

Skill Acquisition And Entrepreneurship Development Programmes And Reduction In Youth Unemployment In Nigeria

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Abstract: Nigeria is a country universally known to be blessed with both human and material resources, though harnessing them has been a major challenge for successive governments. Contemporary, unemployment is one of the developmental problems bedevilling the world although the up-surge is more pronounced in the developing nations like Nigeria. Unemployment among youths in Nigeria is a very daunting challenge and constitutes a serious threat to national development, hence this study. This paper examined skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programmes and reduction in youth unemployment in Nigeria. The study concludes that despite the avalanche of programmes being initiated and introduced by government and even the private sector in Nigeria in terms of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship among youths in particular that youth unemployment rate continues to soar. The efficacy of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship to tackle this menace has been constrained by factors such as neglect of rural areas in skill acquisition programmes, poor funding by government, inadequacy of training infrastructures, epileptic power supply, unfavourable fiscal policies, difficulty in accessing of funds, and quality of skill acquisition training and importantly the attitude of participants. All these needs redress.

Keywords: Skill, Skill Acquisition, Entrepreneurship Development, Programmes, Youth Unemployment, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is one of the developmental problems bedevilling the world in this twenty-first century although the up-surge is more pronounced in the developing nations. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, youth unemployment is a very daunting challenge in the labour market, and constitutes a serious threat to national development (Longe 2017). Sadly, Balogun (2016) hinted that almost half of 10million youths churned out of the over 668 universities in Africa yearly, do not get jobs. Eneji, Mai-Lafia and Weiping (2013) put the rate of unemployed youths at about 60% of the Nigeria labour supply market. Publications of the National Bureau of Statistics (2016) indicated that a total of 52million citizens within the economically active population of Nigeria is jobless and this figure consisted mostly of newly qualified university graduate. Lamentably, Statista (2018) had put the number of jobless economically active population at 61million citizens. Longe (2017) has argued that by any standard that the picture that emerges from the unemployment statistical information seems to portray Nigeria as a country that is incapable of providing wage employment opportunities to a substantial number of her trained university graduates. The government herself does not deny this fact (Olarenwaju 2012). It is not that successive governments in Nigeria have been folding arms and doing nothing to remedy this problem, it is the ineffectiveness of the programmes designed and implemented by government for the reduction of graduate unemployment that is worrisome.

For instance, the period between 2005 to 2012 witnessed introduction of several skills acquisition and entrepreneurship

programmes by government to enhance job creation, self-employment and self-reliance as part of efforts to curb the menace of unemployment (Ekong and Ekong 2016). Some of the programmes included Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), National Open Apprenticeship Scheme, N-POWER, Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme etc. It was hoped that with all these, the incidence of youths' unemployment will be drastically tackled through skills acquisition and utilization through diversified entrepreneurship practices by Nigerian youths. Unfortunately, the evidences in the country cum states' unemployment position does not reflect so. The ugly incidence of the employment test for recruitment into the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) conducted across the country on Saturday March 15, 2014 which consisted of over 56,000 applicants in which 16 applicants lost their lives and others wounded, shows that a reappraisal of the impact of these entrepreneurship programmes on employment creation is important.

2. SKILL ACQUISITION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND REDUCTION IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA.

The origin of unemployment in Nigeria can be traced back to the oil boom era of 1970s. During this period, Nigerian government and individuals abandoned skills acquisition and utilization through diversified entrepreneurship practices that have the capability to boost both individual and the country's economic ego. Emphasis shifted from entrepreneurial practices to paper qualification which has

resulted to increased unemployment in the country (Ekong and Ekong 2014).

The Nigeria economic report released by the World Bank in 2011 (the year preceding the introduction of the SAED programme by the National Youth Service Corps) stated that unemployment rate worsened from 12% of the working population in 2006 to 24% in 2011. In that year, youth unemployment index was at 16% (National Bureau of Statistics 2012).

Faced with the forgoing, the government has made several interventions by establishing various programmes aimed at enhancing skills acquisition and entrepreneurship especially amongst youths. The Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme is an innovation deployed by the Federal Government through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) towards reducing graduate unemployment to the barest minimum in Nigeria. This is because youth unemployment has become one of the most serious socio-economic problems confronting Nigeria.

Unemployment or joblessness as defined by the International Labour Organization (1982) occurs when people are without jobs and they have actively sought work in the past five weeks. The unemployment rate is a measure of the prevalence of unemployment and it is calculated as a percentage by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by all individuals currently in the labour force. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2009), unemployment rate is the proportion of those who are looking for work but could not find work for at least 40 hours during the reference period to the total currently active (labour force) population.

