

Socio-Political Implications of Unemployment among Nigerian Graduates: Need for Rebuilding Trust in Educational System

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Abstract

The paper focused on the socio-political implications of unemployment among Nigerian graduates and the need for rebuilding trust in the educational system. Unemployment as a social phenomenon is one of the most potent forces that has created so many reasons for worry in the polity. The cases of unemployable nature of graduates, tribalism, corruption, nepotism and indiscipline expose how unemployment among Nigerian graduates is at the background of poor education system. The study adopted the functional and analytical methods to under see the problem of unemployment in the polity. It recommended that in a bid to rebuild trust in our education system, parents, schools, and government have a big role to play such that parents should limit their interference as regards their children's choice of course of study; the school should focus more on using practical method of teaching in developing the skills of the students; and the federal and state government should help equip schools with standard learning facilities as well as provide scholarship schemes which the students can capitalize on in developing their skills and talents.

Key words: Socio-political, Unemployment, Education, Workforce, Development

Introduction

The importance of the youth in any given society is one that cannot be disputed. This is because the youth in every society comprise the larger portion of the productive population. The youth comprise an important socio-political and economic force in any society they belong. Consequent upon this, they stand a better chance to contribute to the well-being of that same society when properly guided or do otherwise, when not properly guided. Nair (2009) captures the importance of youths in society by stating that, they are the treasure of human resources of a nation having a lot of talent embedded in them, and if tapped in the right direction, would bear great fruits to the benefit of their nation.

Grant (2010) posits that at a global scale, youth unemployment has become one of the major concerns of governments. This has even been worsened by world economic crisis making it the focus of much research and arguments at various global fora. It is necessary to point out that, though the incessant level of unemployment has been a global phenomenon since the 1980s, unemployment has remained one of the most disturbing socio-economic problems blockading the peace and progress of Nigeria (Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014).

Massive youth unemployment, especially of University graduates in Nigeria shows that the nation is experiencing a waste of human resources and as well, is deprived of the services of professional youth force and this is in no way good for any nation that intends thriving the way of development. Sequel to the foregoing, Alarudeen (2019) opines that the state of unemployment among Nigerian graduates has remained a central policy issue since the second half of the 1980s following the downturn of the economy from 1982 and the adoption of the

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. Since then, the topic of unemployment has been discussed more often than not by both the few privileged employed and the unemployed. Nigeria's unemployment rate has been on the increase, standing at 25.9% as at 2013, as compared to 23.12% in 2012 and 23.9% in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). It was projected to rise further to 27% by the end of 2014. Unfortunately, it has continued to increase even till the present, as majority of youths have remained unemployed.

It is interesting to note that there are newspapers and firms' websites in Nigeria such as Punch Newspaper and Nairametrics that are awash with advertisement on graduate job vacancies in one sector or the other. Some of the posts declared vacant are sometimes re-advertised several times perhaps due to lack of qualified applicants. Given the high educational attainment of these unemployed graduates, it therefore becomes necessary to query the relevance of their academic qualification because of a truth, there lies an existing gap between what the labour market needs and what the school produces.

In a bid to find solution to this problem, there is serious need for parents, schools and the governments to work together independently and collectively so as to come up with measures that can help remedy the situation. Based on this, it is therefore the aim of this paper to explore the causal factors of graduate unemployment in the polity, its socio-political implications and the way forward.

Conceptual Clarification

Unemployment

So many scholars, researchers, and even freethinkers have said and as well written elaborately on the topic of unemployment. As viewed by Fajana (2000) in Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014), unemployment refers to a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment. It is one of the macroeconomic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. Put differently, Fairchild (2013) writes that, unemployment is forced and voluntary separation from remunerative work on the part of the normal working force during the normal working time, at normal wages, and under normal working condition. In the course of identifying the types of unemployment, Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014) outlined the different types of unemployment to include; structural unemployment, frictional unemployment, seasonal unemployment, cyclical or Keynesian unemployment, technological unemployment, and residual unemployment.

