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Challenges of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: Effective Career Guidance as a Panacea

Ajufo, Beatrice Ifeoma - Guidance and Counselling Unit, School of Education, National Open University of Nigeria
Victoria Island, Lagos
E-mail: ifyajufo@yahoo.co.uk
Tel: +2348034103357

Abstract

Unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youth, causing increased militancy, violent crimes, kidnappings, restiveness and socially delinquent behaviour. Youth unemployment is devastating to both the individual and the society as a whole both psychologically and economically. The paper examines the issue of youth unemployment and looks at potential interventions such as effective career guidance, technical and vocational education as well entrepreneurship education. A number of recommendations were made which include that youths should be trained to possess skills which are congruent with real labour market demand, developing a special focus on career guidance and counselling support in schools and introduction of entrepreneurship education into the school curriculum.

Key words: Youth unemployment, career guidance, panacea, entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is becoming an increasingly troublesome issue in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, it has become one of the most serious socio-economic problems confronting the country. The magnitude of this can be appreciated if accurate statistics could be obtained from the Federal Bureau of Statistics on the number of unemployed youths roaming the streets of Nigerian cities. However, Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) observed from the excerpts of statistics obtained from the National Manpower Board and Federal Bureau of Statistics showed that Nigeria has a youth population of eighty (80) million representing 60 percent of the total population of the country. Sixty four (64) million of them are unemployed while one million six hundred thousand (1.6 million) are underemployed.

Unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youth causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends, who also have their own problems to contend with. The high rate of unemployment among the youths in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. Unemployment is worldwide economic problem, causing poverty and lack.

In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability. The Nigerian situation is further compounded by the recent global financial crisis that has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people (Fanimu and Olayinka, 2009).

Adejumola and Tayo-Olajubulu (2009) contended that unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices, including armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more. Musari (2009) corroborated this statement by saying that about 4.5 million enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for life sustenance. The precarious situation has left the youths in a vicious cycle of poverty that daily erodes their self-confidence and bright future.

The Concept of youth unemployment and its main causes

Youths occupy a prominent place in any society. They are one of the greatest assets any nation can have. Apart from being the leaders of tomorrow, they out-number the middle-aged and the aged (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youth Development Policy (2001) asserts that the youth are the foundation of a society; their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pattern of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides. The youth are a particular segment of the national population that is sensitive, energetic, active and the most productive phase of life as citizens. The youth are also most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population in terms of social-economic, emotion and other aspects (Anasi, 2010).

The National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youth as people aged between 18 and 35. They constitute about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. The Nigeria's unemployment rate is projected at over 11 percent compared to the average rate of 9.5 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2004), young people aged between 15 and 24 years account for 52.9 percent of unemployed people while those aged between 25 and 44 years accounted for 41.1 percent. Therefore, those in age bracket of 15 and 44 years account for 94 percent of the total unemployed persons in Nigeria (Osibanjo, 2006).

Youth's unemployment in Nigeria is a consequence of several factors. One major factor is that of population growth. Nigeria has continued to experience high rate of population growth. This increasing population growth has produced an overwhelming increase in the youth population thereby resulting in an increase in the size of the working age population. Related to the rapid population growth is the massive rural-urban migration by the youth. According to the United Nations (UN) Report (1999), the high degree of geographical mobility of youth in Africa is in form of rural to urban which has been influencing youth unemployment. In Nigeria, youth migrate to the cities more than other migrants and in the cities, job opportunities are very limited. Thus, the rate of urbanization of the youth has continued to create unemployment.

Lack of employable skills due to inappropriate school curricula is another factor contributing to the rising youth unemployment. Analysts have argued that in Nigeria generally, the skills that job seekers possess do not match the

needs and demands of employers (Mcgrath, 1999; Kent and Mushi, 1995). According to them, the education system in Nigeria has its liberal bias which indeed over supplies the labour market with graduates who do not possess the skills required by employers. Many graduates in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self-employment (Oladele, Akeke and Oladunjoye, 2011).

