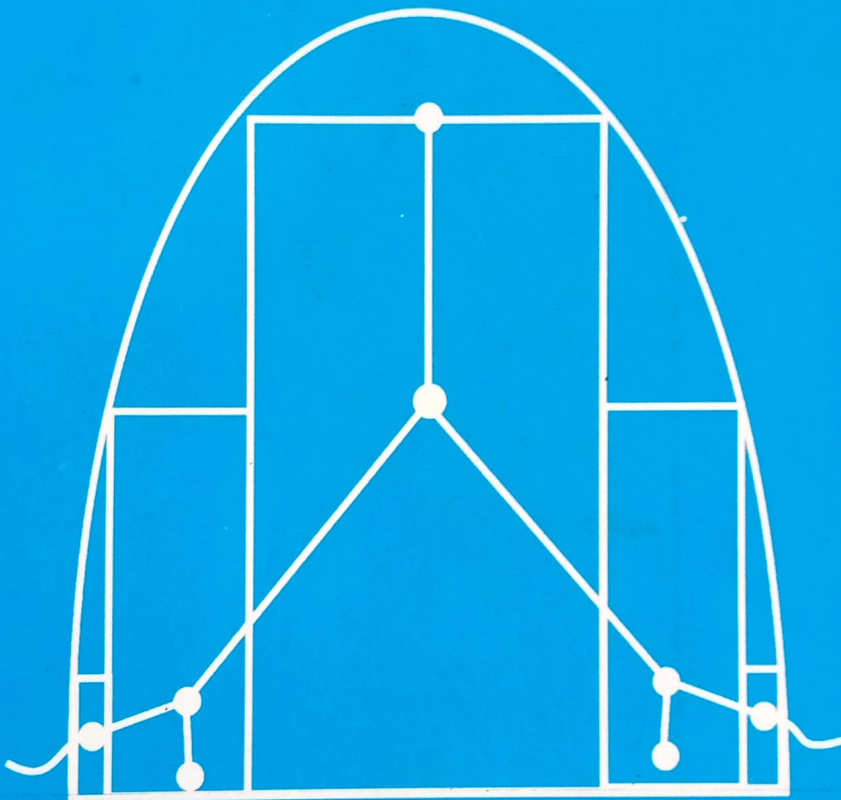


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Abstract

The issue of graduate unemployment has been in the front burner of discourse in the nation in recent years. The churning out of graduates, year in, year out has further clogged the labour market. Though many universities engage in entrepreneurship training programmes, still many of their products are still not self-employable. They lack certain requisite skills for sustainable self-employment. These skills create a gap in their knowledge which should have been embedded in the curriculum used in the process of training them. From the literature reviewed, the paper looked into what the self-employers actually need, recognising the gaps in the required skills and how these can be incorporated into the curriculum the students are exposed to before they graduate. This curriculum should expose students to skills apart from technical and professional skills that will make them employable or make them self-employed, reducing greatly the number of unemployed people in the nation. This will stem the tide of rising social menace in the country often created by joblessness, which if not addressed can threaten the stability of the nation.

Keywords: Graduates' self –employability, youth unemployment

Introduction

Unemployment has been a serious problem facing the country for so many years. This notwithstanding, tertiary institutions made up of Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education, about 322 in all excluding Technical Colleges (Educational and Employability Survey Report – March 2014) had been churning out graduates that have continued, to clog up the labour-market, thereby, increasing the growth rate of unemployed youths in the nation. Unemployment is defined as an economic condition in which individuals seeking jobs remain unhired (Eurostat, 2013). It can also be seen as part of the labour force that is without work but available for seeking employment. The unemployment rate is a useful measure of the health of a particular country over time as it has both social and economic implications. Rising incidence of unemployment results in loss of income for individuals, reduces revenue for

governments, hinders economic growth and increases pressure on government-spending on social benefits in advanced countries especially. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria has been on the rise especially from 2007 to 2011, dropped in 2012 till 2015 and started to rise again in 2016 with the highest rate in 2018 as shown in table one.

