

MANAGING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Every nation desires full employment. However, the accomplishment of this objective is an arduous task that involves creating policies and implementing programmes directed towards the goal. Education *inter alia* is a potent tool for building a robust economy characterized with full employment. Over the years, Nigeria has implemented several educational policies and programmes designed to improve its economy. However, all these policies have not yielded the desired results. This study examines the educational policies and programmes of Nigeria with a view to identify lapses that could be remedied to make education more responsive to employment generation. Since education involves many stakeholders, it is opined that to achieve this crucial objective, it is needful to fine-tune policies and re-engineer teaching and learning architectures in Nigeria institutions of learning especially with tertiary institutions to provide cutting-edge skills and competencies for employment generation in the modern world.

Education is regarded as the bedrock of any society because it provides impetus for various activities. The system and method of providing educational services have great impact on the social, political and economic lives of people generally. It is on this premise that educational service deliveries have become a topical issue to both government and people all over the world. Education occupies strategic position in our national and personal life because of its immediate and long term benefits.

As a nation Nigeria has planned and implemented several educational policies and programmes designed to improve lives and boost economic activities. Most of these policies and programmes are yet to produce the dramatic turn around which the nation desires. Hence our national economy is bedecked with plethora of social and economic problems. One of such problems is unemployment. A vast majority of people are affected by this problem especially the youth. The youths constitute a significant portion of the Nigeria population. Therefore, unless urgent steps are taken to address unemployment, the problem will escalate to an unmanageable level.

According to Sarkar (2007); a critical part of the world population (about 18%) is made up of youths between ages of 15 – 24. He further stated that this segment of the world population is confronted with diverse social and economic problems; poverty, health practices, gender biases, education, unemployment, social responsibilities, good citizenship, juvenile delinquency etc. Okafor (2011) highlighted the problem of youth unemployment quite succinctly by stating thus “the problem of chronic youth unemployment is very evident in Nigeria. Every year thousands of graduates are turned out for whom there are no jobs; Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers who ordinarily would have found gainful employment in some enterprise. The self-employed are in quandary as scant infrastructures makes it impossible for them to ply their trade. The National Bureau of Statistics (2009) in its labour force survey reported that the unemployment rate for this age group is 41.6%. It must be noted that the youth population is witnessing an increasing growth rate.

Education and employment are interwoven. Education provides the skill and competence required to live a productive life. For this reason the United Nations listed education and employment as the two utmost concerns for youths and this has always been the case for youth all over the world. Governments understand the fact that the future of the country’s economy is highly dependent on its

ability to produce and maintain a skilled and competent workforce. Education helps the young to live productive and responsible lives. Usoro (2010) stated that Nigeria's higher educational institutions have fallen short of expectations-their products (graduates) lack the skill required by the labour market and this trend results in mass graduates unemployment. The products of educational system (graduates) appear not to have adequately satisfied the requirements of the labour market (i.e commerce and industry) in terms of the requisite skill, competence and practical knowledge. In view of the foregoing this paper tried to;

- . Examine the state of youth unemployment in order to ascertain the causes of unemployment among Nigeria youths.
- . Review the system and apparatus for providing educational services in Nigeria particularly at the tertiary level with the view to establish whether such services meet the standard for training and development of skilled and competent workforce with requisite practical knowledge.
- . Examine ways in which the educational system can be revitalized to deliver effective service capable of generating employment in Nigeria.
- . Advocate a paradigm shift in the management of tertiary education in Nigeria so as to provide greater employment opportunity to the citizenry.

Graduates Employments in Nigeria

The schools impart the labour force with the knowledge and skills required in the workplace. This need is more pronounced at the higher level of education. The extent to which this body of knowledge and skills are transmitted by the educational institution have great impact on the employability of the product of the higher educational system. Nigeria is experiencing a high graduate unemployment. The report of the National Bureau for Statistics indicates graduates unemployment rate of 21.3% which is higher than the composite rate of 19.7% by 16%. See table 1 below.