Another factor is the perception of policy makers and the youth themselves about employment. To the policy makers and the youth, employment means a job with salary and working for someone else. It is this perception that has continued to influence the institutions in Nigeria that provide skills and training. Based on this, curricula and training programmes are generally tailored towards preparing young people for formal sector jobs. Since these jobs do not exist, there is often a mismatch between the skills possessed by the job seekers and the available jobs.

Evidence shows that Nigeria is committed to education reforms. The promulgation of Decree 9 of 1993 created rooms for the establishment of private institutions in the country. Following the deregulation of education in Nigeria, government has encouraged the opening of private schools and universities. As at May, 2012, the total of approved universities in Nigeria is 124, comprising of 37 federal government-owned, 50 states' government-owned and 50 privately-owned universities. The aggressive creation of more private and publicly-funded universities and colleges of technology has inadvertently created an adverse disparity in job creation efforts. This is because Nigeria has not pursued a commensurate job absorption strategy for the many graduates from these educational institutions. Whereas universities have grown at multiple progression, jobs and employers have grown at arithmetic progression. This gap in Nigeria strategic approach to job creation has led to the supply of skilled graduates being higher than the demand in the economy thus driving down wages and further increasing unemployment.

Among other factors responsible for youth unemployment are poor governance, ineffective targeting of the poor resulting in resources being thinly spread among competing projects, overlapping of functions, poor coordination and lack of sustainable measures (Musari, 2009).

In response to the alarming unemployment situation, Nigerian governments at various times have made attempts to solve the nagging unemployment problem by setting up various solution agencies. Notable among these agencies are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and National

Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). However, it is on record that these attempts have not made any significant impact on youth unemployment (Omorodion, 2010).

Effects and consequences of youth unemployment

Youth unemployment poses a risk to the Nigerian society. The consequence of this problem, if no major corrective initiatives are taken, could be disastrous for the nation. Youth unemployment has national and global impacts, notably among which are increased violence, crime, drug abuse and political instability. Desperation can drive many people into living outside the law in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence.

Furthermore, the negative consequences include poverty, psychological problems of frustration, depression, hostility, abduction, murder, armed robbery, and all manner of criminal behaviours causing general insecurity of life and property (Adebayo, 1999; Egbuna, 2001; Alanana, 2003; Okonkwo, 2005).

Figures supplied by the Nigerian Prisons Service (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009:248) actually confirmed this. For instance, persons admitted into the prisons by age groups are as follows:

Year	16 – 20 years	21 – 25 years	25 – 50 years
2004	31,700	39,045	63,100
2005	40,170	34,600	65,140
2006	19,122	28,705	75,491
2007	16,236	57,736	80,134
2008	25,317	28,049	73,071

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2009:248)

Crime may be a consequence of unemployment, but it is also an additional factor causing youth unemployment through its negative effects on the economy. Crime affects the economy through a number of channels/ways. First, it increases the cost of doing business for the private sector and

providing public services. Resources that would otherwise have been invested in increasing output and funding education and health programmes are diverted to crime prevention. Finally, because of increase in crime rates, the attraction of foreign investors and foreign direct investment will be drastically reduced (Economic Commission for Africa, 2002).

Role of career guidance in reducing youth employment

The term career guidance is generally replacing the concept vocational guidance. Vocational guidance is focused upon the choice of occupation and is distinguished from educational guidance, which focuses upon choice of courses of study. Career guidance brings the two together and stresses the interaction between learning and work (Bezanson & Turcotte, 2004). Career guidance has been identified as a key focus in addressing this mismatch between the needs of labour market and the products of the educational and training system thereby dealing with unemployment and improving labour mobility (Balasuriya & Hughes, 2003).

