

Topic: Programs in Nigerian Higher Institutions and Graduates Unemployment

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Abstract: *The study investigated the programmes in Nigerian higher institutions and how they influence unemployment of graduates in the country. The study employed the survey design. The population of the study includes two universities, two polytechnics and two colleges of education in Lagos State. A total of 350 participants, which include graduates and students were sampled for the study. A researcher constructed interview schedule and direct observation were used to collect data on the three research questions drawn for the study. The data were analysed using rating of the structured interview in tables and percentages. The results of the study revealed that Nigerian graduates are not only unemployed but can hardly meet the requirements of available job vacancies due to the stereotype nature in scope, content and methods of the programmes in the institutions. Recommendations such as collaboration of companies (end- users) and institutions in the training of students, restructuring of the content and methodology of programmes and providing soft loans and other facilities to the young graduates were proffered to reduce the rate of graduates' unemployment in Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Education has been the major index for national development. This was brought to the fore as Nigeria approached independence with the need to restructure the educational system to effect positive impact. Thus the Ashby Commission was constituted to look into Nigeria manpower needs. The recommendations of the commission brought about so many innovations in the Nigerian system of education. The changes were felt in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education. Prior to independence, Nigeria had few tertiary institutions with the University College of Ibadan being the highest having limited stereotype programs mainly in the humanities (Okafor, 2011). The tertiary system of education got a boost in number and course content as many programs were introduced such as the sciences and the technical courses when the Ashby commission recommendations were implemented..

In furtherance to the Ashby Commission, the National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1977 came up with more policy changes in the Educational sector. Thus Section 79 posits that Science and Technology Education should be given 70% in admission into tertiary institutions while Arts and Social Sciences should have 30%. This policy was hoped to bring about the required manpower that will harness Nigeria resources and increase the employment rate of graduates(Akintunde,2010). This inadvertently led to admission culture which gave prominence to students who offered the Science and Technical academic programmes.

The policy on Science and Technical admission got a boost as enrollment into the higher institutions increased and a larger number of graduates were turned out. The few years after independence witnessed a boom with graduating students having good jobs in the offing. This perhaps was due to the oil boom and limited number of graduates (Salami, 2011). The trend took a sharp turn with the rise in population accompanied by corresponding increase in the number of graduates. Thus gradually graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions have all tended to become job seekers rather than job creators. Most of the time, the types of jobs which they consider appropriate for their status are not available, hence the large pool of unemployed graduates in the country (Salami).

The initial national preference for Science and Technical Education as opposed to Arts and Social Science seemed not to have solved the issue of self reliance in Nigerian graduates. No doubt there is a school of thought that believes that the tertiary institutions of today have generally been too theoretical in the approach to their courses and have virtually ignored the training of students in entrepreneurship and creativity to the extent that students who graduate from the institutions are not in any way equipped for self employment.

Most programmes of Nigerian higher institutions seemed not to have met the requirements of the manpower needed. This could be in their teaching methodology, scope and content (Bashorun, 2011). Stakeholders in education generally see education as an investment. Parents and guardians ignore all the options and sacrifice their scarce resources to have their children educated in the hope that education will open the gates of employment into attractive jobs to them. Moreover, it is believed that the higher one climbs the education ladder, the easier it is to secure an attractive job. All these become mirage as thousands of Nigerian graduates roam the streets and various offices in the urban cities in search of unavailable jobs. To such people, higher education has failed its function of empowering graduates to be employable.

The programmes offered in the tertiary institutions are required to equip the students with the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences. These competences are used in employment resulting in economic development of the individual and the society at large. For the skill, knowledge and competences learnt in the higher institutions to be useful, the program must be appropriate and must match the tasks, skills needed in different jobs. If the competences do not match the tasks in a particular job, the graduate cannot do the job. This coupled with the fact that the programs offered in the institutions do not allow for the graduates to be self employed, have led to the frustrating experience of unemployment among graduates of Nigerian higher institutions.

II. Statement Of The Problem

Unemployment among graduates of Nigerian higher institutions looms such that its consequences are alarmingly daring. Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education graduates are the worst hit. Most of the courses learnt in these institutions become unattractive to fetch the young graduates' good jobs. This negates the response to the clarion call by the federal government of Nigeria to develop and empower the Nigerian youths to enable them contribute to the development of the nation.

