



## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: A CRISIS POINT

Ifediatu, Ngozi Mercy,  
Chukwudebelu, Chinwe<sup>i</sup>

PhD, School of Education,  
Department of Educational Foundations & Administration,  
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri,  
Imo State, Nigeria

### Abstract:

In the traditional (pre-colonial) African society, education was regarded as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. That is, education was not an end in itself. That is, education was mainly functional in objective and achieved through the apprenticeship or on-the-job training system. Both the young and the old were practically trained for specific occupation and professions. That type of education, that emphasized social responsibility, relevance to the needs of society and moral values. The ultimate good of traditional African education was to “*produce a man or woman of character, with the useful skill appropriate to his or her status in life*” Fafunwa (1982). As a result, there was no question of unemployment then, and where it existed at all, it was very minimal. The major aim of education in all societies should be a preparation of Youths for a productive working life. In line with these, the paper looks into government policies and the way it affects education and world of works. The paper also discussed the ravaging unemployment in the society, and the causes. And it came to a conclusion that unless the new 9-3-4 system of education is faithfully implemented, Nigeria might be faced with a very explosive school leaver problem.

**Keywords:** education, policies & unemployment

### 1. Introduction

One major aim of education in all societies throughout the ages has been the preparation of youths for a productive working life. In the traditional (pre-colonial) African society, education was regarded as a means to an end and not as an end itself. That is, education was mainly functional in objective and achieved through the apprenticeship or on-the-job training system. Both the young and the old were practically trained for specific

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [ngoifedi2017@gmail.com](mailto:ngoifedi2017@gmail.com), [chokifarms@gmail.com](mailto:chokifarms@gmail.com)

occupations and professions (Khan, 1996). In addition, that type of education emphasized social responsibility, relevance to the needs of society and more values. As Ejiogu (2004) puts it, the ultimate goal of traditional African education was to “*produce a man or woman of character, with the useful skill appropriate to his or her status in life*”. As a result, there was no Thatis, a symbiotic relationship that had existed between education and work in traditional African as in all early cultures.

## **2. Education and the World of Work in Nigeria**

Traditional education in Nigeria as in any other African country emphasized functionalism as people were trained on specific jobs. However, there has been very little link between the formal type of education inherited from the colonialists and productive work. The type of education was elitist in orientation and ill-designed for preparing Nigerian youths with the appropriate attitudes, knowledge, skills and motivation needed for transforming their rural and urban slums areas into modern societies. Instead, it was esoteric and it emphasized the development of man-power interested in white collar jobs and not in manual work which is needed in the modern sector of the economy such as the civil service and the modern industry. Thus, curricula at all levels of education are purely academic and unrelated to the world of work, merely encouraging the acquisition of paper qualifications. Technical and vocational education were relatively neglected as the few technical institutions, apprenticeship in professions and local industries were under-subscribed and/or at best regarded as dumping grounds for school dropouts. Igbuzor (2007).

In the conventional secondary schools, most students express preference for non-science and technical-based subjects, while at the tertiary level, enrolment in colleges of technology/polytechnics is only considered by students when admission into universities fail. This apparent neglect for technical/vocational education has led to the detest and disrespect generally expressed towards productive manual work by the Nigerian society and resultant dearth of skilled middle-level technical manpower.

The consequences of all these is the observed gross disparities (quantitative and qualitative) between the kinds of manpower most needed and the kinds, quality and proportion, actually being churned out by the educational system. There is thus a distorted pattern of manpower production in relation to urgent national needs. For example, an exceedingly large number of graduates in the humanities and law are yearly produced while very few graduates (In the natural sciences, medicine, engineering and agriculture the areas of greatest development needs) are produced. Since employment is not readily available to most of these highly qualified graduates because of the nature and level of Nigeria’s industrial development, most of them end up doing the work of middle-level manpower and are thus underutilized.

### **3. Government Policies on Education and Employment**

The importance of producing the right type of quality of manpower needed for transforming Nigeria's economy into a modern one has often been recognized by successive governments through policy pronouncements. For instance, the Ashby Commission Report (1960) and the National Policy on Education (2004, revised) views education as an investment in the economic growth of Nigeria. Consequently, a large proportion of the national income has been invested on education over the years.

However, educational planning, relative to manpower requirements had been mostly quantitative in terms of estimating the number of engineers, scientists, doctors, accountants etc. rather than being qualitative in terms of relating the content and structure of education of the world of work. Some of the policies expected to qualitatively link education with employment but which have so far failed to achieve the objective will be now examined at each level.