TABLE 1: Unemployment Rate by Educational Group

Items	Urban	Rural	Composite
All groups	19.2	19.8	19.7
Educational group			
Never attended	20.6	20.0	20.1
Below primary	18.4	22.9	22.3
Primary	15.1	14.7	14.8
Secondary	21.4	25.3	23.8
Post-secondary	13.9	26.4	21.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2010)

Table 2: Distribution of Unemployed Persons by Educational level, Age Group and Gender, March 2009

Educational Level	International Labour Organization			NIGERIA		
	Urban	Rural	Composite	Urban	Rural	Composite
Never attended	0.0	0.8	0.5	0.8	3.2	2.5
Primary	5.7	13.9	11.0	20.4	37.3	32.7
JSS	1.8	4.1	3.3	5.0	8.1	7.2
Vocational/commercial	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
SSS	43.7	62.1	55.6	37.2	39.2	38.7
NCE/OND/NURSING	16.1	6.9	10.2	15.1	5.7	8.3
B.A/B.Sc/B.ED/HND	32.0	11.6	18.8	19.1	5.1	8.9
M.Sc/M.A/M.Adm	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.5	0.1	0.5
Doctorate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.9	1.2	1.1
Age group						
15 – 24	39.0	50.8	46.7	28.9	32.8	32.0

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25 – 44	54.8	43.6	47.4	53.0	46.0	47.5
45 – 59	4.8	4.3	4.5	14.5	16.5	16.1
60 – 64	1.4	1.3	1.3	3.6	4.6	4.4
Gender						
Male	50.4	57.4	55.0	48.4	52.9	51.9
Female	49.6	42.6	45.0	51.6	47.1	48.1
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: International Labour Organization (2010)

The above statistics when supported with table 2 and 3 below become more revealing.

Table 3: Graduate Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (2003 – 2009)

Years	Urban %	Rural %	Total %
2003	17.3	8.3	25.6
2004	25.2	12.8	38
2005	19.0	13.3	32.3
2006	18.8	13.4	32.2
2007	18.7	13.4	32.1
2008	15.8	21.7	37.5
2009	13.9	26.4	40.3

Source: International Labour Organization (2010)

The table 2 shows that the young adults of (covering ages 15-24 & 25-44) are facing significant problems of unemployment in Nigeria. Table 3 indicates that graduate unemployment in Nigeria is on the increase.

Various forms of unemployment have been identified and have been elaborated in the literature. According to Adebayo (1999) and Damachi (2001) these include frictional, cyclical and structural. From another perspective unemployment may be regarded as the proportion of the labour force that is available for work but did not work for at least 39 hours in the week.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2010) stated that the standard definition of unemployment covers persons who during the reference point were without work, currently available for work or seeking for work. Oyebade (2003) in his own contribution stated that Nigeria's unemployment can be grouped into two categories; first the older unemployed who lost their jobs through retrenchment, redundancy, bankruptcy and secondly the younger unemployed most of whom have never been employed.

Although unemployment is a global trend it occurs mostly in the developing countries of which Nigeria is one. It has attendant social, economic, political and psychological consequences. Hence massive youth unemployment is an indication of a far more complex problem. Sarkar (2007) stated that the proportions of world unemployment are steadily increasing and that the numbers of those without jobs remained at an all-time high rate of 6.3%.

Causes of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Accurate data on unemployment in Nigeria may be difficult to access but the events that gave birth to the high rate can be easily discerned from experience and literatures. In the study of unemployment in Nigeria, Adebayo (2003), Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), and Ayinde (2008) have identified the main causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The first is the rapidly growing urban labour force arising from rural - urban migration. Rural-urban migration is usually explained in terms of push-pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate. The factors are further exacerbated in Nigeria by lack of infrastructural facilities which make the rural life unattractive. Youths move to urban areas with the probability of securing lucrative employment in the industries. In addition to this, there is the concentration of social amenities in the urban centres. This means that the rural areas are neglected in the allocation of social and economic opportunities.

According to Sarr (2000) in Okafor (2011) youth migrants in Africa are three times more in number than other migrants. The author argued that the urbanization rate of youths was 32 percent in 1990, compared to less than 25 percent for the non-youth population. He estimated that by the end of year 2010 over fifty percent of youth in Africa will be residing in urban areas where job opportunities are limited to a few modern sectors and establishments.