Okafor (2011) reported that National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Education Trust Fund (ETF) revealed in their survey that 44 % of the 20 organisations rated Nigerian science graduates as average in competence, 56%t rated them as average in innovation, 50 % rated them average in rational judgment, 63 % as average in leadership skills and 44 % as average in creativity. These statistics reflect a poor assessment of graduates of Nigerian higher institutions and further buttress the argument that they are unemployable. The alarming rates of unemployment among Nigerian graduates of higher institutions have necessitated the call for a review of the programmes offered in the institutions (Gardner, 2005). The need becomes so apt and urgent due to the rise in recent crime rates with terrorism and kidnapping being a menace to the whole nation. It is believed that the programs offered in the higher institutions have not equipped the graduates to be proactive and combat ready to deal with the technicalities of the labour market. Thus the study sought to investigate the courses offered in Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education and how effective they are in aiding the graduates to becoming employable, thereby reducing unemployment.

Research Questions

The following guided the study:

1. What are the requirements in the labour market that Nigerian graduates are yet to fill?
2. To what extent have programs of study in Nigerian higher institutions contributed to unemployment among the graduates?
3. How would methodology in teaching and course content reduce the rate of unemployment among graduates of Nigerian higher institutions?

III. Literature Overview

Employment refers to the number of people who work for salary either in cash or kind, work on their own account or are unpaid family workers. Unemployment figures include those that are able to work and are available to work but are out of work, through recognised channels. This definition should be extended to include those unemployed persons who give up job-seeking out of frustration, are retrenched or laid-off persons. Colleges and universities have traditionally had three major goals. They teach, conduct research, and provide service to the community. Higher education Institutions can contribute to economic development in a variety of ways but the reverse is almost the case in Nigeria as most graduates from higher institutions are left without jobs. Development Plans of Tertiary Education, implementation strategies and practices are critical in developing the appropriate caliber of human capital for a country. Gardner (2005) argued that for Tertiary Education to deal with the human capital needs of a country appropriately there is a flexibility challenge that must be overcome between the production of Generalist, Versatelist and Specialist.

The main preoccupation of the post independent Nigerian government is to build a formidable manpower force through education that is relevant to the country needs. (Okafor, 2011). Thus acquisition of special and relevant skills and creation of jobs have remained a focal point in the Nigerian Government policy. To get the desired manpower among the graduates, the NPE made it mandatory that higher percentage of admission is given to the sciences, technical and vocational courses. This policy is meant to create and promote self-dependence and self-reliance by producing gainful self-employment to the graduates (Awogbenle. & Iwuamadi, 2010). It is believed that the education system operated since the post-independence placed emphasis on academic excellence rather than skill acquisition which can prepare the individual for a more useful and fulfilling life within the society. This over reliance on academics rather than skills could be the major bane of graduates' unemployment in Nigeria.

The incessant cry and critique of most programmes and their content in Nigerian higher institutions led to the establishment of several committees, worthy of note is the Chukwuma Committee (Oluseyi & Elegbede, 2012). These committees were given the mandate to critique the seeming ineffective courses in order to bring out the Nigerian need of self-reliant graduates. In tackling the problem of unemployment among Nigerian graduates, various theoretical approaches have been employed. The systems theory which advocates for interrelation among input, throughput and output factors in organisations was used. It involves transdisciplinary study of the various programmes in the institutions while taking into account multiple objectives, constraints and resources. Koontz in Ezeani (2006) asserted that all systems including the higher institutions interact with and are influenced by their environment.

The above assertion when translated to resolve the problem of unemployment among Nigerian graduates will involve the consideration of the political, economic, social, ethical and even the educational environments as important. This is because, for a problem like unemployment, its solutions are not with the governmental provision of jobs but other sources which can emanate from the environment (Ezeani, 2006). Unemployment is the greatest challenge to developing countries which is characterised by graduate unemployment (Fajana, 2000). In a study conducted by Fajana, the following factors were identified as the major causes of unemployment in Nigeria:

- the long period of initial unemployment among university graduates in Nigeria;
- faulty manpower planning and expansion of educational facilities;
- the economic recession;
- continued proportionality of expatriates in employment;
- the institution of NYSC ;
- the collective bargaining process;
- graduate attitude to some types of jobs; and
- attitude to jobs in other location.

