
2. Strengthening Community Partnerships: Higher institutions should collaborate with local communities, NGOs, and private organizations to

co-sponsor practicum activities and provide practical sites for learning.

3. Integration of Digital Technologies: Cost-effective virtual tools (e.g., simulations, community mapping apps, and online collaboration platforms) should be adopted to complement fieldwork where physical visits are limited.
4. Capacity Building for Supervisors: Lecturers and practicum coordinators should be trained in innovative methods of organizing fieldwork under resource constraints, ensuring quality delivery despite financial challenges.

REFERENCES

[1] Adedeji, S. O., & Oyebade, S. A. (2021). Funding higher education in Nigeria: Implications for experiential learning. *African Journal of Education Studies*, 18(2), 45–60.

[2] Amadi, U. V., & Nwogu, U. J. (2025). *The Impact of Funding on Educational Development in Nigeria*. *Journal of Education in Developing Areas*, 31(3).

[3] Aiyedun, T. (2020). *Community Service Programme of Nigerian Public Tertiary Institutions: Problems and Way Forward*. *Spanish Journal of Innovation and Integrity*, 5, 2022.

[4] Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E. (2018). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[5] Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

[6] Kellerman, A. (2022). Virtual experiential learning in higher education: Opportunities and limitations. *International Journal of Educational Technology*, 9(1), 1–14.

[7] Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.

[8] Lakan, M. J. (2025). *Community Participation and its Impact on Sustainable Educational Infrastructure Development in Rural Areas of Niger State*. *Journal of Research in Adult and Continuing Education*, 4(1), 55–65.

[9] Mugisha, A. (2020). Higher education and experiential learning in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and innovations. *Journal of African Education Research*, 12(3), 56–72.

[10] Ogunode, Y., Yiolokun, O., & Akeredolu, O. (2022). Inadequate Funding and Community Service Programme Implementation. *Spanish Journal of Innovation and Integrity*, 5(12).

[11] Funding Education in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward. (2025, March 3). *Teesas*