Table 1. National unemployment rates 2003-2011

Year	Unemployment Rate
2003	14.8
2004	13.4
2005	11.9
2006	14.6
2007	12.7
2008	14.9
2009	19.7
2010	21.4
2011	23.9
2012	10.6
2013	10.0
2014	7.8
2015	9.0
2016	13.4
2017	17.5
2018	22.6

Source: The National Bureau of Statistics (2019)

The problem of unemployment and poverty spurred the Nigerian government into developing a policy framework for youth entrepreneurship education. This saw the birth of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986, and the Work for Yourself Programme (WFYP) in 1987. Both programmes were joint programmes of training and financial support to entrepreneurs. The NDE was however more extensive and included three core programmes namely the Youth Employment and Vocational Skills Development Programme; the Agricultural Programmes, and the Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Scheme. These programmes made significant impacts on Nigeria's economy and national development as they were able to empower young graduates in the task of job and wealth creation through entrepreneurial thinking.

However, the youths were also confronted with the problem of non-possession of sound knowledge of entrepreneurship or core skills needed to enable them excel as entrepreneurs. Thus the graduates' self-employability was very poor. Graduates' self employability according to Weligamage (2009) and

Oliver (2015), self-employability means the possession of necessary qualities to create employment, maintain it and progress in it.

The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), revealed that about 92 per cent of Nigerian population survive on less than 2 dollar daily, while about 71 per cent survive on less than 1 dollar daily – a condition many have described as inexcusable judging from the abundant natural deposits and high human population at the country's disposal. With an estimated population of about 200 million people (2017) and the high level of poverty in comparison to the abundant resources available in Nigeria is highly unacceptable. There is therefore the urgent need for government and individuals to create more job opportunities for the teeming youths especially through self-employment.

The thrust of this paper is to look into problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria and how the universities can help in enhancing the graduates' self-employability so that they can be job creators rather than job seekers. Through this, the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria can be reduced.

Concept of Graduates' Self-Employability

The concept of employability is sometimes confusing because it is a term used with various meanings and can lack good understanding without carefulness and concentration. Some researchers viewed the possession of generic skills as employability skills which has been criticised for being too narrow (Bridgstock, 2009). The generic skills include verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, and analytical and critical thinking skills, applicable in a range of contexts. It should be noted that generic skills are basically the subsets of employability skills, and its development could lead to enhanced employability. Also, for many persons, employability is as well the same thing as being employed (Harvey, 2003, Pool & Sewell 2007). It should be noted that employability and employment does not have the same meaning. According to Weligamage (2009), to be self-employed means having a job created and owned by an individual, while self-employability means the possession of necessary qualities to create employment, maintain it and progress in it. Therefore, employability means more than ordinary getting a job.

However, several other researchers (such as Yorke & Knight 2006, Pool & Sewell, 2007, Bridgstock 2009, Cavanagh, 2005) have conceptualised employability from a more holistic perspective but in different contexts. Yorke & Knight, (2006), see self-employability as a set of achievements (skills, understandings and personal attributes) that make individuals more likely to create employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the work force, the community and the economy. Yorke and Knight (2006) summarises employability as four interrelated components, these being understanding (of course of study and how organisations work), skilful practices (academic, employment and life generally), efficacy belief (the student's self-

concept and self-belief), meta-cognition (including self-awareness and a capacity to reflect on learning).

Pool and Sewell (2007), defined self-employability as set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose, create and secure employment in which they can be satisfied and successful. According to Oliver (2015) defined self-employability means that students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understanding and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce; the community and the economy. The continuous enhancement in this definition stresses the fact that self-employability is not static but a continuous process. No wonder lifelong learning is one of the characteristics of employability.

Self-Employability of Nigerian Graduates

Statistics according to National Planning Commission's Performance Monitoring report on government's Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDA's), shows that unemployment rate in 2010 was 21% which rose to 23.9% in 2011. A National Baseline Youth Survey Report by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reveals that 54 % of Nigerian Youths were unemployed in 2012 out of a total population of 64 million comprising youths aged between 15 and 35 years. Of this figure, 51.9% are female, compared to 48.1% male. This alarming situation which is a real, serious social problem if not checked can be a huge time bomb that could blow up in the face of the nation. No wonder the high incidence of crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, terrorism (Boko-Haram menace), prostitution, drug peddling and other social vices, being exhibited brazenly in the country. All these can be traced to the high rate of unemployment in the country. The people in this category are becoming more and more hopeless and desperate. The recent incidence of recruitment exercise across 33 states of the country and Abuja organized by the Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS) which left 18 Nigerian Youths including 3 pregnant women dead at Abuja, Minna and other centres while 100 people got injured during a stampede (P.M News, March, 18 2014) shows the level of degradation the issue of unemployment has sunk into.

