

## **Education and the Paradox of Graduate Unemployment: The Dilemma of Development in Nigeria (Pp. 253-265)**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper is an assessment of education, graduate unemployment and the dilemma of development in Nigeria. Formal education is universally acknowledged as a legitimized vehicle for self and societal advancement. The educational curricula, especially that of a university, imparts knowledge, relevant skills and competencies on the individual. It is through these knowledge and skills that education in its manifest function makes provision for social placement. However the paper maintains that distressingly, there exists lack of synergy between the number of graduates turned out annually and existing job opportunities. As a result of this mismatch, university graduates wander hopelessly for years in search of jobs. The problem of graduate unemployment is attributable to corruption in governance, population explosion, expansion of university enrolment and lack of entrepreneurship education in the university curricula. The high rate of graduate unemployment is indicative of deteriorating economy and it jeopardizes Nigeria's chances of achieving its development aspirations. The paper therefore recommends among others that there should be radical curriculum and pedagogical reforms, upgrading existing facilities to match international standard, the emergence of visionary leaders that can build an economy that has the capacity to generate employment for the nation's teeming unemployed graduates.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, University, Graduates, Unemployment, Development,

## **Introduction**

All over the world, a university is the highest tertiary institution that is saddled with the responsibility of the dissemination of knowledge and skills to middle and high level manpower. Academic degrees are awarded as a proof of having completed an academic programme in a given discipline. The capacity of a nation to adopt, disseminate and maximize rapid technological advancement is dependent largely on its university education. This is because knowledge and intellectual skills are critical determinants of economic growth and development in any society. Those who acquire university education are able to secure employment in areas related to their knowledge and skills and this enable them live above poverty level.

In consonance with these benefits of university education, the university college, Ibadan was established in Nigeria in January 1948 by the colonial master to train high level manpower to fill specific vacancies in the then colonial administration. Currently, Nigeria has over 95 universities that are owned by federal, state governments and private individuals. This is the highest in sub Saharan Africa. This expansion also reflects the number of graduates that are turned out annually in Nigeria.

With the emergence of university education, one expects that every person that is able to acquire a university degree should be able to secure a job from available employment opportunities. This will in turn, transform and enhance his or her quality of life and be able to live above poverty level. However, this is a far cry from reality. The shocking paradox is that people with university degrees roam the street for years after graduation in search of jobs. Out of frustration and desperation, some either secure menial jobs as drivers, barbers, pool masters, or lower jobs with their secondary school certificates in order to meet up with survival expectations. Rather than being controlled, the spate of unemployment among graduates is assuming on alarming dimension. It is against this background that the paper examines the issue of graduate unemployment and its implication for development in Nigeria with view to exploring the sustaining factors and proffering solution that will eradicate the menace of graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

## **Evolution of University Education In Nigeria**

Motivated by the ideals of liberal education introduced by the early missionaries, Nigeria sought to acquire the new and exciting vision of life, which was then only available overseas. In response to the pressure generated

by the quest for knowledge, the colonial government established tertiary institutions to train and provide well qualified administrative assistants. With the passage of time, the first university college was established in 1948 to train people to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration.

The university system like every other tertiary institution in Nigeria has its origin rooted in colonialism. The Secretary of State for the British West Africa established Walter Elliot Commission on higher education on June 13, 1943. The commission's term of reference among others was to make report on the organization and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa colonies and make recommendations regarding the establishment of universities in those areas in the future. The commission recommended that three university colleges should be established in Nigeria, Ghana (then Gold Coast) and Sierra Leone. It is in line with this recommendation, that the University College, Ibadan was established in January 1948 to grant the degree of the University of London (Fafunwa 1974, Onokerhoraye 2007).

In the second half of the 1950s, countries in Europe had already started to invest in human capital through university education. Apart from the Nigerian government aligning herself with new thinking of human capital development, its perception of the University College, Ibadan as colonial institution served as an impetus for the establishment of indigenous universities. According to the nationalists, the mission and vision of the University College, Ibadan was nothing but native education that was not meant to meet the development challenges of Nigeria. This was evident in the non availability of professional courses such as architecture, surveying, engineering, law etc. In other words, the aspiration of the nationalists was not only to expand university system but also to introduce courses and curricula with developmental relevance to Nigeria.

In order to actualize its dream, the Ashby Commission was set up in April 1959. The Ashby Commission saw that the surest way for Nigeria to conveniently produce the needed manpower for development was by expansion of the university system. The commission recommended the establishment of new universities in the then three regions and Lagos the then capital territory. Based on this recommendation, the first indigenous university conceived with definitive nationalist vision came into being in 1960. The University of Nigeria was established in Nsukka, a town in the present day Enugu State in Eastern region. In line with its anti-colonialist

posture, its motto reads *To restore the dignity of man*. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was established for the north in 1962. In that same year, the University of Lagos was established.