Graduate Unemployment

According to Oppong and Sachs (2015), graduate unemployment is defined as the number or proportion of degree holders (graduate and post-graduate) in a given economy who are capable and willing to work, but unable to find jobs. Based on this assertion, it is established that graduate unemployment is a specific type of unemployment among people with academic degree from higher institutions of learning. In agreement to the aforementioned, Eneji, Maifa and Weiping describe graduate unemployment to encompass graduates of Universities and Polytechnics who are ready to work, but could not find a job or discriminated by experience. Consequent upon this perspective, graduate unemployment has been explained in this study to mean condition of involuntary idleness for University graduates who are actively seeking for employment, but cannot find any, under the prevailing economic circumstance.

Causal Factors of Graduate Unemployment

First, among the causes of graduate unemployment is poor educational system. It is not only embarrassing, but also discouraging that most Nigerian graduates are unskilled and unproductive and therefore in most cases, lack the ability to pass job interviews. There is indeed a mismatch between the output of educational institutions and the requirements of the labour market and this is the reason why most firms reject applications from graduates especially those who do not have the necessary skills they need irrespective of their qualifications. In this case, one may choose to query the essence of being part of the educational system of Nigeria in the first place as a student. Why would a student spend four to seven years and even more in the tertiary institution, and still be turned down at the labour market? Does it mean that the educational system of the country is faulty that it cannot prepare students with all that is needed for survival outside the school premises? Giving credence to the aforementioned questions, Asiogu (2019) writes that the Nigerian educational sector has made education non-profitable, in that students in the end of their four, five, or six years of study in institutions of their choices, graduate as school leavers, but yet are uneducated. They end up passing through school without letting school pass through them and this results in the production of half-baked graduates who lack proper exposition and commonsense.

Beyond this, most Nigerian graduates are not marketable in the global economy because even the institutions that produced them are lowly ranked. Some of these graduates are also unemployable because their educational career was built on a faulty foundation as many are products of examination malpractice which makes them intellectual giant on paper, yet empty in reality. This could account for the reason most graduates find it difficult to practically defend themselves as well as their certificate when it comes to applying knowledge in solving tasks.

Second, tribalism is another causal factor of unemployment. Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problems of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word tribe in her vocabulary (Achebe, 2000). Tribe is meant to be an acceptable idea among all Nigerians because it explains the beauty of belonging or being recognized as a distinct group. Conversely, it has also been rejected as an enemy because it has brought about division and separation among the people in the polity. This has become so alarming such that a Nigerian child seeking admission into a federal school, a student wishing to enter a College or University, a businessman tendering for a contract, a citizen applying for a passport, filing a report with the police, and a graduate seeking employment in the public service, will later fill a form which requires him to confess his tribe. To prevent a citizen from working anywhere in his country is an act that does not only socially destabilize the polity, but also slows down the development rate of such country. A lot of Nigerian graduates have remained unemployed at present, because they do not belong to a certain tribe or the other in the country and this instill in the aggrieved people of a certain tribe, resentment and tension against other tribes.

Third, another causal factor is corruption. Corruption in Nigeria has left the alarming and entered the brutal stage and Nigeria will die if she keeps pretending that she is slightly indisposed (Achebe, 2000). Corruption has eaten deep into almost every sector of the Nigerian polity: church, school, public offices, among others and it has continued threatening to paralyse the foundation of truth, justice, fairness, and equity upon which the country was built. The issue of morality and legality in the country is one that has remained questionable. Corruption has contributed a great deal to the reason a lot of Nigerian graduates with very promising future have remained unemployed either because they do not have money to bribe their way into offices, or they do not know anybody who can do so on their behalf.

It is no longer news that even though people keep complaining that there is no job in the country, some other people are still being recruited whether qualified or unqualified into different private and public sectors because they were able to meet up with the financial demands of their employers. So, in this situation, one may be forced to ask: what then happens to those without the finance to buy themselves jobs? Why would an employer request for money from an employee whose major aim for securing a job is to save money? And how well can a system that absorbs such attitude maintain sanity and integrity among its citizens?

Fourth, in the polity today, the place of meritocracy to a larger extent has been taken over by favouritism. It is quite disturbing that, as a graduate in Nigeria today, if you do not have relatives or friends who are in higher positions of authority, it is possible that you may remain unemployed if care is not taken. Most employers of labour today now consider relationship as a sine qua non for employment rather than capability. However, this has never yielded productive result for the polity, as it only results in low employee morale, which can mean loss of profits for companies, risk of family feuds which can cause major workplace disruptions and reduce productivity, lack of fairness among employees, among others.