Various causal factors traceable to the prevailing general status of socio-economic system in some emergent nations were held responsible for exacerbating the growing incidence of graduate unemployment. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (2016) identified some factors that predisposed tertiary institution graduates to unemployment in the country. These were lack of national employment policy, sub-optimal quality of graduates, educational system not tailored and aligned to industry need and inappropriate educational curricula. Similar findings have been documented in Malaysia by Sirat and Shuib (2012) and Noor (2011) where job mis-match, English non-proficiency, misguided educational qualification and lack of employable skills were given as factors accountable for unemployment among university graduates. Madoui (2015) argued that there is a disconnection between the university education system and the world of work in Algeria leading to graduate unemployment. He advocated for among others, some appropriate skills acquisition programme even after university graduation.

To the views above, it is important to note that while non proficiency in English could be a factor in Algeria, it is not in Nigeria or any other Anglo phone countries with regards to graduate employment. On the issue of job mismatch, until admission in tertiary institutions are tailored towards employability and not certification, the problem will still linger. In the same vein, Adawo (2015) suggested entrepreneurship development and venture capital promotion while Chukwu and Igwe (2012) recommended rendering mentoring roles to university graduates to become self-employed. The recommendation for mentoring and venture capital promotion respectively is a welcomed development but the study failed to buttress the issue of lack of integrity in Nigeria manifesting in non-compliance of loan repayments, abandonment of programmes etc. making mentoring ineffective. The introduction of the SAED programme by the NYSC in Nigeria was in this direction and is meant to tackle the menace of youth unemployment especially as it affects the graduates.

The impact of this programme in this regard has been a subject of great debate. In his work titled "Graduate unemployment in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Remedial Approaches" Longe (2017) observed that the socio-economic implication of graduate unemployment on the nation and affected individuals were gruesome. Using quantitative research method, data were collected from 360 Abuja based professionals through a self-administered questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. The study indicated that there is no effective collaboration between universities and labour employers in providing relevant skills required for employability. The study concluded that to remediate this would require soft wired deliberate policies of government and concerted efforts of various stake holders. Laudable as this sounds, the study failed to examine the role or impact of existing programmes and collaborations aimed at reducing the incidence of graduate unemployment. Interestingly, the situation in Nigeria is seemingly a case of existence of fewer employment opportunities and not a situation of absence of skills for employment. The emphasis of the entrepreneurship drive seems to be on acquiring of skills for self-employment and not for collar employment.

According to Ogundele et al (2012) in their work "entrepreneurship trainings and education as strategic tools for poverty alleviation in Nigeria", the trend in skill acquisition and training seems to be city based neglecting the rural areas where majority of the unemployed dwell. They concluded that the contribution of skill acquisition and training on unemployment reduction through youth empowerment and social welfare service improvement will be much significant if encouraged at all levels in the states especially at local and community levels.

However, it is needful to even examine how successful these programmes have even been in the cities. The location may

not even be the problem. If the programmes can empower those in the cities, at least the problem will be half solved. Ohize and Muhammed (2009) decried the low level of involvement of non-governmental organization (NGOs) in skill acquisition training, and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. They observe that NGOs especially religious organizations have rural reach and can help extend such programmes to rural dwellers and that until that is done many youths will be unemployed. They opined that nongovernmental organizations can play a vital role in skill acquisition and employment generation. This to them is evident from the success story of project Youth Entrepreneurship Solution (YES) as findings revealed that the scheme has contributed to the economic uplift of the youths by providing them with vocational skill acquisition and counselling services aimed at reorienting their attitudes towards self and societal development. This is needful as participation of Non-governmental agencies will increase the reach and impact. However, participation is one part while utilization of skills for productive ventures is another.

In their study of Non-Formal Education Programmes and Poverty reduction among young adults in Cross River State, Akpama et al (2011) observed that acquisition of vocational skills leads to a significant reduction of poverty among young adults who participated on skills acquisition programmes. They emphasized on entrepreneurial studies which is interdisciplinary training that focuses on the tools needed to start up a new business vocation. As Nigeria is fast becoming a predominantly youthful society with high rate of unemployment, they concluded that there is urgent need of training the youth in entrepreneurship skills in technical vocational education to enhance employment generation. The emphasis on interdisciplinary training that focuses on tools for startup new business vocation is of vital interest to this study but the study did not emphasize much on the hindrances to the process in Nigeria.

Abdullah and Amadi (2012) reported from their study that a greater percentage of the sampled youths reported high and moderate levels of their capacity building resulting to engagement into various productive ventures. This implies that the vocational skills acquisition and development was a success. They however recommended that the constraints that impede the success of the scheme be addressed by policy makers to make the outcome more successful. Unfortunately, the study did not conclude the impact of the productive ventures on the unemployment status.