The unemployment of graduates in Nigeria can be said to be in a systematic manner. From independence till the 1970s, unemployment was never the challenge. However, the trends have changed greatly from late 1970s as the numbers of universities have increased and their curricular though changed, have not produced the desired results. Since the middle of the 1970s, the policy of increase enrolment and turnout of university graduates was aimed at easing some of the development problems identified above. It was hoped that by providing the required quality and quantity of different manpower the nation can advance at a faster pace. Thus the incidence of graduate unemployment is indeed an unfortunate problem, as these graduates find it difficult to enter labour activities to generate growth and development for the economy (Fajana, 2000).

Graduates unemployment has various consequences on the psychological, social, occupational and financial aspects of graduates (Morphy, 2008). These effects can manifest in series of negative attitudes as witnessed in high crime rates such as kidnapping, terrorism and arm robbery. Unemployment has serious effects both on the present living conditions and the future of the society in which the graduates are part of. Unemployment according to Otobo (2002) creates a vacuum in the graduates with the attendant results of idleness, withdrawal, resentment and sometimes violence. Most of the Nigerian future leaders' lives have been in uncertainty due to unemployment. Thus unemployment among graduates can result in loss of status, low self-esteem, depression and lack of economic strength or power.

In trying to get a favourable ground for job-oriented programs, De Grauwe (2008) listed characteristics of educational programmes that have broken poverty barriers by linking education to world of work. The curriculum content goes beyond theoretical knowledge or specific technical skills. It includes transversal skills such as reasoning and relating. The writer stressed that these skills are more useful to graduates in today's volatile labour market. Advocates of change in programmes content in order to beat unemployment, suggested that the curriculum implementation process should involve teachers who are willing to give attention to each student. The inclusion of flexible time table should be used which deviates from the formal or traditional school timetables. In summary, the literature suggests that for an effective human resource development to occur, which will absorb Nigerian graduates, there should be:

- a national development plan;
- a national manpower plan;
- human capital development; and
- more practical methods of teaching.

IV. Methodology

The study employed the survey design. The population of the study includes two universities, two polytechnics and two colleges of education in Lagos State. From the population a stratified sampling method was used to bring out different courses in the institutions. Five courses were picked which cut across science, technical, social science and Art Discipline. The courses are Mechanical Engineering, Business Education, Food

and Nutrition, Economics and English. A total number of 350 participants were sampled for the study. Also a follow up of graduate students was done and a total number of 100 students were contacted. The major instruments for the study were direct observation and researcher interview schedule. Data was analysed by rating the responses on the interview schedule along with the observed primary records in tables and percentages.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1: What are the requirements in the labour market that Nigerian graduates are yet to fill?

Table 1: Gaps in Graduates job Skills

Responses	Percentage
practical skills	87
entrepreneurial skills	79
innovative skills	83
team approach to work	60
leadership skills	75
supervisory skills	60

Table 1 contains the analysed response to the gaps in the labour market that are yet to be filled by graduates of Nigerian higher institutions. It showed that the practical, vocational, entrepreneurial and leadership skills are highly lacking among the graduates.

Research Question 2: To what extent have programs of study in Nigerian higher Institutions contributed in unemployment among the graduates?

Table 2: Unemployed Graduates in Different Programs

Program	No of Graduates Contacted	No of unemployed Graduates
Mech. Engineer	20	9
Bus. Education	20	10
Food&Nutrition	20	8
Economics	20	6
English	20	10

Key: Unemployed include underemployed

Table 2 revealed the response of graduates contacted through follow up. It shows that a high number of graduates in different programmes are unemployed as those who seemed to be working are underemployed. Economics has the least number of unemployment with 6 out of the 20 graduates contacted.

Research Question 3: Would methodology in teaching and course content reduce the rate of unemployment among graduates of Nigerian higher Institutions?