The second is the rapid population growth. Going by the 2006 census in Nigeria; the nation's populations was put at 140,431,790 and the projections for the future indicate that the population could be over 180 million by the year 2020, given the annual growth rate of 3.2 percent (National Population Commission & ICF Macro, 2009:3). With this population, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa. It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labour force, which is far outstripping the supply of jobs. The accelerated growth of population of Nigeria's unemployment is multifaceted. It affects the supply side through a high and rapid increase in the labour force relative to the absorptive capacity of the economy.

The third is the outdated school curricula and lack of employable skill. Some scholars and commentators have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigeria graduate is not employable because they do not possess the skill needed by the employers of labour for formal employment. Often this is attributed to the Nigerian education system, with its liberal bias. The course content of most tertiary education in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial contents that would have enabled graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers.

The fourth is the rapid expansion of the educational system which directly leads to increase in the supply of educated manpower above the supply of jobs. This has led to the problem of the youth's unemployment in Nigeria. For instance, according to Manning and Junankar (1998), the total numbers of graduates turned out by the higher institutions in Nigeria, which were 73,339 in 1986/1987 rose to 131,016 in 1996/1997. Presently with over 97 universities in Nigeria (Federal, State, and Private) and the increasing demand for higher education, there has been the problem of suitable and adequate employment as varieties of graduates are turned out by these higher institutions every year. Ordinarily, this should not have been a problem, but the reality is that the Nigerian economy is too weak to absorb this large number of graduates. Further, there is no vibrant manufacturing sector which has the capacity to absorb unemployed youths in Nigeria. There are over 800 collapsed industries in Nigeria and over 37 factories have closed shop in 2009. About half of the remaining operating firms have been classified "ailing", a situation that poses a great threat to the survival of manufacturing sector in the country next few years. According to a survey carried out as part of its membership operational audit in January by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN); the 834 figures represent the cumulative aggregates of firms that have shut down their operations in 2009 across the country. The MAN's survey usually covers geo-political zones into which the country is divided, in terms of manufacturing activities. These include the Lagos, northern, southern, east, south-south and south-west areas. The report of the survey showed that in 2009, a total number of 176 firms became terminally sick and collapsed in the northern area, comprising the Kano and Kaduna states manufacturing axis. In the South-east area which is comprised of Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Abia States, a total number of 178 companies closed shops during the period. While in the south-south area which consisted of Rivers, Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom States, 46 companies shut down operations before December, 2009. According to the survey, the South -West area, which is comprised of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kogi and Kwara States, lost 225 companies during the year. It noted that the Lagos area, covering Ikeja, Apapa, Ikorodu and other industrial division in the state, followed closely with 214 manufacturing firms closing shops before the end of 2009 (Okafor, 2008; Oparah, 2011, Usman, 2011).

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In a nutshell, the fact is that the Nigerian investment climate is not investor friendly. Besides, higher and multiple levies and taxation being paid by these companies, energy crisis have combined to make the cost of doing business in Nigeria to be very exorbitant. Adedoye (2010) and Onifade (2011) opined that when the industries and factories closed shops or relocated to a friendlier economic environment, workers were laid off and prospects of recruiting new ones were dashed. All these exacerbated the crisis of youth unemployment in the labour market.

Discourse on the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria will be incomplete without discussing the issue of the massive corruption which is perpetuated, and still being perpetuated, by successive military and civilian administrations. Corruption, which has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria, has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks, while some incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats and administrators in the public enterprise and parastatals have liquidated these organizations (Okafor, 2007). The point being made here is that the collaboration of the political elites, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from the oil sale in the last fifty years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youths in various sectors of the economy. The ruling (political) class failed because they replaced the vision, policy and strategy which should be the thrust of every leadership with transaction (contract award and other mundane money-related activities). Each successive government took turns to pry on the nation's wealth by using public power, resources, goodwill, utilities, instrument of abuse and personal gains (Okafor, 2005).

Educational Service Delivery in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria operates a parliamentary system of government which runs on three tiers: the Federal, State and Local Government. The 1999 constitution which made provision for proper delineation of powers among the three tiers puts education on the concurrent list thus making it the responsibility of the three levels of government. In the past, provision of educational services was the responsibility of the government. However, with the declining government revenue and the ever increasing responsibility for provision of educational services occasioned by the rapid growth in population government cannot bear the burden alone. Therefore, the private sector is currently taking part in the provision of educational services. Educational services are delivered via: the school systems and other agencies established by laws and policies, provision of critical infrastructures and facilities, manpower, funding and curriculum.