#### **3.1 Primary and Secondary Education**

Historically, there has been very little or no policy and organizational links between primary and education and employment. Thus, products of primary education who could not continue into the secondary level for one reason or the other and drop-outs from the system have formed a large proportion of the unskilled excess labor.

Perhaps the first attempt at encouraging a link between secondary education and work was the establishment of secondary modern schools. In some parts of Nigeria in 20<sup>th</sup> century, the curriculum then included practical subjects like agriculture, carpentry, domestic science and civics, in addition to the purely academic subjects. Their graduates did not have much problem in securing employment in the rural areas, at least. For example, closely linked to the secondary modern-school was the establishment of farm settlement schemes in Western Nigeria in 1959. The schemes were designed to generate employment in the rural areas and thereby minimize rural-urban youth migration as well as boost agricultural production. Some of the secondary modern school graduates were employed in the scheme, but the scheme failed as a result of lack of funds. This was mainly because instead of being labor-intensive as originally planned, it turned out to be capital intensive (Ejiogu, 2004). Also, because the products of the elitist grammar type of secondary education was seen to be better-off socially and economically, enthusiasm for enrolment in the secondary modern schools declined and the modern system eventually died off.

Another educational policy related to employment was the introduction of comprehensive colleges in the 1960s. There, secondary school pupils were encouraged to learn some skills in crafts, introductory technology and commerce, in addition to the academic subjects. The capital-intensive nature of comprehensive education involving the provision of workshops and equipment also contributed to the gradual phasing-out of the program. Even though, some comprehensive colleges still exists, they exist only in the name as curriculum emphasis is still on the purely academic subjects.

Mention should also be made of the existence of trade centers and technical colleges for the production of skilled middle-level (technical and commercial) manpower. But as earlier indicated, technical/vocational education was despised by society and relatively under invested by government with the result that the expected middle-level manpower was under-produced relative to the needs of the economy.

A major initiative at re-orientating primary and secondary education towards national development need was the organization of a National Conference in 1969 by the Nigeria Educational Research Council (NERC). The final outcome of that conference is the National Policy on Education (1977, revised in 1981 and 2004), which forms the basis of the new popular 6-3-3-4 system of education. The central theme of the policy is that education should be functional and serve the goals of social transformation and the development of the Nigerian people. Explicit and specific objectives at each level of education that will relate education to productive work are stated. For instance, the six-year primary education aims among others at: Giving the child opportunities for developing Manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively. In the society within the limits of its capacity and providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation or trades and crafts of the locality.

The curriculum proposed for achieving these objectives include; elementary science, local crafts and agriculture. At the secondary level, the general objectives are:

- 1) Preparation for useful living within the society, and
- 2) Preparation for higher education.

The three-year Junior Secondary stage would be compulsory and its curriculum, comprehensive. Subjects like woodwork, home economics, metal work, local crafts, business studies, technical drawing etc. which hitherto were absent at that level will be emphasized. Graduates from the junior secondary school who are academically gifted can continue into the three year-senior secondary and ultimately enter the universities. Those with different aptitudes and interest can go for professional/vocational training in the technical colleges, teachers college, colleges of technology and polytechnics, while those who cannot continue with their education after the Junior Secondary, will go into the labor market at least with some saleable skills. To promote and coordinate technical/vocational education at all levels of education, a National Board of Technical Education was established in 1977. In summary, if the 6-3-3-4 system is faithfully implanted, the qualitative defects in past educational planning and implementation will be removed. That is, manpower planning would have been linked to employment needs, qualitatively and quantitatively (Ibebeme, Alumode & Usoro, 2012).

### **3.2 Tertiary Education**

The fact that education at the tertiary level has been mainly academic and unsuitable to the needs of employers particularly in the private sector of the economy needs not be over emphasized. Hitherto, such a type of education was considered adequate because employment as administrators and others needed to sustain government machinery was readily available for the products of tertiary institution. In recent years, however, with considerable progress in industrial and social development, industry becomes one of the

largest employers. Tertiary institutions are thus required to train not only administrators, but also scientists, technologists, engineers, etc, to generate and sustain Nigeria's industrial growth. The fourth national development plan (1981-1985) rightly observed that in quantitative terms, the gap between the demands and supply of manpower, particularly scientific and technical manpower, has remained very wide.