There are a number of variations in the definition of career guidance. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004) defines career guidance as services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. This definition includes making information about the labour market and about educational and employment opportunities more accessible by organising it, systematizing it and having it available when and where people need it. It also includes assisting people to reflect on their aspirations, interests, competencies, personal attributes, qualification and abilities to match these with available training and employment opportunities. Career guidance plays a key role in helping labour market work and education systems meet their goals.

According to “International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance” (IAEVG, 1992), career guidance refers to assistance given to individuals or groups of individuals in addressing problems related to occupational and life choices, offering full opportunities for personal development and work satisfaction. A mismatch has been evident between the skills imparted by the national education system and those demanded by the workplace. Career guidance is widely accepted as a powerful and effective method of helping to bridge the gap between education and the world of work, as well as between school and society (Hansen, 2006). It is a means of

assisting young people to make appropriate and judicious educational choices that will enable them to develop their potential and to have access to employment opportunities that are compatible with their interests and abilities. It can also help to instill confidence and positive attitudes, to derive fulfillment from their chosen areas of learning and work and most importantly, to inculcate an eagerness for lifelong learning. The potential impacts of such efforts include reducing youth unemployment and raising income, thereby reducing poverty.

According to Jarvis (2011), career guidance assists the young ones in selecting their career in line with their choice and interest thereby making them healthy, self-reliant and resilient individuals. It enables individuals to assess the following areas while choosing a career (Francis, 2011):

- Aptitude
- Skills
- Personality
- The level of responsibility that suits him/her
- Interests
- Needs
- Priorities

The Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE)

Technical and vocational education (TVE) is concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment and sustainable livelihood (Maclean and Wilson, 2009). Technical education is that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of skills as well as basic knowledge. Vocational education, on the other hand, is training for a specific vocation in industry or trade or job (Webster, 1993). The mission of technical and vocational education is to promote the production of skilled, technical and professional manpower to revitalize and sustain the national economy and reduce unemployment and poverty. According to Oni (2006), technical and vocational education gives individuals the skills to learn and become productive citizens and for advancement in the workplace.

Despite the contributions of technical education to national development, it still has a low public status (Moja, 2000). This mentality has, in most part, contributed to the neglect of technical education institutions and reason why the youth shy away from technical and vocational studies. As a result, most of the secondary school graduates (and some of those who managed to pass through the university) lack the skills and knowledge to compete effectively in the rather tight labour market and thus loiter around in the cities from dawn to dusk looking for jobs that are not available (Dike, 2009). The youth are struggling with the challenging of acquiring “employability” skills because the society is focused mostly on formal university education. Every facet of the economy has been affected by the scarcity of skilled technicians. The society lacks competent bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto mechanics, laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/ electronic technicians and skills vocational nurses etc. which the nation needs to function effectively and efficiently (Moja, 2000).

Some scholars perceive technical and vocational education as one of the “bulwarks of social efficiency” as the preparation of a well-trained workforce is a sine qua non of an efficient society (Camp, 1982 and 1983). In this regard, technical and vocational education is an integral component of lifelong learning and an important determinant of income and wealth creation/distribution. It empowers the youth with skills to become productive and highly paid workers.

In this era of global unemployment situation, the role of vocational and technical education in reducing youth unemployment cannot be overemphasised. Olaitan (1996) emphasised that one of the major crucial factors leading to unemployment in most countries is lack of vocational and technical skills.

Vocational education refers to systematic learning experiences which are designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in recognised occupations as semi-skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals. It includes guidance and counselling in relation to training and giving other instruction directly associated to an occupation (Osuala, 1987). According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), vocational education is seen as an integral part of general education; a means of preparation for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; an aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible

citizenship; an instrument for promoting environmentally sound, sustainable development and a method of alleviating poverty.