Over the years planners and executors of educational policies in Nigeria have been less successful hence the provision of educational services in Nigeria has been characterized by inequalities in providing access to education for the urban and rural populace as well as the male and female folks, inadequate funding, ill equipped libraries and laboratories, decaying infrastructures, poor staffing and ill-motivated workforce especially teachers and policies inconsistency and poor implementation. These problems have greatly affected the quality of teaching and learning in schools at all levels. It has equally contributed to the poor quality of graduates from the nation's tertiary institutions. Another issue contributing to low quality of tertiary institution graduates is high enrolment. This has resulted in high student-teacher ratio. The colleges of education, polytechnics and universities are forced to absorb more than they can actually cope with. The fact that the skills and knowledge imparted by educational institutions in Nigeria differs from what is required by the industry have been established by Usoro (2010), Loop (2008), Bangser (2005), National Universities Commission (2004) and Dabalén, Oni & Adekola (2000).

Educational Reforms

The recurring theme in educational sectors across countries all over the world is reform and this is based on the dynamics of the society: change. A phenomenal level of change is taking place in societies demands new skills, competences and practical knowledge to deal with emerging issues. Hoeing (2006) stated that the new professional economy is placing an increasing premium on the mind, body and soul of the adventurer. The problems-solvers are people who can conceive, organize and lead expeditions that “add value” to the society, business and humanity. These problems-solvers have the adventurer’s blend of innocence and wisdom, self-reliance and willingness to collaborate, competence and the capacity to scale new peaks as well as the resilience to persevere through uncharted territory. Sarkar (2007) equally stated that demand of skilled workers in a knowledge of economy has created a hindrance for a large portion of the world youths, especially in developing countries where higher education system has not been able to, realize sufficient “value addition” in terms of enhancing employability in the labour market. Noteworthy point is that today’s youth find themselves in an era wherefore the first time in modern civilization; purely economic value of higher education is no longer a luxury, it is essential to national social and economic development.

Education therefore is being modernized to meet the demand of industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology. The task of education is fast becoming that of developing personnel to speed up the modernization programme. Gone are the days when a degree was widely regarded as a passport to elite status. Employment opportunity creation has become the focus of educational reforms and it is only in this way that educators can empower today’s youths.

Conclusions

The challenge of youth employment is evident in Nigeria. This problem has far reaching economic and social implications. It not only hampers economic growth and development but threatens the stability of the nation in the long run. Although other factors contribute to this problem, it is obvious that the educational system is a major tool that can be used to provide lasting solutions. The content of education and training (in most cases) not in line with work place requirements to facilitate the employability of the graduates is a menace. No matter how daunting it may seem, the bull has to be taken by the horn. There is widening gap between the present educational apparatus and the demands of the labour market. It is undoubtedly clear that if graduates were to have all the required skills that will place them at a better position in the labour market, most of the unemployed graduates would have been gainfully self-employed. The abysmal fund unavailability has also hampered the full trainability of Nigerian undergraduates.

Recommendations

The issue of youth employment is very crucial for economic development. Unemployment must be tackled if a nation is to grow. It is from this background therefore, that the following recommendations are put forward.

Appropriate mechanism should be established to facilitate interaction between government, industry and educators. The industry should have the means to articulate its needs and then contribute to the design of solution. Improvement should be driven by policies and include initiatives that generate impact across board to all sectors of the economy.

The quality and relevance of educational programmes should be improved. The relevance of course content should be stepped up to meet workplace requirements. This will enhance employability not only within but outside the shores of this nation as the world has become a global village following the advancement in ICT.

Professional and vocational education should be encouraged and supported as these can generate employment. This is a good platform through which unemployed graduates can get

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themselves employed. As a matter of fact, a self-employed graduate provides a window for the engagement of at least three others which will go a long way to reducing this menace. Adequate funding of education and research should be a topmost priority to the stakeholders. Research provides avenue for improvement of education and other aspects of human endeavours. Establishment of model schools with suitable arrangement for staff exchanges should be considered by stakeholders. The exchange will help to improve standards in other institutions.

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