Hassan (2013) in his study of curbing unemployment through entrepreneurship development opined that unemployment problem like corruption in Nigeria is a hydra headed problem, and thus require the collective effort of all. The study made use of primary data sourced from 220 respondents in Kogi State through administration of questionnaire. Their responses were tested using appropriate statistical tools like the simple percentage and chi-square

research techniques, the study revealed that the unemployment problem in Nigeria can be solved through entrepreneurial development and that government effort in this regard is not sufficient given the magnitude of unemployment in Nigeria. The emphasis on solely government support is faulty and needs to be addressed. The study did not emphasize much on the issue of accountability and prudence which is limiting the possible impact the government efforts would have had in the fight against unemployment.

Asogwa and Dim (2016) investigated the relationship between Entrepreneurship Development and Unemployment reduction in Anambra State. The study focused on youths from five (5) selected local government councils of the state. Data were collected using questionnaire, and 30 youths were drawn from each of the local government through sampling technique. Thus a total of 150 youths were sampled for the study. The study concluded that the variables were significantly and positively related. It is glaring that every well-coordinated entrepreneurship programme will have a reduction impact on unemployment. But the question will be on the magnitude of such impact.

Taiwo (2014) presented an empirical research on the impact of entrepreneurship on job creation in Nigeria. He evaluated the relationship between job creation and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, and found out that in any given economy, entrepreneurship development always give birth to job creation which will force people to engage in something that will better their lives and the country at large; thus, job creation could be traced to entrepreneurship training and development. This is true but the extent of the job creation will depend on the enabling environment being provided for.

Akanwa and Akpanabia (2012) evaluated the need for promoting employment in Nigeria through the development of entrepreneurship. Utilizing secondary data, they concluded that government and its agencies should deliberately encourage entrepreneurial culture and skill in Nigeria so as to mitigate and eventually reduce the high level of unemployment situation in the country, so that the nation will boost its economic development. For this to happen, it is needful to state that such deliberate effort must be seen to be real by the populace as trend of events are evoking suspicion and distrusts.

Eme (2014) in his study of unemployment rate in Nigeria, found out that statistically speaking in the last couple of years, Nigeria's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world while her people scampered for about 4500 job vacancies advertised by the Nigeria Immigrate Service leading to the death of about eighteen of them in an unwarranted stampede. This betrays the irony of the nation's nominal growth without corresponding development. He concluded that with global unemployment projected to reach over 215 million by 2018, experts fear that Africa,

particularly Nigeria's share of the global surge might increase disproportionately, with attendant unsavory consequences unless the country adopts pro-active and holistic approach to halt the rising youth unemployment. He however did not elucidate on the nature or content of such proactive measures.

Salami (2013) in his work on "Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: A time for creative and innovative intervention", observes that there are no effective interventions being put in place to mitigate the ugly impact of high youth unemployment. His work established a link between entrepreneurship and youth employment if adequate attentions are focused on the creation of enabling socio-economic and political environment that can galvanize a culture where the youths think job creation and take away the mindset of job seekers. My take on this is that even with the creation of enabling environment, until the youths shifts their focus from white collar jobs towards self-job creation, the issue of unemployment reduction through entrepreneurship will be a mirage.

Furthermore, Akanwa and Akpanabia (2012) examined the need for the promotion of employment in Nigeria through the development of entrepreneurship. Their work relies mostly on secondary data from scholars/authors in the field. They concluded that government and its agencies should deliberately encourage entrepreneurial culture and skill in Nigeria in order to attack and eventually reduce the high level of unemployment situation in the country so that the nation will boost its economic development. To me, the emphasis on government and their agencies does not seem to recognize the dire need for involvement of individuals and corporate organizations in youth entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. This should be the fulcrum of the new entrepreneurship drive.

Ebiringa (2012) reviewed entrepreneurship development and growth of enterprises in Nigeria and found out that several policy interventions in the country that were aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship development through small and medium scale enterprises have failed. He recommends that the government and the organized private sector should increase their support for entrepreneurship training programmes, and deliberately provide enabling environment for survival and striving of entrepreneurship in the country. The study did not ex-ray the role of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in the failure mentioned above. Any reliable analysis on small and medium enterprises should be anchored on the activity or inactivity of this agency charged with their development.