Oyesiku, (2010) in a paper, giving the synopsis to a workshop, organized by Ogun State Bureau of Tertiary Institutions in 2010 revealed that available statistics shows that the nation's job creation capacity is growing at an annual rate of between 5% and 7% over the last seven years. Meanwhile, about 213 Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country then produced over 300,000 graduates annually; a number that should ordinarily meet the country's human capital resources needs, but employers willing to pay well to attract skilled workers are increasingly, finding it difficult to fill job vacancies.

Oguntuase (2013) opines in an article: Employability of Nigeria Graduates: Myth or Reality? that products of the Nigerian University system

have at different forum been challenged to test their suitability or otherwise to secure few available white collar jobs. He went further to say that the situation is not only sympathetic but embarrassing that the vast human material resources available to the country had not been trained and utilized to the advantage of the country. He cited Tunde Lemo, former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) saying that it has become evident that very modern day Nigeria graduates are not employable, Lemo went on to say that the Nigeria Education system is bedeviled by myriads of problems ranging from poor funding, undue interference, poor staffing, overcrowding and management incompetence. Oguntuwase also cited in his article, Professor Sola Fajana, who explained that the dismal performance of many graduates in the labour market was due to faulty curricular in most Nigerian universities, that most programmes run in the universities are no longer relevant. He also said that classroom teaching mostly focus on concepts and not marketable skills.

Oyesiku (2010) went on further to say that tertiary institutions are being reproached for declining quality of educational outputs due to deterioration in teaching and physical facilities, inadequate funding, quality of inputs into the institutions, government and private sectors' lack of support and the curricular for teaching the students. He is of the opinion that there is a sharp decline in required skilled graduates available to the labour market, that is, there is a gap between the demand for and the supply of graduates into the market. There is the need to identify the skills that the graduates need to close the gap between unemployment and the 'unemployables'. Demands of the industry are high on institutions to produce resourceful and competent graduates.

Akanmu (2011) also opined that despite an average economic growth rate of about 7% per annum over the last seven years, a good performance by global standards, wage employment is estimated to have declined by about 30%. Nigeria's strong economic performance over the last decade has not translated to jobs and real life opportunities for its many youth. Akanmu said further that three out of ten graduates of tertiary institution cannot find work. Being highly educated does not increase the chance of finding a job. Those who find work are not usually gainfully employed. Some are forced to accept marginal jobs that do not use their qualifications in sales, agriculture and manual labour citing the British Council sponsored Nigeria – Next Generation Report. For those who are lucky to find jobs, employers are concerned about their skills and suitability with their job requirements.

Employers are getting worried over the competency of the graduates that do apply for very limited job vacancies. They want the graduate recruits to be professionally competent in their chosen fields. They also want them to be equipped with complementary life skills such as problem solving, reflective and critical thinking interpersonal and teaming skills, effective communication character, integrity, self-esteem, self-discipline, organizing skills, leadership skills and the ability to translate ideas into action. The problem is that these skills are rarely taught in schools and these are the gaps that are missing in a graduate's

ability to be gainfully employed even when the jobs are there.

Sodipo (2010) affirmed this in a survey carried out on the level of competency of tertiary education graduate employed in the Ogun State Civil Service between 2004 and 2006 and found out that graduates generally perform well on their jobs especially in the core –ministers. However, special departments like Bureau for Monitoring Projects, Bureau for Urban and Regional Planning, Bureau for Transportation, Bureau for Lands and Survey and other agencies where special technical skills are required, were found wanting hence their recommendation that these relevant skills be integrated into the curriculum of programmes in the institutions producing them into the market.

This finding is in line with Detoun (2010) who defined employability as a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining the employment and obtaining new employment if required. The scholar noted that there is a mis-match between the teaching in tertiary institutions and the needs of the labour market, emphasized that students should be given life-skills needed to navigate murky waters of life. She said further, that employers want curriculum designed in such a way that would promote conceptual and creative thinking, self-awareness, sense of career direction, emotional intelligence

Skills-Gap

Skill-gap or performance gap may be seen as the difference between employability skills and present performance of the individual, that is, the skills that the individual lacks which are inhibiting his performance or which may make him unsuitable for a gainful employment or to create his/her own job. It is the required performance minus the present performance. No doubt, there is a lot of competition for jobs where and when available when the nation is faced with high rate of unemployment. To be found employable the individual must possess in addition to qualifications or specialist experience, capabilities or competencies such as aptitude (talent) attitude and behaviour. The individual (employee) must be aware of what the employers are looking for in any employee and what are needed to be self-employed. The person must be able to show that he is employable or self-employed.