Entrepreneurship education

Apart from career guidance, technical and vocational education, entrepreneurship education is also effective in preventing youth unemployment. There is a growing recognition among governments and international bi- and multi-lateral organisations that as jobs become scarce, youth entrepreneurship becomes an important strategy for integrating youth into labour markets thereby addressing unemployment challenges (ILO, 2009). Due to limited resources, life and work experiences, young people face barriers than older age cohorts (Schoof, 2006; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1999).

Suleiman (2006) defined entrepreneurship as “the willingness and ability of an individual to seek for investment opportunities to establish and run an enterprise successfully”; while Drucker (1985) viewed an entrepreneur as a person who perceives business opportunities and takes advantage of the scarce resources and use them profitably. Entrepreneurs are job creators and/or become self-employed rather than seekers of jobs in an overstretched public service. The entrepreneur is essentially a person who owns or controls a business through which income is gained. An entrepreneur gives the marketplace a product or service by doing it in a new way. Drucker also considers that the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it and exploits it as an opportunity.

Entrepreneurship is not just skill acquisition for acquisition sake; it is an acquisition of skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for oneself and also for others. It also includes the development based on creativity (Oseni, Momoh and Momodu, 2012). Entrepreneurship leads to the development of small, medium and sometimes large scale businesses based on creativity and innovation. The success of these businesses in turn helps in developing the nation’s economy. It equally reduces poverty rate with visible increment in employment rate among the youth. Entrepreneurship shifts young people from being “job seekers” to “job creators” and also from social dependence to self sufficient people. However, training is very essential in entrepreneurship.

In a similar vein, Chiguta (2001) notes that entrepreneurship has been receiving increasing recognition as a source of job creation, empowerment for the unemployed and economic dynamism in a rapidly globalizing world. Unemployment rate was discovered to be negatively related to entrepreneurial development (Oladele, Akeke and Oladunjoye, 2011). High rate of unemployment has been associated with low level of entrepreneurial development in any country. This justifies the need to increase entrepreneurial activities to reduce the high rate of youth unemployment.

Conclusion

From all indications, youth unemployment is a menace in Nigeria and constitutes a real danger and a threat to social, economic and political development. This paper has placed substantial hope in the power and potential of career guidance to transform the relationship between the educational system and the labour market. However, career guidance can only be a panacea for reducing the rate of youth unemployment in conjunction with technical and vocational education (TVE) and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the energy, skills and aspirations of young people are invaluable assets that no country can afford to waste and holding them to realise their full potential by gaining access to employment is a precondition for poverty eradication, sustainable development and lasting peace.

No amount of career guidance will help if there are no employment opportunities, no entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self employment, and no technical and vocational skills needed for gainful employment.

Recommendations

In the light of the crucial issues discussed above, the following recommendations are made:

- Career guidance services should be made compulsory and provided for all levels of education to help students in making realistic career choices. The efficiency of any career guidance effort will be dramatically enhanced if it begins early in life and becomes a way of thinking.
- The government should ensure that the policy measures be strictly adhered to by encouraging the various financial institutions to grant soft

loans to potential and prospective youth entrepreneurs in order to encourage small scale businesses.

- Vocational and technical education should be introduced at all levels of education. It is an indisputable means of reducing youth unemployment since it is skilled-oriented and employment motivated.
- Entrepreneurship education should be incorporated into the curricula of secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This will help shift the youth from being “job seekers” to “job creators” and also from social dependence to self-sufficient people.
- In promoting youth entrepreneurship, government should concentrate on those activities where youth are known to have comparative advantage. Globally, modern information and communication technologies are offering significant opportunities for job creation. The Nigerian government should therefore explore how the ICT industries can provide new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for the youth. They could then take advantage of this exploration activities to mobilise the energies of the youth from destructive tendencies to productive people.
- School-to-work transition skills should be introduced into the curricula of senior secondary school and tertiary institutions in the nation, specifically, for the final year students who are about to enter into competitive labour market. The training should create avenues for providing experience with a view to promoting and developing desirable work ethics and culture for national development. Youth should be trained to possess skills that are congruent with real labour market demands.

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