In an effort to link tertiary level education with employment in industrial training fund (ITF) was established to provide facilities for training of persons employed in commerce. The ITF initiated the student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) to help the student of engineering, technology, banking and accountancy acquire the much needed on the job practical experience which will prepare them to fit more readily into industrial colleges of technology \polytechnics and universities are made to spend a minimum of three months during their training an attachment to various industrial and commercial organizations. As a further development in the last few years, Ordinary National Diploma graduates from the colleges of technology and polytechnics are now required to gain a one-year industrial experience before returning into Higher National Diploma programs. Nigeria's relatively low industrial base however base made it difficult for most of the students to gain the required experience.

The main categories of graduates that have had problems with employment in the private sector are the scientists because of their purely academic and narrow specialization. Aware of these problems, the universities are now striving to get such students exposed to a broad spectrum of courses like applied science/technology and management in order to make the graduates flexible enough for the labor market. The number and proportion of young people entering the labor Efforts are also being intensified to make university course contents relevant enough for self-employment in industry. Still another government attempt to relate university education to employment and promote technological development was the establishment of universities of science and technology by the federal governments in the last few years. The present economic depression has however constrained development in this area because of the capital-intensive nature of such institutions. Perhaps it is also pertinent to mention that courses leading to certain professions like medicine and teaching have always had theory and practice integrated in the training of students. Thus, very few of these professionals are among the unemployed youths.

#### **4. The Problem of Unemployment**

We have established that education and employment are often related in all economies and also that education in Nigeria has been geared largely towards producing workers for the modern sector of the economy (largely in cities), while majority of workers needed in the rural or informal sectors have been neglected. Even though employment opportunities have created in the last two decades mainly as a result of industrialization, the available labor supply corresponding increasing over the years far out-strips the opportunities created. This has led to large scale unemployment. As observed by coombs in Ejiogu (2004), Unemployment can be caused by a gap between employment

aspirations and actual opportunities. The size of this gap is a function of four dynamic variables:

- 1) market each year with various formal education credential;
- 2) the size of the modern sector and the proportion of the total national labor force it employs;
- 3) the annual rate of growth of new jobs in the modern sector, and
- 4) the proportion of non-manual (white collar) jobs offered in the modern sectors (which are of prime interest to secondary and college graduates).

The unemployment problem, which hitherto restricted to the urban area in Nigeria (Ejiogu, 2004) is now equally biting in the rural areas. We shall be examining the scale and causes of open and disguised youth unemployment as well as the characteristics and categories of youths involved.

While it is common characteristics of the unemployed youth (especially in developing countries) that majority are unskilled. And majority of them may be uneducated for example, about 60% of all the unemployed in Imo state 2007 had a maximum of full secondary education.

The problem of open youth unemployment is not restricted to graduates of primary and secondary schools alone; it has also extended to graduates of higher institutions despite the lack of middle and high level manpower needed for economic development often lamented. Graduates from the NYSC Program are always discharge into the labor market with little hope of finding jobs. The situation is in fact getting worse today as medical doctors are roaming the streets of urban and rural areas seeking employment. In fact, the scale of unemployment in Nigeria was one of the reasons cited for military takeover of government in December 1983, but that government and its successors have continued to aggravate the problem through mass retrenchment of able youths for example, the retrenchment of 10,000 jobs for Imo youth. Encouraged by government action and the unfavorable economic condition in the country, nearly 0.4million jobs were lost in the private sector alone as early as at 2010/2011, thus worsening the problem of open unemployment (Ukaegbu, 2011).

Apart from the problem of disguised youth unemployment manifested partly in what Ukaegbu (2011) described as “*educated unemployment*” or “*under-employment*” and partly in higher staying on ratios in educational institutions. There are many youths who out of frustration have been forced to take on jobs which are below what they are qualified for or jobs which are irrelevant to their training-such people are consequently under-utilized. For example, many graduates in pure science or engineering are now teaching in secondary schools because they cannot secure appropriate employment, and this causes more problems for the educational system. Ibeneme et al. (2012) has argued that “*many people, particularly in developing countries, are forced into such a situation of great under-employment, unemployment is not an option that all can afford; when employment is hard to find, members of the primary labor force in their desperation for food, cloth and house for their families are forced to take on practically any odd jobs, however irregular and marginally productive it may be*”.