Factors influencing Graduates' Self-Employability

Self-employability skills are those skills necessary for creating, keeping and being successful in a job. These are the skills and attitudes that enable graduates to get along with their colleagues, to make critical decisions, solve problems, develop respect and ultimately become strong ambassadors for their own organization. These skills (soft) are usually lacking in graduates that are just out of school, even those already in employment and those who are self-employed. Such skills according to Skills You Need (2013) include:

Interpersonal skills: used to interact with people, participate effectively as members of a team, negotiate, satisfy customers, make decisions, manage time and work effectively with colleagues

Communication Skills: Verbally and in Writing. Writing clearly and succinctly, demonstrates good vocabulary and listening actively.

Critical thinking Skills:- Ability to solve problems and make decisions is a huge asset to employers. This also includes ability to effectively plan and organize creative thinking are innovative and inventive and are more likely to devise new ways of doing things that add value to the work environment.

Personal Development:- Having the right attitude towards work and the organization you work for. Employers look for people who are open to learning and embrace change. Such a person will be more successful than the person who is afraid of learning and resistant to changes in the organization.

Self-management skills i.e. self-motivation, self-confidence, self-control-skills that are used to manage personal feelings and how people react to challenges and problems both at work and in their private lives.

Presentation Skill:- Needed for presenting information clearly and effectively in the work place. This includes business plans, reports, minutes etc.

Leadership Skill:- Ability to influence others towards the achievement of a goal.

Numeracy:- Involves understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs. It is also a part of making decisions and reasoning.

IT Skills:- Acquiring basic IT skills and being familiar with the computer open a wide range of employment opportunities and increase marketability in work place. (Skills You Need, 2013)

Challenges militating against Graduate Self-employability

As important as necessary self-employability is, there are several challenges militating against it. These include the following:

Inadequacies in the Curriculum Content of Entrepreneurship Training: the educational curriculum in Nigeria cannot boast of possessing entrepreneurial modules that prepares her students for self-reliance. The content of entrepreneurship training curriculum has been reported as inadequate at all levels. Such inadequacies in the curriculum especially north central, Nigeria could lead to the production of half-baked graduates who do not possess the necessary skills for effective performance nor compete with the performance of graduates in other parts of the world.

Non Relevance of the Course Content: An entrepreneurship training and skills acquisition programme should include courses that would prepare the students for saleable skills, help them have an understanding of the economic system and how a business operates. It was also to be geared towards helping people to acquire knowledge, and attitude/value that would enable them function in the world they live. This is not the case in many Nigerian universities (Sodimu, 2010)

Qualification and quality of teachers: An entrepreneurship education teacher

is a person who holds a degree in entrepreneurship education from a recognised university or an NCE (National Certificate of Education). Holders of NCE from the recognised colleges of education in entrepreneurship education are competent to teach the five components of the JSS entrepreneurship training programme. Shortage of these qualified personnel is a problem.

Facilities: facilities for teaching and learning in any programme are usually given a prominent position in the field of instructional technology. Just as Nolan (2010) said, it is not possible to achieve the objectives of a well-designed programme without adequate facilities. This means that facilities must be adequate and functional. Facilities in entrepreneurship training are as important as the entrepreneurship trainers. Many universities in Nigeria are not adequately equipped to handle entrepreneurship education.

Suggestions

It is hereby suggested that the missing skills gap may be filled by:

- The curricular in all disciplines must be reviewed from time to time and drawn in consonance with what self-employment requires to meet with current realities.
- Students should be encouraged to have a paradigm shift in their orientation of searching for jobs that are just not available, but aspire to be employers of labour themselves.
- Partnership of tertiary institutions with the private sector to develop employability content in their curriculum and provide life skills training for their students. Lecturers should use more life cases analysis that brings real work problems to life in teaching.
- The board of Regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Council of Colleges of Education (NCCE) should be restructured in a manner that their membership would accommodate representatives of the private sector to ensure and monitor that the curricular used in these institutions are in line with their recommendations i.e. the curricular reflecting what they need to become self-employed.
- Students should do their Students Industrial Work – Experience Scheme (SIWES) in places relevant to their discipline so as to have hands-on experience and be familiar with the latest and modern equipment before they graduate.
- Entrepreneurship development programmes should be institutionalized to equip the students with lifelong learning processes and entrepreneurial spirit. On vocational skills acquisition, artisans or master craftsmen should be brought in to mentor the students properly while in school.

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