Fifth, another causal factor is indiscipline. It is the failure or refusal to submit one's desire and actions to the restraints of orderly social conduct in recognition of the rights and desires of others (Achebe 2000). Youths who lack respect and are not teachable and cannot be advised on the proper way to do things cannot work under anyone and therefore would remain unemployable. It should be pointed out that most graduates in Nigeria today have remained unemployed because of indiscipline. This is evident through their indecent dressing, indecent hairstyle, indecent use of words and less or no regard at all for courtesy and with this, no right thinking employer of labour would want to employ such people.

Socio Political Implications of Unemployment among Nigerian Graduates

The problem of unemployment as a social phenomenon has caused the society so much trouble and discomfort that it has not only redirected the visions and goals of graduates, but also has ended up turning some of them into agents whose actions antagonise the peace and progress of the country. Viewing the problem of unemployment seriously, Edward (2011), posits that the problem of social and political crime in Nigeria has been worsened by the incessant rate of unemployment and incessant hardship which has forced many University graduates to go into various crimes. On this same issue. Further, he reported that the United Nations Habitat study on crimes and violence stressed that socio-economic inequality and lack of opportunities for social advancement and employment are among the root causes of crime. And this, to greater extent has caused a large number of youths to see criminal endeavors as an alternative to survival.

The disenchantment and frustration of young people due to mass poverty and unemployment, has increased the number of aggrieved youths and resulted in the emergence of "area boys" and "almajiris" who targeted the very society that alienated them. In addition, Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) note that research revealed that armed militant groups in Nigeria namely: Bakassi Boys, Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and Egbesu Boys were made up of youths within 16-17 years (40%), 18-19 years (10%), 20-21 years (20%), and 20-23 years (20%). Approximately 70% of these youths were unemployed which explains why it is easy to recruit them. It must be mentioned that most of these unemployed youths, as a matter of frustration, join insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, among others just to get back to the government as a means of retaliation.

Bennely (2002) argues that urban society is becoming increasingly criminalized, especially with the proliferation of youth gangs. Further, the writer stressed that neither homes nor markets are safe in Nigeria because of frequent occurrence of armed robbery (including bank robberies), rape, assassination of different kinds, ritual murders, vandalism, car theft, cybercrimes, prostitution, use of illegal substances, drug pedaling, gun running (proliferation of small arms), among others.

According to Abdullahi (2005), political godfathers use unemployed youths to undermine the democratic process, thereby hindering the election of competent leaders by the electorate. In other instances, during election, these politicians take advantage of the unemployed youths who are assigned to engage in stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, ballot box snatching, mobilizing children for underage voting, among other activities that bother on rigging of elections (Olarinmoye, 2008). Again, Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014) write that, the inability of the Nigerian State to provide stable power supply made it difficult for investment and that manufacturing industries that rely on generating plants to power their manufacturing outfits end up operating at higher costs than their competitors in other countries, and in the era of globalisation, they chose to close shop or relocate to countries with favourable operating environment. Closure of or relocation of such industries leads to loss of jobs and inability to create new ones, which heightens the crisis of youth unemployment in the country. From the foregoing, it is worth noting that no society enjoys social, economic and political growth when her economy is not viable. Hence the closure and relocation of the industries affect economic development as the contribution they were making to the national economy will be lacking. With this, there would not be need for labour which would automatically increase unemployment.

Need for Rebuilding Trust in the Educational System

It has become a 21st Century government slogan that Nigerians (most especially graduates) should no longer depend on the government for white collar jobs, rather they should set up small scale businesses or venture into agriculture or any other business that can yield profits and as well contribute to the economic growth of the country. This is a very good advice but the question remains: what effort has the government made in creating a favourable environment where these businesses would thrive?