Table 3: Content and Methodology in Higher Institutions

Program	Methodology %		Content %	
	Theory / Practical		Cognitive Acquisition / Skills Acquisition	
Mech. Engineer	66	34	55	45
Bus. Education	73	27	72	28
Food&Nutrition	50	50	60	40
Economics	97	3	95	5
English	90	10	90	10

Table 3 revealed the rated observed methods of teachings and content of the scheme of the programmes in the institutions. It showed that most of the programs schemes contain mainly cognitive topics while the skills aspects are few. Also the activities and methods of teaching do not place priority on practicals except Food&Nutrition

V. Discussion Of Findings

Unemployment is a great scourge to the affected individual and to the nation at large. This becomes more worrisome when those affected are the graduates from higher institutions who constitute the greater percentage of the active work population. The findings revealed that the unemployment rates among the graduates are connected with the gaps in the skills needed in the labour force that the graduates can hardly fit into. These include the practical, entrepreneurial skills coupled with innovative and team work skills. These skills are the hub on which the wheel of job productivity, creativity and ability to work without much control lie. When these are lacking in the graduates then the labour market might not be able to absorb them after graduation. These could explain the emphasis on skills and practical requirements in most vacancies. It seemed that the requirements in the labour market that the Nigerian graduates lacked are connected to the content and methodology used in their training. This was revealed in Research Question 3 that the predominant methods of teaching the students are more theoretical while the schemes contain majority of cognitive topics. This finding supports the positions of Fajana (2000) and Awogbenle. & Iwuamadi (2010) that Nigerian graduates do not possess the requisite skills that could make them self reliant and be gainfully employed.

Similarly it was found from the analysis that the nature of most programmes offered in Nigerian higher institutions could induce unemployment among the graduates. This is so as findings revealed in Research Question 2 that courses that would equip the graduates to be self reliant like Food and Nutrition and Business Education recorded low cases of unemployment. This could be understood taking into consideration that graduates from these courses hardly seek jobs. They become self employed as they engage in Small Scale production or business like owning a Café or supplying confectionery to stores. These findings buttressed the study of Gardner (2005) which emphasised the need for graduates to study programs that will not only equip them but also enable them contribute to the economy of the nation as a whole.

The findings also revealed that unemployment among graduates does not only reflect lack of available spaces for work in Nigeria but also the deficiencies in the nature, methodology and content of programs offered in the higher institutions. This is best understood when we consider the various efforts and pressure mounted on the institutions and federal government to change their content and provide better facilities for practicals (Salami,2011).The need for Nigeria to train graduates that will constitute a viable means of harnessing the nation's resources is yet to be fully realised through the higher institutions. Most courses are taught theoretically; even the technical courses such as Engineering and the sciences do not have enough practicals. During the interview, one of the unemployed graduates complained of the inability of most graduates in the sciences to work with the facilities found outside the school due to lack of practicals while in the university.

VI. Conclusion

The rate of unemployed Nigerian graduates is growing at an alarming speed; the call for drastic actions cannot be undermined. This study revealed that Nigerian graduates are not only unemployed but can hardly meet the requirements of available job vacancies due to the stereotype mode of teaching in most higher institutions that exclude innovations. Most practical oriented programmes lacked actual practical training and some courses were found not to be in demand in the labour market as a result of their narrow scope. Planning for programmes in the higher institutions has not been based on the actual human resource needs of the labour force in Nigeria. These findings are frightening considering the fact that about 70% of the entire Nigeria's 160 Million populace are youths with about 71% being majorly unemployed graduates who are 20 years and above (Emeh, 2012).

VII. Recommendations

The study has made important findings which demand a collaborative effort from all stakeholders involved in the training and employment of graduates in higher institutions. There should be a means of bridging the gaps found in the mismatch between training, skills acquisition and opportunities for employment in industry/job market. Thus the policy of inclusion as championed by many organisations that will enable collaboration of companies (end- users) and institutions, in training students, is a welcome relief that would usher in the desired growth and development in Nigeria. The universities should make pragmatic effort to restructure the content and methodology of programmes with emphasis on practicals methodology. The federal government and the financial institutions should intensify present effort at providing soft loans and other facilities to the young graduates for self employment. Graduates need a new mental orientation by being creative/ innovative in seeing their courses beyond theory to practical.

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