Okeke and Eme (2014) cited in Ogbodo and Oraka (2017) argued that entrepreneurship development in Nigeria is very slow despite the entire numerous programmes and schemes that have been designed by different government at different times. Descriptive survey research method was used in the

study whereby data collected from both primary and secondary sources were analyzed using chi-square. The study concludes among others that with the introduction of business incubators into the system, proper handling of political and socio-economic problems, privatization and commercialization of power sector and provision of alternative power supply, entrepreneurship development has a lot of prospect towards enhancing youth employment in the country. Unfortunately, privatization and commercialization of the power sector which the study recommended has been done but the problem of power still persists. It goes to show that the problem of entrepreneurship could be addressed better from a micro-individual level in Nigeria. Some of these macro analysis is proving ineffective.

Mgbemena (2015) in his review of the National Youth Service Corps scheme at 40 observed that entrepreneurship development will undoubtedly enhance youth employment in the nation. He however noted that lack of interest of the youths in entrepreneurship endeavours, absence of skill acquisition centres in NYSC orientation camps and poor funding of entrepreneurship initiatives is bane towards achievement of youth employment in the country. He however did not say much on the operation of the programme by the scheme in terms of fund utilization, monitoring and coordination and mentoring. These are the real bane of entrepreneurship efforts in Nigeria.

Islam et al (2014) critically evaluated unemployment reduction through entrepreneurship in Pakistan. The outcome (using regression analysis) indicated that 91% variations in entrepreneurship development have been explained by the explanatory variations in variable. The unemployment rate has been found to be negatively related to entrepreneurial development in the economy of Pakistan. This is a dilemma. The study needs to expatiate on the factors that led to this situation.

Nwachukwu and Ogbo (2012) carried out empirical research on the role of entrepreneurship in employment generation in Nigeria. The paper analyzed the contributions of entrepreneurship in employment generation and economic development through Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) development in Nigeria. A total of 1000 SMEs were randomly selected from a cross section of SMEs spread around some states in Nigeria. The hypotheses of the study which were tested at 0.05 level of significance using chi-square statistics hinged on identifying the greatest problem which SMEs face in Nigeria. The researcher found out that SMES have played and continue to play significant roles in the growth and development of industrialization of many economics worlds over. They concluded that coordination of entrepreneurship programmes, and provision of enabling grounds for emergence of SMES will enhance self-employment in Nigeria. Specifically, the study did not emphasize much on access to credit facilities in entrepreneurship development. The issue of easier access to

credit facilities needs to be emphasized as a foremost enabling ground for the striving of SMEs in Nigeria.

Okoye, et al (2014) on their study on the extent to which entrepreneurship in Nigeria has helped to reduce youth unemployment observed that policies and initiatives in this regard has affected the transformation question. This is due to the increase in corruption, inadequate facilities, inadequate funding and maladministration. They conclude that Nigeria's entrepreneurs have a long way to go before they can effectively drive changes in the economy. I concur to this assertion as it seems that at present government's policies does not reflect realities on ground.

Lending support to this view, Khan (2014) explains that infrastructures need to be developed in order to cultivate the appropriate environment for entrepreneurship and quality of leadership among potential enterprising young men. When this is actualized, he opines that youth employment will soar. Kadiri (2012) examined the contributions of 600 small and medium scale enterprises (SMES) to employment generation in Nigeria using what he called Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis, and observed that SMEs was unable to deliver on its mandate of generating employment due to its inability to obtain adequate business finance and suggested that for employment to be achieved adequately, both formal and informal financial subsectors must be integrated to provide necessary finance.

There should also be deliberate government policies and support system to enable accessibility of fund for emerging entrepreneurs. This corresponds with the view of Adewusi and Adisa (opcit) who from their study of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development programme among corps members in Ibadan observed that one of the bane of successful entrepreneurship in Nigeria is the difficulty in accessing capital for business by participants of skills acquisition purpose.

Going by the above views, it is however worrisome that despite the avalanche of programmes being initiated and introduced by government and even the private sector in Nigeria in terms of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship among youths in particular that youth unemployment rate continues to soar. The efficacy of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship to tackle this menace has been constrained by factors such as neglect of rural areas in skill acquisition programmes, poor funding by government, inadequacy of training infrastructures, epileptic power supply, unfavourable fiscal policies, difficulty in accessing of funds, and quality of skill acquisition training and importantly the attitude of participants. All these needs redress.

3. CONCLUSION

Youth unemployment has remained a major challenge to developmental process of the Nigerian state despite myriads of entrepreneurship programmes. Nigeria is a country universally known to be blessed with both human and material resources, though harnessing them has been a major challenge for successive governments. This study examined skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programmes and reduction in youth unemployment in Nigeria. The study concludes that unemployment problem in Nigeria can be solved through entrepreneurial development and that government's effort in this regard is not sufficient given the magnitude of unemployment in the country.

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