As an alternative, many youths especially graduate from tertiary institutions have returned to school to read further or to read other courses which they expect will suit them better to the job market. The increasingly large number of applicants for places in university post-graduate programs and the thousands of arts, science and social science graduates yearly seeking admission into M.B.A and/or law programs are reflections of this option.

## 5. Causes of Unemployment

Open and disguise youth unemployment are caused primarily by excess supply of labor and reduced rate of growth in the economy. The rapid population growth in Nigeria invariably influenced enrolment in educational institutions consequently contributing to the excess labor.

It is therefore apparent that an increasing number of the products of education are unemployed as there is little or no match between educational planning and economic planning.

Another major cause of youth unemployment already discussed is the inadequate preparation of youths by the educational system for the labor market, usually manifested in their lack of marketable skill. This problem is characteristic of most developing countries as observed by *“the formal educational system in most countries shows typical cannibalism tendencies in the sense that each level of education educates its product mainly for the next higher level rather than the world of work outside. Thus, the entire educational system is primarily geared to the minority climbing up to the educational ladder and not to the majority, which drops out well before the end of the ladder is insight”*.

Majority of those who graduate from the top of the educational ladder have also been found wanting by most employers especially in industry because there has been very little or no integration between theory and practice in education (Ejiogu, 2004 & Ojirunde, 2005). This yawning gap between education and work has contribute a lot to open unemployment and under employment. The situation is further aggravated by the current economic recession, which has now rendered even many skills professionals jobless.

The rural-urban migration of youths in search of employment in the cities, since industrial development is concentrated in the urban areas, also contributes to the problems of unemployment. Many unskilled youths who would otherwise be gainfully in their localities either in agriculture or local traditional industries as apprentices migrate into urban centers to accentuate the already serious urban unemployment situation.

Nigeria’s main industrialization policy of encouraging capital intensive but labor saving techniques of industrial production leads to a relatively low rate of expansion in industry’s demand for labor (skilled and unskilled). Employment in the civil service is also contracting instead of expanding in view of present economic realities. This low rate of growth of new jobs in the modern sector (public and private) further widens the gap between employment aspirations and actual opportunities.

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

It is clear that successive governments in Nigeria have invested a lot on education without correspondingly increasing employment opportunities. Also, while there has been a large quantitative increase in manpower production, the structure and content of education have not been properly linked in a qualitative way to the immediate job environment in which such manpower would spend the rest of their lives. These and other factors like population explosion, rural urban migration and the industrialization policy have contributed to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria, which is projected to increase substantially in this and the next decade.

Unless the new 9-3-4 system of education is faithfully implemented such that there is greater interaction between education and the world of work and unless governments' industrial policies change towards rural development and the creation of more jobs, opportunities for the ever-increasing manpower being produced, Nigeria might be faced with a very explosive leaver-problem in the very near future.

## References

- Ajufo, B. I. (2013). Challenges of youth unemployment in Nigeria; Lagos: Winners press.
- Ajufo, Beatrice Ifeoma (2013). Effective career guidance as a panacea for sustainable development. *African research review*, 7(1), 309-312.
- Aromolaran, E. A. (2014). *Career guidance and skill acquisition: A panacea for unemployment*. A seminar paper delivered at the employment workshop, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Redemption Chapel, Ibadan.
- Bello, S. A. (2006). *Fundamentals of Educational Planning and Model Building in Education*. Lagos: Vitamin Educational Books.
- Ebeneme, O. Alumude, B. & Usaro, H. (2012). The state of education in Nigeria Onitsha: West and Solomon Publishing Co Ltd.
- Ejiogu, A. (2004). *Nigerian Educational and Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Lagos: Mukugamu & Brothers Enterprises.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1982). *African Education in Perspective* in Fafunwa, A. B. and Aisiku, J. U. (eds) *Education in Africa. A Comparative survey*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*, Lagos; NEDRC.
- Igbuzor, O. (2007). The state of education in Nigeria. A keynote address delivered at a round table organized by civil society action coalition on education for all (CSACEFA) on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2006.
- Khan, M. B. (1996). Parental involvement in education: Possibilities and limitations. *The school Community Journal*, 6:57:68
- Ocho, L. O. (2005). *Issues and concerns in education and life*. Enugu; Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria.
- Ukaebgu, M. N. (2011). *Issue on Contemporary Nigeria Education* (Book of Reading) edited by Oku, O. O. et al. Owerri: Corporate Impressions.



Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).