Since there was already a University College in Ibadan (which upon independence became full fledged university in 1962) in the Western region, the University of Ife was a child of protest arising from the minority report on Ashby Commission by one of its members, Dr. Sanya Onabamiro (Olorode 2009). The Midwest Institute of Technology, Benin City was converted to the University of Benin in 1972. These universities were the first generation universities in Nigeria and they were nationalist oriented not only in their mottos, but also in their curricula. Technical and many professional courses were introduced, serious academic staff training was embarked upon, massive infrastructure for learning and recreational activities, accommodation for staff and students were made available by the state.

From these first generation universities, the second generation universities emerged. In 1975, three universities were created by de-merger. The Jos Campus of University of Ibadan, the Calabar Campus of the University of Nigeria and the Abdullahi Bayero College, Kano of Ahmadu Bello University. Thus, the Universities of Jos, Calabar and Bayero, in Kano were cloned from the first generation universities. The universities of Maiduguri and that of Sokoto now Usman Dan Fodio University was established in 1976. The University Colleges of Ilorin and Port Harcourt were converted into full fledged universities in 1977. The seven universities established between 1975 and 1977 constituted the second generation universities. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) came into being in 1977 to regulate the admission of students into universities in Nigeria.

An Open University now University of Abuja was established in 1980. Seven federal universities of technology were established between 1980 and 1988. Federal Universities of Technology, Owerri was in 1980, Akure and Yola 1981, Minna in 1983, Abeokuta, Bauchi and Makurdi 1988. The Universities of Technology in Abeokuta and Makurdi were converted to Universities of Agriculture in 1988. Another University of Agriculture was established at Umudike in 1992. Cross River State University now University of Uyo, Uyo and Anambra State University now Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka were established in 1991 and 1992 respectively.

Between 1980 and 1984, some state owned universities were established. This was necessitated by the inclusion of higher education on the concurrent legislative list in the 1979 constitution. Thus, eight state owned universities were established between 1980 and 1984. More state owned universities were established between 1990 and 1999. The federal government granted license to individuals, corporate and religious bodies to establish private universities. The Igbinedion University, Okada in Edo state established in 1999 was the first private university in Nigeria. Other private universities have been established and more licenses are been granted by the federal government. Currently, Nigeria has 27 Federal Universities, 30 state owned universities, 35 private universities and other 19 degree awarding institutions (Okecha 2008).

### **Unemployment: A Conceptual Framework**

Unemployment does not refer to everybody who is not employed but only to those who have attained working age, have the requisite skills and are eager to work but cannot find work (Fourie 1989, Kendall 2001). There are basically four major types of unemployment; the cyclical, seasonal, frictional and structural. Cyclical unemployment is the type of joblessness that occurs as a result of lower rates of production, during recessions in business cycles resulting in massive layoffs of workers. Seasonal unemployment results from shifts in demand for workers based on conditions such as weather (in agriculture, construction industries and tourism) or the season (holidays and summer and vacation).

Frictional or search unemployment occurs when individuals lose or choose to leave his/her job in search of new one. It sometimes takes a relatively long period of time before another job is secured. The time lag between the previous job and securing a new one explains this type of unemployment. The more efficiently the job market matches people and jobs, the lower the frictional unemployment and verse versa. However, if there is imperfect information and people do not hear of job availability that may suit them, then frictional unemployment will be protracted. Generally, cyclical, seasonal and frictional unemployment are relatively temporary in nature.

Structural unemployment in contrast is relatively permanent in nature. This type of unemployment occurs when the skills demanded by employment do not match the skills of the unemployed or because the unemployed do not live where the jobs are located. As an economy develops over time, type of industries may as well change. This is necessitated by change in people's

taste or change in technology. The extent of structural unemployment depends on various factors-namely; mobility of labour, the pace of change in the economy.etc (Adebayo 1999). If people are able to quickly switch jobs from a declining industry to a rapidly growing one, then there will be less structural unemployment. The faster the change taking place in people's taste and demand and supply the more the structural unemployment there may be, since industries have to adapt more quickly to changes.

In Nigeria, unemployment could be categorized into open unemployment and disguised unemployment. Open unemployment is usually associated with urban areas. It also involves people who are able and eager to work but for whom no suitable jobs are available. While disguised unemployment occurs mainly when people who are normally working full time but whose productivity is so low that a reduction in hours will have a negligible impact on total output.