Apart from government intervention in a bid to curb unemployment in the country through the empowerment of the agricultural sector and encouragement of private sector industries to absorb more employee, Bassey and Atan (2012) posit that today's volatile labour market requires government policy linking education to world of work and developing University curricula content that go beyond theoretical knowledge or specific technical skills but transversal skills that include reasoning and relations. Indeed, most University curricula in Nigeria bear little or no practical and more realistic relevance to the needs of the national economy. In order to remedy this problem, Poletaes and Robinson (2008) suggest that Universities should engage in concrete partnership with employers of labour to develop a demand driven curriculum that will produce graduates with skills suitable for employment. Further, the writers proffered a competence based educational scheme to blend theory and practice, thereby inculcating entrepreneurial and vocational skills in tertiary institution graduates. For education to be more realistic and productive, Nigerian schools should employ unique procedures in training pupils and students who have been identified as gifted or talented in specific areas of their interest: medicine, ICT, sports, science, technology, music, fine arts, business, among others. Talented and Gifted programmes should be set up and students who

go through such programmes should be provided with additional information, substantially enough to get them exposed to the usefulness of their skills. Every child is specially gifted with unique talents. Though children may vary in aptitude and learning process, but there must be an aspect where they are gifted in. Students should also be properly guided to study subjects/courses they are really interested in, one that can develop their skills and talents.

The Nigerian school curriculum is loaded with so many subjects/courses that can be labeled as junk in the light of modern development. As a result of this, students end up being stressed and confused. The Nigerian curriculum when compared with that of more advanced countries like Britain and United States is seen to be different in quality and practice. Supporting the notion that the contents of the Nigerian school curriculum gives students fair theoretical grounding, Okebukola (2017) regrets that the much desired process and hands on skills that will facilitate job creation are grossly deficient. Further, the writer gave an example with the High school science curricula in the United States and United Kingdom which are about half in terms of theoretical content load than that of their Nigerian equivalent. American and British students are given a wide vista of opportunities for laboratory work, indoor and outdoor projects and extensive exploration and thus afford students the opportunity to concentrate on learning very secular subjects necessary for their academic development.

A lot of less meaningful subjects/courses should be removed and replaced with the ones that are relevant most especially, the ones that are needed in the labour market. Also, there is need for quality teachers in schools because no nation can hope for quality educational system if schools are staffed with second-rate teachers. There are many students who are eager to learn, but cannot because of the poor teaching techniques of teachers. On the other hand, it should be noted that the quality of teachers is dependent on the quality of training they acquire. Consequent upon this, there is need to double the current rate of teacher-training in different teacher-training institutes all over the country. Also, incentives should be given out to teachers by the government to aid their training and other personal needs, and in so doing, teachers would be motivated to put more effort.

Educational policies consist of government principles in the educational sector that govern the operation of education system. Within a period of 50 years, Finland progressed from austere conditions to global cutting edge. Her projects and surveys have attracted a number of international interests. This is as a result of her educational policy reforms in the areas of an equal system, a science-based teacher training programme and a high regard for teachers (Lonka, 2018). Based on this, It is therefore imperative to point out the fact that there is need to reform Nigeria's educational policies so as to be able to meet up with modern development and these reforms should focus on the aspects of teachers' certification, teaching techniques, curricular content development which should be work oriented, and the values that schools are expected to uphold.

Conclusion

The study emphasized that graduate unemployment is one of the most critical problems facing Nigeria and as a result of this; the country cannot reasonably expect to achieve her developmental aspirations if she cannot effectively put to good use a large number of her trained graduates. The study unveiled the causal factors of graduate unemployment, mainly concentrating on poor educational system. It also examined the social and political implications of graduate unemployment on the nation and the affected individuals. From the foregoing, this study outlined some remediable approaches to graduate unemployment and how trust in the country's educational system can be rebuilt.

The Way Forward

Sequel to the issues discussed, the following measures should be given consideration:

- i. Parents should properly guide their children in studying subjects/courses that are work-oriented and are related to their talents/skills; not compelling them to study courses that are against their wish.
- ii. Schools should engage in partnership with employers of labour to develop a demand-driven curriculum that will produce graduates with skills that the society needs.
- iii. In schools, quality should be chosen over quantity in the sense that school authorities should focus on making available subjects/courses that are realistic and practicable in Nigeria than the ones that end up not being useful to students upon graduation.
- iv. The government (both Federal and State) should help in the formulation of educational policies that target the development of students' talents/skills, the recruitment of qualified teachers, accreditation of courses that are relevant, proper remuneration of teachers, and provision of convenient learning environment for both teachers and students.

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