Individuals are said to be employed if they did any work at all as paid employees or work in their own business, profession etc. An individual is referred to as unemployed if he/she meets all of the above criteria. If he had no employment during the reference period, he was available for work at that time and they make specific efforts to find job sometime during the period (Onwioduokit 2007). The magnitude of unemployment rate is the percentage of unemployed persons in the labour force actively seeking jobs. The rate of unemployment is significantly higher in urban areas than rural areas. The reason is that in rural areas, people are usually self employed in family farms or non agricultural enterprises (Kandim 1999).

### **University Education and Graduate Unemployment in Nigeria: A Shocking Paradox**

Within the context of globalization, world economy is experiencing expansion with healthy growth in both employment and productivity (Dorothea 2006). In spite of this global expansion and growth in labour and productivity, Nigeria and other developing countries in Africa and beyond are experiencing the problem of unemployment. The National Bureau of Statistics 2004 indicated that the rate of unemployment in Nigeria stood at 11.8 percent in 2004. This means that over 9 million Nigerians are unemployed. This rate is above the average rate of 9.5 percent for sub-Saharan Africa.

The unemployment rate becomes more disturbing when viewed against the background that majority of the people that unemployment acquire one form

of university qualification or the other. With the expansion in development of tertiary institutions, graduates are churned out in their numbers and they seek hopelessly for employment opportunities. This had led to graduate unemployment (Unemployment among people with academic degree). Observations have shown that graduates wander the street in search of jobs for years after graduation without finding any. Sometimes, out of desperation and frustration, they get absorbed in menial jobs or are underemployed upon graduation. This trend and dimension is disinteresting getting worse by the day (Oladeji 1987).

A number of factors account for the upsurge of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. The first factor is a system of governance that thrives in corruption. A recent global corruption index put Nigeria as the third most corrupt nation on earth. This is an insignificant improvement from previous second position she occupied in 2003. Nigeria has lost over 300 billion U.S dollars of oil revenue to corruption under this present democratic dispensation. Between 1999 and 2007, 21 out of the 36 states governors, were investigated and indicted for looting their state treasury (Ujah 2003, Ogege 2007, Agbo 2009).

This inordinate looting of public treasury has grave implications for unemployment in Nigeria. Corruption distorts the allocation of resources and the performance of government. This has a pervasive impact on the unemployed poor since it distorts public choices in favour of the wealthy and powerful and reduces state's ability to invest in genuine development projects that are employment intensive.

Nigeria is undoubtedly the richest black nation in the world endowed with abundant crude oil deposits and a clement weather yet it imports fuel. All the refineries are in a comatose state thereby aggravating the unemployment problem. Nigeria ranks very low in terms of energy supply and consumption globally. Currently its power generation capacity has reduced to 1000 mega watts (Adekeye 2009). This is grossly inadequate for a country with a population of over 140 million. This lack of power has forced many blue chip companies to shutdown and relocate to neighbouring countries with stable and favourable energy supply. This has severe implications for overall development and unemployment in Nigeria.

Another factor that contributes to people with educational qualification being unemployed is the expansion in the educational system. Currently, Nigeria has over 27 federal universities, 30 state owned universities, 35 private universities and other 19 degree awarding institutions. What obtains is

graduation and unemployment rates that is growing at a geometric progression while economic growth and development is assuming a declining shape. Besides the sluggish growth rate of the Nigerian economy, it lacks the structural and transformation capacity that is sufficient to expand employment for the long bloated labour market. In other words, whatever growth that takes place in Nigeria is not labour intensive and as such cannot generate a commensurate proportion of jobs for the unemployed graduates.

Lack of entrepreneurship education in the curricula of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is also a factor responsible for the high rate of unemployment among graduates. Entrepreneurship education is the process of planning, operating and assuming the risk of a business and it centres on innovation, creativity, risk taking etc. Entrepreneurship education makes it possible for graduates to start off something on their own without undue reliance on the government to create jobs. Lack of entrepreneurship education is reinforced by our value orientation that every educated person must secure a paid employment either in the private or public sector. This value system aggravates the unemployment problem because the available paid job opportunities in Nigeria cannot absorb all the unemployed graduates.

Besides the lack of entrepreneurship education, the curricula and pedagogical arrangements are obsolete, therefore cannot meet the challenges of today's workplace. In other words, the number of graduates turned out is not employable due to the falling and compromised standard, infrastructural decay etc. (Obanya 2004, Odia and Omofonmwan 2007, Dike 2010). These deficient graduates discouraged organizations from employing them. This is because, they have to train and retrain for them to fit into the organization. The huge resources used in training programmes have serious impact on their profit margin. This perhaps explains why most banks and other organizations prefer employing secondary school and diploma certificate holders. This they will train, pay low remunerations and at the same time maximize profits.

### **Graduate Unemployment Crisis and the Dilemma of Development in Nigeria**

Development is a multifarious concept that has to do with improvement of people living standard in income and consumption levels of food, medical services, education etc through relevant economic growth processes. Other indicators of development include creation of condition for the growth of people's self esteem and also increasing people's freedom of choice by

enlarging the range of their choice variables (Sen 1999, Myint and Kruger 2009).

Education is a fundamental social institution that is central to development. This is because it empowers people and strengthens the society. It is a powerful equalizer that opens doors to all to lift them out of poverty. That is why education is critical to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Education can only bring about development if its educated and skilled individuals are able to secure placement in the workforce.

The Nigerian situation, where majority of the educated persons are unemployed, poses serious challenges to its development. Development becomes very difficult or impossible to achieve through education if those who have one form of university qualification or the other cannot secure jobs. Consequently, such persons live at poverty level or even below. This is made manifest in poor feeding, housing, medical care etc that are characteristics or indicators of under developed economy. This scenario jeopardizes Nigeria's chances of achieving the millennium development goals and other trappings of development.

The persistent nature of graduate unemployment in Nigeria is indicative of financial and manpower wastage. So much is invested in the training of people from primary level down to university level. This has strong implications for household income and investments. Upon graduation from the university, they stay for years without job, thereby leading to manpower wastage. If such persons are employed immediately after graduation, they would be able to boost household income and at the same boost the revenue base of the country through the payment of tax. The absence of this affects the investment potentials both at the micro and macro level of the economy. The implication is that the economic growth and development of the nation is negatively affected.

There exists a nexus between unemployment and crime rate (Chiricos 1987, Winter and Raphael 2001, Egunjobi 2007). Unemployment breeds frustration. In the face of this, frustration and hopelessness, some persons engage in one form of crime or the other in other to survive. Most of the crimes perpetuated by unemployed graduates are internet fraud, robbery, kidnapping. Internet fraud brands the image of the nation negatively. (Ogege 2009). Currently, the spate of kidnapping especially in the south-south and south east geo-political zones poses serious human security problems in

Nigeria. This is a serious disincentive for investors and tourists and this has adverse effect on economic growth and development in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Unemployment among graduates in Nigeria constitutes a growing proportion of the Nigerian population. The lack of synergy between the production of graduates and employment opportunities underscores the complexity of the problem. The upsurge of unemployment is attributable to corruption which impedes the nation's ability to invest in genuine development projects that can generate employment. The problem is compounded by the expansion of the university system, the general population explosion, lack of entrepreneurship education.

The rate of unemployment among graduates in Nigeria poses serious challenges to the nation's economic growth and development. It hinders the people's capacity to live above poverty level. There is also the problem of wastage in economic and human resources. Out of frustration, the unemployed indulge in criminal behavior that creates an unfavourable climate for investment and tourism. A combination of these negative effects of unemployment jeopardizes the chances of development in Nigeria. Consequent upon the above, it becomes imperative for Nigeria to take some bold steps in addressing the problem of graduate unemployment.

Nigeria leaders must change their orientation towards selfish and primitive accumulation of wealth through corruption. The Nigerian state should be able to use its huge resources in transforming the economy from its present state to a level that it can generate sustainable employment opportunities. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) should be packaged to enhance employment led growth strategy.

Nigeria should make frantic efforts to come out with population policies that will check the growth rate of the population. Also the expansion of the university system and enrolment should equally be checked. This will reduce the number of graduates that are turned out annually. When this is done, the gap between the number of graduates and employment opportunities will be bridged.

There should be a radical curriculum and pedagogical reform. The Nigerian university system should ensure that all obsolete aspects of the curricula should be discarded and replaced with new and relevant ones. This will help to impart in students the requisite knowledge and skills that can meet the

challenges of today workplace. If this is done, it will solve the problem of our university system turning out graduates that are seemingly unemployable in modern organization.

Finally, the Nigerian University Commission should redesign its curriculum to include mandatory entrepreneurship education. With the knowledge of entrepreneurship education, students upon graduation will be sufficiently equipped and oriented to go into small scale industries and other entrepreneurial ventures that will be of benefit to the individuals and society at large. With the opportunities offered by this entrepreneurship education, graduates will be job creators rather than job seekers as they will be self employed, thereby sustaining themselves out of the arena of paid employment. This in a long run will reduce the rate of graduate unemployment and save the nation from its current development dilemma.

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